In this moment of economic and ecological crisis a feminist anti-capitalist politics could generate a transnational solidarity that is larger and more powerful than anything we have yet seen. Such a politics requires both Marxism for its trenchant critique of capitalism and the class inequalities essential to it and feminism for its commitment to gender equality. Both require a commitment to anti-racism. In this chapter we trace the uneasy relations between Marxism and feminism showing the contributions each has made to the other and argue that the success of the current Marxist revitalisation hinges on a more equal relationship. This integration is best described as a socialist feminism based on the understanding that ‘the liberation of women depends on the liberation of all people’ (Rowbotham 1972: 11).

Feminism is both an intellectual project and a political movement, so its theoretical debates are also political and strategic. Feminists tend to be drawn together by their commitment to oppose women’s oppression, but they are also engaged with different theoretical and political paradigms, differences that are sometimes obscured by the apparent unity of ‘feminist theory’. There are multiple ‘feminisms’. Typically, mid- to late twentieth-century feminism included several distinct political currents: liberal feminism aspiring to formal legal equality and access to equal opportunities with men; radical feminism,
which assumed that unequal gender relations are the primary contradiction of social organisation and that women’s oppression underlies all other inequalities; Marxist feminism, which assumed that women’s liberation depended on over-throwing or dismantling capitalism; and socialist feminism which combined the historical materialism of Marxism with an analysis of gender-based inequalities.

In an influential intervention published over thirty years ago, Heidi Hartmann complained that the relationship between Marxism and feminism was marked by extreme inequality. She compared it to the marriage between husband and wife depicted in English common law at the time: ‘Marxism and feminism are one, and that one is Marxism’. She concluded that ‘either we need a healthier marriage or we need a divorce’ (Hartmann 1981: 2). Her hope for a healthier marriage was based on a conviction that each had strengths the other needed:

> [W]hile Marxist analysis offers essential insight into the laws of historical development, and those of capital in particular, the categories of Marxism are sex-blind. Only a specifically feminist analysis reveals the systemic character of relations between men and women. Yet feminist analysis by itself is inadequate because it has been blind to history and insufficiently materialist.

While Hartman was writing from a US perspective, Belinda Bozzoli (1983: 142), writing from a South African perspective, noted that ‘the dominant tendency in analyses of women in South Africa’ collapses ‘female oppression into the capitalist mode of production’. Bozzoli’s and Hartmann’s interventions were part of a heated and extensive debate that raged throughout the 1980s. A central question was whether Marxism could be reworked to integrate gender and whether class-based political movements would integrate feminist demands into their practices. Many left-wing feminists shared the concern that feminism was at risk in engagements with Marxism, especially in political organising (Shelton and Agger 1993). Roberta Hamilton’s mischievous position (1978: 104) that socialist feminists should avoid marriage with Marxism, opting instead for shacking up together, captures what has typically happened. Socialist feminism remains an autonomous political current engaged with both Marxism and other currents of feminism, theoretically and politically (Sangster and Luxton 2013).

At stake in these debates was the issue of how to understand the relationship between class and gender hierarchies and, based on that understanding, how to
most effectively mobilise politically to fight for a world in which class exploitation and gender oppression are eliminated for all peoples. Sexism, heterosexism, racism and different class interests, as well as a diversity of other systemic inequalities, easily undermined the ability of activists to work together in solidarity. The capacity of scholars to develop an integrated analysis of gender, race and class, or what Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991) called ‘intersectional analysis’, remains challenging, partly because of radically different objects of analysis and partly because of the uneven strength of various political movements. Both Marxism and feminism have long histories of struggling with issues of race, racism, colonialism and the subjugation of indigenous peoples. Both traditions, theoretically and politically, have been ‘race-blind’, forcing anti-racist and post-colonial scholars and activists to simultaneously develop their own work while challenging Marxism and feminism to integrate their perspectives (Joseph 1981; Sunseri 2011).

Through the 1990s and early 2000s, the collapse of most communist governments, especially the USSR, and China’s turn to the market undermined Marxist politics. At the same time, English-language scholarship turned to postmodernism and post-structuralism in ways that denied the value of historical materialism and undermined its presence in academic thought. The current period disrupts those tendencies, inviting a re-engagement with Marxism and re-animating a socialist feminist politics. We argue that socialist feminism offers a vital corrective to twentieth-century Marxist politics and has the potential to inform new forms of struggle and compelling alternative visions.

Central to the contribution of socialist feminism is its commitment to integrating analyses of gender, race and class. This is not an easy task. Despite a voluminous literature and decades of political struggle, many Marxists have resisted feminist interventions. Similarly, many feminists have dismissed Marxism as economistic and reductionist.

FROM MARXISTS AND FEMINISTS TO MARXIST FEMINISM

No Women’s Liberation without Socialism!
No Socialism without Women’s Liberation!

This slogan of the 1970s’ women’s liberation movement expressed the political convictions of movement activists and reveals important political tensions that have confronted such activists. Identified variously as women’s liberation
movement activists, left-wing feminists, radical feminists or socialist feminists, they live the tensions and contradictions of adhering to both Marxism and feminism. They are drawn to Marxism for its critique of capitalism, its commitment to class struggle and its vision of a future world free of class exploitation. Marxism also provides a theoretical perspective that rejects arguments that women are a uniform social category inevitably subordinated to men, instead linking women’s oppression to specific historical circumstances and providing some political strategies for overcoming that oppression.

However, throughout the twentieth century Marxist political movements failed to seriously address sexism, heterosexism, racism or the systemic subordination of women. One of the goals of socialist feminists is to put women’s oppression and liberation and anti-racism at the heart of Marxism and to integrate gender, race and class in Marxist analyses and politics.

At the same time, socialist feminists are drawn to other feminists by their shared commitment to develop both critiques of ‘malestream thought’ (including Marxism) and a shared feminist politics around basic demands intended to challenge sexism, heterosexism and racism. Such demands are intended to ensure for women at least the same legal rights and cultural norms as men, to reduce women’s economic vulnerabilities, give them greater control over biological reproduction and foster at least some degree of social support or collective responsibility, both from men and the society as a whole, for care of people. Practically, feminist politics includes demands such as improved maternal and child health, access to free, safe birth control and abortion, paid parental leave, childcare, micro credit, access to clean water, housing, sanitation, an end to men’s violence against women, an end to police and legal harassment of indigenous people and people of colour, access to education and good secure jobs, and greater involvement by men in care work. In different times and places, some of these demands have been partially met, especially in welfare states where women have been able to organise strongly, and where employers need women’s participation in the labour force.

But these are resolutely social democratic demands that do not challenge the essential dynamics of capitalist economics. As the recent global economic crisis illustrates, these gains are among the first to be attacked when profits are threatened, and even the most advanced social democratic policies do not eliminate the subsidy that women’s unpaid care work ensures for the private profit-making essential to capitalism (Braedley and Luxton 2010: 12–16; Connell 2010). Another of the goals of socialist feminists is to integrate an anti-racist
class analysis into feminist theory and to win wider support among feminists
for the recognition that ‘the liberation of women depends on the liberation of
all people’ (Rowbotham 1972: 11).

No women’s liberation without socialism!
The assertion that efforts to end women’s subjection to men and the oppression
they face because they are women are not possible in a capitalist society has its
roots in early nineteenth-century socialism in Britain and France. Rejecting
the social organisation of the new capitalist societies that were emerging, activ-
ists formed communal or collective communities where they tried to create
alternative ways of living, some of which were explicitly anti-capitalist (Hayden
1982; Taylor 1983). Writing about their ideas, William Thompson and Anna
Wheeler ([1825] 1983) argued that in any society based on competition and
private ownership of wealth, women would be at a disadvantage because of
their responsibilities for pregnancy, childrearing, care provision and household
management. Instead, they envisioned communities in which all members
would cooperate to generate livelihoods and look after each other. Domestic
responsibilities, including care, would be shared by all. They argued that
such communities would free women from the burdens imposed by private
individual families and households. As fully integrated members of the com-
munity, women would be able to realise their full potential and subjection and
discrimination would no longer be possible.

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels identified such ideas as ‘utopian socialist’
because they failed to take account of class differences and they assumed that
total social transformation involving the elimination of individualism, compe-
tition and private property is possible, failing to recognise that it is impossible
to create cooperative societies in a world where elites retain power and wealth.
In The Communist Manifesto, Marx and Engels wrote:

The undeveloped state of the class struggle, as well as their own sur-
roundings, causes Socialists of this kind to consider themselves far
superior to all class antagonisms. They want to improve the condition of
every member of society, even that of the most favored … Hence, they
reject all political, and especially all revolutionary, action; they wish to
attain their ends by peaceful means, and endeavor, by small experi-
ments, necessarily doomed to failure, and by the force of example, to
Instead, they insisted on the necessity of class struggle and the revolutionary role of the proletariat in accomplishing the transition.3

However, like Thompson and Wheeler, Marx and Engels assumed that women’s oppression was linked to the historical development of private property and family forms based on private property. In that context, women were isolated in private family households under the authority of their husbands, subjected to a sexual division of labour that made childrearing and running the household women’s responsibilities and excluded them from public life. For Marx and Engels, the solution to women’s subordination required their full participation in public life, especially in production. Women’s ability to do so required the socialisation of household labour and childrearing, something Marx and Engels advocated but did not elaborate on.

Marx ([1867] 1976: 718) stressed that ‘the maintenance and reproduction of the working class remains a necessary condition for the reproduction of capital’. What he neglected was that this ‘maintenance’ and ‘reproduction’ involved a great deal of work done by women. Classical Marxism analysed the consumption of labour power, but left the production of people to their own self-interest, assuming that the production of labour power occurs naturally as people live their lives. It never challenged the domestic and family forms that produce labour power for capitalist or communist markets. The result is the social organisation of childbirth, infant care and socialisation, and the care of adults is ‘naturalised’ (relegated to the realm of the ‘natural’) by default.

The sexism and essentialism of this analysis reverberated through the communist and socialist politics of the twentieth century. While Marxism recognised women’s oppression, its treatment of ‘the woman question’ focused on the relationship of women to the economic system of production for the market rather than on sex/gender divisions of labour or on gender relations. The early Marxists failed to examine gender differences, particularly on the difference between women’s and men’s experiences under capitalism. In his Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State ([1884] 1972), Engels argued that as women were incorporated into wage labour, they would become economically independent; the authority of the male head of the household would be weakened and patriarchal relations destroyed.

Early twentieth-century thinkers and revolutionary activists influenced by Marxism, such as Alexandra Kollontai, Clara Zetkin, Vladimir Lenin, Leon Trotsky and August Bebel, likewise argued for the integration of housewives into the paid labour force and for the collectivisation of housework (Davis
1981). However, unlike the early nineteenth-century European socialists who called for collectivisation of social life, including the abolition of the nuclear family and who experimented, albeit in very small communities, with ways of living communally, most Marxists did not spell out what collectivisation of ‘housework’ would mean. They assumed that paid teams of employees with access to advanced technologies could clean houses, produce meals, do laundry and other household tasks more efficiently than unpaid housewives working alone in their individual homes (Davis 1981, chapter 13). No attention was paid to the gender of those ‘employees’.

Several of these women understood the family to be the source of women’s oppression. Some developed scathing critiques of marriage and family relations, calling instead for free love. Kollontai, for example, is remembered mainly as the proponent of the ‘glass of water theory’, the theory that sex should be as easy and uncomplicated as drinking a glass of water (Kollontai [1921] 1972).

In the excitement of the first years of the new communist Soviet society, Kollontai ([1920] 1977: 259) articulated her vision of the new order:

> The workers’ state needs new relations between the sexes, just as the narrow and exclusive affection of the mother for her own children must expand until it extends to all the children of the great, proletarian family, the indissoluble marriage based on the servitude of women is replaced by a free union of two equal members of the workers’ state who are united by love and mutual respect. In place of the individual and egoistic family, a great universal family of workers will develop, in which all the workers, men and women, will above all be comrades. This is what relations between men and women, in the communist society will be like. These new relations will ensure for humanity all the joys of a love unknown in the commercial society, of a love that is free and based on the true social equality of the partners.

Assuming that the new communist society would eliminate exploitation in the workforce, Kollontai understood the family as the source of women’s oppression. She wrote of the necessity of introducing public services of every kind that would free women from the ‘petty cares’ of everyday life. Sensitive to the double load of housework and wage work, she emphasised the solution to women’s oppression as the collectivisation of domestic labour under socialism. This provision of such public services was necessary to bring women into
politics. She argued that ‘society should relieve women of all those petty house-
hold cares which are at present unavoidable (given the existence of individual,
scattered, domestic economies)’ and take over ‘responsibility for the younger

She envisioned and fought for a workers’ state that would create ideal condi-
tions for women and children, by taking collective responsibility for them:

The workers’ state aims to support every mother, married or unmarried,
while she is suckling her child, and to establish maternity homes, day
nurseries and other such facilities in every city and village, in order to
give women the opportunity to combine work in society with maternity

For Kollontai and others, the struggle for women’s liberation was part of the
struggle for socialism. In their view there should be no separate women’s move-
ment. Kollontai was dismissive of ‘the feminists’ because ‘they seek equality in
the framework of the existing class society; in no way do they attack the basis

Similarly, Lenin understood women’s positions in both the household
and the paid workforce as problematic and was dismissive of feminism. For
Lenin, a housewife was a domestic ‘slave’ and women’s unpaid labour within
the family was a major obstacle to progress. Writing in 1919 Lenin (cited in
Vogel 1983: 121) points out that despite ‘all the laws emancipating women, she
continues to be a domestic slave, because petty housework crushes, strangles,
stultifies and degrades her, chains her to the kitchen and the nursery, and she
wastes her labor on barbarously unproductive, petty, nerve-racking, stultifying
and crushing drudgery’. Hence Lenin argued strongly for the socialisation of
domestic labour, to ‘transform petty housekeeping into a series of large-scale
socialised services: community kitchens, public dining rooms, laundries, repair
shops, nurseries, kindergartens and so forth’ (in Vogel 1983: 122).

The dreams of these early communists were destroyed by the events of
the 1920s and 1930s (Zizek and Douzinas 2010). In practice, the communist
states of the twentieth century pushed for women’s entry into the labour
force but did nothing to challenge the deep sexism and sex/gender divisions
of labour that relegated women to low-paying jobs and made them vulner-
able to sexual harassment. They provided childcare to facilitate women’s labour
force participation but did little or nothing to encourage collectivisation or
democratisation. Instead of free love and new relations of joy, they imposed heterosexual marriage, made homosexuality illegal and manipulated mothers to have many children or to limit childbirth to one child. Instead of ‘true equality’, they romanticised and reinforced the private, heterosexual, nuclear family and the prevailing sex/gender divisions of labour, stressing women as workers and mothers but failing to provide support for them.4

Communist states became infamous for inadequate housing and poor domestic services such as the provision of water, sewage or electricity. Most women in communist countries worked a double day with few supports for their domestic responsibilities and little acknowledgement of the systemic sexism women faced. Given the explicit state opposition to an autonomous feminist movement, women in communist countries were rarely able to mobilise in order to challenge or change their oppressive conditions (Molyneux 2000; Urdang 1989).

In capitalist countries and the so-called Third World countries of the twentieth century, communist and socialist parties and movements relied for the most part on the political analyses of classical Marxism. The narrow legacy of ‘the woman question’ produced a tendency for left-wing and revolutionary movements to insist that women’s concerns were of secondary importance and divisive of working-class struggles. Women were told that their issues would naturally resolve themselves ‘after the revolution’. Left-wing organisations rarely integrated women into their leadership, usually downplayed issues deemed ‘women’s’ and ignored the sexism of their men as well as the sexual harassment their women were subject to. As Hartmann (1981: 2) noted, women’s issues were seen: ‘at best [as] less important than class conflict and at worst divisive of the working class’. While there have always been Marxists and activists in the communist and socialist movements who took up women’s issues, that dismissive context limited women’s capacity to analyse their specific oppression, undermined their ability to organise and struggle for their issues and constrained efforts to analyse the interconnections of gender, race and class.

**No socialism without women’s liberation!**

With the re-animation of the women’s movement in the 1960s and 1970s, women’s liberation activists took up and began to rework the earlier Marxist critiques. In doing so, they simultaneously drew on the insights, debates and struggles of the larger feminist movement while trying to make Marxism
more receptive to gender and race politics (Hennessay and Ingraham 1997; Rowbotham 1992). They agreed that participation in the paid labour force was essential for women’s economic independence and agreed with the need for a wide range of benefits and social services designed to socialise care and household labours, but they went further.

They developed complex analyses of the social construction of gender, showing how deeply and profoundly gender hierarchies have penetrated all aspects of social life, from psychic patterns of gender identity and embodied being (Benjamin 1988; Bordo 1993) to political and economic structures (Armstrong and Armstrong 1987). Sex, for example, they argued, was infinitely more complicated than drinking a glass of water (Segal 1994). They showed that changing people’s ways of being was much more challenging than the early Marxists had anticipated and argued that socialism had to take into account all aspects of personal life as well as people’s experiences in the workplace (Rowbotham, Segal and Wainright 1979).

At the same time, they struggled with issues of race and racism. Anti-racist feminists revealed the ways in which the women’s movement of Western Europe and North America failed to take up racism analytically or politically (Amos and Parmar 1984; Bhavnani 2001; Bulbeck 1998; hooks 1995). Socialist feminists recognised that struggles for women’s liberation in one part of the world were always linked to other struggles against exploitation and oppression (McClintock 1995). They took for granted that women in ‘advanced capitalist’ societies had much to learn from the struggles of women in other parts of the world, especially those resisting imperialism and colonialism and those participating in revolutionary movements against capitalist and authoritarian regimes (Ferree and McClurg Mueller 2004; Rowbotham 1972). But despite their interest in and solidarity with anti-imperialist movements, they were slow to attend to the racism permeating their theorising and practice. Much of their work assumed that the family forms, work experiences and political strategies of Western Europe and North America (often referred to as ‘Western feminism’ or the ‘global North’) could be generalised. For example, Michèle Barrett and Mary McIntosh’s (1982) critique of the nuclear family as an ‘anti-social institution’ which monopolised the caring and sharing that should be spread more widely in society, did not resonate with the experience of African women in South Africa who saw the family as an arena to defend from the encroachments of capitalism and the state. Subsequently, anti-racist socialist feminists have deepened the analytical capacity of socialist feminism to integrate race
with its analysis of gender and class (Mohanty 2003), thus operationalising the early socialist feminist insistence that the liberation of women depends on the liberation of all peoples.

Although Marx and Engels limited their solution to ‘the woman question’ to integrating women into the labour force by collectivising household labour and providing childcare, and failed to integrate a gender or race analysis into their understanding of class, Engels’s work offers two important insights that Marxist feminists have built on.

In his 1844 *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, Engels reports on the devastation caused by the appalling working conditions in the factories of Manchester. He tells the story of an unemployed man who is found by his mate, at home, mending his wife’s stockings. His mate is shocked to see a man doing women’s work, but poor embarrassed Jack explains that he has been unemployed for a long time and has no prospects of getting employment while his wife works long hours in the factory earning the only income their household has. Jack defends his inappropriate gender practice by explaining that his wife is exhausted by her employment and Jack does what he can to relieve her. Engels concludes this account with a profound insight. There is something terribly wrong, he says with:

this condition, which unsexes the man and takes from the woman all womanliness without being able to bestow upon the man true womanliness, or the woman true manliness – this condition which degrades, in the most shameful way, both sexes, and, through them, Humanity (Engels [1844] 1987: 147).

He goes on to offer an embryonic analysis of the social construction of gender:

[W]e must admit that so total a reversal of the position of the sexes can have come to pass only because the sexes have been placed in a false position from the beginning. If the reign of the wife over the husband, as inevitably brought about by the factory system, is inhuman, the pristine rule of the husband over the wife must have been inhuman too.

His critique of the normative sex/gender divisions of labour and family relations prevalent in his time was elaborated 40 years later in *Origins of the Family,*
Marxism and Feminism

Private Property and the State ([1884] 1972). He argued that different modes of production, based on different labour relations, coincided with different family forms and therefore with different patterns of relations between women and men. He linked the rise of private property to ‘the world historic defeat of women’ (120), thereby laying the basis for later analyses that women’s liberation depends on their integration into production and the collectivisation of social resources. He also provided a key theoretical insight about how to understand the interconnections of gender and class in his discussion of reproduction.

The idea of social reproduction had its origins in Marx’s analysis of capitalist society. In Volume 1 of Capital, he pointed out that ‘every social process of production is at the same time a process of reproduction’ ([1867] 1976: 71). Although his work was concerned specifically with economic processes relating to production of goods and services for exchange in the market, Marx also examined the processes of the reproduction of capitalist social relations. He and Engels applied these ideas to all modes of production, leading to Engels’s ([1884] 1972: 71) formulation that

[according to the materialist conception of history, the determining factor in history is, in the final instance, the production and reproduction of immediate life. This, again, is of a two-fold character: on the one side, the production of the means of existence, of food, clothing and shelter and the tools necessary for that production; on the other side, the production of human beings themselves, the propagation of the species.

Despite the importance of this insight, neither Engels nor the leaders of the early twentieth-century communist movements inspired by Marx and Engels, realised the full implications of this analysis (Maroney and Luxton 1987: 13). Instead, they equated the production of the means of existence with labour and assumed the production of human beings could simply be left to ‘drives for self-preservation and propagation’ (Marx [1867] 1976: 718). They left this untheorised and ignored the fact that ‘maintenance’ and ‘reproduction’ involved a great deal of work done by women. However incomplete and unsatisfactory, this insight nonetheless proved a fertile starting point for later feminist interventions on gender and class.
MARXISMS IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

MARXIST FEMINISM: THEORISING CLASS AND GENDER

One of the central preoccupations of women’s liberation activists was to challenge the primacy Marxists gave to class. Initially women’s liberation activists and theorists struggled to understand how class and gender could be understood in relation to each other. Some, especially US radical feminists such as Kate Millet (1970) and Shulamith Firestone (1972) were influenced by Marxism but identified unequal gender relations as the primary contradiction of social organisation. Both Firestone and Millet give patriarchy an analytical primacy. Their project is to substitute sex for class as the driver of history. Drawing on Weber’s use of the term ‘patriarchy’ to describe a particular form of household organisation, in which the father dominated and controlled the economic production of the household, Millet argues for patriarchy as a system of male domination that is analytically independent of any economic mode including feudalism and capitalism. In capitalist society all women are characterised by an economic dependency which ‘renders her affiliation with any class a tangential, vicarious and temporary matter’ (Millet 1970: 32). Drawing on Engels’s concept of the production and reproduction of immediate life, Firestone argued that ‘the economy’ and ‘the family’ are distinct sites generating class and gender hierarchies. She argued that the subordination of women was a necessary precondition for the development of class inequalities (Firestone 1972: 175).

Dual systems theories

Some socialist feminists, similarly influenced by Engels’s production/reproduction formulation, worked with the same dichotomy but understood the two sides of the divide as related and equally important. Some rejected the notion of an unchanging universal patriarchy, offering instead a separate system of social relations and divisions of labour that organises human sexuality, nurturance, affection and biological reproduction. They argued that this system, what Gayle Rubin (1975) calls ‘the sex/gender system’, or ‘sex/affective production’ (Ferguson 1989 and 1991) has different historical modes, just as Marx argued that economies do (Ferguson and Folbre 1981). Others retained patriarchy, positing two separate structures: the mode of production and patriarchy (Eisenstein 1979; Ferguson and Folbre 1981). Some of the attempts at developing a more cohesive Marxist-feminist framework have involved some very convoluted theoretical formulations (Folbre 1987; Walby 1990). For example, in attempting such an integration, the concept of a ‘patriarchal mode of production’ has been proposed.
[This] is a theoretical model of class relations between a class of patriarchs who, as heads of households, control the access of other household members to the means of production and a class of patriarchal dependents, wives and working children, who gain access to the means of production and consumption by providing surplus labour to the class of patriarchs (Henn 1988: 28).

In another variant of this dualistic analysis, which reduced patriarchy to an ideological structure, Juliet Mitchell wrote of ‘two autonomous areas: the economic mode of capitalism and the ideological mode of patriarchy’ (1974: 412). A more materialist definition is provided by Hartmann (1981) who defines patriarchy in terms of men’s control of women’s labour power in terms of both their sexuality and their access to resources. However, patriarchy remains a universal, transhistorical category which lacks a material basis and easily falls into the trap of assuming men are innately oppressive (Beechey 1979; Young 1981). As Bonnie Fox notes, ‘this understanding of patriarchy does not involve a clear specification of its origins, its structure, and its direction. Because the motive force is not specified, the shortest step (usually taken) is to invoke male agency, and by implication, an innate desire for power on the part of men’ (1988: 170).

This analysis is not just sexist in assuming men’s proclivity for domination, but as Meg Luxton has argued elsewhere, it is also analytically incoherent:

Like Engels, many feminists tend to equate production, labour and men with the economy and reproduction and women with the family, even while they recognize women’s involvement in subsistence economies or in the paid labour force. That formulation fails to understand the family as both a set of economic relations and a part of the economic workings of society. It also generates conceptual chaos as ‘reproduction’ embodies several overlapping but contradictory meanings, including human biological reproduction, the socialisation of children, the reproduction of labour power and the reproduction of the mode of production or of the society as a whole (Luxton 2006: 27).

**The expanded mode of production concept**

In opposition to the dual system approach, other Marxist feminists took up Marx’s observation that in the capitalist mode of production, ‘the most indispensable means of production’ is the worker and that the ‘maintenance and
reproduction of the working class remains a necessary condition for the reproduction of capital' (Marx [1867] 1976: 718). They also took up Engels’s formulation that ‘the determining factor in history is, in the final instance, the production and reproduction of immediate life’ (Engels [1884] 1972: 71). In contrast to those arguing that patriarchy as a mode of reproduction and capitalism as a mode of production were two separate systems of domination operating in relation to each other, they argued for an alternative approach based on an ‘integrated system or expanded mode of production model’. Instead of positing two distinct systems of economics and family and thus of class and gender, they argued that no mode of production can exist without its labouring population (‘life itself’) (Morton 1972). Instead, they conceptualised an alternative approach based on an expanded concept of mode of production that includes the propagation of the species, particularly the production and reproduction of people on a daily and generational basis (Seccombe 1992: 14).

They argued that central to any mode of production is the production of its people. From this perspective, the social organisation of childbirth, infant care and socialisation and the care of adults are as much a part of any mode of production as the labours involved in producing goods and services for exchange (Seccombe 1983). In short, the way in which the population as a whole is produced is as critical to the organisation of any mode of production as the organisation of objects (raw materials) and forces of production (tools). Both the production of the means of life and the production of life itself are distinct but interrelated necessary social processes.

Wally Seccombe, a leading proponent of this approach, argues:

All human societies are necessarily involved in three interrelated productions: the production of the means of production; the production of the means of subsistence; and the production of labour-power. The reproduction cycle of each is constituted by means of the regular repair and periodic replacement of the productive force in question. Standard Marxist accounts of the mode-of-production concept are confined to the first two ‘departments’. The on-going production of labour-power – its daily rejuvenation and generational replacement – is missing. Yet this is primarily what families do: they people societies, restoring their members’ energies and replacing worn-out labourers with the ‘fresh blood’ of youth. The exclusion of labour-power’s daily and generational reproduction from the conception of modes of production has made it
almost impossible to see families, as labour teams, pumping the life-blood through socioeconomic systems. From a feminist perspective, this tunnel vision is deadly, since the social control of women is based upon the control of their reproductive capacity in a broad range of societies (Seccombe 1992: 11).

Three significant challenges to prevailing assumptions about social relations followed. First, the sex/gender divisions of labour that exist in most societies are not natural and are not based on biological differences between women and men, but are historically and socially constructed and subject to change (Rubin 1975). Second, the activities involved in sustaining and reproducing daily life – having babies, raising children, caring for frail seniors, people with disabilities and looking after each other – and the related domestic work of procuring food and other goods and services for immediate household consumption – cooking, cleaning, laundry and so on – are not just expressions of the way people naturally live their lives, but constitute socially determined work (Luxton 1980). Finally, the labours involved in looking after people are not just private activities involved in intimate kinship, family and personal relations, but work that is socially necessary and central to the production of both subsistence and wealth in any society. In the capitalist economies most of us currently live in, that labour is essential to the process of capital accumulation (Bakker and Gill 2003).

Indeed, one of the most important insights of the global feminist movement has been the recognition that capitalist economies depend for their existence on the unpaid care work of women (and a minority of men). Feminist scholars have shown that unpaid care work acts as a significant subsidy for the private profit-making essential to capitalism and that the divisions of labour which make this work central to women’s lives are key to women’s oppression and subordination. Class and gender operate as one integrated system (Pollert 1996).

The domestic labour debate
Socialist feminists identified the primarily women’s unpaid, non-market work that was required to maintain working-class households and ensure the daily and generational reproduction of labour power, as ‘domestic labour’ (Luxton 1980; Morton 1972; Seccombe 1974). They argued that it is socially necessary work that contributes to the production of the labour power that is essential to the capitalist mode of production. At the end of the working day, a worker
returns home depleted, tired and hungry. The time off work is necessary as part of the process of replenishing the worker, so that she or he is ready and able to return to work the next day. Similarly, from a social and structural perspective, in raising their children, parents are ensuring the generational reproduction of the working class. This analysis theorised households, families and kinship systems as crucial relations in any social formation and exposed the material basis of working-class women’s subordination and its links to the political economy of capitalist society. It demonstrated housework’s contribution to maintaining the capitalist system and showed the important link between working-class housewives and capitalist economics.

Unfortunately, the theoretical gains of this perspective were undermined by at least three related problematic developments. Some contributors to the domestic labour debate tried to bring this work – housework and child-rearing – into the sphere of Marxist analysis by arguing that housewives’ unpaid labour reduces the value of labour power and thus cheapens the cost of wage labour to capital (Dalla Costa and James 1970; Seccombe 1974; Zaretsky 1973). Mariarosa Dalla Costa claimed that housewives were not only essential to capital by reproducing the labour force, but also produced surplus value. The implication was that women should demand wages for housework. Orthodox Marxists objected, arguing that non-commodity-producing labour (housework, childcare, subsistence agriculture and so on) is incommensurable with capitalist wage labour (Henn 1988: 29). This provoked an extensive and largely arid debate about whether or not domestic labour contributes to capital accumulation (Molyneux 1979). The focus in this debate was on capital and tended to subsume the feminist struggle into the struggle against capital, ignoring relations between men and women. Hartmann (1981: 9) stresses that for most contributors their Marxism dominated their feminism; they failed to recognise how women’s domestic labour benefited men ‘who as husbands and fathers receive personalized services at home’. They also failed to account for the negative impacts of men’s power on women.

At the same time, feminists studying the oppressive and exploitative conditions of paid household workers such as nannies, cleaners and home care providers, applied the term ‘domestic labour’ to the paid work of such employees (Giles and Arat-Koc 1994). Others use domestic labour to refer to the activities of women and men of the managerial classes or even the elites (Stone 2007). Such usages remove the focus on social relations, so that domestic labour loses its analytical capacities and becomes just a descriptive term for
either the paid work some do for others or the unpaid work all people do in their own homes. Missing from such formulations is the understanding of the importance of the social relations in defining the organisation of labour. If a working-class woman does certain tasks in her own home for her family, she is doing unpaid, non-market, domestic labour that contributes to the production and reproduction of labour power on a daily and generational basis. If she does the same tasks in someone else's home for pay (in other words, if the work is commoditised) she is a paid employee or wage labourer. The distinction lies in the social relations of the work, not in the tasks themselves or the physical and emotional exertions performed by the worker. By ignoring the class relationships involved, the term domestic labour lost its analytical power as a term describing a set of social relations, becoming instead a simple adjective applied to the performance of a range of tasks (Luxton 2006: 34).

Furthermore, the domestic labour debate left unexplained why women retain primary responsibility for domestic labour, even when they are fully integrated into the paid labour force – an oppressive reality in most countries (Bittman 2002; McMahon 1999). Instead, its adherents tended to generate a Marxist functionalism or reductionism which reduces women’s oppression to an effect of the operations of capital (Barrett 1980). As Bozzoli (1983: 142) wrote, ‘The problem of functionalism rests in the fact that descriptions are presented as explanations. Because female oppression performs certain functions for capitalism, this does not mean that it was a pre-creation of capitalism.’

That existing sex/gender divisions of labour are oppressive to women does not explain why or how sexual differences produce gender hierarchies. Theory must address the apparent empirical reality that in almost every society at least two dominant genders, feminine and masculine, are recognised and anchored by divisions of labour in which specific labours are associated with one to the exclusion of the other. Feminists asked some key questions: (i) under what circumstances does women’s childbearing result in childrearing and other related household and caring work being socially allocated as women’s responsibility? (ii) why are women’s labour and women’s spheres of responsibility so frequently of lower social status than men’s (especially when cross-cultural and historical studies confirm the elasticity of gendering)? (iii) to what extent is the sex/gender division of labour based on women’s childbearing and responsibility for childcare a cause or effect of women’s oppression? and (iv) under what conditions do biological females become oppressed women? To date, neither Marxism nor feminism has provided satisfactory or conclusive answers.
Marxisms in the twenty-first century

Social reproduction

Marxism and feminism have made a major contribution to current theorising about the concept of ‘social reproduction’ which is derived from Marx’s analysis of ongoing, related social processes: ‘When viewed … as a connected whole, and in the constant flux of its incessant renewal, every social process of production is at the same time a process of reproduction’ ([1867] 1976: 711). In his analysis of capitalism Marx notes:

The capitalist process of production, therefore, seen as a total connected process, that is, a process of reproduction, produces not only commodities, not only surplus value but it also produces and reproduces the capital-relation itself: on the one hand the capitalist, on the other the wage-labourer (724).

By integrating the sex/gender systems essential to the reproduction of a capitalist mode of production, Marxist feminists give a centrality to women’s oppression and establish the undissolvable links between gender and class.

Feminists have defined social reproduction in contested ways. Underlying theories of social reproduction are the different ways in which social relations and organisation are understood and the various kinds of economic and social structures its theorists aspire to. However, Isabella Bakker and Stephen Gill point out that most identify three dimensions: firstly, ‘the biological reproduction of the species’. This involves both the material and cultural aspects of giving birth and raising children in different social contexts. According to Bakker and Gill (2003: 32) it includes ‘the social constructions of motherhood in different societies’. The second aspect or component of social reproduction involves the reproduction of the labour force. This involves a range of social institutions including the family and various educational institutions to provide the necessary informal socialisation as well as formal education and training. The third aspect Bakker and Gill point to is ‘the reproduction of provisioning and caring needs that may be wholly privatized within families, or socialised or, indeed provided through a combination of the two’. They stress that each of these dimensions relate to a ‘gender order’ which refers to a set of social relations grounded in a sexual division of labour. These are the analytical tools used to examine the transnational process of neoliberal restructuring which has exacerbated inequalities in many parts of the world.
This approach is taken further by Kate Bezanson and Luxton (2006) who argue that an analytical framework based on social reproduction leads to new ways of understanding women’s situation in capitalist society. The:

concept builds on and deepens debates about domestic labour and women’s economic roles in capitalist societies … it offers a basis for understanding how various institutions (such as the state, the market, the family/household) interact and balance power so that the work involved in the daily and generational production and maintenance of people is completed (Bezanson and Luxton 2006: 3).

As Barbara Laslett and Johanna Brenner (1989: 382) note, social reproduction refers to:

… the activities and attitudes, behaviours and emotions, responsibilities and relationships directly involved in the maintenance of life on a daily basis and intergenerationally. Among other things, social reproduction includes how food, clothing and shelter are made available for immediate consumption, the ways in which the care and socialisation of children are provided, the care of the infirm and the elderly, and the social organisation of sexuality. Social reproduction can thus be seen to include various kinds of work … aimed at providing the historically and socially, as well as biologically defined care necessary to maintain existing life and to reproduce the next generation.

Not all the work involved takes place in the family-household. There is the complementary work provided by state services such as education and health care, by the voluntary sector and the community such as children’s sports or food banks, or in the market.

Based on the expanded mode of production approach, the emphasis is on analysing society as a totality, a totality in which social reproduction is central at various levels. As Bezanson (2006: 28) writes, ‘Social reproduction is … a central aspect of the capitalist economic system:

1. at the level of production, because labour is considered a produced input to production but one that is produced outside that sphere;
2. at the level of distribution, because savings on the costs of social reproduction of the labouring population lead to higher profits;
3. at the level of *circulation*, because the consumption of wage goods is the largest component of aggregate demand;
4. at the *institutional level*, because insecurity of access to the means of reproduction is the fundamental source of command over work processes;
5. at the *political level*, because the process of social reproduction implies a radical conflict between profit and the living standards of the whole labouring population.’

A class analysis is necessary to understand how production and reproduction are linked in a single process. Luxton (2006: 37) argues:

By developing a class analysis that shows how the production of goods and services and the production of life are part of one integrated process, social reproduction does more than identify the activities involved in the daily and generational reproduction of daily life. It allows for an explanation of the structures, relationships and dynamics that produce those activities.

Further drawing from Marx means recognising that these class relations render the capitalist totality fundamentally unstable. This is because there is a central contradiction between capital accumulation and social reproduction, which is anchored in the capital–labour contradiction and:

is expressed when workers through their unions try to improve working conditions, pay and benefits to ameliorate their livelihood, while employers resist and, under pressure to make profits, try to cut labour costs by reducing pay, benefits and working conditions (Bezanson and Luxton 2006: 8).

Following this approach means that contemporary analyses of institutions, such as commodified household labour, pay close attention to the race, class, ethnic and gendered dimensions involved. Furthermore, the scope of analysis is expanded: for instance, on how household labour is increasingly globalised, as women from the global South and European post-socialist countries have been recruited to service an exploding demand for household workers in the United States, Canada, the European Union, Hong Kong and the Middle East. This is ‘the global care chain’ of women moving from poor to rich countries (Ehren-
Marxism and Feminism (Reich and Hochschild 2003), involving work for low wages under poor working conditions in what has been termed ‘the feminisation of survival’ (Sassen 2000). It is part of a rich and growing scholarship on the ‘care economy’.

Social reproduction has generated an extensive literature that has stimulated new analyses of capitalist political economy and challenged the political and economic theories of mainstream economics that promote capitalism as the ideal or only viable economic system (Picchio 1992). This wealth of material demonstrates the value of a Marxist–feminist alliance, a historical materialist approach that integrates gender, race and class. However, it remains hampered by two difficulties: its relative isolation as a scholarly field and its own, as yet, unresolved theoretical questions. On the one hand, social reproduction remains primarily of interest to socialist feminists and has hardly been taken up either by Marxists or by broader feminist scholarship. On the other hand, trying to develop a new way of looking at the world is profoundly challenging. At the same time as it must deconstruct prevailing theories by revealing their class and gender biases and their failure to account for race, ethnic and other systemic discriminatory regimes, it must also reconstruct new theories based on the valorization of all aspects of social reproduction. Despite frequent assertions that the intersections of gender, race and class are core topics of study, very few studies actually succeed in dealing adequately with all three.

A final challenge relates to social reproduction as a way of theorising the politics of everyday life. Since the late 1970s, neoliberalism has forced a move away from national or public commitments to universal forms of social reproduction such as citizenship rights, welfare and development services, through which working classes, peasants, some indigenous peoples and other marginalised groups had some claims to public services and assistance. There has been a move to marketised and exclusive forms of social reproduction. Both public and private forms operate within a capitalist framework and neither provides secure conditions of social reproduction for the majority, although the former modified somewhat the vulnerabilities produced by market economies while the latter has undermined the capacities of a growing population to ensure its own social reproduction. We suggest that a major challenge facing those of us who are concerned about these issues is to envision what kinds of political, social, cultural, ecological and economic initiatives would foster revitalised forms of social reproduction. And what would a politics that takes social reproduction seriously look like?
CONCLUSION

Much progress has been made in the relation between Marxism and feminism since Bozzoli’s claim that in southern African studies ‘no substantial challenges to androcentric tendencies within Marxism have been made’ (Bozzoli 1983: 140). The ‘collapsing of female oppression into the capitalist mode of production’ is no longer the ‘dominant tendency in analyses of women in South Africa’ (142). Marxism’s earlier claim to provide a comprehensive theory of human history and society has been shown to be flawed by its marginalisation of experiences and aspects of life traditionally associated with women.

The solution to a ‘healthier marriage’ that Hartmann offered in the 1980s lay in giving equal weight to patriarchy and capitalism. Historical materialist feminist scholarship has since shown that such a dualistic analysis dehistoricises women’s oppression (Lerner 1987). Patriarchy is not a universal system and cannot be understood as distinct from the relations of production or outside of a specific historical context. Instead, with socialist feminism’s concept of social reproduction, domestic, procreative and caring activities and relationships are understood as part of the material basis of society.

No one now attempts to appropriate Marxist concepts of value or productive and unproductive work and apply them uncritically in an attempt to establish the value of domestic work (Cock 1981). The accusations of a white-feminist epistemological imperialism are no longer apt. No one assumes that a socialist order will necessarily guarantee gender equality. No one now presents women, irrespective of class, race, nationality, ethnicity, or sexual preference as comprising a homogeneous group bound together by their shared ‘oppression’. The theories developed through the engagement of feminism and Marxism over the past century offer important tools of social, political and economic analysis to their practitioners. The challenge in the current period is to use those tools as weapons in a resurgence of a socialist feminist politics. Both Marxism and feminism contain insights into an alternative social order and point to the means of reaching it. Mapping this alternative vision would challenge ‘the deepest shadow that hangs over us (which) is neither terror, environmental collapse, nor global recession. It is the internalised fatalism that holds there is no possible alternative to capital’s world order’ (Kovel in Kelly and Malone 2006: 116).
NOTES

1 As Marxist feminists who came of age during the previous period of left-wing mobilisations and the global revitalisation of feminism in the 1960s and 1970s, and who have lived through the defeats of left-wing politics and the rise of neoliberal capitalism during the 1980s and 1990s, we have been energised and excited by the recent mobilisations. Living in different parts of the world, in countries with very different histories (South Africa and Canada), we understand that the mobilisation in different parts of the world will reflect and be shaped by the constraints and possibilities of local situations. But we are also struck by the ways in which our experiences and our related political analyses are similar. One of the challenges facing those who are trying to develop new approaches to Marxism is how to attend simultaneously to global patterns and local specificities.

2 The struggles of women of colour, indigenous women and others to make white feminism aware of its own racism and to integrate race and gender has been long and difficult. Socialist feminism has often shared the racism, indifference and resistance that the larger women’s movement manifests. However, socialist feminism starts from the premise that the liberation of women depends on the liberation of everyone. At least in theory, that means that socialist feminism integrates both class analysis and an anti-racist politics (Mohanty 2003; Rowbotham 1972).


4 By the 1980s, woman leaders of the main women’s organisations insisted that they had too much emancipation; they called for less. What they seemed to mean by this is that they equated emancipation with integration into the paid labour force, forcing them to manage a double day they found exhausting and overwhelming. They wanted an opportunity to ‘stay home’ as housewives. They had no vision of collectivisation of domestic labour (Luxton and Reiter 1991).

5 As far as we know, Simone de Beauvoir (1952) was the first theorist to use the production/reproduction dichotomy in analysing women’s oppression.

REFERENCES


