WOMEN, WORK AND IDENTITY : A SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF MOTHERHOOD AND PROSTITUTION

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CERTIFICATE

This dissertation entitled "**Women, Work and Identity : A Sociological Analysis of Motherhood and Prostitution**" submitted in partial fulfilment for the M.Phil. degree of this University has not been previously submitted for any other degree of this or any other University and is my original work.

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We recommend that the dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

What kinds of human beings have we become ? This question seems to have returned to the heart of social theory, embodied in a host of investigations of subjectivity, self, the body, desire, identity. It reactivates a theme that was central to sociological and anthropological thought in the early decades of the 20th century. In different ways Emile Durkheim, Max Weber, Marcel Mauss, Norbert Elias, George Simmel and Karl Marx focused upon the relations between social arrangements and the capacities, moral frameworks, cognitive organisations, and emotional economy of the human being as a creature with a history and a sociology. Marx, Weber, Durkheim and innumerable others developed different versions of the thesis that the individual or individualism was a modern phenomenon, one to be praised or deplored, explained in different ways, but nonetheless a sociological phenomenon- a consequence of the effects of changes in the social organization of collective life upon human beings. However, this notion of the `individual' did not distinguish between `men' and `women' and treated the `individual' as a mental category. In fact, "there has been and continues to be a passive tendency to make allegedly general statement as if the human race were not divided into two sexes, and then either to ignore the female sex

altogether or to proceed to discuss it in terms not at all consistent with the assertions that have been made about `man' and `humanity'". While man has been categorized in terms of a generally limitless potential, for rational thought, creativity, and so on, woman has been viewed as functionally determined by her reproductive role, and her actual and potential abilities perceived as stunted, in accordance with what have been regarded as the requirements of this role. Woman's function is seen as physical and sensual, whereas man's potential is seen as creative and intellectual.

Feminists have become deeply suspicious of theoretical discourses that claim neutrality while speaking from a masculinist perspective, and have at times despaired of the possibility of `gender-neutral' thought. Women's oppression in society was thus reflected in their absence from male stream thought. Amidst shifting and often overlapping perspectives feminists sought to uncover the cause of their oppression: Was women's oppression primarily located in the sphere of work or the sphere of the family ? In the realm of production or the realm of reproduction? In economic structures or cultural representations ? In sexuality or mothering or what ? Such disagreements operated within the broader context of debates over the relative weight to be attached to structures of patriarchy versus capitalism; and either of these structural accounts versus social roles, or pshychologies of power.

Such concerns are still as much alive as when the pioneers started

thinking about them. The objective here is to travel that path once again in order that we understand our situations better and act on it.

I. Gendered Work and Feminist Politics :

Feminism is concerned with the social processes whereby the two genders--women and men--which make up the category human, are constituted, reproduced and changed. The constitution of humanity is an active, sometimes conscious, frequently politically contested process. The exploration of this process has made it clear that women's activities have contributed to altering the content and the context of gender relations, thereby constantly consituting and reconstituting gender categories. While women have not done this in conditions of their own making, a good deal of feminist exploration has been devoted to identifying the conditions which allow women to extend control over their lives, and a good deal of feminist strategy to extending and building upon these conditions. Both socialists and radical feminists have defined, albeit in very different ways, the essential parameters of gender constitution as the relations between the production of society's goods and services and the reproduction of people as biological and social beings. And while radical feminists concentrated on the politics of reproduction, socialist feminists attempted to articulate this understanding to broader theories of social change.

Women in capitalist culture (and by implication men) are defined from,

live and work in, an inherently contradictory material position. Women are defined as responsible for essential social work-mothening and caring for adults--what is commonly called reproductive work. They do this in a society where power and analytic categories derive primarily from the productive sphere like class relations, but in a more obvious way, gender relations are constitututed not only by relations of production, but also by the relations involved in the reproduction of people. Women's dual roles can thus take a multitude of forms. Women can work in two separate and functionally disparate places, attempting to bridge constant discontinuity in their daily lives, largely through individual effort and the use of a range of services available in their communities. Alternatively, they can obtain a variety of resources in a variety of ways within the home, and thus alter not their location but the social meaning and function of home and work. However they may carry them out, women's dual roles are not a radical break with the past, but another adjustment of their use of space and time in order to maximize access to resources.

Women's dual roles is directly contingent upon their natural propensity to conceive and give birth. What to make of this apparently pre-social reality and its political and cultural institutionalization has always been a central question in the history of feminist theory and ideology. It also occupies a particularly vexed place in understanding the origins and basis of women's

oppression. Much of the suffrage movement staked its claim on what was, after all a demand that the domestic importance and private skills of women as mothers be officially recognized and given full reign in the public domain. On the other hand, an ideological vanguard of the contemporary women's movement, confronting the possibilities of new contraceptive technology rejected patriarchal prescriptions for compulsory motherhood to lead a struggle against both the socialization patterns and economic constraints that serve to restrict women's lives to ahistorical maternity. Despite ideological differences, both Betty Friedan and Juliet Mitchell found the family to be the lynchpin in an ideology which offered feminine fulfilment within the confines of the home and apart from a world of self creative and paid work. The most radically anti-maternalist position, that women's liberation requires extra uterine reproduction, was argued by Shulamith Firestone in line with a generally biologistic analysis of the sources of male female power differentials in patriarchal society.

More recently however, and linked to a larger concern with biological and social reproduction, a quite different thematization has begun to emerge, one that reflects the evaluation of motherhood as an essentially positive activity and insists on its disalienating recuperation by and, in the first instance, for women themselves. In developing the theoretical underpinnings of the new problematic, feminism has woven together lesbian- feminism, psycho analysis,

and female experience. The first of these, radical lesbian ideology, adopted matriarchy as an idyllic and strategically useful myth. The second, psychoanalytic theory, shares an object with feminist theory the role of the mother child father trangle in producing sexual difference. The most representative text of this genre is perhaps Judith Butler's `Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity' (1989), wherein she argues for a common identity for women based on their embodied resistance to abstract and objectifying modes of thought and experience, their felt sense of their bodies, their capacity for maternal identification or maternal thinking, the nonlinear directionality of their pleasures or the elliptical and plurivocal possibilities of their writing. The third strand uses motherhood as a metaphor , outside the role of phallocentric linear logic. Much of this writing has been formally experimental, in Helene Cixous's term, `Woman writing woman'[1],and so more easily ignored than assimilated by traditional disciplines with their fundamentally sexist foundation and territorial jealousies.

The most provocative of all the initiatives at recentring feminist theory on the maternal are the meta theoretical revisions of Mary O`Brien, Mary Daly and Dorothy Dinnerstein, all of which are predicated upon a conviction that patriarchal theory has ignored and suppressed the importance of motherhood. They carry the themes of matriarchal motherhood, the historicization of

[1] Cinous, Helene. The Laugh of the Medusa' in ***Signs : Journal of Women in Culture and Society***, Vol.I.no.4,1978.

mothering and gender differences in consciousness to a more general, indeed universal level. For all three, the denigration of motherhood in political theory in symptomatic of global deformation of consciousness which substructures a potentially catastrophic opposition between culture and nature which at its limit threatens life on this planet. In its strongest form, this view argues that the specific capacities and powers of women's bodies imply an essential difference between men and women, where women may be presented as essentially peace loving, `biophilic' or caring and men as essentially aggressive, `necrophilic' or selfish.

Understanding the separation of women's differences often lead to a problem in the long standing debate in feminism: the sexual equality versus sexual difference debate. However, proponents of both the equality camp and the difference camp operate within the same paradigm of theorising the body . Both understand the body as a given biological entity which either has or does not have certain ahistorical characteristics and capacities. To this extent, the sexual difference versus sexual equality debate is located within a framework which assumes a body/mind, nature/culture dualism. The different responses are both in answer to the question of which should be given priority: the mind or the body, nature or culture. In such a paradigm, the underlying power of patriarchal logic remains largely hidden. At this end, feminists started re-theorizing the gendered body as docile in a male dominated culture and

thus opposed not exclusivity of sex, but sexual exclusivity of power.

II. Feminism, the body and identity :

What is currently in flux in feminist politics is feminist identity--what feminism is and what it means. The subject of feminism is ostensibly women, and its aim to improve the lives of women. This notion of improvement has been based on the argument that the ways in which women have been understood in western culture haver denied many possibilities to women because men generally exercise power over them. Feminists, from the 1960s, have identified and criticised, in different ways, dualistic, patriarchal, heterosexist models of gender identity, in which men are taken to be the active, strong and moral half of a human whole which has and needs two parts. Women are the other half: evils necessary for reproduction and other male needs. As a source of truth, the subjectivity of the subject constitutes feminism's alternative to operspectival and presumably masculinist reason and science.

However, the notion of the unified `subject' has come to be criticized within the new theoretical paradigm of postmodernism and poststructuralism. "There is a marked interest in analysing processes of symbolization and representation--the field of `culture'--and attempts to develop a better understanding of subjectivity, the psyche and the self"[2]. Feminist interrogations

[2] Barrett, Michele, `Words and Things : Materialism and Method in Contemporary Feminist

have shifted, "from a determinist model of `social structure' (be it capitalism, or patriarchy, or a gender, segmented labour market or whatever) and deals with questions of culture, sexuality or political agency--obvious counterbalances to an emphasis on social structure"[3]. Thus, with post modernism, feminism faced a formidable challenge. Post modernism "heralded the end of history"; "announced the end of man and reduced the anthropological subject to a vanishing face in the sand, a disappearing signifier, a fractured, centerless creature; postmodernism trumpted the end of philosophy and of master narratives of justification and legitimation"[4]. This became both a boon and a bane for feminist epistemological and political work: "on one hand, it animates and legitimizes feminism's impulse to politicize all ideologically naturalized arrangements and practices; on the other, it threatens to dissipate us and our projects as it dissolves a relatively bounded realm of the political, and disintegrates the coherence of women as a collective subject"[5].

Feminism's interest in fragmented, multiple, multivocal subjectivities, introduced by the regime of postmodernism in social theory, culminated in their

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Analysis', in M.Barrett and A.Phillips (eds.), ***Destabilizing Theory : Contemporary Feminist Debates***. Polity Press, Cambridge,1992,pp.204.

[3] ibid.

[4] Benhabib, Seyla, 'Sexual Difference and Collective Identities : The New Global Constellation' in ***Signs : Journal of Women in Culture and Society***, vol.24..no.2, 1999, pp.335.

[5] Brown, Wendy, 'Feminist hesitations, Postmodern Exposures', in differences : *A **Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies***, vol.3, no.1, 1991, pp.70.

examination of bodies and the ways in which power (i.e.masculine power) both produces and limits identity. In this project, the most important theorist that feminists have borrowed from is Michel Foucault. Foucault offers a reformulation of power which facilitates intriguing possibilities for feminist identity. Foucault's conception of bodies in "The History of Sexuality", his analysis of truth and knowledge as power which enables and limits identity, refuses the possibility of absolute and final cultural transformation. Thus, Foucault's readings of the history of bodies as subject to the power relations of late 20th century post industrial capitalist culture, helps feminism to win a fight without having an absolute war. Foucault's suggestion that resistance to the specific relations of power might start with a turn to bodies and their pleasures, embraces not only the partiality of identity, but consequently the partial knowledge which produced this identity.

The theory that bodies are not biological essences, but are culturally constructed, just as much as sexuality and sex are cultural constructions, frustrates the possibility of a feminist identity grounded in any kind of "natural" category of women. This means that women cannot share a universal, timeless identity based simply on being essentially, biologically women. Foucault's suggestion that all discourses can give rise to resistance offers a more fluid, more partial identity which could enable feminist politics without subjecting this politics to an absolute and eternal feminist identity.

Thus, although Foucault's analyses of power undermines previous feminist understandings of a patriarchy as monolithic power structure, it does not deny the possibility of understanding gender relations as serving specific, interlocking interests. Thus it allows an understanding of social formation as masculinist. The collapse of the concept of `patriarchy' frees feminists to pursue specific, local struggles without justifying these with reference to an entirely male system of power and consequent oppositional female powerlessness.

The present work is an endeavour to relook at the age old debates in feminism. in the light of contemporary developments in feminist theory, as outlined above.The problems which concern us in the present work are: how do we reconceptualise the notion of woman as a subject in light of the philosophical contributions of feminism ? How does feminism alter our understanding of the traditional epistemological/moral subject of western philosophy ? Has the feminist emphasis on embodiedness, intersubjecctivity, caring and empathy, sexuality and desire subverted the categories of the dominant tradition ? What is the relation between subjectivity and political agency ? Can we think of political/moral/cultural agency only insofar as we retain a conception of the autonomous, rational and accountable subject, or is a concept of the subject as fragmentary and riveted by heterogeneous forces more conducive to understanding varieties of resistance and cultural struggles

of the present ?

In this work, an attempt has been made to explore the relationships between work and women's identity through an analysis of the institutions and practices of motherhood and prostitution, wherein women's sexuality and body becomes the primary site of the power differentials which consolidate male power in our societies; also, this is an attempt to critically explore the possibilities of women's agency and their perceptions of the work they perform within given ideological and material circumstances that not only devalue their work but also devalue them as persons.

A Brief Outline of the Study:

The next chapter outlines the theoretical debates on the notion of `work' in classical social theory, especially in the context of Marx's theory of work and labour. The basic theme underlying the discussion of the notion of work is that work is itself socially constructed and reconstructed. This implies that it is contingent on and requires perpetual action by agents for its reproduction. In the context of an understanding of women's work, this chapter focuses on theoretical debates in feminism which, while borrowing from Marx, tried to reappropriate the notion of reproduction (biological and social) into the Marxist paradigm. This chapter looks at work and its meanings historically and in contemporary times and also at the sexual division of labour which has been a contentions issue insofar as it is held to be the site from which women's

oppression in society originates.

The next chapter is an exposition on the debates in feminist identity politics. It deals with the analysis of the construction of gendered identities in a patriarchal society, and probes whether women's identity, agency and subjectivity are entirely a product of patriarchal ideologies or whether women's autonomous agency is a viable alternative in cultures which privileges the male. It focuses on the transformation of patriarchal power in society from `father-right' to `male-right' and tries to analyse the significance placed on the body as the primary site of male violence in a patriarchal culture. It also tries to understand in what capacities women can challenge the patriarchal society and the spheres in which it is possible for a cultural intervention on the part of women which would not only alter the ways by which women are constructed in a patriarchal culture but the bases of that culture itself.

Chapter four tries to contextualize the debates on women's work and their identity in the institutions and practices of motherhood and prostitution. The basic premise of looking at motherhood and prostitution is the contention that in a patriarchal culture, women as mothers and women as prostitutes have been denied right to their bodies. While mothers essentially serve the male need of species reproduction, prostitutes provide sexual services to men; in the process women come to be constructed oppositionally as either `moralized angels' or `carnal magdalens' thus failing to expose the workings of patriarchal

ideology. This chapter looks at the feminist debates around the prioritization of women's `natural' attributes of caring, empathy, sacrifice embodied in mothers and the drawbacks of such a politics which falls back on exactly the same attributes which naturalises women's oppression in society. Here we make an attempt to go beyond the paradigm of woman as victim to explore the ways in which women can subvert or trangress the system to forge an autonomous definition of themselves in society without arguing for a separatist politics.

The final chapter relooks at the question of women's consent within patriarchy which perpetuates their oppression in society and the evidence of woman's experience as a dialectical engagement with their world, as a site where women's agency can be located. Women's experiences are not taken as monolithic categories but as multiple and contested, which thus makes identity a process rather than static and unchangeable.

CHAPTER TWO

WORK : HISTORICAL, ANTHROPOLOGICAL AND SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

I. Work in Historical Perspective:

For any activity to be considered as `work', its embeddedness in a social context is a primary prerequisite. The social context can be structured in turn by the capitalist economic system; by the principles of both the market and of reciprocity and by the social hierarchies of age, gender, kinship, neighbourhood and informal groups. Succinctly put, `work' is a social construct with variations in meanings depending on the social context in which it is embedded.

Social and political philosophers have sought to distinguish `work' from the related concept of `labour'. Hannah Arendt, in her major work, ***The Human Condition (1970),*** distinguishes three' general human capacities' and their "corresponding conditions" as labour and life, work and worldliness, and action and plurality, which together constitute what she calls the ***vita activa***[1] (emphasis in original). `Labour', according to Arendt, corresponds to the biological process of the human body and is based primarily in the private realm- the realm of the household, family and intimate relations. In contrast to labour, `work' is the activity that entails "the working up of the world, the

[1] Mary G Dictz, `Hannah Arendt and Feminist Politics', in Mary Lyndon Shanley and Carole Pateman (eds.), ***Feminist Interpretations and Political Theory***, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1991.

production of things-in-the-world"[2]. For Arendt, `work' opens up a human world in which labour and action can then appear.

In the Marxist discourse, on the other hand, no such rigid distinction between the concepts `work' and `labour' can be discerned. Neither Marx, nor Hegel before him, differentiated between labour and work in the manner of Arendt. However, both Marx and Hegel aim to relate `work', in precisely the sense used by Arendt, to `labour', in terms of the bodily expenditure of energy, as effort. As Mildred Bakan has argued, "the relation of work to labour is a particularly important instance of the more general Hegelian conception of the dialectical relation of form (as work) to its material content (as labour)[3]".

In contradistinction to Arendt, Marx sought to investigate the concrete conditions in which a work process is carried out, how this is realized as `work' for society in general and as `labour' from the standpoint of the worker. In this definition of `work', Marx is quintessentially concerned with `work', in its economic sense, i.e. with production, since the production of something is the raison d'etre for work of any sort. The term `labour' is usually reserved for "a structuring activity in everyday life"[4], by which human beings as `persons' reproduce themselves. However, in Marx's scheme of things, the concept of labour is mostly used as a synonym for the category of the alienated work process. Alienation is seen as particular to capitalist production, wherein "the

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[2] Ibid, pp.235.
[3] Mildred Bakan, `Hannah Arendt's Concepts of Labour and Work', in Melryn A Hill (ed.), ***Hannah Arendt : The Recovery of the Public World***, St.Martin's Press. New York.1979.

worker is deprived of the `objects of production' and of its `means of production' which are opposed to him as an alien social power'[5]. As "alienated work", "the performance of work loses its quality as self-realization and serves only to reproduce the worker in its existence"[6]. `Work', and `labour' are then, two aspects of one and the same process viewed from the standpoint of social reproduction or from the standpoint of the individual worker.

While the definition of `work' is fraught with ambiguities, with Maurice Godelier arguing that the words `work', `to work' and `worker' took on their meanings in (our) language at a certain period and it was not until the development of political science in the nineteenth century that the idea of work became a central concept[7], representations of work in themselves evince the intensely subjective and ideological nature of work. Patrick Joyce has argued "the history of work has to be about more than work alone"[8], suggesting that more than economic activity, "work" is a cultural activity, in which the political and social are inseparable from the economic. However, in the west, as a degree of disjunction between the spheres of kinship, religion, politics and the economic is discernible, as Godelier has pointed out, making `work' a discrete activity in a distinct `economic' realm[9].

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[4] *Agnes Heller, **Everyday Life***. Routledge and Kegan Paul.London and New York.1984.
[5] Ibid. pp.63. 6.
[6] Ibid. pp.64.
[7] R.E.Pahl., ***Divisions of Labour***. Basil Blackwell. Oxford.1984. pp.18.
[8] Patrick Joyce, ***The Historical Meanings of Work***. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge.1988.
[9] Maurice Godelier. `Work and its Representations : A Research Proposal'.***History Workshop Journal***.10.Autumn.1980.

A crucial determinant of any activity qualifying as `work' in contemporary societies is its situatedness in a market relationship dictated by production relations. In the discussions of `work' in which `market thinking' has predominated is that of neoclassical economics and Marxism, both sharing `a certain rationalism and universalism and certain assumptions about the human subject[10]. The market principle thrives on the assumption of equality of agents in exchange, what Still calls, "the representation of the other as ***economically*** the same" (my emphasis)[11].

A fundamental question about the market is whether it has been a universal structure or a historically contingent phenomena. The argument that the market was once a self-contained place which has become more and more dominant, encompassing more areas and more aspects of people's lives, obfuscates more imaginative aspects of exchange governing people's lives earlier, namely, gift exchange. Anthropological literature is abound with the evidence of societies wherein gift exchange, the form of exchange immortalized in Marcel Mauss's path breaking work on **`The Gift'**, underlined primary economic relations. Mauss argues that "gift exchange often exists along side market exchange in archaic societies"[12], the economic aspect, however, being

[10] Judith Still. ***Feminine Economies***. Manchester University Press. Manchester and New York. 1997,pp.2.
[11] Ibid. pp.1.
[12] Ibid.pp.13.

neither predominant nor isolatable. Giving, thus becomes, economic behaviour combined with "legal, moral, social, religious and aesthetic behaviour"[13].

Thus, we can argue that exchange characteristic of market societies is at significant variance with those characterisizing non-market ones, with the important implication that exchange per se does not determine a market situation. One important character of market economies is the assumption that "value is fixed, that it can be measured and stored. An exchange of one good for another assumes the rational quantification of value (the recognition of equivalence)"[14].

In the capitalist market situation, labour power appears as a commodity exchangeable in the market for wages. In commodity production, Marx has argued, "labour' is not only useful labour but also value-creating labour"[15], the value of any product determined by "the labour-time socially necessary for its production"[16]. Whenever a division of labour exists, labour may be considered as social labour. However, in a market economy, labour is not directly social labour but destined for exchange in the market. Labour is `private' autonomous labour which becomes social indirectly through some mediation by the value-endowed commodity or product of labour. As values, commodities are equatable with one another: so much so that a universal equivalent may be

[13] Ibid.pp.14.
[14] Ibid.pp.8.
[15] J.Mepham and D.H.Ruben (eds.). ***Issues in Marxist Philosophy***. Vol.I. Dialectics and Method. pp.96.
[16] Ibid. pp.95.

substituted for them all–the money-commodity[17]. Hence, in capitalist commodity production, labour power is exchanged for a wage, but as Carole Pateman has argued, "workers are usually bound to employers by more than the cash nexus"; capitalist-worker relations create social relations of subordination[18]. Hence, the labour market theory of work has to take account of the fact that the labour market is ordered by institutions and values emerging in particular conjunctures and must be understood in relation to factors such as ethnicity, community, gender and household.

Alongside production of commodities for market exchange, `work' for reproduction, both in its limited sense as the reproduction of labour power and its larger sense as the reproduction of society itself, is an integral part of the domain of `work'. The analytical distinction that can arguably be made between work for production and work for reproduction could also have been made in the past, but was not very important. Individuals were largely obliged to be members of household based on an economic partnership between men and women. As M.Segalen has remarked, referring to peasant families in France, "the household had to produce in order to live, and often lived in order to produce, production guaranteeing the perpetuation of the human grouping"[19]. The assumption that households are `natural' units, transcending both historical and social boundaries, are pivotal to theories which propose a `domestic mode of production', distinct from the capitalist mode. In the work of Christine Delphy,

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[17] Ibid.,pp.95-105.
[18] Carole Pateman, ***The Social Contract,*** Polity Press, Cambridge, 1988, Ch.5.

a prominent Marxist-feminist theorist, the proposal of a family mode of production stems directly from her concern with how to interpret the subordination of women. Economic anthropologists such as Marshall Sahlins have also developed theories of a domestic mode of production in an attempt to understand the logic of economic systems not dominated by commodity exchange and the law of value. Sahlin's conception of the domestic mode of production, assumed to be characteristic of all primitive and peasant economies, is premised on two main assertions. First, that while households are never entirely independent, autonomy and self-sufficiency are ideals which affect economic behaviour. Secondly, that there is a difference in the form of circulation or distribution of goods and of labour within as opposed to between households. Thus, as Olivia Harris[20] has argued, economic activity within the household is either characterised as `natural' or "as an absence- the absence of exchange relations, as though a polarised distinction between consumption and exchange could encompass the multitude of ways in which objects and labour circulate other than as commodities".

Past ways of working thus entailed, an engagement with productive activities within a domain delineated by kinship and familial networks, although it is difficult to assume that economic activity within this domain lacked connectedness with the public sphere. In developed capitalism, the household has become a mediating institution between `work' for production and that for

[19] M.Segalen, *Love and Power in the Peasant Family*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1983.

reproduction, mediating two sets of social relations: those of marriage and filiation, which act to constitute the household and determine the context of much of extra-economic activities, and the wider economic relations of the society[21]. The work of feminist historians such as Alice Kessler-Harris and Joy Parr "demonstrates how widening the boundaries of the economic to include household affairs has decentred workplace history and reforged the analysis of politics as well as class: the household is no longer construed as a private domain, rather it is the source of consciousness that generates public activity"[22].

Historically, then, the model of a binary opposition between the sexes, which was socially realized in separate but supposedly equal `spheres', underwrote an entire system of institutional practices and conventions, ranging from a sexual division of labour to a sexual division of economic and political rights. The following analyses traces the debates regarding the origins of the sexual division of labour in society which characterizes the type of `work' men and women perform in everyday life.

II. Work and the Sexual Division of Labour:

Throughout histories and across cultures, the sexual division of labour and the division of sexual labour has been integral to any society. But as Joan

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[20] Olivia Harris, `Households as Natural Units', in Kate Young, Carol Wolkowitz and Roslyn McCullagh (eds.), **Of *Marriage and the Market***,CSE Books,London,1981.

[21] Maureen Mackintosh, `Gender and Economics', in Kate Young et.al (eds.), ***Of Marriage and the Market***.

[22] Leonore Davidoff, ***Worlds Between : Historical Perspectives on Gender and Class***, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1999, Ch.8.

W Scott has argued, by itself that means nothing[23]. What is important is what the society makes of that division of labour. Analysis of sexual divisions of labour therefore starts from the premise that these are not `natural', but, as Pierre Bourdieu has argued, "the division of labour between the genders becomes the foundation of the vision of the world and mentally structuring it- that is, of a cultural construction"[24]. The sexual division of labour is fundamental in determining the nature of `work' performed in society by men and women. Thus the fact that women and not men bear children has led to the naturalization of the division of labour between the genders, with the important consequence of women's subordination in almost all known societies[25].

Any discussion of the origins of women's subordination in society inevitably recounts the pioneering work of Frederick Engels, `**The Origin of the Family Private Property and the State**' (henceforth, 'The Origin'), in which, in contrast to intellectuals who accepted women's position within society as the natural result of `the female nature', Engels looked for the historical factors that led to male dominated structures. In contrast to the `myth of matriarchy', Engels proposed the evolution of societies from `mother right' to that of `father right'. The `world historic defeat of the female sex' was attributed by Engels to the

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[23] J.W.Scott. `Gender : A Useful Category of Historical Analysis'. in ***Gender and the Politics of History***. Columbia University Press.1988.pp.28-50.

[24] Beate Krais. `Gender and Symbolic Violence : Female Oppression in the Light of Pierre Bourdieu's Theory of Social Practice', in ***Bourdieu : Critical Perspectives***.

[25] Here, a distinction between `sex' and `gender' is in order : the former to mean invariant and nearly unchangeable features associated with human life; the latter to mean socially and culturally constructed distinction between `men' and `women' which vary across time and space.

passage of society from `group' marriage to `monogamous' forms of marriage and the rise of private property. As he notes in `The Origin',

> "Thus, as wealth increased, it, on the one hand, gave the man a more important status in the family than the woman, and, on the other hand, created a stimulus to criticize this strengthened position in order to overthrow the traditional order of inheritance in favour of the children. But this was impossible as long as descent according to mother right prevailed. This had, therefore, to be overthrown, and it was overthrown...The overthrow of mother right was the world historic defeat of the female sex. The man seized the reins in the house too, the woman was degraded, enthralled, became the slave of the man's lust, a mere instrument for breeding children"[26].

The most problematical aspect of Engel's formulation was the assumption of a `natural' sexual division of labour, as this passage clearly elucidates,

> "Division of labour was a pure and simple outgrowth of nature; it existed only between the two sexes. The men went to war, hunted, fished, provided the raw material for food and the tools necessary for these pursuits. The women cared for the house, and prepared food and clothing; they cooked, wove and sewed. Each was master in his or her field of activity; the men in the forest, the women in the house"[27].

Later anthropologists have refused the myth of a `natural' division of labour between the sexes, to argue for women's role in social production and their participation in work outside the domestic sphere. However, the merit of Engel's argument rests on its assigning a central motivating role in social development to the continual evolution of the division of labour from its rootedness in the sexual act to social divisions of labour.

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[26] F.Engels, ***The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State***, Progress Publishers,Moscow,1985,pp.56.
[27] Ibid. pp.56.

Alongwith the separation of the types of work by gender, another important distinction which characterizes the sexual division of labour is the separation of `private' and `public'. Thus, the `natural' reproducing capacities of women condition not only the type of work women do, but the domain in which women work. The `domestic'/private' versus `public' model has remained a point of contention in feminist analyses because it provides a way of linking the cultural valuations given to the category `woman' to the organisation of women's activities in society. One of the earliest expositions of the model was given by Michelle Z. Rosaldo, in which she made claims regarding its universal applicability: "though this opposition (`domestic' versus `public') will be more or less salient in different social and ideological systems, it does provide a universal framework for conceptualizing the activities of the sexes"[28].

The conception of female sexuality and procreation as `natural' (i.e.wild, untamed, dangerous, raw) by virtue of the dictates of their bodies: menstruation, pregnancy, birth, coupled with the heritage of the idea that mother and mother child units have a universal function, helps to maintain the easy separation of the `domestic' from the `public'. Recent feminist critique in anthropology have argued for the historical and cultural variability of ideas about motherhood, childhood and family life. In her, **`Sex and Destiny : The Politics of Human Fertility'**, Germaine Greer has argued that "the idea that mothers have always been isolated in the home with their children, organizing

[28] M.Z.Rosaldo, `Woman, Culture and Society : A Theoretical Overview', in M.Rosaldo and L.Lamphere (eds.). ***Women, Culture and Society***. Stanford University Press.Stanford.1974.

their days around the primary tasks of childcare, and acting as moral guardians of society through their responsibility for socializing the young, is not generalizable to all of western life, let alone to all other cultures"[29].

However, the public/private distinction has itself contributed to the perpetuation of the apparent universal sexual asymmetry, "for the public/private divide has played a dual role as both an explanation of women's subordinate position and as an ***ideology*** that constructed that position"[30] (emphasis in original). However, despite their instability and mutability, public and private are concepts which also has powerful material and experiential consequences in terms of formal institutions, organizational forms, financial systems, familial and kinship patterns, as well as in language. Thus, the ideologies of private and public, and nature/culture rationalized the division of men's and women's tasks and a differentiation between domestic and wage labour, and reproduction and production. Men and women not only performed different tasks, but they occupied different space.

Labour, as defined in the preceding section, constitutes contact and transformation of nature[31]. There are, however, important differences between

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[29] Henrietta L Moore. ***Feminism and Anthropology***. Polity Press. Oxford.1988.

[30] Leonore Davidoff, op.cit.;30 a. As here used. the term ideology is a set of beliefs. or as Althusser. the 'imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence', in his 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses'. or as Charles Taylor. ideologies are given concrete form in the practices and social institutions that govern people's social relations and that. in so doing. constitute both the experience of social relations and thenature of subjectivity. in his 'Interpretation and the Sciences of Man'.

[31] 'Nature' as has been represented in western culture. has three very basic meanings: "(a) the essential quality or character of something; (b) the underlying force which directs the world; (c) the material world itself. separate from people and human society". However. nature has a history. 'Every attempt at describing nature. every value attributed to Nature--harmonious. ruthless. purposeful. random--brings

male and female labour. As Nancy C.M.Hartsock has argued, "women's activity as institutionalized has a double aspect : their contribution to subsistence and their contribution to child bearing. Whether or not all women do both, women as a sex are institutionally responsible for producing both goods and human beings and all women are forced to become the kinds of persons who can do both"[32].

The `separate spheres' debate, that of `production and `reproduction' has engaged both Marxist and socialist feminists for well over a decade. Socialist-feminist Lise Vogel's main concern is with what she calls the `dual systems perspective', seen as characteristic of socialist feminist theory. She traces its origins to Engels, as elucidated in this oft-quoted passage from `The Origin':

> `According to the materialist conception, the determining factor in history is, in the last resort, the production and reproduction of immediate life. But this itself is of a two two fold character. On the one hand, the production of the means of subsistence, of food, clothing and shelter and the tools requisite thereof, on the other, the production of human beings themselves, the propagation of the species. The social institutions under which men of a definite historical epoch and of a definite country live are conditioned by both kinds of reproduction: by the stage of development of labour on the one hand and of the family on the other"[33].

Vogel is critical of the dual separation of production and reproduction. She argues that "this conceptualization reifies the family as an analytical category, while, at the same time, it fails to specify how the family function

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nature inside human society and its values". This definition is from Mick Gold. `A history of nature', in Doreen Massey and John Allen (eds.). Geography matters! A reader. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge. 1984.

[32] Nancy C.M.Hartsock. ***Money, Sex and Power : Toward a Feminist Historical Materialism***. North Eastern University Press.1985. Ch.8.

[33] Engels. op.cit. pp.5-6.

within the overall process of social reproduction"[34]. While Engel's argument for women's `world historical defeat' lies in their non-ownership of the means of production, Claude Meillasoux, in his seminal work, `**Maidens, Meal and Money**', argues that the control of the means of production is less important than the control of the means of reproduction, i.e.women. However, his analysis suffers from similar drawbacks of theories which assume that "the characteristics of women's lives are generally known, and that the same perspicuity applies to the social units, particularly `the family' and `the household', within which women are embedded"[35].

This makes it imperative to study the sphere of the `domestic because they organize the reproductive functions of women in most known societies. `Households' as domestic units remain near universal in shaping women's lives, and in particular their ability to gain access to resources, to labour and to income. Alongwith arguments about the cultural and historical variability of households, feminist critics have demonstrated that the domestic domain is not so `private' as it is made out to be. Under capitalism, the domestic domain is subject to continued intervention both directly through state agencies, legislation, welfare provision, and indirectly through the mass media, the structuring of wages, and through technological change that constantly alters the nature of work carried on within the home.

[34] Moore. op.cit. pp.48.

III. Work under Capitalism:

The sexual division of labour is constantly being transformed and re-created as social and economic change takes place. The transition from `pre-capitalist' to `capitalist' economic formation has been accompanied by large scale industrialization which "tended to increase and sharpen the sexual division of labour between (unpaid) household work and (paid) work outside, by depriving the producer of control over the means of production. In the pre-industrial or proto-industrial economy, household and production were generally a single or combined unit"[36], while the capitalist economy is primarily based on a separation between the `domestic' domain and the workplace. However, it should not be forgotten that women were often the first labour force of factory based, industrial capitalism and their long history of paid labour outside the home. Sally Alexander has argued that "in this sense, modern industry was a direct challenge to the traditional sexual division of labour in social production".

The traditional sexual division of labour was sought to be socially reproduced in the capitalist economy. As Bourdieu argues, "the economy itself, by taking into account the division of labour between the genders and working on the male/female dichotomy as rooted in social practice outside the economic sphere, has an important part to play in the constant reestablishment of the doxic order"[37]. The division of labour between the genders based on the two-fold

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[35] Ibid. pp.54.
[36] E.J.Hobsbawm, Worlds of Labour : ***Further Studies in the History of Labour***, Weidenfeld and Nicholson, London,1984.
[37] Krans, op.cit, pp.165.

dichotomy of the public and the private, and the economic sphere and the domestic sphere, had to be restructured. Both men's and women's job had to be transformed, sometimes rather fundamentally, in other cases, quite marginally. It wasn't so much `work' as `going out to' work which was the threat to the patriarchal order. This happened in two ways: it threatened the ability of women adequately to perform their domestic role as homemaker for men and children, and it gave them an entry into public life, mixed company, a life not defined by family and husband. It was, then, a change in the social and the spatial organization of work which was crucial for both women and men. The so called women's job were jobs previously done by men; however, gender discrimination on the labour market operated by the social recognition or denial of competence and skills which reestablished the asymmetrical sexual division of labour. Anne Phillips and Barbara Taylor have shown that the establishment of the sexual division of labour in production was based on the minutest of differences of job, changes in those differences over time, and the use of them in whatever form they took to establish the men's job as skilled and the women's less so'[38].

Any analysis of the sexual division of labour in any society requires the examination of the social relations in which they are performed. The implications of the sexual division of labour for women therefore depend on whether they work as wage workers, as unpaid household members, as self

[38] A.Phillips. and B.Taylor. 'Notes towards a feminist economics', ***Feminist Review***, Vol.6, 1980, pp.79-88.

employed entrepreneurs etc. The conceptualization of the social relations of production and its importance to an understanding of the division of labour in society is integral to Marxist economic theory. However, the Marxism appealed to by feminists and considered paradigmatic was itself `orthodox' Marxism and hence the concept of reproduction introduced by feminists to be included in that of production, did not challenge the primacy of production within Marxism but subsumed typically female activities under the model of work, narrowly understood as the production and formation of an object. Along with this attempt to subsume female activities under orthodox Marxist categories, went the efforts of many feminist to unify class and gender. Hence, women's condition was sought to be equated with the proletariat within the working class, and the emancipation of women was envisaged along with the emancipation of the proletariat through the liberation of work. As Hannah Arendt has argued. "this is a paradox in Marx's thought: on the one hand, Marx followed 19th century myths of progress, growth and production and deified labour as world constitutive activity; on the other hand, when contemplating modes of meaningful and fulfilling human activity, he frequently followed the western philosophical tradition since Plato in its denigration of labour and saw such fulfillment as lying beyond labour and beyond the realm of necessity in play, aesthetic contemplation, leisure and fantasy"[39].

[39] Seyla Benhabib andDrucilla Cornell (eds.). ***Feminism as Critique.***

While orthodox Marxist analysis largely ignored women's work in the `household' and was primarily concerned with work as the production of exchange values, a number of Marxist feminist scholars have sought to highlight what has been termed as the `unhappy marriage' or `trial separation' between Marxism and feminism[40]. Along with Heidi Hartmann[41], and Juliet Mitchell[42], Vogel rejects "the adequacy of Marxist work on the so-called woman question, for they deny the specificity of women's oppression and subordinate it to an economistic view of the development of history". However, while rejecting the economic determinism inherent in Marxist theory, Vogel argues that the terms of the Marxist discourse had to be developed in accordance with socialist feminist practice in order to understand women's position in society. Taking cue from the works of radical feminists such as Shulamith Firestone's `**The Dialectic of Sex',** and Kate Millett's `**Sexual Politics'**, socialist feminists tried to theorize the two concepts: patriarchy and reproduction.

A recognition of the ambiguity in the terms patriarchy and reproduction, however, underlined socialist-feminist scholarship. "Patriarchal authority", wrote Sheila Rowbotham, "is based on male control over the woman's productive capacity and over her person"[43]. Thus, more often, the concept of patriarchy remain embedded in its radical feminist origins as an essentially ideological and psychological system, wherein the material bases of women's oppression is not

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[40] Lise Vogel, ***Woman Question : Essays for a Materialist Feminism***, Pluto Press, London, 1995, Ch.4.
[41] Heidi Hartmann, `The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism : Toward a More progressive Union', in Lydia Sargant (ed.), ***Women and Revolution***, South End Press,Boston, 1981.
[42] Juliet Mitchell, ***Woman's Estate***, Penguin Books, Baltimore, 1971.

adequately examined .Socialist feminist application of the concept of reproduction has also been imprecise, referring variously to reproduction of the conditions of production, reproduction of the labour force, and human or biological reproduction. Reproduction of the conditions of production or social reproduction is "the process by which all the main production relations in the society are constantly recreated and perpetuated. Thus, e.g., in developed capitalism, social reproduction involves not only the production and maintenance of the wage labour force, but also the reproduction of capital itself"[44]; reproduction of the labour force "involves the production of people"[45], distinct from biological reproduction; human reproduction involves `those relations which circumscribe and determine the operation of fertility and sexuality, and construct the context for the bearing, care and socialization of children'"[46]. However, the real contributions of socialist feminist theory has been towards viewing Marxism as a less rrigid dogma, seeking instead to situate women's oppression more precisely within, rather than, alongside, a Marxist theory of social reproduction.

Women's subordination in capitalist society, in spite of their increased participation in commodity production, has been attributed to, what Heidi Hartmann has called, the partnership of patriarchy and capital. The mutual accommodation of capitalism and patriarchy took the form of the development

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[43] Sheila Rowbotham, ***Man's World, Woman's Consciousness***, Penguin Books, Baltimore, MIT 1973.
[44] Mackintosh, op.cit. pp.10.
[45] Ibid. pp.9.
[46] Ibid.

of the `family wage' in the early 20th century. As Annette Kuhn has argued, "the wage, because it is apparently given as a return for work performed outside the home, is seen as the property of the wage earner, and that part of it which is passed on to the housewife then appears as a gift"[47]. The `ideal' of the family wage--that a man can earn enough to support an entire family may be giving way to a new ideal that both men and women contribute through wage earning to the cash income of the family. Instead, however, the wage differential based on criteria such as sex and skill of the worker, becomes increasingly necessary in perpetuating patriarchy. The wage differential aids in defining women's work as secondary to men's, while necessitating women's actual continued dependence on men. As Joan Scott has argued, "...gender differences are part of how capitalism is organised...the sexual division of labour, oppositions between work and family, household and workplace, men and women, are what capitalism itself is all about"[48].

The expansion of capitalist production, especially after progress in scientific management and `Fordism' around the turn of the century, necessitated the construction of new markets and most of the third world was exploited in the wake of capitalist expansion. Ruth Pearson has argued that women's labour constitutes the preferred `cheap' labour in a situation of surplus labour of both sexes in a third world economy. She enumerates four essential

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[47] Annette Kuhn, `Structures of Patriarchy and Capital in the Family', in Annette Kuhn and Ann-Marie Wolpe (ed.), ***Feminism and Materialism***, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London and New York, 1978.
[48] Interview with Joan W. Scott, in Radical History Review, 45, 1989.

components which comprise the stereotypical image of the average or ideal third world woman factory worker--

(a) that she is young;

(b) that she is single and childless;

(c) that she is `unskilled' in the sense of having no recognized qualifications or training; and

(d) that she has no previous experience of formal wage employment in the industrial sector[49].

However, these being `ideal' rather than `real' conditions of recruitment, there are considerable variations in the composition of the labour force and in the employment conditions which demonstrates that, women's potential labour power, as a commodity available for exploitation by capital, has to be negotiated for with forms of patriarchal, and with her childbearing and reproductive role. Thus, Pearson argues, firstly, that women are sought out by capital for specific roles in new and emerging forms of production, as well as old and declining forms. And that in both old and new production processes, women continue to occupy the bottom layers of the occupational structure, reflecting the way in which women workers, doing women's work, are socially constructed as a subordinate group differentiated from the dominant labour force. Secondly, she argues that the recruitment of women workers in new industrial situations-either new sectors and processes or parts of the world new

[49] Ruth Pearson, `Female workers in the First and Third Worlds : The Greening of Women's Labour', in R.E.Paul, (ed.), *On Work*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1988.

to given kinds of industrial processes-does not of itself provide capital with suitable labour power. This labour has to be constituted, taking into account the pre-existing sexual division of labour. It is constructed directly by the recruitment, selection, management and personnel policies of individual enterprises, and indirectly by the intervention of the state, and negotiation within local and traditional modes of control of women.

In the capitalist world economy, then, the international and sexual division of labour compound women's subordination in the labour market. Maria Mies's study of Indian women lace makers in Narsapur, shows how the seclusion of women has conditioned their participation in non household production[50]. Although lace making is an industry geared toward the international market, it is highly compatible with seclusion and domestic work. Mies argues that this highly exploitative system has in fact led to greater class differentiation within local communities as well as greater polarization between the sexes. The system is made possible by the ideology of seclusion that rigidly confines women to the home, eliminates their opportunities for outside work, and makes them willing to accept extremely low wages.

Olive Schreiner, writing in the early years of the 20th century, argued for possibilities of a gradual erosion of women's role in social production by men, reducing working class women to drudges and middle class women to useless

[50] Maria Mies, 'The Dynamics of the Sexual Division of Labour and the Integration of Women into the World Market, in Lourdes Beneria (ed.), ***Women and Development : The Sexual Division of Labour in Rural Economics***.

dolls[51]. Women have been and are still implicated in the marking of class boundaries. In particular, since men are so closely associated with generating income through `work', women came to be increasingly associated with correctly consuming the products of that work, an activity increasingly located in the differentiated private sphere of the `Home'. The transition from classical economics of 18th century liberal political theory which centred around production, to neo-classical theories which centred around consumption, viewed `productivity' not so much a capacity for the activity of production itself, but rather one concerning appropriate and modified forms of consumption. Thus, "modes of consumption...stood not only as an eventual ***outcome*** of production processes but also as the ***evidence*** of human productivity[52].

But, as Georg Simmel has pointed out, consumption is intricately related to leisure[53]. Thorstein Veblen, in his `**Theory of the Leisure Class**' introduces a significant definition of leisure related to consumption as an activity which connotes ***non-productive consumption of time***. In Simmel's investigations of leisure, too, leisure is ultimately associated with consumption, with the possession of things, with having rather than doing. The separation of the worker from the means of production and from work activity itself as `purely objective' and autonomous in indicates that labour now shares the same

[51] Olive Schreiner, ***Woman and Labour.***
[52] Gilliam Swanson, `Drunk with the Glitter', Consuming Spaces and Sexual Geographies", in Sophie Watson and Katherine Gibson (eds.), ***Postmodern Cities and Spaces***, Blackwell, Cambridge, 1995.
[53] David Frisby, ***Simmel and Since ; Essays on Georg Simmel's Social Theory***, Routledge, London and New York, 1992.

character, mode of valuation and fate with all other commodities. Thus, `leisure for some is labour for others'.

Women, in the present world economy, are both consumers and commodities that enter the public sphere of the market. Recent feminist historical studies of institutions such as the department store show the intimate connection between `shopping' as a mainly feminine activity and the commercialization of consumption which drew women into the wage labor market. With the equitability of labour power as commodities, women's work has become synonymous with the largely service activities, on the one hand and on the other, with the glitter of the world of fashion, media and pornography. Furthermore, women are constructed as the consumers of the commodities they `market' through the media. A severance between masculinity and domesticity has become pronounced in cultures gradually getting transformed by the onslaught of the all-pervasive consumer culture. `Work' in particular, and the world economy in general, are re-creating gendered identities, by dissolving the specific historical experiences of a people and replacing these with a universal experience derived from the system called `world-capitalism'.

We now turn to an analysis of the creation of gendered identities and its implications for a feminist identity politics.

CHAPTER THREE

IDENTITY, AGENCY, SUBJECTIVITY : A FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE

I. Woman as the `Other':

`Gender ' as a historical category has been acknowledged as a social construct, not an essence of human beings. The question which becomes important in understanding women, their identity, their agential capacities, and the nature of their subjectivity is the nature of their existence in a society dominated by the "patriarchal principle"[1]. The "patriarchal principle" arguably might be said to represent the rule of men over women, in at least three senses. First, this rule may be taken literally as father-right over wives, children, servants and wealth through their position as heads of households; second, the rule may be taken metaphorically, to stand for an abstract law of the father which manifests itself by means of paternal authority and morally sanctioned punitive force; third, it may also signify the rule of the father in the functional sense, "the locus of that rule's having been displaced in modern times from the kinship group to the centralized state"[2]. Thus, the "patriarchal principle" not only operates at the level of interpersonal relations between men and women but increasingly manifests itself as an abstract power encompassing the lives of both the sexes.

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[1] Cocks, Joan, ***The Oppositional Imagination***, Routledge, London and New York, 1989, pp.211.
[2] Ibid, pp.210.

In societies and cultures characterized by masculinist practices, the world of women is marginalized, distorted or negated. Hence, "far from being subjects, women are, variously, the Other, a mysterious and unknowable lack, a sign of the forbidden and irrecoverable maternal body, or some unsavoury mixture of the above"[3]. The characterization of woman as the `Other' in feminist theory can be traced back to Simone de Beauvoir's ***The Second Sex***, wherein drawing on Alexandre Koje's reading of Hegel and on Levi-Strauss's structuralist theory of human culture, she analyzes the relationship of man and woman in terms of a subject object opposition, according to which man's subjectivity–his self assertion as a free, autonomous, and independent being--is established only through an attempt to negate or exclude, an other. Hence, for de Beauvoir, the development of self-consciousness or human subjectivity hinges on the possibility of transcending the conflict between subject and object, through reciprocal recognition. In accordance with Kojeve's philosophy, Beauvoir sees the struggle for recognition as more fundamental than women's role in productive activity which accords with the Marxist view. Beauvoir argues that women is the `Other' in relationship to men because women do not engage, with men, in the struggle for sovereign subjectivity. Throughout history, women have ben assigned and have, for the most part, accepted the

[3] Butler, Judith. `Gender Trouble. Feminist Theory and Psychoanalytic Discourse'. in Linda J.Nicholson (ed.), ***Feminism/Postmodernism***. Routledge. London and New York. 1990. pp.326.

position of `other'; she has not raised a reciprocal demand for recognition. However, as Eva Lundgren-Gothlin has argued, "while Beauvoir uses the Hegelian master-slave dialectic to explain the origins of oppression, she does not locate man as master and woman as slave in this dialectic. Instead, woman is seen as not participating in the process of recognition, a fact that explains the unique nature of her oppression. Although the man is the master, the essential consciousness in relation to woman, the woman is not a slave in relation to him. This makes their relationship more absolute, and ***non-dialectical*** and it explains why woman is the ***absolute Other***"[4]. (emphasis in original). She quotes Beauvoir to find support for her interpretation thus:

> "To regard woman simply as a slave is a mistake; there were women among the slaves, to be sure, but there have always been free women- that is, women of religious and social dignity. They accepted man's sovereignty and he did not feel menaced by a revolt that could make of him in turn the object. Woman thus seems to be the inessential who never goes back to being the essential, to be the absolute other, without reciprocity"[5].

In de Beauvoir's opinion, women must enter the master-slave dialectic--i.e.participate in work and demand recognition--in order to liberate themselves. Furthermore, according to de Beauvoir, the traditional relationship between man and woman is not dialectical in itself, and it is only in the public sphere of production that new terms and conditions for changing the relationship between the sexes are created.

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[4] Lundgren-Gothlin. Eva. 'The Master-Slave Dialectic in The Second Sex'. in E.Fallaize (ed.). ***Simone de Beauvoir : A Critical Reader***. Routledge. London and New York.1998.

The affirmation of self-identity through opposition runs through the work of those feminists who have taken the critique of the logic of identity further through a critique of de Beauvoir's assertions. Thus, cultural feminists such as Nancy Chodorow and Carol Gilligan, on the one hand, and postmodernist and poststructuralist theorists like Luce Irigaray, Jacques Derrida, Julia Kristeva, on the other, are united by the common assumption, unchanged since de Beauvoir, that identity is necessarily a product of the repression of difference, the domination of the other, and the negation of non-identity. While Chodorow's and Gilligan's attempt to revalue "feminine" qualities-nurturance, caring, empathy--romanticizes qualities born of oppression, poststructuralist feminists criticize any notion of "woman" as a category, because to invoke "women" as such is to invoke an identity, and every identity is based on the negation and repression of all differences.Any identity thus can only be based on a "sacrificial logic"[6] of opposition and exclusion.

Women's identity thus conceived as an opposition or negation vis-à-vis men points to the fact that in any patriarchal culture, it is men who are imbued with the qualities of a master, with women being mere slaves. While such a culture represents men as not merely the privileged beneficiaries of that culture, but also its self conscious authors and powerful agents; the

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[5] De Beauvoir, Simone. ***The Second Sex***. ed.and translated by H.M.Parshley, Penguin Books, 1972, Reprint 1974, pp.173.

entire social world emanating from their desire, purpose and will; women represent the blinded victims of male machinations who in their true and uncontrolled state are the repositiories of everything that the culture holds good. As Catharine A McKinnon puts it, "male power produces the world before it distorts it"[7]. Thus, male power subjects women to submission, first, by glorifying certain feminine attributes such as their no innocent and caring nature and second, by degrading women who do not qualify as possessors of the avowed qualities. It seems that in a patriarchal culture, women are the conditioned objects of social life, "the nature, the matter, the acted upon, to be subdued by the acting subject seeking to embody himself in the social world"[8]. Given the mode of operation of such a culture, then, women's identity can be meaningful only in the formation of a counter culture which bases itself on essentially "feminine" ways of thought and action. Such a culture could boast of a matriarchal myth prior to the beginning of patriarchal civilization, celebrate the emergence of women's communities in the contemporary world and uncover "a subterrranean field of women's disaffection from social disloyalty to the established order, including all women's episodes of madness, protest, defiance and outright rebellion,

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[7] Weir, Allison. ***Sacrificial Logics : Feminist Theory and the Critique of Identity***, Routledge, London and New York, 1996, pp.5.

[8] Mckinnon, Catharine A, 'Feminism, Marxism, Method and the State : An Agenda for Theory, in Nannerl O Keohane, Michelle Z Losaldo and Barbara C.Gelpi (eds.). ***Feminist Theory : A Critique of Ideology***, The Harvester Press, Brighton, 1982, pp.28.

[9] Ibid.

along with the bonds of love women have forged with one another under the shadow of the phallocentric law'[9].

However dominant and powerful the masculine way be over the feminine, it is ultimately the consolidation of male rule in the realm of ideas rather than in the everyday employment of force and subjugation that the origins of male power must lie. Thus, as Mary Daly has pointed out, there must be a distinction between two sorts of men, "the mass of them, conditioned to think and act on behalf of the masculinist cause; and the few self-determining male `conditioners', `enforcers', and `mythmasters'[10].

It also might be argued therefore that male power over women serves as an ideological construct which obliterates the real conditions of existence for both men and women. Ideologies of the "sex/gender system"[11] not only exist as ideas, they are given concrete form in the practices and social institutions that govern the social relations of the system. This is what Althusser argues when he says that ideology is more a matter of the very starting point that are taken for granted in formulating explicit ideas and arguments and thus is profoundly `***unconscious***' for the exploiters as the

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[9] Cocks, op.cit., pp.177-8.
[10] Ibid. pp.184.
[11] This term is used by Gayle Rubin as a neutral term referring to the domain of patriarchy and indicates that oppression is not inevitable in that domain but is the product of the specific social relations which organize it. See, Gayle Rubin, `The Traffic in women : Notes on the Political Economy of Sex', in J.W.Scott (ed.), Feminism and History.

exploited which is then responsible for reproducing a given power structure from generation to generation[12].

Language serves as a repository of ideological representations in which is contained a specific conception of the world. Language not only transmits ideology, it actually creates it and structures our sense of the world. Gender ideology based on language organizes itself through a system of binary oppositions that justify men's claim to a unified identity: subject/object, culture/nature, law/chaos, man/woman. Language is a central concern for theorists targeting "phallocentrism"-the structuring of man as the central point of thought and of the phallus as the symbol of sociocultural authority. Responding to Derridean deconstruction and to Lacan's structuralist version of Freud, feminist critics expose the phallocentric arguments inherent in thinking woman as lack. Lacanian psychoanalysis, which French feminist theorists critique, defines language as the world of public discourses which the child enters only as a result of culturally enforced separation from her or his mother, and his--but not her--identification with the Father, the male representative of culture. Lacan reserves the `I' or subject position for men. Women, because they lack the phallus, the positive symbol of gender, around which language is organized, occupy a negative position in language. Following Freud's definition of all sexual desire as masculine, Lacan also argues that women can enter into

[12] Harland, Richard, ***Superstructuralism : Thre Philosophy of Structuralism and Post-Structuralism,*** Routledge, London and New York, 1987, Ch.4.

the symbolic life of the unconscious only to the extent that she internalizes male desire, i.e. to the extent that she imagines herself as men imagine her[13]. Helene Cixous suggests the psychic force of this longstanding structure of thought when she writes:

> "Men and women are caught up in a network of millenial cultural determinations of a complexity that is practically unanalyzable: we can no more talk about `woman' than about `man' without getting caught up in an ideological theater where the multiplication of representations, images, reflections, myths, identifications constantly transforms, deforms, alters each person's imaginary order and in advance renders all conceptualization null and void"[14].

Luce Irigaray, one of the most vocal critics of Lacan's Ecole Freudienne, argues against Lacan's conclusions about women as outsiders to language and posits women's lack as a consequence not of "inevitable family arrangements but of millenia of cultural subordination of women's bodies and their sexuality to the needs and fantasies of men. Phallocentric concepts and their historical consequences can be transformed only when women find ways to assert their specificity as women, their ***difference*** from men and men's systems of representation"[15] (emphasis in original).

Franco-feminist critic Julia Kristeva, in arguing for women's specificity in the existing symbolic order, sees maternity as a conceptual challenge to phallocentrism. According to her, "women's strategy should be neither to adopt masculine modes of power nor to free encounters with the symbolic,

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[13] Jones, Ann Rosalind, 'Inscribing Femininity : French Theories of the Feminine', in Gayle Greene and Coppelia Kahn (eds.), ***Making a Difference : Feminist Literary Criticism***, Methuen, London and New York, 1985.
[14] Quoted in Jones, ibid. pp.82.

but to assume `a negative function : reject everything finite, definite, structured, loaded with meaning, in the existing state of society. Such an attitude puts women on the side of the explosion of social codes : with revolutionary movement"[16]

Theorists basing their model of femininity on women's exclusion from the symbolic order has essentialized and reified negativity. Thus, glorification of "feminine" "characters " defeats the idea of subversive negativity by its structural confinement to that role.[17] As Monique Wittig argues from a materialist feminist standpoint, "attempts to define a feminine subjectivity in contrast to phallocentric views of women founder upon masculine/feminine oppositions rather than moving beyond them. In such an analysis, the privileging of the masculine side of such hierarchies may be questioned, but masculine fantasies of centrality still remain the central point of reference"[18] She calls for a deconstruction of the term "woman" itself, through a historical analysis of the moves through which men have mystified women's biological potentials into a supposedly unchanging female `nature". In contrast to Kristeva, Irigary and Cixous, who often seem to be describing women's subjectivity on the basis of biological and psychic traits that might have enormously different effects in different social situations, Wittig arguing from a Marxist/materialist point of view, asserts the need for women's group

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[15] Ibid. pp.84.
[16] Ibid. pp.86.
[17] Cornell, Drucilla and Adam Thusrchwell, 'Feminism. Negativity, Intersubjectivity'. in Seyla Benhabib and Drucilla Cornell (eds.), ***Feminism as Critique***, Polity Press, Cambridge. 1987.
[18] Jones, op.cit,, pp.91.

identity "that must catalyse the transformation of society and of its languages"[19].

The feminine character and the ideal of `femininity' on which it is modelled is portrayed by theorists of gender, as specifically a product of masculine society and its representations of women. The conceptualization of difference as a binary organization of sex had an increasingly persuasive impact on the way women's sexuality, the nature of her desire and the specific capacity of women to reproduce has been looked at. Moreover, the different ways of representing women, their sexuality and their bodies, exposed the differences that existed between women on the lines of class, race, age and ethnic lines. Thus, "the ideological work of gender"[20], is uneven, not only with regard to men and women but also with regard to differences among women. The fact of differences among women "establishes the fact of separate identities, but also raises the issue of the relational nature of difference when we ask how nineteenth century white women dealt with black women, or English women with Indian women, we imply that those identities had something to do with one another, that they were not only interconnected socially, but definitionally. Part of being white, in other words, meant not being black; Englishness was established in contrast to Indianness. Identity did not inhere in one's body or nationality,

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[19] Ibid.

[20] Poovey, Mary, ***Uneven Developments : The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England***,The University of Chicago Press,Chicago,1988,Ch.1.

but was produced discursively by contrast with others.And these contrasts, whether of race or class or gender, have had a history"[21].

Questions of identity are thus also a problem of discourse or ideology in a historical context. "Women" is historically, discursively constructed and always relative to other categories which themselves change. Categories of identity interact complexly to describe identity as shifting, to assert power or to enact new ideas of social order.

Women's sexuality and sexual desire, constructed as a lack, as passive to men's desire, has been instrumental in sustaining the practices characteristic of the institution of marriage and family or the heterosexual ideal. Women's sexuality as an ideological construct "appeared in a thousand different shapes and places--as an image in a photograph, a sentence on a page, a joke in a conversation. They surfaced in more fleshly form as the living passions of men in everyday situations: in marriage, as the demand for the virgin; in the family, as the yearning suspicion that the molested child was seducer of the adult; in the brothel, as the use of and contempt for the prostitute; in the street and the courtroom, as the hatred and scorn for the woman raped; and finally, transmuted in the different context of the prison and the military training camp, as the taunting provocation and humilitation of the woman believed to be secreted in the man"[22]. Adrienne Rich's essay, `Compulsory heterosexuality and lesbian

[21] Scot, Joan Wallach (ed.), ***Feminism and History, Introduction***. pp.8.
[22] Cocks, op.cit, pp.138.

existence'[23], prototypical of a genre which viewed women's oppression as beginning in the arena of the heterosexual family, has demonstrated the social construction and enforcement of compulsory heterosexuality. However, the depiction of women's sexuality as submissive and self-annulling in the heterosexual marriage contract does not mean that men automatically become the author of female desire in the heterosexual arrangement. It is ultimately how female desire is represented in a given culture that decides the nature of a heterosexual relationship. Thus, no amount of female sisterhood or "lesbian existence" can make the representation of female desire advantageous for women in general. As Joan Cocks has further argued, "two lovers with the same kind of body enjoyed opposing kinds of sexuality: one of command, the other of a vulnerability before it"[24]. Also, as Ann Ferguson et. al. points out, "Emily Dickinson may have bonded with other women, but it is not clear...that her life is not the sad case of a victim, rather than a successful resister, of patriarchy"[25].

Therefore, what becomes significant in positing `lesbian' as a new dominant ideology of women's sexual identity is the fact that it challenged the connection between women's sexuality and motherhood that had kept women's erotic energy either sublimated in love for children or frustrated

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[23] Rich, A., 'Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lisbian Existence', in ***Signs : Journal of Women in Culture and Society***, 5, no.4, Summer 1980.
[24] Cocks, op.cit., pp.162.

because heterosexual privilege often kept women from giving priority to their relations with other women. Furthermore, it is important to look at what it means to posit the "lesbian' as a new way of viewing legitimate sexual identity for women, or , to extend the argument further, what determines the legitimate or `normal' and illegitimate or "deviant" ways of sexual conduct. As Michel Foucault puts it, in his `The History of Sexuality', lesbian practices were, in part an ideological concept created by the sexologists who framed a changing patriarchal ideology of sexuality and the family; in part it was chosen by independent women and feminists who formed their own urban subcultures as an escape from the new, mystified form of patriarchal dominance that developed in the late 1920s; the companionate nuclear family.[26].

Far from being an essence, Foucault sees sexuality as a real historical formation which gives rise to the notion of sex, and creates sex in difference ways. In "Language, Counter-memory, Practice" (1977), he argues,

> "We believe in the full constancy of institutional life and imagine that it continues to exert its force indiscriminately in the present as it did in the past. But a knowledge of history easily disintegrates this unity, depicts its wavering course...we believe, in any event, that the body obeys the exclusive laws of physiology and that it escapes the influence of history, but this too is taboo. The body is molded by a great many distinct regimes".

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[25] Ferguson, Ann, Jacquelyn N. Zita and Kathryn Pyne Addelson, On "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" : Defining the Issues, in Keohane, et.al (eds.). ***Feminist Theory : A Critique of Ideology.***

For Foucault, different "regimes of truth" define sexualities, He argues that the pre-eminence of the "deployment of alliance", in which power in sexual relations works off systems of marriage, family structure, the "transmission of names and possessions", gives way in the modern age to the pre-eminence of the "deployment of sexuality" in which power enlarges itself on the basis of bodily sensation, the "quality of pleasures", the enjoyments of the flesh.[27]. However, in such a scheme of things, power does not have any specific origin or source. Power cannot be a possession, since it is not a quality of persons, but is a function of the "enumeration, classification, elaboration and specification of sexuality"[28]. Foucault also argues that "if the deployment of alliance is firmly tied to the economy due to the role it can play in the transmission or circulation of wealth, the deployment of sexuality is linked to the economy through numerous and subtle ways, the main one of which, however, is the body-the body that produces and consumes"[29]. Moreover, the "deployment of alliance" has its reason for being, in reproducing itself, while the "deployment of sexuality" has its reason for being, not in reproducing itself, "but in proliferating, innovating, annexing, creating, and penetrating bodies in an increasingly

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[26] Focault, Michel, ***The History of Sexuality***, Vol.I, An Introduction, trans, Robert Hurley, Pantheon Books, New York, 1978.
[27] Ibid, pp.106.
[28] Bailey, F.E., Foucauldian feminism : contesting bodies, sexuality and identity, in.
[29] Foucault, op.cit., pp.106-7.

detailed way, and in controlling populations in an increasingly comprehensive way"[30].

Patriarchal power, then, operates by attaching women to certain paradigms of feminine identity. However, patriarchal power do not represent the machinations of a male conspiracy. As Susan Bordo has argued following Foucault, patriarchal power is intentional without being subjective. There is a patriarchal logic to the historical power relations exhibited in them, but this logic is not the invention of any individual or group. Power over women can be exercised by men but cannot come from men. Foucault's conception of sexuality as social construction views femininity as an effect of power produced in discourse, so that women have to struggle to become feminine just as men struggle to become masculine. However, what Foucault does not ask is why these historical discourses are so systematically produced by men and in men's interests. Hence, women's sexuality becomes contradictory in both contesting men's power, and contributing to its continued success, through women constituting themselves as acceptably feminine. Thus, in Foucault's scheme of things, resistance becomes elusive for women and leaves unanswered the question of the immensity of the consolidation of men's power. As Nancy Hartsock, a leading feminist standpoint theorist, and prominent critic of post-structuralism argues, Foucault's alleged "wholesale" rejection of modernity and its emancipatory theories, his refusal to envision alternative orders, and

[30] Ibid. pp.107.

his emphasis on resistance and and destablization over transformation robs feminism of elements that are indispensable to its emancipatory goals. Hartsock observes, "systematically unequal power relations ultimately vanish from Foucault's work". She also alleges that his ascending analysis of power leads to victim blaming insofar as it highlights agents' participation in their own oppression. According to Hartsock, Foucault's theory of power is deficient insofar as he allegedly rejects subjectivity and the possibility of transformative agency, systematic knowledge and epistemological foundationalism[31].

From the above discussion, it may be argued that women's identity is contingent on the "patriarchal principle" which not only robs women of any agency and subject position in a patriarchal culture, but also makes them partners in their own oppression. Whether women's experiences, feelings and voices can be looked at as certifications and sources of women's autonomous identity formation, is the crucial question for feminism. Wehile most feminist theorists embrace some version of the social construction of gender, many have been unwilling to "relinquish their understanding of feminist consciousness-raising as revealing the hidden truths of women's experiences. In attempting to secure a ground of truth that is beyond the realm of social construction, and thus is incontenstable, feminist theories are involved in a paradoxical inconsistency. On the one hand, they acknowledge

[31] Sawicki. Jana. 'Foucault Feminism and Question of Identity', in Gary Gutting (ed.), ***The Cambridge Companion to Faucault,*** Cambridge University Press. Cambridge, 1994.

that feminine identities are constructed under patriarchal conditions, and on the other hand, they attempt to secure a ground of truth that is beyond this scene of construction"[32]. The power to signify,to enter into the struggle over meanings is crucial to any feminist politics. Thus, narratives of oppressed groups are important insofar as they "empower these groups by giving them a voice in the struggle over interpretations without claiming to be epistemically privileged or incontestable; they are not denied the `authority' of experience, if, by `authority' one means the power to introduce that experience as a basis for analysis, and thereby to create new self-understandings"[33]. An analysis of the truth claims of women's experience should thus take into account the realms in which people's actions are conducted and what special significance it has for women's identity construction.

II. Public and Private in Contemporary Societies: The Gender Dimension

Women in contemporary societies have shifted from being victims--who can offer only resistance-to being owners of their own lives. There has been a partial eclipse of masculine power as patriarchal power in familial and public life. This is a consequence largely of the logic of the capitalist development and the solidification of the modern ethos comprising primarily the proliferation of democratic ideals--tendencies originating outside but

[32] Ibid.
[33] Ibid.

having fundamental consequences inside the "sex/gender system". There has been ,firstly, a decay of men's sovereign economic power in and over the family with the move of production out of the domestic sphere and the absorption of wives, sons and daughters into the social labour force. Secondly, there has been an erosion of the legitimacy of a fixed hierarchical order in which women had a restricted and subordinate if also a protected and sanctified place, as principles of autonomy and individuality replaced principles of obedience and obligation. The spatial base of patriarchal relations has also undergone a change through the increasing fragmentation of the family under the pressure of both economic and cultural factors. Finally, there has been a replacement of paternalistic rule in society at large by impersonal, bureaucratic authority which might well be controlled by men but such authority never works personally. Moreover, bureaucratic authority arose in the political sphere precisely to ensure the equal treatment of all individuals against particular privilege, including patriarchal privilege.

In these changed circumstances in which women find themselves today, women's self-identity depends on their "capacity to experience" themselves respectively as an "active" agent and a "coherent participant in in a social world", the former entailing reflexivity and the latter intersubjectivity, as essential components of self-identity.[34]. Reflexivity and intersubjectivity are components that develop in a social world comprising of

[34] Weir, Allison, 'Toward a Model of Self-Identity : Habermas and Kristeva', in Johanna Meehan (ed.), ***Feminists Read Habermas***, Routledge, London and New York, 1995.

socially produced meanings, choices, or goals which guide our practices and justify our claims as human beings. Women's claims as new entrants to a sphere- the public sphere- which till recently was a masculine domain, has reshaped their self-worth and hence their identity as individuals. An analysis of the nature of the public sphere and the meanings constituted therein is thus pivotal to an understanding of the nature of women's lives today.

Theorists of the public sphere, such as Hannah Arendt, and Jurgen Habermas, emphasize the constitution of individual identity through communication, which holds that one becomes a part of a social world through making negotiations which are intersubjectively recognized.Both Arendt and Habermas agree on the potential of words or discourse to generate power. In 'The Human Condition' (1970), Arendt argues that insofar as persons display themselves in public, they do so as story tellers, revealing aspects of their selves by acting in and through their bodies. Neither labour (the metabolic interaction with nature) nor work (the making of products) but action produces relationships that bind people together. As Bonnie Honig argues, for Arendt, "action produces its actors; episodically, temporarily, we are its agonistic achievement"[35]. Arendt views the "self" as multiplicity, identity as a performative production, and action as creative of new relations and new realities. However, for Arendt, certain aspects of one's identity are "constatives" or self-evident truths which are not open to

[35] Honnig, Bonnie, "Toward an Agonistic Feminism : Hannah Arendt and the Politics of Identity', in Judith Butler and Joan Wallch Scott (eds.). ***Feminists Theorize the Political***. Routledge. London and New York, 1992.

change but are "irresistible", they "are not held by us, but we are held by them"[36]. Hence, for Arendt, being a woman and a Jew are private matters, because it is a fact, which is not at all actionable. However, in Honig's appreciation of Arendt, the "politics of performativity assumes that identities are never seamless, that there are sites of critical leverage within the ruptures and inadequacies, in the ill fittedness, of existing identities. The premise of this performative politics is that in matters of identity, no less than in politics, it is not possible to get it right. The conception of the self presupposed in all this is an agonistic, differentiated, multiple, non-identitied being that is always becoming, always calling out for angmentation and amendment. And the politics truest to all this is likewise agonistic (resistant but still responsive to the expressive aspirations of any identity) and performative, potentially subversive, and always seeking to create new relations and establish new realities...even in the private realm" [37].

Jurgen Habermas, in "The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere : An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society" (1962), offers an important corrective to the standard dualistic approaches to the separation of public and private in capitalist societies. He conceptualizes the problem as a relation among four terms: family, (official) economy, state, and public sphere. His view suggests that in classical capitalism there are actually two distinct but interrelated public private separations. One public private

[36] Ibid, pp.217.
[37] Ibid, pp.231-2.

separation operates at the level of "systems", namely, the separation of the state or public system from the (official) capitalist economy or private system. There is another public-private separation at the level of the "lifeworld", namely, the separation of the family or private lifeworld sphere from the space of political opinion formation and participation of public lifeworld sphere. However, as Nancy Fraser has pointed out, Habermas never thematizes the gender dimension of the relations and arrangements he describes. As she has argued, "Habermas's account fails to theorize the patriarchal, norm-mediated character of late capitalist official- economic and administrative system.Likewise, it fails to theorize the systemic, money- and power- mediated character of male dominance in the domestic sphere of the late capitalist lifeworld"[38].

Habermasian model of the public sphere brings into focus another vital identity of persons in the public sphere, that of citizenship. As Habermas understands it, the citizen is centrally a participant in political debate and public opinion formation. This means that, citizenship in his view, depends crucially on the capacities for consent and speech, the ability to participate on a par with others in dialogue. But these are capacities connected with masculinity in male-dominated, classical capitalism which are denied to women and regarded at odds with femininity. As Carole Pateman has argued, women's words are not only invalidated but are

[38] Fraser, Nancy, What's Critical about Critical Theory ? in Meehan (ed.), ***Feminists Read Habermas***.

consistently reinterpreted. Hence, in a democracy, women do not participate in speech among citizens[39].

Habermas's conception of the public sphere is nevertheless, important, in understanding how women can cease to be victims and instead self-fashion their lives. As the political philosopher Maria Pia Lara argues, the public sphere makes available interactional and cultural structures through institutions which can then be worked upon to create women's "narratives in the public sphere"[40]. Pia Lara uses Habermas, Arendt, Paul Ricouer and a number of feminist authors to critically understand women's identities in the public sphere. She views `recognition' in the public sphere as the main component of self-identity. Women now search for personal meaning within broader communities than the family, while at the same time not ignoring the total context of their lives. No longer shut up in the domestic sphere, they are entering into the dialogue of collective identity which occurs within the world of public action. Where men once were privileged to experience personal fulfillment beyond the home, now both men and women are free to decide, on their own, who they are and what goals they wish to pursue.

Thus, following Pia Lara, we might argue that women's struggles for recognition are not only struggles for inclusion into a realm from which they were previously excluded, but are also efforts towards major cultural

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[39] .Ibid. pp.35.

[40] Pia Lara. Maria. ***Moral Textures : Feminist Narratives in the Public Sphere,Polity*** Press.Cambridge.1998.

transformation. Such transformation entails changed representations of women's sexualities, ideas of justice and the good life and more generally, earlier world views. Thus, women's ways of forging an identity in the public sphere does not do away with their role in the private sphere but actually incorporates and makes visible their experiences of the private sphere in their dialogue with the public sphere. Pia Lara captures the myriad ways in which women forge their personal identities while at the same time changing other self-understandings:

> "Transformation entail a `fusion of horizons', a new and novel way of seeing the other that also becomes a new way of understanding oneself. Recognition is a struggle, a struggle that must be fought in relation to others and in the permanent tension of changing prejudice and transforming the symbolic order. This battle plays a major role in how one uses institutionalized channels of communicating with others, and how one redefines the limits on traditional views, enlarging one's own understanding of values and `changing the rules'. Dialogue is not only a menas of showing what makes one different, but also showing that those differences are an important part of what should be regarded as worthy. Solidarity enters here because it is through others that one can define one's own identities, and no solidarity is possible if the discourse does not form a bridge to the other's understanding of what are considerable to be worthy features and needs of human beings. Recognition, in this sense, is a performative process of acquiring identity"[41].

Thus, the public sphere ultimately provides women with an understanding of the cultural dimension of the construction of historically contingent social and personal identities. It is the critical reflection on one's practice that enables people to change themselves and the domains in

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[41] Ibid. pp.157.

which they belong. The "sex/gender system" is one primary component of the practical domain in which people's actions are conducted and it is in conjunction with other components of the domain that people are socially identified.

In contemporary societies, the thematics of sex and gender manifests itself on two axes, with the double possibility of the operation of masculine power; the thematics of species reproduction, and the thematic of sexuality. While the former essentially operates to maintain the patriarchal right, the latter operates to maintain the phallic right, over women[42]. In the sphere of species reproduction, women are exploited as `mothers', in that of sexuality, as `prostitutes' and the associated identities of `loose' women, `spinster' etc.

In the following chapter, `motherhood' and `prostitution' will be looked at as universal identity categories in which women find themselves, in the light of the previous discussions on work and women's identity. This kind of universalistic understanding of women's identity would seek to link women's self-conceptions with competing notions of justice which are clearly connected to a larger interpretation of human beings and their needs.

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42. Cocks. op. Cit. pp. 210-11.

CHAPTER FOUR

WOMEN, WORK AND IDENTITY : MOTHERHOOD AND PROSTITUTION

1. Women, Work and Identity

It is the distinction between working for wages and working without wages which has become one of the key elements of sexual differentiation in contemporary societies. Gendered work cultures help to perpetuate this process by articulating notions of distinct sexual identities. This has been well documented by Cynthia Cockburn; as she says, work-based gender ideologies specify,

> "What a man `is', what a woman `is', what is right and proper, what is possible and impossible, what should be hoped and what should be feared. The hegemonic ideology of masculism involves a definition of men and women as different, contrasted, complementary and unequal. It is powerful and it deforms both men and women"[1].

Gender segregation has meant a differece in the work experience of men and women. Most women's work experience is not the same as men's and that difference affects even those women whose experience is closest to the masculine patterns. At the same time, when women have the opportunitity of paid work, then certain rational calculations will usually enter into play as they do for men: the amount by which the income and wealth to which they have access without paid work falls below their perceived needs; the difference between the wage they can command and the costs they incur by working

[1] Cockburn, Cynthia. 'The relations of technology', in R.Crompton and M.Mann (eds), ***Gender and Stratification,*** Polity Press, Cambridge, 1980, pp.85

(such as child care or travel); the satisfaction derived from paid work as against the physical and mental toil. However, the patriarchal ideology of women as essentially maternal beings have been an essential component of women's differential work experiences from that of men. Reproduction affects women as women, in a way that transcends class divisions and that penetrates everything--work, political and community involvements, sexuality, creativity, dreams.

As has been argued before, while wage labour under capitalism is considered productive labour, the productivity of sexual services for reproduction under wage relations is not considered so, and is rendered invisible by ideological mediation and institutional structures governing sexuality. Women, according to a widespread and controversial paradigm are grounded in nature by virtue of the dictates of their bodies: menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth. This conception of female sexuality and procreation as natural has fuelled ideologies of reproduction as social facts, collective representations which seem to justify existing orders of power and domination.

Reproductive labour is that category of labour that derives from the use of the body--particularly its sexual dimensions--as an instrument of labour. It encompasses: (a) biological procreation or reproducing the species, (b) provision of bodily pleasures through sex. The social dimension of women's reproductive labour covers a wide spectrum of functions for physical and emotional sustenance--under the label `domestic work'. The aggregate of the social and sexual dimension constitutes women's reproductive labour. Historically, as well as in the present, women's reproductive labour or the use

of women's bodies to provide various services pertaining to the physical,sexual and emotional reproduction of labour power has occurred under a diverse range of social relations of production. Thus, under slavery, women were directly and blatantly coerced into being biological breeders; under capitalist relations defined by market forces, surrogate motherhood or the notion of the womb for rent are conceivable. While motherhood depicts the social aspects of women's reproductive labour sans the sexual aspects, in the case of prostitution or sex work, the sexual aspect of reproductive labour is detached from its procreative adjunct and subjected to a network of commercial relations. In both cases, labour thus performed is work in the final instance, though mothering per se is still an unpaid occupation while prostitution or sex work "is often defended as a type of social work or therapy"[2]. Thus, in contemporary patriarchal culture, women as mothers and prostitutes have become commoditized and their work has been appropriated by men in perpetuating descent and satiating their desires. Thus, although "analytically, female sexuality and women's work are separated"[3], in the era of world capitalism, the twin institutions of motherhood and prostitution has become the significant sites of their convergence. Inevitably, the questions of motherhood and prostitution "feed into the feminist interrogation of heterosexual relationships (including marriage), family, work and economic exchange, based upon the recognition, more or less overt, of women's equivalence to each other

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[2] Pateman, Carole, ***The Sexual Contract***, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1988, pp.211.

[3] Rajan, Rajeswari Sundar, The Prostitution Question(s): (Female) Agency, Sexuality and Work, Occasional Papers on History and Society, Centre for Contemporary Studies, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library.

at the level of function and structure, women as the universal objects of exchange in every kind of social transaction, economic, familial, sexual, psychic, aesthetic, religious and linguistic. Though the distinction between women who are prostitutes and women who are not, is sharply and explicitly drawn in social arrangements, the slippages between the two categories are frequent and significant in both discourse and practice. The contractual terms of bourgeois marriage; many women's confessions to `occasional ' prostitution', or sex for favours; the forms of heterosexual `dating', the description of women accused of promiscuity as `whores': these provide example of the blurring of the categories of respectable bourgeois womanhood and the prostitute, otherwise maintained in sharp disjunction from each other[4].

Patriarchal culture and ideology, then, construct womanhood as beings endowed with maternal instinct. Woman's desire, whether heterosexual or otherwise, appears as something fixed by nature, an essentially nurturing and pacific expression of a sexed, maternal body, rather than something socially constructed, fluid and transformable. Capitalizing on such an essential nature of woman, mothering and the associated works of caring and nurturing jobs are seen as a sexual. Susan W. Contratto has argued that insofar as women internalize the identity of asexual motherhood, they become intensely uncomfortable with their own sexuality, consciously or unconsciously[5] Pitted against asexual motherhood, prostitutes are seen as excessively virile,

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[4] ibid. pp.2.

[5] Contratto Susan W., Maternal Sexuality and Asexual Motherhood. in Catharine R.Stimpson and Ethel Spector Person (eds.). ***Women : Sex and Sexuality***. The Univ. of Chicago Press. Chicago and London. 1980.

`deviant' sexual beings, who "literally and figuratively...was the conduit of infection to respectable society"[6]. However, the shaping of women's identity is not merely a function of the operation of the logic of patriarchy but, as will be discussed subsequently, women's narratives of their identity bring into focus their action and experiences of an event and their capacities for intersubjective and reflexive considerations. As Joan Scott has argued "this entails focusing on processes of identity production, insisting on the discursive nature of `experience' and on the politics of its construction. Experience is at once always already an interpretation *and* something that needs to be interpreted"[7]. (emphasis in original).

At this point, it is necessary to explain why the body and sexuality has gained so much prominence in recent discourses of power and pleasure. It might be argued that, with the waning of patriarchal power over the economy, polity and society in general, the phallic power of the masculine self has finally undermined women by founding itself on brute bodily differences. As Joan Cocks has forcefully put across, "it is as if, after centuries of pointing upwards and talking sanctimoniously about the divinely prescribed moral superiority of the father, the phallic self coarsely points down wards and declares; `Here this has been the only real basis of masculine power all along!"[8]. The public incitement of desire, along with a liberalization of public discourse that allowed and then encouraged an explicit articulation of the sexual theme, have

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[6] Walkowitz, Judith R., ***Prostitution and Victorian Society : Women, Class and the State.*** Cambridge Univ. Press,Cambridge, 1980, pp.4.

[7] Scott, Joan W., The Evidence of Experience. ***Critical Inquiry***, 17, Summer 1991.

[8] Cocks, Joan, ***The Oppositional Imagination,*** Routledge, London and New York, 1989, pp.213.

provided perhaps the most important cultural accoutrements of the contemporary phallic self. As Michel Foucault has argued convincingly that the trappings of Victorian prudery were part not of a massive campaign of sexual repression but rather of a massive production and invention of sexuality and the desiring subject. In principle then there is no necessary contradiction between legal repression and official condemnation on the one hand and centrality to the workings of power on the other[9]. Thus, while patriarchal and phallic right are connected together, the former is a "quintessentially traditional form of power", and the latter a "quintessentially modern form". Against patriarchal power, feminism "fights for the right to abortion and birth control, and for the end to the sex discrimination and the sexual division of labour. Against phallic power, it fights to stop sexual harassment pornography, prostitution, rape and the sexual use of children by adults[10].

Hence, female subjectivity and female sexuality has been equalled in phallocentric culture, thus relegating women to carnality, biologistic identity, physical sexuality. Yet, at the same time, we know now from a proliferating literature that such identities are historically and culturally specific, that they are selected from a host of possible social identities, that they are not necessary attributes of particular sexual drives or desires, and that they are not, in fact, essential i.e, naturally pre-given aspects of our personality. So there is a real paradox at the heart of the question of sexual identity. Thus. `sexuality' is about flux and change and what we so readily deem as `sexual'

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[9] Foucault, Michel. ***The History of Sexuality***. Vol.I. An Introduction. Trans. Robert Hurley. Penguin Books, London, 1978.

is as much a product of language and culture as of `nature'. Yet we constantly strive to fix it, stabilize it, say who we are by telling of our sex. Thus, as Jane Gallop has put it, "`identity must be continually assumed and immediately called into question"[11], or alternatively constantly questioned yet all the time assumed. For it is provisional, precarious, dependent on, and incessantly challenged by social contingencies and psychic demands--but apparently necessary, the foundation stone of our sexual beliefs and behaviours. The body and the self are not identical but selves are inseparable from bodies. The idea of property in the person has the merit of drawing attention to the importance of the body in social relations. As Pateman has argued, "masculinity and femininity are sexual identities, the self is not completely subsumed in its sexuality, but identity is inseparable from the sexual construction of the self[12].

The following exposition deals with what might be argued as the universal situations in which women find themselves today--as mothers and as prostitutes. It will be argued here that identities are constantly in flux "moving between determinism and free will and agency[13]. Underlying the notions of prostitution and motherhood is a notion of the woman's body as the primary site of oppression because it is essentially on the "biological difference

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[10] Cocks, op cit., pp.213-214.

[11] Quoted in Weeks, Jeffrey, Questions of Identity, in Pat Caplan (ed.), ***The Cultural Construction of Sexuality***, Tavistock Publications, London and New York, 1987,pp.31-49.

[12] Pateman, op cit, pp.207.

[13] Thapan, Meenakshi, Gender, body and everyday life, Occasional papers on History and Society, Centre for Contemporary Studies, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library.

between the male and the female bodies that the edifice of gender inequality is built and legitimated"[14]. However, this does not entail essentializing women's experiences on the basis of an essential bodily attribute but tries to explain the cultural subtext of gender oppression which makes a woman's body the basis of all that she stands for.

II. Motherhood : Virtuous Sexuality and Caring Work

Mothering and motherhood has been and continues to be an area primarily of female work. So far, most feminist concerned with the contribution that feminism could make to democratic politics have been looking either for the specific demands that could express women's interests or for the specific feminine values that should become the model for democratic politics. Liberal feminists have been fighting for a wide range of new rights for women to make them equal citizens,, but without challenging the dominant liberal model of citizenship and of politics. Their view has been criticized by other feminists who argue that the present conception of the political is a male one and that women's concerns cannot be accommodated within such a framework. Following Carol Gilligan, they oppose a feminist `ethics of care' to the make and liberal `ethics of justice'. Against liberal individualist values, they defend a set of values based on the experience of women as women, i.e. , their experience of motherhood and care exercised in the private realm of the family. According to this view, feminists should strive for a type of politics that is guided by the specific values of love, care, the recognition of needs and friendship. One of the clearest attempts to offer an alternative to liberal politics

[14] McNay, Lois, ***Foucault : A Critical Introduction, Continuum***, New York, 1994, pp.99.

grounded in feminine values is to be found in `Maternal Thinking' and `Social Feminism', principally represented by Sara Ruddick and Jean Bethke Elshtain. Feminist politics, they argue, should privilege the identity of `women as mothers'and the private realm of the family. The family is seen as having moral superiority over the public domain of politics because it constitutes our 'common humanity'. The maternalists want us to abandon the male liberal politics of the public informed by the abstract point of view of justice and the `generalized other' and to adopt instead a feminist politics of the private, informed by the virtues of love, intimacy and concern for the `concrete other' specific to the family.

However, not all mothers conform to the maternal instinct which feminists and antifeminists alike adhere to. The meanings and practice of motherhood vary enormously through history, across cultures and within the same culture--indicating that these `natural' realms of human experience are incessantly mediated by social praxis and design.Anthropologists such as Carol P. MacCormack has challenged this `universal' devaluation of women being equated with nature, by arguing that the nature/culture dichotomy in relation to women/gender is mainly a western phenomenon and does not exist in some non-western cultures, such as Papua New Guinea. In the Indian context, however, Leela Dube has argued that in northern and central India, the symbolism of the `seed' and the `earth'/field prevent in the explanation of the process of biological reproduction. She argues that there appears to be some sort of a homology between the sexual asymmetry in biological reproduction as conceived by the culture and expressed through the use of the

two terms to symbolize differential contribution of the male and the female and the sexual asymmetry in relation of production expressed in the structural rules which govern ownership, control and use of productive resources and in the `structure and functioning of domestic organization as such[15]. Providing ethnographic descriptions from studies of different communities in India, Dube concludes that "an essentially unequal relationship is reflected in and emphasized through the use of these symbols, and, the symbolism in utilized by the culture to underplay the significance of woman's contribution to biological reproduction"[16]. This further "provides the rationalization for a system in which woman stands alienated from productive resources, has no control over her own labour power, and is denied rights over her own offspring"[17].

Thus, it is clear that each of these spheres--the economy, the polity, the familial--were in one way or the other outside the purview of woman's influence. These segmented worlds had rational man at its centre, embodied woman at the periphery. "To take part in this public, in the world of the studio culture as protagonist rather than muse or model, in Griselda Pollock's words, women had to choose between being human and being a woman"[18]. She further argues that the same forces which constructed women as the key figures of the moral order, however, deprived them of access to major

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[15] Dube, Leela, Seed and Earth : The Symbolism of Biological Reproduction and Sexual Relations of Production, in L.Dube, E.Leacock and S.Ardener (eds.), ***Visibility and Power : Essays on Women in Society and Development***, Oxford Univ.Press.Delhi.1986,pp.23-24.

[16] ibid, pp.38.

[17] ibid, pp.44.

[18] Davidoff, Lenore, ***Worlds Between : Historical Perspectives on Gender and Class***, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1995, pp.256.

institutions and the means of generating group resources in time, energy, money, organization, building and training. Their efforts at group action were often ridiculed, their attempts to create rituals or traditions of their own were written off as trivial and tawdry. Women's public appearances were always open to sexual innuendo because the category, 'woman' has been defined as embracing the sexual from which the category 'man' had been exempt[19].

The dominant patriarchal ideology thus constructed not only the separate spheres but also multiple female sexualities based on differences of race and class, what Mary Provey has termed an "uneven development"[20]. Thus, for some groups of people some of the time, and ideological formulation of maternal nature might have seemed so accurate as to be true; for others, it probably felt less like a description than a goal or even a judgement- a description of what the individual should and has failed to be. Women's sexuality and maternal work were mainly used in the consolidation of bourgeois power and women's bodies came to be inscribed with the dominant class ideology. As Poovey has argued, "the rhetorical separation of spheres and the image of domesticized, feminized morality were crucial to the consolidation of bourgeois power partly because linking morality to a figure (rhetorically) immune to the self-- interest and competition integral to economic success preserved virtue without inhibiting productivity. In producing a distinction between kinds of labour (paid versus unpaid, mandatory versus voluntary. productive versus reproductive, alienated versus self fulfilling), the segregation

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[19] ibid. pp.262.

[20] Poovey. Mary. *Uneven Development : The Ideological Work in Mid-Victorian England*. The

of the domestic ideal created the illusion of an alternative to competition; this alternative, moreover, was the prize that inspired hard work, for a prosperous family was the goal represented as desirable and available to every man"[21]. This process, in turn, included generalizing the morality attributed to middle class women to all women, "translating the discrepancy between what one now has and what one could acquire, into a psychological narrative of personal development, and subsuming the economic rewards capitalism seemed to promise into the emotional rewards that seemed available to every man in the castle of his home"[22]. As has been documented in the case of the United States, by the 1850s, "a campaign was under way to transform the character of working class womanhood into one resembling more closely the female identity that the cult of domesticity celebrated. Mediated by a particular, class based conception of gender, a moral reform movement that targeted the households of labouring women became linked to the wider efforts of the bourgeoisie to suppress an oppositional working- class culture"[23]. Thus, in the 1990s, two populations of women, indeed two populations of mothers have emerged. The first is well educated, has children later in life, benefits from maternity leave and return to full time work with the same employers shortly after bearing a child. This minority population is beginning to approach equality with men. The less highly educated majority follows the opposite pattern: it has

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Univ. of Chicago Press. Chicago. 1988.

[21] ibid. pp.10.

[22] ibid. pp.11.

[23] Traube. Elizabeth G.. 'Family Matters : Post feminist Constructions of a Contested Site. in Lucien Taylor (ed.). *Visualizing Theory*.Routledge. New York and London. 1994. pp.310.

children early, is less likely to be eligible for maternity leave, unlikely to return quickly to full time work and unlikely to remain with the same employer. Motherhood used to be a leveller for women in terms of their own careers, although not in terms of their spending power, which was dependent on their husbands. Now social class impinges not only on disposable income and assets, but also on independence. In fact, in the highly developed industrialized nations today, single motherhood is a pervasive feature. Although here too, "dominant images of single motherhood..continue to be polarized on racial lines. At one pole of the prevailing representational system, poor black single mothers remain under the sign of the irrational, constructed as `excessive' reproducers whose fertility must somehow be restricted. At the other pole, single motherhood appears as the rational `choice' of elite white career women who have revised an earlier life plan"[24].

> As Betty Friedan argues optimistically, "it is historical, political reality that when motherhood was women's only function, status and identity, as well as her biological necessity, it kept her, or was used as an excuse to keep her, from education or opportunity to use her abilities in the mainstream of our evolving society.The change in women's historical, political reality is that motherhood- which was once her necessity and passive destiny, and which confined, defined, used up her whole life--is now no longer necessity, but choice, and even when chosen, no longer can define or even use up most of her life"[25].

It is however evident that in the sphere of work, the essentialization and universalization of women's motherly nature has been a fundamental determinant for grouping certain jobs as specifically female jobs. Thus, the

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[24] ibid, pp.305.

[25] Friedom, Betty, *The Second State*. Michael Joseph Ltd..London,1982.pp.94.

ideology that women are essentially maternal brings have led to a double oppression:the potential and real situations of motherhood, on the one hand, and the choice of a career that is economically less promising. A typical case where a woman's caring nature has been particularly exploited is that of the governess. As Poovey has argued, the governess was called a `redundant woman', and that, "as a consequence, she constituted the border between the normative (working) man and the normative (non-working) woman. Not a mother, the governess nevertheless performed the mother's tasks, nota prostitute, she was nevertheless suspiciously close to other sexualized women; not a lunatic, she was nevertheless deviant simply because she was a middle class woman who had to work and because she was always in danger of losing her middle class status and her `natural' morality"[26]. Thus if one has to historicize the notion of motherhood, it would point to the ways inwhich women contributed to the construction and application of the domestic ideal or, conversely the extent to which women have themselves participated in their own oppression/ "One reading of this history stresses", Poovey argues, "women's ability to capitalize on and enhance the kinds of power that the 19th century moralization of women and the feminization of virtue generated; another emphasized the restrictions women suffered as consequences of being idealized"[27]. Such a dual reading can either lead to the idealization of woman's separatism that a critique of separate spheres should undermine, or it can generate a sense of victimization among women that defeat our desire to

[26] Poovey, op.cit., pp.14.

[27] ibid. pp.21-22.

inaugurate change. This remains a vexed and complex issue for feminists even today.

While it might be argued that the ideological constraints imposed by the `patriarchal principle' implicate both men and women, at the same time, it is also true that men and women were subject to different kinds of ideological constraint. As long as motherhood and the work that mothers do are taken for granted for the benefits of a partrichal culture, the possibility of women's agency lies in transgressing the identities imposed and self consciously excavate one's own assumptions and narrative paradigms. Insofar as an intervention becomes a challenge to the status quo, it becomes a part of the cultural contest by which new meanings are produced.

We now turn to an examination of an antithetical image of women as prostitutes, constructed parallely with that of a bourgeois domestic womanhood which in fact helped to consolidate the public and private dimension of work/sexuality.

III. Prostitution : Desirous Sexuality and Carnal Work

The "ethos of containment[28] which defined the family as the uniquely safe site for all expressions of female desire, took shape in the 18th century through an opposition between "a sexless, moralized angel and an aggressive, carnal magdalen"[29]. Natalie Zemon Davis argues that in early modern Europe, the female sex was thought the disorderly one, par excellence[30]. While the

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[28] Traube, op.cit.pp.304.

[29] Poovey, op.cit., pp.11.

[30] Zemon Davis, Natalie, `Gender and Sexual Temperament', in *The Polity Reader in Gender*

defects of the males were thought to shem from nurture rather than nature, "with the woman, the disordeliness was founded in physiology"[31]. The medical discourse on female physiology attributed wet and cold humours to women (as against the male's hot and dry) which meant a "changeable, deceptive and tricky temperament. Her womb was like a hungry animal, when not amply fed by sexual intercourse or reproduction, it was likely to wander about her body, overpowering her speech and senses"[32]. This image of woman was that of a sexualized, susceptible and fallen being. If women were governed not by reason (like men) but by something else, then they could hardly be expected to participate in the economic and political fray. Increasingly, from the late 18th century, the medical model of reproductive difference was invoked to define this something: when it was given one emphasis, woman's reproductive capacity equated her maternal instinct, when given another, it equalled her sexuality. The representation of women not only as dependent but as needing the control that was the other face of protection was thus integral to the separation of spheres which defined maternal work and sex work as two facets of women's reproductive labour. While maternity was glorified, prostitution was vilified and the one created its other through continual opposition between virtue and vice, sexless love and carnal pleasure.

Any understanding of the question of prostitution thus involves a myriad of issues: sin, promiscuity, disease, prostitutes', work as free

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Studies. Polity Press, Cambridge, 1994, pp.129.

[31] ibid.

[32] ibid.

contract/autonomous action, subordinated labour/subordinated sex. Historical changes in prostitution (primarily in direction of increasing proletarianisation); differences in the levels of prostitutes in terms of clientele, income, work and life styles (from call girls to street-walkers); differences in the function and social prestige of prostitution due to cultural variations, or to the practitioners', skills and accomplishments, and international differences in prostitution-systems, broadly between those in first world and third world countries:these facts have been repeatedly invoked to account for the widely different ways in which prostitution is read.

The contemporary debates on prostitution is a complex one because of the acute divide it has created among different feminisms-liberal, Marxist, radical, postmodern. While contractarians and liberals such as Carole Poteman try to puzzle over issues of choice and freedom; Marxists such as Catharine Mackinnon and Andrea Dworkin trouble themselves with labour and commodities; radical feminists emphasize sexual violence and subordination, and "within the postmodern historical moment, prostitutes have been enabled to assume their own "subject position and produce their own political identity"[33] Thus, prostitution debates, centre on the notions of prostitution as a `system' and prostitution as "practice', which further points to the context of the event wherein either the system or the practice is prioritized. As R Sunder Rajan argues, "if we believe that politics is necessarily generated from social realities, then they are dictated instead by different contexts, and have, therefore, the status of descriptions. It is indeed as description that the discourse of

[33] Rajan, op.cit. pp.12.

prostitution often functions. In view of this, we would have to contend with the variety and heterogeneity of "sex work" as practice in place of a singular phenomenon `prostitution'"[34]. However, as Noah D Zatz has argued, following Laclau and Mouffe's notion of articulations, "how prostitution is articulated then, is not simply a process of description but a productive process that helps shape the cultural landscape and involves inescapably political questions about how, for instance, to organize sexuality, labour and commerce. In articulating prostitution, then", one must attend "both to details of the practice itself and to how discurssive choices will play a role both in shaping that practice and in shaping other practices with which prostitution is articulated"[35].

Prostitution thus becomes a site where women's sexuality, work and agency gets converged. Prostitution challenges the possibility of identifying an action as simply either a market transaction or the realization of private desire. In Michel Foucault's terminology, prostitution challenges both the deployment of alliance (in its appropriation of sexual activity for atomized, anonymous pleasure and profit rather than for procreative, community building purposes) and the deployment of sexuality; prostitution is about not only sex without reproduction but sex without desire, sex without identity, indeed, sex without sexuality[36]. In any discourse on prostitution then, the question of the prioritization of work and sex on the part of the prostitute is a measure of her agential capacity. The issue of agency relates to the subject position

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[34] ibid,pp.15-16.

[35] Zatz, Noah D., Sexwork/Sex Act : Law, Labour, and Desire in Constructions of Prostitutions, in Signs: ***Journal of Women in Culture and Society***, Winter 1997, pp.294.

[36] Foucault, op.cit., pp.106-107.

accorded to the prostitute. Within a framework that treats prostitution as analogous to slavery and views the practitioner as one who can only have been coerced into the trade, the prostitute can be represented only as victim--whether of an organized prostitution trade, or specific agents of force and oppression, or widespread socio-economic circumstances. If however, prostitution's central figure is regarded as an individual to whose action a certain measure of choice must be accorded--however restricted such a choice may be- then she is a social agent and the privileged voice of prostitution. The extremes of the coercion/free choice pole are easy to recognize and therefore easy to condemn and approve, respectively, without much disagreement. However, as Zatz argues, in any sexwork, there are "possibilities of miscommunication, performance, and the divergent significance of single signifying acts". She further states that "it is precisely in the disjunction between the meanings that sex work occurs". What is crucial is a "question of fantasy, of the narrative that organizes the perception of the individual, `experiencing' the event. Since the erotice significance of sexual acts always depends on specific context, individual desires, and unarticulated assumptions about the act's significance for others, there is considerable room for radically different experiences of a 'single' act"[37]. In the same vein, it might be argued that even if women by and large internalise the ideologically constructed idea of a specific female sexuality, they may develop communities in which sexuality is rearticulated through collective cultural work. Veena Talwar Oldenburg

[37] Zatz, op.cit., pp.296

makes a similar argument with regard to courtehesans of Lucknow, India[38]. She argues that these women live in their community full of rituals, narratives and practices meant to affirm women's alternative sexuality and contest the image in which they are cast by the masculine culture outside their community:

> "these women, even today, are independent and consciously involved in the covert subversion of a male dominated world; they celebrate womanhood in the privacy of their apartments by resisting and investing the rules of gender of the larger society of which they are part. Their way of life is not complicitous, with male authority; on the contrary, in their own self-perceptions, definitions, and descriptions they are engaged in ceaseless and chiefly non confrontational resistance to the new regulations and the resultant loss of prestige they have suffered since colonial rule began. It would be no exaggeration to say that their `life-style' *is resistance to rather than a perpetuation of patriarchal values*"[39] (emphasis in original).

In fact, as Judith Walkowitz has documented, it was precisely to curb the formation of such exclusively female networks that the Contagious Diseases Acts were implemented in 19th century England. Her study reveals that "in fact, a strong female subculture was a distinguishing feature of the 19th century prostitution. As 'outcast women', prostitutes banded together and adopted an outward appearance and a more affluent style of life that distinguished them from other working class women. The most visible symbol of the prostitute's relative affluence was her dress[40]. Walkowitz also carefully documents the effect of the acts on prostitutes themselves- for example, registration served to isolate even occasional prostitutes from the community

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[38] Oldenburg, Veena Talwar, `Lifestyle as Resistance : The Case of the Courtesous of Lucknow, in Violethe Graff (ed.), ***Lucknow: Memories of a City***, Oxford University Press,Delhi,1999.

[39] ibid.pp.138.

[40] Walkonitz, op.cit.,pp.25.

of casual labouring poor into which they were otherwise well integrated- as well as their resistance and agency[41]. Alleged prostitutes "were used as a leverage on the working class community, not simply because of their marginal status within that community, but in good part because they shared social characteristics in common with the mass of the urban poor"[42].

Thus far we have argued that in contemporary capitalism, women's bodies are sold in the market as commodities: what sells is not only the material body per se but also and this is important, the narrative structures that construct such bodies as commodities. Prostitution has brought sexuality and money together in the same event, although the barrier between work and sex is permeable. Even within the prostitution exchange, the experiential diversity of sex workers is of paramount importance. The mediation of experience is particularly important when how and why participants experience a practice (as degrading, as shameful, as fun, as erotic, as liberating) ought to play a crucial role in evaluating prostitution. However, it is one thing to subvert a system while already a part of it and quite another to be pushed into it. Prostitution remains one of the professions today which is degraded. Often however, structurally induced material factors such as poverty, deprivation and its interaction with patriarchal cultural settings that marginalize women from access to education and the job market for instance, render commercial provision of sex services a survival strategy for large masses of women.

[41] ibid. pp.236-52.

[42] ibid. pp.192.

However, by the strictly Marxist definition of work, it is doubted whether prostitution work is `productive' and what exactly is the `product' of such work. The better a `job' prostitution is, i.e., the less it looks like a job, or the less it looks like prostitution[43]. As productive work, i.e. an activity undertaken for payment, it has been viewed variously as wage labour, as trade and as service. Lynda Nead reads this conceptual uncertainty as in fact constitutive of and specific to prostitution in nineteenth century Britain in the historical context of industrial capital and urbanization. Nead argues that prostitution deconstructs the differences among the terms of capitalist production:

> "...the prostitute does not behave like any other commodity; she occupies a unique place, at the centre of an extraordinary and nefarious economic system. She is able to represent all the terms within capitalist production; she is the human labour, the object of exchange and the seller at once. She stands as worker, commodity and capitalist and blurs the categories of bourgeois economics in the same way as she tests the boundaries of bourgeois morality. As a commodity, therefore, the prostitute both encapsulates and distorts all the classic features of bourgeois economics. This is the full nature of her threat and it is also the key to her power"[44].

Although there is ambiguity as to its status as work, nonetheless, it thrives as a full fledged industry under capitalist conditions. In Catharine Gallagher's terms, `what multiplies through her (the prostitute) is not a substance but a sign: money. Prostitution becomes like usury, a metaphor for the unnatural multiplication not of things but of signs without referents"[45]. The

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[43] Rajan. op.cit., pp.37.

[44] Nead. Lynda. ***Myths of Sexuality : Representation of Women in Victorian Britain***. Basil Blackwell. Oxford. 1988. pp.99.

[45] Laqueur. Thomas. ***Making Sex : Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud***. Harvard Univ.Press. London and Cambridge. Paperback edition 1992. pp.232.

sex service sector operates through a variety of locales connected to the process of capital accumulation under capitalism, facilitated by the exploitation of sex and women's bodies as commodities, by controllers of sex service sector to make the enterprise possible in the first place. Fiscal benefits, the earning of huge foreign exchange reserves by nation states, result in collusion between the larger state apparatus and the immediate controllers of the sex service sector. In the ex-colonial third world countries. the situation is worse. While these societies have gained formal political independence from colonial powers, they continue to be subordinated economically, politically and socio-culturally by newer forms of domination. The poverty thus resulting from these structurally induced inequalities and intrinsically linked with capitalist relations of domination between the centre and periphery interfaces with patriarchal culture, where gender discrimination against women at all levels, renders poor women even poorer than men. Within this generalized culture of poverty, prostitution serves as a survival strategy for large masses of women in our realities.

To sum up, it might be argued that patriarchal power in contemporary capitalist societies manifests itself by constructing women as essentially either asexual mothers or `sexy' prostitute'. Luce Irigaray claims that women are not women because they are trapped in various social roles allocated to them by the patriarchal economy. Women are pure exchange value as virgins; use values as mothers and prostitution amounts to use value that is exchanged[46].

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[46] Still, Judith, ***Feminine Economies,*** Manchester Univ. Press, Manchester and New York. 1997. pp.178.

The basis of women's commodification in society has been a common-sense notion of women's situation being determined by their biology which is alternatively put to use as either reproducers of babies or providers of sexual services. This, moreover, has created a polarisation within women themselves, viz, the polarisation between procreative pleasure and sexual pleasure which creates dually opposed and mutually exclusive categories of women, i.e. the homebound wife responsible for social and biological reproduction and the public woman, the sexual temptress and provider of sexual pleasure.

Finally, we may ask: what becomes of the woman--the object of male machinations, the provider of male sexual desire and fantasy and the nurturer of the generative `male seed'? Where lies the potential for women's unique agency and subjectivity and what can be its possible sources? These are some of the ambiguities which still puzzles feminists. It might be argued that the process of identity formation is a continuous process- a becoming rather than being- and the possibilities of realising one's self worth lies in weaving together the material and cultural realities of one's field of vision. This narrative view of identity regards individual as well as collective identities as woven out of tales and fragments belonging both to oneself and to others. Women might choose to be mothers or prostitutes in a patriarchal culture but the important issue is with what consequences. Increasingly, feminist theorists are beginning to realize that "agency" i.e. arguments to determine coercion/choice, is not a useful terrain on which to debate issues relating to women's social roles and status[47]. Rather, identities and possibilities for agential capacities should be

[47] See, Kumkum Sangari, 'Consent Agency and the Rhetorics of Incitement', *Economic and*

seen as historically specific and culturally contingent. If the body and the specific work it is supposed to perform is granted a history, then traditional associations between the female body and the domestic sphere and the male body and the public sphere can be acknowledged as historical realities, which have historical effects, without resorting to biological essentialism. Thus, we might argue that rather than biology being the destiny, culture is the destiny. A radical intervention on the cultural front, it may be argued, can serve the interests of women in a particular socio-historical juncture. On the one hand, the victories of equality in the economic and political stage will help to erode fixed feminine and masculine identities and so the certainity of just what, with respect to their productive capabilities and political intelligence, `women' and `men' are; on the other, the practices of separatist women's culture would force open or at least provide possibilities of forcing open the imagination of the larger social whole. They would exhibit in front of that whole a different valuation of bodily selves, a different rule over those selves' erotic relations, a different aesthetic, a different political commitment and a different living of everyday life. Once these victories become a part of the public sphere of social knowledge and cultural capital, women's agency would ultimately be manifested in making the crucial choice which would not only remove the fetters of male domination but would also be another addition to the cultural forms and institution which challenge their hegemonic counterparts.

Political Weekly, May 1, 1993, 867-882.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

This work has been an attempt to understand the whys and hows that go into the making of woman in our society the `second sex'. Even today, for large masses of women, male power, whether as ideology, or language or discourse, still wields consent, and the notion of individual/collective resistance becomes either elusive or contradictory for women.

The continuity of women's oppression in society, it might be argued, is thus contingent upon their collusion with patriarchies and the formation of consensualities, either through hegemonic practices, or, as Kumkum Sangari argues, through `women's agential capacity within so-called `traditional' societies and accompanying discurssivities...for unless certain distributions of power are made within patriarchal arrangements, it is difficult to imagine how any degree of consent from women can be obtained[1]. Thus, women may occupy seemingly powerful positions, either working through a play of compensations or through a valorisation of separate spheres of female power. Hence, female transgressive or subversive capacities are not necessarily an antidote to the all pervasive patriarchal power unless they acknowledge their linkage to wider social processes through which

[1] Sangari, Kumkum. 'Consent, Agency and the Rhetoric of Incitement'. ***Economic and Political Weekly***, May 1, 1993, pp.867-882.

patriarchies function. Thus, to realize the possibilities of women's agency, there is a need to work with a notion of materiality which can extend from the micro-arrangement of daily life to the macro processes of the wider society as well as work towards a better understanding of the differences between the nature of change brought about through individual acts of resistance and collective resistance.

This work has made an attempt to understand the way women are perceived through the prison of male fantasies and needs and the possibilities women can forge, out of either subverting the system or by transgressing it. In exploring women's situation in their capacities as mothers and as sex workers, an attempt has been made to understand their situations within the matrix of politico-economic and historical circumstances. Women's lives are only intelligible at all as a function of the ways of making sense of the world available in any historical moment. Understood as ideologically constructed, women's lives can be read in terms of woman's contradictory position under capitalist and patriarchal arrangements where the symbolic economy of an opposition between men and women comprises only one of the articulating principles of the prevailing truths. The hierarchy often only thinly concealed within this opposition underwrites the ideological construction of the feminine as excess or lack, and is materialized from and in a corresponding unequal division of labour and allocation of social resources. Thus, as Nancy Hartsock has argued, "the subjects who matter

are not individual subjects who are simply human beings but subjects who are defined by their relation to large collective subjects or groups. And these groups must be understood as defined by macro-processes that structure societies as a whole. At the same time, these groups must not be seen as formed unproblematically by their subjection, that is by existing in a particular social location and therefore coming to see the world in a particular way".[2]

Thus, it appears that privileging a particular identity, either of asexuality or sexual excess, undermines the possibility of subverting these positions, while at the same time obfuscating the power dynamics that construct women in particular way in a patriarchal culture. Privileging the notion of care, empathy etc. embodied in mothers should not seem as essential attributes and a sself evident truths perpetuated by the dominant culture. Rather, the possibilities for overcoming what the dominant culture tells us about the world and ourselves must be in a dialectical engagement with the world. "Dialectics restructures our thinking about reality by replacing the common sense notion of `thing' as something that has a history and has external connections to other things, with notions of `process', which contains as a part of what it is its ties with other relations".[3]

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[2] Hartsock, Nancy, 'Marxist Feminist Dialectics for the 21st Century', *Science and Society*, Vol.62, no.3, Fall 1998, pp.407.

[3] Harvey, David, quoted in ibid, pp.40, no.5.

Women's own perceptions of their bodies and their femininity are therefore as important to our analysis as are the dominant ideologies of gendered representation available to them through social practice. This however, brings us to the problematic of the validity of an analysis based on women's viewpoint because in most cases of interpreting the experiences of the subject of analysis, "what is to count as truth, methods for obtaining it, criteria for evaluation--all are profoundly influenced by extant power relations".[4] There may be multiple loci of these power relations--race, colonialism, class--which intersect to determine the nature of the subject and their possibilities of agency. It is the recognition of the macro-processes of power that brings out different aspects of the subject.

A politics informed by women's experiences therefore, hinges on the possibility, not of changing one's location in the social structure, but that of a shift in understanding the meanings of that structure. This would not only create new knowledges for acting in the world but also new practices to generate new ways of knowing. However, this paradigm leaves a few questions unanswered: how to reconcile the empirical materiality of women's lives and their narratives of it ? If women's lives are both discursive and non-discursive, how are we to understand their relation ? How does a feminist translate the experiences of lived women's realities, given that gender as a historical category intersects with race, class and other oppositions ?

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[4] ibid. pp.406.

This has been an exploration in understanding the myriad ways in which men and women come to perceive themselves. One primary contention consists of the fact that material life in the form of human activity sets limits to human understanding and that subjectivities are constructed out of the available knowledge in a culture as they circulate in discourses and institutional practices. Any emancipatory politics can thus be based on contestation among discourses and not by sheer self--assertion: this characterizes not only the nature of formation of identities but also feminist identity politics itself.

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