The most important difference between the sexes, as people say and anthropologists often repeat in their texts, concerns the roles played by men and women in the act of procreation: women, not men, bear and breast-feed children. Women get pregnant, and this is supposed to be their nature, or as others put it (for example, the French anthropologist Maurice Godelier in a recent interview [Godelier 1984]), it is their handicap. “Biology” and “nature” are called upon to explain social differences between the sexes and thus to perpetuate them by giving them a seemingly indisputable basis. The same thing is or has been done in relation to the poor, to blacks, and to Indians. Women’s biology is given as the basis of their subordination. But the convenience of this explanation tends to make it suspicious. Paradoxically, biological data will enable us to reject this natural “explanation” of women’s subordination.

What is really biological or natural in all this? A woman’s capacity to bring ova to maturity inside her body and to bring a pregnancy to term, but not the number of children produced. Between the ovum and the child, between the capacity to procreate and the fact of giving birth, there is the relationship between the sexes. Between the capacity to procreate and procreation itself there is the history of the relations of reproduction, the history of the social organization of reproduction, in large part of reproduction as exploitation.

Reproduction is not a spontaneous manifestation of a woman’s body. A
woman alone cannot move from the ovum to the embryo stage. Yet this is what students of demography and even popular opinion would have us believe when procreation and fertility are presented as matters concerning women alone. And it is an extravagant fertility at that—indeed, at times a sort of flood which society has to get under "control." It is clear that when demographers and other social scientists speak of control of fertility it is not in the general sense of command over fertility or regulation of fertility. This would, in fact, include all kinds of social pressures and interventions on reproduction, pressures tending to maximize procreation to obtain more children, as well as those tending to curb it. Instead, they use the word control in one sense only, that of containing, restraining; of limiting women's particular "handicap" by artificial means, by contraception, abortion, etc. So only one of the ways in which society intervenes on reproduction is accounted for, and fertility that is "unrestricted," that is, fertility of populations not using contraception, abortion, and so on, is presented as "natural fertility" (see, for example, Leridon 1977).

All this is quite astounding. For if there is one thing that is not "natural," something where the social relations between the sexes dominate, it is human reproduction. In this paper I propose to show that this view of fertility and the use of the notion of control as applied to reproduction ("birth control," for example) are merely ideological concepts which completely obliterate the social organization of sexuality and the reality of the relationship between the sexes.

First of all: it is not so simple for conception to occur; or, in other words, to get a woman pregnant is not so easy. There are various reasons for this:

1. The human species, compared to other species, is relatively infertile (Short 1978; May 1978). Obviously a single act of coitus is enough to produce conception, but statistically it is not so. Though a woman can get pregnant after having had intercourse just once, the probability of conception is much lower: "The studies imply a typical 'waiting time' of something like 6-12 months before a menstruating woman becomes pregnant" (May 1978), and this is the average time for young couples who want children and have regular intercourse. Even artificial insemination, which takes place when a woman's probability of conception is highest, needs three to four cycles, counting three inseminations for each cycle. Other species need much less: one single insemination of a cow has a 75 percent chance of success. The low fertility level of the human species seems to be due mainly to the presence of human sperm of genetically abnormal spermatozoa (over 40 percent).²

2. Ovulation, that is, the fertile period, is not clearly indicated by
regular and reliable external signs. Moreover, it varies from woman to woman, and for each woman may vary from month to month. So it is both difficult to detect and to predict accurately. Complex laboratory techniques (used, for example, when it is necessary to extract the mature ovum for the purpose of test-tube fertilization) are now able to determine the exact moment of ovulation, but couples who have used methods like the Ogino-Knaus method to calculate fertile or infertile periods know all too well that they are exposing themselves to a great margin of risk.

3. Last but not least, ovulation does not trigger sexual impulse, as happens in many animal species in which the female has estrus (goes into heat and solicits the male). Sexual impulse in the human female is not hormone-controlled. So not only is our species relatively infertile, but there is no regular, cyclical sexual drive, synchronized with ovulation to assure regular (more or less periodical) conceptions. On the contrary, in human beings (as opposed to most mammals, where it is cyclical or seasonal) sexual desire is intermittent and "situation-dependent" (Hrdy 1981). It can be felt at any moment. So human sexuality (and to some extent that of some primates; see Hrdy 1981) is diffuse, not limited to and by the reproductive cycle (and now modern contraception breaks the sexuality-reproduction link even where it still existed—in coitus during a woman’s fertile period).

Sexuality in human beings is thus potentially separate from reproduction, and this has an extremely important consequence: unhinged to reproduction, human sexuality is extremely flexible, polymorphous, not tied to sex difference, and manifold in its objects and its ways, capable of multiform expression and elaboration. In brief, it is a sexuality not constrained by reproduction and that does not force its practitioners to reproduce.

So biology has not made reproduction that easy. How then can we explain the high birthrate of many European peoples in past centuries and that of many non-European peoples today? Women in France two centuries ago, for example, were caught up in an uninterrupted cycle of pregnancy/breast-feeding/pregnancy from when they first gave birth up to the time of their menopause. In cities where women worked in cotton mills and other textile factories and had to use wet nurses for their babies, natality could be extremely high, to the point where a woman could give birth to a child each year for ten or twelve consecutive years. Naturally, there was a high death rate among both mothers and children. This was true, for example, of women working in factories in Lyon in the mid-eighteenth century (see Garden 1975). How was it possible, and how is it still possible in certain countries today, for women to be subjected to such continuous and dangerous fertility?
The question, in other words, is: If women are not bound to reproduction by hormonal cycles, if they are not forced into reproduction by their biological makeup, and if their sexuality tends to be polymorphous and not directly linked to reproduction, by what means was female sexuality transformed into a sexuality specialized in reproduction? And specifically, how is it assured that ovulation and intercourse occur simultaneously, since sexual impulse is not synchronized with ovulation and ovulation cannot be easily detected? Frequent and regular intercourse is the surest means of making fertilization possible: By hook or by crook, as the saying goes, you'll end up with a hit during the fertile period!

This is precisely what the complex institution of marriage guarantees, even without female sexual impulse. Marriage is, in fact, the social and legal structure which ensures that a woman will be regularly available for coitus ("copulable," as others say; see Beach 1974) or, in other words (where contraception is not available), permanently exposed to the risk of pregnancy. I wish to emphasize that we are talking about a socially organized exposure to risk. Women are not simply exposed to risk, which could allow for a biological or naturalistic interpretation. No: women are exposed to risk by society. Marriage is the answer with which society counters the problem that female sexuality is intermittent and not linked to reproduction.

Marriage is not solely the institution in which reproduction is imposed. Incorporated into the relationship of marriage are also the rules and the material means (such as the sexual division of labor and differential access to resources, land, instruments of production, and capital) by which women are subordinated to such a point that, as the Hausa of Niger put it, "women have only their sex to make a living with" (see Echard in Echard, Journet, and Lallemand 1981). Imbedded in marriage is the ideological face of women's oppression: the ideology of maternity as the only role for women, women's "mission" in life; the powerful ideological and material framework for the oppression of women—women's lack of access to the means of production (Tabet 1982) and the use of women as instruments for labor, reproduction, and sexuality.

Nevertheless, the permanent exposure of women to the risk of pregnancy and the resulting massive fertility of past centuries was not solely a direct product of marriage. Nor was it the result of a spontaneous and reciprocal desire which both partners realize through marriage. Many facts contradict this interpretation: the number of imposed or arranged marriages in which no love or desire bind the two partners together; statistical data which tell us that in countries where unions other than marriage (common law unions or visiting lovers) are common, women in marriages have about
50 percent more children than women living in other types of unions (see data for Martinique, for example, and a discussion of "the role of nuptiality" in Leridon 1977). Explicit and widely diffused rules, backed by sanctions, force women to accept coitus with or without desire. All of this works against the interpretation of a "spontaneous" sexuality, of a sexual drive that would find a legitimate outlet in marriage. In most societies, including Western societies both past and present, social rules and laws allow the husband to use his wife's body at will and recognize, tacitly and often even explicitly, his right to force sexual intercourse upon her. The concept of a "natural" sexuality is therefore negated by the various ways in which each society manages to effectively expose women to the risk of pregnancy.

A complex body of social and psychological pressures—material constraints, physical violence which has been socially acknowledged and codified, psycho-physical oppression exerted directly upon female sexuality—all make it possible for marriage to maintain its function as the cardinal institution for the imposition/control of reproduction.

All these pressures tend to channel female sexuality exclusively towards procreative-heterosexual forms and to suppress any form of autonomous eroticism as dangerous and uncontrollable. This transformation of female sexuality—produced by conditioning, force, physical and psychological mutilation, and the systematic exposure of women to the risk of pregnancy through marriage—represents an extremely complex modification of the biological basis of human sexuality and reproduction. At the same time, it seems to be the ground for the exploitation of the reproductive labor of women. I will give here only a few indications of this complex manipulation of women's sexuality, and I will have to group together ways and means which are in fact separate and might even belong to different societies. Not all societies are as repressive as some I will mention here; some are more tolerant, or at first glance at least appear to impose repression less violently. I know of no society, however, where these repressive elements are totally absent.

The domestication of female sexuality, the domestication of women for the purposes of reproduction, is a slow and steady process and takes place in many different ways, some very specific, others that permeate every moment of life.

Let's look at some of the instances occurring during childhood and/or adolescence as a preparation for marriage or even in the marriage relationship itself. These are the means of psychological conditioning for coitus, including specific pressures, such as the advice given to women to accept intercourse at the husband's bidding whether they themselves want it or not.
For centuries in our societies the Catholic Church's doctrine on "conjugal duty," on marriage as "remedium concupiscentiae," and on sexuality legitimized or even sanctified only through procreation was the basis for girls' preparation for marriage and for good wives' conduct. This education in submission was also based on the representation (still alive and well, alas!) of male sexuality as a potent, irresistible force, whose indispensable outlet is coitus with ejaculation—and women can only accept to be its "target"—and the other idea, less diffused now perhaps, but still not completely dead, of female sexuality as almost nonexistent or, at least in potential wives and mothers, of very minor importance.

In many societies the learning of sexual rules takes place through a kind of institutionalized period of "apprenticeship," as in the case of certain forms of initiation, and in the "youth houses" and other similar institutions common outside Europe, from the ghotul of the Muria in India studied by Elwin (1947) to the manyatta of the Masai or the tsarance of the Hausa in Africa (Echard 1981). In the tsarance, as Nicole Echard says, girls learn to submit to male desire; it is a sort of apprenticeship in "sexual good manners" that prepares them for use as instruments of reproduction.

In these initiation rites or institutionalized sessions where young people practice sexuality in specific groups and places, many elements may vary. Choice of partners can be free or obligatory. The rule can be faithfulness or promiscuity; the age of the partners and the duration of the initiation can also vary. In comparison to the situation of Western adolescents, whose sexuality (even "normal" heterosexuality and autoeroticism) can still be subjected to considerable repression, these forms of initiation may sound like sexual freedom. But for one good reason it is not so: although it is true that in the Hausa tsarance or the Muria ghotul young people are free to have sex, it must be stressed that to have intercourse is also a duty; failure to comply results in severe and often violent sanctions. A Hausa girl, or child rather, cannot refuse a man who asks the head of the tsarance for permission to spend the night with her. These institutions ensure that all girls—and it is generally young girls on the threshold of puberty and rarely fertile—learn coitus; they represent for all a training in obligatory genital heterosexuality. It is the first step on the way to matrimonial, reproductive sexuality.

This training can at times be gradual and nonviolent, it may contain some elements of pleasure, and it may allow the expression, in certain pre-established forms, of adolescent sexuality (although it is mainly the girls who are adolescent; the males are often adults and even married ones at that!). But for all this, we must not forget one basic fact: by this training, sex-
Tabet 9

uality—potentially open and polymorphous—is reduced exclusively to a coital-reproductive expression.

Alongside these forms of psychological education and conditioning, we find more violent forms of “initiation,” and we find the forms of body mutilation such as infibulation and clitoridectomy, which are aimed at impeding any form of sexuality that does not lead to procreation—all those types of shock treatment which are meant to render women docile and to break down their resistance. (The expression break down resistance is not my own; it is taken from ethnological texts that describe these practices.) Such a one is the initiation rite of the Aranda (Australia), in which a girl is seized by a group of men, penetrated with a stone knife which serves to enlarge the vagina, and then exposed to collective copulation. Roheim (1933), ethnologist and psychoanalyst, considers this act necessary, given the “sexual immaturity” of the girl. Prenuptial intercourse and homosexuality play an important part in the life of these girls, as Roheim himself states. But for Roheim this is obviously a kind of uncontrolled (and immature) sexuality and it has to be tamed: “In order to be transferred from an alkharintja [untamed woman] to a nguanga [a subdued woman who submits to the desire of men], from frigidity[?] to object eroticism, from homosexuality to heterosexuality, the female must be subjected to force: raped, conquered, castrated.” (So we have a complete identification of the ethnologist with the men of this society; the sexism of the observer and that of the society under observation go hand in hand—and not only in the case of Roheim but in that of other qualified ethnologists as well.)

In various parts of the world, from Polynesia to Africa, rape is a regular feature of wedding-night ceremonies, and is often acted out in the presence of several men who hold the girl down so that her husband may rape her more comfortably.

The techniques used are often the same as those employed for the taming of wild animals, the Pavlovian technique for the training of dogs: suffering, physical violence, lack of affection, dislocation from all former points of reference. When the animal is given a few crumbs or a little peace, it pulls itself together and is prepared to accept anything at all and be grateful. In any case it knows who is the boss. These methods are systematically used in situations where one wants to force a reluctant woman into prostitution or punish a prostitute for some act of disobedience, and are further developed and “scientifically” refined in political torture. Shock therapy alternates with moments of verbal and psychological conditioning that appeal to the person’s emotions. This is the type of nuptial ceremony that takes
place among the Samburu in East Africa and that Spencer (1965) describes
and compares to Pavlov's experiments as far as psychological effects on the
girl are concerned.

Among the Samburu, girls and youths live a relatively free premarital
period together, but marriage changes everything very suddenly. (We will
follow here Spencer's description of one ceremony.) Within a period of forty-
eight hours the girl is separated from her lover, undergoes a clitoridectomy,
and then under the shock of pain is harangued for hours on end by the elders
of the tribe, who try to persuade her that they are giving her away in marriage
for her own good, because they love her, etc. She then is "made to leave her
mother's hut, to which she had been attached all her life, in a slow process-
ion which after her circumcision looked both painful and exhausting." Terrified,
she is then handed over to the husband, who is usually ten to forty years her
senior and who belongs to the category of men she had always been taught to
fear and respect. The husband, whom she does not yet know, immediately
leads her away. This multiple shock treatment makes it quite clear that, as
Spencer says, "her only way of retaining a place in society and even of
surviving at all was to accept her change in status and transfer to a new social
group as inevitable" (Spencer 1965, p. 248).

The obliteration or stifling of female sexuality is accomplished through
the well-known use of techniques of physical mutilation such as clitoridec-
tomy, which I won't enlarge upon, as it is accomplished by their functional
equivalent, the forms of destruction of sexuality produced by the oppression
and psychological conditioning like those which women—particularly mid-
dle-class women—underwent in the Victorian era. But here too, when psy-
chological and social conditioning has not been a complete success, some
form of physical violence is resorted to. Clitoridectomy was practiced in
Europe and America to cure women of what was considered pathological
and uncontrolled sexuality.

Sexual violence has often been used as punishment for behavior con-
sidered unacceptable. Many societies use group violence as a form of punish-
ment. It can be used to punish girls who are considered too proud or wives
who are not docile; in a number of societies, at the request of the husband,
collective rape tames or breaks down the girl who rejects conjugal relations
and leads the adulterous woman back to marriage.

Physical violence accompanies sexual violence when the latter is used
for punishment or coercion. Beating is often used in marriage to force sexual
relations on the woman, and it is often considered man's right and indeed his
duty to discipline his wife in this manner. This is true for many non-Euro-
pean societies and has been the case for centuries in European society, as we
know from recent work (by Flandrin, for example) and better yet from the experience of many battered wives today.

Finally, conditioning and material and psychological constraints work together to ensure that women both get married and stay married. There is a kind of vicious circle or feedback here: on the one hand women are trapped within marriage to ensure that they will procreate, but on the other hand it is a well-known fact that having children traps and binds a woman and forces her to stay in a marriage.

Thus, through various means, the first and fundamental aspect of the imposition and control of reproduction is realized: women are exposed to the risk of pregnancy.

The next step is vigilance to ensure that all goes according to plan. Once a woman is exposed to the risk of pregnancy, it is necessary to check that all should go well, that there is no possibility of reaction against or protection from pregnancy.

I am, of course, describing an extreme situation, a model, and I am condensing a process which contains many variables and sparse data into one single pattern: I am presenting an abstract model, although it is in fact very close to reality. One must remember, for instance, that not all societies have equal interest in a high birthrate and a big increase in population, and that in most of these societies the resistance offered by women can modify things considerably. In this sense we can consider the history of reproduction from a different point of view: not only in terms of the efforts made to domesticate women into reproduction, but also in terms of the acts of resistance, and of the partially successful efforts of women, against this process. Their resistance is expressed firstly on the sexual level and then in terms of self-defense against the risk of pregnancy, and finally as a kind of total refusal, in attempts to protect their own lives through contraception, abortion, or even infanticide (Cowlishaw 1978 and 1981). Infanticide in many societies is carried out as soon as the fetus is expelled or immediately afterwards; it can be felt as getting rid of an accidental, yet imposed, organic product, not of a being with whom one starts to relate.8

Awareness of women's possible resistance means that every moment of the reproductive process—from coitus to gestation to parturition to breastfeeding—needs to be strictly supervised. Control extends beyond reproduction, for in order to be efficient, it needs to permeate all aspects of a woman's life, the material, but also the mental—the power of ideology as a means of conditioning is well known. In the case of reproduction, men in many societies are aware that procreation is not only a matter of women's desire, but also of their refusal, and that reproduction is mostly an imposition. And the
repression of contraception and abortion becomes necessary to maintain this imposition.

Let us consider this for a moment. We know a great deal about this subject through recent personal experience. We know the risks, the suffering, the deaths we go through to remove from our body something which has been imposed upon us. We know the taboos which existed in the past and still widely exist today concerning contraceptives, and how fragile and vulnerable to attack all our conquests are (consider the attack on abortion in the United States and elsewhere). And we are aware of another very shameful fact which is not given sufficient attention: Despite all the research in progress (which usually ends up finding new methods of contraception to be used by women, almost never by men), it is still permissible to make a woman pregnant when she has not decided to have a child. The fight for abortion— for the right not to die—has been absolutely necessary, but it has bypassed one important step, that of questioning the right to expose a woman to the risk of an unwanted pregnancy. A woman's right to choose afterwards, the a posteriori remedy, is not sufficient. Making a woman pregnant when she has no desire to be so is an exercise of violence against a person and should be considered as such. The fact that it is common and tolerated tells us something about the obligation to reproduce in our society.

I have so far been using ethnological and historical documentation to support my thesis that reproduction is socially organized and imposed. This could lead us to suppose that the imposition of reproduction does not concern us, that all this concerns the past or other societies and has nothing to do with us. It is not so. What I have just been saying about abortion shows it clearly. Forced reproduction is still our problem. Not in the sense that women are forced to have ten children, but our society has not given up trying to mold female (and male) sexuality into a genital-reproductive pattern and to use marriage, although this institution is certainly disintegrating, as the framework for the control of reproduction. Nor has society abolished the economic disparity between the sexes that makes it difficult for women to live alone and makes marriage a convenient choice.

In this sense, maternity, although we live in the "era of contraception," is not a free choice, even though it may be a choice on the individual level. Our society manages to keep women available for reproduction (and, in general, for male domination).

The obligation to reproduce remains, although it has been quantitatively reduced. It is inculcated into girls; it is part of their role, of their socialization; it is what society expects of them and what they expect of
themselves. Who has not felt the pressure put upon young women in the first years of marriage? The look, the gesture which asks, "Well, nothing yet?"

Nowadays women have two or three children, but in the future they may be asked for more. Once the mold is made and women are domesticated to reproduction, the birthrate can be adjusted if necessary. Through further pressure you can loosen or tighten control on abortion, contraceptives, youth sexuality, etc. Women or couples can be asked to increase or decrease the number of births. European societies in this century and particularly in the last forty years have shown that this is quite possible. The basic structures for imposing reproduction thus allow a considerable margin for exerting political or state control over the birthrate.

So the imposition of reproduction and the control exercised over the reproductive process really concern us. Certain societies, studied by ethnologists, have accepted a wide margin of decision on the part of women about abortion, while others have imposed abortion upon women when a pregnancy was considered illegitimate and was not desired by the girl's father or the woman's husband. "Respect for life" is not the issue, either in those societies or in ours; rather it is general control over women. Here again things differ considerably from one society to another.

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Control over the reproductive process is all-encompassing; it extends even to the moment of delivery. Here again the issue is general control; it is important for patriarchy to define and order every moment of women's experience. But there often is also the suspicion that women might want to rid themselves of the product of gestation. Women are therefore given precise rules to follow for delivery, and although for centuries in Europe, as in many societies, only women were admitted to assist at childbirth, even this moment can be subjected to direct or indirect male surveillance.

In England in the seventeenth century, for example, a woman who was giving birth would call upon her neighbors to be present, so that if the child was born dead or died shortly after delivery, they could testify that it was not a case of infanticide. This shows how strong the suspicion of infanticide was. In other societies, a woman who is suspected of not wanting a child can actually be whipped during delivery, in order to prevent her from getting into positions that might result in injury to the child. But women don't even need to be recalcitrant in order to be treated badly—just think of the treatment (verbal abuse and slaps) that women in our countries have often received in hospital obstetrical wards.
In certain societies where only the presence of women is allowed at childbirth, the husband's relatives ensure male control. Among the Chagga of East Africa, for example, women undergo a form of clitoridectomy (with removal of the labia majora) resulting in loss of all elasticity in their tissues, making the act of giving birth dangerous and particularly painful (Raum 1940). But the woman in childbirth is not allowed to cry out because her husband, who is listening outside, might come to hate her, and, as every girl is taught before marriage, according to testimony collected by Gutmann (1932): "We are sheep... My granddaughter, though you suffer such severe pain as to make you think that you are dying, control yourself and go ngkr like the sheep. A sheep doesn't scream when the knife is being stuck in. It only goes ngkr until it dies."

Then the last step, breast-feeding.

Domestication to reproduction is irreversibly engraved upon the body. The taming of a Mossi female child (of the Upper Volta), as described by Lallemand (1977), consists of a crescendo of violence over a period of time, and is felt as such by the victim. Between the ages of one and ten she is subjected to excision (removal of the clitoris and labia minora); then she is forcibly married to a man whom she does not choose and with whom she initially submits to sexual relations with intense disgust. She feels rage and despair at her first pregnancy: "She weeps because she is no longer a girl"; "She feels shame, pain, and, they say, anger at having been tricked." Then comes childbirth, and she has to keep absolutely silent, although she feels "the desire to throw the child away and kill the man with a gun." Immediately afterwards she undergoes an extremely painful operation which is meant to make her a better milk producer: the peebo (milking), whereby the mammary glands are squashed by pulling the breasts downward for a week with an instrument made for carding cotton. The girl's breasts become "bags": they droop and the girl is immediately recognizable as a reproducer.

Finally, also breast-feeding, the last moment of the reproductive cycle, can become the object of control. Its modality and duration can be decided upon according to the interests of the child, but also according to the decision of the head of the family, who might decide that it is time for another pregnancy. Just as calves are taken away from cows or milking is reduced when it is decided that the animal should go into heat, so a woman can be ordered to stop feeding her child when it is decided that she should become pregnant again (see Roscoe 1923). (See below for the physiological mechanism for inhibiting ovulation and the consequent possibility of conception during breast-feeding.)

Through the control and transformation of female sexuality, the female
body is remodeled into an organism which specializes in reproduction—a species, women, is produced as reproductive machines. Various operations are then carried out on those machines to ensure that the quality of the product and the rhythm of production remain as required and that production takes place when decided upon. These more technical operations do not have the scope of the institutional interventions discussed above, the comprehensive operations designed to limit sexuality to genital-reproductive forms only and the organization of women's exposure to the risk of pregnancy, which is made concrete in marriage.

These technical operations that I shall discuss now are more specific and limited, but they are of considerable interest, for they show how reproduction is in effect manipulated in a technical manner, precisely as in other types of production or other labor processes. They show how reproduction can become a productive process, how it can be programmed as machines are programmed, how operations are put into effect to improve quality, just as in other lines of production. Improving output is an important aspect of technical processes. To decide the quality and the quantity of the reproduction desired and when it is desired, and then carry out the relevant operations, this means organizing reproduction just like any other production. Let us examine some of these interventions.

1. Many human societies including our own have been interested in determining fertile periods in order to ensure that pregnancy takes place when and as required. Much reflection and observation and also empirical experimentation have taken place to this purpose. The nineteenth century was still very unclear about fertility and believed that a woman was fertile during her menstrual period. Many non-European societies shared the same idea. The Chagga, for example (see Gutmann 1932), attempted to establish the days of fertility empirically: they taught the new husband to try out each day in the month of his wife's menstrual cycle systematically until she became pregnant, and then to remember the date on which she was fertile in order to use it again when a new pregnancy was desired.

Locating the time at which a woman can become pregnant can lead ultimately to coitus itself becoming a technical act of insemination, just as now happens with "artificial" insemination. The unreliability of female fertility, one of the biological difficulties which hamper the control of reproduction, is thus overcome. A man who wants a child can carry out an act of insemination, that is, a precise and economical operation which need not take place repeatedly but only at the opportune moment: a better technology of coitus itself, a more efficient management of reproduction.

2. Let us now consider another element: the product of the reproductive
machine. We know from many societies studied by ethnologists—the most famous in this sense being the Eskimos—and from European and oriental societies, past and present, that many societies have a preference: the good product is a male. The lower-quality product, the female, tends to be eliminated either at birth or shortly afterwards through neglect, lack of food, etc. The selective infanticide of females was also known in Europe, for example in central Italy, and was remembered among peasants as a practice up to a few years ago. If the father so decided, the child's umbilical cord was simply not tied (Banotti 1971).

Nowadays when sex can be predetermined, it is easy for female fetuses to be aborted, and this takes place in some countries. Advanced technology simply makes the operation more economical. The rejected product does not have to go through to the end of the assembly line: production is interrupted.

3. The infanticide of female children does not simply mean getting rid of an unwanted product. It also means interrupting the reproductive process and cutting down on time so that the machine can be put back into operation as soon as possible in order to produce a better product. The result obtained from infanticide is an intensification of the work of reproduction as far as gestation is concerned: within the time span needed for one gestation and consequent breast-feeding period, a woman can have two gestations and begin breast-feeding the second child if it is a male child, or, as can happen in some Eskimo cases of repeated infanticide (in one famous case the father had nine girl children killed, and the wife produced another ten boys and one girl who was allowed to live), even begin a third gestation (Balikci 1967).

On the biological level the reproductive process is in fact a single unit which goes from conception to breast-feeding, up to the weaning stage when the infant organism is capable of survival without help from the maternal organism. The maternal organism, when it is involved with full-time breast-feeding on demand and the child is solely on a milk diet without being given any other form of sustenance, tends to have a long period during which ovulation does not take place; that is, conception becomes impossible. This period is interrupted (or shortened) if the child dies, or if for other reasons breast-feeding is interrupted or never gets started (as when the baby is given to a wet nurse or is bottle-fed). Where there are no suitable alternatives to breast-feeding, as has been the case for most of human history, the fact that a woman is generally unable to conceive even if she has intercourse safeguards the child, which would die if weaned too early. This anovulatory period, which is linked to certain hormonal mechanisms whereby lactation tends to
inhibit ovulation, lasts quite a long time (this “postpartum sterility,” as it is called, has an average length of ten to twelve months; see Leridon 1977).

Breast-feeding, as Short (1977) says, becomes a factor limiting reproduction. If, as has happened in the past and still does happen in certain ethnologically documented societies, breast-feeding lasts two or three years, pregnancies cannot be very frequent.

Breast-feeding is therefore the weak line in the chain of reproduction, a link which can easily be broken if a social class or group wishes to increase the output of the reproductive machine. This can be done through a precise operation carried out on the reproductive process, by dividing it into two phases or separate labor units, with different people being assigned to each phase. The first is the conception-gestation-parturition phase, and the second the breast-feeding phase. The first phase, production (intrabody), is carried out by women of the dominant group or superior social class; wet nurses, whether paid laborers or slaves, provide for the nutrition of the child when it has been expelled from the mother's body. Let us remember that the physiological immaturity of the newborn and its dependence on the maternal body is such that doctors speak of an exterogestate foetus (Jelliffe and Jeliffe 1978). Wet nurses therefore produce woman's milk in order to complete the reproductive process.

Thus we have a taylorization of reproductive labor, a specialization of the reproductive machine—in short, an assembly line. The higher social group is able to command (and exploit) the labor and reproductive work of the two groups of women. Using women of the lower classes for milk production, it can thus free its own women from the “servile” job of breast-feeding. In turn, as those women don’t breast-feed, it is possible to reduce the intervals between their successive gestations; they can thereby produce more children, for the direct benefit of the masters and husbands. The modern case of “gestators” or “surrogate mothers,” women who specifically “rent their womb” for gestation (which I will discuss further on), represents yet another phase of the decomposition of procreation into separate work units.

The kind of operation we have just seen (reproductive work divided between two women) is only a specific manipulation of one point of the reproductive process: the link between pregnancy and lactation. Even so it is important in my discussion of reproduction, not as a natural but as a socially organized process, a social manipulation which tends to make reproduction a technically (and politically) controlled process.

Nowadays, we can see how this line of ever more precise technical
operations with regard to reproduction has developed in a number of important ways.

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The production of human beings, like other production processes, is part of that technical evolution which characterizes the human species and which tends to extend the capacities of the human body outside the body itself. From activities carried out by means of the body alone, a long process, begun in prehistoric times, has led to the development of tools that are not only a substitute for the movements and faculties of the body but also an extension and strengthening of them. This process concerns first the most simple gestures and bodily instruments, such as teeth, nails, and hands, then muscular force and energy, and finally the more complex faculties. We move from simple tools such as the knife or the hammer to machines that incorporate gestures and finally energy, to complex machinery that "externalizes" the work of the human brain. Reproduction too is affected by this process which obviously transforms the conditions of manual and intellectual labor. But by stages.

The first stage concerns the breast and the production of milk. The activity of the mammary glands has been partly or wholly replaced by the use of cow's milk in some agro-pastoralist societies, or the use of a wholly artificial product in modern society. This is, in Leroi-Gourhan's (1965) terms, a "liberation" or substitution of a capacity of the body, and with this a physical transformation of the species has begun.

After breast-feeding, other parts of the reproductive sequence have become part of a long and increasingly complex program which is not yet completed and which tends to carry outside the human body the whole production of the human species: in vitro fertilization (the "test-tube baby"), research on the possibility of an artificial placenta and on the creation of an environment that can harbor ever less mature fetuses. The replacement of the maternal organism for part of the period of gestation has already been realized, if not on the level of industrial production, at least as a feasible alternative in an emergency. Research in the field of genetic engineering is vast and complex and impossible to analyze here. Let us not forget the political and economic applications of this research, however.10

The manifold and long-lasting trends towards the political and technical control of reproduction would thus have their realization with the production of life outside the human body. The production of human beings—no longer carried out by a human reproductive machine whose control is at best difficult and a matter of conflict—would be, at least the-
oretically, totally regulated and controllable (with a reduction also of the biological element of chance).

But this might also mean an almost unimaginable transformation of human life. It is difficult to predict the far-reaching effects that “externalized” reproduction could have. First of all, in the relations between the sexes, which would probably be radically changed, men and women would stand in the same material, physical relation to procreation, both sexes contributing only genetic material to it. But the imposition of reproduction has also meant constantly molding sexuality into the heterosexual reproductive pattern and largely blocking and repressing any other expression. A radical change in the structure of reproduction could then reopen the road to an expansion of the basically free and flexible character of sexuality.

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Reproduction is an integral part of the process of technical evolution, of the “liberating” of human capacities which has modified so many other activities considered as work. And today we can see it as work because of the transformation of the relations of reproduction, which until now had partially hidden its true character.

The whole structure of reproductive relations seems to be changing. The role of marriage as the locus of procreation (with its ideological counterparts, the definition of procreation as “natural activity” for a woman, her “mission” or “function” in life) is now slowly breaking down. The capacity to procreate is now seen directly as a capacity for work, as labor on a time contract that has to be remunerated. Not only breast-feeding but the central phase of the reproductive cycle—pregnancy and parturition—is performed for pay: it is the limited but expanding phenomenon of “womb-renting,” which is creating news and controversy.

We are not interested here in the technical aspects of “womb-renting” (artificial insemination, the implantation of embryos, etc.). We are more interested in the relationship between the gestating woman and the donor involved. The fact that insemination is carried out via a syringe rather than via a penis means a) that the process is under greater technical control, and b) that one specific aspect of the reproductive process is eliminated—bodily contact with the partner. So here the “partner” is definitely the employer; all ambiguity is eliminated. The work relationship is made more “antiseptic,” there is nothing “sexual” in it; quite evidently it concerns just a kind of labor to be done (the same is true where an embryo-implant is concerned).

The production of babies thus becomes part of the wage-labor market, the market for the selling of labor power, that is, the selling of a capacity of
the human body for a specific period of time—in this case, the time of a pregnancy—and not forever, as happens in slavery or serfdom or marriage. Time is the element that distinguishes the lending out of a capacity of which one remains the owner, from giving it up completely: “For if he were to sell it rump and stump, once for all, he would be selling himself, converting himself from a free man into a slave, from an owner of a commodity into a commodity” (Marx 1967, p. 168).

So gestation enters the supply-and-demand market as paid labor on a time contract, just as for centuries the work of women who produce milk for others, the wet nurses, has been wage labor.

On the level of relations of reproduction and on the level of technology, “womb-renting” continues the process of decomposing procreation into work units or phases, such as we have already observed in the separation between gestation and breast-feeding. With the renting out of the womb and the implantation of embryos, the “ova producer” and the “incubator” become two separate and distinct persons. Pregnancy becomes separated from conception or “fertilization”: the genetic program of the fetus no longer depends on the woman who goes through the pregnancy and the act of giving birth and who is paid to complete the development of a preformed embryo.

“Womb-renting” seems to be a disquieting phenomenon, if we consider the reactions it has provoked in legal and religious circles. Is it also disquieting because of the light it throws on the normal relations of reproduction? Because it introduces the idea of reproduction as work? In any case, it should pose another kind of question: Can it lead to the exploitation, for the purpose of increasing the labor force in industrialized countries, of the poorer women in the Third World or in Western countries? Could this exploitation be linked to a project of selection on a large scale according to “race” or “quality,” as happens in cattle raising (selected embryos obtained from high-quality cattle are introduced into the uterus of ordinary cows)? Dreams of “racial” selection are not new to human history; we need only recall the experiment of the Lebensborn, the Nazi centers for the reproduction of the “Aryan race” (Hillel 1975). In this case, as in many other aspects of the new reproductive technologies, the basic problem is: Who is in charge of the research and its applications? For the benefit of whom are they being carried out, or against whom? Who is being subjected to them? These questions are becoming more and more the focus of women’s attention (see Guillaumin in Jacquard and Guillaumin 1982).

So far, however, the renting of wombs is taking place on a small scale and is not part of political, economic, or commercial programs for the mass production of human products. It is just a case of clear and direct use of
woman's body as an instrument of reproduction. As such it becomes part of
the list of cases of "surrogate mother" use. The use of "surrogate mothers"
was frequent, for instance, in many forms of slavery (Patterson 1982). The
Bible offers an example of this: the story of Sarah and her slave Agar (Gen-
sis 16). We find other examples among African tribes, as in the use of "buying
a womb" among the Lovedu (Krige and Krige 1943; Krige 1974). The "sepa-
rate" use of the uterus, based on payment or slavery (in other words, not as
an integral part of a marriage relationship) is analogous to the "separate" use
of the breast of wet nurses who are slaves or receive wages for their services.11

These are two specific aspects of the productive specialization to which
the female body is submitted, of the way it is sectionally exploited. It is worth
noting that in our society a phase of the reproductive process, either gesta-
tion or breast-feeding, comes into the category of work, is thought of as work,
only when it is not carried out within a marriage relationship. This is some-
what similar to what has happened, as we know, with "domestic work." This
kind of activity was until recently—that is, before feminist analysis—not
regarded as work if it was carried out by wives, but was considered as labor
(and therefore paid) if it was carried out on behalf of someone other than
one's own husband or children.

The explicit use of the female body as an instrument of reproduction
can be seen today in large-scale operations that particularly but not ex-
clusively concern the Third World; it is unmistakably clear in the discourse
of economists. The milk-producing capacity of women is the focus of this
specific orientation towards resource and labor exploitation.

Economists make numerous precise estimates. The production of
women's milk is calculated in tons, both for individual countries and on an
international scale. It is calculated, for example, that "at the present day the
yield of human milk in developing countries is about one-quarter of that
produced by cows," that is, women produce "approximately 18 million tons
of milk as opposed to 66 million tons of cow's milk" (Jelliffe and Jelliffe
1978, pp. 134, 295). Economists talk about potential production and unre-
alized production, and because the production of women's milk is on the
decline, they worry about the losses and calculate them in millions of dol-
ars. A few examples. In Kenya, "a few years ago the estimated 11.5 million
dollars annual loss in breast-milk is equivalent to two-thirds of the national
health budget." In the Philippines, "31 percent fewer mothers nursed their
babies in 1968 than a decade earlier. The $33 million waste for that year is
nearly double the $17 million loss in 1958" (Jelliffe and Jelliffe 1978, p. 294).
Still others speculate on what would happen if x numbers of women stop
breast-feeding. We are told that India would need an additional herd of 114
million lactating cows if all the infants were to have powdered milk instead of
being breast-fed, or that if even only 20 percent of the 27 million mothers
and "potential producers of milk" living in the urban areas of developing
countries do not breast-feed, "the loss to the developing world is $365 mil-
lion," and so on. The production costs of women's milk are carefully calcu-
lated, and it is shown that it is cheaper to produce than cow's milk and infant
formula based on it. In fact, "double cycle" animal products like cow's milk
are rising in cost, but no such thing happens with women's milk, though it
too "forms part of the usual earth-animal food chain, with the mother acting
as the last link in the chain, as biological transmuter." The rise in price of
cow's milk is due to the increasing costs of cattle feed and of agricultural and
industrial labor. "By contrast, there has been no rise in labour or production
costs in the maternal processing plant, although the price of the extra foods
needed by the lactating woman has increased with inflation" (Jelliffe and
Jelliffe 1978, p. 136; emphasis added). This economic miracle is easy to
accomplish! First, mothers can take care of themselves and of their families
(clean their own stables), and their work is not paid, so no problem; they
won't ask for a raise in salary. But second, "it is cheaper to feed a lactating
mother than to use formula," especially since the extra food she needs
doesn't cost much: mothers don't have to be fed "overly expensive foods,
particularly animal products? No, you can feed them with "appropriate
mixtures" of the less costly local foods, "particularly using the 'principle of
multi-mixes' based on cereal-legume mixture." And, as for those in "the well-
to-do circumstances," they can just have "larger helpings of usual food
which may already be available and wasted" (Ibid., pp. 134-35)! Why not exploit this milk more "rationally," since it is so cheap to
produce? This is what has been proposed in India. In India, cattle produce
"only 250 litres of milk per year, whereas it has been estimated that poorly
nourished Indian women can secrete almost 200 litres in the first year of
lactation." Why then not milk women mechanically (by means of the breast
pump)? Their milk could then be sold "pasteurized or even spray-dried." The
women could be paid partly in food (multi-mixes?) and partly in money.
There is nothing scandalous about this idea, we are told, as it "would, in fact,
only institutionalize and mechanize the age-old wet-nursing principle, and
conform to the concept of using human resources as a national asset,
especially in highly populated, less industrialized circumstances" (Jelliffe and
Jelliffe 1978, pp. 140-41; emphasis added)!! QED, this human milch cow is economically very profitable indeed.
Clearly we are far from "externalizing" reproduction here, and it would
seem that we might have to go through phases and forms of exploitation of women's reproductive work that are as bad or worse than those of the past.

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I would now like to examine some specific aspects of the reproductive process as labor.

1. Starting with an embryo which is born from the fusion of male and female gametes, the maternal organism carries out an activity that results in a product, a new human being. But whereas the genetic contribution made to this new human being is equal on the part of man and of woman, in the succeeding phases the role of the two sexes is totally diversified, so much so in fact that the work of reproduction can be considered exclusively female work: the development of the embryo depends entirely on the maternal organism. The female body functions as a highly efficient biochemical machine from the moment the embryo starts to develop until the baby is weaned.

a) Reproductive activity, like all other bodily activities, requires an expenditure of energy which can be calculated for both gestation and breastfeeding. Specialists' calculations produce a wide variety of results, but one evaluation of the expenditure of energy necessary through pregnancy and the first three months of breastfeeding sets the figure at 144,000 kilocalories (Frisch and McArthur 1974). Breast-feeding requires an estimated extra 1,000 kilocalories a day; the expenditure of energy in one day of breastfeeding is equal to that required for a nine-hour walk or two hours of woodcutting. Pregnancy alone requires an expenditure of energy equal to one month (160 hours) of woodcutting. But in most known societies women continue to carry out the subsistence work that has been assigned to them. The cost of this for women is exhaustion, premature aging, and excess mortality. On the other hand, breastfeeding cannot be seen as merely an internal function of the maternal organism. It also requires a very considerable expenditure of time, which is rarely calculated when the division of the work load between the sexes is studied. When feeding takes place on demand, it may mean seven to eight feedings a day, each lasting fifteen to thirty minutes on the average, as shown by one study carried out in the Philippines (Jelliffe and Jelliffe 1978, p. 138). This a conservative estimate. In some cultures babies take the breast thirteen to fifteen times a day.

b) Reproductive activity, unlike other bodily functions such as breathing, digestion, etc., is not essential to the life of the organism which
bears the child. The end product is not a residue of other metabolic processes, but is a product which is built and programmed for its own sake.

Let us recall here a banal but important fact: the product of reproduction, the child, is not a product for self-consumption, no matter what illusions the parents may have. On the one hand it exists for itself, and on the other it immediately becomes a social product.

c) On the individual level procreation is not necessary: it is not indispensable for the reproducing organism itself, as we have seen, nor is it imposed through hormonal conditioning. So reproductive choice is possible: individuals can decide to begin a pregnancy, to carry it through, or to refuse it (the possibility of realizing these decisions is also related to the technological level).

Human reproduction cannot therefore be seen as a natural, spontaneous happening. From the simplest care taken during pregnancy or delivery to the complex mechanisms for imposing and controlling reproduction, which we have been examining, reproduction in human beings is the object of decisions and planning; it is a project.

d) Procreation, which is a natural activity in other species, becomes in the human species a social activity or, more precisely, work.

2. Like any other work, reproduction can be performed freely, or it can be the object of exploitation.

Just a moment. The word work, which I have been using freely for several pages, might provoke some reaction. We generally consider having children a choice, a desire, an act of love, or at the very worst an accident, but not work. The word work immediately evokes what work is and has been for most people throughout history: an indispensable activity which is imposed upon us, which is tiring and exploitative, which is constrictive and alienating and causes suffering. For many people, intellectual and especially creative or artistic work is not considered work at all. But the opposition between pleasure (or interest or creativity or what have you) and work does not seem pertinent to me here in order to define the notion of work theoretically.

Another element comes into the problem of considering reproduction as work. Reproduction and taking care of children, bringing them up, lie at the heart of the "role" of women in the family. This involves the whole ideological framework—affection, instinct, mission, nature—that has surrounded domestic activity, domestic work (which is not considered work), and that has served to lock women, whether or not they work outside the home, in this "function." I am not denying that a very complex mixture of elements comes into play in reproduction: affection, interest in children, joy
in watching their development, etc. This does not mean that we cannot consider it work.

I am maintaining that reproduction is work, but *at the same time* it is not necessarily alienating work. The relations of reproduction are not invariable, but rather, like the relations of production, they are social and historical. In the course of history and in different societies these relations have had very different forms and these forms have yet to be analyzed.

Like any other work, then, reproductive work can be free or exploited. Exploitation takes place not only through the imposition of reproduction but also:

a) By not allowing the person who is carrying out the gestation the following labor rights: choice of partner; choice of work tempo (when to have children), of the rhythm or cadence of work (distance between births); decisions concerning the quantity of work (number of children).

b) By imposing the type of quality of the product (for example, the sex of the child as exemplified in the selective infanticide of female children or the rejection of female children; the legitimacy of the product by the imposition of sanctions on illegitimate mothers or children; "racial" or social quality obtained by only permitting union of certain groups or classes).

c) By depriving the reproducer of the product itself (consider the power, which varies from one society to another, that fathers have over their children).

d) By depriving her, in symbolic terms, of her procreative capacity and her reproductive work (as when woman is thought of as simply a container in which man deposits sperm from which the child is born, reproductive work is not recognized as work, much less as work that is a collective concern—just consider how controversial maternity leave still is among us).

3. The exteriorization of reproduction is still not complete. No reproductive machine which is totally dissociated from the human body has yet been invented. The human body itself is the productive machine, and for almost the whole process that body is the female body.

In reproduction the person and the instrument of reproduction are fused, with the fundamental consequence that the *appropriation of the power of reproduction*, of the reproductive machine or instrument, *takes place through the direct and total appropriation of the reproductive person herself* (or at least it has historically happened this way). Furthermore, strict physical proximity is implied in the relation between the partners, and complete physical union between the reproducing woman and the child. Imposing reproduction directly concerns the physical integrity and consequently the very identity of the woman (Petchesky 1980). "It is literally an invasion" of
her corporeal territory, not only in regard to the act which imposes pregnancy, but also because of the long and difficult symbiosis with the fetus that pregnancy involves, as many women who have gone through unwanted pregnancies well know (Willis 1983).

Women's right to their own physical integrity has indeed been one of the basic claims in the struggle for abortion. When reproduction is imposed, the person undergoing the pregnancy "faces a terrifying loss of control over her fate" (Willis 1983)—in brief, she is alienated from herself. This casts a particular light on the violence of that "most direct material appropriation" of women which is realized in marriage (Guillaumin 1981, 1984) and on marriage as the locus of forced reproduction.

And it is this well-preserved structure of reproduction, consolidated through a very long history, which now seems to be in deep crisis in the industrialized Western countries. A transformation of the relations of reproduction appears to be taking place. We have seen signs of this in the work relations of so-called "womb-renting," where female procreative capacity is directly posited as work capacity, where gestation and parturition are seen as payable work.

The most important aspect, however, of the transformation of the relations of reproduction taking place at present, in terms of significance and importance, seems to be the falling apart of the institution of marriage. This is a mass phenomenon. More and more women are escaping from this kind of personal dependence. They either have children alone as a matter of personal choice, or, as most frequently happens, after a divorce or separation they find themselves carrying the burden of reproductive labor alone, in particular the raising of the children. In the United States the number of divorced women with children tripled between 1970 and 1981, from 956,000 to approximately 2,700,000. It is estimated that 13 million children at present live with the mother alone—almost one child in five (Arendell 1984; English 1983).

We have seen that as far as technical evolution is concerned reproduction is being "externalized," as the other bodily faculties, from the hand to the brain, have been over the course of centuries. Should we then think of an analogy between production and reproduction also in terms of the evolution of social relations? Have they been following a somewhat parallel course (at least in Western society)? As far as the relations of reproduction are concerned, we seem to be in a complex and contradictory situation at the moment, rather like that which existed in Europe when the ties of serfdom were dissolved and the serf was replaced by the free modern worker who belongs to himself and sells only his labor power. Are we therefore about to
face, are we already facing, a great structural transformation in the relations between the sexes?

There are two different but important analogies between these two situations:

1. In the case of the worker, the dissolution of the bond of serfdom and the selling of the labor power are somehow linked together. In the case of the relations of reproduction, however, there seem to be two distinct phenomena: on the one hand, a minimal number of women who sell their reproductive capacity as we have seen in a “womb-renting” relationship; on the other hand, millions of women who are escaping the bond of private appropriation, marriage (Guillaumin 1981, 1984), and are free to dispose of their own person but do not enter into paid relations of reproduction. They choose, like men, to enter into various types of paid labor.

2. The life and work of these women takes place in a society dominated by males, where they have to endure profound inequality on all levels, especially the economic level, from job access to inferior salaries. Few women have access to regular, well-paid jobs. The extra work they do, which is of benefit to the whole community—their reproductive work—is not shared on an individual level by the fathers themselves, nor is its cost (and the cost of children) adequately taken on by society. Fathers do not even contribute regularly to the maintenance of the children, let alone pay for or share the mother's work to rear them. In the United States, for example, only 20 percent of fathers pay the (usually inadequate) child-support payments they have been required to pay by law; 65 percent pay nothing at all (Arendell 1984; Vandelac 1985). The economic prospects of these women are very dim. In the United States, in the first year after divorce, a woman's socioeconomic level goes down by 73 percent, a man's increases by 42 percent (Arendell 1984). The number of women at or below the poverty level keeps increasing. Official statistics show that in 1981 at least one-third of single women with children were below this level, and that half the families at or below the poverty level consisted of single women with children. The transformation of the relations of reproduction does not therefore imply the end of male domination any more than the transformation of feudal relations meant the end of class domination. The present situation offers another analogy with the formation of the working class: the cost of the structural transformation of society, the cost of liberation from relations of personal dependence, is paid for by women alone—in exhaustion, insecurity, poverty. Exploitation has changed but it is if anything worse than before.

The cost of the reproduction of society is falling more and more on the shoulders of women, a proletariat in the complete sense of the word. If this
trend continues, in the United States, for example, by the year 2000 the poor will consist essentially of women and their children. Will the class character of the relations between men and women then, at last, become completely evident?

Translated by Christine Hubert

Notes

1. See, in particular, Lowe and Hubbard 1983 and Bleier 1984 for a critique of the use of biology as a means for justifying inequality between the sexes and the oppression of women.
2. Such spermatozoa are not able to unite with the ovum, or, if the fusion occurs, the resulting embryo is spontaneously ejected (Short 1977).
3. It could happen that women never saw their menses again from the time of their first pregnancy to the end of their reproductive period (menopause), as they passed directly from postpartum amenorrhea, prolonged by breast-feeding, to another conception.
4. Data regarding the Hutterites, an Anabaptist sect in North America where fertile married women produced an average of twelve children, are considered the height of "natural fertility" by demographers. On the contrary, I would tend to see it as the height of social fertility, or the sum of a complex series of social operations carried out on the biological structure of social sexuality, because the high birthrate of the Hutterites, like that of so many populations in the past and the present, presupposes precisely a social conditioning and control of those characteristics of human sexuality that we have already encountered.
5. The problem that we find here is not only that of sexual mutilation and the imposition of pain, which are so frequent in initiation ceremonies (see Mathieu 1985 for the difference in the meaning of courage and pain as expected from men and from women). A further point needs to be emphasized: in the Australian case described above by Roheim, as it seems to me, in most other cases, it is the men who impose the violence, directly or indirectly, on the women. And it is again the men (and not groups of women, as might be if you want to imagine a symmetrical situation) who are responsible for the ritual operations carried out on young males, such as subincision and other forms of physical violence (a clear and fully described example of this from a New Guinea society is the imposition of fellatio on Baruya boys; see Godelier 1982).
6. Among the many examples available, see Firth 1963 for the Tikopia and Levine 1959 for the Gusii.
7. Fran Hosken has documented the wide diffusion of the "traditional" forms (clitoridectomy and infibulation) of female genital mutilation (Hosken 1979). See Les mutilations du sexe des femmes aujourd'hui en France (Paris: Tercie, 1984) for information about the present-day occurrence of these practices among immigrant women in Western countries. See Rubin 1984 and Ehrenreich and English 1978 for information on "therapeutic" clitoridectomy as a remedy for masturbation or over-active sexuality in female children in America.
8. It is interesting to note that girls accused of infanticide in Italy in the last century (in Arezzo, to be precise) described their act as the elimination of a natural product, such as a clot of blood for example, or in any case something with which one has only a biological, involuntary relationship (personal communication from Annarita Buttafuoco). See also Hoffer and Hull 1981 for infanticide in England and New England, 1558-1803.
10. There is an increasingly urgent need and demand for precise and up-to-date information on the development of genetic engineering and the manipulation of reproduction. Among the recent books on the subject see Arditti, Duelli Klein, and Minden 1984.
11. Astuti (1985) has made an in-depth theoretical analysis of "uterus substitution" among the Swazi: there the *inhlanti*, the wife chosen to "place a child in the womb" of another wife who is sterile, is not recognized as the social mother of the child she has borne. The modern "breeders" industry and its particular form of exploitation are described by Ince (1985). Nevertheless, I would hesitate to define this form of reproductive exploitation as prostitution, as Ince does (and as the Catholic Church, which defines love and marriage as the only moral basis for procreation, has recently done). It seems to me a more useful analytical strategy to separate sexuality and reproduction, or, if we wish, sexual and reproductive usage or exploitation, though they are frequently linked, as in marriage for example, but not usually in prostitution (for a theoretical reconsideration of prostitution and other forms of relations based on economic exchange, see Tabet 1986).

12. See Jelliffe and Jelliffe 1978 for the studies these examples are taken from and for more documentation.


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