

GENDER AND CLASS REVISITED: OR, THE POVERTY OF 'PATRIARCHY'

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Introduction: 'Patriarchy', Gender Relations and Theory.

On the face of it is curious that at a time when structures and causes seem to have been replaced by fragments and contingencies, the 'grand narrative' of 'patriarchy' seems to have survived. While other 'totalizing' projects such as Enlightenment progress, Weberian bureaucracy and Marxist analysis of capitalism have been repudiated, in feminist writings, 'patriarchy' marches on. Debate about 'patriarchy' has used up a great deal of ink. Is there more to be said? I think there is. While most analysis has addressed the substantive issues raised by the concept of 'patriarchy' itself as an explanation of gender oppression, few have taken this further to explore the wider issue of the type of sociological theorisation which is intrinsic in its mode of analysis. My purpose here is to do both, and draw the links between them. I intend first to address the problems of positing a system of 'patriarchy' as a conceptual tool, drawing on existing critiques, but highlighting its most basic weakness of collapsing explanation with description - a weakness which derives from the circular explanations of its constitution and reproduction. Second, however, I argue that this tendency of using a descriptive category for explanation becomes a form of abstract structuralism. This type of analysis was very prevalent in early Marxist feminist debate influenced by Althusser in the 1970s and 1980s. What I wish to argue is that the recent most sustained elaboration of 'patriarchal' explanation by Walby (1986, 1989, 1990) represents a continuity with the Althusserian mode of explanation and theorisation. I believe the analytic implications of this approach need to be drawn out precisely because Walby's work has been highly influential in feminist theory. Not only do I want to indicate how and why Walby has been unable to overcome the difficulties of 'patriarchy' revealed in the earlier debates among Marxist and socialist feminists. I want to carry this further, by showing that Walby's conceptualisation perpetuates the theoretical tradition of abstract 'semi autonomous structures'; as I shall argue, this loses the tension between agency and structure necessary to understand social process, and ends in a static form of systems theory.

I believe a fundamental evaluation of a type of theoretical approach is long overdue. Dual systems theory, and Walby's analysis in particular, are the most frequently invoked benchmarks *as theory* in contemporary feminist writings. Among those who appear to support it as helpful to explanation, such as Cockburn (1991: 7) in the study of equal opportunities, Rees (1992: 31) in the

study of women and the labour market, and Halford (1992: 158) in feminist organisational analysis, I believe there is a very wide spectrum of interpretations of what is being adopted as 'theory' in allusions to both 'patriarchy' on its own and to dual systems theory. The apparent broad agreement about their utility obscures what I contend to be a widespread ambivalence about concepts as *explanation* and *description* of institutionalised gender relations. To leave theory loosely used does not do it justice - and if the following analysis is critical, this is testimony to my taking it seriously.

Critiques require better alternatives. I will press Acker's (1989) case that the continuation of dualist analysis is unhelpful since the process of gendering takes place inside class relations. This is accessible to the study of *substantive* social experience for which historical materialism provides not only a method of analysis, but an enormously rich *theory* to unravel the complexities of social process. I turn next to examples of micro-level analyses of gender relations at work conducted in the 1980s which unpack how gender relations are actively constituted as part of class and, in two cases, ethnic relations: Pollert (1981), Cavendish (1982), Cockburn (1983) and Westwood (1985) are each engaged in the substantive empirical analysis of gender relations at work. In each, theory is interlaced with empirical analysis. In none is 'patriarchy' used as an *explanation* of gender relations. While Pollert and Cavendish explicitly adhere to a conceptualisation which emphasises the empirical inseparability of gender and class relations, and Cockburn and Westwood claim sympathy with the concept of 'patriarchy' and dual systems at the beginning, in practice, the use of processual analysis emphasises the fusions and mutual shaping of gender and class, not some articulation of two abstractly separate systems.

While the difference between the latter two approaches may seem subtle and difficult to gain purchase on, I believe this is clarified by an examination of historical materialism as a perspective and as a theory of social process. The next section therefore outlines its bare essentials in terms of: a sensitisation to political economy in terms of rooting analysis in modes of production and their social relations; of delineating the mutual relationship between material experience, ideas and consciousness; the approach of moving between agency and structure and showing the dynamics between them; the potential of analysing the interconnections of different levels and a multiplicity of dimensions of difference in a social formation; and the capturing of tensions, contradictions and oppositions within social process as part of its dynamic. Having explored and illustrated materialist analysis, I then turn to discuss its neglect *as theory*. This is arguably partly ideological, because of the unpopularity of Marxist analysis, and partly through a narrow definition of Marxism and materialist analysis as 'Marxology' in some feminist analysis as the ungendered account of history in which everything is allegedly reduced to capitalism and class relations. Cockburn (1991: 10) counters this with an allusion to a '*historical materialist feminist tradition*' (her italics); yet it is

significant that this tradition remains hidden and ambiguous as *theory* in feminist debate. This is precisely because, unlike the 'pure' 'theoretical practice' of Althusserian Marxism, or the engagement of post-modernism in narrative, discourse and text, materialist theory *by its very nature* is integrated in the explanation of substantive social experience and is not an isolated entity. For those who wish only to see only the empirical analysis, its theory can be ignored because it does not jump out of the page as free-standing writing, but must be understood in the way it is applied.

This leads back to a questioning of the persistence of 'patriarchy' as a concept straddling explanation and description in a variety of writings on gender relations today. I begin with its academic use, and popularity in teaching, suggesting that the apparent simplicity of 'structures' and dual constructs may be attractive to lecturers and students, but is not helpful in progressing understanding. I then turn to the question of its co-option in some feminist post-modernism. I argue that this paradox is not simply due to the elasticity of post-modern concepts to accommodate any discourse. It is explicable through the mode of theorising itself: relatively autonomous abstract structures can be metamorphosed from rigid categories into variegated discourses: both remain in static articulation with each other - in the one they are structures, in the other, free-floating texts. This is nothing to do with the intentions of the theoreticians of 'patriarchy'; it is an unintended consequence of the theoretical continuity between one form of 'left' abstract theorisation, as 'political practice' in Althusserian Marxism, and post-modernism. Finally, I speculate on other forms of political appropriation of 'patriarchy', as well as reasons for its appeal to feminists, both to explain its survival and examine its potential to effect change.

I conclude with a health warning: as a shorthand for cases of male domination, and for specific historical uses of 'patriarchy', 'patriarchy' can be used. But, contrary to Walby's claims that it is an essential tool for the analysis of gender relations (1989:213) I conclude that it is not a theory of gender relations at all, and further, that its use as explanation at best flattens analysis into structural mechanisms, and at worst, leads to lazy analysis conflating description and explanation prone to appropriation by all and sundry - even those who allegedly oppose all grand narratives. Instead, I propose that a conceptualised of gender and class as a totality can best be explored in its dynamic tensions and contradictions with historical materialist theory.

The Circularity of defining 'Patriarchy' as a System and the Problem of Description and Explanation.

During the 1970s, extensive attempts to refine or criticise the concept of patriarchy were conducted. Key articles criticised the concept for its a-historicity (e.g. Beechey 1979) and argued for an alternative approach to understanding gender relations which allowed both class and gender to be

viewed in historical process (e.g. Barrett and McIntosh 1979, Barrett 1980). Patriarchy, it was argued, also foreclosed the possibility of struggle for change among both women and men as gendered subjects; it implied 'a structure which is fixed, rather than the kaleidoscope of forms within which women and men have encountered one another' (Rowbotham 1979: 970). There were others who continued the search for materialist explanations for women's oppression under capitalism in terms of structured relationships between gender and capitalism: in terms of capitalist production and family reproduction, and wage labour and domestic labour, in the 'domestic labour debate' (e.g. Gardiner 1975, Gardiner et al 1975, Himmelweit and Mohun 1977, Harrison 1973). The strength of this literature was that it addressed the economic structures underpinning and underpinned by gender relations, taking explanations for the persistence of women's oppression under capitalism beyond the ideological into the field of political economy. However, a number of problems emerged from a pre-occupation with structuralist analysis divorced from human agency. One was that of 'Marxist functionalism': the emphasis on material structures in this debate ran into the danger of reducing women's oppression or exploitation to 'the needs of capital'. Men and women, pursuing a range of interests, sometimes together and sometimes in opposition, were absent from this scenario. Further, capitalism itself appeared in the functionalist light of a self regulating system pulling in its 'needs', without the conflict and contradictions which beset it.

At the other extreme to 'class reductionism' were attempts to conceptualise 'patriarchy' in materialist and so-called Marxist terms. Women's oppression was hereby rooted in an autonomous *mode of production* - a '*domestic mode*'. Delphy (1977) pioneered this approach, going further to argue that, on the basis of women's exploitation by men within housework, the system of patriarchy constituted women and men as the main antagonistic classes of society. Delphy's a-historical as well as ethnocentric approach to the concept of 'housework' and the institution of marriage, as well as misrepresentation of Marxist analysis of 'mode of production' in attempting to identify a 'domestic' mode of production were extensively criticised by Barrett and McIntosh (1979) and Molyneux (1979). Further attempts to define a materialist base for women's oppression without jettisoning class analysis, developed into a 'dual systems' theory of 'capitalism' articulating with 'patriarchy'. However, the problem here of not being able to find a material base for 'patriarchy' led either to admission that it only *described* a system, or evasion of its circular, self-explanatory status and assertion as an explanatory concept. Once used in the latter way, 'patriarchy' attains the theoretical status of a 'semi-autonomous structure', which, as I shall outline, comes down heavily on the structure side of the agency - structure tension of social analysis.

While Delphy located the alleged economic dynamic of 'patriarchy' in men's exploitation of women's labour in marriage and the household, Hartmann (1979a), attempted to avoid such a-historicism but subsequently was sucked

into circularity in trying to define 'patriarchy'. The attempts to incorporate a concept of 'patriarchy' within a materialist framework without resorting to some form of biological reductionism foundered because it oscillated between using the term as a loose description of what it was trying to explain, and the explanation itself. Hartmann's 'The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism' exemplifies this ambivalence, yet although extensively debated (Sargent 1981), this aspect has not been emphasised. I quote here because Hartmann's formulation remains one of the most quoted defences of a theory of 'patriarchy's as part of a dual system' including its assimilation into Walby's work. Hartmann defines patriarchy 'as a set of social relations between men, which have a *material base* (my italics), and which, though hierarchical, establish or create interdependence and solidarity among men that enable them to dominate women' (1979a:11). She continues, 'The *material base* (my italics) upon which patriarchy rests lies most fundamentally in *men's control over women's labour power* (my italics). Men maintain this control by excluding women from access to essential productive resources (in capitalist societies, for example, jobs that pay living wages) and by restricting women's sexuality' (ibid.: 11).

There are three steps in this argument: first description, then attempted explanation and finally tautology: the *explanation* for a material base for 'patriarchy' comes back full circle onto itself as description for its explanation. Indeed, later, Hartmann acknowledges that her usage of the term is *not explanatory*, but *descriptive*: 'Patriarchy as we have used it here remains more a descriptive term than an analytic one' (ibid.: 22). She concludes that there are 'many problems for us to explore'. Nevertheless, she claims to have established the basis for a *definition* and a *basis*: the appeal to and justification for 'patriarchy' as a system articulating with capitalism has been made, and despite its evident slippage between tautology and description, continues to be used. The only explanation for men's alleged control over women's labour power lies in their acts of exclusion and control, which itself can only be explained by itself.

The concept of 'patriarchy' as a *system* is premised on a social reproduction framework (Connell 1987: 45): that is, it is not just a question of exploring the ideological and institutional construction of different sites of male domination - (which is open to empirical analysis), but 'patriarchy' must be explicable as self-perpetuating - either as a totality, or, as Walby postulates in her later elaborations (1989, 1990), through the articulation of sub-structures of the main structure. The problem of defining such a process of social reproduction at the abstract level of analysis was posed by Molyneux (1979) in relations to a 'domestic mode' of housework in the domestic labour debate. Here I want to return to this issue in simple terms as it applies to 'patriarchy' as a system of abstract gender relations reproduction. There is no *intrinsic* motor or dynamic within 'patriarchy' which can explain its self-perpetuation. Capitalism, on the

other hand, does have such an internal dynamic: the self-expansion of capital - profit - which drives the system, is premised on a particular set of social relations of production: the class relations of capital and wage labour. Capital cannot exist without profit, which is created by the extraction of surplus value from wage labour - that is, the invisible difference between the wage and the value produced by workers. The explanation of the reproduction of capitalism does not, therefore, lie in voluntarism such as, capitalists exploit wage labourers simply because they like to live off their surplus. Of course, agency is involved. But so are structural constraints. They are also *alienated* in that system by not being in control of it as a totality - even if they control parts: they are driven by it, and its demands. As a mode of production, it is created by a mutually defining social relationship: capital and wage labour. There is no necessary internal connection between men and women as gendered subjects which defines a self-perpetuating material dynamic or economic/social system. Many (or most) men, and thus a widespread masculinity, may be premised on a hierarchy of power over women; but this does not *define* a system of producing social and material existence. Capitalists could not become 'good capitalists' by ceasing to exploit wage labour; *they would cease to be capitalists* and if they did it en-masse (and we know no system has ever committed collective suicide), capitalism would disappear with it. By contrast, men can and do alter their gender as do women, and they can alter their material and ideological relationship into *different* sex-gender systems without social production grinding to a halt, or abolishing all gender relations and men and women (see also Rowbotham 1979). The two sets of relationships - class and gender - are of a different analytical order.

The recourse to 'patriarchy' as a structure of equal status to capitalism in dual systems theory is therefore misleading in bestowing equivalent material dynamic to two very different forms of social relations (see also Bradley 1989: 59). In the post-modernists' jargon, capitalism *is* a 'grand narrative' in the sense of a universalising theory of a driving force of history, while 'patriarchy' is not, despite appearances. The only way feminist theories have dealt with this problem in dual systems analysis without confining 'patriarchy' to descriptions of systems which then beg the question of how they go there, is to elevate the concept to an abstract structural entity in Althusserian structuralism in which no economic structure is 'privileged' (except in some abstract sense of 'in the last instance') and a range of 'semi-autonomous' structures exist - of 'the economy', 'politics' and 'ideology' - and any number of other levels of the 'social formation' - including, one can add, 'patriarchy'. An illustration of the influence of Althusserian theory and language on formulations of 'patriarchy' in the late 1970s is Kuhn's discussion of patriarchy as '*a relatively autonomous structure written into family relations - the privileged site of social relations between men and women - whose operation is broadly historical ... but overdetermined by specific features of the conjuncture*' (1978:51, my italics to illustrate Althusserian terminology). As I shall argue and illustrate below this

Althusserian form of structuralism is implicit in the use of a system or structure of 'patriarchy' as an explanatory tool.

Those striving for a more fused or integrated conceptualisation of class and gender relations in the concept of 'capitalist patriarchy' (Eisenstein 1979) and 'patriarchal capitalism' (Game and Pringle 1984) still rest heavily on a notion of two analytically equivalent sets of social relation- although the latter also embraced a more open ended view of the integration of *gender* rather than one-dimensional 'patriarchy', as part of capitalism (ibid.:23). However, it has been Walby (1986, 1989 1990) who has been influential in defending two separate, but interacting systems of capitalism and 'patriarchy'. Yet despite an exhaustive examination of the literature, she cannot overcome the logical difficulties of circular explanation or the collapsing of explanation into description. Confronted by the impossibility of finding a material base to 'patriarchy', she continues first by denying the need to look for it, but then, like Hartmann, falls into circularity:

Patriarchy is distinctive in being a system of interrelated structures through which men exploit women, while capitalism is a system in which capital expropriates wage labourers. It is the mode of exploitation which constitutes the central difference between the two systems. The distinctiveness of the patriarchal system is marked by the social relations which enable men to exploit women' (Walby: 1986:46).

Walby falls into exactly the same tautology and slippage between description and theory as previous formulations (see Bradley 1989: 55 - 60 for similar critique). Yet while claiming to eschew the need for an institutional base to 'patriarchy', her analysis is contradictory in that she does in fact lean heavily on Delphy's model of two spheres of the household and production as separate sites for the reproduction of patriarchy and capitalism:

I would suggest that within the patriarchal mode of production the producing class is composed of housewives or domestic labourers, while the non-producing and exploiting class is composed of husbands' (1986:52-53).

Her caveat in facing critics of the fundamental theoretical difficulties of Delphy is that they can be 'overcome' (Walby 1986:42). The defence of 'patriarchy' straddles description which is agnostic about origins, and Delphy-influenced essentialism. Significantly, while this ambiguity is not resolved, in application of the concept to explanation, Walby is driven into abstract structuralism. This is evident both in her application of 'patriarchy' to explain historical events (Walby 1986), and in her later elaboration of the concept (1989, 1990).

By lapsing into structuralist explanation, Walby's (1986) use of 'patriarchy' as an explanatory concept in examining gender relations in employment between 1800 and 1914, hinders rather than enhances analysis which is potentially important in demonstrating the role of men excluding women in the construction of gender divisions. Analysis would be far more convincing if it remained close to the subjects of the process, unpacking motivations and interests as they were then. Instead, inferences are drawn about the role of 'patriarchy' from viewing organisational policies from the outside, with no evidence about the consciousness and experience of the male actors inside who were allegedly constructing this system. For instance, because there is no evidence that early trade unions' exclusion of women was to protect their skills from downward pay pressure, since they 'did not have skill to protect', we are told 'these actions must be seen as specifically patriarchal in that they attempted to raise men's wages only, and at women's expense' (p.92). Perhaps; but a historian would ask more questions, and raise further what is meant by 'patriarchal'. Further on, we are told of 'the strong and organised attempt by patriarchal forces to resist the entry of women into factories' (p.98); there may have been organised attempts, but without a close reading of agency and consciousness in this process, we miss the possibility of the double-edged nature of action. The problem is partly to do with a sociologist interpreting other historians' interpretation; historical enquiry is itself an enormously complex process in terms of the credentials, type and purpose of enquiry (for discussion, see E.P. Thompson 1978: 221). One historian is quoted as saying the factory system 'was resented as a break-up of family life...the unions long opposed the introduction of women workers' (Walby 1986:98). Walby infers that 'the employment of women threatened to undermine patriarchal control in the household and elsewhere' with 'resistance by men to women's employment in the factories...based both on its disruption to the patriarchal ordering of the family and on its effect on the wages of men' (ibid.). this is asserted, not demonstrated. It begins to appear that the category of 'patriarchy' is being imposed on a potentially more nuanced reality. E.P. Thompson's discussion of historical method applies equally to sociological interrogation. The discipline must be developed,

...to detect any attempt at arbitrary manipulation: the facts will disclose nothing of their own accord, the historian must work hard to enable them to find "their own voices". Not the historian's voice, please observe: *their own voices*, even if what they are able to "say" and some part of their vocabulary is determined by the questions which the historian proposes. They cannot "speak" until they are "asked" (1978: 222, italics in original).

The difficulty of attributing one set of interests and motivations - those of patriarchy - to historical process is most clearly demonstrated in the debate on legislation to restrict women employment: Walby attributes the 'protective' legislation of the Factory Acts from 1844 to 1901 to reinforcing the patriarchal

structuring of society, not to 'working class struggle' or reform (1986:100 - 101). What is not countenanced is that the actual process may have been *double-edged*, sometimes one, sometimes the other *and both*. Thus, it seems that this kind of analysis cannot cope with the dialectical contradictions and ambiguity of history and social process which explain how it unfolds. The multi-levelled nature of reality can only be explored through detailed analysis - and sometimes there is no neat answer, as demonstrated by the fertile and unresolved debate about whether the institution of the 'family wage' was promoted as a working class interest (Humphries 1980) or in the interests of men (Barrett and McIntosh 1980). Both these accounts kept close to the details of process and action, and neither resorted to 'patriarchy' as an explanation. Yet, if the debate remains open, we have learned much from their analysis. Walby, by contrast, while supporting Barrett and MacIntosh's account of male interests does not praise their processual analysis, but bemoans the 'lack of a concept of patriarchy' and the alleged resort to 'historical contingency' (1986: 106).

The search for neatness using a dual systems theory can slide over agency and flatten a far more complex analysis. While Walby's study of a period of gender relations highlights the impact of men's exclusionary behaviour, and not just capitalist development, on women's subordination, her case is weakened by seemingly making *no* allowances for class struggle; it appears it is either capitalist employers, or men, who drive history. This is the weakness both of dualist analysis and of structuralism: dualism seeks two separate systems, and in doing so, de-genders capitalism and separates out 'patriarchy'. This allows for broad manipulation of evidence (precisely what E.P. Thompson 1978 warns against), and 'patriarchy' takes a central place. The use of structuralism is itself ambiguous, and we do not know where agency starts and where embedded institutions operate. Hyman's review of Walby 1986 (1990:231) likewise points to the conflation of levels of abstraction: ambiguity between the empirical and theoretical levels is illustrated in the sliding between propositions about 'men's interests' and 'the interests of patriarchy'. He continues, 'historical developments are often attributed to "patriarchal forces" without clear indication whether the term denotes social groups or structural dynamics. The imprecision weakens the force of Walby's argument that factory legislation should be seen as a protection of men's interests rather than as an outcome of class struggle' (Hyman 1990:231; see also a similar critique of patriarchal reductionism in Glucksman 1991). This would clearly undermine Walby's demonstration of 'patriarchy' at work: her claim that 'the concept of patriarchy is an essential tool in the explanation of gender relations' is undermined by her own use of it, which tends to shift between *assumptions* rather than explanations, and *description* of what it is that needs explaining.

Walby's subsequent (1989) elaboration of 'patriarchy' by fragmenting it into 'six main patriarchal structures' in response to allegations of universalist and

formalist tendencies in her first version is a concession not only to the fact that women are not a homogeneous group, but also to the demands for greater differentiation by post-modernist critics. Yet she arrives at this by a refinement of *structures* - (patriarchal mode of production, patriarchal relations within waged labour, the patriarchal state, male violence, patriarchal relations in sexuality and patriarchal culture' (Walby 1989: 220) - a process resonating of Althusserian structuralism. This is both an arbitrary exercise, and leads to the static perspective articulating parts, with agency even more absent than before. As E.P. Thompson (1978) has argued, Althusserian theory does not investigate substantive history as process, but sets up the categories of structure; these can be endlessly refined, but in the end, 'however many variables are introduced, and however complex their permutations, these variables maintain their original fixity as categories' (p.275). Why does Walby choose *six* structures as 'the most significant constellations of social relations which structure gender relations' (1989: 220)? Why not the four in someone else's theory rejected on the previous page, or forty, or four hundred? Gender relations are everywhere; the close interrogation of social *process*, not the juggling of empty categories, will go and find out what happens in substantive research. As I will argue below, both the theory and method for such enquiry can be found in a historical materialist analysis: at this point, I will merely signal that this process requires the unpicking to the best of one's ability and state of knowledge, the delicate tensions between agency and structure (see Crompton and Sanderson's 1990: 12 on the 'action-structure' relationship in Marx and Giddens 1984).

Despite Walby's *assertion* that she adheres to 'a concept of social structure which has similarities to that of Giddens (1984), in the sense of institutionalised features of society which stretch across time and space, which involve the dual aspects of reflexive human action and of their continuity over and above the individuals involved in any one instant' (1989: 221), this is not apparent in her application of 'patriarchy' to historical analysis. In her subsequent 'Theorising Patriarchy' (1989), social process appears as the expression of structures 'articulating' with each other in a manner resembling Althusserian semi-autonomous structures. The creation of smaller and smaller units of analysis, of conjuring up 'three main levels of abstraction' and of a larger system (patriarchy) operating through the workings of the six smaller structures, but which is also 'flexible enough' to capture difference (Walby 1989: 217) evokes the machine drawings of pulleys, gears and arms used by E.P. Thompson to parody the static, mechanistic conceptualisation of structures in Althusser (1978: 291 - 294). It appears that we are locked into an interminable closed system of capitalism interacting with patriarchy. Just as E.P. Thompson described a 'structuralism of *stasis* departing from Marx's own historical method' (1978: 197), so it appears there is no dynamic either for 'patriarchy' or for capitalism to change - a pessimistic view to say the least (see also Connell 1987).

Gender, Class and Historical Materialist Theory

Beside the theoretical impasse of 'patriarchy' imposing a structural label on what it is supposed to explain, the problem of a dual systems conceptualisation of capitalism and 'patriarchy' is that it implies that, while one set of relations is gendered, the other is something else. It is left intact from gendered analysis (Acker 1989: 238). A different view, and one I share, is that class relations are infused with gender, race and other modes of social differentiation *from the start*. There is a subtle but crucial difference between dualist perspectives 'positing analytically independent structures and then looking for the linkages between them' and the view 'that social relations are constituted through processes in which the linkages are inbuilt' (Acker 1989: 239). This is because the first seeks abstract dynamics, and becomes caught up in the tangle of the non-equivalence of two types of social relations (as we have already discussed), whereas the second seeks the answers in substantive historical process as the appropriate level of analysis of the mutual constitution of two conceptually different types of social relationship - class and gender. While class relations can be conceived abstractly in a mode of production, gender relations cannot be conceptualised without material actors and concrete social processes and relations; they have to be analysed at a lower level of abstraction, in lived experience. It is at this point of intersection - in empirical investigation - that the analysis of class and gender intermingling can take place, and static oppositions disappear (Glucksman 1990: 15 - 16).

At the level of lived social relations, the process of gendering can (indeed must) be perceived as endemic to them. As Cockburn observes, 'employers are never sex-blind' (1991: 24). There are no ungendered class relations, and conversely, there are no gender relations without a class dimension. Obviously, the mediation of gender and class processes are complex, and the focus changes depending on what one is looking and asking - sometimes gender is in the foreground, sometimes class. By grasping class and gender as fully intertwined, we can gain purchase on the social dynamic of their construction and possibilities of change from the tensions and contradictions in experience. In examining women's oppression in wage labour, I have previously put this as, 'the experience of female oppression shapes their exploitation, their exploitation alters their oppression. The two together combine into an unstable whole: both the 'double burden' and a potentially explosive challenge' (Pollert 1981: 4). The process of *explanation* of how this process is constituted requires prising open different dimensions of a lived totality: while the language of class, employers, workers; and gender, men, women may evoke two analytic levels, this is for the purpose of explaining one system, not two. Once two systems are postulated, we lose sight of the very process of intermeshing which is the problem for explanation and end up with describing the outer manifestations of two systems, such as 'patriarchal capitalism' (Hartmann 1979a: 13, Game and Pringle 1984:23) or 'capitalist patriarchy' (Eisenstein 1979).

I shall argue that for a conceptualisation of a fused system of gender and class relations, a separate or free-standing 'theorisation' of gender relations is inappropriate; only theory which is *embedded* in substantive empirical interrogation will disclose the object of analysis for which I propose historical materialism. While historical materialist analysis has not been in vogue for some time, throughout the '60s, '70s and '80s there have been those who have been practising its method, either explicitly, or in practice. There continue, of course, to be debates about what it is, the connections between Marxist and Weberian analysis, and more widely, how to address the relationship between agency and structure. This occurs in labour process analysis, as it does in industrial relations. There are some who, for example, prefer the terms 'materialist analysis', thereby distancing themselves from what *they* interpret as central tenets of Marxism. Thus, Edwards (1986: 86 - 90) eschews what he regards as the implied historical logic of social development of Marxism, with different modes of production *necessarily* collapsing because of the contradiction between the forces and relations of production, and in particular he argues against the assumption of capitalism leading to socialism. That barbarism is another scenario for Marxism is another issue, and another paper; to reflect my non-engagement with this side of things here, I shall use historical materialism and materialism interchangeably. The point is to find a theoretical perspective to tease out the continual interplay of action and structures within a political economy.

Edwards (1986: 11) points out that materialist analysis can be applied at different levels, corresponding to different levels of abstraction, with the broadest and most abstract in the mode of production, going down to different social formations, (diverse social and institutional arrangements), and then going further down to sectors, workplaces and so forth. The approach is not confined to the employment relationship, but, unlike Althusserian structuralism or post-modernism, it does pre-suppose that there is a material existence and experience 'out there' to be explored. Materialist theory is also dynamic in that it constantly tries to relate the parts to the whole, which, at the widest level, is the mode of production. As Edwards (1986: 60) proposes, this can be accomplished with the metaphor of 'levels' which '...helps to deal with the long-standing analytical problem of relating structure and action'.

The concept of different levels in materialist analysis can also be broadened to different dimensions: feminism has sensitised historical materialism to experiences both inside and beyond the employment relationship: aspects of 'work' have been exposed - not just in the household, but emotional work and sexual work, as have types of identity and materiality, such as sexuality and bodily experience (Cockburn 1991:10). These are all open to materialist analysis. Just as feminist analysis has forced gender into the materialist perspective (although still not enough), it has also been enriched by it. For a

crucial difference between structuralist analysis using 'patriarchy' and a historical materialist approach, is that in the former, while agency in general is absent, where there *are* actors, they tend to be men. Women are construed as victims or are invisible as actors (Rowbotham 1979). Materialist analysis opens up action in process, and makes visible both women and men - and even if what emerges is that women *are* usually those at the receiving end - resistance does enter the frame.

Materialist analysis steers a course between structuralism and voluntarism: political-economic processes and structures are crucial, but active subjects have a voice; analysis of action, identity and subjectivity can be extremely detailed; but this is not disconnected from political and economic interests and processes. Agency in materialist analysis fundamentally differs from the pure voluntarism and relativism of post-modernist immersion in diverse, ungrounded subjectivities, identities and discourses. Finally, historical materialism's concern to interrelate different levels of the social structure as well as how experience and consciousness are both actively constructed and constrained, exposes the importance of *contradictions* and *tensions*, both between elements of social structure (Edwards 1986: 68) and within the mode of production itself. Contradictions also operate at the level of action and of consciousness: motives may be double edged, and consciousness full of contradictions. To become aware of the contradictory nature of social process is not a tenet, but, 'brings "dialectics", not as this or that "law" but as a habit of thinking (in coexisting opposites or "contraries") and as an expectation as to the logic of process' (E.P. Thompson 1978: 306).

While I shall not argue that qualitative research is the only answer to a feminist-informed materialist sociology of process, like Acker (1989: 239) I will argue it is necessary. There is a strong British ethnographic approach to understanding capitalist relations as lived experience in the tradition of engagement with social class as a 'historical relationship', which 'evades analysis if we attempt to stop it dead at any given moment and anatomize its structure' (E.P. Thompson 1968: 9). Beynon (1973), Nichols and Armstrong (1976), Nichols and Beynon (1977), Willis (1978) all produced in-depth explorations of men 'living with capitalism'. Class and not gender relations were the main focus, although several accounts addressed sexual division and the relationship between maleness, its alienation and its entrapment in wage labour (Willis 1978), and the male family wage (Nichols and Beynon 1977). It was feminists who concentrated *primarily* on the relationship between gender and wage labour. Cockburn (1983, 1985) pursued the issues of maleness and sexual division; Pollert (1981), Armstrong (1982), Cavendish (1982) and Westwood (1984) explored female wage labour. Armstrong analysed the relationship between capital and labour intensity and sexual division in the labour process; Pollert, Cavendish and Westwood each probed what it was like for women working in low-paid, low-status, repetitive assembly work. Each provided

different insights into the ways in which class and gender are interwoven at every level of social relations and illustrated some of the processes of reproducing - and challenging - the gendering of people, jobs and institutions.

As one illustration of this approach I will highlight several features of Girls, Wives, Factory Lives (Pollert 1981). I was concerned with experience and consciousness and problematised the interplay of class and gender as they were constituted both within employment and in the household. I explored both common class experience shared by women and men in routine, 'unskilled' wage labour, and what was distinctive about female wage labour. The study was historically materialist in being grounded both in a political economy of the employing company and the relations of production in it, and in moving between different levels of lived experience of paid work and domestic work, and material processes and ideological processes. In exploring the constant collision between ideas as both 'received' from dominant class and gender stereotypes, and those created through lived experience, the concept of contradiction was central to the analysis. Gramsci's theory of hegemonic ideas and that of 'common sense' as the fragmentary but active 'making sense of the world' of lived experience were central to the continual interplay between women's consent and resistance to their experience as wage workers and as women. Gramsci's approach, however, which in its original form focused on class relations, was gendered in my analysis: class and gender constructions were fused in consciousness, with a complex dynamic of tensions (Pollert 1981: 87). Lived experience was explored at a number of levels: those of how jobs and people were sexually stereotyped, and how images of what constituted 'women's work', both in terms of pay, monotony and being 'unskilled' were both accepted and rejected by women; how the sexual division of labour in employment and in the domestic sphere created a vicious circle which reproduced women's exploitation and oppression; how the model of the 'family wage' was both accepted and rejected, how the impact of the ideology of marriage as a 'future' for young women and the reality of a lifetime of the double burden of wage labour and household work both trapped women and created opposition both to capitalist exploitation and gender oppression *simultaneously*; and how men as union 'brothers' and as husbands excluded them from the male world of official trade unionism, yet inspired alliances with other excluded groups (including some men). The study could not have been carried out with a conceptualisation of two 'systems' of class and gender; they were constantly inter-penetrating. Moreover, women were seen as active, sometimes merely complying with, sometimes consenting to and sometimes resisting class and gender boundaries with their own interpretations and actions. Nor would 'patriarchy' do; while the key theme was the way gender oppression and class exploitation interacted, gender division was not the only cleavage: there were times when class unity appeared, both at work, and in family cohesion.

In the detailed case studies cited above, there were, of course, varying methodologies, empirical and theoretical objectives. Cavendish (1982) and Westwood (1985) were both concerned to reveal the relationship between gender, class and ethnicity, but Cavendish's theoretical framework was closer to the intermeshed view of the three dimensions analysed, while Westwood (1984:5), argued she was theoretically guided by Hartmann's definition of 'patriarchy'. What bound these studies together, however, and tended to minimise *espoused* theoretical differences, was that their *actual analysis* drew on the resources of the materialist approach outline above. In neither Cockburn's nor Westwood's work was 'patriarchy' used as an abstract structural force; it served only as a language to *describe* but not explain the prevalence and reproduction of male oppression both at the ideological and material levels within the employment sphere. They all also pointed to the creative, often contradictory aspects of the gendered capitalist employment relationship and its relationship with the household. Analysis was not flattened to fit in with a bi-polar view of capitalism on the one hand, and 'patriarchy' on the other. Concern with the processes of consent and resistance to gendered class relations, including ethnicity and sexuality, operate on the ground, took them beyond the static and rigid confines of interaction of structures of 'patriarchy' and 'capitalism' emptied of historical actors.

Materialist Analysis - Hidden from 'Theory'?

The qualitative studies mentioned are only illustrative of an approach to the agency - structure dynamic in gender - class exploration and I cannot do justice here to wider and more recent literature. But as suggested earlier, while such detailed studies of *how* gender relations are made, reproduced and changed are indispensable to the problem of explanation, they are not the only level of analysis which adopt a similar approach. A large body of empirical research has also accumulated at a more macro level of the sexual division of labour which, while analysing processes of structuration, does not use abstract structuralist theory. Beechey and Perkins (1987) provide empirical and theoretical insights the gendered time construction of jobs in contemporary Britain rooted in the male family wage; Bradley (1989) examines the history of occupational gendering; Crompton and Sanderson (1990) and MacEwen Scott (1994) provide different examinations of the processes of gender segregation and social change. International perspective on women and work, such as those found in Elson and Pearson (1989) and Redclift and Sinclair (1991) deploy gendered materialist analysis of sexual division in the international political economy. In several of these, the concept of a system or structure of 'patriarchy' as an explanatory device, is either explicitly rejected, (Crompton and Sanderson 1991: 15, Bradley 1989) or is simply not referred to. This is because analysis not only did not need it, but would have been hampered by a-historical, abstract conceptualisation.

However, not all these writers would necessarily subscribe to historical materialism as a theory, not least because the concept of class itself has been subject of so much debate both on its own and relating to gender, and the materialist approach is organised around the relational interpretation of class mentioned earlier. There has also been an ambivalence among some socialist feminists towards viewing historical materialism as adequate as a *theory* for understanding gender. Some have explicitly or implicitly bracketed it with a 'Marxism' which is viewed as only concerned with economic and class relations: hence its dismissal as 'gender blind' and 'reductionist' to capitalist and class relations (Walby 1986). Or, it is viewed only as a methodology, but not as a *theory*. Others, such as Cockburn (1983, 1985) subscribe to it and use it, yet see it as compatible with dual systems theory, either in the looser form of 'sex-gender system', which, as Connell (1987) points out, begs the question of 'system', or, most recently, with 'patriarchy' as a 'conceptual tool' (Cockburn 1991: 6). There are also those who, while rejecting 'patriarchy and dual systems theory; nevertheless still seek a separate theory of gender relations; thus Crompton and Sanderson (1991) are sympathetic to Connell's (1987) exploration of gender and power. This seems to indicate a wider ambivalence among feminist sociologists about the type of theory we allude to in our approach to gender analysis: it is as though, on the one hand, there is recognition that the most incisive tools come from a much wider theory than 'gender' since it can be applied at so many levels (materialist analysis), and on the other, to demonstrate that we register the persistence and prevalence of male domination and women's oppression, we have to signal a *separate theory* of gender relations. This strikes me as confusing and unnecessary. Instead, what we have to do is continually make women and gendering visible, together with other dimensions of difference and inequality which are usually hidden in 'mailstream' analysis, within processural analysis (Pollert 1995, 1996).

Attempts to develop a separate body of theory on gender relations, even for those sympathetic to a view of an open-ended gender system which is closely tied to class relations, end up with semi-autonomous systems, and the whole point of an integrated conception of class and gender is lost. When Connell, for example, argues 'that gender relations are parallel to, interacting with, and in some sense *constitutive of class relations*' (1987: 46, my emphasis) he appears not to register the analytic difference between looking at class and gender as two systems ('parallel', 'interacting') or as one ('constitutive'). While open to more diversity than 'patriarchy' and registering agency in emphasising 'gendering' as active, his theory of a 'gender order' belongs to a dualist conception, and is based on a diffuse, Foucauldian notion of 'power' relations which can be detached from class relations. Once this rupture takes place, the whole point of a synthesis is lost, and gender relations can be explored in an economic vacuum. This can be co-opted by organisation theory which is silent on capitalism and class relations. Thus, the concept of 'gender paradigm' is used in a feminist organisation theory approach to bureaucracy (Savage and Witz

1992), but the significance of economic aims and relations of production to what these bureaucracies do is absent. Elsewhere, otherwise valuable studies of sexuality at work (Pringle 1988) lose their conviction because the perspective is partial: all we see are gendered power relations, and economic and class power remain invisible.

The search for a separate theory of gender relations may also be associated with the fact that language tends to lend itself to dualisms. The very verbalisation of two dimensions of class and sex tends towards thinking along two tracks; this is why dialectical analysis is important, since it allows - indeed requires - thinking in linked pairs, contraries and tensions. A further reason is that it is much easier to present and study 'pure' theory, than to research and find theory which is embedded in substantive empirical analysis. Referring once again to E.P. Thompson, 'it is exceptionally difficult to verbalise as "theory" history as process' (1978: 276). So we find that the materialist theory which informs empirical studies of gender, class and ethnicity is *invisible* in the current ways *theory* of gender and work are debated. Significantly, Walby (1986, 1989) makes no reference to these studies in her writing. Yet she is not alone in this silence. It is symptomatic of a wider set of assumptions about what qualifies as 'theory' and what does not: Pollert (1981), Cavendish (1982) and Westwood (1985) are ritually brought out as factory 'case studies' on women and occasionally for specific instances of discussing hierarchy in organisations (Hearn and Parkin 1995: 36). But their theoretical contribution is ignored. Historical materialism seems only to half count as sufficient theory even for those feminists who use it most sensitively, such as Cockburn, who simultaneously adopts a 'historical materialist feminist tradition' (1991: 10) and 'patriarchy' - both as a conceptual tool and 'popular shorthand' (ibid.:8).

I will also argue that feminist analysis would benefit from a fuller recognition of the type of theory which has most advanced the understanding of gender oppression - materialist theory. Instead of side-lining it in favour of the search for 'pure' theories of gender relations, it would be well to register its arguments within the substantive studies which use it, and develop these further. In the untidy world, empirical research and theorisation is a multi-layered dynamic; so analysis must necessarily select moments and places and can offer only partial insights into a complex web of gender and class identities, relations, actions and institutionalised structures. Theory which is not continuously enriched by empirical work becomes arid, and - as in the case of the theorisation and deployment of 'patriarchy' - a super-imposition on reality which, far from usefully organising it for analytic purposes, is confusing and often misleading.

Regardless of the substantive problems of 'patriarchy' as an explanatory concept, and its acceptance or rejection accordingly, one can also address its continuing presence in feminist analysis as part of a preference for 'pure theorisation' to that of a theory which cannot be divorced from engagement

with lived experience. In the following, I explore this further, both in terms of the apparent paradox of its survival as a 'grand narrative' despite the fashion of post-modernism, and in terms of a wider discussion of its political use, particularly a critique of the dangers of its co-option by the class and gender status-quo.

The Onward March of 'Patriarchy' as Grand Narrative.

The foregoing discussion of approaches to explaining gender relations has demonstrated that there is by no means unanimity about the utility of 'patriarchy' as a conceptual tool. At the same time, it has indicated that in the literature on theory, it has dominated debate and Walby's recent defence of 'patriarchy' has been influential in reviving older forms of dual systems analysis. In view of the substantive difficulties with the concept as analysed here, it is not obvious why it has been so successful as an academic project. Since, as I have indicated, part of its success lies in its ambiguity and slipperiness between description and attempted explanation, there can be no single answer as to its survival: analysis needs to be at different levels, tracing its various types of deployment.

I begin with its most mundane, but highly influential, deployment in the teaching of gender relations in academic work. It is on course on 'theories of gender relations', that 'patriarchy' and 'dual systems theory' have their widest diffusion. These concepts are arguably highly attractive: superficially, 'structures' - especially interacting in pairs - sound easy to teach and apparently easy to understand; they can be illustrated with diagrams; they can be contained in a couple of hand-outs or chapters on 'theorisation'; and they do not require the much more demanding task of exploring the multi-levelled complexity of class and gender relations, nor the interrogation of substantive empirical studies of their operation in process. This fits very well with fast student throughput, efficiency assessment and the whole range of rationalisation and quantification of the academic process. Needless to say, I do not believe it advances the critical understanding of gender relations much. The attraction of 'patriarchy' is also its weakness; the slipperiness of the concept does not encourage sharp thinking about the subtle distinctions between description and explanation, and it can be reproduced by the naive or careless in the crudest form of reification..

There is also the question of 'patriarchy's' success as an academic project within the context of current academic discourses. This needs to address the apparent paradox that a mode of analysis which is effectively part of the tradition of Althusserian Marxism, in which 'patriarchy' as a semi-autonomous structure articulates with capitalism, has survived in a period when the fashion is for post-structuralists to gaze on a multiplicity of texts, narratives or voices. How can structuralism survive with such extreme relativism? While this is not the

place to enter a critique either of Althusserian structuralism, or of post-modernism in themselves, and I am aware that they come in many varieties (Callinicos 1989, Thompson 1993), I refer to a strong continuity between both approaches: both deny that lived experience or material existence can be validated in any way, and both operate at the level of the autonomy of ideas (in post modernism, language) and a type of theorisation which is self-enclosed in its own activity. Althusser contributed to the theoretical process of establishing the 'autonomy' of ideology and politics, and contemporary post-structural pursuits have pushed this to its furthest limits.

'Productive activity has finally been displaced by 'discourse' as the constitutive practice of social life, the material reconstruction of society has been replaced by the intellectual reconstruction of texts', and the terrain of left politics has been purposefully enclosed within the walls of the academy, while historical causality has been completely dissolved in post-modern fragmentation, 'difference' and contingency' (Meiksins Wood 1995: 45).

The ever increasing obscurantism of post-modern writing (Thompson 1993: 198) is a grave danger for the women's movement. Disengagement with lived practice in post-modern feminism reinforcing 'one of the most stubborn roadblocks standing in the way of its own emancipatory project, the class barrier which has often divided feminist from working class women' (Meiksins Wood 1995: 46). In the case of the type of structuralist analysis engendered by applying 'patriarchy' as an explanatory device, as is implied by Walby's conceptualisation, there is a real danger that feminist analysis becomes shifted further from engaging with substantive historical process, and further, that it can be incorporated within the rarefied and obscure concerns of post-modernism. The concession to the post-modernist calls for greater diversification in sub-dividing 'patriarchy' into six smaller structures (Walby 1989) does not bring analysis closer to processual analysis, but arguably opens a bridge between notions of structure and those of discourse. One can see how 'patriarchy' can slide into post-modern language and perspectives in Hearn and Parkin (1993: 160), who highlight post-modernism's challenge to monocausality by revealing 'multiple oppressions', and yet find no problem with locating 'patriarchy' as the site of 'discourse, discursive constructions and discursive practices'. They continue, 'Furthermore, within patriarchy and patriarchal relations the dominant, though not the only, powers, constructions and controls are those of men over women in heterosexuality' (Hearn and Parkin 1995: 183). The concepts of 'patriarchy' and 'patriarchal relations', are presented in circular fashion as something to do with a diffuse (Foucauldian) notion of 'power'; but we also have 'controls' and 'constructions'; 'patriarchy' is not theorised: is it description, structure, or 'site' of discourses and what might be the relationship between them? While much could be said of the chameleon quality of post-modernism in wanting things both ways - some admission of social structure, but not too much - I wish only to point out here how what

appears to be grand narrative can be accommodated within post-structuralist plurality. There is, then, an epistemological affinity between 'patriarchy' in both structuralist and post-structuralist writings in circular, self-referential thinking. There is a difference, however. Althusserian structuralism did at least have the virtue of a project for change. Post-modernism appears so absorbed in its detached observation of languages and meanings, that this is lost. The concept of 'patriarchy', in its abstract structuralist deployments did at least come from a position of feminist commitment; the danger of co-option by post-modernism, is that it becomes part of a voyeurist apparatus.

This brings me to broader issue of the role - if any - of 'patriarchy' as a political tool for change. While (Acker 1989: 239) points to its earlier role in spot-lighting male dominance as the target for feminist action, and fears that 'gender relations' may not replace it, since the term can be easily neutralised, I would argue that, as suggested above, this political justification no longer holds. 'Patriarchy' can be neutralised and co-opted as easily as 'gender relations' into post-modernist narratives. Secondly, for socialist feminists there is the danger that 'patriarchy' loses sight of class. As already signalled, it is the potential of dualist analysis to divide and lose the link between capitalism and gender relations: in Walby's (1986) historical analysis, class struggle is not given the same hearing as 'patriarchy', while in the later focus on polishing 'patriarchy', capitalism recedes even further from view. The absence of class as an arena of conflict and change for those socialist feminists who began with a double vision of 'capitalism' and 'patriarchy' clearly alters their political perspective: men become the 'main enemy', and sisterhood is all. For much of the eighties, few writers directly confronted this disappearance of social class from the academic feminist gaze, or the fact that women are not a homogeneous group. Ramazanoglu (1989) provided one such timely, if obvious, reminder that women are divided by class and race and often have far more to unite them with men of the same class, race or nationality than with other women. This is where liberal feminist equal opportunities agendas, which usually focus on women managers and professionals, become problematic for socialist feminists, not only in terms of their limited horizons on feminist organisational and cultural change (Cockburn 1989, 1991, Pollert and Rees 1992), but also in terms of their political ambiguity: can they be developed into wider challenge to capitalist class interests, or are they simply an example of conservative incorporation?

In terms of sexual politics, the term 'patriarchy' can also arguably be more easily co-opted by a male anti-feminist backlash, than the more challenging concept of gender relations. Indeed, far from encouraging change, it can lend itself to fatalistic acceptance of its inevitability through humour. It does not encourage questioning of male identity and behaviour; indeed, it is voiced as a term by many men to demonstrate that they have had some lessons in feminist terminology, without necessarily seriously taking on board their own role in reproducing gendered power and division. Others might fear that questioning

the term might indicate lack of recognition of sexual inequality. In either case, its generally uncritical incorporation into any discussion of gender relations then serves to close-off the issue to further serious debate and maintain the marginalisation of gender and sexuality to 'mainstream' concerns.

But beside this examination of the paradoxes of 'patriarchy's' co-option as theory in academia and within a conservative political climate, there is simultaneously a very different materialist explanation for its persistence as a focus for many feminists. This is the legitimate anger, impatience and also pessimism of women in the face of the entrenched nature of male domination, despite opportunities for change and attempts to create 'equal opportunities' climates. This has arguably pushed many socialist feminists into a more radical feminist position. Thus, Cockburn, (1991:6) makes an impassioned justification for her conviction of the existence of 'patriarchy':

'If the United Nations Decade of Women, 1975-85, did nothing else it demonstrated the reality of patriarchy. The opening years saw the assembling of detailed evidence of women's subordination around the world; the end of the decade confirmed just how hard it was to change anything. Patriarchy was real and it was durable'.

Yet, real as these feelings are and compelling as such a statement appears, it is emotive rather than analytic, appealing to symbolism rather than history. It does not consider what capitalism contributed to women's situation, and departs from a dialectical way of seeing the world as the mutual interplay of class, gender and race. Unless one's theoretical framework opens up the whole social dynamic of impoverishment, exploitation and oppression, one's strategy for action is one-sided and ineffective.

However, I would suggest that, sympathetic as I am to the need to find a language to highlight all male domination and women's oppression, 'patriarchy' is a dangerous term. Short-hand adjectival use might be used - carefully - as a descriptive tool just to indicate male dominance. But, more often, its use indicates confusion. When Cockburn argues that 'female subordination is *systemic*' (1991:6, italics in original), this could suggest the institutional embeddedness of different forms of male power. I think this is what she *does* mean, in which case she is simply describing, not explaining, something. Yet the concept of 'systemic' also suggests something more; it implies a systems analysis - but she does not go that far, nor does her analysis indicate that she supports structuralist accounts. Why then, does she claim 'patriarchy' to be an 'analytic' tool, when all it is a descriptive pointer? We are left to decide ourselves whether there is a 'system' there or not. This seems unhelpful both for analysis and a strategy for change. In seeking usable language, I prefer terms which carry less of a conceptual or ideological load: what is wrong with 'male dominated', or 'gender relations' or 'gendered' (depending on what we are

talking about). With Bradley (1989: 55) I would reserve 'patriarchy' or 'patriarchal' to specific social structures.

Taking these speculations together, it would seem that a mixture of decline in class politics, academic elitism leading to the isolation of theory, and the very ambiguity of the term, have encouraged the appropriation of 'patriarchy' by a wide tranche of modern intellectual development, from post-modernism to organisation theory and liberal feminism.

Conclusion.

I have written this paper as a long overdue response to 'patriarchy's' resurrection, particularly in the work of Walby. As a concept for the explanation of the production and reproduction of women's oppression it has been exhaustively examined for over fifteen years. It's problematic status either as an abstraction or a material and ideological structure in a dual systems theory has been riddled with difficulties about its institutional origins, the sites of women's oppression, and the difficulties of accounting for the embeddedness of gender division in employment. The reality of the self-perpetuation of male dominance does not, however, make it a structure in the sense of containing a structural dynamic; male dominance feeds on itself in terms of vested-interests defending the status quo. But while this has durability, men's relationship to women does not contain a mutually defining economic relationship in the same way as the relations of capitalism to wage labour. Attempts to elevate patriarchy to a mode of production, thus giving it equal historical and explanatory weight to capitalism, have fallen into the trap of a-historicity and biologism, or into circularity. Rather, gender relations are constructed and reconstructed at both a material and ideological level and are intertwined at both a material and ideological level with class relations. The task for sociological analysis of class and gender relations is to explore how these two dynamics enmesh in practice. Thus, although separable conceptually to the extent that we have different words for them, in concrete social experience, class and gender are inseparable. But to argue that class relations themselves are always *gendered* is not the same as saying that class relations are '*patriarchal*'. We need far more complex metaphors to understand class and gender than 'patriarchy' can provide. This can only be developed in the process of researching concrete moments and relations in history and social process. It is only when lived practice - including the dimension of human agency - is the central object of exploration, that theory can develop as an interpretative and analytic activity.

If 'patriarchy' could be used in the limited sense of describing male dominance, as when it is used adjectivally for particular historical sets of relationships or institutions, it would have some use. Unfortunately, slippage between this application and its hardening into a structure is a more common application.

This is particularly so in over-generalised and abstract analysis, in which social process is conceptualised as the expression of abstract structural dynamics. The problems of 'patriarchy' are thus both endemic to the concept, and to a particular kind of abstract theorising which is not fully integrated into analysing lived social processes, past and present. As a term with any scientific use, it can only be rescued with a general turn in contemporary theorisation to become firmly rooted into empirical engagement with people's lives. However, if this is pursued, the question arises as to what is wrong with using the perhaps longer and clumsier terms such as gender relations? These cannot be as easily reified into a structure since they propose no consistent pattern and gender is open to construction and is problematised. This not only allows for the detailed exploration of the persistence of male power domination, but also leaves room for the more subtle play of gendering men and women, and of the dialectical tensions of history.

If the aim of analysis is to *explain* men's oppression and/or exploitation of women, then politically, it is also to inform and find the spaces for *challenge*. For this, historical materialist theory provides the most delicate tools to probe the historical process in its many levels of detailed, substantive reality: the forms of collusion and consent, opposition and conflict, of sites of reproduction or change of gendered relations, of articulation of different interests, of relations between experience, consciousness and ideologies, of contradictory and double edged actions and meanings and of the diverse sources and consequences of actions. The awareness of opposition, contradiction and dynamic is central to this approach and is what is 'dialectical' about it; this is a qualitatively different perspective from structuralist perspectives, while its grounding in material systems of production and political economy sharply distinguishes it from the fragmentation of post-modernism.. Moreover, materialist theory has to be *integrated within* an analysis of these processes. Because it is a theory which is embedded in the very complex interpretations and explanations of these processes, it cannot stand out as a separate entity, divorced from its object. This may not strike the reader who is habituated to having distilled 'theory' presented on a plate as 'theory'. Perhaps the time has come round to reconceptualise what is most incisive for feminist explanation, and move away from the futile search for a separate theory of gender relations, and instead, infuse wider materialist analysis with feminism.

My analysis has thus tried to make a link with the substantive critique of 'patriarchy' as an explanatory theory of gender relations, and has linked its weakness to a wider failure in a particular kind of theorising: abstract structuralism. Further, it has drawn attention to 'patriarchy's' persistent appeal to a wide body of academia today. The question remains, do the advantages of using 'patriarchy' as a limited shorthand outweigh the dangers of conceptual confusion, neglect of class dynamics in favour of one-dimensional concentration on gender, and closure of an agenda for change? I think not.

Given that the concept has been through a renaissance over the past ten years, I would suggest that it should be labelled 'dangerous: handle with care'. Pessimistic prognoses for the future of the women's movement should not justify recourse to reductionist explanation in terms of structures of 'patriarchy'. Unless one addresses the differentiated and contradictory processes in the reproduction and modifications of class and gender relations, gender becomes a static property, while class becomes a qualitatively crude category. Gender is a mutable dimension of experience and social relationships; without recognition of this, there is no room for change either for women or for men.

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