THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SEXUAL DIVISION OF LABOUR TO ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

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The recent cross-cultural literature on women and development is overwhelming in its view that women lose more than they gain in the process of development. The tremendous social upheavals which development requires have devastating effects on certain social groups: while the accumulation of wealth in the long run may provide for higher standards of living in the form of more calories consumed, higher incomes, more leisure, access to knowledge, longer lives, and less disease, these benefits are by no means assured or immediate. Nevertheless, despite the dislocations of development, the potential benefits are usually not at issue as much as the form under which it proceeds; for it is the potential for social progress which is the promise of development--a promise which is irresistible. The dilemma for women is that the very process which appears to be progressive, which appears to offer solutions to poverty, ignorance and autocracy, also intensifies the sexual division of labour and relegates women's activities to the private sphere and marginal areas of social production.

The prominent western theories about social change have explained women's subordination as a necessary social structure which supports the development process. What is more, there has been a strong tendency for feminist analysis to concur with these views. The point of this paper is that the anthropological material, which looks at the effect of development on women cross-culturally, necessitates a different perspective. This material is particularly important for showing both that economic development imprints on women in extremely diverse ways, and that industrially developed economies do not have a monopoly on notions of egalitarian relationships between men and women. Unfortunately, in the process of developing a wider perspective on women and development the explanations rely on the argument that the
division of labour by sex is not inherently unequal, an approach which is criticized in this paper.

The paper is divided into three parts. In the first I will discuss the significance of the sexual division of labour to various social theories: I will show how some feminist analysis has tended to conform to the pattern established by other social theories which see women's subjection and the sexual division of labour bound together as an essential part of cultural development. The second part will examine the significance of recent anthropological analysis of the relationship between development and the sexual division of labour, specifically to show that there is no clear, deterministic relationship between the sexual division of labour and women's status. In the third part some conclusions will be drawn regarding the significance of the sexual division of labour to understanding women's subordination to men.

The significance of the division of labour is a "given" of economic development theory. In traditional, no-growth societies, individuals perform a multiplicity of tasks and while there is a division of labour, it is not highly developed. Production tends to remain at subsistence level until there is sufficient specialization to command a surplus. More complex economies with highly developed markets coincide with much more specialized labour forms, and it is the combination of the two which produces the dazzling results of modern economies.

While the division of labour leading to increasingly narrow areas of specialization is an Intrinsic feature of the development process, the reasons for the primary division being sex-related are not clear. The economic argument of biological efficiency is accepted as an explanation in societies where men's physical strength seems greater than women's, but several arguments point to the inadequacy of this factor in explaining why the division of labour so rigidly adheres to gender differentiation as societies develop. Most obvious is the fact that muscular strength is not a significant requirement for industrial production. But even in societies where production methods do require
physical exertion there is no universal assignment to men of the heavy or even the heaviest labour: there is a universal in the division of labour by sex, but there is considerable variation cross-culturally in the work performed by each sex. So while the division of labour and its intensification is crucial to the process of economic development, there is no specific economic requirement that the division be along sex lines. Rather, explanations for its function in changing economies rely much more heavily on its significance to the social structures which support new types of production.

In these analyses which stress social cohesion and the cultural advance of human kind, woman plays a significant role, performing tasks which are distinctly appropriate to her sex but which lag behind man's more culturally and socially significant activities. The most obvious example of this approach is that of Durkheim, who, in his monumental Division of Labour in Society, sees the economic services which the division of labour renders as "picayune compared to the moral effect that it produces." He sees "... its true function is to create in two or more persons a feeling of solidarity." (Durkheim 1964, p. 56). The division of labour by sex fits very neatly into this analysis, for the more developed it is, the greater is the conjugal solidarity and the more society can advance. Durkheim sees that sexual roles were more homogeneous at a lower stage of human evolutionary history, but as we advance to modern times women's and men's spheres become separate with women specializing in the affective functions and men in the intellectual functions. When women do begin to participate in some sphere which was clearly male (such as in artistic or literary life) it will not lead to the integration of sexes in occupations, but rather will perform a much more positive function for human civilization--it will permit men to specialize even further in pursuit of science: men will move upward and onward as women move in. While Durkheim carries the logic of his argument of the significance of the division of labour by sex to an extreme which appears hopelessly dated, his notions about males as the progressive force in social evolution still have considerable currency.
The male as the bearer of civilization, as the generator of culture, is a powerful concept which reinforces ideas not simply about the functional nature of the division of labour by sex, but also about its necessity for human social evolution. This notion can be seen as an active element even of theories which are unsympathetic to its outcome. For Engels, for example, female subordination is coincident with monogamous marriage, private property, inheritance and class oppression (Engels 1942). But what is important is that this is a universal process in the transformation of societies from primitive communism to civilization. Patriarchy becomes a necessary stage through which civilization must pass on its torturous route toward mature communism. Freud's less materialistic approach also has a devastating inevitability for female inferiority, but one ultimately with a considerably less optimistic resolution toward homogeneity of male and female psychic and social configurations. For Freud, women cannot hope to achieve the strength of males because of their inadequately resolved Oedipus complex and the absence of castration anxiety. The female superego therefore remains undeveloped and so, consequently, does a sense of conscience and of justice, prerequisites for the development of civilization (Freud 1974). For Freud women, in fact, retard civilization.

Marxist and Freudian ideas have had a strong influence on feminist writers who have tried to explain female subordination and to find ways to overcome it. In coping with what appears to be the universality of separate male and female spheres and a division of labour by sex, there has been a strong tendency for feminists to accept the already well entrenched idea that the sexual dichotomy was essential for social and economic progress. Simone de Beauvoir states this most plainly. Although her analysis of women's oppression has frequently been the subject of feminist criticism the deterministic thread of her argument needs special consideration, for it has had a strong influence on recent feminist thought. De Beauvoir is unequivocal in her view that it is through the subjection of women that males learn about power and experience causation. It is not the female activity of giving life, but the male activity of risking life which has raised man above the animal: "that is why superiority has been accorded in humanity not to the sex
that brings forth but to that which kills" (de Beauvoir 1961, p. 58). This superiority of males is crucial if society is not to be arrested at a primitive stage of development. She states quite plainly the "devaluation of feminity has been a necessary step to human evolution" (p. 677). What is more, de Beauvoir sees the domination by males as so total that women's capacity to effect change simply does not exist. Women's subjection is totally bound to the production process and only when this changes (independent of women's actions) can women be liberated. 

Shulamith Firestone also regards male domination as inevitable and historically necessary for certain stages in development. (Firestone 1971). She argues that the inherent distinctions between the sexes in their biology produces unequal power distributions and only when sex is no longer an issue in reproduction itself can women really be free. The preconditions for women's liberation can be achieved through the advances of technology: "Empirical science is to culture what the shift to patriarchy was to the sex dialectic, and what the bourgeois period is to the Marxian dialectic--a latter day stage prior to revolution" (Firestone 1971, p. 181).

For other feminists, the very process of change which relates to capitalism and industrialization creates values which are essential for future liberation, even though the immediate effect limits women's sphere more distinctly. Sheila Rowbotham, for example, sees the development of specific western ideologies as significant for providing a more humane concept of relationships between the sexes (Rowbothan 1974). Likewise, the questioning of authority, the idea of individual responsibility and the development of the notion of conscience as a guide for political action are important steps toward a state of equality. (Rowbotham 1973). For Juliet Mitchel, capitalism and industrialization are specific preconditions for women's liberation: "Probably it is only in the highly developed societies of the West that an authentic liberation of women can be envisaged today" (Mitchell 1973, p. 131). 

There has been a tendency then, for feminists who have examined only western experience to explain what appears to be a devastating and inevitable subjection of women as a process which is integral to
human advancement. They tend to conclude that while industrialization certainly does limit women's sphere by limiting their productive activities and increasing their dependency on men, this in itself may have a liberating potential. Yet these deterministic perspectives, which see male domination as universal and capitalism as a necessary stage for women's liberation, have a particularly gloomy message for women in underdeveloped parts of the world. I maintain that these views are particularly culture-bound. When Mitchell says that just as capitalist market relations are a precondition for socialism, bourgeois marital relations will be a precondition for women's freedom, she is condemning women to a fictitious determinism (Mitchell 1973, p. 114). An examination of other cultures indicates that there are extraordinary variations in sexual relationships and while development certainly alters these relationships, the effect on women is not uniform.

II

Cross-cultural material gives ample evidence that concepts of egalitarian sexual relationships are not peculiar to industrially developed economies. By looking at the variations in experience, and by trying to account for these differences, anthropologists are able both to stretch current investigations regarding the origins of female oppression and to lead the way toward a more sophisticated model of the effect of development on women. In this section I will examine both the strengths and the limitations of the analysis which arises from the anthropological findings.

One of the fundamental issues about which there is considerable disagreement in the cross-cultural literature on women and development is the extent to which the division of labour by sex necessarily implies the subordination of women. Whether or not a sexual division of labour is seen as necessarily unequal determines the approach to the universality of women's oppression, for there is uniform acceptance of the sexual division of labour as common to all cultures. This debate surrounding the issue of the sexual division of labour has significant ramifications for understanding the determinants of social change, the
impact of development, and what would constitute a solution to female inequality.

Those who tend to see the sexual division of labour as a symmetrical arrangement in certain precapitalist societies argue against the universality of women's subordination to men. This view holds that oppression is not conditioned by sexual relations but by property relations and the division of labour by sex only implies inequalities as colonialism and capitalism introduce productive relations which give rise to class inequalities. In discussing solutions to women's oppression this view looks toward changing property and productive relations.

The second approach, which sees the division of labour by sex not as a natural but as a cultural construct, argues that it is necessarily an asymmetrical social arrangement. Since the division of labour by sex necessarily leads to the subordination of women and the division of labour by sex is universal, women's subordination is universal. That is, while the form subjection takes may change and even intensify as economic and social conditions change, class and property relations are not sufficient to explain sexual inequalities. Likewise, changes in production and property relations will be insufficient to eliminate sexual inequality.

Eleanor Leacock is one of the most prominent anthropologists among the first group which argues that male dominance and female subservience are neither biologically based nor universal. She sees those arguments which have posed the matriarchal rule of women over men as the alternative to patriarchy as red herrings which have obscured the reciprocal nature of sex relations in egalitarian or "primitive Communist" society. She argues that the view which sees the universality of male dominance reinforces and demands the image of humans, particularly males, as basically aggressive and competitive. It also reinforces the notion that sexual equality is a Western concept which is foreign to third world peoples (Leacock, 1978, 1981b). Both the ideas (i.e., those which equate aggressiveness with maleness and equality with western civilization) are based on a male and ethnocentric bias in anthropology and discount the extraordinary variations cross-culturally in relations between the sexes. Fundamental to the approach which
denies the universality of male domination is the argument that the division of labour by sex is not inherently unequal: that where basic resources are available to everyone a division of labour by sex results in reciprocal exchanges of goods and services, equal (but not identical) participation in production, and symmetry in decision making. The division of labour by sex admits to inequalities only when hierarchies in property relations are established. This approach conforms rather closely to Engel's analysis of naturally separate spheres of labour without male domination in the period before accumulation and private property result in man's domination of women. The fact that Engel's argument had been bound in the concept of matriarchy made it fairly easy for anthropologists to reject it since evidence for genuine rule by women was elusive (Gough 1975). Recent interpretation of anthropological findings have focused on the issue of equality of sex relations rather than on reverse domination of the sexes, and has resulted in more convincing evidence for seeing productive relations as crucial to explaining female subordination. What is particularly important about the cross-cultural studies, and what is absent from those studies which examine capitalist production relations alone, is that they show that it is not female participation in production itself which determines women's status (Kandiyoti 1977; Sanday 1981). While female participation in production is a necessary condition for female equality, it is not a sufficient condition to ensure that equality will occur (Mullings, 1976, p. 243). It is the relations in production, then, not the actual work performed which accounts for female subordination in society.

Recently there have been several studies which have documented how capitalist trade relations and colonial ideology have imposed male dominance on societies which are believed to have been fully egalitarian. Buenaventura-Posso and Brown's study of the Bar! of Colombia is a good example of what is meant by a fully egalitarian society where the division of labour by sex is not exploitative. They also show what accounts for the introduction of inequalities between the sexes. (Buenaventura-Posso and Brown 1980).

The Bari are a forest horticultural group who have fiercely resisted imperialistic encroachment and over a four hundred year period,
the 1960s, have been unusually successful in their resistance. While the Bari are extremely hostile in external relations, their internal social organizations are fully egalitarian and harmonious. By fully egalitarian Buenaventura-Posso and Brown mean a society without classes and with full sexual symmetry. The society is characterized by a high degree of individual autonomy with no individual having authority over another. There is no differential access to resources, all labour is considered socially useful, and the concept of the accumulation of wealth does not exist. Social control is exercised through group pressure and public opinion without authority vested in a leader. Decision-making is in the hands of groups who are to be directly affected by the particular decision. Missionary attempts to use the social positions of responsibility of certain individuals as ways to establish permanent hierarchies were unsuccessful because the holders of the positions did not have any authority at all, even temporarily. Because there was no basis on which to stratify the group on either the economic or political level, the Bari were able to resist attempts of missionary and colonial control. In the Bari society there has been a clear division of labour by sex, although it is not a rigid one. While the authors do not speculate about why certain tasks are sex specific, they refer to the division of labour as being "simple and practical" (p. 118). Some tasks are done by men, some by women, and some by both, but generally there are no strong taboos regarding work and gender. In fact few tasks are strictly limited to one sex" . . . and such restrictions as do exist most often serve to enhance the interdependence of the sexes" (118-119). The sexual division of labour does not result in hierarchies of any sort, rather it serves "to insure the completion of essential subsistence tasks [and] to create a meaningful place for each individual within society. . ." (119).

While the Bari have been able to retain remnants of their former egalitarian society, the introduction of wage labour and the restriction of access to resources has imposed social change which has seriously undermined the reciprocal nature of the separate but equal spheres of Bari traditional society. This process has occurred through a deliberate plan by the Colombian government to westernize the Bari and is
reinforced by the destruction of the communal subsistence economy. Males become dominant as they engage more and more in wage labour and women become dependent on them for cash. Female solidarity in labour is further undermined by the deliberate breakup of collective living units and the imposition of nuclear family dwellings. But, most importantly, the basis for collectivity with equal access to productive resources ends as men are given exclusive access to knowledge and capital equipment by government authorities. As men become more significant in their relationship to economic resources they develop a basis on which to dominate women.

Not all examples of sexual symmetry exhibit the same type of collective decision making and the lack of a rigidly defined division of labour by sex. The Iroquois are often cited as a people where sexual differentiation was extreme but where the sexes had equal power and status (Sanday, 1981). Both political and labour roles were strictly differentiated by sex. Women performed tasks surrounding the household, planting, and harvesting. They participated in village decision-making and had a say in which men would hold leadership positions in inter-tribal groups. Males were hunters and warriors and were active in intertribal politics. "This tension between male and female spheres, in which females dominated village life and left intertribal life to men, suggests that the sexes were separate but equal . . ." (Sanday 1981, p. 28).

While the significance and power of women in Iroquois society has long been recognized because of the extent to which the female element dominated Iroquois symbolism, lineage, and economy, there is evidence that the separate but equal status of women in other similarly regulated societies was overlooked in historical accounts because variations in power could not be recognized by European males who kept records. Grumet, in his study of the Coastal Algonquin of the 17th and 18th centuries, feels that chroniclers undervalued the status of women because of a state bias in their perception of power (Grumet 1980). In these groups while there was labour specialization along sex lines, all major tasks were cooperatively performed. Nevertheless, there was a clear distinction between the sexes regarding the exercise of power.
Crumet claims that the matrilineal-matrilocal corporate kinship groups were the primary locally important form of Coastal Algonkian sociopolitical organization (p. 46). The extent of decision making at this sociopolitical level went unrecognized by Europeans because they rarely had contact with the domestic group. Europeans were primarily concerned with affairs which would have led them into contact with civil leaders. These civil leaders at the confederacy level were generally male (although not exclusively) yet they were subject to considerable control by other forms of political organization at the village, tribal, and clan levels in which women played prominent roles and had considerable influence. Grumet’s point is that historical records have tended, therefore, to overlook the key roles women played in all phases of Coastal Algonkian economic and political life. In general, the egalitarian nature of both the economic organization and the sociopolitical organization which characterized the Coastal Algonkian throughout the entire colonial period was obscured by a male European perspective toward social organization.

These authors, who deny the universality of male dominance, must necessarily show that there is nothing inherently unequal about a division of labour by sex even if it is highly developed. Rather, as property relations change the distinctions in labour becomes a basis through which inequality develops. Two issues need to be considered before this approach can be accepted. First there is the issue of equality and whether the concept of equality as described in traditional societies conforms to what feminists would consider an equitable relationship in any society today. The second issue is why sexual equality is characteristic of some, but not all traditional societies.

The major problems with the descriptions of societies exhibiting "total equality and sexual symmetry" are either that the ideas of what constitutes equality are suspect or that the reliability of the anthropological material on which the analysis is based is open to question. The reliability of material must be cast in doubt when the case for egalitarian sexual relations is based on historical accounts by European males, whose perceptions of egalitarian relationships cannot be assumed. Other indications of equality between the sexes are based on societies
perceived to be in transition; societies which now exhibit male domination with high status for women but which are believed to have been fully egalitarian in the past (Leacock 1980). In cases where there is anthropological evidence based on the direct observation of an egalitarian society, male domination in specific areas is not considered indicative of inequality. Richard Lee's studies the Kung are examples of an approach where men and women are seen as equal even though men have considerably more political power than women (Lee 1979; 1982). While this anthropological evidence may well point to sexual relationships which are different and relatively more egalitarian, to argue that it demonstrates sexual symmetry and full equality is not convincing. One could well imagine a plausible and not inaccurate anthropological description of the sexual symmetry of our own society as follows:

While there is a sexual division of labour, there are few strong taboos regarding work and gender and no tasks are completely barred to women. Men are frequently involved in child rearing and domestic tasks. In fact, instances where men assume total responsibility for these tasks are unknown. There is total juridical equality and females are often found in positions of authority over males. The society is highly stratified along class lines, but women often possess great wealth and some own and control the means of production. While women are more likely than men to be involved in child rearing and domestic tasks, they are able to choose freely whether or not to assume this role. The assignment of domestic tasks to women does not indicate subordination, rather it indicates the interdependence of the sexes: the males provide income while females provide care and service to the family. Motherhood is highly valued and females have considerable control over the use of the family's resources and considerable influence in decision-making at this level. While women are less represented than men in positions of leadership, they nevertheless are equally influential (through their vote which is equal to that of men) in deciding who the leaders will be. This is a highly stratified society in which there is full equality between the sexes.

Nothing in this description is untrue, except the last sentence, for sexual relationships are not fully egalitarian in this society. Yet this is precisely the type of analysis which is offered as proof of sexual equality in traditional societies. Measuring relative levels of equality is difficult in any society, but some indicators used to measure inequality in our society, such as income levels, income distribution, and quantity of labour time expended are factors which are not considered in anthropological descriptions of equitable relations. While the ethnographic
literature is important in that it points to variations in sexual relationships and provides proof to counter the assumption that women always have been passive victims of male dominance, it does not prove that the division of labour by \textit{sex} (other than for reproduction) is compatible with sexual equality.

The second issue, that is why sexual equality is characteristic of some, but not all traditional societies, is more convincingly dealt with by the approach which denies the universality of male dominance. However, it becomes clear in cross-cultural studies that capitalism and colonialism are not exclusively responsible for inequalities. As Etienne and Leacock point out, in most of the world inegalitarian social structures with differences in wealth and status developed long before there was contact with European culture (Etienne and Leacock, 1980). Their argument is not that female inequality follows from the development of class differences generally, but rather that the origins of both socioeconomic and sexual hierarchy are inextricably bound together. They identify four broad types of production relations as being indicative of the stages of development which succeed each other in the course of human history. These are egalitarian, ranking or transitional, preindustrial hierarchial, and industrialist capitalist. It is not the mode of production itself which determines the productive relations, but the economic relationships combined with the particular history of a society. Together they produce endless varieties in cultural outlook and relationships between the sexes. It is extremely important to be able to explain the variations in sexual relations and the division of labour by \textit{sex} which exist in societies which have similar economic arrangements. While there certainly is some correlation between the position of women relative to men and the degree of socioeconomic inequality in a society, as Etienne and Leacock assert, there is considerably less correlation between its basic mode of production and sexual inequality. That is, while there is a tendency for females to have greater equality with men in gathering societies than in hunting societies there is enough variation in this pattern to indicate that other cultural factors may be equally significant.
Peggy Reeves Sanday, in *Female Power and Male Dominance* has gone further than anyone else in trying to explain the variations in the role and status of women and the relationships of culture, economics, and oppression. Sanday sees the sexual division of labour as grounded in primary sex differences: women give birth, raise children while men kill and make weapons. That is, she begins with the acceptance of a premise which those who are convinced of universal male dominance cannot accept, a conceptual symmetry of the division of labour by sex. Nevertheless, Sanday sees the cultural construction of the division of labour by sex as significant in explaining male domination over females. While she does not see any inherent difference in the valuation of male and female roles necessarily arising from the sexual division of labour, she sees the degree of separateness of spheres as being significant: "Whether or not men and women mingle or are largely separated in everyday affairs plays a crucial role in the rise of male dominance" (Sanday, p. 7). What determines whether they mingle or are separated in their work is how the society perceives its relationship to the environment. If the environment is perceived as being relatively hostile the sexes tend to have separate spheres, when the environment is perceived as being a partner the sexes mingle in most activities. In an elaborate argument which shows how a society's perception of its creation (in religious terms) reflects its perception of its environment and the social relations necessary to deal with the environment, Sanday develops an explanation of why women are subjected in some societies but not in others. Crucial to this explanation is the notion, grounded in the acceptance of primary sex differences, that women have an inner orientation while men have an outer orientation. With the distinction in orientation established, Sanday is then able to show that power is accorded to whichever sex is perceived to be more in touch with the forces on which the society depends for its perceived needs. Broadly speaking then, societies which are concerned primarily with hunting large game have an outer orientation to sources of power and are more likely to value male activities more highly than female ones. Similarly an inner orientation to sources of power occurs when large game is not hunted and when plant food is more important in these societies,
women's activities will be highly valued. A sexually segregated society, then, will be associated with an outer, animal orientation, and a more balanced division of labour will be found in an inner, plant oriented society (Sanday, p. 76). Important exceptions to this generalization (such as the Abipon, who exemplify female power in an outer-oriented hunting society) are explained by making distinctions between the origins of power women have. Females are ascribed, power or authority as a natural right when there exists" . . . a long-standing magico-religious association between maternity and fertility of the soil [which] associates women with social continuity and the social good" (Sanday, p. 114). However, this is not the only way women can obtain power. Women can achieve power when economic circumstances grant them economic autonomy and make men dependent on female activities (such as when males are frequently absent). The importance of making a distinction regarding the origins of power is that Sanday is able to show that where power is ascribed, development is less likely to undermine the importance of women. However, where women's power was achieved, as a result of historical or economic circumstances, it is more likely to vanish with the changed circumstances of development. This is an important factor in explaining why there is substantial variation in the impact of development on women.

Sanday has brought together a great deal of material to show that the impact of development on women will vary considerably depending on the socially perceived significance of women and their work to the culture in times before development. This follows the approach of Boserup, who also was interested in explaining the variations in the effect of development. While Boserup found that in general women are more likely to be confined to the less productive spheres of the economy as development proceeds, the extent to which women are excluded altogether from the modern sectors depends primarily on the customary pattern of female labour (Boserup, 1970, p. 175).
The recent literature on women and development makes it clear that the variations in experience have plausible explanations: whether or not a society is able to hang on to remnants of a more egalitarian social structure in the face of colonization and modernization can be explained. The extent to which cultural, economic, or political factors dominate the process is specific to historical circumstances but one factor is accepted as fundamental: the intensification of gender inequalities which accompanies development builds on the existing divisions of labour by sex, whether or not the productive relations are perceived as having been originally symmetrical and egalitarian. That is, the relatively egalitarian nature of a society is significant in determining the extent to which development will increase the subordination of women, but whatever inequalities are developed are based on what already existed in the society—a sexual division of labour.

By looking at the variations in experience through the development process, cross-culturally, anthropologists have thrown light on variations in sexual relationships in more traditional societies. Their point is to show that modern productive relations do not necessarily improve the relative position of women in the society. For some anthropologists, the argument becomes stronger if it can be shown that truly egalitarian forms of sexual relationships have existed in societies at some time historically. In order to prove this it has been important also to prove that the sexual division of labour does not necessarily imply inequality, since a sexual division of labour appears to be universal. The basic dilemma to be solved is how the sexual division of labour can be benign at a simple stage of development, yet be so inseparably linked to general sexual inequalities as societies become more complex. While it certainly can be shown that property relations are crucial to explaining the development of inequalities in a society, they are not sufficient to explain why the inequalities should be based primarily in sexual differences. There has been considerable literature which convincingly indicates the functional nature of sexual inequalities in capitalistic societies. While these explanations explain how and why the inequalities are perpetuated, they do not explain why they occur initially.
The best lead so far is to look at the sexual division of labour as indicative of unequal power relationships. Only in reproductive activities is there anything "natural" or biological about a division of labour by sex. In all other activities the cultural perception of what is appropriate, or necessary determines what will be performed by men and what will be the tasks of women. Mackintosh sums up this position: "... only in a society where men and women constitute unequal genders is there any reason why gender should be an important organizing principle of the social division of labour, with the exception of the physical process of childbearing" (Mackintosh, 1981 p. 3).

The attempt to prove that the division of labour by sex is not inherently unequal is part of a larger argument which denies the common notion that modernization will herald equality between the sexes. However in proving this point, the division of labour by sex is overlooked as the fundamental factor in the origin of inequality. What is more, this line of reasoning is not even necessary to the argument which is able to explain variations of the impact of development on women. That is, anthropologists are able to explain the impact of development on women, and how it varies depending on the culture in which development takes place, without resorting to the denial of the inequality inherent in the division of labour by sex. What is sufficient to support the approach of these anthropologists is the proof that earlier, less complex societies, often were relatively more egalitarian than the more modern productive and social relations which replaced them.

The relationships between the division of labour, development and status cannot, then, be confined to the deterministic perspective inherent in much feminist analysis. The variations which are associated with development are a result of historical and environmental circumstances and cultural perceptions which have been instrumental in determining the nature and significance of women's work and status to specific" societies. The important issue is that by examining the variations of the impact of development on women, broader insights into
the nature of women's oppression are possible. Also, with the recognition of the variations in women's experience, the prospect of a more equitable role for women in the development process does not seem so bleak.
Notes

1. In some analyses women's status is seen as declining in relation to men's while in others the loss is not relative in that both men and women lose autonomy, independence, and security through the development process. For example, see Heidi Hartman and Ann Markusen (1980) for a clear statement of the position which sees men as the beneficiaries of a sexual division of labour. Mona Etienne and Eleanor Leacock (Leacock 1981a; Etienne and Leacock 1980) and Heleieth Saffioti (1978) are among those who tend to stress the view that since class stratification and private property accompany colonization and modernization, men in general are not the beneficiaries of women's subjection. Other writers (Sanday 1981; Boserup 1970), while recognizing no the deleterious effect of social change on men, tend to focus on the distinctions between the experience of men and women and point to the fact that the experience is often relatively more detrimental to women. Still other analyses show that the impact of western cultures can sometimes have a neutral effect. In these cases women are often able to maintain traditional social status and labour roles (Klein 1980; Weiner 1980; Stoler 1977).

2. Feminists quite rightly have made the distinctions between gender and sex, with the term sex used in connection with biological distinctions and the term gender to refer to categories not based on biology, but on cultural constructions. I argue that labour clearly is divided along gender lines (except for reproduction) but I will use the more conventional term division of labour by sex in this paper.


4. Even analyses which discuss the significance of housework to the process of capitalist accumulation are not prepared to draw the conclusion that there is an economic requirement to capitalism that women do this work. See especially Briskin (1980).

5. While Durkheim does not specifically conclude that this division of labour by sex necessitates a subordination of the female role, he alludes to the relative value of their contribution to the "solidarity" between the sexes in the description of the effect of the civilizing process on the differentiation in male and female brains. As civilization progresses, the brain of the two sexes differentiates itself more and more. For proof of this he cites the work of Dr. Lebon who showed that in Paris (the most advanced example of civilization?) the average size of crania for men ranks among the greatest known, while the average crania size for women ranks among the smallest observed--even smaller than that of women in primitive societies. The significance of this fact would not have been lost on any of Durkeim's readers and it is just a hop, skip and a jump to the conclusion that the specialization of women (even if it leads to a smaller brain) is essential so that men can develop both a larger brain and civilization.
6. For discussions of culture as male and nature as female see Ortner (1974); MacCormack and Strathern (1980); Rosaldo (1974); Sanday (1981).

7. Freud says specifically "... women soon come into opposition to civilization and display their retarding and restraining influence--those very women who, in the beginning, laid the foundations of civilization by the claims of their love. Women represent the interests of the family and of sexual life. The work of civilization has become increasingly the business of men, it confronts them with ever more difficult tasks and compels them to carry out instinctual sublimations of which women are little capable." (Freud 1972, p. 40).

8. It is interesting to note that although de Beauvoir later changed her mind on the significance of feminist action, her analysis in The Second Sex leads her to view feminism rather narrowly: "I never cherished any illusion of changing woman's condition; it depends on the future of labour in the world; It will change significantly only at the price of a revolution in production. That is why I avoided falling into the trap of 'feminism'" (de Beauvoir quoted in Mitchell 1973, p. 65).

9. Mitchell sees women's oppression as inevitable and necessary for the advancement of civilization because patriarchy enforces the incest taboo, without which civilization could not have progressed (because no group would be outward looking). Only in advanced industrial societies, where kinship structures are unnecessary for human survival and advancement, can the precondition for the elimination of patriarchy arise--that is the elimination of the incest taboo. (Mitchell 1975).

10. See, for example, Safa and Leacock (1981). They explain that while there is considerable debate among feminists regarding the relative importance of patriarchy or capitalism as an explanation for women's subordination, all views point to the universality of the sexual division of labour.

11. The invisibility of women and the lack of interest in women's social and political activity in conventional anthropology is a problem which is recognized also by anthropologists who accept the concept of the university of male dominance and female subordination. See, for example, Rosaldo and Lamphere (1974) and Ardner (1975).
References


