THE ROLE OF HOUSEWIVES AND MOTHERS IN HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

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THIS PAPER is addressed to the question, how does the status of wives and mothers affect the development of humankind? I start by stating my biases concerning human development. First, I believe with Teilhard de Chardin that the evolution of humankind has just begun, that our human nature is constantly changing, and that humankind as a whole has the power to make it change for the better, until it reaches the Omega Point: God.[1] My second bias is that as persons we grow only through our relation to other persons, but that this relation is itself mediated through our experience of ourselves and of everything that is not us, including our experience of the world of material objects. Third, I believe that all our human problems are interrelated. We live in an age with strong tendencies to compartmentalize reality and to search for isolated solutions to isolated problems. But it may well be that, by studying how our problems are related to each other, our ability to understand and solve them will grow. The problems of humanity may be susceptible of concrete solutions only in specific areas at specific times; but while searching for such specific solutions, efficient planning initially may require a rather high level of abstraction. Because of the limits of this article, I will remain at a global level of analysis and will emphasize only certain aspects of certain problems.

A basic concern throughout the paper is the development of housewives and mothers as persons. An attempt must be made, therefore, to determine their status, the condition and place they occupy in society at large. We have few reliable comparative measures for the status of women. Legal equality may be a significant indicator of women's higher or lower status in specific countries. The legal rights that have been granted to women are a necessary initial step, but the gap between the *de jure* and the *de facto* situation prevents the legal provisions from being an accurate assessment of improvements in the status of women. If we focus on the actual condition of women and compare, on a cross-cultural basis, their life expectancy, years of education, participation in salaried work, and so on, such indicators will be useless if we do not also compare in each specific area the concrete situation of women with that of men. When dealing specifically with the status of wives and mothers, how-

[1] Cf. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man* (New York: Harper & Row, 1954).

ever, these indicators, especially those relating to women's participation in productive work, are very imperfect, since available statistics often exclude large numbers of agricultural workers who are nevertheless actively involved in production and do not deal at all with housework. Furthermore, these indicators are not very useful in determining the dignity and worth as persons that housewives and mothers may have in specific areas of the world. The attitudes and values of each region must be taken into account when attempting to measure what comprises a high or a low status for women. In an area where the prestige of the woman rises in the eyes of her community with every child she bears or where the man is ashamed that his wife is working outside the home, the perspective of the observer may be contrary to the actual status of the women involved.[2]

Thus, political and social structures, economic and demographic conditions, cultural values, beliefs and practices and public priorities for policy and action all play an important role in determining the status of women in the family and society at large; but a global, abstract analysis may be the necessary initial step to determine the effects of the status of housewives and mothers in human development.[3]

It is my contention that the paramount roles of wife and mother affect population processes, since the higher the education of women and/or their participation in salaried work, the lower the fertility rate will tend to be; it also affects production processes, since housework is an economic category essential to production in general. Identification of the biological function of giving birth to a child with the social functions of nurturing, educating children and performing all general housework tasks not only restricts woman's identity to the paramount role of wife and mother; it may also affect the development of all people.

My article is divided into three parts: (1) the biological function of motherhood: how the role of women in the nurturing and education of children affects fertility, and how population processes affect and are

[2] Cf. Ruth Dixon, "Women's Rights, Family Planning and Family Size: An International Perspective," United Nations ESA/SDHA/AC.1/5, p. 3.

[3] The first section is largely based on Isabel Larguía and John Dumoulin, "Toward a Science of Women's Liberation," in *Nacla's* Latin America and Empire Report, Vol. 6, no. 10, Dec. 1972), and Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James, *The Power of Women* (Bristol: Falling Wall, 1973). The basic points of section 2 have been made by Elsa Chaney, "Women and Population: Some Key Policy, Research, and Action Issues" in Richard L. Clinton, ed., *Population and Policy: New Directions in Political Science* (Lexington, Mass.: D. C. Heath, 1973) pp. 233–46; Ruth Dixon, "Women's Rights and Fertility," United Nations E/Conf.60/BP/11, June 17, 1973; Emily Moore, "Population Problems from a Woman's Perspective" (mimeographed); and Betsie Hollants, who is the editor of the excellent *Boletín documental sobre las mujeres*, Coordinación de Iniciativas para el Desarrollo de América Latina (CIDAL), Cuernavaca, Mexico.

affected by the status of women; (2) the social function of housewives and mothers: how the roles of housewife and nurturer of children have affected the status of women; (3) the role of housewives and mothers in human development: the relationship between the status of housewives and mothers and human development.

SOCIETY'S FOCUS ON MOTHERHOOD

Throughout history the biological function of motherhood—giving birth to a child—has placed women on a pedestal (fertility goddesses, etc.). The social functions connected with motherhood, however—nurturing and educating children and performing housework as a supplementary function—have received an inferior position in the prevailing values of society.[4]

Although both men and women are responsible for conceiving children, women alone give birth to them. The social function, however, of raising the children should be the responsibility of the mother, the father, and the society. Indeed, perhaps 50 percent of the responsibility should devolve upon society, since the child is going to grow up to be a citizen and to render much more service to society than to either the mother or the father. Historically, the biological function of bearing children and the social function of nurturing and educating them at home have been identified as a single function, with housework as its secondary element. Despite those men who help women to carry out these social functions, women generally have been held wholly responsible for this task. That the biological and the social functions have been merged together into a single unity has restricted woman's identity to the paramount role of wife and mother. But is there a causal relationship between higher status for women and lower fertility rates? Most people today assume that, although a continued high rate of population growth has serious consequences in retarding socioeconomic development, the limitation of fertility in itself does not constitute a policy of development. If human reproduction must be rationalized and planned, this must be done in relation to all other social phenomena. Fertility at the micro-level implies the human right of everyone to determine freely and responsibly the number and spacing of one's children, and at the macro-level a national policy affecting the public future. But since the success of a population policy depends on the will to influence individual decisions, such policy envisions authority in an intimate and personal field of human experience. How can this authority be nonrepressive, liberating for all of hu-

[4] The woman is placed on a pedestal (goddess, virgin, mother) or down below (devil, prostitute). But when can she be a person sharing on the same level with other persons, interact on an equal basis with men?

mankind? Population control may be a collective responsibility entailing deepest concern for the welfare of humankind, but the bodies of women are the instruments through which population will grow rapidly, slowly, or not at all.

If a population policy is to influence the decisions of individual women or couples, we must ask: why do people have children? Many men and women have children because they enjoy having them, enjoy motherhood or fatherhood. Others do so from ignorance of contraceptive methods —especially in underdeveloped and rural areas. Another reason, which applies to both men and women, is the sometimes erroneous presumption that children will provide financial and emotional insurance for old age. But perhaps the reason that has not been looked into carefully enough, one which applies only to women, is that many of them have children because it gives them dignity, esteem, worth, and higher status. If a man has many children, his virility will give him prestige; yet his status in society is not determined by the number of children he has but by his socioeconomic position. In the case of women, however, religious, political, economic, cultural, and social institutions developed to promote natural childbearing, so that the principal roles of women have been those of mother and wife. This was essential for the survival of humanity because of the high death rate among children, which called for a high birth rate. Now, however, with a world population growth of 2.5 percent a year, women are being encouraged in the opposite direction, that is, to discourage fertility, and again for the survival of the race. Such discouragement may be imperative, but can it be achieved without a redefinition of women's role in society? Even in societies where fertility is comparatively low, such as the United States, Germany, and France, women's primary role is still wife and mother. In these societies life expectancy usually is around seventy years, and a great number of women complete their childbearing before thirty-five. How, then, can a woman be expected to derive her primary life satisfaction from her motherhood role? But even in societies with high fertility rates, where life expectancy is usually relatively low, women can only be expected to lower their fertility if suitable alternatives are provided. Women do not have an open range of real choices as alternatives roles.[5]

Research suggests that the higher the education level of women, the lower will be the fertility, especially in those high-fertility countries where education is most scarce.[6] Most of the research conducted also

[5] Moore, *op. cit.* p. 7, and Chaney, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

[6] Halvor Gille, "Summary Review of Fertility Differentials in Developed Countries," International Population Conference, London, 1969, Vol. 3 (Liège: International Union for the Scientific Study of Population, 1971) 2011–25; Council of Europe, Second European

indicates that women who work outside the home tend to have fewer children, and that the longer the duration of women's working life in relation to their married years, the smaller their family is likely to be.[7] But does the opportunity for education and employment actually

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Population Conference, Strasbourg, 1971; CDE (71) T. 3, pp. 131–39. Cf. also Carmen A. Miró, "Some Misconceptions Disproved: A Program of Comparative Fertility Surveys in Latin America," in Bernard Berelson, *Beyond Family Planning* (New York: Population Council); H. V. Muhsam, "Education and Demography," International Population Conference, London, 1969, Vol. 3 (Liège: International Union for the Scientific Study of Population, 1971) 1867–74; Jeanne Claire Ridley, "Number of Children Expected in Relation to Non-Familial Activities of the Wife," *Milbank Memorial Fund Quarterly* 37 (1959) 277–96. Also: "Demographic Change and the Roles and Status of Women," *Annals of the American Academy* 375 (Jan. 1968) 15–25; Serim Temur, "Socio-economic Determinants of Differential Fertility in Turkey," Second European Population Conference, Strasbourg, 1971; J. M. Stycos, *Human Fertility in Latin America* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1968) p. 269; *The Determinants and Consequences of Population Trends* (New York: United Nations Department of Social Affairs, Population Division, 1953) ST/SOA/Ser.A 17; *Human Fertility and National Development: A Challenge to Science and Technology* (New York: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 1971) ST/ECA/138. Also references in the IUSSP International Population Conference, London, 1969; UN World Population Conference, Belgrade, 1965: *Proceedings of the Eighth International Conference of the International Planned Parenthood Federation* (Santiago, 1967); KAP studies; Robert H. Keller, "The Employment of Working Wives, Dominance, and Fertility," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 30 (1968) 437–42; "The Employment of Wives, Role Incompatibility, and Fertility: A Study among Lower- and Middle-Class Residents of San Juan, Puerto Rico," *Milbank Memorial Fund Quarterly* 46 (1968) 507–26.—It has been noted that the number of years of formal schooling may be the most visible and quantifiable element in all the variables affecting fertility and that it is not higher education per se but its association with openness to new ideas, higher standards of living, exposure to an urban environment, and a greater range of options and interests outside the home that are responsible for the apparent influence of one on the other. It seems, however, that the educational level of the wife is more strongly correlated with a couple's fertility than the educational level of the husband. This suggests that, however the causal mechanism works, investments in female education may have a greater impact on fertility than the same investment in schooling for men.

[7] Numerous studies of the developing nations have turned up fertility differentials by the working status of wives. Among those showing a negative relationship between work-force participation of married women and fertility are L. Tabah and R. Samual, "Preliminary Findings of a Survey on Fertility and Attitudes towards Family Formation in Santiago Chile," in C. V. Kiser *et al.*, *Research in Family Planning* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1962) pp. 281–82; A. J. Jaffe and K. Azumi, "The Birth Rate and Cottage Industries in Underdeveloped Countries," *Economic Development and Cultural Change* 9 (1960) 52–63; Murray Gendell, "The Influence of Family Building Activity on Women's Rate of Economic Activity," World Population Conference, 1965 (New York: United Nations, 1965) 4; J. Berent, "Some Demographic Aspects of Female Employment in Eastern Europe and the USSR," *International Labor Review* 101:2 (Feb. 1970) 175–92; John J. Macisco, Jr., *et al.*, "The Effect of Labor Force Participation on the Relation between Migration Status and Fertility in San Juan, Puerto Rico," *Milbank Memorial Fund Quarterly* 48 (1970) 51–70; J. Mayone Stycos and Robert H. Weller, "Female Working Roles and Fertility," *Demography*

influence women to have fewer children, or is it more often the case that women who have fewer children for whatever reason are free to obtain an education and to take outside employment?[8] The direction of cause and effect has not yet been established; but indirectly at least, the status of women seems both to affect and to be affected by reproductive behavior, that is, women's health, educational opportunities, employment, political rights, and role in the family influence and are influenced by the timing and number of births and by the knowledge of how to plan them.

Relationship between Fertility and Female Education

Females are less than half of the school population in most countries and the proportion declines rapidly at the highest levels of training. Even the transition from illiteracy to literacy, however, is shown to have some influence on family size in many areas, unlike the situation in industrialized countries, where a significant reduction in family size may not appear until much higher levels of schooling are reached, sometimes as high as the final year in college.[9] Studies in many developing countries show that women with a high-school or higher education marry considerably later (or do not marry at all), desire smaller families, and are more likely to know about and to practice modern effective contraception than less educated or illiterate women.[10]

Delaying the first birth has the greatest impact on a woman's opportunity for learning in those situations where she has a high probability of pursuing an education beyond the normal first year of childbearing. But where few girls receive higher education, delaying the first birth is likely to make little difference, if any, as to her educational opportunities. Parental control over which of the children will attend school, over the timing of children's marriages, and over the choice of a spouse may preclude a young woman from placing education above early motherhood. A high degree of parental control, however, does not necessarily lead to very early marriages, and is also compatible with marital postponement.[11] The majority of women of reproductive age in

4 (1967) 210–17. For some disagreement on the meaning of negative association between wives' employment and lowered fertility, see Charles Westhoff *et al.*, *Family Growth in Metropolitan America* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1961) pp. 301–4; "The Employment of Wives, Role Incompatibility, and Fertility: A Study among Lower- and Middle-Class Residents of San Juan, Puerto Rico," *Milbank Memorial Fund Quarterly* 46 (1968) 518–52.

[8] Chaney, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

[9] Dixon, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

[10] *Ibid.*, pp. 9–10.

[11] *Ibid.*, p. 7. See also Judith Blake, "Parental Control, Delayed Marriage, and Population Policy," *UN Proceedings of the World Population Conference* 2 (1967) 132–36.

underdeveloped countries, especially in the rural areas, are illiterate and without effective options to birth control. Furthermore, it seems that in rural areas cultural pressures towards high fertility—the paramount motherhood role—may be so strong that they can neutralize the effect of six to eight years of schooling.[12]

Relationship between Fertility and Female Employment

As in the case of education, this relationship must be studied from both sides. One method would be to explore the impact of labor-force participation of women on their fertility goals; the other would be to try to determine to what extent the full exercise of women's right to equality with men in employment might influence the number and spacing of their children. As already stated, women both in developed and in underdeveloped nations who engage in nonfamilial occupations tend to reduce the fertility below those who do not.[13] Professional women have the greatest motivation to reduce their fertility, to minimize role strain created by simultaneous work and familial duties. But even less prestigious nonfamilial statuses may offer attractive alternative opportunities to childbearing for working-class women as well.[14] Some studies in urban centers of developing countries have shown that women in the professions and in white-collar occupations are more favorably disposed to the use of contraceptives and have fewer children than skilled manual workers, who in turn have smaller families than women in sales, trade, or the service sector.[15] In rural areas, however, paid employment usually has little impact on fertility, partly because the value and prestige connected with large families often remain strong, partly because the employment is likely to be of an agricultural-marketing or cottage-industry type in which a woman may either keep her young children with her while she works or leave them with other family members.[16] The rural urban migration which usually accompanies development frequently deprives women of their formerly productive role in agriculture, handi-

[12] Dixon, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

[13] See nn. 6 and 7 above.

[14] Judith Blake, "Demographic Science and the Redirection of Population Policy," in Mindel C. Sheps and Jeanne Claire Ridley, eds., *Public Health and Population Change* (Pittsburgh: Univ. of Pittsburgh Press, 1965) pp. 41–69.

[15] Dixon, *op. cit.*, p. 14, and Chaney, *op. cit.*, p. 7; Patrick Ohadike. "The Possibility of Fertility Change in Modern Africa: A West African Case," IUSSP, *International Population Conference* 1 (London, 1969) 89.

[16] Dubrovka Stampar, background paper, A Seminar on the Status of Women and Family Planning, Istanbul, 1972; H. Yuan Tien, "Employment and Education of Women in China: Implications for Fertility Change," IUSSP, *International Population Conference* 3 (London, 1969) 1981–82.

crafts, and marketing without offering them a substitute role in the modern sector of the town or city, where unemployment is usually high.[17] Furthermore, less developed countries tend to be committed to capital-intensive labor-saving technologies and therefore do not expand employment opportunities quickly enough to take care of more than a modest percentage of new workers entering the labor force each year—not even to have one breadwinner steadily employed per family.[18] In the case of educated middle- and upper-class women in underdeveloped regions, the competition for employment is not as intensified as with their sisters in developed countries, and so they have more opportunities for employment. These educated middle- and upper-class women in underdeveloped countries have smaller families, but they are not enough in number to affect the birth rate of their nations. Level of economic development is not necessarily correlated with greater participation of women in the labor force or with a meaningful participation. Low-level, repetitive, and underpaid jobs will be only a temporary means for women to earn extra money unless they are the sole support of their families. Unless the alternatives offered to women are challenging, nondomestic employment will not tend to affect fertility rate sufficiently.[19]

The common views in research that regard as mutually exclusive the roles of women as workers and mothers, as well as those who promote the creation of new fields of work for women that do not compete with male fields in areas where disapproval of women working runs high,[20] do not seem to be aware that *discrimination against women in all forms yields pronatalist policies*. Women should not only receive equal pay for work of equal value; they should be expected to be as well educated as men, equally capable of serious commitment to a career or job, and expected to perform all jobs equally well without exception in great numbers. Meaningful activities providing women with esteem and prestige must replace the motherhood role society has expected women to play. Even if successful in the short run, the strictest demographic control will fail if society does not offer alternative roles to women's motherhood. Teaching unemployed urban girls typing may do more to solve population problems than millions of dollars spent in a family-planning campaign that does nothing to make society give a competent secretary the same dignity and respect as a mother.

[17] Dixon, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

[18] Chaney, *op. cit.*, p. 10. She states that an extensive bibliography is contained in William C. Thiesenhusen, "Employment and Latin American Development," in Peter Dorner, ed., *Land Reform in Latin America: Issues and Cases* (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin, 1971).

[19] Chaney, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

[20] See n. 30 below.

Births are the result of social interaction and the motivation to have or not have a child is primarily socially determined. To alter reproductive behavior, one needs to alter the motivations that cause them. Can women be expected to alter the reproductive behavior if meaningful alternative roles to those of housewife and mother are not given to them? A population policy should emphasize the qualitative sense of human life, taking into account that population phenomena represent people themselves. As the Center of Concern has stated, "population is people." Neither a plan carried out only within narrow interests of politicians nor a policy allowing total spontaneity to individuals or families will meet the challenges of overpopulation and underdevelopment.

SOCIAL FUNCTIONS OF HOUSEWIVES AND MOTHERS

How have the roles of women as housewives and nurturers of children affected their status in society? By "housewife" I mean a woman who does housework and who is usually working for her husband and children (or only for her husband if she has no children, or only for her children if she is unmarried or a widow or an abandoned wife). Women working outside the home and earning a salary are also housewives if they are performing housework in their own house; they have a double shift. A maid, for example, is a housewife because of the work she performs in her home, not when she is carrying out the same tasks for a salary. The concrete situation of housewives in different areas of the world varies tremendously, of course, according to the different degrees of socioeconomic development of specific regions and other factors. I am concerned here with what is particular to domestic work on a world level. I shall, therefore, make generalizations that may not always fit specific problems in specific areas. These abstractions, however, may be useful in understanding housework and the quality of relationships it generates.

A first question: Why does domestic work fit within the lowest category of creative human activity? It would seem that continued childbearing prevented women from hunting and fishing in a prehistoric time; thus, females engaged in agriculture and domestic production while the males hunted and fished. Women owned the domestic tools, and men owned the hunting and fishing implements.[21] Ownership of hunting and fishing tools developed into ownership of everything that did not have to do with the household. As productivity increased, therefore, it was the men who were able to produce *more* than what was necessary for human maintenance. As history advanced, men continued to own everything which was not related to domestic work. They owned cattle, the first

[21] Frederick Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State* (New York: International Publishers, 1942) p. 50.

form of money, and, when wars began between different groups, men owned the slaves that were taken. Furthermore, since the possibility of exchange carries with it the possibility of making a profit, wealth could be accumulated: and since it was the men who apparently owned the goods that could be exchanged, it was the men who gradually accumulated the wealth. Eventually, moreover, men felt the need to establish inheritance patterns to make sure that their offspring and not someone else's would be the ones to inherit their wealth. This development may have coincided with the appearance of monogamy.[22] With the establishment of the patriarchal family, a centralized form of basically agricultural and artisan production began. Children, the aged, women, each person had a relative power derived from the family's dependence on their labor, which was seen as social and necessary.[23]

With the gradual substitution of the factory and office for the patriarchal family, the patriarchal family ceased to be the center of production. Socialized forms of production developed in factories, offices, and so on, but not within the family. Two distinct spheres of production developed: a public sphere, where factory and office work was done in a socialized manner, and a private sphere, where productive housework was performed in isolation.[24] Housework is productive work. It is a social service performed in isolation. The "economically active" population of the world, who go out and do their job, must have clean clothes to wear that either they themselves or someone else has had to wash and iron. They have to eat food which either they themselves or someone else has had to prepare. They must have a comfortable dwelling that either they themselves or someone else has had to clean; and if they have children, either they themselves or someone else has had to take care of them during the time of factory or office work. But housework is "invisible," as Isabel Larguía and John Dumoulin have called it, because it is immediately consumed, is never exchanged for money. Thus it has not been considered productive, or been given economic value, or been accounted for in the Gross National Product of nations, because it is immediately consumed after it is produced and because its product is never brought into the market place and exchanged for money. If all emphasis is put on buying and selling and not on producing and

[22] Although Engels' book was written before most of the now available material on primitive and early urban society had been collected, the fundamentals of his outline for history have remained valid. I have selectively avoided Engels' suppositions that have been contested by anthropologists (such as the move from matriarchy to patriarchy or from group marriage into pairing) because they are incidental to my subject, and developed the distinction between what was owned by men and women.

[23] Mariarosa Dalla Costa, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

[24] Larguía and Dumoulin, *op. cit.*, and Dalla Costa, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

consuming or on an attempt to satisfy human needs and to better the living standard of humankind, then the productive value of housework will not be apparent. As a matter of fact, economists of all ideologies have considered housework as nonproductive. Furthermore, housework is carried out under conditions far underdeveloped as compared to the technological advancements that have been attained in the public sphere.

1) *Housework is productive work.* Because housework has not been considered productive, it has been branded as feminine work. Thus, although those biological differences which in earlier societies negatively affected women's position are no longer decisive, they have continued to keep women in an inferior status in society. Housework, however, is not a feminine characteristic necessarily associated with the procreation of children; it is an economic category. Housework is productive in itself and it is essential to production in general. Yet, because housework has not been seen as an economic category, the woman who is not working outside her home has not been considered a true worker. She must perform a full-time job while appearing as though not really working. She is caught up in a contradiction between doing more than a full-time job—depending on the number of her children—and appearing as someone who does not work. The only way she can resolve this contradiction is with electrical appliances.[25] Increases in the demand for electrical appliances may provide an increased incentive for the development of light industry at the expense of that heavy industry which may be necessary for economic development.

The idea of beauty imposed upon the psyche of women through the mass media emphasizes the need to look young, attractive, and fragile. The aim is to induce women to consume cosmetics and other light-industry products, once again at the expense of heavy industry. But because of their "fragility" women are kept in "light" jobs. This continues to justify, on the one hand, a woman's obligation to be totally responsible for the care of her home and for the nurturing and education of her children, even though such responsibilities should be a social rather than an individual obligation; on the other hand, the image of "fragility" continues to justify the lower wages paid to women for work of equal value.

2) *Housework is performed in underdeveloped conditions by comparison with other productive work.* Indeed, the best-equipped kitchens in the world reflect merely the technology of the nineteenth century, not the

[25] Except for the small number of women who can afford maids. The number of women who are forced to choose other women's housework as their means of livelihood, however, steadily decreases.

attained advanced levels of technological development that could or should be available to humankind today. Despite the existence of sophisticated electrical appliances that facilitate the task of housewives who can afford them, the method of production used in the private sphere are far more similar to the methods used by individual artisans in the Middle Ages than to the highly sophisticated and efficient machinery that has developed in, for example, outer-space technology or military industry.

Production techniques have developed at a much greater rate in the public sphere than the private sphere. Housework, because it is performed in isolation, uses individual methods that have been overcome long ago in the public sphere.

The problem may well be that, if you are not paid by the hour, no one cares how long it takes you to do your work, and . . . in sweeping, the majority of women still use brooms. While greater mechanization could improve the efficiency of specific services such as cooking, washing, and cleaning, it will not help women in their task of taking care of their children from the moment they are born until the time they are ready to go to school. The workday of housewives and mothers is unending not because they have no machines but because they are isolated.[26]

3) *Housework is a social service performed in isolation.* The difference between social and socialized labor must be emphasized. Women's work is social, but they work in isolation and not in a socialized structure. Although the percentage of men who share in the performance of household tasks and in the care of children, especially young ones, may be steadily increasing, most of the housework and of the nurturing and education of children is still carried out basically through female exploitation. Women carry on such work without a wage and without going on strike.

While men were hunting for days at a time, they may have learned to work together. In any case, factory and office work is done to a great extent collectively. Housework, however, is performed in isolation. Because housework is reconciliable with the cares of maternity, the basic tasks of domestic work are repeated from day to day almost without change from one century to another. Simone de Beauvoir writes: "Man furnished support for the group, not in the manner of worker bees by a simple vital process, through biological behavior, but by means of act that transcended his animal nature. *Homo faber* has from the beginning of time been an inventor. . . ." [27]

Why have women not been "inventors"? It could be argued that ability

[26] Dalla Costa, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

[27] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (New York: Modern Library, 1968) p. 63.

to invent comes through continuous contact with the unpredictable and mysterious outside world, with that "real" world from which women were cut off because of their institutionalized responsibilities of raising and educating the children and of performing domestic work. Although factory work also is usually tedious and repetitive, it is not done in isolation, whereas the social and productive character of women's work in the home is basically ignored. Even today housewives continue to work in isolated ghettos called "homes."

A consequence of this condition of isolation may be the traditional rivalry among women. Women are not workmates. The traditionally privatized work of females leaves little room for sisterhood. I am not arguing that there is necessarily solidarity among working men. But who ever heard of solidarity among housewives? Just as working conditions in factories, for example, have been improved through the organization of trade unions, the working conditions within the home could definitely be improved. Furthermore, the private sphere does not reflect whatever degree of equality different societies may have attained. While the public sphere expands into greater national industries and into private corporations, privatization and individualism grow within the home and deepen psychological processes by which women are cut off from the "real" world. The implications are enormous; one is exemplified by the old saying "a woman's work is never done," which Betty Friedan renders "housewifery expands ad infinitum." The development of housewives as consumers may be another implication.

Every place of production outside the home presupposes the productive work that is being carried on day after day within the home. If all the activities performed by housewives were considered for what they really are, an enormous quantity of social services which have been transformed throughout the ages into the privatized activities characteristic of women, that is, into "feminine work," the economic value of domestic work would become evident.

Viewed thus, the apparently separate and opposite experiences of a housewife and mother on the one hand and of a working woman on the other may represent too many tasks for a single human being to bear, but they are not mutually exclusive roles as has been commonly affirmed.[28]

[28] William J. Goode's "A Theory of Role Strain," *American Sociological Review* 25 (1960) is an example of research which has focused on the concept of "role incompatibility" in attempting to explain variations in the strength of the association between female employment and fertility. And Aziz Bindary, "New Approaches to Rural Population Problems," paper prepared for UN, FAO/UNFPA Seminar on Population Problems as Related to Food and Rural Development in the Near East, Cairo, Dec. 1972, is an example of research which suggests as alternative forms of development in areas where disapproval of women working runs high, to create new fields of work for women *that do not compete with male fields.*

It is, however, only when women have the opportunity to work outside the home, and choose to do so, that they may begin to break the far-reaching psychological consequences of their isolation. Paulo Freire has stated that the oppressed internalize within them the image that the oppressor has of them.[29] Women have internalized within themselves the image that the male creators of the values of our culture have had of women. Men may not have fully developed the human capacity for self-experience, but their chances seem far greater than those of housewives and mothers. And if housewives and mothers do develop some of their human capacity for self-experience, will society's image of femininity accord more with the experience which women have of themselves? The dependence of women, especially if they are not working outside the home, is not only economic; it is also psychological, emotional, and sexual. Men working in the public sphere have the opportunity to grow through others with the experience they acquire in their work and in their homes. But if the housewife and mother does not work outside the home, she can only grow through her husband, children, friends, and relatives.[30] Men and women working outside their home live life directly and acquire their socioeconomic status through their work. The housewife and mother lives indirectly through her man and gets her socioeconomic status through her family situation. She tends to accept domestic work as something inherent in her feminine nature, strengthening and deepening the image of femininity that society has defined for housewives. Even if she works outside the home, the housewife is expected to consider her role as wife and mother paramount. Furthermore, as education and job opportunities have opened to women, it has been in the feminine areas of health, education, and welfare. These areas are extrapolations of the motherhood role to the arena of public affairs.[31]

Our next question is: How can the subjugation of women to housework be eliminated? Some have proposed bills to give a pension (not a wage) to women at home when they reach a certain age.[32] Such bills, however, might only serve to institutionalize the role of women housewives. Others speak of the automation of housework and see it developing into a socialized industry. Would this destroy the family or would it improve family and neighborhood relations? While closing the gap between the highly efficient advanced technology used in the public sphere as

[29] Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Seabury, 1970).

[30] To a greater or lesser degree depending on whether she lives in an area where extended families still prevail.

[31] Moore, *op. cit.*, p. 4, and Chaney, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

[32] According to Dalla Costa, the communist party in Italy proposed that both housewives and single women be given a pension when they reached fifty-five years of age. The bill was never passed.

opposed to the backward and obsolete methods of individual production used in the private sphere of the home, socializing housework into an industry probably would allow for more efficiency and higher productivity. It might be then that women could be expected to have full commitment to a career and job and thus perhaps to decrease fertility. But the socialization of housework is a very distant goal, which may depend more on the economic development of each country than on policies and priorities.

In the meantime, what can be done to ease the burden of housewives? Some groups of feminists in Italy and in England say "pay us wages for housework." Earning a salary outside the home certainly has not liberated the female. It may be an essential initial step towards liberation,[33] but women are beginning to sense the myth of liberation through the kind of work that restricts human creativity in either men or women. As long as they continue to perform a social service free just because it has not been socialized into a structure, not only their own development but also that of humankind as a whole is hindered.

But who should pay women this wage? Who should finance housework? Are husbands and children the sole recipients of the services performed by housewives? With a rearranging of priorities, governments of developing countries could afford to pay a wage directly to whoever performs housework, men, women, or children, in proportion to the work performed.

Perhaps a more feasible alternative for both developed and less developed countries is that employers should pay an extra allowance to employees for the housework invested in them. The argument has been set forth that by the nonpayment of a wage for housework the figure of the boss, of the employer, is concealed behind that of the husband and children, who appear as the sole recipients of domestic services. The marriage contract legitimizes the appropriation of the housewife's work ability as a natural thing. Yet the husband working outside the home, regardless of what his situation at work is, owns his power to work; and he sells it. The woman does not own her power to work; it belongs to her husband. The love and affection characterizing the relationship between husband and wife and children further camouflage the fact that husbands are the first foremen, the immediate controllers, of a housewife's work. If she cooks well and maintains a clean house, she "loves" her husband more than if she does not. Salaried housework, neighborhood collectivized housework, canteens, and personalized care

[33] José A. Alonso, "La mujer Guatemalteca en 1973: De 'inferioridad' a 'explotación,'" *Estudios sociales* 10 (Sept.-Oct. 1973) 23.

centers and nurseries may be only stages in the process toward a more just society whose ultimate goal should be the full development of human potential in both male and female. Once these services are provided, women's emancipation will have just begun. It is then perhaps that men and women together may consciously and creatively participate in the development of their communities.

THE ROLES OF HOUSEWIVES AND MOTHERS IN HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Christianity, in an attempt to legitimize itself, adopted Roman law as its own, extending the power of the *paterfamilias* far beyond the walls of Roman homes. Even today many laws automatically assume the male to be the master of the household. In 1796 Mrs. Mary Wallstonecraft wrote *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman.* She was concerned that Rousseau and Montesquieu were speaking of human rights only in terms of the rights of men and not of women. She built a case for the attainment of equality between men and women through the guarantees of civil liberties. Her argument was based on the same moral principles that were discussed in the writings of the French Revolution.[34]

John Stuart Mill in 1869 went a step further. He maintained that it is difficult to distinguish the natural attributes of women from those which are a product of the culture. He would have opposed the protective labor legislation of this century and the laws dealing with women as a special case on the ground that such laws inhibit women's earning ability. Mill realized that "Only when women can exercise their earning ability will they have dignity." [35] But he thought that even if women were given the opportunity to work equally with men, most would elect to remain full-time wives and mothers. Women, he thought, need only to be given the alternative of economic independence to strengthen their bargaining power; they need not actually avail themselves of that opportunity to obtain equal status with men.

Charlotte Perkins Gilman takes Mill's arguments and notes that the unique attribute of the female economic position is economic dependence. The value of female services is not connected with her standard of living. What a woman consumes bears no relation to her power to produce but only to the man she marries, how much he has and how much he is willing to give her. Gilman thus concurs with Mill that economic independence is vital to female dignity. This independence comes only with the acquisition of earning potential which links

[34] Mary Wallstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (London: J. Johnson, 1796).

[35] John Stuart Mill, *The Subjection of Women* (London: Longmans, Green, 1869) p. 89.

consumption to female productivity. Only on this basis, she says, can women earn their share in the advance of the human race.[36]

Today the percentage of females who are economically active in the world is steadily increasing. In a ratio of female to male activity rates, about 26.3 percent of women of all ages in Africa are defined as economically active, 21.5 in Asia, 17.6 in the Americas, 15.6 in Oceania, 44.6 in the USSR, and 29.4 in Europe.[37] Women earn, however, an average of 40 percent less in wages than men for the same jobs. Often women occupy inferior jobs, and when men begin to participate in traditionally female employment (such as teaching in primary school), these teachers' salaries rise, and the percentage of males and females occupying executive positions grows disproportionately in favor of the males. Thus, exercising their earning ability may be a necessary minimum, but does it give women dignity and worth as human beings?

Attainment of equal rights for all and elimination of discrimination are necessary for human development. The discrimination that has been suffered by women, however, may be part of a broader phenomenon, related perhaps to the ways people communicate with each other. Competition is a generalized phenomenon. If we relate to other persons in terms of superior or inferior, we are prone to discrimination. Thus, whites feel superior to blacks, Catholics to Jews, men to women, adults to children or to old people (and adult chauvinism may be worse than male chauvinism); there is superior intellectual work as opposed to manual labor; and there are those who produce things to be sold, as opposed to those who produce things to be immediately consumed. The elimination of discrimination, however, is a long-term process; it requires a change in the attitudes, beliefs, values, and practices of cultures and peoples, since our civilization has institutionalized prejudices within the laws and the sciences. Women concerned with their liberation should themselves avoid falling into fascistic or chauvinistic tendencies. But a certain stage of preoccupation with oneself before everyone else may be necessary in the search for identity. Susan Sontag has stated:

> For thousands of years, practically everyone in the world assumed that it lay in the "nature" of the human species that some people were superior (and should be masters) and other people were inferior (and should be slaves). Only about a hundred and fifty years ago did elements of the ruling classes begin to suspect that slavery was not really, after all, "natural," and that the undeniably servile and culturally underdeveloped character of slaves could be explained by the very fact that these people were slaves, were brought up to be slaves—instead of proving that they deserved to be slaves.... Support for the emancipation of

[36] Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Women and Economics* (Boston: Small, Maynard, 1898).
[37] *United Nations Demographic Yearbook, 1971.*

women stands today approximately where support for the emancipation of slaves stood two centuries ago.[38]

Both masters and slaves must be liberated, she says, but the liberation of the master is incidental; what is essential, first of all, is the liberation of the slave.[39]

But the merger of the biological function of giving birth with the social functions of nurturing and educating the children and performing housework has not only been detrimental to the development of women as persons, limiting their identity;[40] it has also limited the development of humankind.

If persons grow only through others but relate to others only through their own experience, then women must widen their level of experience. If they are confronted with the absence of self, if they do not know who they are, the absence of that self is the slave that must be squeezed out drop by drop. Sexism is inside the female psyche and the process of its elimination from within themselves goes together with the process of eliminating sexism from society. In searching for identity, housewives and mothers can accept responsibility for their actions and may re-create themselves through effective choice. For example, if women want the freedom to choose the number and spacing of their children, this does not mean that they want to abdicate procreation.

Thus *family role is the determinant influence of women's status in society, whereas socioeconomic role is the determinant of men's status.*

In spite of their subordinate position, mothers may be the basic influence in the shaping of the character of children. The process of education during the period when children first express their partial sexual instincts may be of utmost importance. Research in this field is urgently needed, but the child's sense of self seems to evolve gradually during the first several years of life primarily *as a consequence of the interaction with the person who takes care of him or her.* In other words, despite their socially inferior position, women today are still the decision-makers in the most basic of the socialization processes, that of the family. It may be, then, basically through the mother, a subordinate being, that the potential of human creativity is developed in the child.

Furthermore, the relationship between human nature and culture

[38] Susan Sontag, "The Third World of Women," *Partisan Review*, 1973, pp. 180–81.

[39] *Ibid.*, p. 186.

[40] Even women who freely choose not to marry and not to have children cannot totally escape the far-reaching influences of the paramount roles of wives and mothers. The negative connotations of the word "spinster" illustrate the case of the secular single women. An increasing number of younger women religious, however, no longer tend to consider themselves "brides of Christ" or "spiritual mothers."

must be researched from new perspectives, taking into account the psychological and socioeconomic implications of the roles of wives and mothers. For example, what is the extent of a mother's influence in shaping the human development of her children as persons? For example, in order to conform to the male stereotype institutionally sanctioned, men should not cry. Mothers teach their male babies that if they are to grow up to be men, they should not cry as their sisters are allowed to do. Nature, however, has provided both men and women with identical lacrimal glands. Studies show that the lack of a necessary emotional outlet like crying is a very important factor in the development of heart diseases, especially arteriosclerosis. In several of the studies, patients with heart disease (mostly men) stated that often they felt a very deep urge to cry but were unable to do so. In some cases the lacrimal glands had been physically dried up.

Experiments carried out in Sweden, Finland, certain Kibutzim, and China, suggest that children who receive daily contact, love, and affection from more adults than just the mother and/or father develop greater degrees of creativity. No matter how dedicated a mother is, she will have moments of impatience if she is in constant contact with a newborn, as opposed to the mother who spends six hours a day, for example, with her baby and may therefore give during that time the best of herself. Because of the child's incapability for empathy, he or she may tend to equate the mother's impatience with total rejection: "nobody loves me." Thus insecurities and anxieties may begin to shape the child's personality. With regard to the specific insecurities of women, from childbirth people relate differently to a male than to a female baby. Midwives in rural areas in Latin America still charge double rates for the delivery of a baby boy.

Women must develop their human creative activity in direct contact with the real world. This may be the necessary initial step to change the way people relate to each other today. Trina Paulus makes a beautiful analogy: like caterpillars, we crawl the earth, eating mud and leaves, without developing the potential to fly, live off the nectar of flowers, and disseminate their pollen.[41] The chrysalis in the cocoon imprisons itself by its own work to die and leave silk, and from there the butterfly grows. As human beings, we do not have within us the capability to grow in isolation; we grow through our relations with others, and through others we could certainly become butterflies, bringing "hope for the flowers."

Paul frequently used the image of the "old man," the sinner, the slave who would become the "new man" redeemed by Christ. Thus evolution

[41] Trina Paulus, *Hope for the Flowers* (New York: Newman, 1973).

and creation have not finished. We are not finished, complete persons: "Lie not one to another, seeing that you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man, who is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him—where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision or uncircumcision, barbarian or Scythian, enslaved or free [we could add "male or female stereotypes"], but Christ is all and in all." [42]

Perhaps the message of the gospel, "a new humanity in Christ," suggests a process of *metanoia*, a change in mentality, perspective, purpose. Within this context, to be human would mean symbolically to become flesh of the other, and this points towards something far beyond genital relations, far beyond a mere mutual tolerance, and far beyond a simple reciprocal task of help or charity. Allowing for the development of all persons and becoming closer to the purpose of unity of all human beings may be the way towards the full development of humankind.

[42] Col 3:9-11.