

ON THE DEVALUATION OF WOMEN'S LABOUR: HEGEMONIC AND LOCAL IDEOLOGICAL PRACTICES

PAUL SHREENAN

Carleton University

INTRODUCTION

The Atlantic region of Canada has a history of underdevelopment beginning shortly after confederation and which continues to the present¹. The particular form of capitalist underdevelopment² which has occurred in the region is one characterized by a heavy reliance on the government sector and also on resource extraction industries like fishing and forestry. The fishing industry presents a complex of relations between levels of state regulatory mechanisms, class conflict, and gender inequality. One particular division, that between inshore and offshore fishing, is important in this paper. Offshore fishing is carried out on large vessels (65 feet and over) owned by large fishing and fish processing companies (e.g., National Sea Products or Fisheries Products International). Small boat fishers with boats under 45 feet in length pursue inshore fisheries including lobster, herring, mackerel, cod and other groundfish when conditions permit. They are versatile, multi-purpose fishers. Small boat fishers operate out of the household unit of production and comprise the mainstay of hundreds of small fishing communities on the whole of Canada's east coast.

In fishing communities, the focus of this paper, women contribute to the family economy through a variety of productive strategies including subsistence production, the informal economy and waged labour (Connelly and MacDonald, 1983:46), yet women's work has consistently been devalued, undervalued or simply ignored by both the scholarly and broader community (Porter, 1987:48). It is in the sphere of domestic labour, both productive and reproductive, that women's work is most undervalued because it is not public/visible and because its contribution has been systematically ignored in terms of the enduring cultural production surrounding the fishing industry and related sea-going cultures. In Brunton et al. (1981) we see, for example, an extensive compilation of song and poetry about the lives of working class (including fisher) Atlantic Canadians over the past century or more. Unfortunately, as the authors are well aware, the material is practically devoid of the presence of women and women's experience except where they are mentioned in a sexist and derogatory way. Cultural production, thus, reflects the kinds of ideological practices which legitimate certain kinds of discourse and render alternate voices inaudible. In this paper I will be concerned, mainly, with the question of how the invisibility of

much of women's labour and its under-valuation is reproduced through ideological practices which legitimate female subordination³. I will examine the ways in which three hegemonic ideological practices (capitalism, liberalism, patriarchy) together legitimate and reproduce this subordination. Then moving from the general to the specific I will introduce an exploratory discussion of a local ideological practice which, though not unheard of in other industries or regions, has manifestations peculiar to small boat fishers.

The purpose of this paper is thus modest; to begin to recognize particular, local forms of knowledge and practice which articulate with other hegemonic practices hence contributing to the reproduction of the subordination of women. I offer an analysis of those ideological practices integral to the reproduction of unequal gender relations in the Maritimes. In particular the focus is on the culture in which small boat fisher families are immersed. It should be stated at the outset that my analysis is an exploratory discussion of gender relations in Maritime fishing communities rather than a comprehensive examination. The analytical focus is, therefore, admittedly theoretical and self-consciously lacking in detailed empirical material. In addition this discussion should not be read as an attack on small boat fishers, their communities, or their ways of surviving. Instead, it is advanced in an effort to recognize gender inequality in this historically specific material and cultural context; to begin to explicitly define one such local ideological practice, what I call the *ideological practice of independence*; and to make some tentative suggestions pertaining to possibilities for social action and social change.

Few studies articulate the actual labour processes of the women of fisher households in the contemporary context. However, in an important case study on women of small boat fisher households in Gloucester, Massachusetts, Clark shows how women's labour is integral to the overall labour processes of small boat fishing. In some circumstances, for example, women may represent the fisher household's interests at the level of political organizing activities, whether these are formally established or not. This may entail lobbying at the local level or at other state regulatory sites. Clark also explains how some women have initiated creative marketing of the catch through marketing a cookbook which spreads the knowledge of local seafood cookery. Women, acting as "land agents" for the household fishing enterprise work to get the best deal possible for the catch by negotiating with more than one buyer; they are, in other words, sales agents for the catch. Fisher women have often stayed in school for significantly longer than their partners, their reading and writing skills are better than their partners' thus enabling them to be more effective managers of particular organizational tasks involved in the fishery. They have been responsible for the negotiation of loans, equipment purchases, bills payment, crew payment, repair arrangements, mortgages, insurance policies and licences (Clark,

1988:264-8). Each of these tasks merits close examination in order to articulate the *nitty gritty* of household production in the age of monopoly capitalism.

As already mentioned my goal here is more modest -- to move toward the recognition of local ideological practices and the development of a theoretical framework which may assist in this area of research. To that end the concepts of hegemony and ideological practice must be introduced.

The concept of hegemony borrowed from Gramsci and developed by others serves as a corrective to the exclusively class determined analysis of orthodox Marxists (Mouffe, 1987). Hegemonic domination in present day capitalist society, or the way in which capital establishes and reproduces its rule is not accomplished through force. Hegemonic rule is always precarious or unstable. Consent or hegemony is produced and reproduced through the institutions and practices of civil society as opposed to being solely enforced through the repressive state apparatus.

The concept of ideological practice is central to the present analysis; practices are ideological when they legitimate relations of inequality¹. As Dorothy Smith points out ideological practices "are pervasive features of the organization of the juncture between the relations of ruling and the actualities of people's lives they organize and govern" (Smith, 1990:43). These practices make social relations intelligible to us although they are systematically selective and incomplete. They tell partial truths, thereby obfuscating the major contradictions that characterize power relations. These concepts will be more fully developed below, but will nevertheless be illuminated here.

What makes certain practices ideological is that they embody highly selective representations of reality. For example, liberal philosophy posits *free* and *equal* individuals; by doing so it defines out of existence a vast array of social structural elements like gender, class, ethnicity or sexual orientation. Furthermore the philosophy posits that all individuals are equal before the law; yet when confronted with the reality of the law, individuals who bring to the court vastly different economic and social resources predictably get vastly different outcomes. In fact, given an historically informed theory of social relations it would indeed be odd if all groups had similar experiences *vis a vis* the law.

Formally equal individuals also freely compete for places in the world of paid work. If we systematically ignore the above mentioned structural differences we can look, for example, at the labour market and assume that any individual is free to take up any occupation given the proper motivation. The divergence between ideological practice and reality is readily apparent. We know that it is neither happenstance, poor individual choices nor biological

programming that push and pull women disproportionately into particular occupations (Armstrong and Armstrong, 1978).

HEGEMONIC PRACTICES AND WOMEN'S SUBORDINATION

In this section I will discuss liberal, capitalist, and patriarchal ideological practices each of which includes important constituent relations that contribute to the reproduction of the subordination of women in general. It is, however, only for heuristic purposes that I separate these hegemonic practices; in everyday life they are inextricably intertwined.

Liberalism

Ideological practices make the contradictions between lived experience and the theory disappear by not addressing them. As a later example will illustrate in more detail, the pervasive liberal conception of equality carries a highly specific meaning which is much narrower than other conceptions of equality. One common illustration of the breadth in the potential meaning of equality is posed as the difference between equality of opportunity and equality of condition. The everyday experience of people often points up the contradictions between the purpose of ideological practice and reality, but there remains albeit a limited and selective "truth" to the practice nevertheless. The liberal subject is thus formally free and formally equal; these formalisms are supported by selectively chosen examples (the Fords, Horatio Alger and other dead white males that are part of the cultural baggage of the Americas) which are used to illustrate that "anyone can make it". It is true that these individuals have succeeded; what is ideological in the use of the examples is that the vast majority of hard working people do not make it, and cannot, for structural reasons.

Pervasive though it is, liberalism should be understood as having developed out of a particular historical conjuncture and as a result it embodies a set of practices which are historically specific. So often today analyses utilise a totalizing discourse which confers an almost transhistorical status to the liberal *status quo*. One of the main tenets of liberalism is that all individuals are equal before the law; this postulate establishes the grounds for another liberal principal, that of, equality of opportunity. In our society, however, the belief in not only the ideal but also the practice of equality of opportunity (and this practice has some major flaws) has served to both obscure and legitimate in significant ways inequality of condition. Since liberal theory posits that all people are free individuals abstracted from society and history, as it were, anyone can simply be or do anything one wants given the proper motivation. Women's oppression in this case may be conceived of as their own fault and the familiar practice of blaming the victim is reinforced.

Liberal feminists contend that women's subordination is reproduced through traditional (i.e. Non-western and therefore by definition non-rational or illiberal) values and their concomitant social structures. This position has certain idealist tendencies which have important consequences for the kinds of political strategies or policy goals that are suggested. In her discussion of liberal feminism (in particular the WID school)⁵, Asoka Bandarage makes reference to the kinds of social and economic strategies of this kind of analysis,

Similar to liberal thinkers in the West, WID thinkers seek this [primarily economic] integration [of women] through legal measures and changes in attitude. To this end many conferences, declarations and legislation including the UN decade for women (1984:498).

There is a problem with these strategies; to the extent that they spend a great deal of time and energy on the changing of attitudes they neglect the more fundamental problem of material conditions. Even legislation, in and of itself, does little to address this problem as has been seen throughout the world where women in industrialised liberal democracies who enjoy *de jure* equal rights remain marginal in terms of ownership and control of resources.

Capitalism

Capitalism is a mode of production which entails a variety of ideological practices. My discussion of capitalism is very much tied to the preceding section on liberalism because the two are inextricably linked historically, as such, in this section I make frequent reference to both liberalism and capitalism. The point of departure for critical, gendered analyses of capitalist society is Engel's treatment of gender inequality in The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State. In this work Engels drew from notes written by both he and Marx while reflecting on the work of Lewis Henry Morgan who wrote extensive empirical researches on the Iroquois in New York (Leacock, 1973:9). While Morgan was interested in how change occurred in terms of social relations and ultimately developed a typology of stages of human history supporting the unilinear evolutionary theory of his day, Engels had quite a different use for Morgan's empirical data. He used Morgan's work as a basis upon which to develop a more consistent and theoretically informed, materialist understanding of the question of the social change from so-called primitive society onward. Leacock points out that the issues raised by both Morgan and Engels remain the concern of many scholars today. Socialist feminist scholars like Mies (1982;1986) and Eisenstein (1979:43) acknowledge the importance of many of Engels' insights, but reformulate his question about the origins of gender inequality in such a way that it serves to explain the ongoing problem of women's subordination. That is, they ask how women's subordination is

reproduced and attempt to get at questions of reproduction, and the legitimation of subordination.

In a context of regional underdevelopment, distinct from, but in many ways similar to, that experienced by women and the broader working class in the third world, Connelly and MacDonald make the another important link between capitalism and women's subordination,

working class households here always required more than the male wage and [...] women here always contributed to the family household either by intensifying their domestic labour in the home, by earning money through an informal economy, or by participating in the labour force and earning a wage themselves (in Porter, 1987:47).

Since in many cases women's work has been in the home it has remained invisible (and was considered private, domestic and non-productive). When they have gone, or do go, from the household to sell their labour power women's work has, however, been devalued. It has become apparent that this enabled capitalists to exploit women's labour to an even greater extent than has traditionally been the case with men's. The most important international example of this is found in the burgeoning maquiladoras of Mexico; however, the same strategies are in evidence around the world (Elson and Pearson, 1981:92). In part this is where the practice of patriarchal relations is important, but this is the focus of an ensuing section.

In terms of the focus on capitalist production what the above quotation leaves out is the fact that women contribute directly to what is generally thought to be their husband's fishing enterprise. The fact that this is largely ignored may be a result of the structural invisibility of the woman's contribution to what I and others argue must be recognized as the household's fishing enterprise -- not just that of the male fisher (See Klein and Davis, 1988:31-33). This broader perspective on the fishing operation, one that is based in the household unit of production, would be a positive step in challenging the false dichotomy of the public/private work worlds where one is viewed as productive and the other is regarded as natural (Mies, 1982:2-3).

In Canada, for example, the public/private split only occurred with the development of capitalism and eventually with the *de facto* privatization of land across the country. Popular knowledge of this is, however, limited and there seems to be the broad based perception that the public-male/private-female split has always been the way social life has been organized. Once the land was claimed immigrants could no longer go out and enter subsistence production where men and women living in households worked together or separately, but almost always from the household (household production for use-value). They were forced to find work as

labour for capitalist enterprises or government infrastructural projects which ultimately were built to the great benefit of capital.

Several of the characteristics of liberalism were taken up and utilized in the development of capitalism. One example of the interconnectedness of capitalism and liberalism is the particular usage or definition of the concept of equality. Capitalist practice and its ideological use thus overlaps with liberalism (they are in agreement). Each shares the ideal of equality, but as Mina Davis Caulfield points out, the conception of equality which they share has a culturally specific and consequently a very limited meaning. Equality,

was inextricable from the concept of individual achievement in 'free' competition, and never included (except among socialist theorists) the idea of any kind of equal sharing of societal products (1981:202-203).

Caulfield elaborates further on how this cultural ideal of equality (and the widespread belief in this particular definition of equality as the only possible one) acts to conceal the extreme inequality inherent in capitalist society. She offers an important critique of the capitalist definition of equality. What Caulfield does not bring out is the connection between the capitalist and liberal definitions of equality. Fundamentally they rely on a definition of equality which targets equality of opportunity and not that of condition. Equality of opportunity focuses, as Caulfield makes clear, on the freedom of individuals to compete for unequal rewards⁶. The individualist emphasis in capitalism is in many ways an outgrowth of the same emphasis in liberalism which conceives of individuals as existing prior to, or as Jaggar says, "in abstraction from" a society. This leads to the faulty assumption that individuals' needs can be fulfilled without any real impact on others (1983:29). Another contradiction between capitalism and liberalism is apparent when we look at the idea that, in liberal theory, inequality can be eliminated or minimized through reform. From this conceptualization, liberal theory legitimates inequality by suggesting that inequality is an aberration that can be eliminated through education, attitudinal changes, legal reforms and intervention projects (Bandarage, 1984:499) none of which broach the problem of inequality as a structural imperative of capitalism (Bandarage, 1984:500). Both Caulfield and Bandarage bring out important criticisms of liberal theory and capitalism which illustrate how each established beliefs and practices which, understood in culturally specific ways, serve to legitimate the structure of inequality.

Mies points out several major contradictions of capitalism when she discusses the approach which she advocates (socialist feminism) in opposition to the dominant, capitalist and patriarchal

practices. First she points out the ideological nature of the dominant definition of work.

It is thus necessary, regarding the concept of the productivity of labour, to reject its narrow definition and to show that labour can only be productive in the sense of producing surplus value as long as it can tap, extract, exploit, and appropriate labour which is spent in the production of life or subsistence production which is largely non-wage labour done by women (Mies, 1982:3).

What Mies argues here and elsewhere is that traditionally defined "women's work" is the fundamental precondition of all other work including that involved in capital accumulation. Women, then, can be conceived of as productive and exploited even though they appear external to the direct processes of capital accumulation. In fact they are not external, but are intimately connected to the system through their labour. To the extent that women's work is considered private and nonproductive their subordination under capitalism is reproduced through a systematic ignorance of the material base of the actual system; it therefore becomes, as Mies points out, "a mystification" (1982:4) which legitimates women's subordination, thus the practice is ideological.

Classical or orthodox Marxist accounts of productive work also offer little room for analyses of work which does not take place under the classical capitalist relations of production: where surplus value is directly extracted from the labour of the dispossessed worker. Other forms of work which do not directly produce surplus value as a result fail to pass the test of the definition of "productivity". As has been pointed out this is often the bulk of the work done by women. The effect of defining work in this way is important in terms of reproducing the subordination of women because it reinforces the widespread dualistic notion of private and public work stratified by gender. There are those who argue that the underlying use of dualisms (i.e., as in the work of Levi-Strauss) is itself a product of male modes of analysis (Daly, 1978:11). However, the use of dualisms often relies on naturalistic explanations of gender differences which see, for example, the family and women's traditional role within it as products of biological differences and therefore their legitimation relies on a functional analysis of nature shaping the human social order (Barrett, 1985:199).

The Ideological Practice of Patriarchy

In the broadest terms, patriarchal ideological practices may be defined as social relations in which women tend to exist in an unequal and subordinate power relation *vis a vis* men. In explaining patriarchal relations the view that male dominance is biologically determined is widespread among both anti-feminists and feminists. Anti-feminists see women's subordination (although they

would not call it that) as designed by nature; therefore; it cannot even be conceived as oppressive (Jaggar,1983:88-89). Anti-feminists often adopt a scientific discourse to explain women's inequality as natural. In Gough's analysis she unmasks the implications of such naturalistic, and biologically determinist, theories;

A "scientific" argument which states that all such features of female inferiority are instinctual is a powerful weapon in maintaining the traditional family with male dominance (Gough, 1975:58).

Gough is critical of anthropologists who attempt to establish a scientific basis for a theory of gender inequality in humans; however, the critique works equally well when applied to capitalism because it is under capitalism that the rational, scientific model heavily influenced by the ideological practice of patriarchy, has been largely developed and tested.

Radical feminists like Firestone (1970) and Brownmiller (1976) also consider biology to be the determining factor in their own analyses of, for example, the division of labour by sex and rape respectively. A variety of criticisms have been levelled at analyses which favour biological determinism. Among the most problematic assumptions made by those who accept biological determinism is the fact that such a position makes social change highly unlikely if not impossible because of the "fact" of this biological or natural inequality.

In her discussion of the lacemakers of Narsapur, Maria Mies shows how the system of capitalist production built upon previously existing patriarchal practices and beliefs to transform the lives of the Kapus, a peasant agricultural caste, and some Christian women. As the industry developed women became segregated in the production jobs while men captured the jobs of agents -- which gave them access to the actual site where the value of the women's labour was realized. In this way the women's labour was exploited. The reason that was given for women's exclusion from the activity of agent was that they were not mobile enough since, among other things, they could not ride bicycles due to local social traditions (1982:10). Such beliefs about what is socially acceptable are effective ideological and material barriers to women's emancipation,

The tenacity with which women cling to these oppressive [patriarchal] norms, because they are symbols of a bygone higher status ... is the ideological and psychological base on which a new phase of exploitation can be built (Mies, 1982:13).

Similar methods of social control and gender oppression are evident in the fisher society of Atlantic Canada. One researcher

relates how women in the fishing communities of Newfoundland formerly had a higher status because their work was more directly related to production,

The older women are guided by the past in much the same way as the men, and they too defer to the identity of "fisherman" ... Their role as fishermen's wives has vanished. Not only are there no fish to be dried on flakes [drying racks], but virtually all other aspects of their past lives have gone as well (Porter, 1988:175).

The tendency to want a return to the old norms which guided life is evident as Porter indicates. We must recognize, however, that such practices offer hierarchical, gender inegalitarian based definitions of women and men. For example, the idea that the man is the head of the household in fisher society, as in India, legitimates such things as the knowledge that women's sphere of activity is in the house, and more broadly, it can legitimate the unequal gender division of labour. Finally, it is evident that material interests underlie these ideological practices.

Although Porter makes useful reference to the desire to maintain the norms of a bygone era, I think she over-states the case when she says that "virtually all other aspects of their lives have gone as well". In the past women's labour may have been more visibly a part of the fisher household's production'. In contrast to Porter what I am emphasizing here is the extent to which women's labour remains an indispensable, albeit ignored, component of contemporary household production. Women in small boat fisher households are not left with nothing to do, rather with the concentration on production for exchange-value, women's labour (connected to the household's fishery activities) has become less visible, but it has not ended.

To expand on this, I would suggest that the development of capitalism has distorted the labour processes of women such that the content of their labour has changed, but not necessarily the amount. They have in some cases been left with a much less public role within the family of the fishing household; for example, most fish processing is now done in specialized processing plants -- that job, as a productive household or community-based activity, is no longer available. Since processing work is almost always seasonal women's public exposure through this sort of work changes accordingly. The point here is that while the demands of capitalism have changed the process of production immensely, it has left women in a less powerful position, but not a less integral one.

Southwest Nova Scotia's "Independent" Small Boat Fishers: Culture and Class in a Harsh Environment

In this section I will examine another ideological practice which helps to legitimate and reproduce the subordination of women in various parts of the Atlantic Provinces. The sub-region of southwest Nova Scotia is of interest here as a kind of precursory case study. The dominant ideological practice in southwest Nova Scotia, especially prevalent in the powerful fishing community (fishers, processors and suppliers inclusive), comprises a brand of laissez-faire capitalist and petty bourgeois production (Clement, 1986). This practice is distinctly free enterprise in relation to the rest of the province and the region. In practice however, even southwest Nova Scotia's fishers analyze the system based on their own constellation of interests and objectives. Like other groups they selectively reject laissez-faire policies when it is in their interests to do so. In instances where fishers have felt threatened by a particular group or perhaps a state policy they have mobilized in order to circumvent the strictly laissez-faire operation of the market. Special social programs represent the most obvious state interventions taken at the behest of fishers; examples include, special loans for vessel replacement and unemployment insurance considerations, but virtually all state policies affect the market in some way. Under such circumstances fisher families, like many other actors in the economy, are often unwilling participants in a hegemonic practice, namely capitalism and they attempt to make the best of their situation -- sometimes successfully, sometimes not.

As explained earlier, small boat fishing tends to be gender stratified activity with men tending to do the fishing and women being involved in a variety of on-shore labour processes. Typically, a male fisher has formal ownership of the boat and crews are made up of family members whenever possible. Otherwise close friends or neighbours crew boats on a share of the catch basis (Clement, 1986:27,29,32; Brym and Sacouman, 1979). In his discussion of some of the contradictions between fishers' view of their work and the reality of their work, Davis clearly gives his analysis of the contribution that the fishing labour process makes toward the fisher's ideological practice of independence,

Fishing boats and gear are formally the property of their users. The units of production are self-contained small-scale and individually operationalized in an often risky environment. All of the work tasks in each unit of production are generally completed by its crew members. Fishing incomes are solely derived from the production strategies and the expenditures of each unit of production. In short, small boat fishing is in many ways characterized by the independence and the individuality of each crew. Moreover, attributes of production strategies lend a sense of inter-boat competition to some

of the activities, e.g., lobster fishing. The fishermen's ideology of self reliance and rugged individualism is in these ways reflective of aspects of their real experiences (1984:435).

Fishers clearly have a material basis for the ideological practice of individualism and "independence". However, it has been constructed on a highly selective basis. The influence of patriarchal practice is evident in Davis' quotation in that the work task description has excluded virtually all work that does not take place at sea. Again, in the highly gender stratified society of the fishing communities this, by definition, excludes most, if not all, of the work women do. By ignoring the contribution of women the ideological practice of independence is reproduced along with women's subordination. The labour process, as just outlined, is one characterized in some instances by autonomy or "self-dependence", but not independence. It is true that fishers decide when, how, where, and how hard to work. They do not make, however, these "autonomous" decisions as though they were extracted from the exigencies of daily survival as fishers or as members of households -- outside forces affect their decisions and these include the need to turn a profit which in practice translates into catching enough fish, and selling it, at the going rate of fish per kilogram or tonne to reproduce the enterprise. Women's role in affecting the decisions that fishers make have also traditionally been ignored by scholars (Porter, 1987:45) as well as by the state and capital.

At the level of the market where oligoponistic and paternalistic relations abound (Kearney, 1983) between fishers (sellers) and merchants (buyers/processors) the ideological practice of independence ceases to function. In that context the bases of the fisher's sense of independence, the product of their labour, and the romantic, idealist notions of fisher "independence" produced in patriarchal culture and folklore are unmasked before the harsh material forces of market exchange. The glorification of the male culture of fishers is an important part of the ideological practice in the Maritimes where the male culture is often characterized as engaged in a taming the natural "she-world".

The peculiar strain of the ideological practice characteristic of southwest Nova Scotia, with its perhaps more adamant than average free enterprise position, is more completely understood when we also consider the cultural ties or the historical linkages between the area and New England. The local adherence to the individualism of laissez-faire capitalism is, in effect, a function of these two primary influences -- the material base of fishers at the level of labour process and the New England connection. New England's historical economic and cultural\ideological domination of southwest Nova Scotia established conditions which clearly fostered a cultural climate amenable to their free enterprise practice.

In the market exchange the unequal and antagonistic nature of relations (fishers dependent on a few buyers for the purchase of their catch) is de-emphasized in the local culture; instead, paternalistic relations between them often legitimate these inequalities in conjunction with the hegemonic ideological practices: capitalism/liberalism'. Fishers are relevant here in two particular respects. First, fishers' labour is commodified in the fish that is caught, consequently when they sell their fish they are actually, at some level, selling their labour power. In the same labour process women's organizational labour is also commodified in the fish which is caught; this is so because their labour is socially necessary. Socially necessary labour or abstract labour, as opposed to individual labour in any given firm, is defined in terms of units of time and entails "the labour time required to produce any use-value under the conditions of production normal for a given society" (Marx, 1986:46-47). We also know that Marx and many others regard certain practices as productive which at first glance do not seem to be. Consider, for example, the case of manufacturing. Actual manufacturing is preceded by organizational labour processes in which raw materials must be purchased, the labour that goes into this is thus socially necessary, as is women's organizational labour in the fisher household. Furthermore the distribution of the product is regarded as productive. So too I would argue is organizational labour in fishing which is broader than the simple labour process of casting nets or laying traps and later pulling them in. Nevertheless, the value of a commodity appears only as the exchange ratio between the commodity in question and the money commodity in a particular exchange and at the time of sale the social relations which produced the commodity are not readily apparent, except to the producer. In this way women's labour is obscured through a form of commodity fetishism. That is, the sales transaction is allowed to reify relations between commodities, while relations between producers and buyers are conceptualized as free transactions unencumbered by enduring social relations of either a classed or gendered character.

Secondly, because of the oligoponistic nature of the fish markets, which are inextricably linked to and are part of the capitalist system, "freedom" is limited to such an extent that it is equated with coercion, i.e., sell on the oligoponistic market, even if you are not being paid the real value for your fish, or get out of the industry. The fisher, and for that matter the entire household, is in a position similar to that of any other worker under capitalism. They are *freely compelled* to sell their labour (commodified in the fish they catch) or not sell it and take no income.

One other important characteristic of the ideological practice of independence is the underlying misogyny which structures the gendered division of labour. For a variety of local cultural reasons women rarely take part in the fishing (Porter, 1988:170;

Davis, 1984). Several instances of this are noted in Faris (1972:73). For example, women may not be permitted to set foot on the boat for fear of "polluting" the vessel for the day. Such social prohibitions⁷ additionally serve to perpetuate women's devalued and subordinated status within the household by clearly situating the means of production in the hands of the male. The fact that women's contribution to their household's fishing enterprise is minimized or ignored completely is, as I have argued, partly a manifestation of the hegemonic ideological practices discussed in the first section and also the local fisher variant. There is relatively little work done on what I have termed here the "ideological practice of independence" specific to Atlantic fishers. One of its most striking facets is the exclusion of women from its analysis and the lack of attention to women's work which contributes directly to the fishing enterprise of the household. It is slowly becoming recognized that, historically, women's labour was important in the mercantilist (or salt-cod) era of fishing. Ellen Antler wrote an important piece on women's historical, though often hidden contribution, to production in the Newfoundland fisheries as well as producing a wide variety of use values for subsistence. In it she estimated,

that the process of drying fish added \$2400 (1950 values) to the value of the seasons catch in Labrador, and \$1500-2000 (1969 values) in Conception Bay. In all Antler suggested women contribute around 35% of the family income in direct, measurable economic values (Porter;1987:45).

Equally important as Porter indicates is the fact that Antler's analysis finally made visible the economic activity of rural women which, to that point, had been ignored by male analysts. However recognizing past sins is easier than admitting those of the present. Nevertheless recognition is slowly emerging as to the extent of the contribution to the fisher household by women today (Connelly and MacDonald, 1990).

Since there is little research that deals specifically with the issue of women's labour in fishing, empirical evidence of their participation is difficult to locate. My own research points to some trends already mentioned. During field work in the summer of 1989 I was able to discuss with a lobster fisher, albeit superficially, the question of the household as a unit of production and the gendered division of labour that existed therein. In this discussion, the male fisher while admitting that his spouse's labour was important attempted to minimize it by making light of it:

PS: When you do your income tax or your inventory of how much you've spent on equipment ... does your wife do that?

Fisher: Oh yeah she does it ... in fact she gets paid year round for doing it ... she gets to live with me.
(Southwest Nova Scotia Interviews, June 23, 1989).

The underlying relations of ruling are made apparent and the ideological practice of independence is shown to be in effect even at the level of casual conversation. Unfortunately what barely gets recognized in the informal context of casual conversation is ever more difficult to recognize and legitimate in public discourse.

Subsistence activities were undertaken by each partner during other times of the year, but during the fishing season both partners, not only the male, contributed to the fishing enterprise. The woman I spoke with did what she modestly called "book-keeping" and was therefore instrumental in terms of budgeting, maintenance decisions, crew payment and outfitting (i.e. equipment purchasing). The problem of recognition, however, requires discussion in a theoretical light which will make visible that which much past theoretical and empirical work made invisible. Additional fieldwork is planned to explore this.

Women's labour is commodified in the fish they make it possible to catch. What I attempt to highlight is the diversity of labour processes which are included in the term "domestic labour"; and the way in which this term slides women's decidedly productive labour into the category of unproductive or domestic labour. Through this I attempt to problematize fisher women's productive and reproductive labour and sketch the kinds of considerations that must inform a fully developed analysis. The requirement therefore is to begin to recognize and value women's decidedly productive labour and to formally differentiate it from other domestic labour while at the same time attempting to change the fact of women's sole responsibility for domestic labour. In terms of the ideological practice of independence, the women of fisher households are caught in a difficult position. Their unpaid work is not recognized as contributing to fishing and as long as their work is not recognized as productive they remain subordinate in the household unit of production.

CONCLUSION

At the level of praxis, women are developing strategies which may begin to break down the exploitative elements of the ideological practice of independence. One such strategy would be to take an active part in gaining recognition of their work. This might be done at the individual level by encouraging more women to go to the dock side to be part of the fish sales process. In this way women would be part of the process in which the value of the catch is realized; their contribution would be concretized. I think this might be a significant material change in circumstances. It would perhaps change the woman's role from that of isolated,

powerless and dependent worker in the household domain to that of equal partner/actor in the realization of the household's material well-being. Initially such a transformation would have to be negotiated at the level of the individual. Notwithstanding some imminent structural transformation in both gender and class relations it seems to me to merit some consideration. This practice of course has been happening in some areas (Clark, 1988:267) and it has an admittedly double-edged characteristic. While it would help to concretize the labour of the women it adds yet another task to women's already double-burdening responsibility for reproductive labour in the home. Another facet of this strategy would have to include a redistribution of reproductive domestic labour -- not an easy challenge.

As in the Gloucester example, women may establish their own organization where they could act at a political level in their own and their household's interests. Another possible strategy might be for women to struggle for a place within the local fisher's associations or the Maritime Fishermen's Union (MFU). At present the MFU only allows certain types of fishers in the union and all of them actually have to be "doing fishing"; however, some other fishing unions encompass both "shore/plant" and "at sea" workers (e.g., NFFAWU -- Newfoundland Fisherman, Food and Allied Workers Union). If this approach were adopted the union would have a greatly expanded membership. On the other hand it would have to begin to address the very real issue of women's subordination in fisher households.

Endnotes

1. Thanks are due to Jared Keil and Mary-Anne Kandrack for comments on early and later drafts respectively.
2. For a variety of positions discussing the meaning of underdevelopment in Atlantic Canada see Brym and Sacouman, 1979.
3. Things ideological here are defined in a way that has been termed critical by Thompson who points out that ideology "is essentially linked to the process of sustaining asymmetrical relations of power - that is the process of maintaining domination" (1984:4).
4. Dorothy Smith (1990) calls these "relations of ruling" and others have different names for such relations. See Armstrong and Armstrong (1990); Thompson (1984).
5. Women in Development (WID).
6. Jaggar (1983:62) points out the contradiction inherent in the liberal focus on equality of opportunity; equal opportunity to compete for unequal rewards is impossible to achieve as long as rewards are conspicuously unequal.
7. Initial fish processing work used to be organized and controlled by women in a community based labour process.
8. Although the capitalist mode of production and its many underlying practices derived from the practice of the theory of liberalism this is not to say that the two are, in fact, unproblematically compatible. See for example Mcpherson on the contradictions between capitalism and democracy. In practice liberalism has clearly served as a legitimating force for capitalism.
9. As noted in a previous example Mies gives of the prohibitions that certain women should not ride bicycles.

References

- Armstrong, Pat and Hugh Armstrong. The Double Ghetto: Canadian Women and Their Segregated Work. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1978.
- Bandarage, Asoka. "Women in Development: Liberalism, Marxism and Marxist Feminism." Development and Change, 15 (October):495-515, 1984.
- Brownmiller, Susan. Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape. New York: Bantam, 1976.
- Brunton, R., J. Overton, and J. Sacouman. "Uneven Underdevelopment and Song: Culture and Development in Atlantic Canada." in L. Salter (ed.), Communication Studies in Canada. Toronto: Butterworth, 1981.
- Brym, Robert J. and R. James Sacouman eds. Underdevelopment and Social Movements in Atlantic Canada. Toronto: New Hogtown Press, 1979.
- Clark, Margaret-Elwyn. "Managing Uncertainty: Family Religion and Collective Action Among Fishermen's Wives in Gloucester, Massachusetts." in Jane Nadel-Klein and Dona Lee Davis, To Work and To Weep: Women in Fishing Economies. St. John's, Nfld.: ISER, 1988.
- Connelly, Patricia and Martha MacDonald. "Women's Domestic Work and Wage Labour in a Nova Scotia Community." Studies in Political Economy, (10):45-72, 1983.
- _____. "Class and Gender in Fishing Communities in Nova Scotia." Studies in Political Economy, (30):61-85, 1990.
- Daly, Mary. Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism. Boston: Beacon, 1978.
- Davis, Anthony. "'You're Your Own Boss: An Economic Anthropology of Small Boat Fishing in Port Lameron Harbour, Southwest Nova Scotia." Ph.D. Thesis. Halifax: Dalhousie University, 1984.
- Eisenstein, Zillah, R. (ed.). Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1979.
- Elson, Diane and Ruth Pearson. "'Nimble Fingers Make Cheap Workers': An Analysis of Women's Employment in Third World Manufacturing." Feminist Review 7 (Spring):87-107, 1981.
- Engels, Frederick. The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State. Eleanor Leacock ed., New York: International Publishers, 1973.

Faris, James C. Cat Harbour: A Newfoundland Fishing Settlement. Memorial University of Newfoundland: Printed by University of Toronto Press, 1972.

Firestone, Shulamith. The Dialectic of Sex: The Case For Feminist Revolution. New York: William Morrow, 1970.

Gough, Kathleen. "The Origin of the Family." in Rayna R. Reiter (ed.) Toward an Anthropology of Women. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975.

Gramsci, Antonio. In Mouffe, "Hegemony and Ideology in Gramsci." in Tony Bennet et al., Culture, Ideology and Social Process. London: Batsfords, 1987.

Hartmann, Heidi. "Capitalism, Patriarchy, and Job Segregation by Sex." in Zillah Eisenstein (ed.), Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism. New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1979.

Jaggar, Alison M. Feminist Politics and Human Nature. Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1983.

Kearney, John. "Common Tragedies: A Study of Resource Access in the Bay of Fundy Herring Fisheries", Unpublished Master's Thesis, Department of Environmental Studies, Dalhousie University, Halifax, Nova Scotia, 1983.

Leacock, Eleanor ed., "Introduction" in Frederick Engels The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State. New York: International Publishers, 1973.

Marx, Karl. Capital. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1986.

Mcperson, C.B. Democratic Theory: Essays in Retrieval. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973.

Mies, Maria. Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale: Women in the International Division of Labour. London and Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Zed Books, 1986.

_____. "The dynamics of the Sexual Division of Labour and Integration of Rural Women Into the World Market." in Lourdes Beneria (ed.) Women and Development: The Sexual Division of Labour in Rural Societies. New York: Praeger, 1982.

Mouffe, Chantal. "Hegemony and Ideology in Gramsci." in Culture, Ideology and Social Process. London: Batsford, 1987.

Porter, Marilyn. "Women and Old Boats: The Sexual Division in a Newfoundland Outport." in Arlene Tigar McLaren ed. Gender and Society: Creating a Canadian Women's Sociology, 1988.

_____ "Peripheral Women: Towards a Feminist Analysis of the Atlantic Region." Studies in Political Economy, (23):41-71, 1987.

Smith, Dorothy. Conceptual Practices of Power: A Feminist Sociology of Knowledge. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990.

Thompson, John B. Studies in the Theory of Ideology. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984.