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Women, Work, and Karl Marx

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Twenty years ago all the anthropologists who were doing or contemplating research on women and work could (and most did) meet in one room. It is a good idea to revisit the past every once in a while, because if we forget our particular histories, others will rewrite them in ways from which we might not benefit. The historical axe I am grinding is to argue that the feminist anthropology of work was part of a wider network linked to Marxist theory and politics, and that the anthropology of women and work became one site where big changes in anthropological paradigms happened: from a kind of contrast between an "Us" and a "Them," and an emphasis on stages of cultural evolution, to an emphasis on cultures in historical perspective and to ground-level ethnographies of life in a global political economy and

racialized neocolonial world. I will close by asking about today's agendas: If early scholarship was politically motivated by a desire for change, can we say the same about current work? Where might we like it to go?

Women and work was a major theme of early feminist anthropology. One of the two anthologies of the anthropology of women, *Toward an Anthropology of Women* (1975), had a very work-centered focus: from Sally Slocum's classic "Woman the Gatherer" to Judith Brown's paper on Iroquois women to Susan Brown's, Anna Rubbo's and Dorothy Remy's work in the Dominican Republic, Colombia and Nigeria, respectively. But then this was the "leftie" book, which leads to the next point.

Feminist anthropology was never just an *anthropology* of work, but was part of wider network of socialist feminist theory and practice. When Robin Morgan asked me to write the "anthropology piece" for *Sisterhood is Powerful*, I asked, "what does anthropology have to do with women's liberation?" "Oh, you know, Margaret Mead and Engels," she said. I was off and running. In 1977, when Dorothy Remy, Heidi Hartmann (an economist) and I organized a weekend conference at a camp in Connecticut, those were the networks we mobilized. Most of the anthropologists who were involved in this and other low-budget networks came together across disciplines and were connected more by

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activist and feminist agendas than by strictly anthropological ones. We all felt the need for something between a consciousness-raising group and a conference. The idea was to bring together everyone we could find who was working on women and work (understood as wage work, and as Carol Stack reminded us, as unwaged labor as well) to bat around ideas, cook and walk, and give each other courage to do research that had no conventions or legitimacy. Among anthropologists, Helen Safa and June Nash were pioneers, having actually done such work long before it was fashionable. Helen's graduate students—Lynn Bolles, Patricia Fernandez-Kelly and Yolanda Prieto—were beginning their dissertations and hosted a second meeting of our ragtag group, with Helen's support and that of the late Vera Green. They gave us both support and legitimacy. At the meeting in the woods, I think Dorothy Remy and Louise Lamphere were the only anthropologists who had actually done fieldwork that was theoretically situated in a global capitalist context (Dorothy in Nigeria and Louise in Rhode Island), and Dorothy and Louise were connected to Kate Young and other British feminists who were doing quite theoretically sophisticated feminist and Marxist studies of women in the global economy (which appeared as the edited volume, *Of Marriage and the Market* (1984) and as a pathbreaking article in *Critique of Anthropology*). And Dorothy's and my volume, *My Troubles are Going to Have Trouble with Me* (1984), focused on the counterpoint between global exploitation and the ways U.S. women workers coped with and resisted it.

Tackling issues of women and work was also a response to male bias in Marxist politics. Socialist feminists had struggled against Marxist notions that women's unwaged work was not "productive" labor. In the jargon of the time, "productive" labor was what made surplus value, exploitation, and working-class consciousness, simultaneously. It was the justification for white left's men's practice of dismissing women as revolutionarily challenged housewives (hard to believe in the era of women's kick boxing and Xena Warrior Princess). This loose network of socialist feminist scholars crossed disciplines and continents. From England, the 1981 volume, *Of Marriage and the Market*, re-theorized global capitalism from the vantage point of women, showing how colonial and neocolonial systems of exploitation depended upon women's unwaged labor. June Nash's and Patricia Fernandez-Kelly's *Women, Men and the International Division of Labor* described and analyzed the connections between the household economy, gender, unwaged work and global capitalism, especially in garment and electronics industries.

The volume Dorothy Remy and I co-edited, *My Troubles are Going to Have Trouble with Me* (1984), highlighted the counterpoint between the structures that constrained and oppressed women in narrow occupational niches and women's ground-level daily resistance to their oppression. It was followed by Ann Bookman's and Sandra Morgen's *Women and the Politics of Empowerment* (1988) that brought together studies of women's waged and unwaged labor and evidenced women as economic contributors, political resisters

and community builders at work and in their neighborhoods. Taken together, feminist work that was cooked in the 1970s and published in the 1980s demolished the old Marxist paradigm of the worker as waged and male and the shop floor as the primary site of proletarian uprising. In its place emerged an understanding that the working class is half women, and class consciousness is likewise gendered; that gender is critical to the way capitalism constitutes work, waged and unwaged; and that gender is equally central to the forms and sites of resistance to exploitation.

However, there was still considerable work to be done: Feminists of color struggled to get white feminists to deal with race. Where white feminist scholars fought to expose male bias in left scholarship, so too did feminists of color have to battle with resistance to white bias in feminist work. I look through *Troubles* today and am embarrassed by the race-avoidant discourse in my contributions to it. An excellent white and male exception in early work to this bias is John Keller's underappreciated chapter on the race and gender division of labor in California's Silicon Valley, "The Division of Labor in Electronics," in June Nash's and Maria Patricia Fernandez-Kelly's *Women, Men and the International Division of Labor* (1983).

Ethnographic analyses of household workers of color were key to opening the doors to analyzing theoretically the relations of race and gender. The pioneers were not anthropologists, but social feminist sociologists: Bonnie Dill, Judith Rollins, Evelyn Nakano Glenn, and Mary Romero. Their ethnographic work with African-American, Japanese-American, and Mexican-American household workers revealed how their white women employers refused to treat their work as "real" work, and how this not only demeaned women of color, but shot themselves in their would-be feminist feet. This work put an early nail in the coffin of the notion that there was one true raceless and genderless class consciousness.

The anthropology of women and work was one site nurturing major shifts in anthropological research agendas to global frameworks and to working in the U.S.A. To indicate the change, consider the organization of *Toward an Anthropology of Women* (1975). It was still very much within the left version of an evolutionary paradigm: the chapters go from non-human primates to the origins of hominid society to "simple" societies like the !Kung to "complex" societies like agrarian capitalist and neocolonies, and finished with then-socialist Chinese society.

Feminist studies of work also helped reintroduce history to ethnography, and introduce non-indigenous North America to anthropology. Cases in point are Louise Lamphere's combination of history and ethnography in *From Working Daughters to Working Mothers* (1987), and my *Caring by the Hour* (1988). Feminist work studies also nurtured paradigms for understanding structures of mutual aid among working-class and poor communities, as Carol Stack's work on African-American women's networks of social support (1974) and Mina Davis Caulfield's (1974) theorizing family and gender in the Third World show. It birthed extensive inquiry

into the relationship of women's unwaged community work to political activism (in Sandra Morgen's work and Ida Susser's, for example). Not least, it expanded outward from colonialism as a racial and gendered system of labor to examine the interaction of global capitalism's racial and gender systems with a variety of indigenous systems as a way of understanding the complexities of national and racial divisions within a global political economy.

The upshot is that we no longer have a literature or academic or political network that deals with women and work. Instead, this topic has been mainstreamed. For example, most of the articles in a book like Rothstein and Blim's 1992 *Anthropology and the Global Factory* deal with work in a gendered manner. The result of this for anthropology is that the research agenda has shifted from a reactive one (to put women in the picture as active agents in the contemporary world), to asking about the variety of ways that gendered and ethnoracial resistant subjects construct themselves in a world dominated by global capitalism. As workers become global, diasporic forms of kinship, new ethnoracial identities, gendered forms of social control in families and corporations are all issues tied closely to work. The same holds true for resistance to capital's control: the informal ways women cope with, bend and confront these regimes; the ways they resist corporate and state constructions of daughterhood, nimble fingers, and feminine virtue that facilitates paternalistic control by factory and family.

For me, the optimistic view is that the field of women and work helped develop a coherent research agenda within anthropology: it attends to the ways and sites at which people resist global capitalism, to what works and what does not, the relationship between the cultural constructions of identity and how, when and in what ways they do and do not work for mobilizing social change. Much of this is a wish list. My first wish is that the anthropology of racial and gendered work becomes a hot topic in anthropology. My anthropology students do not get excited about labor issues as much as my sociology, urban planning and history students do. Maybe an agenda that links issues of politics and identity to labor and class will help.

I told you I had an axe to grind. I would like to see the anthropology of work develop an ethnographically-based research agenda of how to struggle against global capital: for example, I would like to see more attention to racial/gendered patterns of occupation segregation: ethnographies of how work is different depending on who you are; how segregation is reproduced and the most productive ways waged workers have struggled against it. We need to move past anguishing over whether everyday stuff is resistance or complicity and ask instead, "how is it each?" What are the gains and limits of any given strategy? We need also to be much more attentive to event analysis: to moving from looking at any point in time as the same as any other, to focusing on situations where people are trying to change their circumstances and to comparing efforts that work and those that do not. Let us study the new AFL-CIO from a race/gender sensitive perspective. Let us look at the links among, and the

transmission of, forms of resistance through time and space. Let us look at the evolution of garment and electronics worker resistance globally: how does knowledge of resistance travel along lines of global migration of industries; do women learn from previous histories of resistance in these industries? These are some of today's salient research agendas which anthropologists of work should take up. ■

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Non-Capitalist Work: Baseline For An Anthropology Of Work Or Romantic Delusion?

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In recent years the Anthropology of Work has come to focus primarily on workplace studies in advanced Capitalism or in the *maquiladoras* of the periphery. But from the Bemba to the Zinacantecos, an older programmatic can be discerned; documenting the existence of coherent and self-reproducing work logics that were distinctly *non-capitalist* in nature. In current research this baseline, if not denied outright, is usually ignored, or considered moot. In celebrating the Society for the Anthropology of Work's twentieth anniversary, we would do well to remember this older tradition in the anthropology of work: the study of labour process in societies *outside* the Capitalist system. This broader perspective, embodied in Sahlins' classic studies on "the original affluent society" first published in 1968, had the salutary effect of reminding us that despite its current ubiquity, Capitalism is a product of a particular historical epoch, and its internal laws of motion cannot be universalized.

This paper surveys some of the earlier writings on the anthropology of work and attempts to delineate some of the alternative logics and underlying dynamics. The search is more than an antiquarian exercise. Non-capitalist work ethics are surprisingly resilient; both on the periphery and in the heart of the beast, people are maintaining, reviving or reinventing other ways of being in the world of work. In the age of "the bottom line," corporate anorexia, and globalization, many are searching for alternatives. If we reconnect with our roots, the anthropology of work could be a rich source of alternative possibilities.

Hunters and gatherers stand at the opposite pole from the

dense urban life experienced by most of humanity; yet these same hunters and gatherers offer insights to some of the central questions about the human condition: Can people live without the State or the Market? Can people live without accumulated wealth or "advanced" technology? Can people live in Nature without destroying it?

Hunter-gatherers are peoples who lived (until recently) without the overarching discipline of the State: they lived in small groups, without centralized authority, standing armies or bureaucratic systems, exchanging goods and services without recourse to markets. Yet the evidence indicates that they lived together surprisingly well, solving problems among themselves largely without courts or prisons and without a particular propensity for violence. It was *not* the situation that Thomas Hobbes, described as "the war of all against all." By all accounts life was not "nasty brutish and short." With relatively simple technology—wood, bone, stone, fibers—they were able to meet their material needs with a modest expenditure of energy. Most strikingly, the hunter-gatherers demonstrated a remarkable ability to survive and thrive for long periods—in some cases thousands of years—without destroying their environment.

In a foundational essay thirty years ago, Marshall Sahlins called them "the original affluent society" (1968, 1972). To the economists' view of *homo economicus*, strategizing to maximize and minimize, Sahlins proposed that hunter-gatherers are best seen as in business for their health. Their means may be limited but so are their ends, offering a Zen alternative to the unlimited wants of the consumer economy. In contemporary terminology we could say that hunter-gatherers were in the business of social reproduction. Other writers before and after Sahlins took up this theme, offering empirical evidence to support Sahlins' thesis: Eleanor Leacock on the Montagnais-Naskapi (1954, 1982b), James Woodburn on the Hadza (1968a, b) and Nurit Bird-David on the Nayaka (1990, 1992).

For my own work starting in the early 1960s among the Ju'hoansi (formerly the !Kung San), the best model on offer for research that studied both diet and work was in the American-Australian Scientific Expedition to Arnhem Land (Mountford 1960). Frederick McCarthy and Margaret

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