

## Famille et Travail Domestique Éléments d'Approche Théorique (The Family and Domestic Work)

### Aim of the study:

The study attempts to analyze domestic work in the family, its social necessity, and the consequences of its particular assignment to women.

### Hypothesis:

The material basis of oppression inflicted on women is the result of the sexual division of labor resulting in woman's imprisonment within the home. Housework is considered exclusively a woman's work. It has a private character and is carried out within personal and affective relations. It is not considered as real work, hence it is not remunerated.

The study thus proposes:

1. To oppose the idea that housework is a sexual characteristic linked to woman's biological function.
2. To show the social, economic and ideological role of the family which revolves around woman's housework.
3. To bring out the relation existing between the family and the sphere of direct production.

Recently sociologists and economists have been

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## United Nations' International Activities

### 1. Day of Peace

The third Tuesday of September of every year has been set aside by the UNO to be observed by the world's peoples as a "Day of Peace".

### 2. A University for Peace

The University for Peace has been recently founded in Costa Rica under the auspices of the U.N. General Assembly. The first members of the University Council were inaugurated in March 1982. The Council will eventually have 25 members representing the five world areas and various U.N. organizations.

(*Peace and Freedom*, vol. 42  
no. 9, Dec. 1982, p. 15)

### 3. 1983, World Communications Year

On Nov. 19, 1981 the UN General Assembly

proclaimed the year 1983 World Communications Year, (WCY). The UN resolution A/36/40 states that the purpose of the year is "Development of Communications Infrastructures". In order to ensure the harmonious development of these infrastructures by effective coordination at the national level National Coordination Committees for WCY will be set up in member states. They will represent the following sectors: common carrier telecommunications, broadcasting and television, aviation, shipping, transport, meteorology, agriculture, education, postal services and industry. WCY will provide the opportunity for all nations to undertake an in-depth review and analysis of the policies on communications development and stimulate the accelerated development of communications infrastructures.

The entire programme of WCY activities is to be financed on the basis of voluntary contributions.

(*Asian Women*, June 1982, p. 12)

rejecting the notion of the non-productivity of housework. We claim that housework contributes indirectly to the **production** of capital.

Various studies have emphasized the multiple roles of working housewives. They are the producers of the future work force and hold responsibility for their upbringing. They are depended on for the transformation of raw materials into consumable products and for the production of certain commodities like foods, clothes etc. within the family.

Although housework differs in kind and quantity according to social classes, women who perform the housekeeping tasks sacrifice their autonomy and their energy because they accomplish them freely. In return marriage offers them security and comfort, without which they cannot exist. Security and comfort, however, are sometimes an illusion since divorce or repudiation may leave women helpless.

### A class struggle

Women's condition results from a whole condition of the social system which legitimizes it. Women's struggle is not different from that of the laboring class; women represent one of the exploited social forces.

In handling the subject of housework, therefore, two theses have been presented: making it salaried, or allowing the housekeeper to do outside work. Both of these propositions presuppose the following argument: if they do not work outside, they remain dependent on their husbands; if they do, they will have to carry a double burden. Those who claim a salary for housekeepers consider every activity of women, including sexual service which produces the labor force, as a contribution to the needs of the capitalist system.

### Point of the researcher

It is inadmissible to claim a salary for housework because it would lead to a reinforcement of the sexual division of labor in the sense that salary confines women to the home and confirms their segregation from society. On the other hand, if housework remains a free activity, it may be easily assimilated with extra work on the theoretical plan. The assimilation is however wrong because it is not remunerated and not directly productive, though it has an indirect productive value.

The appropriation of women's work by men is based on the historical domination of the former by the latter. Women work at home in return for their maintenance, protection and social position. Men have a more important right regarding the children because they carry their name. The sexual obligation is not always linked with reproduction. It may be for men a form of relaxation.

### Right to work

Women's and children's integration in industrial activity brought dangerous results because it provided

cheap labor for industry, while it confirmed the disappearance of the economic role of domestic work, the number of jobs which women had access to was highly limited. Women were obliged to perform a double task.

On the other hand, if the outside work done by women is of the same nature as their housework, it would bring only a partial amelioration of woman's status. Outside work can be of value as a factor in the improvement of woman's condition when it gives her the opportunity for education, promotion, and social recognition. Transcendence does not mean resignation or escape, but a remodeling of interpersonal relations within the family in an egalitarian spirit.

In Marxist theory, domestic activity is not considered as real work because it is non-productive. The feminist movement has already denounced this Marxist blunder.

### The role and function of the family in general

The family tends to perpetuate the existence of the prevailing social system. It is the place of production and reproduction of the work force, i.e. future workers. It is not a static, isolated institution, but an intrinsic part of capital. To maintain the present structure of the family, benevolent associations and all other forms of social relief have been created.

At the root of women's oppression is the class inequality which links the domination of the monogamous family to the domination of private property. Services such as the upbringing of children and preparation of food are performed by the family at a low cost. Products made for domestic work and services freely performed allow low income families to subsist more or less tolerably. On the other hand, family solidarity helps to solve financial problems through mutual aid and thus to maintain a certain equilibrium which serves to prevent public interventions and social explosions.

The role of the family thus appears not only as a security value but also as an indispensable place for the stifling of social contradictions, so frequent in the families of laboring classes.

### Domestic work in different class families

Domestic work is subjected to outside pressures and exigencies which make of it an important element in the reproduction of class families, of the division of labor, and hence of the existence of conditions of the capitalist system.

**In bourgeois society** family life is controlled by a number of norms dictated by the social environment in which the family lives: receptions, parties, possession of property, standard of living, standard of children's education, etc. Those who fail to follow these norms may be in danger of losing their social prestige. In principle, it is women who are responsible for the maintenance of this prestige.

**In families of laboring classes** women

through their free housework ensure the reproduction of the labor force produced by their husbands and consequently the perpetuation of the work system or order.

A woman's work at home is determined by her husband's position. Her budget depends on the salary he receives, her hours of work and rest are modeled after his own hours.

### **Social consequences of the allocation of housework to women**

Women's work at home, which is essential for the perpetuation of a traditional social order, is the main obstacle for their work outside the home. If they are actually involved in any job, housework will equally be the main obstacle to their development and promotion. It clearly explains the discrimination imposed on them by employers.

A working housewife is expected to reconcile both types of work in such a way that her outside work will in no way injure her family duties. She is also obliged to pay those who replace her in performing the house duties which she formerly performed without pay.

It is true that modern technology has in a way relieved housekeepers of a number of chores but in return, it has increased the profits of industrial and commercial people.

In conclusion, a woman who desires to be recognized as a citizen with full rights has to pay heavily for it. The biological function of women is overvalued as their exclusive privilege but at the same time it is to them a source of intellectual inferiority and of social underdevelopment, and a form of self-sacrifice.

### **Critical analysis of the different approaches of the Algerian family.**

The author presents two studies dealing with the Algerian family. The first by M. Boutefnouchet, "La Famille Algérienne — Evolutions et caractéristiques récentes," Algiers, 1979, draws a parallel between women of the traditional type and those of the modern type in Algerian families. In both types no true evolution exists. Woman's traditional work has not changed her traditional status. She is still considered first and foremost as a wife and mother, this condition being the only protection for her against anti-social elements which are harmful to the Algerian personality.

According to Boutefnouchet the following improvements have taken place in family relations:

Spread of the nuclear family.

More equalitarian relations between married couples.

Better understanding of children's education.

Outside work open to women.

In spite of the above changes, the author confirms the great difference between male and female roles. Girls have less chance for education than boys. Family ties are more repressive to them. Even if they are allowed to work, they have to submit to paternal or fraternal authority or to the husband's will. Outside

employment does not liberate them from housework and family duties. It is evaluated solely on an economic basis.

### **Article by Larbi Touat** (Revue Algérienne des sciences juridiques et économiques no. 3, 1974).

In the second study on the Algerian family, Touat says that the family is rarely a production unit. He limits his analysis to a model family in which the wife and children try to have an independent economy and to keep their gains for themselves while the father alone is responsible for the whole family. Solidarity and individualism thus grow under the same roof and equilibrium is destroyed. The change that must be sought, he says, is an economic equilibrium which does away with conflict and individualism. He advocates the action of the state to put an end to these anomalies.

Both Boutefnouchet and Touat commit the mistake of taking one type of family for a basic study and overlooking other types.

### **Conclusion**

Mme. Dalila Bousalah concludes by pointing out the contradictions existing in the National Charter where the status of the Algerian woman is subjected to the bipolar vision of wife and mother and only incidentally that of worker and producer. Women's rights and sexual equality are always an object of reserve or neglect.

According to the Charter, Arabo-Islamic traditions which glorify the mother and wife as guardian of these traditions must be expressly maintained. They should not suffer from the possibilities offered for women's participation in social life. Salaried work should by no means impede women's role in the family.

We cannot deny, however, that the stabilizing factors surrounding the family concept meet with more and more objection. In intellectual circles, women claim an effective role in political and social activities and a more equalitarian family status.

In the laboring classes, women are preoccupied with problems of survival connected with repudiation, pensions, salaried work, and social and inheritance rights.

There is a flagrant contradiction between the proclamation of women's right to work and the absolute necessity of preserving the traditional values of the patriarchal family: female modesty, submission, self-sacrifice, and a status of the eternal minor and follower.

The promotion of women requires a transformation of social structures with a new definition of woman's status in family and society. This means a strengthening of affective equalitarian relations between couples. The transformation will demand the solution of many socio-economic and socio-cultural problems, including the recognition of woman's right to occupy positions compatible with her capacities and the fair and equitable employment of unprivileged women in charge of families. It will also mean a change in the mentality of parasitic wives, which calls for new methods of analysis and social reorganization.