

SELMA JAMES AND MARIA DALLACOSTA: *Women and the Subversion of the Community*

The oppressed position of women is also an inheritance from a pre-U.S. Europe.

Costa and James argue, with reference to a lot of Marx, that the family structure in Feudal Europe, prior to the emergence of ("modern") Capitalism, was quite different from what the "family" becomes under capitalism.

*Both "the family" and "women" are *historically constructed* and serve a role in the capitalist system.

Costa and James describe the Feudal family as typified by a "unity of unfreedom." That is, the whole family had to work, together, to feed itself and to provide quotas demanded by Feudal Lords. They weren't free, by any means—they were enserfed—but the family had a different form than it came to have later, under Capitalism.

Capitalism needed different things out of the population than Feudalism did. Specifically it needed "wage laborers," and these were mostly male. Capitalism thus begins by splitting the family into oppositional parts.

--The man goes off to the factory.

--The child goes off to school.

--The woman stays in the home.

Now in the history we're looking at, these phenomena of alteration to family structure begin in Europe in the 1600s and 1700s, finally being released and entrenched by the English and then the French Revolutions. In the proto-U.S., to some extent there's an inheritance of that capitalized family... and in another respect there's "uneven development" of that family structure. Where industrialization happened early—New England—the family altered too. But since the "frontier" was expanding in a fashion where families still had to work in a "unity," we're also looking at a development that happens across the history of the development of the U.S. industrial economy. That development takes a decisive turn with the Civil War and finally with the mass migrations of rural folk to cities in the early 1900s. So on the one hand we're looking at how the family was formed *before* the U.S. achieved independence, but on the other we're looking at *how family structure changed in the history of the U.S.* as population was more and more thoroughly integrated into capitalist, industrialized production. This is not even to mention of course the utter violence performed as a matter of course on slave families.

What happens to the Feudal family? It's attacked and broken because it and its traditions, though not "free," nevertheless constituted an obstacle to preferred Capitalistic production and valorization (profit-making).

The man goes off to work.

The kid goes off to school.
The woman stays at home.

Now Costa and James consider it clearly established for example by Marx that wage labor is a form of exploitation. The new "proletariat" (waged workers) works for a wage *because* it can't live and eat otherwise. It receives enough wage to pay for necessities (which means paying other capitalists), and then it's broke again and has to go back to work. What Costa and James want to establish is that children and women are also attacked and exploited by this system—that their exploitation is also *essential* to the system.

SCHOOL, according to this text, begins as an abandonment of the child by the parent, which the parents are compelled to perform. Then the school prepares the child to be a good submissive worker. It disciplines them, it turns them against their working class origins, teaches regular attendance, attention... and it stratifies the class itself by "grading and selection." This institution, which is *supposed* to educate the young for their own good, actually trains them in such a fashion as to break class solidarity, break family ties, and make them easily integratable into the labor force (or to force the females back into the home.) Thus working class kids feel an instinctive (and *correct!*) resistance to "education," and consequently "do worse." That is, they often refuse fully to internalize as their own values and functions the values and functions of a class that oppresses them.

"Capital constructed the female role."

WOMEN meanwhile are isolated. There's a key point here which runs contrary to some "conservative" American values. It's not just "natural" that women play this certain role, in the home, with the young children and the aged needing care. Prior to the advent of capitalism, they didn't. The role of women essentially becomes to be the *support staff* for wage laborers—their husbands. They do everything necessary to return the man to the factory the next day, and the kids to the school the next day. They are disrespected and dismissed, even by the revolutionary tradition, because they are not "wage-earners." But they contribute to the generation of capital through invisible labor in the home—which *never ends*. Women are always on duty. They work ceaselessly to make wage-exploitation possible. Thus "the boss is hidden behind the husband."

Meanwhile their capacity to organize, to develop their skills... is systematically inhibited. Thus a prison-like domestic situation produces examples proving the identity-stereotype that women are "incapable."

Additionally, and to some degree for men as well, key aspects of life are taken away from women. As "reproducers," sexuality as pleasure, expression, intimacy, is removed. So, in the course of this history, they note, is *birth control*.