

EXCERPTED FROM
RESTORATION OF CAPITALISM:
REPATRIARCHALIZATION OF SOCIETY

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CHAPTER THREE: DISTORTION AND DEGRADATION
OF EMANCIPATORY GUIDELINES FOR THE POLI-
CY OF SELF-MANAGEMENT SOCIALISM: POTENTIAL
PROBLEMS OF THE “NEW” POST-SOCIALIST MARXIST
LEFT

*Traps and fallacies of the established Western European Marxist
feminism in the context of socialist feminism*

Amid ideological distortions and the erasure of the structural achievements of Yugoslav socialism (among others) as relevant starting points for teaching, we should not overlook the supporting and therefore highly critical role played by the noncritical adoption of flawed and contradictory theories of Western European Marxist feminism. The latter had not begun to develop in the form in which it is applied today until the second half of the twentieth century. What characterizes this form is that its central, and later academically implemented current never managed to move beyond a reductive set of references restricted solely to the (early)

works of Marx, Engels, and Bebel (Vogel 2013; Davis 1981). Not knowing or deliberately ignoring subsequent canonical works that constituted the core of the first phase of the revolution in the Soviet Union, this current ended up rejecting significant structural insights and key theoretical shifts developed and propagated by Lenin, Alexandra Kollontai, and Clara Zetkin, whose writings identified a structural correlation between the accumulation of private capital and the confinement of reproductive labor within the private sphere, thus an inherent connection between the emancipation of women and the abolition of class society. Precisely these foundational writings and theoretical insights were subsequently further elaborated by generations of Eastern European and Yugoslav political workers, for whom the aforementioned conceptual breakthroughs became the starting point for devising and implementing the structural emancipation of women in most of the nascent socialist systems, particularly those of Eastern Europe, with Yugoslav socialism taking the lead. What raises even more concern—and is likewise directly related to the fact that Western European Marxist feminism is primarily based on Marxist and Engelsian discourse, which are only exceptionally supplemented by the systematically elaborated analyses and theoretical breakthroughs of Lenin and Kollontai, if at all—is the fact that Western European Marxist feminism¹ is largely overdetermined by the theory of dual systems. The latter constitutes the fundamental postulates that frame the central debates of Western European Marxist feminism.² Ac-

according to the theory of dual systems, capitalism and patriarchy are supposed to be two entirely separate, even opposing systems; according to some derivations of the theory advanced by its main representatives, they even exist in mutual conflict.³

The theory of dual systems is rooted in the premises of Western “radical” feminism, by which radical is here meant as a negative term. Namely, it understands patriarchy as an inherently existing and self-perpetuating phenomenon, whereby individual men, bonded in homosocial groups, exercise their allegedly inborn power over individual women, who also, from the other end, make up a homogeneous, oppressed whole. Patriarchy is supposedly not subject to social variability; rather, it exists as a universal phenomenon originating in male/female roles that are in turn related to sexual reproduction and thus the ever-same division of labor between men and women (Runyan Sisson 1994: 211). This patently ahistorical approach is based on a barely disguised biological determinism (Fine 1992: 33), since it does not consider the projected attributes of femininity and masculinity as constructs but as facts—even though these ascribed attributes, and the

1. For a general overview, see “Historical-Critical Dictionary of Marxism” by Lise Vogel and “Beyond the Unhappy Marriage: A Critique of the Dual-Systems Theory” by Iris Marion Young.

2. Therefore I use the term Marxist feminism in its strict sense to designate the Western European current that originated exclusively from the interpretation of Marx and Engels and the theory of dual systems; whereas, for feminisms that follow the theoretical breakthroughs of Lenin and Alexandra Kollontai, which originate from a systemic analysis and synthetic understanding of patriarchy and capitalism (and thus of imperialism, racism, and nationalism), I use the term socialist feminism.

3. The main representative of the theory is Heidi Hartmann, who is joined—in a more or less resolute way—by Sylvia Walby, Zillah Eisenstein, and Nancy Fraser. These theoreticians are still the most prominent and internationally

sought-after names
representing West-
ern European Marxist
feminism.

naturalization of the division of labor that derives from them, must be established and inscribed again and again within the bodies and minds of explicitly designated and traditionally socialized individuals.

Already within the first two decades of the twentieth century, the avant-garde communist movement, under the influence of Lenin and Kollontai, had recognized that capitalism does not parasitize on the previously existing and thus "primordial" power relations between women and men; rather, they saw that it contemporaneously resets and consolidates these relations on its own and, in this respect, readjusts the patriarchally tailored nuclear form of the seemingly atomic family unit so as to transfer onto it the financial burden of reproduction of the existing and future workforce. Hence, the avant-garde communist movement recognized that the oppression of women is structurally determined and directly related to the accumulation of private capital, whereby the exploitation of men in the so-called public sphere and of women in the private sphere are structurally correlated: not two separate phenomena, but freely flowing and reciprocal aspects of one and the same socioeconomic

system (Lenin 1972; Young 1981: 44; Vogel 2008: 242). Such profound and, at the same time, structural analytical recognition does not apply at all to the theory of dual systems. On the contrary.

The latter considers the present domains of public and private—which, to be fair, had not taken form until the onset of industrial capitalism—to be existent in themselves and, at the same time, mutually separate and unrelated units. Therefore, dual systems theory does not treat family or the relationships within it as flexible phenomena, inevitably enmeshed within a wider context which is intersected and determined *inter alia* by factors related to the material and economic order and the functioning of society as such. Instead, this theory treats the family as an isolated and separate formation and, as such, as a vital core of the inherently existing patriarchy, which, being without apparent triggers, thus supposedly always already exists in itself. Specifically, the theory of two separate systems conceives of the nuclear family as an independent unit and addresses it as the main and sole source of patriarchy, and thereby also as the seat of patriarchal rule—inexplicably adopted and supposedly incontestable—of individual men over individual women (Young 1981: 48). The oppression of women therefore has nothing to do with the society's macro-framework and the structure of its reproduction, as is otherwise required by the capitalist order. From the perspective of the theory of two separate systems, the source of this oppression is located in the supposedly already given division of

labor by gender, long demanded and exercised by the man exclusively to his advantage within the private walls of the family. Consequently, the woman gets trapped in a subordinate relationship with the man and is in turn only able to stand up for her individual struggle against the rule of the man within the narrow family circle (Vogel 2013: 134). [...]

The main blemish on the theory of dual systems is its lack of understanding of the dynamic structural correlation between reproductive labor confined to the private sphere and the accumulation of private capital—a correlation that not only requires the breadwinner model and, with it, the patriarchal character of the nuclear family cell, but also actively expands and structurally renews the latter to its own advantage. Since the theory of dual systems treats patriarchy as a naturally occurring formation that supposedly exists above and apart from the broader capitalist framework, with which it is nevertheless regularly associated, it also treats in a similarly narrow and decontextualized manner the purpose and role of reproductive labor. Specifically, dual systems theory interprets the latter as work which, in accordance with the perception of patriarchy as an entirely separate and private family phenomenon, should be carried out merely for the needs and personal benefit of the man in the family—since this, after all, is what patriarchy demands. [...]

The theory of dual systems has split the category of reproductive labor into two hierarchical levels, pushing into the background the educational and care work that is

needed for the reproduction of the next generation of humankind, i.e. the future workforce (Osborne 1977). Only thus could it single out housework as the sole burning issue affecting women, so as to consolidate the idea that the woman's primary reproductive task is to tend to the man's everyday needs. This makes reproductive labor as a whole an entirely separate form of work intended merely for the gratification of individually conceived or private patriarchy. From this also follows the claim that women purportedly constitute a distinct and separate category of the exploited—a category not exploited by capital, but rather merely and solely by their husbands, to whom they are therefore assumed to be directly subordinated within the privacy of their homes (Fine 1992: 12). Hence, it is in the interest of merely individual men to keep women in the private sphere on account of the (household) maintenance services with which the latter directly provides them. [...]

Since the theory of dual systems views patriarchy as something primordial and separate, naturally rooted within a family, it settles for a narrow emphasis on the family unit, which it furthermore represents as independent from capitalist relationships, thus from sociopolitical and productive relationships. Therefore, housework is also viewed merely through the prism of male/female relations, emphasizing its unwaged status within the family circle. Hence, the problem no longer lies in the fact that most of the reproductive labor—related to supplying all family members, not only the partner—in capitalist systems has been pushed

within the privacy of the home; rather, the problem now lies merely in the fact that this otherwise versatile type of work, which of course still falls on one single person and therefore exceeds the standard eight-hour working day, is simply unpaid. Since it does not treat this lack of payment in the broader context, and therefore does not see its structural mechanisms—which of course are not to be found within but outside of the family unit—the dual systems theory reductively and misleadingly associates the emancipation of women with payment for their housework, which ought to be settled either by their husbands or by the capitalist state. According to the theory of two separate systems, payment for housework allegedly revokes the subordinate status of a family member, since the housewife's work has finally become visible and acknowledged as a form of work. In this way, Western European Marxist feminism—which abides by the theory of two separate systems by insisting on family and patriarchy as a standalone system excluded from the capitalist system—falls into its own trap. By seeing the problem merely in terms of individual men, and not at all in the system as such (whose victims are also men), the valorization of women's work and the supposed emancipation of women implied in the form of wages granted (albeit symbolically) by men, acts in reality as a form of consolidation of capitalist patriarchy. With the potential introduction of a housewife's wage, the woman's present status—as a dependent semi-subject who, despite being directly entitled to the housewife's wage, still remains a

“universal servant”⁴ or an errand girl—would merely be legitimized and confirmed in a different manner. She would still remain dependent on her husband, now her official personal employer, while in fact he functions merely as a mediating agent between her work and capital. [...] The housewife’s wage is merely a slightly different legalization and confirmation of the same system that is endemic to capitalist patriarchy, i.e. the traditional or modernized breadwinner model. It is allegedly intended to set women free from the patriarchal yoke, when in reality it re-confines them in one.

The above-mentioned theoretical fallacy, which is the consequence of treating patriarchy and all its real-world consequences as a separate system, structurally backfired on the Western European Marxist feminism of the 1980s and 1990s. The idea of housework subsidies—whereby the old breadwinner model is preserved, albeit in a new guise, thus masking the patriarchal character of the nuclear family in an apparent progressiveness and concern for women’s issues—has been seized by neoliberalism. However, neoliberalism did not utilize this idea primarily in order to privatize

4. [See Irene Osborne, “Wages for Housework: A Dissent,” reprinted from *Meeting Ground 1* (January 1977); originally printed in *Tell-a-Woman* (April 1976). Available at meeting-groundonline.org/housework-reproduction-and-womens-liberation. February 2015. Last accessed June 2020.—Trans.]

housework as such, since the latter could always be concurrently integrated into other types of reproductive labor, possibly in ways even more profitable for capital. Instead, it skillfully utilized the idea originating in Western European Marxist feminism to transfer or to newly consolidate and confine as much social reproductive work as possible—work related to childcare and rearing on the one hand, and to the care of the elderly (infirm) on the other—in the privacy of an ideally standardized family, in the context of which the mother or female partner initially cares for children at home, only to later care for incapacitated parents or other aging relatives. From the point of view of capital—which aspires to further reduce income tax rates and to “reduce labor costs”—its private accumulation would be faced with particular set-backs resulting from the transfer of (unpaid) domestic labor into the (waged) public sector. Not only would this transfer require new infrastructural and workforce developments as well as new mechanisms to ensure its ongoing productivity; but, moreover, being socially recognized as labor means being a part of the public sector, which in turn means being protected by collective agreements. It is worth noting that neoliberal policies have, in fact, again demonstrated that housework—by which Western European Marxist feminism otherwise swears, so as to consolidate the image of patriarchy as a separate system—presents a lesser evil to capital within the framework of privatized reproductive labor than do other kinds of similar work that are disregarded by Marxist feminism, namely the integral

reproduction of future generations and care of the elderly and infirm. In a seemingly bizarre and yet predictable turn of events, neoliberalism ironically indicates the falseness of the theory of two separate systems and the catastrophic, co-optative effects derived from the decontextualized view of patriarchy and capitalism. Hence, neoliberalism in its essence differently exposes and reversely confirms the well-known premise of socialist feminism: that capitalism is a system and patriarchy one of its operative principles, and therefore one of the constituent (sub)elements that are of key structural importance for the greater accumulation of private capital.

This brings us to the final and equally dangerous trap into which Western European Marxist feminism has fallen on account of advocating the theory of dual systems. As this theory considers patriarchy to be a naturally occurring system and presents it as ensuing from the supposedly universally existent and likewise naturally occurring selfish interests of the man, it also does not regard reproductive labor systemically; rather, by reducing reproductive labor to housework alone, the theory inaccurately considers it to be a separate gendered form of individual work, which the woman ought to perform for the allegedly self-interested man. The theory of dual systems thus falls victim to the claim that the capitalist system must be a separate phenomenon. It must, by its very nature, be a system purportedly “neutral in terms of society and gender” since it is, on the basis of this deduction, concerned with merely

socioeconomic relationships in the public sphere (Fine 1992: 43). If anything, it is in the interest of capital to aspire to a diversified workforce that is continuously expanding in the formal labor market, which in turn allows for its greater and increasingly diversified exploitation—whereas, allegedly, it is in the interest of men, i.e. patriarchy, to confine women within the four walls of the home. This supposedly leads to friction between capital and patriarchy, showing up the clash of interests between the two. This way they are seen to be in a kind of permanent conflict. [...]

Since the theory of dual systems insists on the disjuncture of capitalism and patriarchy, with the latter supposedly being merely the result of personal interests and thus an expression of the selfishness of the man in the private sphere, it not only presents capitalism as a phenomenon related merely to the public sphere and thereby in conflict with patriarchy, but it also—following on from this premise—presents capitalism as the natural ally of women in the public sphere, in their struggle against patriarchy (Fine 1992: 43). Capital is meant to enable the employment of women in the labor market and, according to the theory of two separate systems, automatically ensure their exit from the patriarchal field and thus their liberation from the patriarchal yoke. In striving to employ women, capitalism is therefore seen as a challenge to male domination and as presenting a threat to patriarchy itself (38). According to this logic of structurally unrelated spheres, whereby capitalism is concerned only with socioeconomic relationships

in the public sphere, capitalism shakes the very foundations of society's patriarchy, enabling the woman to break free from her dependence and from the hold of patriarchy merely by entering the capitalist labor market.⁵ According to the logic of the theory of dual systems, capitalism for women—despite their segregation within the labor market, which this theory merely associates with prejudice—is first and foremost a liberating force. Together with women, capitalism is seen to occupy the first line of battle against men and, by implication, against patriarchy (42). It is purportedly in the interest of capital that, through labor diversification, it extracts women from the privacy of households—as if capital itself has, in fact, never demanded the domestication of women and their removal into the institutional sphere of privacy that has been specially designed for this very purpose, simultaneously including them in the labor market as a secondary and therefore even more underpaid workforce. Since, according to the theory of two separate systems, capital is assumed to work to the benefit of women by successfully transferring them from the private sphere into the labor market, it ought to automatically con-

5. History teaches us that capital, with its financial influence and propaganda activities, consolidates the woman's role as angel-in-the-house and, moreover, thoroughly exploits the figure of housewife/mother in order to continuously underpay her work in the formal labor market (Young 1981: 60).

tribute to their liberation. In short, capitalism is supposed to undermine patriarchy or male domination in the private sphere. The only force available to challenge patriarchy, following the logical acrobatics of the theory of dual systems, is precisely capitalism itself. [...]

With the theory of dual systems, Western European Marxist feminism joins in its basic premises with liberal feminism. This emphasis only contributes to discrimination against women in the labor market, attributing this discrimination to societal prejudices, as if the latter were the cause and not a consequence of the functioning of the system as such. Thus the theory of dual systems presents the effects of this system as the source, while failing to acknowledge and rather obscuring the actually existing deeper structural causes and mechanisms related to the order of the private accumulation of capital and the functioning of the capitalist system per se. For this very reason, the theory of dual systems is fundamentally concerned with constructing and producing women primarily as private reproducers, and therefore as merely secondary workers—that is, as a workforce base that is rendered flexible, labelled as spare or auxiliary, and therefore indispensable for the accumulation of capital. [...] Given that within the formal economy and in the labor market, the woman is supposed to do her work merely as an appendix and thus a supplement to her primary role as reproducer, regardless of her actual status, her work and wage, regardless of their actual scope, are meant to serve and act merely as a support to the central wage la-

bor and income of the man. This construct results not only in the legalization of lower pay for women—in spite of equal work they do side-by-side with men and to which constructs of femininity contribute—but also in the revaluation of the otherwise qualified work of women into semi-qualified or unqualified. Add to this an additional pretext: that women's work is merely a natural extension of their skills and chores as housewives, which women ought to perform instinctively, by virtue of their nature and not through acquired knowledge. [...]

The structural marginalization of women and their work therefore inevitably leads to a different kind of positioning, and thus to a different set of privileges and a different status of men in relation to women (Young 1981: 61). The patriarchal structure of family units, which feeds off the breadwinner model, and with it the differential power and positioning of men in relation to women within the family, are all a consequence of the division of labor as demanded by the capitalist system for the purpose of the private accumulation of capital by the few. In order for the capitalist elite to ensure this accumulation, even to increase it at the expense of externalizing the costs related primarily to reproductive labor, the capitalist elite encourages the division of labor into private and public, not only by way of ideological interventions that entrench conservativity but, equally importantly and above all, by way of structural interventions. Consequently, this elite encourages and thus sets up the supremacy and the privileging of men in the

family environment, as the main breadwinners and therefore also as direct executives or managers, through whom capital—in the form of a family wage—percolates to the sidelined reproductive labor of women. [...] The emancipation of women therefore constitutes an immediate pressure on capital to renounce its seizure of a substantial share of jointly produced assets—which capitalism will never agree to. Or, if it does, it will do so only co-optatively and selectively for certain segments of women, since this would entail a proportionally lower possibility for appropriating the work of others to its own private luxury gains (Vogel 2013: 153). In other words, and returning theoretically to what we have already illustrated practically, this simply means that the real and structural emancipation of women, as socialist feminism has understood only too well, requires the abolition or annulment of the capitalist system as such.

In contrast, the theory of two separate systems demands only the abolition of patriarchy, as if patriarchy were merely an autonomous unit, or even an independent system, rather than the operative principle and thus a constituent element of the capitalist system—one that structurally parasitizes on the division of space and labor into the public and the private spheres, transferring reproductive labor into the latter. The recognition of patriarchy as an in-built phenomenon, and therefore of a piece with capital, has enabled socialist feminists to take on a different, structural view—namely, that patriarchy, like racism, cannot be eliminated without examining and removing its causes, i.e.

the structural mechanisms that establish and consolidate it. Instead of professing the abstract disconnectedness between patriarchy and capital, socialist feminism has—since Lenin and Kollontai—contextualized and recognized both as integral, constituent parts of the same political and economic system (Ferguson and McNally 2013: xxi; Kollontai 1982). This also led to a leap, from an isolated view of the household and women's work within it as a kind of biological predestination for women, who are supposedly caught in this permanent and unchangeable fix of domination by individual men, towards a structurally differentiated view of women's labor, as having been concentrated in the newly separated private sphere at a specific moment in history. This leap thus moves towards a recognition of the broader relational embeddedness and function of such work within the capitalist socioeconomic framework for the purpose of capital and its costs of reproduction (Ferguson and McNally 2013: xxv; Young 1981: 65). [...]

By failing to acknowledge the structural solutions by means of which lived socialism transcended Engels's fallacy—both in theory and in a practice that drew on the carefully elaborated writings of Lenin and Kollontai, as well as on practices implemented in the Soviet Union and later in other socialist systems—Western European feminist Marxism still remains a prisoner of the theory of two separate systems (Vogel 2013: 139). In this, it is perhaps increasingly joined by the youngest-generation representatives of socialist thought in our region.⁶ Due to the write-off of

6. [Meaning, the territory of former Yugoslavia.—Trans.]

comprehensive book holdings—which were systematically removed from libraries after 1991 and utterly destroyed (or, in rare cases, preserved in the form of occasional individual copies found in specialty stores), and which helped create socialism and, with it, socialist feminism—this new generation is compelled to “learn” only from freely accessible sources of Western European Marxist feminism. As a handful of women critics of Western European Marxist feminism have noted, the greatest damage—which appears ever more permanent, due to the destruction of Eastern European archives, once rich with the legacy of Eastern European socialist feminism—caused then as now by the theory of dual systems, is the ingraining of the belief among modern-day socialists that capitalism is not related to patriarchy and that class struggle must therefore be conducted separate and apart from questions related to the emancipation of women. Such a platform implies an a priori victory for both capitalism and patriarchy—a victory which, ironically, has already made inroads into thinking on the New Left via the adoption of the theses of Western European Marxist feminism. An entirely noncritical reception of the theory

of two separate systems, together with the adoption of the reformist and revisionist theses of liberal feminism—with which the emancipatory policies of socialism have been distorted and degraded in retrospect, notwithstanding the existing contexts and politico-historical circumstances—acts as a fatally regressive combination. Through its conceptual premises and fundamental fallacies, it eerily returns us to the late nineteenth century, and this at a time when awareness of the structural permeation of patriarchy with capital is absolutely vital, since, in our post-socialist societies, before our very eyes, the modernized breadwinner model is returning in response to the demand of capital, and, with it, the repatriarchalization of society.

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TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: The transition of formerly socialist European countries into democracy has brought with itself, among other things, a taste of the free-market economy, but, unfortunately, also the erasure from collective memory of the legacy left by socialism, which is today persistently represented to younger generations as having been primarily negative, adverse, and unproductive. Even though the intensity of the newly imposed measures differs from country to country, the methods are more or less the same: Nearly all industrial production has been obliterated or privatized, workers' rights have been infringed upon in the name of market competitiveness, etc. This obliteration also includes the corresponding anti-fascist history that newly formed (or hitherto dormant) nationalist and religious elites seek to blacklist and condemn under the pretense of tradition and patriotism, which inevitably leads to censorship, the

fabrication of tradition, and a comprehensive and damaging rewriting of history.

In the territory of former Yugoslavia, as is the case elsewhere, the patented political economy of self-management has been replaced by another (authoritarian) system: capitalism, together with (neo)liberalism, as a supposedly progressive and nowadays ubiquitous alternative to socialism. One of the casualties of this new regime is gender equality, which neoliberalism swears by in theory but continuously fails to implement in practice, due to the demands of the free-market economy and to the division of labor toward the end of maximum productivity at the lowest possible (labor) cost, with surplus value privately appropriated by business owners (i.e., capitalists).

The book *Restoration of Capitalism: Repatriarchalization of Society* by Lilijana Burcar—renowned author, feminist, and Full

Professor at the Faculty of Arts at the University of Ljubljana, Slovenia—was first published in 2015, roughly twenty-five years after the onset of the disintegration of the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia, of which Slovenia had been one of six constituent republics. The Croatian translation has been commissioned by the Centre for Women's Studies in Zagreb, in collaboration with the Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Research, and is forthcoming in spring 2020.

This comprehensive and highly informative study presents the present-day state of women's and reproductive rights in formerly socialist countries, together with a review/overview of the sociopolitical situation and economy prior to and during the socialist period, which, as Burcar determined, was far more progressive and beneficial in terms of the above-mentioned rights, in comparison with even the "most advanced" capitalist systems, such as those in

Scandinavia, for instance. The present excerpt consists of selected paragraphs from a subsection of Chapter Three, on the "Traps and fallacies of the established Western European Marxist feminism in the context of socialist feminism." It discusses the theory of dual systems, according to which capitalism and patriarchy are considered as two separate systems, whereby the latter does not arise from the former, but rather the two exist in mutual conflict. As such, the author asserts, this theory presents an immediate danger to the emancipation of women and to women's rights in general.

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