

Women, patriarchy and capitalism

Looking back in history, one might ask whether capitalism is not doing away with patriarchy. Legal equality between women and men, growing economic independence of the former with respect to the latter, increasingly less marked sexual division of labor, decreasing homophobia, questioning of transphobia, more open attitudes towards sexuality: looking at these phenomena, which are clearly evidenced in the countries of old capitalism but are gaining worldwide extension as this system develops historically, it is suggestive to think that patriarchy was left in the past with pre-capitalist societies, when the destiny of women and children was set by the family patriarch. Some go so far as to reduce it to biblical times, considering it more appropriate to speak of the sex/gender system as a neutral and ahistorical concept.

But if this is so, a new difficulty arises: by putting an end to patriarchy, would capitalism be putting an end to the real inequality between men and women? Or would it be necessary to define a new concept, a new theorization without any continuity with previous societies? How would we then explain the common features between men and women? And the differences? What are the causes that reproduce this inequality?

We will say in advance that for us patriarchy continues to be a structural feature of capitalism. We also believe that it continues to be a valid concept for understanding the situation of women, the understanding of sexuality, the social role of childhood, care during an illness, dependency and old age and, in general, the organization of the biological reproduction of human beings *in any class society* and the stereotypes, roles and identities that are produced in it.

Marx says in *Grundrisse* that capitalism allows us to understand the organization of previous societies in the same way that human anatomy allows us to understand the anatomy of the monkey¹. Thus, to ask about patriarchy in capitalism is to ask about the definition of patriarchy as a general concept and at the same time a historical one. To answer this question we can only start from the method of our party, historical materialism, and its basic category, which is the *mode of production*. The *mode of production* is understood as the way in which societies produce and reproduce their life or, to be more precise, the way in which human beings relate with nature to reproduce their life and inseparably the form in which they cooperate -though hierarchically- to establish this relationship².

By virtue of this method, we will be able to understand that there are three great phases of humanity: primitive communism, class modes of production and integral communism. Patriarchy is born of the long transition from the first to the second and will die with the passage to integral communism which, it must be said beforehand, has nothing to do with the counterrevolutionary capitalism of the USSR and its imitators. In dealing with the different class modes of production, however, it is necessary to start from the radical historical difference of capitalism with respect to the previous modes of production, insofar as social relations cease to be guided by the satisfaction of human needs - albeit those of the ruling class - and are directed by the abstract and automatic logic of the production of value. Patriarchy is the way in which class modes of production organize the reproduction of life and capitalism cannot do without it, but at the same time, as with other historical categories, it implies a profound transformation in order to adapt it to the abstract logic of value. It is from this point of view that we must think of the continuities and discontinuities of patriarchy in history.

1 "Bourgeois society is the most developed and the most complex historic organization of production. The categories which express its relations, the comprehension of its structure, thereby also allows insights into the structure and the relations of production of all the vanished social formations out of whose ruins and elements it built itself up, whose partly still unconquered remnants are carried along within it, whose mere nuances have developed explicit significance within it, etc. Human anatomy contains a key to the anatomy of the ape.", Marx: *Grundrisse*, Introduction pt.3: The Method of Political Economy.

2 A text fundamental to the development of our method and which we have drawn from for the elaboration of this text is *Le forme di produzione successive nella teoria marxista* by the Partito Comunista Internazionale, originally written by Roger Dangeville.

A concept like the sex/gender system cannot help in this task. At best, it tells us that human beings biologically reproduce like most living beings on the basis of the anatomical difference between males and females but that, according to its historical nature, it gives this anatomical difference and the different practices for its reproduction a social significance which, as such, is variable. If this is so, if it describes a real but historical link of the human being with their own biophysical nature, it is simply a truism. But if it is not, as we deduce from Gayle Rubin's famous text *The Traffic in Women*³, if this nature is nothing more than a clay on which each culture is limited to imprinting its mark, then the idea of the sex/gender system is not a truism but a reactionary concept, typical of a society that is born and develops by tearing apart the bond of the human being with nature and thus destroying the natural and social metabolism to threaten the extinction of our species.

In this text, we want to make a critique of the two ways in which patriarchy is usually understood, as a gender problem and as a question of sexual class, and put forward our perspective coming from historical materialism in order to address the invariant structural categories of patriarchy in capitalism.

Yet patriarchy is not only expressed through structural categories, but also through roles, social practices, stereotypes and identities which, when they come from previous modes of production, sometimes go through adaptations to the mercantile world of capital, sometimes are revitalized by the resurgence of traditionalism as a form of anti-modern reaction very characteristic, by the way, of capitalist modernity. We will not deal directly with them, not because they are not important in the concrete and real lives of many people and especially of many women, but because in order to analyze them in the global framework of our exploitation and oppression it is necessary to delineate this framework at a more abstract level.

This attempt seems fundamental to us and is what motivates us to publish this text, which is part of a work in progress. By definition, this means that we will have to return to it in the future and that, perhaps, we will find parts that we would add nuance to or others that we would pose in a different way. Academics write closed texts and magna opera, revolutionaries write to contribute to the common debate, a work of continuous deepening, and to try to orient themselves in the struggle against this system of misery.

A gender issue

A majority perspective in feminism, however varied it may be among the different currents, is the one that confronts patriarchy as a problem created by gender. This perspective was born in reaction to the traditional definitions of patriarchy as the natural product of a biological difference between men and women, a biological difference that inevitably had to lead to a natural and therefore social disadvantage. In the face of this patriarchal vision of patriarchy, it was argued that regardless of anatomical differences, the inequality between men and women was a social fact originating from or at least reproduced in the definition of the female gender as relative and subordinate to men: *you are not born a woman, you become one*, said a Stalinist⁴. From this point on, starting from gender as a problem, the gap is open for postmodernity to find the solution in its negation - either through its infinite multiplication and to the consumer's taste, or through the idealistic reclamation for its abolition - however much this may trouble the feminism of equality today.

But in this attempt to denaturalize patriarchy, social relations end up being naturalized. Certainly, in human beings nature is integrated into culture not only in their conception of things, but also in their

3 American anthropologist of the 1970s, specialized in LGBTBI studies and sexual subcultures such as sadomasochism and pedophilia. Her essay *The Traffic in Women: Notes on the "political economy" of sex* (1975) proposes the concept of the sex/gender system that is so often taken up today in radical media.

4 Simone de Beauvoir, author of the feminist classic *The Second Sex*, was an existentialist philosopher and, along with Jean-Paul Sartre, a staunch supporter first of Stalin and later of Fidel Castro and Mao. In *The Second Sex* Beauvoir points to the female gender as a cultural construct defined in relation to men and never as a self-sustaining identity of its own. The famous quote that we point out here goes in this direction

own social practices. But these practices can only be understood as part of their mode of production, by which societies have a specific way of relating to nature, of placing individuals in relation to each other and to society as a whole. Gender is not the assignment of norms, behaviors and subjectivities to anatomical characteristics, chosen more or less arbitrarily in each society. Gender is the *social* and therefore shared experience of sex as a biophysical reality that establishes, on the basis of sexual dimorphism, the possibility or not of becoming pregnant. That the material possibility of becoming pregnant is a specific attribute of a part of the human species, that this material possibility is the basis of a social and shared experience of the body, is something that only a society that exists in a profound antagonism between nature and culture, between the individual and the social totality, can deny. Whether this attribute is an obligation or a choice, whether what defines a person with all his or her human faculties is reduced or not to this potential attribute, is something that will depend on the mode of production in which we find ourselves. Gender as a social experience of sex will be an oppressive category if social relations are oppressive, but it can also be a shared experience and at the same time harmonious with individual desires and wills if we find ourselves in other types of social relations. By defining gender as something inherently oppressive, hierarchical, heterodesignated, we are naturalizing the social relations that make us experience it in that way.

Not by chance, the currents of feminism that explain patriarchy as a gender problem deny that there have been human societies without the subordination of women. They attribute this idea to a mirror inversion of that subordination which was constructed by nineteenth-century anthropology, still in its infantile age, which Engels used as his basis for writing *The Origin of the Family*, which is why that book has become rather old-fashioned. They thus ignore the immense amount of archaeological and anthropological evidence of the existence of non-patriarchal societies, which clearly shows there has been no state, no commodities, no private property and, consequently, no patriarchy for most of the time that our species has been on the planet. During this long phase of humanity, which covers the entire Paleolithic and Neolithic periods and which we call primitive communism, women were not in a subordinate position, the figure of the father did not exist, sexuality was experienced with great freedom, children, the sick and the elderly were cared for by the whole community, in a directly social way, and reproduction was not organized through that violent and aberrant structure, doomed to disappear, which is the family⁵.

In this mode of production, motherhood was not a biological disadvantage as Beauvoir or Firestone claim, but rather the opposite. Motherhood was highly valued socially because belonging to the community was based on kinship, which could only be matrilineal in its beginnings, in the absence of any father figure as it was and the community being the only way to produce and reproduce the material existence of its members, without any mediation whatsoever. Also for this reason the sexual division of labor did not entail, as Gayle Rubin wishes, a hierarchy between genders or an imposed heteronormativity. In fact, from what can be glimpsed from the anthropological and historical records we have, it is quite possible that people of the third gender⁶ were not stigmatized. It is only with the appearance of law that the definition as man or woman will become a problem. When we say law, we also mean State and private property: thus, Roman law will concern itself with determining which anatomical and sexually functional features may incline the intersexual towards its *legal* definition as male or female, something essential in order to be able to establish the right of succession⁷. Similarly, *Sharia* law will do the same for the right of inheritance, or canon law for determining whether an

5 The comrades of *Cuadernos de Negación* make a good synthesis to delve into in "Alguna vez estuvo todo al revés...", pp. 18-25, *Cuadernos de Negación* no. 13 "Notas sobre el patriarcado", June 2019.

6 The issue of the third gender in other modes of production requires more investigation than that which we can dedicate to it here. It's worth calling into attention the anachronism of thinking about these forms of third gender from the perspective of the transgender category under capitalism, given the religious institutionalization that they would often acquire, like the 'two-spirits' of some indigenous peoples in North America, or the hijras in India. In fact, the idea that the divine beings are devoid of sex or flow from one to the other is present in many cultures, from greek to hindu mythology, up to european feudal society and the discussions about if the angels possess a sex or not

7 Yan Thomas: "The Division of the Sexes in Roman Law", VVAA: *History of Women*. 1. *Antiquity*, ed. Georges Duby and Michelle Perrot.

intersex person can receive the sacrament of Holy Orders. Gender emerged *as a problem* with the birth of inheritance and of the State that regulated it.

In the same way, it is with the emergence of private property that the community begins to decompose into the family structure. As Engels will say, the family is born from the ruins of the community, and this will have enormous consequences: on the one hand, production and reproduction will no longer take place directly in the community, but in the family. Certainly first the children and later the woman⁸ will become the property of the man who, previously considered the sexual partner of the mother, will be transformed in the same process into a *father* as an owner. In the same way that private property begins to determine social relations, marking which families belong to the dominant class, and which to the dominated, these social relations will make the female gender equivalent to the property of the father or the husband, or to a sexual commodity open to the public. Gender had become oppressive.

However, it would not be until the arrival of capitalism that gender would begin to be conceptualized as something different from sex. For this conceptualization to be possible, the foundations of the abstract individual of capital would have to be laid. The abstract individual of capital is that juridical subject which is formally equal to others, just as the commodity itself makes all use values equal through its form. Only then would the affirmation of formal equality between men and women be possible, making sex an abstraction and arguing that the problem of their inequality would then be only in their education, in their socialization, in short, as we would say in the twentieth century, in their gender.

This phenomenon is inseparable from the abstraction that capital produces among the social classes, legally equal as citizens; in nature, as a resource only considerable as an economic variable; in labor, equal in all its variety by virtue of the fact of producing commodities. It is also inseparable from a society whose motor is the unlimited production of value to which the biological component is always presented as a barrier to be overcome, as a problem to be eliminated from the equation. And it is inseparable, finally, from a society broken down into social molecules which we call individuals and which oppose each other, where the product of their labor confronts them as an alienating social totality, and where capital, technology, and the state confront the individual as an expression of society and a negation of his or her own individual existence. Only in such a mode of production, in which nature is a barrier and society a Leviathan, can the split between sex and gender occur: not only to be experienced subjectively, as a consciential issue, but suffered materially, as one more way in which commodity fetishism dominates our lives.

That is why the antagonism between sex and gender, between the social experience of the body and the way we experience it individually, is a product of this system and cannot be ended except by ending capitalism as a whole. This is not to say that in integral communism a sex-assigned gender *will be imposed* on all individuals. This has happened historically as the State and law regulate social relations and need to legally define genders to ensure the transmission of inheritance. In capitalism the State can legally accept their lack of definition because inheritance has less social weight and because we are equal and empty juridical subjects. But in communism there is no inheritance, no law, no State. Nor will there be a problem in people seeking to define their identity in full autonomy, in all senses, but it will not be because gender as a social experience of sex denies it.

The reclamation for the abolition of gender, and the other side of the coin its infinite multiplication in queer theory, start from the capitalist antagonism between society and the individual in order to deny society. But gender will continue to exist, because society will continue to exist, because our natural and differentiated attributes will continue to be experienced in a shared, social way. However, gender will not be experienced in an oppressive, hierarchical, heterodesinated way, but harmoniously and fully. In this sense we must understand Marx when he says in the *1844 Manuscripts* that communism is the naturalization of the human being and the humanization of nature. Communism will allow the

8 Cf. Evelyn Reed: *The Evolution of the Woman*

restoration of the bond between sex and gender, because it will restore the human relationship with nature and the relationship of the human being with its own social existence as a species.

And the sexual class

In contrast to the enlightened and liberal vision that confronted patriarchy as a problem of education and socialization through gender, some currents of feminism from the 1970s onward tried to define it from a materialist point of view. Some will do so by seeking a unitary approach that integrates patriarchy into capitalism, others will criticize the impossibility and reductionism of this approach to propose a dual theory whereby patriarchy and capitalism would be two different systems of domination, albeit in solidarity. But all will start from the fact that women are exploited as women in capitalism, if not in all previous societies. What the man is to the bourgeois, the woman is to the proletariat: this is how Engels' quotation in *The Origin of the Family* is taken, regardless of the method he uses to write it, at the same time as it is sought to rectify Marx's *Capital* for having ignored the aspect of biological reproduction and sexuality.

But this is an improper analogy. In the first place because the existence of social classes implies, from the very moment of their emergence, an inherent contraposition: the relation of exploitation between classes can only end with the abolition of that relation, that is, with the dissolution of the classes. The struggle of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie is driven by the imperative need to cease being proletarians. Only from a syndicalist vision of the class struggle can a perpetual antagonism be affirmed, since at no time is the abolition of classes and the social categories on which they are founded present, neither as a program nor as a horizon of emancipation.

This is not the case with the male-female relationship. In primitive communism, this relationship was not in itself alienating or oppressive, it would only become so later on with the transition to class modes of production and their patriarchal way of organizing reproduction. Therefore, the revolution does not lead to the abolition of the male-female relationship but to its transformation in an emancipatory sense.

Secondly, the concept of sexual class and the notion of the proletarian woman as a *super-exploited caste*, in the words of Christine Delphy⁹, clearly draws from the national liberation movements, Third Worldism and, in general, the Stalinist idea that in addition to the relationship of exploitation between classes, there is also one between nations: it is simply a matter of extending this relationship of exploitation to patriarchy and founding a women's liberation movement, as Delphy herself would do with Monique Wittig¹⁰ in the 1970s. Nor is it by chance that Federici adopts jointly Third Worldism and feminism in *Caliban and the Witch*, associating the discourse of the anti-globalization movement against foreign debt with the aggravation of women's oppression at the origin of capitalism. In all these theories of sexual class, with a set of *matrioshkas* that anticipates the hierarchy of multiple privileges of postmodernity, the capitalist would exploit the worker who, in turn, would exploit his wife by extorting her surplus labor with the marital contract. At the same time the two, if white, would be exploiting the oppressed nations, which would in turn reproduce the same model within themselves.

Yet if the national liberation movements did not bring about any emancipation for the proletariat of those regions, but rather the subordination of the proletariat to its national or racial bourgeoisie, the

9 French feminist, co-founder of the Women's Liberation Movement (MLF) in 1970 and of the so-called "materialist feminism", for which the various modes of production are based on the domestic mode of production, which is transversal to the various human societies, thus defining a dual approach where class exploitation is determined by the exploitation of women by Men, the *main enemy* according to Delphy. In the 80's she will work with Simone de Beauvoir in the magazine *Nouvelles Questions Féministes*

10 French feminist, co-founder with Delphy and others of the MLF and later of the group *Gouines Rouges* ('red dykes') split off from the Front Homosexuel d'Action Révolutionnaire (FHAR) accusing it of misogyny. Along the lines of Gayle Rubin, she criticizes male-female binarism as the product of an imposed heterosexuality, defining it in *Heterosexual Thought as a political system* in itself that produces the exploitation of women by men and sexual differentiation in a binary sense

movements for the liberation of women as a sex class could not lead anywhere either. By defining patriarchy as the exploitation of women and, consequently, the inherently antagonistic relationship of women to men, revolutionary women are thrown into an impossible schizophrenia: fighting *with* men to end capitalism and fighting *against* them to end patriarchy. To overcome this schizophrenia, one can only desert men, as political lesbianism¹¹ proposes, kill them all, as Valerie Solanas¹² would like to do, cross the (social) class border in order to surrender to liberal feminism, or abandon this conceptualization of patriarchy.

Undoubtedly, these types of approach had strength because of the prevailing machismo in the radical milieus, just as black nationalism in the United States was nourished by the prevailing racism. To say that women are not exploited by men does not mean that there is not a conflictive relationship with them, to the measure in which patriarchy makes this relationship into something oppressive and alienating to the point where women, throughout history and in different ways, have put up resistance. Nor does it mean that the revolution is a moment of collective enlightenment where patriarchal and racist behavior suddenly disappear, although it is undoubtedly the best breeding ground in which these behaviors can be called into question: this has been the case historically up to now, at every peak of the class struggle, in every wave of the world revolution that began in 1917.

Despite their critique of the idea of sexual class, the theories of the patriarchy of the wage persevere in this vision when, in the hands of Fortunati, Dalla Costa or Federici¹³, they continue to stem from the exploitation of *women as women*. This time it is not in the direct interest of men - a dual approach - but in the interest of capital through men - a unitary approach. In order to defend the woman as *exploited*, an attribute of classes, and not as oppressed, they try to insert her exploitation into the cycle of extended reproduction of capital, in such a way that the capitalist would save in the worker's salary the unpaid work of the woman in the tasks of reproduction, increasing his profits, and the worker would contract through marriage or an amorous relationship the care and domestic work of the woman, which she would accept in exchange for a mystified notion of love and the sharing of his salary with her. Just as the capitalist confronts his capital to the worker, says Fortunati in *The Arcane of Reproduction*, the worker confronts the wage as capital to his wife. The unitary perspective would be achieved because the capitalist is ultimately the beneficiary: he exploits the woman as a woman through her husband and, thanks to this, he can obtain surplus value.

But these theories neither dialogue with Marx nor go beyond him, as they nevertheless pretend to do. We will dwell on their critique more than on that of other currents because of the influence they have had in radical circles in recent years and because of the confusion they can generate when it comes to understanding Marx's critique of political economy. In order to not overextend ourselves, we will try to summarize our position in three points:

1. It is necessary to distinguish in the capitalist mode of production the *immediate* relations of production from the *mediated* relations of production. The immediate ones are derived directly from and reproduce themselves when labor power is sold to the capitalist, meaning they are a product of the capital-labor relation. It is these categories in their complex movements that Marx explains in *Capital*: the commodity, money, constant and variable capital, value and surplus-value, profit, land rent, interest, the social classes that are sustained

11 One of whose best known exponents, apart from Monique Wittig, is the poet Adrienne Rich and her essay *Compulsory heterosexuality and lesbian existence* (1980).

12 American radical feminist, known for advocating the abolition of patriarchy through the eradication of all men in the *SCUM Manifesto* (1967), as well as for having attempted to assassinate Andy Warhol over an intellectual property dispute.

13 Three grand figures in Italian feminism of the 1970's, especially known for their links to the post-operatism of Antonio Negri and for the International Wages for Housework Campaign (IWFHC) As explained in the text, the theorists of the patriarchy of the wage try to defend at the same time a movement autonomous and separate for women and a unitary perspective, in which the exploitation of the woman is due to the mechanisms of capitalism itself and not to the parallel system that radical feminism defends. Although the works of Fortunati and Dalla Costa are almost forgotten, Federici's *Caliban and the Witch* (2004) continues to be well known in radical circles

by these categories, etc. The mediated relations of production are the conditions that permit or make more efficient the expanded reproduction of capital, even if they are not derived as a product from the immediate capital-labor relation: law, the State, the nation and its borders, the electrical grid, roads and ports, schools, hospitals, the family, etc. Although it is naturally the capital-labor relation that determines the others, it is the set of immediate and mediated relations of production that make up the capitalist mode of production. To understand the latter it is necessary to detail the functioning of the former, which is the immense work of Marx in *Capital*. Therefore, it was not due to a macho oversight on his part that he did not include reproduction in them, but due to the very meaning of his method. None of this implies that reproduction is a space of substraction where capitalist relations do not operate. If it does not participate in the relation of immediate capital-labor production, as law doesn't either, it does not mean that both, law and patriarchy, are not indispensable for capitalism.

2. In capitalism, production and reproduction are divided. In contrast to pre-capitalist societies, in which the family produced use values for direct consumption, once the part expropriated by the ruling class had been deducted, in capitalism the family is reduced to reproduction. The family thus remains outside the immediate relation of production between capital and labor. The labor that produces commodities that compete with each other in the market becomes abstract labor, socially necessary, it enters into the criteria of capitalist productivity, receives a wage and produces or collaborates in the production of surplus value. The labor that is not exchanged for capital or that does not directly produce commodities on the market is a private – privatized – activity, because the only way for it to acquire a social character under capitalism is by competing with other labor on the market.
3. Childbirth and upbringing do not produce labor power, but the worker himself. Labor-power is not a thing that is produced, but a social relation that is constituted. It is the form that the vital activity of the worker acquires when it is sold as a commodity in the labor contract. When we say that the education of children serves to valorize their labor power, we say it because we know that most of them are proletarians who will have to sell themselves to survive in the future. It is an anticipation of a reality that, however, will only exist when the immediate relation of production that confronts their labor to capital is constituted. And the fact is that labor power is not a particular commodity just because it is produced outside the mercantile sphere, not even because it is the only commodity capable of creating new value, but because it is the only *property* that the proletarian can commodify to gain access to resources in capitalist society. In a society of commodity holders, the proletariat can only commodify its own alienation. But he is himself the owner of his labor power and decides whether to sell it or to starve to death. That is the fundamental difference with the slave: neither his mother nor his wife, however much he may have an oppressive and alienated relationship with them, reproduce that labor-power, but, if anything, they spend their time in the reproduction of the worker¹⁴. This is why the value of labor-power is not the privatized activity of reproduction, measured in socially necessary time, but the value of the means necessary to reproduce it – their own and that of their progeny – and which, if they represent value, means that they were

14 “The exchange of commodities of itself implies no other *relations of dependence* than those which result from its own nature. On this assumption, labour-power can appear upon the market as a commodity, only if, and so far as, *its possessor*, the individual whose labour-power it is, offers it for sale, or sells it, as a *commodity*. In order that he may be able to do this, he must have it at his disposal, must be the *untrammelled owner* of his capacity for labour, i.e., of his person. He and the owner of money meet in the market, and deal with each other as on the basis of equal rights, with this difference alone, that one is buyer, the other seller; both, therefore, *equal in the eyes of the law*. The continuance of this relation demands that the owner of the labour-power should sell it only for *a definite period*, for if he were to sell it rump and stump, once for all, he would be selling himself, converting himself from a free man into a slave, from an owner of a commodity into a commodity. He must constantly look upon his labour-power as his own property, his own commodity, and this he can only do by placing it at the disposal of the buyer temporarily, for a definite period of time. By this means alone can he avoid renouncing *his rights of ownership* over it.” , Marx: *Capital*, vol. 1, pt.2 ch, 6: The Buying and Selling of Labour-Power

bought on the market. Not only do the domestic tasks of self-care and care of others not produce value, but neither does the earth when it produces coal or the bees when they produce honey, no matter how much some capitalist appropriates it, paying the rent due to the landowner. Failing to understand this, the theories of the patriarchy of the wage end up positing that sleeping, having sex or brushing one's teeth is work and produces value in capitalist terms, something that fits well with Negri's social factory but has little to do with Marxist categories. This does not mean either that domestic chores or that geological or bee activity are not indispensable for the reproduction of human beings and, therefore, of the capitalist social relations with which they have to deal for the time being. It only means that they are reproduction activities outside the social sphere, since in capitalism what is social is inherently mercantile.

The theories of the patriarchy of the wage seek to posit a unitary approach between capitalism and patriarchy as opposed to the dual system theories of other feminist currents. However, by defining women as an exploited class, their theorization cannot avoid becoming dual and split again between two objects of study, two differentiated revolutionary subjects, two systems of oppression: patriarchy and capitalism. For this very reason they need to amend Marx's categorical system and they have to admit - as Fortunati does in *The Arcane of Reproduction* - that the rules operating in the domestic sphere are different from those of capitalist production. Affirming unity is not the same as achieving it, and a dual theory cannot be revolutionary. Attempts to explain patriarchal oppression under capitalism will have to abandon the concept of sexual class and think of it from another place.

With her theory of commodity-producing patriarchy, Roswitha Scholz¹⁵ will try to put forward a theory of patriarchy in which it is integrated into the capitalist social structure and yet does not imply the exploitation of women as a sex class. To this end, and contrary to dual system theories, she argues that value is not gender-neutral. On the contrary, capitalism is constituted on the basis of the value/non-value split. It keeps reproductive activity and the gender traits that it constructs outside the production of value and, therefore, outside of the capitalist public space. In doing this, however, she commits hefty errors: in order to explain pre-capitalist patriarchy, she has to improperly extend value as a social relation to earlier modes of production. Thus, she associates the patriarchy of ancient Greece and the confinement of women in the gynaeceum with the importance of the commodity in this society. However, it remains unexplained why in most pre-capitalist societies, in which the commodity has a very collateral weight and develops, as Marx will say, in its interstices like the gods of Epicurus, patriarchy is nevertheless openly affirmed.

Neither patriarchy nor the commodity can be understood as separate categories of each mode of production because the categories that have existed before can have a different weight and play a different role in the mode of production to follow¹⁶. Patriarchy existed before commodities played any relevant role in the organization of societies and it will be profoundly transformed by them when they take the heart of production and the logic of value becomes the directing element of the social whole.

There is no commodity-producing patriarchy, because the order of the factors matters. Patriarchy is historically prior, but this doesn't mean it is more determinant. On the contrary, it is value that will determine what remains of patriarchy as something embedded in the social structure, and what will be eroded with the development of the new mode of production. In arguing that value is not sexually

15 German feminist belonging to the Krisis group and later, with Robert Kurz and Anselm Jappe, founder of *Exit!* magazine. She is known for her theory of value-splitting, in which she tries to link the domination of women to the critical theory of value of the Krisis group. In English you can find her article *Patriarchy and Commodity Society: Gender without the Body*

16 "Although it is true, therefore, that the categories of bourgeois economics possess a truth for all other forms of society, this is to be taken only with a grain of salt. They can contain them in a developed, or stunted, or caricatured form etc., but always with an essential difference. [...] In all forms of society there is one specific kind of production which predominates over the rest, whose relations thus assign rank and influence to the others. It is a general illumination which bathes all the other colours and modifies their particularity. It is a particular ether which determines the specific gravity of every being which has materialized within it.", Marx: *Grundrisse*, Introduction pt.3: The Method of Political Economy

neutral, Scholz fails to understand how it is precisely the abstract, egalitarian logic of value that calls into question the old patriarchal structures and makes possible the egalitarian discourse that will give rise to feminism. Value is sex-neutral. The mode of production is not. And therein lies the specific way in which patriarchy develops in capitalism.

Our perspective

In *Why are we not feminists?* we explained that feminism splits the struggle of revolutionaries between capitalism and patriarchy, since in its own theoretical foundations, even when a unitary approach is desired, the struggle of women is something different from the struggle of the proletariat. In this sense, feminism can only be reformist, like any partial struggle. Since we understand that patriarchy is a structural element of every class society - also of capitalism - then it can only be ended by abolishing the categories that sustain these modes of production (private property, commodity, family, state) which are brought to their utmost limits by capitalism. Thus, we do not criticize feminism because of a workerist neo-sexism, as does Stalinism, but because we have the deep conviction that it is not possible to fight radically against patriarchy from feminist positions.

One of the fundamental differences we have with feminist visions of patriarchy is that they tend to reduce it to the male-female relationship. Consequently, it is often explained as a male alliance against women, an original sexual pact through which men would have organized to make their privileges prevail and, between using coercion and ideology, subjugate women. This approach, which is obvious in the idea of women as a sexual class, is also underlying in the currents that define patriarchy as a gender issue, for which the origin of the problem would be in the generalized differentiation between men and women and the hierarchy inherent in this differentiation, on the basis of which men would have imposed themselves on women. But reducing patriarchy to the male-female relationship precludes any explanation that does not consist in the latent and finally expressed desire for domination of one over the other. There is no other explanatory cause than the alliance of men to perpetuate their privileges, an alliance which makes of every man a potential rapist. Our method is removed from these types of personalizations which, on the basis of an unexplained, intrinsic will to power, naturalize as an anthropological element what is a product of the social system and thus render impossible any realistic perspective of emancipation.

Patriarchy is not a system of domination or a field of power that is played out in the relationship between men and women. If this were so, it could reasonably be thought that patriarchy is disappearing in the most developed capitalist countries, since in recent decades there have been important changes in this relationship. On the contrary, patriarchy continues to be structural to capitalism because it is not a separate system of domination, but *an attribute* of all class modes of production, the specific form in which these societies organize reproduction when it is no longer produced in a directly social manner, but through the family.

As we said at the beginning of the text, we believe that patriarchy can only be thought of through the category of mode of production and the transition from one to another, the understanding of which is provided by historical materialism. A mode of production is the way in which human beings cooperate with each other to produce and reproduce their lives through their work, that is, through their link with nature. In other words, it is a concrete social metabolism inserted into the natural metabolism, in a more destructive and entropic way or in a more harmonious way with it. The notion of cooperation is essential here, because the work of the human being is *always social*, always cooperative and interdependent on the whole of the members of the community. The emergence of private property implies above all the appropriation of a social labor by the *family* and later the by the *individual*. Even in the most isolated conditions of a pre-capitalist family, where there is relative privatization of labor, autarchy cannot be complete: that only happens in the wet dreams of the bourgeoisie and its *Robinson Crusoes*.

In primitive communism, production and reproduction are directly social. There is no private property or family structure to inherit it. Motherhood is social, just as girls and boys do not have a

subordinate status to adults and the care of the sick and elderly is collective. In fact, anthropologists such as Chris Knight point out that cooperation for breeding not only between females, but also between males and females, is one of the essential factors in the process of hominization, since only with a collective effort could the long periods of breeding and dependence demanded by a mammal with such a highly developed brain be endured.

Until the emergence of private property, the community is both the means and the end of the production and reproduction of the life of its members. But belonging to the community is codified by matrilineal kinship. One becomes part of the clan if one is born from one of its mothers. The biological "father" is only the sexual partner of the mother, not even permanent since there is no monogamy and, in addition, by virtue of exogamy, he will never belong to the clan of his children. Thus, the woman's position is predominant in primitive communism, but it is as a *mother*. This does not mean that the woman is reduced to this position, since reproduction is a social fact that is dealt with by the community as a whole. The communitarian instances in which the woman participates are multiple, but *woman* and *mother* are inseparable categories in primitive communism.

With the emergence of private property the community is fragmented, and from its ruins the family is born. Property introduces a contradiction within the relations of production of primitive communism, as Engels explains well, which will end up by decomposing it into family units where production and reproduction will be concentrated. However, the community will remain in contradictory coexistence with the family for a long time: in the collective labors for large infrastructures directed by an incipient State, as in the Inca Empire, in ancient China or in ancient Egypt; in the forests and common pastures, as in the Germanic communities or the Roman *ager publicus*; in war, a *task* in which every member of the community must collaborate under the threat of no longer being considered a citizen, as in ancient Greece or Rome. The family, where the Greek *economy* (οἶκος - 'house' and νέμωμαι - 'administration') resides, will be separated from *politics* (what has to do with the affairs of the polis) where the community, increasingly mystified, resists.

Thus, community and kinship subsist, but no longer as determining elements but as determined by property. Kinship no longer directly conveys membership of the community, but indirectly through social classes, which are built on private property and its transmission through inheritance. The subsumption of kinship to private property is expressed in the family as a social category, a category with which patriarchy is born and without whose abolition it cannot die. With the subsumption of kinship to private property, it ceased to be matrilineal and became, in a long process of transition that in the beginning must have been quite counter-intuitive¹⁷, patrilineal. In the subordination of kinship to ownership, the woman and children will be subordinated to the father, the owner par excellence in this new social structure that was nascent and that would extend itself to the emergence of capitalism.

Because one of the most profound discontinuities of the capitalist mode of production with respect to the previous ones is that kinship no longer plays any structural role. Unlike these, in capitalism, society is no longer structured in estates organized by families - into which family one is born determines one's social class - but in individuals who can move up or down in class according to their performance in the production of value.

This difference will be the core of the polemic between Marx and Bakunin regarding inheritance. While Bakunin defended including the abolition of the right of inheritance in the program of the IWA, Marx was opposed to it: we should fight for the abolition of private property, not its transmission. Naturally, in capitalism, it is not the same to be born in a rich family than in a poor one, and the most usual thing is for a bourgeois to come from a bourgeois family, but it does not have to be so. The stories of social mobility which the culture industry has been pounding out to us since its birth not

17 That the passage from matrilineality to patrilineality must have been a long, complex and counter-intuitive process in the transition from primitive communism to class societies can be seen, as Bachofen identified and Engels took up, in the drama trilogy of the *Oresteia*. In this drama, an Athenian trial determined that Orestes did not commit patricide by killing his mother, since children are not born from mothers but to fathers. They gave the example of Athena, who was born from the head of Zeus. This is ruled against the Erinyes, pre-Olympian goddesses who defended the ancient customs.

only have a clear ideological function, they also have a material basis in this mode of production in which the important thing is that value is valorized, that the capital machine remains greased and that the capitalists, mere functionaries of capital, ensure its operation. Its social origin is the least important thing. And this is the fundamental point of the discussion between Marx and Bakunin: as long as there is private property, there will be the commodity; as long as there is the commodity, there will be exploitation, whether or not it is transmitted from parents to children. At the same time that property began to deny itself, since the logic of value is not based on its possession but on its alienation through buying and selling -as Bordiga explains in *Property and Capital*-, property obtained its final victory against kinship, expelling it from the categorical structure of the capitalist mode of production.

As long as kinship was part of the social structure, whether in primitive communism or in pre-capitalist class societies, women could fulfill a greater or lesser variation of social roles, but they were above all *mothers*. It was because she was a mother that she had social predominance in primitive communism. It was because she was a mother that in class societies she was subjected as property of the father and husband, that she was married to establish alliances between families, that her sexuality was controlled to guarantee the biological offspring of the father and the right of inheritance. Her oppression was due to the specific attribute of her sex, motherhood. But while the family was a unit of production and reproduction, women were not only mothers, just as children were not only children. Their participation in production allowed them a wider range of possibilities in their socialization than either of them would have just a few centuries later.

Because in the same process in which kinship ceased to be structural, the family ceased to be a unit of production and reproduction. Over the course of three centuries and with the bourgeois revolutions of the 19th century as the culminating moment, the relationship that fixed the peasantry to the land was broken to give rise to a proletariat suspended in the air, free in a double sense¹⁸. The sphere of production was transferred to the public sphere, but not directly as in primitive communism, but indirectly through the market. As production became abstract work, commodity production, reproduction was confined to the private sphere. Women were *reduced to being mothers*, to raising children, and children were reduced to mere passive subjects, waiting to finish being raised in order to fulfill some kind of valid social function.

But capitalism is a contradictory mode of production, profoundly unstable, subject to forces that permanently revolutionize it in order to accentuate the social categories that sustain it. At the same time that women and children were reduced and enclosed within the family as an atomized space of reproduction, separated from the social sphere, capitalism developed the abstract individual.

The abstract individual of capital is the empty juridical subject, characterized only by its form. It is that rational being, owner of himself, who relates to others as owners of goods equal among themselves, as beings of law, as the essential cells of a democratic and mercantile regime¹⁹. This abstract individual will appear with the affirmation of juridical equality against the estates of the Ancien Régime. Without the abolition of the estates and without achieving freedom and formal equality among all men, a *free* proletariat which could sell its labor power to the capitalist, as the possessor of a commodity sells it to its buyer, would not be possible. With the abolition of the estates, the split between politics, the sphere of liberty and equality, and the economy, the sphere of exploitation, of social classes, of the struggle between them, was thus produced²⁰. For the first time, a

18 "For the conversion of his money into *capital*, therefore, the owner of money must meet in *the market with the free labourer*, free in the double sense, that as a free man he can dispose of his labour-power as his *own* commodity, and that on the other hand he has no other commodity for sale, is short of *everything* necessary for the realisation of his labour-power.", Marx: *Capital*, vol. I, pt.2 ch. 6: The Buying and Selling of Labour-Power

19 Cf. Evgeni Pashukanis: *General Theory of Law and Marxism*.

20 "Where the political state has attained its true development, man -- not only in thought, in consciousness, but in *reality*, in *life* -- leads a twofold life, a heavenly and an earthly life: life in the *political community*, in which he considers himself a *communal* being, and life in civil society, in which he acts as a *private individual*, regards other men as a means, degrades himself into a means, and becomes the plaything of alien

mode of production reproduced social inequality through legal equality.

This division between economics and politics, this development of the abstract individual and the atomization of all previous forms of community, brings with it a democratizing force in capitalism that dissolves all that is solid into the air. Only from this perspective can one understand the birth of the Enlightenment and, in its radical wing, the voices that rose up to claim the equality of men and women. Both Olympe de Gouges and Mary Wollstonecraft commence from the same Enlightenment argument, made possible by the birth of the abstract individual of capital: if we affirm the *natural* equality of men as rational beings and explain their inequality on the basis of education, the universality of reasoning is broken by excluding women. What was a philosophical argument will be transformed into a practical and real struggle for legal equality with suffragism. It is impossible to think of feminism except as a product of this democratizing force, as a product of capitalism in its development.

And this is also how the woman begins to split. As a legal subject and an atomized worker, she is an abstract *individual*. The bases are thus established for the questioning of inequality between men and women, for the vindication of the right of women to develop all their human faculties independently of motherhood, for their incorporation into the rational and universal subject of capitalism. But as a woman, that specific part of the species with reproductive capacity, she is a *mother*, and a mother enclosed within the walls of a family structure increasingly atomized and separated from the whole of social production.

The family itself will be subjected to the pressure of this democratizing and atomizing force proper to the logic of value. The passage from the pre-capitalist family to that of capitalism has several lines of action. On the one hand, the economy is no longer a sphere of the family but a rivalry between atomized workers who compete amongst themselves to sign an individual contract and to be fired individually, and the struggle between individual capitalists to valorize their capital against that of others. But while the sale of labor power is an individual event, the reproduction, however separate it may be from the social whole, must be collective: children are not produced in test tubes and, if there were the technological capacity to do so, it would not be profitable either, for the same reason that it is more profitable to take water from the river than to produce it in a laboratory. This pressure on the family structure, this enormous force of social questioning and erosion of the old patriarchal cell is expressed in the intergenerational conflicts between parents and children - so much reflected upon by psychoanalysis - which acquire an extension never seen in previous modes of production, as well as in the massive incorporation of women into the working world and their search for economic independence.

On the other hand, capitalism needs the family as a collective structure of reproduction, which allows it to disengage itself from the family so that its workers arrive already raised, fed and clothed to sell their labor power. In this sense, the family cannot disappear: it is the minimum space of care and socialization for the formation of the individuals of capital. However, the atomizing force of capitalism calls into question the family and endangers reproduction itself. The exodus of peasants at the dawn of the capitalist industry, their overcrowding in big cities and the conditions of absolute degradation in which the new proletarians live, which Engels will describe so well in *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, will mean the decomposition of the peasant family. This is what will lead Marx and Engels to return the criticism to the bourgeoisie in the *Manifesto*, stating that it is they who are destroying the family and not the communists. After this initial chaos, the State will begin to take charge of some spheres of reproduction so that the logic of capital does not threaten its own material bases. This, incidentally, is a task proper to the capitalist State: to try to control the destructive effects of the relations of production, inclined to see only the immediate interest of individual capital, in order to affirm the general interests of capital as a whole, the maintenance of its mode of production in general. It is as such, that it will raise forth the workers' colonies to organize the nuclear family in watertight compartments, that it will elevate family morals to a national value, that it will favor

powers. The relation of the political state to civil society is just as spiritual as the relations of heaven to earth." Marx: *The Jewish Question*. pt.2

institutions that take care of orphans and turn them into cheap labor for the incipient industry, that it will lock up children who neither study nor work in prisons and will threaten fathers and mothers who do not lead a regular life with taking them away²¹. Through education, health and social services, the State will also begin to take charge of reproduction.

Due to the devastating effects of the atomization exercised by capitalism on the family, and the incorporation of women into wage labor and their struggle to be considered an equal and independent subject with respect to men, not just another cog in the family machine, capitalism will socialize reproduction through the only instances it has to do so: the market and the State. Anyone who has visited an old folks' home can verify at a glance that the reproduction socialized by the market and the State is not true socialization but the continuation of atomization by other means. The care of the elderly has been taken over in part by public and private nursing homes, relieving the family and, above all, women of their burden. This supposes in effect that capitalist society through its basic mechanisms has socialized these care tasks. And yet nursing homes, like hospitals, on the other hand, are not spaces of social care but parking lots where bodies are managed like on a factory conveyor belt. In capitalism, socialization is done through atomization and it cannot be otherwise, whether in production or reproduction.

The feminist currents that defend the socialization of reproductive tasks through the state - that is, public services - as a way to fight against patriarchy are both right and terribly wrong at the same time. They are right because they understand that patriarchy will continue to oppress women as long as reproduction is not done in a directly social way. They are wrong because the only way for reproduction to be done in a directly social way is communism. Meanwhile, the State and the market will assume reproductive tasks, perpetuating patriarchal violence - because patriarchy is not limited to the male-female relationship - over their objects of care, whether they are children, the elderly, the physically and mentally ill, or dependents of various kinds.

But they also err in understanding that the state is an ally in the struggle against the oppression of women. At the same time that, in defense of the general interests of capital, it incorporates into its functions certain reproductive tasks, the State replaces the *pater familias* as the one who becomes the ultimate owner of the children and the one who controls the woman's body through family, reproductive and sexual policies. Thus, the debates around prostitution or surrogacy move in a false polarization between the State and the market, where both options are patriarchal. The fact that the commodification of sexuality and the reproductive capacity of women is being advocated as a form of emancipation and empowerment is simply barbaric, only thinkable from an exercise of trivialization that is characteristic of postmodernity. That the State should have the last word on what a woman can do with her body is also an outrage. The State and the market can transform male violence into something more purely mercantile or juridical, with characteristics different from those of pre-capitalist patriarchy, but they cannot cease to be patriarchal because society as a whole is patriarchal, the mode of production as such.

But the false polarization between state and market is not the only one in which feminism is trapped. We cannot understand women's struggle against patriarchy and its recuperation in feminist ideology if it is not a product of capital's own egalitarianism. For us, the fact that feminism is a product of capitalism is not something negative in itself: the labor movement is also a product of capitalism. What is negative is that, unlike the latter, feminism is not capable of overcoming the categories of the mode of production that gave birth to it, since this requires a global program of emancipation and feminism has a partial program by definition.

Capitalism in its development lays the material foundations of communism, which does not come out of nowhere but commences from those. Thus, the elimination of kinship as a structural category allowed women to be understood more and more as persons in a full and autonomous sense with respect to their possible maternity. The rise of the abstract individual and the incorporation of women as such into the world of work made it possible to question the foundations of the old patriarchal family. But with this process, as we have explained, the woman is torn between her sex, with the

21 Cf. Philippe Meyer: *The Child and the Reason of State*, Zero Zyx ed.

possibility of being a mother, and the development of her individuality. For women, being a mother and being an individual are antagonistic elements.

And feminism also remains entrapped in that opposition. On the one hand, a feminism of equality, whose program resides in defending the abstract individuality of women and their assimilation to men in capitalism. On the other hand, a feminism of difference that leans towards the other pole of the opposition, towards the idea of women as a different social being based on their maternity, essentially antagonistic to capital and the anchor point for criticizing this system, which would be the synthesis of the masculine being. This second perspective today is partially taken up by ecofeminism. As we explained in the section on gender, queer feminism is the continuation of the feminism of equality, despite the fact that both currents are now mortally opposed, because the former takes to its ultimate conclusions the abstract individual defended by the latter: the abstraction of the individual is radicalized in the promotion of a la carte identities, radically particular and individual, impossible to subsume in any universal category, not even that of woman.

But this split, this schizophrenia that every woman who wants to be a mother experiences directly, from which feminism starts and in which it is trapped, is insurmountable in capitalism. The labor market, which needs productive individuals above all biological limitations, be it menstruation or childbirth, denies her specific aspect as a woman and makes her feel it as something antagonistic to her own development as a person. In fact, she will often have to choose between her personal development and material independence on the one hand and motherhood on the other, since capitalism itself presents them as mutually exclusive.

Because to be a person in capitalism, one must be a man. But not by virtue of a male alliance for the defense of his privileges, but because the man - as long as he does not get sick or grow old - is more suited to the unlimited production of value. Hence the precariousness of work that is so abundant among women and the well-known M-curve of their working life. The only way women can enter the labor market without falling short of being men, but as women as such, is by selling themselves in the cultural and sexual industry and the nascent surrogacy market. Thus, the market reproduces patriarchal violence in the same way it does with exploitation: by reproducing inequality through equality.

On the other hand, the socialization of reproduction through its commodification or appropriation by the State does not solve the atomized condition of the family either. It does not solve the loneliness of an upbringing which, separated from an increasingly hostile and fragmented social world, locks children and parents in a social structure that becomes increasingly claustrophobic and, therefore, a breeding ground for violence and repression.

Capitalism, in its democratizing and abstracting dynamics, has laid the foundations for the abolition of patriarchy, but it cannot put an end to it. Only a directly social reproduction, which passes through a directly social production, can resolve the contradiction that women experience between their individuality and the specificity of their sex. Only this can put an end to the subordinate status of children and to the family as a nexus of the continuity of patriarchy in its different transformations throughout class societies. Unlike primitive communism, kinship will have lost all its importance in integral communism because the community will have a global and not a genealogical character. The woman will cease to experience motherhood as the negation of her person and will be able to experience it freely, but she will not be defined by it. The individual will cease to be an atom threatened by the social Leviathan and will be able to live the free development of his individuality in a social context that, instead of repressing it, will turn it into an element of feedback for society as a whole. But communism can only be established after a world revolution that puts an end to capitalism. And that revolution will not be carried out by women, which is an interclass category, but by the proletariat. If as women, we experience oppression and patriarchal violence independently from class, nevertheless, we can only fight against patriarchy as a class, constituting ourselves in that social force which, to stop being exploited, needs to abolish the founding categories not only of capitalism but of all previous class societies: private property, the commodity, money, the State, the family, and patriarchy.