

Life without father and Ford: the new gender order of post-Fordism

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ABSTRACT

The coincidence of a set of economic changes in new industrial areas in advanced capitalist societies has initiated a tremendous debate about the features of post-Fordism, flexible accumulation and new industrial spaces. While the distinguishing features of the new production methods and the new industrial geography are widely debated, far less attention has been paid to gender divisions. This paper examines the assumptions made about gender relations in variants of restructuring theory, draws out the similarities and differences between these and socialist-feminist theory and argues that both sets of theories rely on a particular view about the relationship between the spheres of production and reproduction. Despite the assumed marginality of women's labour in conventional approaches to restructuring and its centrality in the work influenced by feminist theory, it is argued here that both perspectives misconstrue current changes. A new gender order is emerging with post-Fordism.

KEY WORDS: Gender, Fordism, Post-Fordism, Patriarchy, Wage labour, Domestic labour

INTRODUCTION

Widespread social, economic and epistemological changes are at large in contemporary industrial societies. Recently defined by Harvey (1989) as a sea-change, such are the scale and nature of these changes that a particular way of labelling them has become common – thus post-Fordism summarizes emergent economic changes, postmodernism is variously used to refer to the cultural changes associated with late capitalism or post-industrial society, post-structuralism to reflect epistemological changes and the increasing distrust of the totalizing narrative of old meta-theories of change; post-feminism to describe the rejection by some of the old demands of the women's movement. In each case, the adjective post reflects uncertainty about the new order – the extent and direction of change is still unclear and incomplete. In the words of Bob Dylan, himself a prophet of the old order, 'something is happening but you (we) don't know what it is'. Indeed, Jessop (1990) has suggested that given the current state of knowledge either a literal translation of the French *après* (after)-Fordism or even non-Fordism might be more appropriate terminology.

Despite this uncertainty and lack of empirical substantiation, or rather perhaps because of it, in this paper I want to address the ways in which gender divisions have been included (or not) in the variants of post-Fordist theory, addressing in particular the links between economic change and the restructuring of welfare provision. Thus the focus is on women's work in two spheres: their increasing participation in wage labour and their work in the home and in the community – the work of reproduction. I shall provide some empirical demonstration of my arguments based on recent socio-economic change in Britain as a whole and sketch out an outline of a research agenda for geography to help to fill some of the current gaps and absences.

Two of the most influential variants of post-Fordist theory will be examined – the regulation school, and the flexible specialization approach. Both of these bodies of work rely on similar explicit or implicit assumptions about women's secondary position in the labour market, neglect questions about the gendering of skills and ignore questions about the changing value of so-called masculine attributes in the labour market. These are questions to which a developing feminist literature on the gender

composition of waged work is directing our attention. It is becoming clear that women's labour and the conditions under which they enter the labour market as bearers of specifically 'feminine' attributes is a central element of current restructuring (Jenson, 1989; McDowell, 1991; Massey, 1984; Murray, 1987; Pollert, 1988; Walby, 1989a). However, I want to further argue that most of this work, reliant as it is on the notion of a patriarchal-capitalism or on the concept of a dual system (of patriarchy and capitalism) in which women's interests are theorized as being in opposition to those of men and of capital, is itself an inadequate reading of contemporary patterns of restructuring. I shall suggest that a new gender order is emerging in Britain with profound implications for the politics of economic change. In the shift from the so-called Fordist mass production regime to the new flexibility of the post-Fordist era, it seems that gender is being used to divide women's and men's interests in the labour market in such a way that *both* sexes – at least among the majority of the population – are losing out. This marks a break from the Fordist period when it is more plausible to argue that both capital and men in general benefitted from the gender division of labour. In this new period, the benefits to capital of women's particular marginal and segmented position in the labour market that developed throughout the post-war period as women's participation rates rose significantly, are enhanced. In this sense there are marked continuities in women's position in both Fordist and post-Fordist times. However, what is different is that the old compact between male workers, industrial capital and the institutions of welfare Keynesianism has broken down. The new order is based on a deepening contradiction between economic and social restructuring, between the spheres of production and reproduction in both of which women's work plays an increasingly central part. While not denying that wage labour may bring (limited) advantages to many women, especially the possibility of their increased economic independence, I shall also argue that feminist critics who believe that current economic changes are beneficial for women are, like many of the post-Fordists, overly optimistic about the consequences of economic restructuring. Long-held beliefs that women's entry into waged labour has emancipatory potential may have to be re-evaluated, at least until current labour market conditions are challenged.

The theoretical discussion that follows is at an extremely general level and the empirical examination of Britain too is at a highly aggregate level. This

is not to deny the diverse pathways that different countries have followed in their response to the crisis of Fordism nor to suggest that Fordism itself was completely hegemonic and spatially uniform. Further the different ways in which women have been drawn into the labour market vary as do the ways in which post-Fordism has been associated with changes in the institutions of social regulation. The purpose of the paper is not to be comprehensive: indeed space precludes this. The aim is to indicate the assumptions made about gender relations by these theorists, illustrate the argument with an outline of British changes and suggest fruitful areas for future geographical work of a comparative nature at different spatial scales, both within and between nation states and internationally.

FORDISM, POST-FORDISM AND THE GENDER DIVISION OF LABOUR

The scale and nature of economic change in advanced industrial societies in the last two decades has been such that has become commonplace in a range of economic and geographic literature to distinguish two distinct economic periods, differentiated one from the other in almost every respect (Allen, 1988; Harvey, 1989; Lash and Urry, 1987; Lipietz, 1986, 1987; Storper and Walker, 1989). Although the nature and pace of change varies within and between societies and the extent to which there has been 'a turning point' (Storper and Scott, 1989, p. 21) in which the social and economic relations of one era have been replaced by those of another is contestable (Amin and Robins, 1990; Hudson, 1988; Lovering, 1990; Scott, 1991), the language of Fordism and post-Fordism has had an important impact on the conceptualization of 'restructuring'. Three variants of post-Fordist economic restructuring theory may be distinguished. Classified on the basis of the key texts of each approach, they may be labelled the French regulationist school (Aglietta, 1979; 1982), the US flexible specialization school (Piore and Sabel, 1984) and the British flexible firm approach (Atkinson, 1984, 1985). Detailed explications and critiques of these approaches are available elsewhere (Jessop, 1990; Hirst and Zeitlin, 1991); here I concentrate on whether and how a specific concern with gender relations forms part of the analysis. Although each of the three approaches has similarities in their emphasis on mass production and mass consumption in the Fordist era and on flexibility in both production methods and the use of labour in post-Fordism, they

differ in the extent to which broader social relations outside the firm, the labour market and the economy are part of their analysis. In a useful summary and reformulation of the Fordist-post-Fordist debates, Jessop (1990) has argued that four levels of analysis may be distinguished. In ascending order of generality they are the labour process, the accumulation regime, the mode of regulation and the mode of socialization. Whereas the US and British variants of flexible specialization tend to focus primarily, although not exclusively, on the former two levels – their chief emphasis is on the firm and the internal structure of labour markets – the French regulationist school also includes greater consideration of the role of the state, in the regulation of the economy and in the conditions of reproduction of labour power. Thus it is this approach that has the most to say about the nature of gender relations and the role of women in the two periods. Hence, whereas all three schools make a gesture towards women's growing significance as 'marginal' workers in the economy, only the regulation school connects changes in the spheres of production and reproduction, changes in the labour market with changes in household and family forms, although even here the latter changes are seen as a consequence of economic change and the capitalist imperative, rather than mutually constituted changes. As, in my opinion, Atkinson's work on the flexible firm adds little to the other approaches, merely hinting at how changes in what he terms the environment of the labour market affect labour segmentation, and moreover has had relatively little impact on geography, his work is not discussed here.

The regulationist school

The French school, based on the work by Aglietta (1979, 1982) and developed by, among others, Lipietz (1986, 1987), distinguishes a number of different regimes of accumulation which are characterized by a particular labour process and by different degrees of state intervention into the regulation of the economy and the reproduction of labour power, family life and consumption (Jessop's modes of regulation and socialization). Fordism, the characteristic regime of 'intensive accumulation', is contrasted with an earlier period or regime of 'extensive accumulation', defined by traditional methods of industrial organization, long working hours, low wages and little state intervention in the reproduction of labour power. In contrast the succeeding period – that of intensive accumulation – is characterized by mass production, reduced working hours, relatively

high wages (at least for the labour aristocracy), mass consumption based on the 'family' wage of the male breadwinner and the commodification of social life. Mass housing, the car and other standardized consumption goods are the characteristic commodities of this regime. Fordism was an era of economic growth in which high aggregate spending on consumption depended on rising real incomes, underpinned by increased public expenditure. In Britain, as in other advanced industrial economies, women were drawn in increasing numbers into tight labour markets, in part to meet the costs of the mass consumption life style. Their entry was facilitated by the provision of a range of social welfare services that, to a degree, mitigated women's family responsibilities. These included state income support, care for the elderly and other dependents and limited childcare provision. These services themselves created significant employment opportunities for women as they relied on a predominantly female labour force, and the expansion of educational and training opportunities provided women with skills and training that also improved their labour market position.

Women's entry into wage labour in this period was not, however, on equal terms with men. Even in the newly expanding public sector, women were concentrated at the bottom of the occupational hierarchy, trapped in the ghettos of 'female' jobs where caring and servicing were seen as desirable but poorly rewarded attributes. In the manufacturing sector women also were concentrated in less skilled and low paid jobs. In Britain, in particular, part-time employment with less security and fewer occupational rights and benefits was a key strategy in expanding female employment. Thus traditional ideas about gender roles combined with labour market regulation created a labour force that was highly segmented by gender (Beechey, 1987; Dex, 1985; Rubery, 1988, Walby, 1986).

Aglietta, however, pays little attention to the role of gender in the segmentation of labour markets in the Fordist regime, although he does not entirely ignore gender relations. Rather, he sees women as virtually irrelevant to Fordism as he argues that, despite their growing participation in the labour market, women's primary role is in the sphere of privatized consumption in the home. Thus their labour market participation is secondary, determined by their role in the nuclear family. Their wages are a supplement to the household wage and as a group, under Fordism, women are characterized as a reserve army of labour, drawn into and expelled from the

labour market according to the requirements of the capitalist production process. However, the notion that women are a reserve army has been the subject of an important critique by feminist scholars (Anthias, 1980; Dex, 1985; McDowell, 1989; Walby, 1989a) who have demonstrated the theoretical and empirical inadequacies of the concept. Women's labour market participation has increased throughout the post-war period in both times of boom and recession, and as Dex and Perry (1984) have demonstrated it is the fortunes of different sectors rather than the gender of the workers that is the most important factor in determining labour market movements. However, the notion that women are a reserve is central not only to the regulationists' analysis of Fordism but is transferred wholesale into the characterization of the post-Fordist regime. And, as will be shown later, the same assumption pervades other post-Fordist analyses.

Post-Fordism, or rather neo-Fordism in Aglietta's work, is a response to the crisis of mass production and consumption in the Fordist regime. Despite sound empirical reasons for being unable to do more than outline the main features of the emerging responses to the crisis of Fordism – many varied and often contradictory trends have been suggested based on case study work in particular industrial sectors (often the car industry) or areas of a national economy (Emilia-Romagna and Orange County are favoured areas) – the identification of a similar set of trends unites the analysts of post-Fordism. In common with the US and British theorists, the regulationists place great emphasis on the impact of flexibility in production methods and in the use of labour in their outline of the new regime. However, unlike the other two schools, the (re)emerging flexibility is regarded by Aglietta a form of deskilling as well as multi-skilling. Thus as well as identifying the key role of new technologies such as micro-electronics and biotechnology in structuring the flexible production process, neo-Fordism also sees the further extension of Taylorism in, for example, low grade clerical and service work and its intensification as in sweated manufacturing and assembly work, in the home and in workshops – all areas of 'women's work' *par excellence*.

Aglietta, however, does not pursue questions of the gendering of skills but rather places greater emphasis on the significance of the growth of a 'core' of skilled workers and an expanding service class whose rising incomes generate increased demand for a wide range of differentiated goods and services.

This demand, in association with the new technologies, is a crucial element in the development of small batch production of specialized goods for niche markets in which the labour of polyvalent skilled workers and professionals receives the greatest rewards. Mass production and mass consumption decline in tandem. As the production line is replaced by the quality circle, so supermarkets and department stores are replaced by the specialist supplier and the shopping mall. The mode of social regulation associated with these developments, although not yet empirically investigated in detail, is typically summarized by the withdrawal of the state from the collective provision of goods and services. State concern with the social reproduction of labour power is reduced as the core workers increasingly rely on specialist and privatized forms of provision in the market. The growing number of workers excluded from the benefits of post-Fordist restructuring – identified by Aglietta as being composed of politically marginal groups such as immigrants, ethnic minorities and rural-urban migrants – have to compensate as best they may for the reduction or withdrawal of state provision.

Despite outlining the main features of change, the regulationist school ignores the significance of gender relations in post-Fordist restructuring. Partly because most of the work in this tradition has focused on the manufacturing sector and the formal workplace of the factory, rather than on the service sector (although Christopherson's work (1989) is an exception) or on sweated and informal work, it has underplayed the centrality of women's labour. Thus, although in one sense there are marked continuities in women's labour market position – in their continuing and deepening segregation in 'female' occupations, in another sense post-Fordism is also witnessing the unmaking of the old Fordist gender order. As I shall demonstrate that old order, based on a stable working class, on the nuclear family supported by a male breadwinner and by women's domestic labour underpinned by Keynesian economic and welfare policies that ensured the reproduction of the working class, is passing from view.

Flexible specialization and the second industrial divide

The work of Piore and Sabel (1984) is a more limited and more optimistic version of the transition from Fordism to post-Fordism, a break marked, in their terms, by a second industrial divide. Concentrating on the liberatory potential of new technology, Piore and Sabel paint a picture of new cooperative

workplace relations in which the old monotony of the production line is replaced by multi-skilled, highly motivated workers equipped with technical know-how producing goods for rapidly changing markets, based on multiple differentiated tastes. Thus there is a transition from mass production to flexible specialization, which Piore and Sabel refer to as a variant of craft production, in which large firms move towards flexible production methods internally and small firms emerge producing short runs or batches tied into the just-in-time systems of the larger firms. This is accompanied by vertical and horizontal disintegration within the production process.

Piore and Sabel's main emphasis is on the development of particular institutional frameworks within which flexible specialization might proceed, at the micro-level of the firm or the region and the macro-level of the national and international economy. Unlike the regulationist school that ultimately explains phenomena in terms of the needs of capital, the flexible specialization theorists place greater emphasis on the contingent and variable nature of these frameworks. They pay less attention than the regulationists to the higher or more general levels of analysis distinguished by Jessop, especially the mode of socialization, although they emphasize the importance of the social regulation of competition, cooperation, prices, wages and training and they acknowledge their debt to the former school in their notion of the regulatory requirements of the technological paradigm. In more recent work, however, Sabel (1989) has developed his analysis of the role of welfare provision under flexible specialization, distinguishing growing trends towards the decentralization and decline.

In their discussion of the forms of institutional regulation needed to maintain innovation and flexibility, Piore and Sabel emphasize the importance of traditions of skills in locally based labour markets and the significance of training in the production of the skills required by small flexible firms, 'solar' firms (those in a subcontracting relationship with a 'core' firm) and the locally-based combinations of 'workshop factories'. Although Piore, Sabel and other theorists in the flexible specialization tradition emphasize labour market segmentation, they ignore the key role that gender divisions play in the (re)construction of valued skills in a post-Fordist restructuring. Nowhere in their book is there the recognition that skill is a socially constructed concept and hence that is gendered, despite the convincing argument made by Phillips and Taylor in 1980 and increasingly

well-documented evidence since then that this is the case. A reliance on the notion of craft production, albeit in a new technological guise, should have alerted Piore and Sabel to some of these arguments. Economic history is replete with examples of struggles between craftbased organizations and the early industrial unions which challenged the definitions of craft and skills and the exclusionary practices based on these definitions. As well as struggles between capital and men and between groups of male workers, men also organized to exclude women from 'skilled' and well paid occupations. There is now a growing body of literature about the interconnections between new technology, skill and gender in restructuring. For example, Cockburn's pioneering work on the printing industry (1983), and on a range of other occupations in which the introduction of new technology resulted in the redefinition of skills (1985), casts doubt on the emancipatory possibilities of technical and technological change for women. As Cockburn and others (see for example Game and Pringle's studies of technological change in Australia (1984)) have shown, jobs themselves are gendered. They are created as masculine and feminine and their skill content is continually redrawn to assert the inferiority of women and of women's supposedly natural attributes – what Jenson (1989) refers to as the 'talents' of women as opposed to the 'skills' of the men. The prevailing societal definition of femininity is based on the idea that familiarity with machinery is somehow unfeminine or de-sexing for women. This ideology pervades the design and construction of machinery itself – the 'average' worker for whom it is designed is male – the allocation of tasks by management and, often, women's own identity and social relations at work. Women are themselves frequently reluctant to acquire technical skills which are seen as unfeminine (Cockburn 1985). For all these reasons the new skilled workers on whom Piore and Sabel pin their version of the future are male, as Jenson (1989), Murray (1987) and Pollert (1988) have recognized.

Restructuring the labour process to privilege skilled work and workers thus recreates the gender segmentation of earlier methods of industrial production and to the extent that women (and ethnic minorities) enter the analysis at all they are there in their familiar, and familial, guise of marginal workers, participating in the secondary labour market in Fordist and post-Fordist times alike. Thus Piore, writing earlier with Berger (Berger and Piore, 1980) argues that 'the migrants (foreign and domestic), the rural workers and the women are attractive precisely

because they belong to another socio-economic structure and view industrial employment as a secondary adjunct to their primary roles. They are willing to take jobs because they see their commitment to these jobs as temporary, and they are able to bear the flux and uncertainty of the industrial economy because they have their traditional activities on which to fall back' (p. 50). For women, these traditional activities no doubt include the domestic labour that an earlier generation of men and capital were anxious to retain and prepared to support through the mechanism of the family wage but which, as will be argued after a brief review of the specifically geographical literature on restructuring, is a misreading of the new times of post-Fordism. The current maintenance of the labour market 'marginality' of the majority of women workers not only disadvantages them but is also imposing an increasing cost on many working class men, who in a previous era expected to benefit from the gender segregation of the labour market.

A BRIEF ASIDE ON GEOGRAPHERS' VIEWS OF RESTRUCTURING AND GENDER DIVISIONS OF LABOUR

West coast geography

The impact of regulation theory and flexible specialization on specifically geographical analyses of recent economic change (in the English language literature) seems to have been greater in the USA than in the UK. Here the recent work by Scott (1988, 1991), Storper and Scott (1989) and Storper and Walker (1989) has been influential. In common with the other theorists, these geographers distinguish in their work on economic restructuring between a core group of skilled workers, implicitly male, and a peripheral group of less well-rewarded workers. Hence Storper and Scott (1989) suggest that post-Fordism creates and deepens the distinction between 'a highly remunerated segment consisting of professional, craft and technical workers, and a poorly remunerated segment made up of politically marginalized social groups such as women, ethnic minorities and rural-urban migrants' (p. 32). There is little need to belabour the points already made about the inadequacies of this division, other than to stress that it hides the deepening divisions that are opening up *between* women in the labour market, as the empirically-based concluding part of this paper will show for Britain.

Not unexpectedly given their disciplinary affiliation, these authors are interested in the spatial

divisions associated with post-Fordism, in how flexible production relations work out over geographical territory. In their notion of territorial production complexes, however, the social relations of gender barely feature, despite their recognition of the interconnections between economic and social change. Thus Storper and Scott define the new flexible production agglomerations as 'an interdependent system of production spaces (the locus of work) and adjunct social spaces (the locus of domestic life of the worker)' (p. 33). Thus just as women workers, according to Piore and Sabel, view their industrial employment as an adjunct to their primary roles, so in Storper and Scott's opinion is this domestic life an adjunct to the real (men's?) world of work (for which read wage labour – which as at least a decade of feminist analysis has taught us is but one particular part of the overall definition of work). Regarding social space merely as an adjunct of production space means that Storper and Scott are poorly attuned to the ways in which social attributes such as gender are mutually constituted in the workplace and the community. Thus in his recent book with Walker, Storper discusses the social construction of skill and, astonishingly, completely ignores the role of gender. Similarly Scott, in his book *Metropolis: from the division of labour to urban form* (1988) (in which only a single final chapter is devoted to the social space of the metropolis) ignores the significance of gender divisions. He poses as a major puzzle in his final chapter: 'how does it come to pass that an occupational division of labour that is established in the first instance in the workplace is thrown out as it were into urban social space where it reappears imperfectly but definitely as a division of residential neighbourhoods?' (p. 221). But as Nelson (1986) has shown in her classic paper on back office employment in the San Francisco metropolitan area the residential distribution of certain types of female labour (in this case white, middle class, college-educated women) itself has an effect on the division of labour and on the decentralization of parts of the production process. Scott thus underplays the ways in which social divisions affect, as well as are affected by the production process and in so doing, paradoxically, reduces the importance of geography. He argues that 'before we can understand the specifically geographical (Scott's emphasis) emergence of the modern metropolis in capitalism, we must first of all seek to comprehend it in its primary function as a focus of production and work' (p. 217).

In an expanding body of work on the new territorial production complexes of post-Fordism, in both

the US and in western Europe (see Martin, 1990 for a review of a conference in 1990 that brought together many of the main proponents of the approach) the emphasis overwhelmingly is on this 'primary function'. Increasingly inter- and intra-firm linkages, technological change, managerial strategies and the like are the focus of attention and workers, industrial struggles and political opposition drop out of the analysis, let alone the analysis of gender relations and social reproduction in the community, which never really had a place anyway. Thus, while Brusco (quoted in Ward 1991), writing of Emilia-Romagna, can suggest that in this area with its dense network of small workshops we might not find 'the sharp split between working and non-working spheres of life that tend to occur in Fordist environments', we can be sure that he (once again) means the non-working lives of the male industrial worker (I am doubtful anyway whether a woman would subsume the whole of everyday life apart from waged labour under the label 'non-work' but this is perhaps an overly essentialist view). Beccatini (1990), also an influential theorist in this school, spoke approvingly (at the conference reported in Martin, 1991) of the ways in which in this area an older form of social association, based in particular on the bar and male camaraderie, is being revived!

Spatial divisions of labour

Although not strictly in the Fordist-post-Fordist tradition, the most influential geographical text on economic restructuring in Britain has been Massey's *Spatial Divisions of Labour* (1984), coincidentally published in the same year as Piore and Sabel's seminal work. The book built on the author's earlier work with Meegan (Massey and Meegan, 1982) in specifying how general processes of economic change affect and are affected by geographical variations. Here, as the title indicates, Massey placed considerable emphasis on the role of labour, as well as changes in the internal structure of firms, in the restructuring process and, unlike the theorists just considered, she deals specifically with the class and gender recomposition of local labour markets. In her analysis, Massey argues firms have a differential requirement for particular forms of labour that are differentiated by gender and skill attributes. She relies on the notion of spatially unevenly distributed reserve armies of labour which endow particular places with locational advantages. Women, and particularly married women, are, she argues, a spatially-specific reserve army of semi- and unskilled labour,

their availability dependent upon previous rounds of accumulation that either excluded them from or drew them into waged labour in particular ways. Their particular position, as semi- or unskilled workers reflected the ideological construction of 'feminine' skills as less-valued than 'male' skills and the gender division of labour outside the workplace in which women shoulder the major burden of the unpaid work of social reproduction (see also McDowell and Massey 1984). This work thus represents a considerable step forward in its understanding not only of the gendered nature of skills but also in its awareness of the interconnections between women's waged and unwaged labour.

However, in their focus on women rather than on gender and in their reliance on a static notion of the patriarchal divisions of labour, Massey and McDowell neglect the ways in which gender relations (rather than women's labour) are an integral rather than a coincidental part of the restructuring process. And in *Spatial Divisions of Labour*, Massey treats rising levels of women's employment as a consequence of increases in occupations and industries that have traditionally employed women – an argument that as Rubery and Tarling (1988) have demonstrated is not wholly correct. In the current rounds of economic change, it seems that certain characteristics of labour market attachment – on a part-time basis for example – that have traditionally been regarded as female – are an integral part of the restructuring process rather than an outcome (Blanchflower and Corry, 1989). Further, in work in this tradition, while taking a dynamic approach to the analysis of wage labour and changes in the sphere of production, the conception of reserves is essentially static. As Pearson (1986) has argued in her critique of the notion of reserves of 'green' female labour, women have to be constructed as a labour force through actions by the state and employers and their entry into waged labour is often contested and challenges forms of patriarchal social relations in the family and the wider community. Massey tends to neglect changes in the sphere of domestic labour and in the wider arena of social reproduction and so the reciprocal relation of changes in these spheres and in the labour market.

CAPITALISM, PATRIARCHY AND THE GENDER DIVISION OF LABOUR

Given these criticisms of the neglect of gender relations in the major approaches to recent economic

change, it is now important to address the ways in which analysts influenced by feminism have portrayed the gender order of post-Fordism. Here the body of work currently is less substantial. In Britain the most vocal proponents of the significance of gender divisions in restructuring have been the Lancaster group of sociologists who in two publications arising from their participation in the ESRC-funded study – *The Changing Urban and Regional System of the UK* – have argued that patriarchal social relations must be an essential part of the analysis of economic change (Murgatroyd *et al.*, 1985; Bagguley *et al.*, 1990). Their conception of patriarchy is that of a system of social relations, related to but theoretically and analytically separate from capitalist relations, under which 'men benefit, directly or indirectly and to a greater and lesser extent, from the subordination of women' (Bagguley, 1990, p. 33). Thus their notion is a particular variant of socialist-feminist theory that has become known as the dual systems approach, deriving in particular from the work of the US theorist Heidi Hartmann (1986), who herself has been an important analyst of the impact of economic restructuring on the living standards of US women.

In their argument that the structures of patriarchal power must form part of any understanding of recent economic change, the Lancaster school base their analysis on Walby's theorization of patriarchy (1989a,b, 1990). She distinguishes six separate structures of patriarchal domination – the patriarchal mode of production, patriarchal relations within waged labour, the patriarchal state, male violence, patriarchal relations in sexuality and patriarchal culture – in which the appropriation of women's labour by men and the exclusionary mechanisms operated by men within the workplace are seen as the lynch pins of the capitalist-patriarchal equation. Whilst not denying the continuing strength of patriarchal relations in other areas, I want to suggest here that recent economic changes challenge rather than confirm Walby and her colleagues' particular analysis (for a more general critique of her approach see Acker, 1989).

The capitalist-patriarchy model relies on the theoretical centrality of domestic labour – it is women's domestic labour that is appropriated by men and is also theorized as essential to the capitalist mode of production. Women in the home are the grist in the mill of the capitalist system. Thus as Eisenstein in *Capitalist, Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist-Feminism* (1979) argued:

All the processes involved in industrial work help in the perpetuation of the existing society:

- (1) Women stabilise patriarchal structures (the family, housewife, mother etc) by fulfilling these roles.
- (2) Simultaneously women are reproducing new workers, for both the paid and unpaid labour force.
- (3) they work as well in the labour force for lesser wages.
- (4) They stabilise the economy through their role as consumers. (p. 29)

Men are the breadwinners of this system, gaining at work from the exclusion of women from well-paid 'male' jobs and bringing home a family wage to support the domestic labour that enables them to appear in the office or on the factor floor each day. The analogy between this argument and the regulationists' view of the mode of social regulation under Fordism is clear.

Walby (1989b) further explicates the benefit for individual men of this system:

The work performed by the woman may range from cooking and cleaning for the husband and caring for their children. Women as housewives perform this work for husbands. In these relations of production the housewife is engaged in labour for her husband who expropriates it. She is not rewarded with money for this labour, merely her maintenance (sometimes). The product of a wife's labour is labour power: that of herself, her husband and her children. The husband is able to appropriate the wife's labour power because he has possession of the labour power which she has produced. He is able to sell this labour power as if it were his own. (p. 221)

My argument with this approach is not that it has never been an adequate representation of gender relations (it is perhaps most appropriate for the classic years of Fordism – the 1950s) but that it no longer fits the current circumstances. The world of a stable working class and the nuclear family – as the post-Fordist theorists discussed above hint at – has melted into air. High divorce rates, increasing variety in household and family forms, women's entry into waged labour all challenge this classic view of patriarchal relations. It is now increasingly difficult to demonstrate that either men or capital need domestic labour, or indeed that capital needs labour at all – at least in the form of the old model male worker who laboured solidly and dependably for a single employer throughout his working life. As Sivanandan (1990) has recently argued 'Prometheus is unbound again. Capital is free from the exigencies of labour' (p. 169–70). Free that is from the labour of a particular male working class reproduced *in situ* as

capital is increasingly internationally mobile, able to move about the globe to recruit the cheapest labour force, and increasingly labour too has been forced to be mobile. As Ehrenreich, an astute critic of contemporary trends, suggests the old world that was portrayed in the capitalism-patriarchy model has disappeared from view. The old order was

a world of relative affluence and apparent stability – where categories like “the family”, “the state” and “the economy” were fixed. . . . Today there is little that we can take as fixed. “The family” so long reified in theory, looks more like an improvisation than an institution. A new technological revolution on the scale of the one that swept in industrial capitalism (and state socialism) is transforming not only production but perception. Whole industries collapse into obsolescence; entire classes face ruthless dislocation everywhere women are being proletarianised and impoverished, becoming migrants, refugees, and inevitably “cheap labour” (Ehrenreich 1990, p. 275)

Ehrenreich suggests that the socialist-feminists’ argument that domestic labour is essential was, ironically, too *benign* an interpretation of capitalism. The theory portrays women’s caring and nurturing work as part of a larger systemic need for these attributes. Capitalism was endowed with the desire to reproduce labour power and thus it became patriarchal capitalism – a Father who, adopting a family metaphor, regarded all male workers as sons and all women as daughters, mediating (with the assistance of the state, also portrayed as patriarchal) the relations between the sons and daughters in order to produce more children (workers) to keep the whole family going.

However, neither the father nor the sons appear to need domestic labour, at least not in the quantities in which is previously was available, or perhaps more accurately they are not prepared to pay the cost of its provision. As women enter the labour market in growing numbers it would seem inevitable that the overall amount of domestic labour performed in an economy must decline, although as I shall demonstrate it is still women who overwhelmingly shoulder this work. Recent figures are not available but in the early 1970s, as women’s participation rates began to increase, Vanek (1974) found that in the US women who were in full-time employment did 26 hours of domestic labour compared with 55 hours undertaken by women not in the labour market. Oakley (1974) found comparable differences at the same time in Britain. The maintenance of the capitalist production system does not seem to have been harmed by this withdrawal. As Ehrenreich (1990) suggests ‘no-one is

arguing that the decline of productivity is due to unironed shirts and cold breakfasts’ (p. 272). And what of individual men? Are they disadvantaged by the reduced service from their wives? Ehrenreich is instructive here also – ‘If we have learnt anything, it is that men have an unexpected ability to survive on fast food and the emotional solace of short term relationships’ (p. 273).

Where the capitalist-patriarchy model also falls down is in its assumption of the unitary interests of men who, it is argued, benefit from the forms of closure and exclusion that restrict women to particular, and subordinate, positions in the labour market. While it is undeniable that the new gender order of post Fordist times has deepened the subordination of many women, trapping them in the increasingly casualized, part-time and temporary peripheral labour market, it has also opened up opportunities for some women to join the core occupations and so increased class divisions *between* women. But what it has also succeeded in doing is turning upside down the gender divisions between large numbers of men and women. Increasing numbers of men are employed in the peripheral labour market too, on terms and conditions that traditionally were regarded as ‘female’. Their life time attachment to the labour market, their ‘family’ wage, their conditions of employment and their skill differentials are all being eroded, so that as Taylor and Phillips presciently suggested over a decade ago, perhaps ‘we are all becoming “women workers” now’ (reprinted in *Feminist Review*, 1986, p. 65) regardless of biological sex.

THE IMPACT OF RESTRUCTURING ON GENDER DIVISIONS: SOME EVIDENCE FROM BRITAIN

Changes in the labour market

It was once axiomatic among socialist-feminists that women’s labour market participation was a precondition of liberation, bringing in its wake greater economic independence and a diminution of men’s power over women, both at the general level and in terms of individual personal relations. It seems as if recent trends may prove this axiom wildly optimistic. Women’s rising participation in the British labour market, under current economic conditions and in association with reduced state intervention in the arena of welfare, appears to be increasing their overall workload and deepening the oppression of many working class women rather than expanding opportunities for their independence. However, for other

TABLE I. Trends in men and women's employment 1971-1988 (Great Britain)

	Men	Women	Employees in employment (000s)			% Share of part-timers of all women
			Women as % of total	% Women full-timers	% Women part-timers	
1971	13 424	8224	38.0	25.3	12.6	33.5
1976	13 097	8951	40.4	24.3	16.3	39.6
1981	12 278	9108	42.6	24.7	17.8	41.9
1986	11 643	9462	44.3	25.2	19.6	42.4
1988	11 978	10 096	45.7	26.2	19.5	42.8
1990	11 937	10 309	46.3	26.3	20.0	43.3

Source: Department of Employment Gazette, various years

women the recent era of economic change has been one in which they have seen considerable gains.

Women's labour market participation in Britain has risen steadily throughout the entire post-war period, accelerating in particular throughout the 1970s and 1980s (Table I). However, the growth of part-time work for women has been a particularly marked feature of post-Fordist restructuring in Britain. Activity rates for full-time female employment actually fell in the 1970s (from 37 to 33 per cent) and remained static until 1986 when they began to rise again. Over the same period, part-time employment rose steadily, even throughout the years of severe recession between 1979 and 1981. Because the increasing feminization of the British labour market has been achieved through the use of part-time labour, the 2.0 million increase in the total number of women workers since 1971 exaggerates the opening up of opportunities for women in the tertiary sector. Rather than the 1970s and 1980s restructuring has achieved is the *sharing out* of employment between larger numbers of women. This feature of the 'flexible' use of women's labour through part-time employment contracts is a particular feature of the feminization of the British labour market that is not found to the same extent in the rest of Western Europe. It is partly a consequence of the social insurance system in Britain in which both employer and employee contributions are less than for full-time workers. This brings with it severely restricted entitlement to a range of social benefits such as unemployment and sick pay as well as poorer provision of work-related entitlements such as holidays and security of employment.

Women working on a part-time basis have little prospect of achieving economic independence as they are particularly poorly paid, not only in compari-

son with men but in comparison with other women. While the average hourly earnings of women employed full-time have remained at approximately three-quarters of those of men in full-time employment from the mid seventies, women working part-time earned only 75 per cent of the average rate for full-time women workers in 1989, a decline from 81 per cent at the beginning of the 1980s (Department of Employment, 1989). Thus, in 1987 women in Britain in full-time work put in 36 per cent of all the hours for 28 per cent of the earnings, and those working part-time put in 12 per cent of all the hours for just 5 per cent of the earnings (Walby, 1989a). These figures are a sober indication that many of the 'new' jobs created in the 1980s match the old jobs in neither the wage levels nor the total hours.

As married women and in particular women with children have been the majority of new entrants to the labour market throughout the 1980s (their participation rate of 58.6 per cent exceeds that for non-married women, standing at 27.5 per cent according to the 1990 Labour Force Survey (Department of Employment, 1991a), it is often assumed that the expansion of part-time employment reflects women's preferences. The Department of Employment in Britain clearly holds this view: as was explained to a House of Lords Select Committee (1988) investigation of part-time employment 'while there are clearly disadvantages which part-timers suffer in relation to full-timers, it is possible to see this as a price which part-timers are prepared to pay for the opportunity to fit work into other commitments'. But a range of evidence makes it increasingly clear that part-time workers themselves find the price too high. Part-time, 'flexible' work has not been created in response to 'demand' on the part of workers, whether men or women. Rather many have had part-time or

temporary jobs imposed on them or have taken them for want of alternatives while continuing to seek full-time and stable work (Hakim, 1987). As Evans (1990) has argued in a recent survey of labour market trends in Britain 'one should be wary of endorsing the view that women have a "taste" for part-time jobs, which are demonstrably exploitative jobs. It may be that the "taste" for part-time jobs is actually that of employers' (p. 53). Indeed as Blanchflower and Corry's (1989) survey that was quoted earlier demonstrated, employers regard the use of part-time labour as an extremely desirable, if not *the* most important, element of a flexible workforce. The creation of part-time jobs has become a means of redefining the status of employees and creating new divisions across categories by separating men and women. Jenson (1990) argues that 'a new employment status is being created for many women and not simply a new time schedule . . . a consequence not of chance but following from the strategic decisions taken by the major actors in the economy' (p. 154–5).

During the 1990s, married women with children will continue to be the most important element in recruitment to the labour market. In the UK, the Department of Employment estimated in 1989 that 80 per cent of the new entrants in the first three years of the 1990s would be exactly this group, partly as a consequence of demographic changes, for example between 1987 and 1995 the number of under 25 year olds in the UK labour market is projected to fall by 1.2 million (approximately 20 per cent) (Department of Employment, 1988). The need to attract women into the labour market to retain its overall size at approximately the same level as in the early years of the decade led the Department to issue advice to employers:

Employers must recognise that women can no longer be treated as second class workers. They will need women workers, and must recognise both their career ambitions and domestic responsibilities. This will involve broadening company training policies, much more flexibility of work and hours and job-sharing to facilitate the employment of women with families and help adapt to their needs.

(Department of Employment, 1988)

Whether the Department really intended to so freely admit the second class status of women workers in the past or not, its current advice seems to guarantee its continuance. It is clear that women's exploited position in the labour market is not seen as an issue to be tackled. Rather the attributes associated with their gender – and particularly their continuing responsi-

bility for domestic labour and childcare – are seen as immutable. While needed (only temporarily?) to replace young people, women continue to be constructed as marginal labour with particular characteristics that mean that their attachment to the labour market is temporary or flexible.

Women themselves, however, are demonstrating both their desire for and the economic necessity of a more permanent rather than peripheral or temporary place in the labour market, not only through their stated preferences for stable employment but also by their behaviour. For example, there has been a fall in women's voluntary turnover rates (Rubery and Tarling, 1988). Increasing numbers of women are acquiring educational qualifications and other labour market credentials (Crompton and Sanderson, 1986) which will give them access to more secure employment. In addition, through their rise in union membership rates and their active involvement in campaigns against the privatization of services and casualization of employment, women in Britain are demonstrating their determination to resist their continuing and deepening exploitation.

The overall impact of economic restructuring on gender relations, however, is neither straightforward nor uncontentious. Feminists, whether activists or academic analysts of women's changing position in the labour market, disagree both on the consequences and on future strategy. Whereas Hartmann (1986), commenting on the United States believes that 'on the whole, the economic changes of the past several decades have been positive for women' (p. 33), Jenson (1990), analysing the same trends in France, came to the conclusion that 'labour force segmentation, low wages and economic dependence within the family remain the lot of French women; their situation can be said to have become even more difficult over the last two decades' (p. 155). In a fine English compromise, Evans (1990), discussing British labour market changes, concludes that 'one should be wary of identifying the indisputable increase in the share of women in UK employment as unwaveringly emancipatory. Certainly economic status rests fundamentally upon access to and acquisition of paid employment – ask anyone who has experienced long-term unemployment or any woman who declares that she is "just a housewife" – yet economic status is also derived from the characteristics of the employment contract, . . . and, of course, from the level of earnings. Moreover, economic status is also inversely related to the amount of domestic labour carried out' (p. 52).

TABLE II. Distribution of gross hourly earnings of full-time adult employees

	Ratios to median				Ratio of women's wages to men's	
	Men		Women		%s	
	'80	'89	'80	'89	'80	'89
Top decile	175	200	169	193	71	76
Top quartile	130	140	126	139	72	78
Median	100	100	100	100	73	78
Lowest quartile	81	76	81	78	76	80
Lowest decile	68	60	70	64	76	83
Mean					72	76

Source: Department of Employment 1989 *New Earnings Survey*, Table 26 (overtime excluded). 1980 sample men 21 and over, women 18 and over; 1989 sample workers on adult rates

But during the 1980s, it seems that gender divisions in the labour market have begun to be re-structured. The gains and losses have not been lined up straightforwardly on a gender basis, or at least not in the expected way. Table II illustrates the pattern of gains and losses in the earnings distribution for full-time workers and shows that between 1980 and 1989 all women workers across the distribution gained relative to men. But the table also shows that the 1980s has been a period of widening income differentials between workers. The highly paid who have benefitted disproportionately from the regressive changes in taxation increased their share of total income whereas the share of the low paid has fallen. Throughout the eighties relative wage rates fell for the weaker segments of the labour market—for young workers and manual workers. Male manual workers were particularly adversely affected as large numbers lost secure employment in manufacturing industries. What these changes have resulted in is a new pattern of widening differentials between workers of the *same* sex. In the 1980s the income distribution for women workers came to more closely resemble that for men than it had in previous decades as growing numbers of women with educational, vocational and professional qualifications entered the high paying occupations in the core. This widening differential between workers of the same sex marked, in the opinion of Ermisch and his colleagues (1990), nothing less than 'an upheaval, after a decade of stability, in the degree of inequality'.

Thus the 1980s have seen a widening of class divisions and a narrowing of gender divisions in the labour market. This has interesting implications for the political strategies adopted by low income workers. It is becoming clear to representatives of

certain sections of low paid male workers that their interests increasingly coincide with those of women workers in the same position. Rather than men benefiting from the gender segregation of the labour market, they are losing from restructuring strategies that are defining increasing numbers of new jobs as jobs for 'women'. Hence notions of equal pay for jobs of comparable worth or equal value suddenly have more meaning for men, anxious not to be undercut by cheap female labour (McCormick, 1991). In addition, the bonuses and benefits that traditionally top up the wages of male manual employees are easily lost in recessionary periods and male trade unionists are realizing the importance of building connections between arguments about low pay, equal pay and minimum wages. The intrinsic value of so-called unskilled jobs is now open to renegotiation as working class men are beginning to realize what the feminization of the labour market means for them. Thus Elisabeth Wilson (1988) urges men and women alike to recentre class-based collective movements:

The interests of low-paid workers of both sexes are therefore likely to draw closer together, while on the other hand it may be increasingly difficult to create a unity of "all women", although there will continue to be areas such as health care and violence where their interests are more likely to coincide. But, in general the vulnerable position of the vast majority of women in the labour force should be a reason to support trades unionism ... (p. 199).

— a movement that many feminists had (correctly) criticized for its male agenda and practices but which at last seems to be taking the interests of its women members seriously.

Changes in social relations: restructuring 'domestic' life?

The post-Fordist years in Britain have been marked not only by significant economic change but also by widespread changes in social relations and in 'family life'. In examining these changes, I shall suggest that, like industrial capital, the state is also less interested in the social reproduction of working class families in general and the old ideal male worker in particular. This is reflected in reduced state expenditure on social welfare provision and the declining real value of many benefits, but unemployment payments in particular. As Elisabeth Wilson (1988) has suggested 'can it really be a coincidence that universal health and welfare services are under attack just as the economy is ceasing to have any use for the old kind of universal workforce?' (p. 198). The institutions of the welfare state, that were to reinforce the particular patriarchal family form that characterized Fordism, are also being restructured.

The declining interest, however, is disguised by a rhetoric of individual responsibility and empowerment through the obligations, rather than the rights, of citizenship. At the same time, and paradoxically, an idealized view of the nuclear family and women's traditional obligations within this lies at the centre of the Conservatives' social policy changes. The contradiction embodied within these opposing views of women's rights and responsibilities has led to the interesting phenomenon of cross-party alliances between women politicians in supporting demands to improve the status of women (Campbell, 1987). A further contradiction is evident at the general level – between a restructured economy that increasingly depends on women's labour and a restructured welfare sector that makes the same demands. The post-Fordist theorists who have argued that the new economic regime is associated with new forms of social regulation similarly fail to make clear that unlike the old Fordist compact between capital, men and the state in which the mode of accumulation and the institutions of social regulation were in (relative) harmony, the new order's reliance on women's labour in both spheres makes it inherently less stable.

In this section I also want to return to the argument about the effects of restructuring on gender relations. It is here that I disagree with those critics who have argued that the changes have, in the main, benefitted women. Hartmann, for example analysing social and demographic change in the United States, has suggested that 'patriarchy is weakening – to the extent that there is a family crisis, it is by and large a healthy one, particularly for women' (1986, p. 49).

The notion of a crisis in family life has played a powerful part in the discourse of political life in 1980s Britain. 'The family', or rather its imminent decline, has been variously blamed for a range of social ills from delinquency to inner city decline and an idealized, outdated notion of family life has been invoked, in particular, to justify the changes in welfare provision introduced by the Conservatives during the decade (Coote *et al.*, 1990). However, many of these changes have trampled on the rights of the women who hold together actual families. British evidence shows that the living standard of many women declined during the 1980s. Reductions in state spending on social policies have the effect of forcing many back into traditional family forms for economic support, health care, care of the elderly and children and so on. However, this 'traditional' family of conservative social policy is at odds with contemporary reality. Many women are no longer available, at least on a full-time basis to undertake the caring labour that keeps 'the family' and the welfare state running in tandem. Women increasingly have less time to do this work but the state is failing to assist them. For example, rising labour market participation rates have been particularly marked among women with children and yet state-provided nursery and after-school provision in this country remains amongst the worst in Western Europe. Less than 2 per cent of under 5s in Britain receive any form of state nursery care and whereas 28 per cent of under 5s are in some form of daycare, including childminding, nursery schools and classes, this compares with 95 per cent in France (Equal Opportunities Commission, 1990). According to recent labour force projections (Department of Employment, 1991b), in which 2001 projections were compared with 1971 figures, 'the most striking feature is sharply higher activity rates for females, particularly those aged between 25 and 44' (p. 275). Among women with very young children the rises were particularly sharp from the mid-eighties onwards, for example rates for women with a child under 5 climbed from 24 per cent in 1983 to 41 per cent in 1989. Most of these women, not surprisingly, are employed part-time.

It is, however, difficult to establish causes and consequences from aggregate trends. These rises might equally well lead to women's greater economic independence and their rejection of the nuclear family or stem from the need to make up for a decline in male, and household, earnings and thus tie women even more tightly into traditional living arrangements. Detailed case study work is needed to

disentangle these causes and effects. However, aggregate analysis suggests possible lines of investigation.

Demographic and social statistics seems to indicate that, at first sight, a 'family' crisis might be underway, with women rejecting conventional living arrangements for other forms. Briefly stated women in Britain are delaying marriage and childbirth, having fewer children and increasingly outside legal matrimony and are spending longer periods living without men, both through rising longevity and rising divorce rates. Two trends in particular, illegitimacy and divorce, seem to arouse most concern among commentators of all political hues, although most strongly from the right. Rising illegitimacy rates – 10.9 per cent of all births in 1979 and 27 per cent ten years later – were an unexpected side effect of 'Thatcherism'. However, further investigation of the statistics reveals that the moral panic of the decade was an overstated response. More than 70 per cent of all these births were registered by both parents and in 52 per cent of cases they lived at the same address – matrimony in all but name (Coote *et al.*, 1990). Further the majority of these parents eventually marry. However, rates of marital breakdown are clearly rising in Britain. Divorce rates rose sixfold between 1960 and 1987 to 12.6 per 1000 existing marriages and are now the highest in western Europe. Remarriage, however, remains popular. 36 per cent of all marriages in 1987 involved at least one divorced partner but these marriages themselves are more likely to breakdown than first marriages. In partial support of the notion that it is women and not men who increasingly are rejecting the 'patriarchal' family is the fact that 73 per cent of all divorce proceedings in 1988 were initiated by women, the majority of whom cited their husband's 'unreasonable behaviour' as the reason for ending the marriage. The majority of men petitioning for divorce cited more traditional ground – adultery. One of the consequences of these changes in marriage patterns is that rising numbers of women are bringing up children alone, either permanently or for periods of time. Almost all single parents are women (9 out of 10) and most of these women are single or divorced. Among all families with dependent children in 1988, 6 per cent were headed by lone divorced mothers, 5 per cent by lone single mothers and only 1 per cent by widows (*Social Trends*, 1990).

It is clear, however, that only this latter group of mothers, and, of course, married women, conform to the Conservatives' idealized notions of family life and motherhood that lay behind numerous policy statements exhorting women to continue to undertake

their traditional roles. Thus in a statement in 1988 when she was still Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher speaking at the Conservative Women's Conference had these words of encouragement for her female audience:

The family is the building block of society. It is a nursery, a school, a hospital, a leisure centre, a place of rest. It encompasses the whole of society. It fashions our beliefs. It is also the preparation for the rest of our life. And women run it.

This glowing tribute to women's multiple organizational skills was not extended to a recognition that, since they are unpaid, they are neither valued nor included in national accounts. Nor indeed that for most women they have to combine this responsibility with low-paid, often monotonous wage labour. Apparently, Thatcher did recognize the labour market changes that had occurred during her premiership, but suggested that motherhood and employment should be undertaken consecutively rather than concurrently. Thus she argued that:

Women of our generation are still comparatively young by the time our children are grown up and therefore we have the opportunity to develop our own talents . . . For many women that experience can enhance their lives and enlarge their interests . . .

(Dame Margery Corbett-Ashby Memorial lecture, 1982, quoted by Wilson, 1987)

This view ignores both the economic necessity that propels most women into the labour market and the fact that 'enhancing' jobs are restricted to a small minority of middle class women.

The value of motherhood that has been re-affirmed in statements on British social policy in the Thatcher era is only regarded as legitimate if it is within a conventional male/female relationship. Thus the family is only a family in contemporary Britain if it is a conventional heterosexual nuclear family. Hence in a debate on the annual cost of income support to lone parents in January 1990, a Conservative member of Parliament, Tony Favell, in asking about the rising cost of state payments to single mothers, suggested that

The traditional family would have no resentment for maintaining mothers who have been deserted by their husbands or treated badly by their husbands, but what of those who leave their husbands with no good reason and what of young women who have never been married who have children?

And in reply the junior Social Security minister at the time, Gillian Shepherd, said 'It is important that the benefits system should not create incentives to lone parenthood or dependence on benefit' (House of Commons, 8.1.1990). It seems an astonishing notion that a benefit of about £30 a week should be seen as an incentive. As Phoenix's (1988) careful work on single mothers has demonstrated, the majority of these women have a clear sighted view of the realities of their economic future and chose single parenthood as a way of conferring status as an adult as an alternative to uncertain labour market prospects. However, determined to stamp out perceived 'irresponsibility' the Government announced in July 1990 the establishment of an ingeniously entitled Child Support Agency, the role of which is trace 'errant' fathers in order to deduct child maintenance payments from their income and so reduce the 'dependence' of single mothers on the state. If single mothers are an anathema, other 'family' forms are even less legitimate. Hence the introduction of clause 28/29 to ban the diffusion of information about homosexual relationships which, among other things, required school sex education to be taught only within the framework of 'loving family relationships' (for which read heterosexual). The furore that erupted in the British press and in Parliament in March 1991 about the immorality of a so-called virgin birth (the artificial insemination of a women who was widely reported never to have had sexual intercourse, in fact penetrative sexual relations) was a further indication of the widespread population belief that only certain familial relations are legitimate.

The notion that the benefits system creates a 'dependency culture' gained widespread credence on the right during the 1980s. A previous Secretary of State for Social Security, John Moore, when interviewed in March 1988 argued that 'there has to be a change from the sullen apathy of dependence towards the sheer delight of personal achievement'. However, these sentiments about personal, individual responsibility are purely rhetorical as it is the *family* and more specifically women within the family, who by their unpaid labour, have borne the brunt of cuts in collective state provision.

A number of changes introduced in the 1980s to the social security and tax systems have reduced, not enhanced, the personal independence and responsibility of women and have either increased their economic dependence on men or reduced their standard of living. In the partial restructuring of the social security system introduced under the Social

Security Act 1986 (implemented in April 1988), new regulations that aggregate households' total income for benefit assessment purposes have increased the mutual dependence of household members. This change not only contradicts the stated emphasis on 'self-reliance' in the Green Paper that preceded the act but also assumes an equitable division of resources between family members. Studies of family budgets have shown that this is seldom the case (Graham, 1984; Pahl, 1983).

Other changes have adversely affected women's eligibility and hence their incomes, increasing the dependence of young and working women on men and exacerbating gender inequalities. The universal maternity grant was abolished in 1987 and changes in eligibility for maternity pay, administered by employers, excluded large numbers of pregnant women. Women's right to unemployment pay was reduced by the introduction of stringent new conditions establishing a claimant's availability for work. Women with children, for example, are now required to demonstrate pre-existing childcare arrangements in order to qualify. This hardly accords with common practice. Women with children were also affected by the decision in 1987 to abolish the annual uprating in child benefit payments. These stood at their 1987 level until the advent of John Major's more sympathetic version of conservatism in November 1990 saw the reversal of this freeze and the immediate introduction of £1 a week rise for the eldest child only – hardly compensation for a three year freeze. Elderly women fared little better throughout the 1980s. Their standard of living was reduced as the value of state pensions failed to keep pace with inflation.

Overall during the 1980s the gap between wage earning households and those dependent on state benefits has widened. Between 1981 and 1988, the state pension for a retired couple fell from 43.3 per cent of average earnings to 32.7 per cent and for single pensioners (the majority of them women) from 27.0 to 20.5 per cent. The value of unemployment benefit for a single person fell from 21.5 to 16.3 per cent. (Average earnings for a man in full-time employment in 1988 were £235 per week.) In 1988 at least three times more people were living in poverty because of unemployment than when the Conservatives came to power in 1979 (Piachaud, 1991). And the earnings of women were an important element in keeping many households just above the poverty line over these years. For example, Townsend (1987) estimated that in 1986 the number

of families below the poverty line would have been four times greater than it actually was without women's financial contribution from their wages. For these women labour market participation seldom brings with it the prospect of economic independence. Indeed, it might be argued that the expansion of low wage part-time work for women over the 1980s in combination with the decline of well-paid work for working class men has actually reduced working class women's prospect of economic independence and, particularly in tight local housing markets, has made 'coupledom' almost an economic necessity.

Inequalities between households

Despite right wing beliefs in the 'trickle-down' theory of social progress, the gains in prosperity achieved by the most affluent over the decade were certainly not felt by the poorest and inequalities between households, as well as between individuals, increased during the 1980s. Labour market, taxation and benefit changes and welfare restructuring together rewarded the rich and penalized the poor. The opening up of class divisions between individual women that was demonstrated in the previous section was paralleled by a growing polarization between households. Of the total *disposable* income in the UK economy, the top one fifth of households received 42.2 per cent in 1986, compared with 38.1 per cent in 1976, while the bottom fifth received 5.9 per cent compared with 7 per cent a decade earlier. Comparisons of total *original* household incomes which include all pay, pensions, investment interest, gifts and maintenance payments, reveal even more startling inequalities. The top fifth received 50.7 per cent in 1986, rising from 44.4 per cent in 1976, the bottom fifth's share fell from 0.8 to 0.3 per cent over the same years. Despite statistical 'readjustments' imposed by an increasingly cynical government, figures released in July 1990 appear to demonstrate that for the poorest households in Britain, the eighties have been a period not only of relative falls in their standard of living but also a *real* decline. Between 1979 and 1987 when the increase in real income for the population as a whole was 23 per cent, for the lowest decile their income fell in real terms by 5.7 per cent and for the next decile by 1.1 per cent (Department of Social Security, 1990).

Women's labour market participation has been an important part of this inequality. Despite small numbers of cross-class marriages, highly educated and well-paid women are most likely to be married to men of the same social status. Thus despite rising

numbers of dual income households – a rise from 55 to 67 per cent of all married couples between 1976 and 1987 – household income differentials were not reduced. Rather there was increasing polarization, between the majority of families, whether dependent on a single or a dual wage packet and the professional, dual career, double 'pay cheque' family. These latter households are the ones that have gained throughout the crises, recession, inflation and expansionary periods that have accompanied economic restructuring.

Thus during the eighties, for the many working class women propelled into the labour market by economic necessity, as well as a desire for greater independence, two incomes were essential to maintain their previous standard of living. This means that these families are now doing three jobs for the price of one previously: two in the paid labour force and one unpaid at home – the labour of household work and child rearing – if it is accepted that previously the male 'family wage' reflected some contribution towards the unpaid domestic labour of female partners. Although as indicated earlier, the number of hours devoted to domestic tasks by women who work for wages has declined, this decline has been insufficient to compensate for the increased hours in the labour market and on 'caring' tasks to compensate for cuts in state provision. As feminist critics have made clear, the introduction of 'community care', portrayed as an essential element of the empowered citizen common in Conservative rhetoric, has costs for women. Thus while Margaret Thatcher felt able to assert that:

We know the immense sacrifices which people will make for the care of their own near and dear – for elderly relatives, disabled children and so on, and the immense part which voluntary effort even outside the confines of the family has played in these fields. Once you give people the idea that all this can be done by the state ... then you will begin to deprive human beings of one of the essential ingredients of humanity – personal moral responsibility,
(quoted in Croft, 1986)

research on community care (Finch and Groves, 1983) has demonstrated that such immense sacrifices are made, in the main, by women. The idea that such work is ennobling is also inaccurate (Ungerson, 1987).

In 1989 when the *Community Care White Paper* was finally published in Britain, establishing the outlines of a service primarily to be provided through the market with local authority coordination, the role of

women's voluntary labour was specifically identified as an important element. Unfortunately, only a week earlier the Charity Aid Foundation had identified a manpower (sic) crisis in the voluntary sector. The growing participation of married women in waged employment during the decade had severely depleted the numbers of volunteers available to prop up state provision, itself subject to cuts during the decade. The budgets for such 'cinderella' services as geriatric nursing, home helps and meals on wheels, for example, all declined in real terms during the 1980s. Finally in July 1990, in a cynical piece of public sector budget manipulation, the introduction of the community care programme was postponed for three years, leaving thousands of women to struggle on alone, unsupported by local state services.

Thus the overall increase in the number of hours devoted to work, whether paid or unpaid, means that leisure and the general quality of life are severely reduced, especially for those women and their households who cannot afford to purchase in the market commodities and services that were previously provided at home. Among more affluent dual income households the tasks previously being done by the now-employed married women increasingly are being purchased: out of the home in the form of fast foods or day care for example, or within the home by the expansion of a range of quasi-domestic service jobs. This commodification of domestic labour has itself created a rise in extremely low paid service sector employment, also usually for women in some of the most exploited and marginal forms of employment, typically on a casual basis (Enloe, 1989; Lowe and Gregson, 1989). It is only for the small, but expanding, minority of women who have gained access to the core labour market and who are relieved from the double burden of routine, boring 'women's' work in the home and in the labour market, that economic restructuring and the feminization of the labour market is a liberating experience, giving them a basis from which to challenge male domination in the home and the labour market.

For working class women, unable to purchase even the low paid labour power of other women, the quality of life has deteriorated. Currie *et al.* (1980) have suggested that the result has been 'a kind of social speed-up resembling the deliberately increased pace of an industrial assembly line' (p. 323). The net effect of women's entry to the labour market has not been a redistribution of the total amount of waged and unwaged work done in Britain. Despite men's declining labour market participation rates, it is

women who are doing two of the three jobs now common in an increasing number of households. A recent survey of social attitudes in Britain, published in *Social Trends* (1989) revealed that in 72 per cent of all households where both partners were in full-time work, women continued to do most of the domestic work. It was concluded that the 'acceptance of a woman's right to work outside the home does not (yet) appear to have translated itself into a sense of egalitarianism in the allocation of tasks, either actual or prescribed, within the home'. Case-study evidence supports these conclusions (see Gershuny *et al.* 1986; Laite and Halfpenny, 1987; Morris, 1990; Pahl, 1984). Men appear to have marginally increased their participation in domestic work but not in amounts sufficient to offset women's increased market work and women in part-time employment seem to have fared worst. Apparently 'male readiness to cooperate was seen to depend on how significant the woman's earning were judged to be for the household's standard of living' (Morris, 1990, p. 90).

Thus for the majority of British women, it seems hard to concur with Hartmann's (1986) argument that recent social and economic changes have contributed towards a diminution of the oppressive structures of patriarchy with the possible exception of women in the most advantageous labour market positions. However, it is also difficult to completely agree with Walby's assessment of the impact of flexible specialization on the gender division of labour that 'old forms of patriarchy are replaced by new' (1989a, p. 140). Current definitions of patriarchy themselves, at least as applied to economic restructuring, have proved an inadequate theorization of contemporary changes, disguising the ways in which new divisions in the labour market and in the home are opening up among and between women and men. The continued assumption by those feminist theorists who rely on the notion of patriarchy that class and gender divisions may be separately theorized (and by Marxists who see class interests as predominant) disguises the ways in which they are mutually constituted. If this is understood a more dynamic view of the different ways in which women's and men's interests are divided or united at different times is possible. In the present era, it seems as if the interests of working class men and women are drawing closer together as both sexes are adversely affected by the reconstruction of large areas of work as 'feminine'. In this latest round in the continuous struggle over the control over women's labour, the majority of women *and* men are losing. Capital is the beneficiary.

CONCLUSIONS

A great deal of work remains to be done by those convinced by the arguments that gender divisions are a crucial, but neglected, element of contemporary analyses of the post-Fordist era. One consequence of the refocus might be to shift attention from manufacturing to the service sector in which the majority of both male and female workers are now employed in Britain and in other industrial societies. Despite a recent and welcome shift of attention in the geographic literature (Allen, 1988; Daniels, 1985; Marshall, 1988) Christopherson (1989) seems to be alone in examining the implications of flexible work patterns in the service economy for gender divisions of labour in the US. Further, greater attention to the interconnections between changes in the economy and changes in what is clumsily labelled the sphere of reproduction (in the family, the community and the welfare state) is required if gender divisions become a central element of analysis. The post-Fordists argue for this but imperfectly realize it and geography, as it conventionally is constituted, divides these areas between the economic and social areas of the discipline or ignores them altogether.

It is also important to examine, challenge and assess these arguments through comparative case study analysis at a variety of spatial scales. Significant regional differences are apparent in the composition of local populations, in the ways in which they are divided into households and in the social characteristics of workers and potential workers who are divided by age, by race and by ethnic origins and by their social and cultural experiences. Regions, classes and genders are being drawn into and expelled from the new order, increasingly at a world scale as multi- and transnational capital is less and less impeded by the institutional regulatory framework of nation states. Thus Third World people are at the same time reassembled as the global workforce of multinational capital in the 'world' cities of the west and exploited *in situ* in their own countries, as the workers, sectors and regions of an earlier round of accumulation are rejected. In all these changes the 'flexible' and 'marginal' labour of women plays a central part, albeit spatially and socially differentiated. Women of colour, for example are constructed as a permanent casual labour force doing high tech work for the multi-nationals under peripheral Fordism and similar work or sweated labour in the new territorial production complexes in the post-Fordist west.

It is perhaps not too much to claim that the feminization of the labour market is amongst the most far-reaching of the changes of the last two decades. Geographers interested in economic and social restructuring must place the new gender order of post-Fordism on their research agenda.

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