

# Three Into One: The Triple Oppression Of Racism, Sexism, And Class

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I.

*"If you argue, then you decide to take the risk of discovering that an argument shows a structure with far-reaching implications for your own existence."  
(Thought Relationships, 553)*

In this sense, this paper is very risky. As a discussion paper, even a preliminary one, it runs the risk of errors - but this is better than the dubious safety of silence.

The background of this paper is a long discussion between leftist women (mainly) and men, conducted mostly through prisoners' letters. In the end, it was put together in jail with the "view from a distance" which overlooks many day-to-day details, but which can (therefore?) see further than just the neighbor's fence. The purpose of the discussion was to critique a handed-down class analysis which is prejudiced and dominated by patriarchal thoughts and which is pervaded with racism. The analysis of global or local oppression- and exploitation- mechanisms was always blurred by economics, making the existence of patriarchy and racism "invisible". It divided struggles into primary and secondary contradictions and covered the world in a white, Eurocentric mold.

Events like May 1, 1987 - with its active mixture of poor neighborhood residents, Turkish youths of both sexes, as well as Autonomen - and the strike at Rheinhausen in 1987/88 - to which the Autonomen did not respond - provided some starting points to this discussion. But these events did not have any major effects on autonomist theory or practice. Even the anti-IMF campaign in West-Berlin didn't make any real progress, apart from token mentions of patriarchy and sexism in texts and pamphlets. Sexism within the left's own inner-structures - which could no longer be denied after the regular attacks on women became known - the weak reaction of the left to the state's hate-campaigns against the "flood of refugees" (although there were some positive exceptions to this, like the RZ's "free flow" campaign), and, more recently, the traditional defensive theme-building around the rise of racism and Fatherland-hype (which has not been limited to mere verbal abuse); these all mirror this to some extent. In searching for a radical critique of these global and local violence- and exploitation-relationships, very little is to be found within the theory of the left. Here, the meanings of capitalism/imperialism, patriarchy, and racism, and the connections between them all, are given but a



passing, formalized treatment.

Much further developed are feminist comrades and blacks, especially black women, which should come as no surprise. Also, a much greater stress is put upon the significance of "triple oppression" of capital, patriarchy, and racism by the militant left in England, America, and the so-called Third World. (Occasionally, a fourth oppression is mentioned, namely the exploitation of the Third World by the metropolises, but even then the triple oppression is retained as a political notion). The longer you come to grips with triple oppression, the more visible its elements and interactions become visible in the theory, history, and day-to-day life and (non-)praxis of the left. This process of recognition is what this paper seeks to stimulate.

*"When we talk about liberation struggle, we mean the fight against all these three kinds of oppression. We don't talk about three different stages or three different struggles; no, we speak of one and only one struggle! I already said that freedom is indivisible. You cannot call yourself free if one or more of these oppressions still exists."*

*- Neville Alexander*

The German left is privileged: it's very white, very male, and less dependent on wage slavery. Privileges make you blind, blind to realities outside your own experiences and commonplace awareness. In this way, men have to learn a great deal from feminist comrades, and we all have to learn from texts by black people. Sure, leftists are anti-sexist and anti-racist, of course - "of course", but rarely with any practical consequences. (But usually, "of course" simply means that a left-wing person doesn't make any special effort to come to grips with the problem, because he (!) thinks he couldn't be guilty in these areas, especially not in the private realm). Relationships in which you are the privileged party cannot become revolutionized without you losing your own power. This is a basic starting point. The autonomous-left (and its theory) is in such a state of indecision, with such a lack of a utopian vision, that its practice is often full of latent or overt examples of sexism, racism, and "white spots", so this discussion of triple oppression can only be healthy. The lack of utopias means the lack of conceptions of something worth fighting for, of something that has to be achieved. To restrict utopias to the possibilities of one's immediate surroundings is to reduce the questions of power and developing a counter-power to mere daily tasks. Long-term mobilizing, however, is only possible if one has long-term goals in mind, goals which go beyond one's current (personal) situation in life.

*"One of the hardest lessons we had to learn was that revolutionary struggle is more scientific than emotional. I don't say we shouldn't feel anything, but decisions cannot be based upon love or hate. They have to be based upon objective circumstances and aim at what is rationally and unemotionally necessary."*

*- Assata Shakur*

After this introduction, the subject now becomes the limits of the old concept of class; that's how this discussion began. Then there follows a definition of racism and its connection to class war and patriarchy. This is followed by patriarchy and its feminist critique and also its connection to

class war. A special section then follows containing longer quotations from black women; as a direct link to German relationships there are excerpts from a critique by a Filipino woman regarding the German women's movement. These are given a lot of space, because they are both important and authentic. The paper then continues with a rather dry theoretical piece on triple oppression. Then there is a short section on National-Socialism and the resistance of the German Communist Party (KPD). The next, longer chapter critiques autonomist theory and practice, followed by some proposals. In discussing this complex theme, it is impossible to avoid some cross-over between the different chapters. On the other hand, they also complement one another. So please, don't take anything out of context from this paper.

Before we start, here are some definitions of terms:

- class struggles: struggles against capitalist oppression, sustained by workers and those in solidarity with them.
- anti-patriarchal struggles: sustained by women and those in solidarity with them.
- anti-racist struggles: sustained by black people and those in solidarity with them; "black" is taken to be a political term for all those exposed to white racism.
- anti-imperialist struggles: sustained by the "Third World" liberation movements and those in solidarity with them.

That these struggles cannot, in reality, be separated, is another theme to be addressed. But these definitions are correct and necessary, otherwise the discussion of triple oppression would go round and round in circles if unclear notions were used to discuss other unclear notions.

## II.

*"What is the working class today? What gender is it? And what color?"*

*- Paul Gilroy*

These questions are based on a notion of class that implies that all struggles can be explained by and reduced to a prime confrontation between labor and capital, thereby proclaiming the working class to be the revolutionary subject. This traditional left concept leaves no room for the historic-authentic oppression of women and black people, nor for the qualitative material differences between the metropolises and the "Third World". It also leaves no room for collective resistance in these dimensions; it is patriarchal and white/Eurocentric.

Marxist theory is indispensable for recognizing capitalist exploitation and for understanding the struggles taking place at the line of confrontation between capital and labor. The class analysis which is derived from this (economic) confrontation, which cites the working class as the only driving force of the revolutionary process, is insufficient, because it only sees patriarchy and racism as secondary contradictions and thus it overlooks their political and social importance. In down-playing the importance of racist and sexist oppression, or at most analyzing them as divisive mechanisms of capital, thereby linking them exclusively to the existence of capital, it fails to give that which is needed in the political/practical process of social change and the mobilization towards a necessary counter-power

to achieve the following: a perspective of liberation from all forms of oppression and exploitation.

Revolutionary goals and behavior cannot be derived economically from one's position in the production process. (Which does not mean that economic or social positions in the class relationships are no criteria). Revolutionary movements have always formed themselves in fought-for and endured experiences, conscious assimilation, and organizational support. This is also the task of the left.

This is not a "farewell to the proletariat", but only the realization that class struggles are not only waged by white working-class males in the metropolises and that on the front-line against imperialism, patriarchy, and racism, there are controversies and struggles which are just as important. All these struggles have roots in historical and structural power-relationships which exist in simultaneous and reciprocal expansion and stabilization.

A theory which comprises all of these struggles (or at least makes it possible to recognize each of them), and which also describes the objective conditions which give these struggles their origins and limits, is not available within the (autonomous) left. Neither has it an understanding of the social actors who (could) have the objective power to turn over the ruling order. By ignoring this question, it becomes impossible to see how this ruling order - with its ideological trenches, productive sources of wealth, and military might - can ever be destroyed. When separated from objectively-present power, revolutionary will is doomed to fail.

No progress is achieved by replacing the notion of the working class with that of (under-)class(es). Either this notion is defined in economic terms and does not specifically state why, from this material position, a revolutionary fighting spirit should arise, or (under-)class(es) is simply applied to all those who fight, thereby veiling all differences of class, gender, nationality, and "race", as well as peoples' different reasons for fighting. (The old "misery-theory", which viewed revolution as the result of hunger, has been proven wrong historically, but bits and pieces of it survive and still clutter autonomist ideas: someone who is poor will fight and is, therefore, automatically revolutionary. This neglects the fact that marginalization brings other, existential problems to the fore, problems which, in reality, leave very little room for dreams of a better life.)

When "Third World" persons involved in an uprising are equated with the German under-class, when simultaneous riots in Sao Paulo, Gaza, Seoul, Brixton, and Kreuzberg are attributed to similar causes, this certainly gives a nice rounded view of the world, but this is the worst possible kind of abstraction. In spite of the growing relative misery of metropolitan poverty, there is a qualitative difference with the mass starvation in the "Third World" and falling bombs "made in the USA". The differing conditions in the metropolises and in the "Third World", and the acceptance of the latter by the majority of workers in the metropolises, not only signifies a (secondary) division of the global proletariat, but in fact proves its non-existence.

On with the question of the gender and color of the working class: Within the notion of the working class, the female gender has been made invisible. Female workers, by the neglect of their additional role as

(house-)wives, are reduced within the labor relationship. Their additional exploitation by the (working-)man disappears within the "proletarian family" much propagated by Marxist-Leninists. The concept of work upon which the notion of the working class is based is that of paid labor. In the realm of social production, in which mainly women (especially in the "Third World") work, is swept under the carpet. The whole division of work by gender and its enormous value for capital and for men is lost as a sort of natural resource in the reproductive sphere, which is not thought of as having any revolutionary explosiveness.

The oppression of women cannot be considered a secondary problem, one which will immediately disappear once the "primary contradictions" are resolved by the "victory of the proletariat", and this is proven by the fact that violence against women is perpetrated by working class men just as it is by men of all other classes. The historical persistence of this violence and the blindness towards it on the part of the labor movement and its theoreticians are a strong counter to the notion that women can be liberated through the struggle of the working class.

The question about the color of the working class shows a further unjustified assumption about the working class being the alleged representative of the oppressed.

Racism will be more thoroughly discussed in the next part and in the section on National-Socialism, where a particularly brutal and racist division of work will be discussed.

Here are some points about the meaning of "color" in relation to workers: Differences in "race" and nationality are, at the same time, differences in the intensity of exploitation. Provided that immigrants don't import struggles - which happens quite often - the racist division of classes plays into the hands of capital, because the individuals can be more heavily exploited while the group represents a variable reserve force whose country of origin does not have to be reimbursed for their labor power and (if any) education.

The following is a quotation concerning the current composition of class, or more accurately, the fractionalization of class:

*"With this 'voluntary' multi-national composition of the labor force (consisting of immigrants from Eastern Europe, the European Community, and the southern hemisphere) in post-war Germany has replaced the bloody, militarist, and violent model of the Nazis with a less-sharp, 'cleaner' method:*

- On the top are the upper-level white-collar jobs (research, construction, management) with mostly male German workers.*
- Next are the 'masters' (semi-independent skilled laborers). They are predominantly male and German.*
- Then come the skilled workers and foremen in the factories. They are mostly German men, but there also some foreign males, like Italians, Spaniards, and Yugoslavians.*
- Below these are the Turkish and Moroccan men and the foreign women in general (in the industrial mass-production sector and the service sector, with jobs like cleaning, etc.).*
- At the very bottom are refugees of both sexes."*

*(from a flyer issued by the Gunter Sare Action Group, summer*

1989)

This gives a rough sketch of the racist (and sexist) division of labor installed by capital. That is one side of the story. What this doesn't show, however, is the very real existence of racism within the working class. The functioning (!) racist split within the working class - under National-Socialism, the destruction of class comrades was silently tolerated as well as actively propagated - gives another important argument against the assumption of the supreme, all-liberating working class. After all the internal contradictions and after the working women, now also the privileges of the white working class and those workers killed because of their "race" and nationality are becoming invisible.

### III.

*"It is the racist who creates the inferior."*  
- Fanon

*"Racism, the incestuous off-spring of patriarchy and capital"*  
- Pratibha Parmar

Forms of racism have become independent. They have been given a lot of attention and careful scrutiny.

There is only one "race": the human race.

"Races" are a construction by which social and cultural differences are translated into so-called biologically determined characteristics. "Race" is an open category, whose definition has varied widely throughout the course of history. That's why it's better to talk about racisms (in the plural) than about racism. (By the way, the biological/genetic differences among whites are as varied as those among blacks and between blacks and whites.)

All racisms have in common the notion that victims are placed on a lower level on the social scale than one's own, and that they have to stay there because they are "naturally inferior". "Naturally" means: without an historical background; fixed for eternity. Racisms try, by means of "descendence" and "purity of blood", to create identities which run straight across class and gender lines. What is reality is not the existence of "races", but rather of racisms.

*"There is absolutely no logical reason to assume from the fact that racial prejudices exist that something like a "race" or an "ethnic group" must exist. Must ghosts exist, simply because a large number of people believe in ghosts and behave like they do exist by not going to graveyards at night?"*  
- Neville Alexander

There are two processes upon which the preservation and development of racisms are founded:

- Physical characteristics are placed in a causal relationship with social and cultural differences. These differences are thereby naturalized and thus interpreted as universally valid.
- Racisms are an authentic form of living out one's inferior position in

the power/exploitation structure. They are constantly fed anew - both ideologically and materially - and are more than just "false consciousness".

*"We have to learn how groups which are excluded from the riches of the welfare society, but who are nevertheless part of the nation and seek to identify with it, find, in racism, an authentic form of identity and self-consciousness."*  
- Stuart Hall

To see racisms as 'false', as mere artifacts crafted by the ruling powers, is to ignore their popularity and materially existing, age-old traditions. Racisms have become structures that cannot be reduced to other social relations. They also cannot be traced completely from knowledge of other social relations, for they are relatively independent of patriarchy and class domination. A separate analysis of "race" and class struggle cannot, for example, explain the racist foundations of capitalism/imperialism.

As power-relations, racisms reach right into peoples' heads. They surface in ideas, attitudes, and emotions. It's very typical for anti-racist views to be linked with spontaneous racist feelings. This internalization of power-relations means that white people, so to speak, stand upon the shoulders of their slave-keeping ancestors, just as Germans stand upon the shoulders of the Nazis' "HERRENmenschen". (In principle, this also applies to those who consciously and militantly fight this!) Black women and men, on the other hand, stand in front of their enslaved and exterminated ancestors, just as Jews and Poles stand in front of those destroyed in the Holocaust.

"The tradition of all the dead generations sits like a mountain upon the minds of the living." (*18. Brumaire, 1*) To be more precise, Marx could have said: upon the minds of the survivors and their offspring.

To legitimize and secure hierarchies and exploitation by means of ascribing certain so-called biological/natural properties is a corresponding mechanism in the beginning phases of sexism and racism. The racisms that arose during the Middle Ages resulted from the persecution of all those that did not live by or seek to adopt the values of the Church. Crusades against these heathens, pogroms against Jewish communities and heretics, and a long series of witch-hunts were the result.

With the conquest of America and Africa, the colonizers were confronted with the problem of establishing a local ruling power structure. Notions of "purity of blood" and "pure nobility" were used in order to keep those being colonized out of power, no matter how wealthy they may become. This kept power in the hands of white Europeans. With the rise of secular society and its emphasis on natural science, "explanations" grounded racisms on solid "foundations". For example, one explorer claimed that Negroes were the result of women mating with apes (!). And Voltaire, who always seems much nicer in school books, thought the following: "There is, in every human race, like there is in plants, a principle which differentiates among them. Thus, Negroes are the slaves of other men."

In the nation states of the 19th and 20th centuries, these coarse racisms were changed into "popular characteristics". "Gallic" French as opposed to "Germanic" Germans, etc. This idiocy played a major role in the hype

surrounding World War I. At this same time, colonial racism became more "humane" and offered the "Negroes" the blessings of German, French, and English civilization. In the words of Bernstein, a social democratic theorist: "We will condemn and fight certain methods of subduing the savages, but not the subduing of savages in itself or of making them feeling the benefits of higher culture." For the rest, the whip and the battle-ship were what those blacks who didn't want to trade their land and freedom for "higher culture" had to face.

Anti-Semitism is a special form of racism, in which, in one important respect, the pattern of all other racisms has changed: Jewish people are the opposite of the normal "race"-construction because they have no common external distinguishing features to set them apart from others within their social surroundings (and this is precisely the starting point for other forms of racism). Jewish people are "hit in their religious personality, in their history, and in their links with their ancestors." (*Fanon*)

For anti-Semites, this assimilation and lack of "racial" distinctions represents an especially perverted danger for the "purity of the race". Already, Jewish ghettos have become the products of this anti-Semitic racism, whose victims had to be first identified by spatial separation and later by the yellow star. (So-called properties of "Jewish looks" were only propaganda, although the Jewish people that happened to look like this had severe problems).

For the racists' plans, Jewish people are "useful" victims, because "popular opinion" would never accept the notion of a "conspiracy by Negroes against Germany" or a "Negro-Bolshevik" conspiracy as plausible. But it wasn't hard to find a few Jews in the Communist Party, either at home or in Moscow.

It makes no difference whether or not the propagandists believed all this themselves or not; it worked for the masses, and this was one of the causes of the Holocaust.

Anti-Zionism, to mention it briefly, is a political category, not a racist one. To put it pointedly: "In West Germany, there are many more Zionists than there are Jews, especially in the ruling parties." This is from the Jewish magazine 'Semit' 2/90, looking back upon Strauss, Adenauer, and Springer.

The effectiveness of racisms, especially for under-class whites, can be partially explained by competition. (For the rich, immigrants don't provide economic competition, and they live in different areas; the rich, therefore, can afford to be liberal).

The fewer left-wing alternatives available, the weaker the women's and anti-fascist movements will be, and the more de-classification will express itself in racism and a hatred of women. On the basis of very real and existing racist patterns, de-classification does not lead to solidarity against the ruling powers, but to patriarchy and kicking those below. This is a starting point for understanding the "economic" development of racisms and sexism. But this does not imply that there is no individual responsibility for the decision between rebellion and kicking those below.

Nor should this give the impression that racisms and sexism could only

be eliminated through the social pressure of a strengthened left. Racism and sexism always exist, albeit open or hidden. That means they also have to be fought against within the left as well, even at times when they are less-visible publicly. (This was not done in 1968, nor in 1980/81!)

As was mentioned before, "race" was originally constructed for racist means. Assigning a "race" means assigning a position: oppressor or oppressed. "Race" is an (additional) factor in the stabilization of unequal political, economic, and patriarchal relations.

But this assignment has also given life to the "racial consciousness" of black people against internal and external colonialization. "Race" then becomes the common ground for organizing the resistance to racist oppression. (Important examples of this are the Black Panther Party and the Black Consciousness Movement). Class oppression and state violence are experienced as "race relations" and the struggle against this is invariably contested along the lines of "white and black". To call this racism a part of other racisms would be to deny their very different starting points: white racisms are used to maintain the imperialist order. They have a long and bloody history. Generations of white people have profited from them, in different amounts. Settler-states like the USA, Israel, South Africa, and Northern Ireland have, by means of institutionalized racisms and the sharing of conquests and positions, given profits to the entire white settler population, including the workers. When resistance to this arises, when black consciousness and black organizations form themselves, in the slaves' rebellions from Soweto to Harlem, then this is directed against the imperialist status quo and white history.

Struggles motivated by "racial consciousness", like black struggles, are anti-racist struggles!

Until all racisms are defeated, organizations which form around the issue of racial oppression are necessary.

*"It would mean to disarm oneself strategically and tactically if one were to deny the reality of prejudices and observable differences, wherever they come from. It would be impossible - with the possible exception of a few thousand students - to organize a mass movement."  
- Neville Alexander*

The black liberation movements in the struggle for national independence are anti-imperialist and anti-racist, but not necessarily anti-capitalist and anti-patriarchal. Fanon says that after a long period of colonial and imperialistic de-identification, "Third World" nationalism is the only way to achieve a collective identity and the practical unification of the (until now divided) oppressed.

This probably is unavoidable, but this is still in the tradition of the step-by-step model which places national liberation before that of the working class and of women. Class struggles and patriarchy continue to exist, but are "frozen" in the interest of the national cause. But this "frozen" state is only an apparent one, placed in the program of the liberation movement.

Whereas the working masses and women figure prominently as fighters in the liberation movement, thereby making an important difference to the

colonial puppet's armies, they disappear after the national victory in the economy which has to be built up in the patriarchal society that has grown into a nation state. The national victory itself is not achieved by means of a sexist-reactionary mobilization. The old is genuinely toppled by the struggle of women. But afterwards - as in Iran - the backlash occurs; the second-strike of the national "revolution" is aimed at women in a "fundamentalistic" - or Stalinistic - way.

Obviously, black people are divided along class and gender lines in the nation states established by liberation movements. But these divisions have different forms than those between white people, because they are determined by a long history of white racism and resistance to it. In the critique of the working class, the racist and patriarchal dimensions were already touched upon. So it is logical that black anti-racist organization and theory don't necessarily have to be anti-capitalist and anti-patriarchal.

#### IV.

*"The notion of patriarchy has been rediscovered by the new feminist movement as a verbal weapon because the movement needed a notion in which the totality as well as the systematic character of the oppressive and exploitative relationships experienced by women could be expressed. Patriarchy names the historical and social dimensions (...) and is thus less open to biological explanations, as opposed to notions of male supremacy. Throughout history, patriarchal systems have not been universal, timeless systems that have always existed. (...) If patriarchy had a certain starting point in history, then it can also have an ending."*

- Maria Mies

The above quotation helps explain the definition of patriarchy and rests further upon the necessity that the direction of anti-patriarchal criticism be given by feminist women.

This section will not proscribe feminist theory and praxis. Both fill countless volumes, and reality as well. But some aspects of feminist theory and practice need to be shortly recollected, however:

Violence against women was taken out of the private realm and shown to be structural and present in all other social relations; the humanistic notion of Humanity was broken down from a male abstraction into men and women, thus making women visible; the ruling conception of nature in science was robbed of its supposed neutrality and the ordering of women under nature was dismissed; the whole of philosophy, including that of left-wing thinkers, was dismissed as being founded on patriarchal premises; the connection between sexuality and domination was illustrated; all dichotomies were critiqued (mind/body, nature/mankind (!)); a critique was made of the working class, as was discussed earlier; the importance of the labor of housewives and women in the "Third World" was affirmed; the demand for control over one's own body was made, against all reproductive technology and laws against abortion; and as a final example, the general remark that, all class and "race" hierarchy notwithstanding, any man gets from the system the control over at least one woman, and it is his duty to refuse this.

A lot of these criticisms, and especially the practice associated with them (more on that in part VII), are directly aimed at the traditional and autonomous left because they affect their theoretical starting points, inner structures, and utopian visions (more on this, too, in part VII).

Something more precise regarding violence against women:

*"I believe that the importance of sexual and physical violence against women (psychological violence is something else, because its effectiveness is often linked to others) has not been understood in its full (social) dimension, not even by ourselves. Far too little, therefore, have we come to grasp and analyze the changes that occur, because only slowly but surely, bit by bit, does more and more come out into the open, even when the difficulties of arriving at a solution are enormous due to the individual nature of the mistreatment. Sexual abuse and rape during childhood doesn't just affect some girls and women, but rather millions of them. Child abuse in particular - as is becoming increasingly clear - is becoming a mass phenomenon all over the world. That is why we can say that this phenomenon marks the social role of women. If your eyes have been open, then you will at least have some idea of the hideous and, most of all, unconscious consequences that (sexual) abuse as a child has on one's conditioning. For the rest of your life as a woman, this is always a determining factor."  
(from a letter by a woman in the discussion)*

Patriarchy does not, as defined at the start, exist in a social vacuum. It is linked to the other forms of oppression and has a common history with them in the process of mutual stabilization. Thus, in a class society, women as abstract beings, not influenced by their respective classes, cannot exist. The forms of oppression against women - and the resistance to them! - are different; they are different for the middle-class woman than they are for her cleaning woman; they are different for the both of these women than they are for a woman working in a sweat-shop in Malaysia or a woman farmer in Africa.

Therefore, the class divisions were followed historically by a division into civic and proletarian women's movements. But both of them, as opposed to the contemporary women's movement, lacked a feminist theory and true autonomy. The former was generally tied to state reformist policies, while the latter, for instance, was told by the Communist International in 1935 that there was no such thing as a specific women's question. Contemporary arguments between left-wing feminists and cultural feminists mirror, in part, these different class positions.

*"The oppression of women knows no ethnic or racial boundaries, that is true, but that doesn't mean that it is identical within these boundaries. To deal with one of them, without even mentioning the other, means to deny both what we have in common as well as what divides us."  
- Audre Lorde*

*"There is no such thing as the universal patriarchal context...not until someone postulates an international male conspiracy or a monolithic, a-historical power hierarchy. But there is a world-*

*wide power structure, in which any analysis of culture, ideology, and social-economic conditions has to be planted by necessity."*

*- Chandra Talpade Mohantey*

In this paper, examples have already been given of the patriarchal and racist dimensions of capitalist exploitation and for the penetration of racisms by class positions and struggles. And more recently, the dimension of class differences within patriarchal oppression was also discussed. What remains now is the question of the importance of racisms - and Eurocentrism - in patriarchy.

The discussion of Black and white feminists on this issue only got underway within the German women's movement after this paper had already been started. The fact that this (very intense) discussion was at first only held within women's groups was surely no coincidence. Leftist men, in the face of more severe attacks or more pressing themes, mostly just dug in and waited. And this is where the criticism of racism and Eurocentrism hits them full smack in the face, in addition to the charges of their patriarchal privileges.

Criticisms by Black feminists are essential to an understanding of triple oppression; in a way, they are a sum of their total experiences. Their criticism attacks racisms from a feminist stance and also considers, observes, and works with class differences and differences between the metropolises and the "Third World".

*"Two-thirds of humanity is colored, and white feminists have to make themselves aware of that. They have to look at the conditions in which people live, and they have to talk about power relationships. Who has the power to oppress? What is the position of colored women? Every oppressed group has to go and define its own road to liberation. But white feminists have to acknowledge that they form a part of economic and cultural imperialism, that they have an ethnocentric point of view, and they often think they have a higher intellect than other parts of the population. How many white feminists would be willing to accept the intellectual leadership of African women? How can women talk about some other kind of freedom, and fail to look at South Africa? Feminism has to deal with imperialism, with land rights, with Maori's, with native Americans, with black women in South Africa; if not, it is a very short-sighted feminism without a global vision."*

*- Gloria Joseph, 1988*

*"It is claimed that racism and sexism are similar processes. Ideologically, for example, they both stress natural and biological differences. It is also said that notions of 'race' and gender both represent social categories. But as soon as a historical analysis is made, it is obvious that they are different and, thus, the analyses must also be different. The fact that black women are at the same time oppressed by patriarchy, racism, and class rule is the main reason not to introduce analogies that would make triple oppression invisible. We cannot define the one and only source of oppression. When white women name only patriarchy, we want a more complex*

concept. We find it difficult, too, to separate class position from sexism, because in our lives, we experience both simultaneously.

"As black women, we, by necessity, are in solidarity with black men against racism. This is a solidarity that white women, of course, cannot have for white men. We fight together with black men against racism - but just as well against their sexism. (...) White feminist theory and practice must acknowledge that white women are the oppressors in a power relation with black women. This compromises any feminist theory based on the equality of all women. Three central parts of feminist theory (family, patriarchy, reproductive labor) become problematic when applied to black women. The way in which the gender of black women is socialized is different from the making of white femininity, because the racist component is added. (...) The understanding of the dependency of the housewife is problematic for black feminists. The claim that this model bridges the gap between the material situation in the household and the ideology of femininity overlooks the fact that black women often lead in their households.

"Black men are very often unemployed and women aren't so dependent upon them. How can it be claimed that black male supremacy exists and functions in the same way as white male supremacy? The history of slavery, colonialism, and imperialism have systematically put the white male roles out of reach for black men. (...) Power-relationships in slavery are obviously also patriarchal. But there is a difference in the patriarchal treatment of black women by black and white men. (...)

"The concept of reproductive labor has to made into a problem as well. What does it mean in a situation in which black women do the domestic labor for white women? In this case, they are not wage laborers, but play a role in which they achieve the reproduction of black workers and of whites in the household simultaneously. (...) The tendency to generalize the oppression of such a vague category as 'Third World women', up to the point where all meaning is lost, is typical of the way whites handle the uniqueness of all our experiences and oppressions in their concepts and theories. The notion of patriarchy was introduced to distinguish sexist forces from other social powers, like capital. But using this term in its turn hides other differences."

- Hazel V. Carby, from "The Empire Strikes Back"

"The way in which capital, patriarchy, and 'race' structure the exploitation and oppression of black women makes it look impossible and undesirable to highlight one specific ground for all oppression: all three are always present in the daily experience of black women."

- Pratibha Parmar

The following quotations come from a speech by a woman from the Philippines, delivered at a meeting of a group against international sexual and racial exploitation held in Frankfurt. They reference the situation in Germany directly. The woman's criticisms are placed in the current context of the women's movement, but they must also be aimed at the entire white

left. That is why they are printed here.

*"Suffering from white racism, coupled with sexism, is an obligatory part of daily life for a foreign woman in West Germany. It's constantly being pointed out to her: this country doesn't belong to you. She feels lost, unwanted, inferior, isolated. And they feel ashamed, the foreign women, because they are looked upon as 'bought' women: dirty, without morality. 'How can you let yourself be sold?' the faces of the German women seem to say. What do you know about the things which are going on in our homes? Do you know what it means to be exploited by the multi-national corporations? (...) You look upon us as victims. Victims? If anything, I sure don't want to be looked upon as a victim, because I would fear that you would come and 'rescue' me and help me compassionately.*

*"We don't need your compassion, we need your co-experience. After that, we can talk about solidarity. Solidarity requires equal footing: we need to be on the same level, not one above the other. (...) And in the heads of many of you, you are saying: 'Why do you let yourselves be treated this way by these stupid German men? Why don't you get a divorce?' You won't understand it, you won't accept it, because you judge them by your own standards, whether knowingly or not. Because you don't have any idea what it means, or what the circumstances are at home, or how few are her possibilities. But most of all: you cannot accept that there are many roads to emancipation. (...)*

*"What are they, German women? They call themselves our sisters, our big sisters...*

*"They are our conversation partners, who discuss with us our problems. (Don't German women have problems? Why is it always we who are talking?) (...) They are also the ruling women, because of what they belong to; their nationality makes them co-perpetrators in the exploitation of the under-developed countries of the Third World. They show great solidarity towards us and join in campaigns to fight the oppression of women in our countries, countries in which war is often the daily reality. What do you really know about our countries? Why do you show solidarity? What's behind that? (...) They are also the women who've been to Third World countries, either on their holidays or for some study project, and who, when they've returned, claim to be experts. They then give lectures and speeches for us and our movements. And for many of you, they are more plausible than we ourselves. (...)*

*"Another reason why German women support projects for foreign women is the enthusiasm of many left women for the strength of the social movements and the liberation struggles in the so-called Third World. The starting point is clear: the social circumstances in some Third World countries - exploitation, corruption, feudalism, US-imperialism - create the conditions for liberation movements. The oppressive situation is as clear as it can be. In the rich metropolitan countries, on the other hand, such a strength cannot develop, at least not without great difficulties. But in many women, there exists a great longing for the enthusiasm of the masses, their strength, their struggle, since it cannot be experienced here. This is connected with the*

*idea that anything which is unfamiliar must be exotic. I can understand the longing. It is hard to bear, however, when the white women start teaching us how to wage our own struggles. Hard, when they want to force through - in old colonial style - their feminist theory. Hard, when they demand, at the same time, to be acknowledged for their sponsorship."*  
- Liclic Orben-Schmidt, 1989

Again, all that has been said here hits left-theory and left-behavior, and left-men even more so. If those who have been quoted so extensively here speak mainly about women's structures, then this is simply because in other places there has been very little discussion about this, and elsewhere no such convincing texts are to be found.

## V.

*"The aim of theory is not to raise our intellectual or academic reputation, but to open possibilities to understand the historical world and its processes, to gain directions for our praxis, and to change it if necessary."*  
- Stuart Hall

Theory which wants to recognize and fight oppressive relationships is no mere hollow head-banging. Being hostile to theory is to partially disarm one's self, because without theory, only immediately experienced supremacy can be registered, without understanding its structure, history, or global dimensions. To recognize this, ideas, notions, and a transmitting language are required. The use of a common language unites; confusion over words and unclear ideas divide.

In all liberation movements, the gaining of knowledge under the most difficult circumstances is a central part of the fight; theory is a weapon and weapons are not voluntarily rejected.

The totality of oppression, of which we are talking, simply cannot be experienced by everyone. The more white, the more male, the more rich, the more metropolitan one is, the less this is possible, and the bigger the obligation to solidarity is; to understand these realities is a learning process, so that you can then practice effective solidarity.

Supremacy is a central concept. To define it as one side of a duality between men and women, between black and white, or between labor and capital, falls way short. This presupposes a uniqueness and a completely separate existence of each of the sides which knows of no dialectic whatsoever. Supremacy for the aim of exploitation and preservation of power is, rather, a many-sided practice of oppression on the basis of several overlapping circumstances. The rules of supremacy change constantly as history moves on, and its material and internalized structures are continually built anew. There is no a-historical capitalism, patriarchy, or racism. They, and their connections, are processes of constant change.

To make a distinction in these oppressions between a material base and an ideological upper-structure would be a purely academic matter. That's why "in recent times, it has become difficult to find a simple economic class interest that is not permeated by ideology" (Hall). And Gramsci, in "The Philosophy Of Practice", points to the fact that it "is a purely didactic

difference between form and content to see the material powers as content and the ideology as form...[because] the material force cannot be understood historically without form and the ideologies would, without the material force, remain the whims of individuals."

The material violence of "ideologies" like racisms and the hatred of women is all too obvious.

Supremacy is never complete; there are cracks in it and its internationalization is never free from contradictions. Oppressions aren't conducted separately and differently in the metropolises and the Third World. They are experienced in different ways, dependent upon which form of oppression is being experienced, and upon which ones they might commit or use themselves, and especially dependent on whether or not they fight against them. It's not the separation of oppressions which is important, but rather their mutual articulation. No single oppression is completely isolated or completely traced to another one; they form a consistent reality.

It's not a bad idea to conceive of supremacy as a sort of net. The meshes can be bigger (metropolises) or smaller (Third World). The threads can be older (patriarchy) or newer (capitalism), more stable (Germany) or weaker (Central America). The threads are knotted in different ways (racisms are connected to capitalism differently than patriarchy is, for example), and the net is constantly being repaired and renewed by many different forces (capital, state, whites, men) so as to catch others in it (women, blacks, workers), and these tear it as best they can.

This net-like view of supremacy, in which, at any knot or thread, both high and low are preserved, but no single cause or main contradiction is presupposed, also touches on the question about the revolutionary subject. If this can no longer be deduced from any one duality or single important cause, then that means that no single group of oppressed peoples can be given a privileged, avant garde position.

To decide upon the revolutionary subject by simply adding up the oppressions (Who is oppressed the most? Ah! They have to defend themselves the most!) would be an abstract construction of numerical science, which, by means of arithmetic, would give women workers a role they never asked for. To embrace them as the revolutionary subject would be fairly comfortable for the metropolitan left because no consequences result. But the lives and demands of black women and workers can very well be a measure for how a utopian liberation must be in order to end all oppressions. In this, no single oppression is played down, but rather the whole of it shows all of the beast!

The question of which oppression is the most important was mostly asked with an eye to formulating strategy; thus, social democratic and Stalinist labor movements claimed for decades that the exploitation of the worker was most important in comparison to other, "secondary contradictions". In an abstract sense, this question cannot be answered without arriving at the most unbearable comparisons. (What is worse, witch-hunts or slavery? Violence against black men or white women? War in the metropolises or war in the "Third World"?)

In reality, however, the question is different. The net-like character of

supremacy and its simultaneous, global application require that the question be asked of each immediate situation of a concretely experienced and applied oppression. Then, differences in the composition of the oppressions appear, and they can be very/somewhat racist, very/somewhat patriarchal, very/somewhat imperialist or capitalist. Some examples: violence by a white man against a white wife is only superficially connected to capitalist/imperialist exploitation and has basically nothing to do with racism; a white male assembly-line worker is not exploited by racism and certainly not by sexism, but the black worker beside him is at least oppressed by racism; when white workers beat up a black man, that is primarily racist, although their act may have roots in the capitalist exploitation of all workers; when black workers strike against a white boss, very different components play a role. This list is as endless as reality.

It's clear that all forms of oppression must be fought against, and it depends on the recognition of the specific composition of oppression to determine just how the fight should go. That the fight against one component of oppression can make holes in other parts of the net (like during the British miners' strike, when the miners' wives organized themselves) is a welcome fact, but it's just as likely that the net could get tightened in one spot because of a misdirected or unfinished fight (for example, when workers' struggles are aimed against "double-earning" women or blacks).

The risk of wrong or unfinished fights is a good reason for the left to abandon its self-security and self-centeredness. As Juliet Mitchell said: "An exploited class, an oppressed group, cannot gain any political awareness if it has not recognized the relationships between all the classes and groups in society; by turning into itself it will never get to this consciousness."

## **VI. Intermezzo: NS-Fascism And Communist Resistance**

This section is not, not matter how it may seem at first, out of place, because NS (national- socialism) fascism is the historical background to a combination of capitalism/imperialism, patriarchy, and racism that is specific to Germany. In view of the present-day imperialism of Great Germany, it is necessary to look at the past with a contemporary vision. Besides, it is often easier to analyze historical phases that it is to examine the present-day.

The traditional left analysis of the NS dictatorship as being the most reactionary fraction of finance capital does explain the support of the multi-nationals for the Nazis, but this only highlights one aspect of the NS. It fails to explain either "the failure of the working class" or the relatively large mass-base of NS- fascism in Germany. As with any form of nationalism, the popularity of NS was based on the premise that you belonged to a certain nationality or "race" and thus deserved privileges over those who did not belong. It also gave the illusion of an identity, which did not in reality exist, but which was in line with a certain desire for order and isolation.

The mobilizing force of Nazi ideologies was tied to those already present: racist ideas of German superiority over other races; demands (from doctors) for the elimination of "life unworthy of life", in the social-Darwinian

tradition; male brotherhood ideals which reacted in irritation to the changing role of women in the 1920s; ideologies about the necessity of 'Lebensraum' (living space) and winning back colonies by revising the peace treaty signed at Versailles; and last but not least, social ideologies which played against class struggles and called for "popular unity".

The effectiveness of these ideologies was multiplied in NS because they became encapsulated in a state mechanism. This led to the briefly mentioned toleration for the destruction of "non-Aryans" and left-wing comrades.

NS was a very special case of racist labor organizing. Especially under the war economy, the spectrum of forms of exploiting labor via industrial hype ranged from a virtually unpaid labor force to working slaves and "destruction by labor". The divisions were done strictly according to the Nazi "race" scale: the management were German "Aryans", as were the technicians and the highly skilled workers; the next level were the non-voluntary "hired civil workers" from the West or Czechs; lower still were Polish workers; and at the very bottom were Soviet prisoners of war.

Besides these were the women and men in concentration camps - who were killed sooner or later - with patches stitched to their clothes which indicated their "usefulness" and perseverance. It's important to note that this labor force did not assemble simple products, but rather high-tech projects in the main economic sector! For instance, at the IG-Farben plant at Auschwitz, forms of oppression which are normally separated by whole continents or epochs were found hand-in-hand. Resistance came primarily from the lower levels of the hierarchy, but the prisoners, whether Polish, Russians, or Jews, were generally abandoned by the German workers. They did not behave as class comrades, but rather, according to their place in the hierarchy, as 'Herrenmenschen' (lords of people). Those who did show solidarity were either leftists or simple, compassionate people, but these were only a tiny minority of the millions. According to NS logic, there may have been economic reasons for the destruction of the Jews and the people of the East, but in general, it was a racist ideology that was utilized. It planned in which order the destruction would occur, and it planned choices for carrying out tests on humans. In a certain way, the NS used up all of the historic forms of racism in a compressed form in just twelve years: the persecution of the ill and mentally disabled, including murdering them; pogroms against Jewish people, leading up to the Holocaust; the wars for conquest and colonial space and for the exploitation and extermination of those that lived there (programs for the re-development of Africa had already been drawn up).

The NS ideologies not only mobilized their followers to attack certain targets, but they also imbued them with brutality, notions of "racial purity", and a leadership cult which surrounded the Party organizations.

Fulfilling one's own desire for power under such conditions was achieved by kicking out those below. In the private realm which the NS offered, at least according to their program, a man was at least guaranteed the control over one woman.

In the social sphere, once racists are in power, they have an immediate interest in controlling "their" women, because these are indispensable for the purity and continuity of the "race". All improvements promised to

women under NS only served to keep them in this role. And this role was only valid for "Aryan" women - the racist divisions ran through both genders. Jewish, Polish, or Russian women were persecuted because of their nationality and "race" and because their "alien race" offspring were not wanted. They were not praised as mothers, but rather were treated as 'Untermenschen' (sub-humans). In Ravensbruck and other women-only concentration camps, there were German female guards, in so far as the SS granted them this power.

German women who fought against the NS did so because they were communists or Jews, and as such, they were compelled to fight. The fact that there were 800,000 women soldiers in the Red Army and other women in the partisan movements in both East and West has only become known in recent years (thanks in part to Ingrid Strobl).

The division of all women according to their "race" and nationality, according to their political convictions and their class status, dominated - under NS and during World War II in general - the patriarchal contradictions of their specific societies. Just being a woman did not determine which side of the barricades you were on.

*"It is not the literal wording of the statute, but the meaning and spirit put into this literal wording by active fighters that determines the value of an organization."  
- Rosa Luxemburg*

It should not be claimed that the course of history would have been different in 1933 if the KPD (Communist Party of Germany) had taken a different political line. The (revolutionary) left was weak, it had very little money, and even fewer weapons, and was facing a broad front of middle-class and fascist forces. But a few aspects are noteworthy (and perhaps something can be learned from them).

From the early 1920s, in accordance with Soviet-style Bolshevism, the KPD had a strict hierarchy, a ban on differing factions, and the Party-line was the primary, fixed dogma, and any diversions from this were punished by expulsion from the Party. It's obvious, therefore, that cultural-revolutionary and women's positions, which were passed off as petty-bourgeois, anarchistic, or secondary contradictions, had no chance of influencing the Party leadership.

With the Stalinization of the KPD, women disappeared completely from the Party leadership (Politburo). So as not to give Nazi propaganda any holding points, communist Jews were also removed from the front ranks. The KPD was not racist, but it had its 'white spots'. In its program, the KPD was much more progressive on women's issues than the other parties (for example, they wanted to get rid of all laws banning abortion), but it also held that women's issues were secondary contradictions. And Rosa Luxemburg's questions regarding the Soviet Communist Party still applied to the KPD.

The concept of solidarity meant that the class-conscious proletarians of the KPD were oriented according to male values. The Party's ranks were never more than 15% women; only the half-charitable group Red Help was about half-women. The whole private realm was separated from class interests and this allowed patriarchal oppression to work its way into the

'proletarian family', about which the KPD propaganda proclaimed 'clean girls', strong comrades, and heroic mothers. This paralleled the Soviet Union, where, after the first few progressive laws, the liberation of women was toppled by Stalinism.

*"The psychological structure of a class is a moment of its objective situation."*

That line is taken from a study which was conducted in 1929/30 among a few hundred workers, almost all of them social-democrats or members of the KPD. One of the results was that the actual characteristics of left-wing individuals often differed greatly from official party platforms and progressive views. The stable base of anti-fascist power was actually much smaller than could be deduced from the membership and propaganda of the KPD and SPD. Sure, all leftists hated war and wished for happiness and liberation. They also obeyed their party - but that didn't mean they were necessarily ready for the personal risks and the private consequences. Their political views were often limited to the public sphere alone and these views were not anchored emotionally into their personality.

The study used questions like: "What can be done to improve the world?" KPD members, of course, replied that "the ruling class has to be crushed!" Well, fine, but when the same persons replies to the question of whether or not children should be spanked that "children need to be spanked so they learn respect", or when he, like 23% of all KPD members, in opposition to the official KPD program, thought that women should not perform paid labor, then there's obviously something wrong. (This study went into much greater detail that is possible to relate here.)

Of all KPD party members, social democrats, and left-socialists surveyed in the study, only 15% had both a political program and a private/personal revolutionary attitude. Only this minority could be expected in critical times to "summon up the courage, self-sacrifice, and spontaneity required to lead the few active elements and defeat the enemy." Another 25% were rated as "reliable, but not active", and the rest were either indifferent or, in the private sphere, utterly reactionary.

In the KPD there were about four times as many true revolutionaries who were progressive in the private sphere as well as there were among the social democrats, especially amongst the 'cadres'. But it would be biased to suppose that only the cadres were good revolutionaries. This was especially true of the non-Stalinist communists who were no longer members of the KPD, and these were not covered by the study. Many Party members, on the other hand, had only been in the Party for a few months at the time of the study and the fluctuation between left- and right-wing parties was very high.

(One necessary remark has to be made about the link between political consciousness and personal behavior: the study mentioned above was only a questionnaire; had it looked into the actual behavior - also of the 'private/personal' revolutionaries - then the results would no doubt have been even more miserable.)

Now, which of us is not curious to know what the results of such a study among present-day left- wing organizations and groups would be?

## VII.

*"Attempts to name the collective subject of a complete social change have, by and large, ended up in one of two quagmires: either an organization, party, or trade union is named, and then the revolutionary subject is not one of flesh and blood, but rather an institution which is external to its members, but which can be identified exactly by its program, internal rules, and membership lists, or no organization is named, but rather a tendency - a cluster of individual subjects - whose state of being is not reliably identifiable and whose program is not available, but has to be deduced by interpretation."*  
- Rudi, an Autonome comrade from Switzerland

These two quagmires can be avoided when we talk here about the autonomous-left. This is clearly a tendency and there is no rigid organization or fixed program. The points on which people come together are defined by the item at stake and change over time. What is meant by the autonomous-left will be made clear by further reading.

The autonomous-left is not ready for revolutionary change, and most autonomists do not want any solidly organized structures. The movement is more an expression of rebellion than of resistance to supremacy. In spite of occasional initiatives and claims to the opposite, it is a defensive trend - which is not surprising, given the balance of power in Germany.

The Autonomen are a constituent part of history; the movement did not come out of nowhere in 1980. It's no coincidence that it did not spring to life from out of the ranks of factory workers. It's no coincidence that it's white and almost exclusively German. It's no coincidence that it never has been an explicitly anti-patriarchal power with women at the head of it. All of this continues as 'white spots' in its theory and practice. Oppressive relationships within the Autonomen's own ranks remain invisible, and some global ones are only picked up on in an abstract way with no consequences drawn. This is hardly ever noticed, but the horizon of experience - which has narrowed because of these white spots - can be filled to the brim by those themes in which the autonomous left is/was strong (ie, squatting, anti-nuclear actions, the Hafenstrasse, etc).

The result of these oppressions becoming invisible is, unfortunately, that the movement's own victories and the campaigns that go with it are overrated. Instead of measuring the success of the fight against all oppressions, everything often gets centered around one's own self and one's own projects. It's typical for self-centered movements to possess a wide gap between the situation of one's immediate surroundings and distant goals and utopias, because the realization of utopia must be preceded by the recognition of the oppression of others and the recognition of fighting potentials outside of the one's own structures. The less this is done, the more stubborn and self-centered the movement becomes and the less this is noticed. To be left, then, merely becomes getting a stamp of approval for one's own project or life-style and not the common opposition against all oppressions and solidarity with all oppressed peoples. (The campaign around the IMF congress in Berlin in 1988 was a good example of at least a partial over-coming of this self-centeredness.)

The autonomous-left:

Which class does it belong to? What gender is it? What color/nationality?

One by one, then:

Class position: this is not intended to allow the previously critiqued economism back in through a side door; revolutionary "truths" cannot be deduced from one's position in the production process. But, class position means a lot more, for it is a deep-rooted pre-conditioning of attitudes. Someone from a working-class family has other experiences and processes these differently than a child from a middle-class background. The factory - depending on one's class position - is either normal or external territory. In the same way, racist and patriarchal experiences are dependent on class. Political targets for attacking are also influenced by it: left-leaning workers often fight a daily war against their bosses and those in command of capital; those who have leisure to study can take on more global activities (there's nothing to be said against either of these!).

Class positions also determine life-styles (something which is often important to Autonomes). Working in a factory means you have to go to bed early. If you have to wear overalls or some company uniform all day, then you're bound to like different clothes than the average Autome. If you become an apprentice at age 16, then you don't have much of an opportunity to settle yourself over the years into some big city's left scene. The life-styles of Autonomes - including female Autonomes - are inaccessible for many class positions. There are exceptions, but they have not greatly influenced the main body of the autonomous left and its composition.

The rather diffuse class positions of the Autonomes, which is certainly not a working class position, creates or continues white spots. Problems of political relations rest partly on ideological elements of the Autonomes, who often see or think of themselves as 'non-working' (which is often not according to the actual conditions). On the other hand, this self-image is due the self-financing of the Autonomes by making use of money given to them either by the state or their parents - and this has much to do with class position.

Strikes by industry workers are seen as external events, so long as there is no major media interest or no cops are involved. The importance of state repression is rather over-stressed while economic violence is underestimated. What is happening in small firms and big factories in terms of rationalization or small sabotage wars is only known to a few Autome specialists. Knowledge of the (international) linkage of capital and restructuring is learned from economics courses rather than from the workers' perspective. Other ways of fighting and showing solidarity, common amongst workers of both genders, usually disappears into the white spots. This often leads to a general denunciation of workers as being stupid blockheads who only have themselves to blame if they have to go to work each day.

*"A patriarchal guy cannot be a leftist."  
- any feminist*

The gender of the autonomous-left: while class position and whiteness have not been made into problems for the autonomist movement, the

same cannot be said of its patriarchal structures. That is the work of women's organizations and feminist criticisms. The so-called 'gender neutrality' of the left was exposed as being based on male brotherhood; the liberation of the worker was, indeed, just the liberation of the male worker; the left as an alleged liberated zone and model for utopia was brought back down to earth by the reality of ('private') relationships between men and women. If you look at the extent of this criticism, it's no wonder that it had to fight its way through the left again and again, even the autonomous-left.

Three examples from the past 20 years:

- *"We can see what a concrete slab you have in front of your faces, because you can't see that without your doings that people are organizing, and in numbers which you would think to be the beginning of the Red Dawn if only they were workers."*  
- Helke Sander, at an SDS conference in the late-1960s
- *"A carnival of feminists, moving through the area, playing pop music, dressed up, throwing paint and smelling with the stench of a foul ideology"*  
- this is how the KBW, at that time the largest Marxist-Leninist organization, described a women's demo. Feminists, according to the KBW, were "indeed reactionary" and had to be "fought mercilessly". Nowadays, the old cadres of the KBW are in the 'realo' wing of the Green Party.
- In 1989, a strategy paper for the "Radikale Linke" conference was released which didn't even mention feminist theory. Only after much protest was this added, but according to many participants, the feminist contributions were not really listened to, at least not by the old-left chairpersons.

The consequence of these contradictions can be summed up in another quotation:

*"Autonome organization was especially stressed against the traditional left organizations, who always claimed leadership, with regard to organizing, ideology, and program. The feminist claim to autonomy in this sense means the rejection of all tendencies that subordinate the women's question and the women's movement to other, seemingly more general themes or movements. The autonomous organization of women is the expression of their wish to make their qualitatively different character and identity into an independent power base for the feminist movement."*

- Maria Mies

Some male Autonomen don't let their attitudes surface openly - for they would be attacked by women - so they decide the smartest thing to do is to be 'neutral' towards women's positions. This neutrality prevents clashes with the women's structures, which have become stronger, but it doesn't do much to change these structures or their own consciousnesses. Old attitudes are just masked over and opportunities for violence still exist, as many examples unfortunately show.

*"Until now, the denunciation of this has been moralistic in tone, and this theme is preferably left in the hands of social workers and psychologists. In any case, it is not a part of their politics. Not at all in the entire left, and certainly not for guys. What I envision for the mixed structures is that we women demand from the guys that they cope politically and in an organized manner with the violence against women exercised by them and their gender in society. They have to work it over, think about it, and decide if they want to be a part of the problem or a part of the solution."*  
(from a letter by a woman in the discussion)

Anti-patriarchal criticism, picked up by men, has the same lack of credibility as is expressed in the coming quotation by Cheryl Benard about the anti-racist behavior of whites. But notwithstanding that, positions have to be made known, because only then can criticisms be made. And criticism is necessary for change. Guilty silence or soft-taking is no good in critical times.

Those places where women's structures are less active, the white spots are especially large. But hostility to theory also plays a role here, because the oppressive relationships which men cannot experience for themselves can only be known through theory (with practical consequences following from this, of course). Hostility towards theory is then felt very much according to gender with immediate results for the relation between men and women on the left.

The more abstract texts by Autonomien on strategies and global issues are also put into a feminist context in the amount that such elements were introduced by women. Usually there are just a few remarks about patriarchy ("race" is virtually non-existent as a category), and even these seem as though they were stuck in at the last minute, rather than having come about through real thought-out politics. The importance and extent of patriarchal oppression is more or less lost.

*"The white offers his rejection of the ruling values as proof of a commonness of interest and puts problems in more categories that affect both "races" (alienation, capitalism, etc.), but this only credible to a point, because his duty can never be like that of a black person's and because he can still make use of the privileges of his "race". The weaker one is then dependent upon the insight of the powerful, instead of upon their violence."*  
- Cheryl Benard

The autonomous-left in Germany is equipped with its privileges of whiteness, whether it wants this or not. The fact that such potentially racist white spots are beginning to be discussed within the women's movement has not yet touched the autonomous left as a whole. But no one will claim that its white spots are in less need of correction. Anti-racist campaigns, such as those against Shell and Daimler in South Africa, are all well and good - but they are not proof of the contrary. This solidarity is practiced from a distance from which those being addressed can hardly reach individual leftists with their demands and criticisms. This solidarity is given according to local rules and with the perpetuation of the usual behavior. It does not demand anything new, since these campaigns are regarded as the same as any other campaign.

This is different than solidarity with those suffering from racism in their own neighborhood. These people are able to come in and question the politics and life-styles of the Autonomen (for example, one illegal immigrant from Chile wondered why a leather jacket and a kafia immediately signified one was a leftist). These people would notice the white spots. For instance:

*"Leftists could not imagine that refugees/immigrants could possibly want anything else than trying to be like them; what they would prefer is a free-spirited, socialist, internationalist, colonized immigrant, not a Muslim, fetishist, or Jew."*  
- Memmi

For more than 20 years, millions of immigrants and refugees have lived in West Germany. They were never present in the movement in '68, nor did they join the ranks of the Autonomen. This was partly because they didn't want to, and also partly because of their class position. Many immigrants disappeared into the private realm after getting jobs, and also into organizations focusing on their country of origin. But the "racial" neutrality of the German left has also made them invisible, and they have only played a role in a few groups and campaigns. Linked to a Eurocentric method of analysis, racisms were only seen as due to capitalist instigation or nazi-like ideologies; that these racisms represent authentic oppression and have evoked ways of life just as authentic was overlooked.

Immigrant communities here are seen as the result of racisms, and communication with them has never been sought or forced. The reason for this is probably that the autonomous-left - and not it alone - has had a paternalistic attitude towards, for example, the "Turks". Without any knowledge of their structures, their habits in actions, or their legitimate fears of the (to them) foreign cops, campaigns are mounted and pushed through. The usual argument that most Turkish people don't want any contact with the German left overlooks the fact that solidarity is only possible between equal sides - sides that need to know each other. And not every personal contact has to be a political one right away. Friendship is based on respect. And this is just what many people don't feel for the "Turks".

A few more examples of the typical errors of judgement caused by racist white spots and Eurocentrism: under restructuring, it's not the "race"-neutral workers that are the first to be fired, but rather the non-Germans; in the "Third World", it isn't a "race"-neutral sub-class that is starving, but poor blacks; there is such a thing as the 'feminization' of poverty, but in Germany, the 'Turkization' of poverty usually comes first; state violence is not "race"-neutrally directed at all those that resist, but rather first and foremost against foreigners, who get in more trouble and longer jail sentences. This list could easily be extended.

## VIII.

*"The problem of unity rests on the definition of the enemy. That means that only people who identify their enemy in at least a very similar way can hope to unite their powers."*  
- Neville Alexander

From these pages of criticisms of white spots, the demand for consequences arises. But, we don't want to fall into the old trap of thinking

up shrewd plans and then waiting for them to be carried out. Here are just a few more general thoughts and suggestions to make this paper something more than just something to be filed away in an archive. The definition of the enemy can be more complete with the analysis of triple oppression. An incomplete recognition of the enemy always leads to a short-coming in liberation struggles and utopias. Either the enemy is diminished in its racial aspect and the liberation of blacks is neglected, or the patriarchal aspect is passed over and the oppression of women remains, or the capitalist aspect is not seen and the workers (and others) have to suffer.

Urgent consequences of triple oppression:

- The consciousness of the impossibility of the separation of fights against all oppressions.
- The consciousness of oppressions and knowing whose privileged/oppressing side you are on.
- Rejecting the orientation which focuses on your own interests in such a way that oppressions that don't affect the left in this country so much are seen as more important.

Claims to personal happiness must be measured against those of the less privileged. The old contradiction between a strategy of one's own liberation in life and surroundings and a selfless revolutionary labor in opposition to distant oppressions has always been present in the autonomous left. Taking triple oppression seriously would lead to one choosing the latter.

Concerning the inner structures of the autonomous-left, the need arises from triple oppression for autonomist organizations which are based on oppressions within and outside of the autonomous left. The women's movement has already fought and reached this autonomy, and rather than waiting to convince the left, it has created its own power base. This is a prerequisite for change, because internally oppressive relationships are also violent relationships. These cannot be changed harmoniously, but only by shifting forces. If this hadn't been done, women's positions would not have been put through to today. The acknowledgement of triple oppression would also demand an autonomous organization of workers both inside and outside the autonomous left so that they can put through their positions. What's more, the autonomous-left has to move more to the fore in the fight against capital. Unfortunately, the existing workers' groups are too small. And last but not least, triple oppression also demands the organization of non-Germans, Blacks, and immigrants. Only on the basis of various forms of autonomy is a unity possible which is not possessive, embracing, or unequal.

Alliances can better be formed out of one's own strength than out of the need created by weakness. Here again: Friendship is based on respect. The white left as a whole has traditionally had a tendency to think of itself as possessing a complete and rigid view of the truth. An acknowledgement of triple oppression, however, results in the realization that "others" (according to gender, "race", and class position) also have experiences of oppression and resistance, experiences, however, which are not subjectively open to us and which can only be partially objectively learned.

Autonomy means understanding that any individual or group can only

decide for itself how it wants to defend itself. Translated, this means an end to Eurocentric ideology and "missionary consciousness". This prerequisite selflessness - even if only partly realized, because in a revolutionary movement, such a moral should have its value - is not only a moral category. Rather, it should be an expression of the knowledge that liberation can only exist by removing all oppressions, thus it is more of a political category. To be more concrete: the enemy, in the guise of the West German system, is changing, at the head of the new superpower Europe, into a clearer form. Capitalist exploitation (especially in the former East Germany) and Germany's imperialist influence are sharply on the rise. Although it's hard to conceive of any possible increase, the contradictions with respect to the "Third World" are sharper now, too. Racisms are changing and, on the whole, getting stronger: against Turkish people, Roma and Sinti, Poles, Vietnamese, and people from Mozambique. Also, women are being forced back into the households and out of the positions they have gained for themselves. This is all obvious and well-known, so we don't need to go into further detail here.

All these changes can be analyzed as oppressions in light of triple oppression, and they can be understood as a whole and fought against. But this is dependent upon the realization that it's impossible to separate these fights and to ignore the (organizational) consequences these fights imply.

The aim of this paper is to make this recognizable and to perhaps push the process along a little further. Hopefully this has been made clear.

## **First Addendum**

In the summer of 1990, I put together, in a written form, the preceding discussion, which I had with women and a few men who had been writing to me or visiting me for years. The discussion took place under the conditions of my imprisonment. This discussion was also very time-consuming and, for practical reasons, unavoidably vague on certain points. The results were then discussed once more and edited until everyone felt that they could be published. But this is still a discussion paper, not all of the parts of all of the individual discussion papers are included in their entirety in this paper.

We then intended to distribute this paper without any author's name being listed, so that the content might speak for itself. But upon reflection, we noted that, in the autonomous-left spectrum, (authors') names seem to be invisible, in other words, by not mentioning any name, it makes it seem like it is supposed to be a secret who the paper came from. But the fact that only my name is signed to the paper shouldn't hide the fact that I encountered many problems, first as a result of promptings from women, and then from feminist texts and texts from the black movement.

These influences are - I hope - strongly recognizable in this text. Even the reworking of the original collection of discussions was a co-production; but this shouldn't serve to deflect any future criticisms from myself. But reactions should also not (only) land on my desk in my cell, because the triple oppression discussion needs to progress openly and not remain stuck in a circle of insiders.

Over the last six months, the discussion of "Three Into One" has continued; the question of utopias, which can reach out beyond the scene-ghetto, plays an equal role in this discussion along with a careful analysis of the relationship between the Three Continents and the metropolises in the capitalist world system. And there is and always will be the permanent question of to what degree men, particularly white men, can participate in a discussions of themes which primarily concern women, particularly women of color.

The results of this discussion can't be summarized with "Yes" or "No" answers. Maybe there will be another discussion paper later on. Another aspect of this paper is the following: This text is an example of how discussions are and could be conducted between prisoners and those on the outside.

**Klaus Viehmann**  
**Werl Prison, January 1991**

## **Second Addendum**

This new print-run was prompted by the discussions of the past two and half years, up until the end of the 80s, summarized under the title of "Three Into One". The end of East Germany and the USSR, the war in the former Yugoslavia, and the Gulf War had not yet taken place. "Three Into One" came into being before Hoyerswerda, before Rostock, and before the wave of fascist attacks against refugees, disabled persons, homeless people, gays, and leftists.

In the last two or three years, the situation on the remnants of the (autonomous-)left has also changed; the developments with the RZ and RAF are just one example of how slim the gap is between radical change and disorientation. Originally, "Three Into One" was merely supposed to preserve a longer discussion in a written form, whose publishing was practically a coincidence and whose initiators had never really counted on a broad circulation. Many things in "Three Into One" are only just sketched out, only just begun, because triple oppression and critiques of racism were new territory in the Germany of the late-80s, thus there were hardly any German-language discussions of this. The other initiators, being more praxis-oriented, and I, compelled to theory by my status as a prisoner, often stood clueless when faced with the complexities of the problems we were dealing with and of the consequential adaptation of the triple oppression conclusions to the reality of the world, to leftist theory and praxis, and, last but not least, to ourselves in our own discussions. We did not have, nor do we now have, any knowledge of all of the aspects of its fundamental structures: class-oppression, patriarchy, racisms; we certainly don't have any knowledge of its endless interrelations.

"Three Into One" was and is a discussion paper and a critique of leftist realities, and, as such, it can never be completed. It is certainly not a reference work for people to take from it only those bits that they need.

The core of the paper, namely the propagation of the triple oppression analysis as a means of bettering our understanding of social totality and the interrelations between anti-capitalist, anti-patriarchal, and anti-racist

theory and praxis, remains the same. The changes and events of this past year have shown once again the significance of this. Nationalisms, for example, are replacing traditional analyses, and the aberrations which are putting a humanistic face on imperialism in the minds of (former) leftists speak for themselves. The rise of the right-wing and its ideology can't be fought against with anti-fascist strategies from the 1920s and 30s, which knew nothing of anti-patriarchal critiques and even less of (new) critiques of racisms. The internal structures of the Autonomie-scene, which were clearly attacked in "Three Into One", need to be critiqued - sadly, no less so today than a few years ago.

The reactions to "Three Into One" were generally selective and the paper was interpreted as being "anti-racist", with critiques of capitalism and patriarchy being superseded by this actual theme. It would be a bitter irony if the change from the old "main contradiction" of class struggle was rewarded with the insidious introduction of a new "main contradiction", racism...

The proposed "net-like" model of thought in "Three Into One" was seen as an improvement over bi-polar proposals and mono-causal thought. Of course, a "net" is a picture taken from mechanics and can never give full representation to the complexities of triple oppression. But as a proposal, it represents some progress from simplistic "top/bottom" schemes and, thus, is still useful.

In "Three Into One", concepts were used which were actually given new content for use in the triple oppression analysis. For example, the "definitions" of various struggles which were given were bad, and they made divisions where divisions should not (now) be made. Even the political concept "black" can't be universally defined, because some migrants and Jewish women don't fit into the usual definition of "black".

The fact that such examples of imprecision are infused in the paper, even up to this day, is caused by the paradoxical difficulty that new concepts first come into being with a new praxis and a new understanding, while the old, existing concepts can't be fully adapted to this new praxis and this new understanding.

In this second addendum, time and space constrictions make it impossible to correct all of the faults in "Three Into One". But a few of these mistakes need to be pointed out, and these can serve as examples for possible ways of broadening and improving the triple oppression discussion.

First, two considerable errors:

The paper "Three Into One" completely lacks any critique from the movement of disabled persons concerning notions of progress and productionism, which parts of the left have taken from bourgeois ideology. The left-wing notion of "a utopia where people are freed from sorry and sadness" contains "a hidden form of violence which, at the very latest, comes out into the open when therapeutic vigor reaches its limits, because the 'patients' are proven to be resistant to therapy. (...) There is no room for old, sick, disabled, and socially 'deviant' persons in this human picture. They again find themselves on the lowest rung of the ladder of social hierarchy of worth, and their very status as people is questioned. It is at this point that the death-fantasies and the death-plans of new and old

'euthanasia' propagandists comes into play. (...) The dogmatic development of productive force as the motor of the process of historical evolution prevents a discussion of the actual content and quality of 'social and technological progress'. And in those places where people failed to follow the logic of historical development or who did not satisfy the demands of a socialist workers' society, communist economists attempt to adapt these persons to the conditions and to intervene in their improvement - perhaps through the use of heredity and human biology. Even left-wing utopias with perfected 'new people' must, against this background, be questioned on account of the implications of their subliminal forms of violence." (from *"Deadly Ethics - Contributions Against Euthanasia and Eugenics"*, Libertarian Association Publishers) Such an examination did not take place in "Three Into One".

Another significant error in "Three Into One" was the unduly brief discussion of anti-semitism. In the paper, anti-semitism was treated as an element of National-Socialism, thus cutting off its century-old history both before and after Auschwitz. Racisms in Germany cannot be understood, at least not completely, without recognizing the persecution of Jews. Apart from the excursion on the communist resistance in "Three Into One", there was no expressive description of the struggles of Jewish partisans and ghetto-fighters who resisted the destruction machinery. These are vividly described in the reflections of Bernard Goldstein ("The Stars Are Witnesses"), Marek Edelman ("Coming Before God"), and others.

In subsequent discussions between the original initiators of "Three Into One", two points came to light which I can only describe from my point of view here. It is of theoretical significance, whether anti-semitism, as it appears in "Three Into One", can be properly described as a "special form" of racism, or if it has a greater significance and extent in the form of "anti-Semitic structures". Or does this strain the notion, and aren't the aspects of "anti-Semitic structures" then brought into line with the fundamental structures of triple oppression? On this second point, the various political biographies and interests of the participants in the discussion clearly played a role. This concerns an assessment of left-wing anti-Zionism as it came about as part of Palestinian solidarity work in the context of the new anti-imperialism of the 1960s. It is to this original starting point that I must align my opinions of certain actions and communiques from earlier this year - in particular against those during the Gulf War who sought to write off solidarity work as "the sin of '68ers". Whether the concept of anti-Zionism is still useful or not is a secondary question.

It's crucial that any critique of Israel not be tainted by anti-Semitic resentment, but rather deal with concrete facts like expulsions and land seizures carried out by Zionist settlers in Palestine, the massive repression of the Intifada, the bombing of refugee camps, Israel's support of military dictatorships and of South Africa, and Israel's role as a nuclear power and a crucial NATO outpost. These things must be remembered in 1993, because some old-leftists want to use generalizations and theoretically lavish anti-Semitic notions to make all critiques of Israel impossible. (To prevent any misunderstandings: There are no such old-leftists involved in "Three Into One".) Despite all of the differences on these individual questions, it's clear nonetheless that "Three Into One" does not take into consideration the importance and continual need of a leftist (self-)critique of anti-semitism.

As for the more general and less serious mistakes in "Three Into One":

The division which takes place in triple oppression, without differentiation, of "different categories of oppression: exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence" is more an expression of laziness than anything else. (see "*Herrenvolk...*", p.58ff) These categories are not complete, and, at the level of fundamental structures, they can be made known and combined. The concept of "oppression" needs to be formulated in a more concrete way in a more in-depth discussion.

Just criticisms have been made (by LUPUS and others), namely that "Three Into One" speaks about repressive relations, but without describing the internal aspects of the subjects which live in these relations and which reproduce them. This gives the impression that there is a "side opposite to the contradictions" within individuals, as if the "net" did not, in fact, penetrate the very hearts and minds of individual subjects. There is too great a demand in "Three Into One" for relations to be destroyed, one which is not tied to a process of emancipation for individuals. What individual forms of living are revolutionary under triple oppression? What would revolutions look like if they were waged along lines of emancipatory living?

It would be wrong to offer a proposal of a monolithic subject, one which is given its unbroken identity by means of its position in society. Consciousness and denial are not "prerequisites of the political process", rather they are first "tied to one another through material conditions, experiences, world-views, traditional interpretations of one's situation (day-to-day consciousness) and 'value', and thus they first become mentioned as effective political 'interests'. 'Objective' social positions and their connected experiences are first translated into a complex and contradictory arrangement of 'interests'." And since "every individual takes part in a whole series of social relationships (privileges and oppressions), it is a plurality of determinations which builds up the position of each individual subject. Every individual is, therefore, necessarily multi-faceted and heterogeneous." (*Hirsch, "Capitalism Or Alternative?"*) Since feelings and "hidden aspects of personality" have an influence on thoughts and praxis, triple oppression must be a subject of political psychology. If analysis always referred back to the social confines of the subject's inner-structures, then it wouldn't have anything to do with forms of psychology.

Another flawed notion is the use of term "white spots" in "Three Into One". Although it's true that there are many gaps in our understanding and that mistakes are often caused by ignorance, the use of "white spots" in "Three Into One" is about much more than just this. "Filters of truth" (*D.King*) depend on one's subjective reality and are tied to a means of recognizing one's interests. These means of recognition are not imperfect reflections of the real world in the form of subjective thoughts, but rather they are a manner and means of making realities "invisible".

Therefore, filling in a "white spot" does not mean filling in a picture with learned information, but rather it means opening a gate to ways of thinking and acting which was previously closed and understanding new worlds and seeking to live in them. This doesn't just change a piece of the "map" of an individual or of the left in general, but rather it's about changing our entire subjective and collective reality.

The calls for solidarity and "selflessness" which were issued in "Three Into One" are occasionally taken to be a call for "representative politics". But along with the use of the notion of "selflessness", consternation politics, with its politeness and continual consequence of being splintered by each subjective location, needs to be criticized. The error inherent in "selflessness" is that it implies an unspoken division between the "self" and the "other". It would be more correct to speak of an "association of relations", in which the "self" is always present and developing itself, because it recognizes "the others" as part of the same relation as itself. In other words: Openness, opening yourself up and learning from people and relations beyond the confines of your immediate experience, and drawing personal and practical consequences from this is by no means a form of "representative politics", but rather a consciously practiced form of solidarity by subjects.

The affairs, struggles, and wishes of those who used to be the "others" now become your own, without forgetting or reproducing your own privileged differences or those conditions that affect your own point of departure.

It would have been good to have included a longer section on new anti-imperialism in "Three Into One", one which dealt with nationalisms and some examples of the relationship between the metropolises and the Three Continents. A section with discussions containing anti-patriarchal contributions from men, or one on the knowledge and experiences of leftists from the former East Germany concerning racisms and patriarchy would have been important as well. But the initiators of "Three Into One" were not able to do this, or they had no direct links to these themes - but this shouldn't stop anyone else from filling in these gaps at some point.

In conclusion, even if this can only be mentioned in passing, there is something else which is fundamental to day-to-day work and which often gets forgotten behind the mountain of problems associated with a discussion of triple oppression. Particularly in a time when the right-wing and its ideology are on the rise, it's indisputable that the notion of "left-wing" needs to be filled with a new identity content. The core of that which understands itself as "left-wing" can best be phrased in this famous line from Marx: "...changing all relations, in which a person is a humiliated, subjugated, abandoned, and despised presence!"

The triple oppression analysis does not simply critique the leftist universalism of "changing all relations" expressed above, rather it critiques much more, namely that (old) leftists were never correct in their own universalist analyses. For them, "a person" meant a white, male, metropolitan worker - and they only sought to change the relations which oppress him.

In contrast to this false, "invisible-making" universalism, the triple oppression analysis recognizes three fundamental aspects to domination and respects the autonomy of women, blacks, and workers, as well as their own critiques of relations and their own (self-)organization. But this is certainly a problem which can be solved both theoretically and practically, namely: Where is the border between a universalist strategy of "changing all relations" and a respect for autonomy and other peoples' chosen path to this changing of relations? And more importantly still: How can this border be erased?

In the quotation from Marx cited above, "a person is a hitherto simply understood, but never yet reached, condition, one which can only be realized in a society which negates all judgements of genders, 'races', and classes. One that defies the hitherto dominant norm which not only determines peoples' behavior, but also - by means of its deep roots - their needs and dreams." (*Ingrid Strobl, "Fear Of The Chills Of Freedom"*)

**Klaus Viehmann**  
**Werl Prison, February 1993**