

TWO MODELS FOR THE SOCIALIST
TRANSFORMATION OF AGRICULTURE :
IMPLICATIONS FOR GENDER RELATIONS

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The orthodox Marxist-Leninist strategy for agrarian transformation and rural development has put emphasis on superseding the role of the peasant household in the organisation of production and its replacement by large-scale collective control of the labour process and production planning. The recent policy move in Vietnam and China to subcontracting production on collectively owned land to peasant households and official encouragement of household mobilisation of material and labour resources for both agricultural and handicraft production after some twenty years of systematic promotion of large-scale collective agriculture with collective control of the labour force organised along non-kin lines, constitutes a major reversal of trends in socialist development thinking. What I wish to do in this paper is to examine the implications for women of these two successive models of Third World socialist development (the collective farm model v. the household contracting model). This question is put in the context of a more general discussion of the implications for women of seeing separation of the organisation of production from the household as crucial to socialist transformation v. official incentives for the commoditisation of the products of household labour.

The orthodox conception of the 'socialist transformation of agriculture' as applied in Vietnam bears close resemblance to an aspect of the prevailing pattern of industrialisation, whether in socialist or capitalist countries, ie the separation of the sphere of production (factory/collective farm) from the sphere of reproduction and consump-

tion (the kin based household) (1). This separation takes place in three senses : from overlap to separation of the units of production and reproduction/consumption in terms of space, membership and self-sufficiency :

1. the spacial separation of the workplace in which production takes place from the site of biological reproduction and the reproduction of everyday life in the household.
2. separation of kin group and force : kinship ceases to be a primary regulator of relations of production while remaining central to relations of reproduction. In industrialised societies the work force within the unit of production is not generally united by kinship ; in Weberian terms there is a change from *gemeinschaft* to *gesellschaft* as the primary social organising principle.
3. a move from a high degree of household self-sufficiency in basic necessities (both food and handicraft products) to social interdependence whether via market exchange or plan allocation.

To the concept of separation of unit of production (factory/farm) from the household we must add the concept of scale : that development entails progress from small-scale household-based production with small surpluses to large-scale production on capitalised farms (whether privately or collectively owned). Despite a growing body of literature on the efficiency of the small-scale family farm as a unit of production and mobiliser of labour, and the survival of family agriculture in industrialised capitalist countries (Barthez - 1982), the dominant idea of 'development' held by policy makers in most Third World countries, whether capitalist or socialist, has broadly conformed to the view of development outlined above : that household based production of handicraft goods and subsistence and petty commodity production by peasant households are 'backward' and that development can be best achieved by concentrating resources on larger units of production (large-scale projects, the large farms of rich peasants, large scale state or collective farms). As Lipton has argued, this can be attributed to the 'urban bias' of development planners concerned with promoting urban industrial development and therefore favouring capital intensive development which utilises industrially produced inputs and the large units

(1) For a detailed discussion of the meaning of the term 'reproduction' see Edholm, Harris and Young, 1977.

from which food for urban workers and civil servants and raw materials for urban industry can more easily be obtained. This has tended to override considerations of the efficiency of family agriculture which should carry particular weight in capital scarce and labour abundant Third World contexts (LIPTON - 1977 : 114).

There are further reasons for similarities between capitalist and socialist development paradigms. The orthodox Marxist-Leninist strategy for socialist transformation, including the socialist transformation of agriculture (model I : collective agriculture) was based in part on a number of key characteristics of capitalist industrial development as described by Marx in *Capital*, including separation of the workplace from the household, growth in scale, mechanisation, the development of social cooperation through specialisation in different stages in the labour process, and the greater productivity of collective over individual labour. This paradox in socialist development theory and policy is due to the fact that Marx provided no description of the principles of socialist development ; *Capital* therefore became ironically and by default the major Marxist source for the principles of socialist development for countries attempting to build socialism without passing through capitalism.

Similarly, the orthodox Marxist-Leninist approach to the question of how to achieve equality between men and women was based on the assumption that capitalist industrialisation played a major role in liberating women from 'domestic slavery' through market provision of goods that formerly had to be provided by domestic labour in the home and by involving women as wage earners in factories.

The concepts of large scale industrialisation and women's emancipation were explicitly linked by Engels in a key passage in *The Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State*, popularised in summaries of Marxism-Leninism on 'the Woman Question' :

The emancipation of women will only be possible when woman can take part in production on a large, social scale, and domestic work no longer claims anything but an insignificant amount of her time. And only now has that become possible through modern large-scale industry, which does not merely permit of the employment of female labour over a wide range, but positively demands it, while

it also tends towards ending private domestic labour by changing it more and more into a public industry. (International Publishers - 1951).

Lenin reinforced this view with the argument that factory employment, however arduous and exploitative, emancipated women from patriarchal control within the peasant family (LENIN - 1966). As Marx and Engels expected socialism to emerge from the positive aspects of capitalist industrialisation, characteristics of the early process of European industrialisation became embedded in the Marxist-Leninist concept of how to achieve socialist development in an agrarian country without passing through the stage of capitalist development. The key difference between capitalism and socialism was seen as being not in the organisation of production but in the ownership of the means of production.

The end of private ownership of the means of production by patriarchal household heads was expected to contribute to the emancipation of women, establishing men and women as equals as both citizens and workers. With the end of household ownership of the means of production, gender relations would be freed from their earlier ties to relations of production and would cease to be determined by economic considerations : Engels argued in *The Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State* that marriage and the family then could become based purely on love. The socialist family of the future would be based entirely on emotional relations. Engels' argument that in all past history the structure of the family was closely related to relations of production, whereas in the future it would be entirely based on affection, effectively completed the concept of a total separation of the family/household sphere of relations of reproduction from the sphere of production, ignored the economic constraints and necessities involved in the family as the sphere of reproduction, and underestimated the continuing necessity and economic importance of the production of use value for family consumption.

Detailed research on changes in gender relations during the period of Industrial Revolution in England has not confirmed Engels and Lenin's view that the transformation from family to factory production was a major contribution to women's emancipation. On the contrary it is more often argued that a social demarcation of male as "public" and female as "private" was both reinforced and encouraged by the physical

separation between work and home' (HALL - 1982 : 15). The transfer of work outside the home and the rise of specialised factory production of goods formerly produced in the home for both family consumption and sale (eg baking, brewing, spinning, etc) led to loss of status, autonomy and relative economic position for women (eg PINCHBECK - 1981). Alternatively, it has been argued that the initial threat to men's position as household head posed by women's work in industry soon came to an end when men, with more time for 'public sphere' activities such as trade union struggles, succeeded in obtaining higher pay and skill classifications for their work (PHILLIPS and TAYLOR - 1980).

I wish to turn now to a brief summary of the effect on gender relations of the orthodox package for the socialist transformation of agriculture which originated in the Soviet Union and was then applied, with some modifications and on a voluntary rather than coercive basis, in China and Vietnam (SELDEN - 1982 ; STANIS - 1976).

As it originated in the Soviet Union, collectivisation of land ownership and production along the industrial model of work organisation had the aim of gaining control of agricultural production in order to finance industrialisation and to feed the cities. Grain procurement at low state controlled prices was a crucial component of collectivisation in China and in Vietnam as well. This resulted in a major difference from the factory model described in *Capital* : collective farms did not pay the work force a set wage to cover the cost of simple reproduction and sell goods at a price covering costs of production, necessary labour and a profit derived from 'surplus labour'. Rather, the state had first claim to a portion of the product at a price that did not necessarily cover costs of production. This pushed down the payment for the collective labour day and in order for the system to work it was necessary to allocate small 'household plots' from which cooperative members derived a high proportion of their subsistence and cash income. The system had an inbuilt contradiction : on the one hand, the 'socialist transformation of agriculture' was defined as moving from small-scale subsistence and petty commodity production by peasant households (a system viewed as nascent capitalism) to large-scale collective production involving a formally organised labour force. On the other hand, the system provided material disincentives for collective production because of the low value of workpoints due to low prices for agricultural goods and provided peasant households with an unalienable

material base for household subsistence and petty commodity production in the household plot. The system thus worked as a symbiosis of peasant household production and collective labour rather than as a transition from one to the other (cf. NGUYEN XUAN LAI - 1967 ; NGUYEN HUU DONG - 1980).

Nonetheless, the positive effects for women expected from women's involvement in 'social production' for the cooperative did materialise. There is evidence that at initial stages of cooperativisation men were more reluctant to join than their wives because of the threat to their 'independent' status as household head managing a family farm (PHAM CUONG and NGUYEN VAN BA - 1976 : 35). Measuring women's work in work points made it more visible. According to Tran thi Hoan, a Woman's Union cadre who had been involved in the campaign to form cooperatives, 'some husbands were very surprised when they saw how many work points their wives earned. Before they had thought that it was they who fed their wives, not their wives who fed them' (interview, Hanoi, September 1979). Another advantage of cooperativisation was the possibility of giving pregnant women lighter work because the unit of production was larger. To quote Tran thi Hoan again :

if farming is done separately on a family basis then family members must do every step of production. In the family farming systems, if it is time for transplanting or for harvest then all hands are needed, and the women must go to the fields, even if they are pregnant or have just given birth. We have documented cases of women with fallen uteruses from being forced to work too soon after childbirth.

While men had previously been the 'directors' of the family farm, the formation of cooperative made it possible for women to be elected to management positions. During the war, when a large percentage of the men of working age were away at the front, there was an active policy of training and recruiting women for cooperative management posts (for a more extensive discussion see WERNER - 1981).

The dependence of children and old people on the family was modified by new collective institutions. Creches were set up in cooperatives, and a uniquely Vietnamese institution, the old people's orchard, with a shaded rest place or house, provided a social meeting place and profitable economic activities for cooperative members who no longer had the strength to work in the rice fields. In a cooperative visited

by the author in 1979, the old people's team even played a role in making marriage a cooperative rather than just a family affair : their garden provided flowers for weddings and furniture for new households was made by their carpentry workshop.

It is probably not coincidental that a new marriage law which outlawed polygamy, child marriage and parental control of their children's choice of marriage partner was introduced at about the same time that cooperativisation began the transformation from family to a larger, non-kin group as the main unit of agricultural production. Traditional forms of marriage which were disguised forms of labour recruitment had continued after land reform such as the practice of finding a strong young woman to work as unpaid family labour by marrying her to a son below working age. Not surprisingly, young women caught in such marriages often became activists in the campaign to form cooperatives, as membership in a newly-formed cooperative gave them independent access to employment (*Vietnamese Studies* - 1966 ; BOUDAREL - 1970).

However, while cooperativisation did undermine the powers and prerogatives of the male family head, it did not lead to full equality between men and women in social production and decision-making. As with differential male and female wage scales in social production in industrialised nations, cooperatives generally accorded men more work-points per day than women on the grounds that men's work was 'heavy' and 'complicated' while women's work was 'light' and 'simple'.

In this the Vietnamese experience is quite similar to the pattern in Western industrialised countries of differential rating of men's work as 'skilled' and women's as 'unskilled' (PHILLIPS and TAYLOR - 1980). This was one point of similarity in the problems facing the women's movements in England and Vietnam which was raised at a SIDA-funded research colloquium on 'Women, Employment and the Family' jointly organised by the Institute of Development Studies (Sussex) and the Vietnamese Social Sciences Research Commission which was held in Hanoi in March 1983 (WHITE - 1984).

One participant, a researcher and organiser from the Vietnamese Women's Union, described the struggle by women in a number of cooperative to have their work in transplanting accorded as many points as men's work in ploughing. These women criticised the usual weighting 10 points for an average day's work transplanting but 14 points for ploughing on the grounds that 'both must work in the mud' ; women's

skilful fingers are as crucial for transplanting as men's muscles are for ploughing, and good quality transplanting is the most important factor for high productivity'. In some villages women were successful in achieving the revaluation of transplanting at 14 points per day.

It should be added that, as often happens in other countries, there is a tendency towards greater capital investment in men's work. One man with a buffalo can plough in one day more land than one transplanter can cover in a day ; moreover, the discrepancy is being increased as ploughing is being mechanised at a much faster rate than transplanting. It is therefore particularly difficult to change the view that men's work is 'more productive' and therefore worth more.

Most problematically, reorganisation of production can not guarantee that the pre-revolutionary patriarchal domination of family agriculture will not be replaced by male domination of collective agriculture. On the contrary, in Vietnam as elsewhere, men tended to assume a higher percentage of leading positions when collectives were first formed due to their advantages in educational level and greater relevant work and organisational experience. In 1966, by which time the gradual transition to fully socialist cooperatives had been basically completed, women comprised 3.3 per cent of cooperative heads, 18.3 per cent of cooperative managing committees and 9.65 per cent of heads of work brigades (MAI THI TU and LE THI NHAM TUYET - 279).

Over time and especially during the war years, the percentage of women in leadership and management positions rose considerably, but since the reorganisation of patterns of work in the fields was not accompanied by a new sexual division of labour in housework and childcare, on the whole Vietnamese men have continued to have more time than their wives to devote to education training and political activities. Educational level and available time became particularly important as prerequisites for leadership positions when the scale of cooperatives was enlarged after the war.

An additional problem has been deepseated male resistance to the idea of women being in positions of authority over men as well as the priority given to veterans with a wealth of organisational experience in the army. In October 1974 there were reportedly nearly 7000 women holding the position of head or deputy head of cooperatives ; a year later this figure had dropped to 3,580 (LE DUAN - 1980 : 111 , DUONG THOA - 1976 : 24). Despite the decrease, women's leadership role

remained significant ; in 1978 it was reported that, 'According to incomplete statistics, 30 per cent of all heads of production brigades, clerks, heads and deputy heads of cooperatives, ie, cadres managing production in the countryside, are women' (NGO THI CHINH - 1978 : 17).

In relative terms, this figure is impressive, even allowing for the incomplete nature of the statistics and the likelihood that the estimate is on the high side due to the amalgamation of clerks and elected leaders. However, while women comprise the majority of the collective agricultural work force (60 per cent according to official statistics, but this seems a considerable underestimation), they remained a minority in cooperative management.

We turn now to a brief examination of the implications for women of the recent (1981) change to production subcontracting to households of collectively owned land in the context of market liberalisation, higher prices for agricultural commodities, and promotion of production of consumer goods rather than heavy industry (Vietnamese Communist Party - 1981, 1982). Certain aspects of these policy trends are clearly advantageous for rural women, including more active state support for rural handicraft and light industrial production which provides employment for rural women. During the process of socialist transformation a sectoral sexual division of labour had emerged, with women forming a majority of rural producers (both in agriculture and handicraft production) while men predominated in the state sector (urban industrial employment and civil servants). The continued mobilisation of rural males into the armed forces further contributes to the female majority in the rural labour force. Because of this important factor, the tendency toward a strengthening of traditional patriarchal authority which has been a result of household contracting in China appears not to be the case in Vietnam, where there are many female household heads. In the previous system, there was a great deal of administrative interference with women's income-generating activities, such as cooperative fines for spending days marketing household produce rather than working for workpoints on the collective. In the present system women's economic activities are fully encouraged ; the primary worry is that this will lead to overwork with negative results on women's health. However, the new system also facilitates calling on male family members working outside of agriculture to participate in agricultural labour at peak labour times (NGUYEN HUY - 1980). Forms of non-kin based cooperation

beneficial to women are continuing, such as mutual aid in rice transplanting, and after some initial disruption the creche system has been maintained although with increased household financial contributions (Central Committee for the Protection of Mothers and Children - 1983).

One important lesson of the Vietnamese experience seems to be that both household and social cooperation in production are economically beneficial for women and society, and that the concept of repressing household economic activity in favour of social production should be replaced with a new and more realistic aim : to achieve a mutually beneficial coordination between household and social production.

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ABSTRACT

The degree of separation or overlap of the spheres of production and reproduction is crucial for any analysis of the implications of different farming systems for women. The orthodox conception of the "socialist transformation of agriculture" (collectivisation) has aimed at replacing the socio-biological family unit as the primary institution for organising production. This paper examines the implications for women of socialist collectivisation in Vietnam with reference to the feminist debate on the effect of industrialisation in Britain on women's capacity to maintain a productive role.

The positive and negative effects on women of recent policy changes in Vietnam towards subcontracting collective land to households on the basis of female labour power are also examined.

RÉSUMÉ

Il est primordial de discerner le niveau de séparation ou de recouvrement des sphères de production et de reproduction dans toute analyse des répercussions des divers systèmes de production sur les femmes. La conception orthodoxe de la "transformation socialiste de l'agriculture" (collectivisation) a voulu remplacer l'unité familiale socio-biologique comme unité de base de l'organisation de la production. Cette communication examine les conséquences pour les femmes de la collectivisation socialiste au Viêt-Nam, tout en faisant référence au débat féministe sur les effets de l'industrialisation en Grande-Bretagne, sur la capacité des femmes à conserver un rôle productif.

Les récents changements de la politique agricole au Viêt-Nam, visant à accorder aux ménages des parcelles des terres collectives en fonction de la force de travail féminine, sont aussi étudiés dans leurs effets positifs et négatifs pour les femmes.