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Opportunities, Constraints, and Tyrannies in the Household; the Intersection of Theory and Practice

I. Introduction

This article reviews the historical and present state of household studies and theoretical models. The public/private household model and those reflecting postmodernist, deconstructive approaches will be examined. The problem of the naturalization of gendered roles, and the cultural hegemony of such roles in the household is discussed with attention to the intersection of theory and practice. The household is a critical site where an array of multifaceted opportunities and tyrannies occur in response to cultural, economic, historical, and individual considerations. The recognition of the centrality of the household in the lives of Japanese women and men, and analysis of the gendered nature of the dynamic processes which occur within are essential to understanding the social fabric of human life. This locates gender, which is largely an unexamined though integral part of everyday living, as an important aspect of the research and analytical process. The representation of women as real people living in real settings doing privatized unpaid labor inside the house, as well as working as paid laborers outside the home, and their relationship with other household members, is necessary in order to elucidate the intertwining relations of production and reproduction which form the basis of capitalist society. Women have historically shouldered a disproportionate share of the costs of the reproduction of human beings, nurturing work, and household labor. This fact becomes increasingly more salient in the recent context of different countries (e.g.,

Japan, United States, Great Britain) attempting to delegate more "socialcare" into the household arena, as governments cut welfare and social programs which deleteriously impact women, children, the elderly, the sick and the disabled most severely (Moore 1996: 62-74). Therefore, this article addresses the importance of household research and the familial experience which resonates throughout the lives of women and men from birth to death (Ortner 1996: 257-73; Mies 1986: 47-9).

Yanagisako and Delaney (1996: 20) argue that families are "culturally constructed social group formations" in which gender roles for men and women are naturalized through cultural processes which imbue these historically, economically, and socially constructed roles as autonomously occurring. Gender, then becomes the basis of inequality constituted as a "system of difference." These unequal roles, once constituted, are legitimated and perpetuated as they are given a foundation in biology, in religion, or as representative of a seemingly "natural order of things," where situations arise spontaneously out of ordinary life and supposed necessity. Once this naturalization process is complete and its hegemony established, it effectively precludes challenge, questioning and analysis. Therefore, an important part of the research on women's roles in the household and in the family deals with the stripping away of the so-called "natural" foundation of such roles. For example, as Shooji (1985) has argued, women can conceive and give birth to children and that is natural. However, raising children to adulthood is not natural for women anymore

than it is natural for men; it is a social act for which society also has a responsibility and a duty. Other scholars have illustrated the historical, class-based and culturally constituted role of motherhood and the variations in the meaning of sex and gender (Foucault 1978; Yanagisako and Collier 1987; Bernstein 1991; Miyake 1991: 273; Smart 1996: 38-56; Moore 1996: 58). Ueno (1996: 3-4) has also forcefully argued that women are not naturally born "Mothers," and this can be easily recognized by showing that there are great variations on the meaning and practices of motherhood throughout history, as well as reflecting geographical and ethnic diversity.

Additionally, as Sen (1992: 122-23) has argued, intrahousehold divisions are not easy to analyze because inequalities in households are frequently characterized by "resource-use" and the "transformation of the used resources into capability to function." These characteristics may not be clearly reflected in concrete income inequality within the family, but rather in certain capabilities such as being free to pursue independent careers, being chosen for and being able to participate in positions of leadership, being able to (at the least), read and write and (at the most), achieve a high level of education. In the same way, we can analyze how women effectively and skillfully use the varied resources of the household to further their own interests and purposes. Thus, researchers must construct new ways of looking at the household and family which better mesh with more current knowledge and situations (Tamanoi 1990). There is a need to develop a better fit between theoretical views of the household economy and the processes within, and practical research on this issue emphasizing the necessary, but sometimes neglected interlocking nature of theory

and practice (Hartmann 1996; Maynard and Purvis 1994: 2; Kelly, Burton and Regan 1994: 27-48).

II. Theoretical Views on Household Studies

As Agarwal (1988) suggests, the household should not be treated as a private entity separable from the context in which it is embedded. The intimate household experiences of life are affected by wider social relations. Thus, intra-household relationships and their dynamics occur within historical, socio-economic and political contexts. Through individual households, the wider structures and processes of society are linked. Treating women as completely, individuated and separable entities in the Western tradition, ignored the processes within the household of which they are a part. While the analytical separation between household unpaid labor and paid labor is recognized, there is an experienced seamlessness between work done inside the home and paid work done outside the home.

The concept of the household has been defined as the domain of cooperative decision making and inter-dependence among individual members (Kabeer 1994: 69). The common tendency to view families as "undifferentiated and altruistic units" continues to hamper household analyses (Moore 1996: 62). As Dwyer and Bruce (1988: 2-11) have argued, the household economy has been treated historically and theoretically within anthropology and sociology as a single, homogenous unit. This theoretical view reflected three different ideological practices. First, the acceptance of overly simplistic household models for the purpose of easy integration into economic decision making and planning. Secondly, the trivialization of the

household arena as a fundamental social site, and lastly, a powerful psychological bias which viewed the family and household as sacrosanct, an untouchable sanctuary, protected from all external social processes. These practices combined to virtually eliminate the possibility of any analysis of resistance, negotiation, and conflict which occur in the household setting. It masked the gendered relations and politics that underpin the household economy and serve as a basis of resource allocation and power in the familial setting. It also meant that gender processes and dynamics were viewed as separated from the household.

However, more recent deconstructed views of the household in anthropology have illustrated the fact that different individuals (women, men and children) within the same household have differential access to influence and resources (Ilcan 1996: 33-49). The people who live together in a household do not live in a protected womb of harmonious bliss unaffected by economic, political and historical influences. Instead the household affects and is affected by the sociocultural, political and historical processes of the region in an ongoing dynamic relationship. Accordingly, the household is a locus for the reproduction of gender segregated work, opportunities for empowerment, inequalities, and power politics.

Though the debate over the public and private theoretical model has raged for many years in Western academic thought, Iwamura, Kunishige, Tanaka, Tomiie, and Yamamoto (1992: 48) have recently argued that the public/private dichotomy is not necessarily problematic for women in Japan. They assert that women take for granted that men should be in the public sphere, and women should be at home in the domestic sphere. Women have advan-

tages and responsibilities in the home such as managing the household and family budget which have value. Yet, countering this point of view, Lebra (1984) states that the 1980's contraction of the housewife role and denigration of its status has caused some Japanese women to decide that the formerly structured reward system, that is, her long-range investment as wife and mother, may not pay off in the way she assumed it would. She may not be supported by her children when she is older, and these same children may not adequately appreciate her sacrifices and devotion in the household. Additionally, Tamanoi (1990) and Shooji (1992) have suggested that many women in Japan are experiencing frustration due to the isolation of staying at home, the alienation of individuals within a capitalist society, and the growing complexities inherent in modern nuclear family and personal life.

Imai (1994: 48) argues that although the birth of the concept of the public and private has been traced to the time of the Industrial Revolution in the West, in Japan this dichotomy has a much longer history. She recently followed the ideology of the public/private spheres back to the 1600s and 1700s. Japan was heavily influenced by Confucian ideology, especially the upper-classes, which advocated that woman work inside the home. This idea became entrenched in Japan by the 18th century, in particular among the *samurai* class (Niwa 1993). Thus, before becoming an industrialized society, the Japanese had established the so-called private and public dichotomy, as well as the accompanying gendered division of labor in terms of inside and outside the home. This is also evidenced by the well-worn phrase *otoko wa soto, onna wa uchi* meaning "men outside and women inside."

Chimoto (1995: 61) shows that rather than a natural foundation for roles in the family, the household division of labor in Japan became rigidly polarized into gendered roles during the industrialization of Japan. The heart of Chimoto's argument is the evolution of the development of the full-time housewife, rather than any natural or biologically based phenomenon, occurred in tandem with the rise of the middle class in the early stages of Japan's industrialization. This new role was accompanied by a more rigid gendered division of labor in the household.

Other scholars argue that it was after the implementation of the Meiji Civil Code that the roles of men and women became more gender stratified (Sievers 1991). Ueno (1987), Uno (1991), Lebra (1984), Smith and Wiswell (1982), Kondo (1990) and Molony (1991) suggest that the Meiji Civil Code legitimated and institutionalized for all Japanese the Confucian practices of *samurai* and wealthy merchant households which greatly restricted women's labor and activities to the household. Smith (1983) suggests that in the Meiji Period women were formally relegated to a subordinate position according to Neo-Confucian ideology which had been previously and predominantly practiced only in the *samurai* class. Smith and Wiswell (1982) in discussing the villagers of Suye, noted that rural, farm women had a much more cavalier and flexible attitude toward matters of marriage and duties in the household with respect to gender roles.

When examining the private/public analytical "trap", Lamphere (1992) has argued, that it is too constraining and that newer forms of analysis have discarded it. More recent approaches in gender and household studies are taking the historical context into account look-

ing at how the lives of women changed in tandem with, for example, the transformative nature of capitalism. Also, women are now being analyzed in terms of age, class, race, ethnicity, and kinship. Typical division of labor arrangements in families which have assigned child care roles solely to women are being challenged and re-evaluated (England 1996: 14). Household research in sociology and anthropology is now focusing on the evolution of rules and customs which assign different kinds of family power to men and women (Maynes, Waltner, Soland and Strasser 1996: 2-20). Various types of inequalities within the family are now being explored, as well as those within society; for example, between men and women, between older women and younger women, between unmarried women, widowed women and married women, and between men and women of different classes. Other studies focus on the concept of gender as continually shifting based on "situated interaction rather than a role or attribute" (Pyke 1996: 530). Indeed, the underpinnings of what actually constitutes kinship relations in families and households is now being examined and re-defined (McKinnon 1995: 25-6). Additionally, there is interest in how gender and class inequality is reproduced through marriage, through the family, and through household labor relationships.

Thus, households are places where both opportunities for empowerment and old and new forms of oppression simultaneously co-exist. Using these latest analytical insights and through the examination of the intra-workings of the household, social scientists can produce a more layered, contextualized portrait of this fundamental social domain.

III. Conclusion

Through household studies the invisible, but so very necessary unpaid labor done in the home by women is made visible. The mystification of such privatized household work as cooking, cleaning, emotional support and psychological nurturance, the care of children, the disabled, and the elderly as "natural" labor for women only is laid bare. Putting the spotlight on the household and the gendered processes occurring within is an important step in the demystification process. This is the critical intersection of theory and practice and foreshadows the next active step which is to seriously challenge why certain jobs are considered only "women's work"; for example, what were the social, historical and gender processes which underpinned and continue to perpetuate these cultural constructions of inequality, and how can they be transformed. In the same way, we can examine what the range of opportunities are for women in the household setting, how do they resist and challenge stereotypical roles and practices, and how this gendered system can provide a place of empowerment for women.

What is now necessary is more research, as Orther (1995: 261-62) argues, "in the trenches" or "on the ground," that is, we need more basic ethnographic description with plenty of women's voices resounding. Research in social settings exposes the relationships between household members, as deeply embedded in gender and power politics, no matter how "natural" or "invisible" these arrangements may appear. Unmasking the tyrannies of inequalities, constraints, and opportunities which exist in the household and the dynamics which underlie them, clearly illustrates the link between the

social processes in the household and outside the home. Studying the ongoing relations in the household and the everyday life occurrences which shape and structure the lives of individuals provides valuable information, as well as the possibility of the construction and synthesis of new theories and ideas regarding gender and diversity in family experiences. Therefore, research in Japan incorporating gender (both female and male gender), can be used to inform or challenge the theoretical hegemony of Western based models which tend to rely heavily on individual based ideologies. This means that gender can be viewed as a relational concept within a broader analytical framework including other important considerations such as ethnicity, region, age, and class. In turn, these new insights will assist our understanding of how gendered relations are reproduced in Japanese culture and in society as a whole.

NOTES

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