

PERIPHERAL SYMBIOSIS: GENDER AND DEPENDENCY IN HELEIETH SAFFIOTI'S THINKING

A SIMBIOSE PERIFÉRICA: GÊNERO E DEPENDÊNCIA NO PENSAMENTO DE HELEIETH SAFFIOTI

LA SIMBIOSIS PERIFÉRICA: GÉNERO Y DEPENDENCIA EN EL PENSAMIENTO DE HELEIETH SAFFIOTI

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ABSTRACT: This article offers a review of the contributions of Brazilian feminist sociologist Heleieth Saffioti on dependency and gender relations, particularly her understanding of gender oppression in dependent countries. The study describes the historical and intellectual scenario where the author was educated and developed her work, discussing her relationships with the context and with classic authors of Brazilian social thought, presenting her view about dependency and the Brazilian social formation. Finally, Saffioti's complex analysis of the female situation in dependent capitalism was outlined, emphasizing its originality, criticism, and relevance to the contemporary debate on unity among oppressions and specific configurations of gender relations in the system's periphery.

KEYWORDS: Gender oppression. Dependent capitalism. Global South. Brazilian social thinking. Heleieth Saffioti.

RESUMO: *O presente artigo enseja um resgate das contribuições da socióloga feminista brasileira Heleieth Saffioti às reflexões sobre dependência e relações de gênero – mais precisamente, sua compreensão a respeito da particularidade da opressão de gênero nos países dependentes. Assim, reconstruímos o cenário histórico e intelectual em que a autora se formou e produziu, esboçamos suas relações com este contexto e com os autores clássicos do pensamento social brasileiro. Recuperando esse diálogo, apresentamos sua visão da dependência e da formação social brasileira. E então, delineamos sua complexa análise da situação feminina no capitalismo dependente, ressaltando sua originalidade, criticidade e a relevância destes estudos para o debate contemporâneo sobre unidade entre opressões e conformações específicas das relações de gênero na periferia do sistema.*

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *Opressão de gênero. Capitalismo dependente. Sul Global. Pensamento social brasileiro. Heleieth Saffioti.*

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RESUMEN: *El presente artículo pretende rescatar las contribuciones de la socióloga feminista brasileña Heleieth Saffioti, sus reflexiones sobre dependencia y relaciones de género – más concretamente, su comprensión respecto a la particularidad de la opresión de género en los países dependientes. De ese modo, reconstruimos el escenario histórico e intelectual en el que la autora se formó y produjo, esbozamos sus relaciones con este contexto y con los autores clásicos del pensamiento social brasileño. Recuperando ese diálogo, presentamos su visión de la dependencia y de la formación social brasileña. Y entonces, describimos su complejo análisis de la situación femenina en el capitalismo dependiente, resaltando su originalidad, criticidad y la relevancia de estos estudios para el debate contemporáneo sobre unidad entre opresiones y conformaciones específicas de las relaciones de género en la periferia del sistema.*

PALABRAS CLAVE: *Opresión de género. Capitalismo dependiente. Sur Global. Pensamiento social brasileño. Heleieth Saffioti.*

Introduction

Gender oppression is an objective reality and affects women as a social category. Nevertheless, there are distinct determinants and contexts that are more vulnerable to oppression, because the gender relations that underlie oppression do not exist in a vacuum, but in socio-historical contexts that confer different characteristics to oppression. Just as the capitalist mode of production is carried out in a specific way in each social formation (SAFFIOTI, 2013), female oppression also presents its singularities. In this sense, the region of Latin America and the Caribbean is considered by UN Women (2017) as the most violent in the world for women.

Studies on the peculiarities of gender oppression in peripheral nations – currently generically referred to as the Global South – are still scarce. And it is precisely on this important – but little discussed – aspect of the complex phenomenon of female oppression that this article will focus on: the particularities of gender oppression in Latin America and Brazil.

Several explanations have been developed for the phenomenon of female oppression; nevertheless, we will undertake this task from the theoretical category of dependence, rarely used to explain our reality recently. To do so, we will base ourselves on the work of Heleieth Saffioti, who was an exception and also a pioneer in this regard. The Brazilian sociologist set out to describe and explain the peculiarities of gender oppression in peripheral countries in most of her work. Although not without limitations, Saffioti understood that race, class, gender, sexuality and nation (or dependency) were not unrelated axes of oppression, but cause and consequence of the same system. Her theoretical contribution is quite original and, although articulated to the general theoretical framework of class domination-exploitation, she seeks to



contribute towards filling the existing gap of a coherent and rigorous theory of female oppression.

The comprehensive phenomenon of oppression is rigorously conceptualized here based on Saffioti's work and, as such, understood as a mixture of domination and exploitation. The domination-exploitation of women as a single phenomenon is based on two bases: 1) the political-economic of the patriarchal regime - which results in intense wage discrimination of female workers, in their occupational segregation and in their marginalization of important economic and political roles- deliberative ones – and 2) the control of female bodies and sexuality – which results in the sexual subjection of women and in the control of their reproductive capacity.

It is possible to identify a growing interest in the work of Heleieth Saffioti, recently documented by Bila Sorj and Anna Bárbara Araujo (2021) in statistical data. Nevertheless, Saffioti's understanding of Brazilian dependency, its relationship to gender oppression and capitalism remains aspects that have not been explored in this context of resuming her thinking. It was to the study of these features of Heleieth Saffioti's theoretical production that our research was dedicated, whose objective is to understand her contribution towards a theory of gender oppression under dependent capitalism. This research focused mainly on Saffioti's writings between the 1960s and 1980s, where the themes of dependency and its articulation with capitalism and gender oppression were more explicitly present, as well as in several interviews granted by the sociologist, here considered precious.

Initially, we analyzed her understanding of dependency and the Brazilian social formation, later we focused more specifically on the articulation between gender oppression and dependent capitalism in her work. Finally, we connect their ideas to contemporary efforts to think of gender and dependency as fundamental elements of Brazilian capitalism, in particular, and of the Global South, in general terms.

The dependence in Saffioti

The category of dependency, long forgotten by social theory and public debate, occupied the center of debates on capitalism and social change in Latin America in the mid-twentieth century (MARINI, 2005a). One of the first institutions responsible for defining it and putting it on the agenda was the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean – ECLAC, where dependency was understood as a limiting condition for development, caused by the vulnerability of the Latin American subcontinent to external control (FURTADO, 1959;



MARINI, 2010). The pinnacle of the theoretical formulation on dependency is, however, in the current that later became known as the Marxist Theory of Dependency, or MTD.

MTD theorists – such as Ruy Mauro Marini, Vânia Bambirra and Theotônio dos Santos – rejected the conception of dependence and imperialism as external agents or entities: they were committed to demonstrating that the expanded internal reproduction of capitalism in Brazil and Latin America reinforced the dependency, insofar as it was based on the transfer of value, on the overexploitation of the workforce and on the split verified in the capital cycle between the production of goods and the consumption needs of the workers who produced them. Each of these elements would favor the strengthening of the others: the transfer of value from the periphery to the centers pressured the bourgeoisie to appropriate the workers' consumption fund, the impoverishment of the masses favored capitalist production aimed at the foreign market or at the consumption of the upper classes, the necessary accommodation of internal capital to this type of production prevented the creation of a production aimed at the great masses that could assume another type of axis of accumulation and face imperialist domination. In this sense, not only would the internal bourgeoisie not be in contradiction with imperialism, but it would reproduce its own subordination at the expense of the impoverishment of the workers; and all classes were doomed to repeat such a vicious cycle if it were not for the complete overcoming of capitalist production relations. In this conception, dependence is related to the specific form assumed by capitalist development in subordinate capitalist countries, in the context of global capitalism (MARINI, 2005b; DOS SANTOS, 2000).

Saffioti was deeply influenced by all these contributions. For her, world capitalism is a complex totality that, although it has universal determinations, valid for all its manifestations, is not homogeneous (SAFFIOTI, 2013). These essential determinations “take on in each singular concretion [...], a necessary appearance, derived from the specific conditions of the life of a people” furthermore, “the capitalist mode of production is realized in a specific way in nations peripherally integrated into capitalism international” (SAFFIOTI, 1973, p. 84, our translation).

For the author, the central countries of capitalism are characterized, above all, by their greater capacity to: 1) attenuate the tensions produced by the capitalist mode of production, exporting them to the periphery and 2) absorb the popular masses into the sectors capitalists of the economy – that is, those governed directly by capitalist relations of production, where the workforce is purchased to value the capital employed by the bourgeoisie through the production of surplus value (SAFFIOTI, 2013; 1978; 1977; 1976; 1973). In dependent countries, the opposite is verified: the contradictions of the system – such as income inequality and



impoverishment – would be more explicit and intense and cannot be exported; and a much larger amount of the popular masses would be concentrated in non-capitalist sectors of production, in the industrial reserve army and/or unemployed – a characteristic also recognized by MTD (MARINI, 2005c).

For the sociologist, greatly inspired by Celso Furtado (1959) and Caio Prado Jr. (1966), the Brazilian social formation was born capitalist, even if only partially: it produced primary products for the exterior and had as a ruling class capitalist entrepreneur who aimed at profit, although slave labor relations and a social structure formally organized in castes, in a “manorial-slave order” or “slave capitalism” (SAFFIOTI, 1976, p. 16, our translation). The full constitution of the capitalist mode of production in Brazil would have taken place in the post-abolition period, with the generalization of salaried work. This conception is also similar to formulations by Fernandes (1976), Cardoso (1977) and Ianni (1962).

After the end of colonization, “a new form of dependency was consolidated, essentially translating into the commercial ties that tied the country to the hegemonic center of the Western bloc at the time”, at first England (SAFFIOTI; ACKERMAN, 1973, p. 86, our translation). After the crisis of the agro-export economy that culminated in the Revolution of 30, industrialization would have transformed Brazilian capitalism into an urban-industrial capitalism, capable of growing economically, but within the “limits allowed by the logic of the international capitalist system”; that is, as dependent capitalism (SAFFIOTI; ACKERMAN, 1973, p. 88, our translation). With the “exhaustion of the import substitution process” (SAFFIOTI; ACKERMAN, 1973, p. 87, our translation), in the 1950s, and in a context of redefinition of the International Division of Labor,

[...] Brazil suffers massive penetration of foreign investments. From the point of view of the dependency relationship, the fundamental change is that it will progressively be characterized more as technological and capital than commercial. Step by step, what is usually called the internationalization of the internal market takes shape (SAFFIOTI; ACKERMAN, 1973, p. 87, our translation).

For Saffioti (2013; 1985) dependence is a constant in the Brazilian social formation, going through colonization, the Empire and the Republic, and assuming different conformations during each of these periods. What they would have in common would be the defining aspects of dependency – economic subordination and the penetration of capitalism from the outside, heteronomy.

It was possible to verify that, according to the materials to which we had access during the research, the term dependent capitalism, typical of the Marxist Theory of Dependency, is



cited textually for the first time by Saffioti in a text from 1973, followed by a footnote criticism, calling it “unsatisfactory” and then referencing texts by Francisco Weffort and Fernando Henrique Cardoso (SAFFIOTI; ACKERMAN, 1973, p. 12). Already in texts from the 1980s (SAFFIOTI, s/d; 1985), Saffioti uses the term without reservations, especially in an article from 1985. However, the reference is to Fernando Henrique Cardoso's idea of dependent-associated capitalism:

If to this intersection of gender and class contradictions one adds the fact that Brazil has been penetrated from the outside by capitalism, only being able to develop “associated capitalism”, dependent on the hegemonic center of the international capitalist system, the situation of women will aggravate even more (SAFFIOTI, 1985, p. 137, our translation).

In this excerpt from a text from 1985 there is something curious. While citing Cardoso's theory, Saffioti presents the conclusions of the Marxist Theory of Dependency. Cardoso was part of another theoretical current that also sought to think about Latin American dependency (CARDOSO; FALETTO, 1984). However, for this current, it is fully possible to overcome the condition of dependence within capitalism, given the favorable context and the correct relations between classes and groups. Saffioti, however, reaffirms that the only possible capitalism in Brazil is dependent capitalism, as do authors such as Ruy Mauro Marini and Vânia Bambirra. This position is present in several passages:

[...] Countries peripherally integrated into the international capitalist system are subject, by virtue of their condition as dependents, to seeing their independence efforts diminished, if not practically annulled (made possible by certain international conjunctures) in times of recomposition of the aforementioned world system (SAFFIOTI, 2013, p. 223, our translation).

[...] the survivals of the Brazilian “traditional society” do nothing but help the historical realization of capitalism in Brazil in the way allowed by the condition of a country peripherally integrated into the international capitalist system (SAFFIOTI, 2013, p. 343, our translation).

[...] there is no room for the hypothesis that, in the near or remote future, the societies in which the “peripheral” realizations of capitalism take place today will reach development, understood as the realization of the macro-structural type towards which they tend (SAFFIOTI, 1973, p. 161, our translation).

These ideas are not present in most of the USP school of sociology, of which Cardoso is an exponent, and in most of the authors cited by Saffioti. However, they are present in Florestan Fernandes (1975) – especially his mature phase – and would not be foreign to Saffioti, who lived directly with the formulators of the Marxist branch of dependency. She fully recognizes this influence in interviews, also referring critically to Fernando Henrique Cardoso:



H.S.: [in response to a question about ECLAC's influence] After the [1973] coup in Chile, I had a lot of contact with people who had gone into exile in Chile and when there was the coup against Allende they went to Mexico. They were Vânia Bambirra, her husband at the time, Dr. Theotônio dos Santos, Ruy Mauro Marini, I went to Mexico a lot at that time. So, I knew everything about ECLAC, but before [that time in the 1970s; during the writing of *A Mulher na Sociedade de Classes* (Woman in the society of classes)]? It could only have been Fernando Henrique and Ruth (Cardoso) because when they lived in Chile, their library was at my house. I don't like him, so much so that I never voted for him. The other day there was a tribute from feminists to Ruth and they asked me to speak and I gave him some hits! I said that I would like to talk about what Ruth was not, not because she couldn't, but because she didn't want to. She didn't want to be a star. But she did honest and correct research. Why? Because FHC and Serra plagiarized Ruy Mauro Marini's dependency theory. And how do I know this? Precisely because Theotônio dos Santos, Vânia and Ruy Mauro were exiled in Mexico and I used to go there a lot (SAFFIOTI, 2008, p. 289, our translation).

This very close coexistence with the listed authors is also mentioned in Bambirra (1991, p. 79), where Vânia calls Heleieth a “friend” and narrates experiences they had together, including the beginning of the partnership organization of a book in Cuba, of interviews and reflections on women and the socialist revolution in Latin America, for which Saffioti would make the introduction, but which was never published (BAMBIRRA, 1991).

In any case, Saffioti shared with the group the skepticism regarding the possibilities of overcoming dependency within capitalism and regarding what dependent capitalist development could offer workers. This is reflected profoundly in their way of understanding gender oppression: just as, for the Marxist authors of dependency, the fundamental problems of the Latin American masses were derived from capitalism and not from its absence – and capitalist development meant more dependency – ; for Saffioti, women's oppression in modernity was neither the fruit of pre-capitalism nor a holdover from earlier modes of production, but precisely fueled by capitalist development, and more capitalism could only mean more oppression for working women. More than anything, the political conclusions that flow from *A Mulher na Sociedade de Classes* (2013) are like an anti-developmental and socialist feminist manifesto, aimed at “dispelling the idea [sic] that the development of capitalism constitutes the solution to the female problem” (SAFFIOTI, 1979, p. 12, our translation).

Gender relations under dependent capitalism, according to Saffioti

The awareness of the dependency in which, since its beginnings, the capitalist economic-social formation has been constituted in Brazil and of the limits that the international structure of power imposes to its realization in the levels reached by the societies of mass consumption constitutes the starting point for the understanding of the social roles that men and women have been playing in Brazilian society since its beginnings (SAFFIOTI, 2013, p. 229, our translation).

In her work, Saffioti is concerned with describing and explaining gender oppression in contemporary capitalism, resorting to the history of the social formations that compose it. Her effort is to capture the general determinations of female subordination in modernity, valid for all capitalist social formations; and their particular determinations, which vary as a result of the history and specific economic and cultural characteristics of each people and location, and, mainly, of the position occupied by these social formations in capitalist accumulation at a global level, that is, in the International Division of Labor. This is where the articulation between gender relations and dependency comes into play (SAFFIOTI, 2013).

For the sociologist, the phenomenon of female oppression cannot be understood only in its ideological and cultural dimension – it is about unraveling which social mechanisms enable the continued reproduction of this oppression and which material interests drive these mechanisms. In this sense, the root of sexism under capitalism would be in the marginalization or peripheral integration of women to this mode of production and the benefits that the system itself – and the main stakeholders in its maintenance, the bourgeois class – would reap from this situation (SAFFIOTI, 2013; 1973).

There are noticeable differences in the way in which the author formulates this question throughout her work. However, in general, Saffioti accentuates the incapacity and lack of interest that the capitalist mode of production would have in transforming all people from the subordinate classes into workers directly subordinated to capital: responsible for adding new value to capital or making it more profitable, in relations of work where the product of toil does not belong to its producer or its producer, but to the capitalist. The foundation of this inability would be, firstly, in the tendency of capital to incorporate a smaller proportion of labor power, in relation to the means of production, as the development of the productive forces makes possible an equal or greater production of goods at the same time with fewer female workers and employed workers. On the other hand, the mass of unemployed or workers in non-capitalist production relations – such as artisanal and peasant production and the provision of individual services – would serve as a reserve army for directly capitalist production, which could be



absorbed in moments of growth, contribute to the lowering of wages and rights of workers in the capitalist sectors, or provide a type of exploitation that benefits these sectors even though it is located outside them (SAFFIOTI, 2013; 1978).

Female oppression, by displacing large numbers of women into domestic work within the home, unemployment, or non-capitalist labor relations, would protect the system from stresses that it could not withstand if all its dispossessed members were to claim a place in the formal capitalist labor market – this would explain the maintenance and promotion of this oppression by capital. Furthermore, resorting to the naturalization of social relations represented by sexism would divert criticism from the system, identifying its failures as natural disabilities of certain groups (SAFFIOTI, 2013).

In her texts from the late 1960s and early 1970s, especially *A Mulher na Sociedade de Classes* ([1969] 2013), Saffioti dwells primarily on the role that female confinement to domestic work, reproduction and socialization in home would have to avoid making explicit the contradictions of capitalism; reinforcing that such a system would have encouraged this confinement as its development had made it increasingly do without female productive work. For this, the author resorts to the comparison between the participation of women in the production of goods during and before the advent of the capitalist mode of production. In this context, Saffioti also highlighted how bourgeois society would only allow working women to perform paid work outside the home if they met certain conditions – extreme economic need, favorable marital status and youth – and even so, maintaining unpaid work in the home.

During this period of her work, dependency appears as a factor that sharpens the material foundation of female oppression in capitalism – peripheral integration into the productive system – in dependent countries, to enable, on the other hand, an attenuation of this same determinant in central countries. This attenuation would explain “the greater number of freedoms enjoyed by women in highly developed countries” (SAFFIOTI, 2013, p. 193, our translation). For Saffioti (2013, 1973), however, it would be exactly the subordination and transfer of wealth from peripheral countries to central countries that made this difference possible. The author then rules out the possibility of universalizing these benefits for women in imperialist countries – the greater female participation in the economically active population and the greater number of reproductive rights – for the entire capitalist world.

With regard to Brazil, Saffioti recovers the history of social formation to highlight how, as in the case of changes, the economic and social permanencies arising from the colonial period are accompanied by permanencies in tradition and culture. Thus, the heavy sexism and racism of the slave society – necessary for the economic and social reproduction of such an order,



based on the dominant role of the patriarch landowner and on the exploitation and dehumanization of black men and women in the face of national subordination to the world capitalist market –, would continue present for the new role that it would play in a capitalist society in “full constitution” and dependent that, for the author, expelled women from the public economy and was built with the combination of modern and archaic forms of exploitation that, never contradictory, sustained each other. He also exposes the data on the reduction of female participation in the secondary sector from the end of the 19th century to the middle of the 20th century as proof of his thesis of the accentuated jettisoning of women from capitalist production in dependent countries: in his opinion, caused mainly by the phenomenon of importation intense use of “labor force saving” foreign technology (SAFFIOTI, 2013, p. 335-340).

And, in this way, the marginalization of the female workforce, often explained almost exclusively in terms of prejudice and remnants of a “traditional society” and the small degree of economic development, is presented as a result of the full constitution of capitalist relations of production [...]. The justifications for the domestic standard of women provided by the “traditional mentality” do not constitute, from this angle, backward factors for the Brazilian economy and delaying its development. On the contrary, even in the phase in which the level of employment could be higher and, consequently, greater use of female labor, the condition of a country with a dependent economy determined an underutilization of the workforce factor in Brazil. The marginalization of huge female contingents from the productive system of goods and services evidently favored capitalist accumulation (SAFFIOTI, 2013, p. 341-343, our translation).

In these terms, Saffioti outlines how the specific situation of women under dependent capitalism – marginalized by a structure incapable of outsourcing its contradictions or solving its problem of excess labor – would require more brutal and explicit ideological tools of female domination. This would be the case of Latin American machismo:

[...] in underdeveloped areas in general, and especially in Latin American nations, the cultural complex of machismo, ostensibly prevailing, exposes the subordinate position of women more crudely. This does not mean, in any way, that macho behavior is responsible for the reduced female participation in the economically active population of these countries, but rather that the techniques of domination of women and the justifications for their expulsion from the labor market are more rude and less refined than in developed nations (SAFFIOTI, 1973, p. 154, our translation).

From the mid-1970s, in a context of relative advancement in female employment in central countries, Saffioti began to be more intensely concerned with the issue of articulation between the capitalist mode of production and non-capitalist labor relations, reflecting on how the female marginalization of the productive structure could also be expressed in its more

significant presence in these sectors of the economy (SAFFIOTI, 1976; 1977; 1978). In dependent countries, these “pre-capitalist pockets” have a “much greater relative weight” in the economy (SAFFIOTI, 1977, p. 33, our translation).

For the author, critical of Poulantzas' (1972 apud SAFFIOTI, 1977) conceptions in this regard, the coexistence between different modes of production in the same social formation is impossible. What is verified, however, is the subordination of non-capitalist production relations to the dynamics of the capitalist mode of production, with these losing their autonomy and depending on the needs of the latter to reproduce. Capitalism would constantly recreate such non-capitalist relations of production within itself, precisely because the exchange with them would benefit it, allowing greater exploitation (or expropriation) of workers in these sectors, without worrying about guaranteeing their reproduction. On the other hand, in periods of expansion, the capitalist sectors could absorb this workforce for whose “formation it never made any investment” (SAFFIOTI, 1977, p. 29). This would be the case of reproductive work within the family:

The services which are carried out, generally by women in the family, are destined to the daily production of the worker's labor power, as well as the reproduction of this labor power. Although this labor is dedicated to the production of a commodity labor power which is indispensable to the functioning of the capitalist mode of production, organization within the family group does not assume a capitalist, that is contractual, form (SAFFIOTI, 1977, p. 33, our translation).

[...] Since it is not a capitalist enterprise, the family invests in the production of labor-power – a commodity on the labor market – without any monetary compensation. In other words, the family (above all its female members) produces a commodity which it cannot commercialize. [...] The worker who is produced in this way will only benefit those who, being owners of a capitalist enterprise, are able to offer him a job. The price of producing and reproducing labor power does not fall within capitalist society's accounting system. [...] (SAFFIOTI, 1977, p. 33, our translation).

In this way, the permanent production of the conditions which permit the reproduction of capital strictly depends on an institution – the family – in which personal relations and domestic production are predominant. By means of the unpaid mobilization of labor, especially of female labor, this institution is more economical than any other for the purpose of supplying capitalism with the labor power it needs (SAFFIOTI, 1977, p. 31, our translation).

Therefore, the family would be an institution highly adapted and functional to the capitalist mode of production not despite, but especially because of the fact that it is not organized along capitalist lines.

Unpaid domestic work would not, however, be the only “pre-capitalist pocket” through which capital could benefit from the accentuated exploitation of female labor. According to Saffioti (1977, p. 33, our translation), in the central countries, “given the very economic and political hegemony exercised by these regions, women have far greater opportunities to perform economic activities organized within capitalist norms”. However, in the dependent countries, there is a myriad of activities organized in a non-capitalist way being constantly produced by the enormous concentration of income and by the smaller capacity of absorption of labor force of the dependent capitalist sectors. These activities are present in the countryside and in the urban environment – in this, the author identifies them as having more expression in the service sector, especially the “low tertiary sector”, where many women are concentrated who would have “no alternative [...] the pursuit of economic activities in sectors not organized along capitalist lines” (SAFFIOTI, 1978, p. 187, our translation). A sector that aroused the author's greatest interest, both due to its almost total female composition and its growth in dependent Latin American countries, was domestic employment (paid) – the subject of her book *Employment Domestic and Capitalism (Emprego doméstico e capitalismo - 1978)*. The sociologist explains and defines the relationships involved in this type of work:

[...] the activities carried out by maids in private homes are not characterized as capitalist. Indeed, they are not subjugated to capital, but are remunerated directly from personal income. The same domestic services performed in bars, restaurants, hotels, are included in the capitalist sector of the economy, subordinating its agents directly to capital. This difference is crucial to characterize domestic servants' activities as non-capitalist, even though they were engendered by capitalism. Remunerated by personal income, housemaids perform tasks whose «product», goods and services, are consumed directly by the employing family, not circulating in the market for the purpose of exchange with the aim of profit (SAFFIOTI, 1978, p. 191, our translation).

Domestic servants – nowadays largely black – would be responsible, especially in dependent capitalism, for part of the biological and social reproduction of large sections of the population – and are, therefore, indispensable to the logic of the system. However, their exploitation would not take place in typically capitalist ways, which would allow precarious conditions to hit them harder. Saffioti also identified them as part of the reserve army, “mobilizable for work in the capitalist sector of economic activities” when necessary (SAFFIOTI, 1978, p. 191, our translation).



At the time of writing, Marxist feminism in the US and Europe was going through what was later known as the domestic work controversy³. The role of domestic work in capitalism was briefly discussed. Saffioti emphasized that the focus of this debate, however, was on the unpaid domestic work performed by housewives in the home – the central countries did not have a significant sector of paid domestic services (SAFFIOTI, 1978, p. 193).

In dependent countries, and especially in Brazil, the situation was completely different: the concentration of income made it possible for women from the upper classes to hire poor women, thus outsourcing the domestic functions that society entrusted them with. These poor women, in turn, were pushed into paid work outside the home by sheer economic necessity and the high cost of living characteristic of dependent countries; without, however, finding space in the capitalist sectors of economic activities. They submitted themselves, therefore, to a type of occupation with low pay and where all sorts of violations of rights took place. In this way, the “dependent character of the development of Brazilian capitalism” (SAFFIOTI, 1978, p. 192, our translation) determined a specific way of carrying out domestic work, and a wide concentration of women in activities not organized along capitalist lines that was the mainstay of their minor rights in the political, labor and reproductive spheres, and also machismo, understood as a particular form of sexist ideology under dependence. Overcoming this condition presupposed a complete change in the country's productive and economic structure that reversed the high levels of unemployment and income concentration – in other words, overcoming dependence. The magnitude of domestic employment in Latin American countries is also explained as a particular determination of dependent capitalist development by Vânia Bambirra (n.d.).

Finally, there is the issue of productive female work under dependent capitalism and its particular determinations. The census carried out by the IBGE in 1970 and in the following decades showed a very expressive growth in female employment in almost all areas, but mainly those linked to capitalist industry. Although the themes of female industrial employment, its instability and low wages had already been addressed in other works by Saffioti (1978; 2013), in the 1980s they gained greater centrality in his explanatory framework. In *Female workforce: inside the figures (Força de trabalho feminina: no interior das cifras - 1985)*, Saffioti presents her theorization on the symbiosis between patriarchy and capitalism, analyzing the interconnections between production and reproduction. In this regard, there is a strong influence

³ A critical synthesis of this debate is in Ferguson (2020).



of the French materialist feminist current on the formulations of Heleieth Saffioti, represented by authors such as Danièle Kergoat, Dàniele Combes and Monique Haicault.

According to the feminist sociologist, there is an intersection between reproduction and production that makes reproduction present in production and production present in reproduction – in other words, class relations cross the family and social relations of sex also cross the terrain of capitalist production. Both patriarchy and capitalism would have an economic, social and cultural dimension, reproducing themselves, however, as a single system. In this sense, “women in the sphere of reproduction and men in the sphere of production cannot be separated, since both are social agents in both domains, reproducing the sexual division of labor in both spheres” (SAFFIOTI, 1985, p. 103, our translation). Women's association with reproduction would be reflected in their exploitation both inside and outside the home and family.

By verifying, concomitantly with the process of expansion of female industrial employment in Brazil, an intense increase in salary discrimination between men and women and their concentration in the lowest positions in the factories, Saffioti associates dependent capitalism not only with the greater magnitude of the not-capitalists sectors and the precariousness of women's work that is verified in them, but also with the highest degree of exploitation experienced by working women (especially poor and non-white) in dependent countries, in relation to women in central countries, in the sector itself economy capitalist. These, moreover, begin to share their insertion in the productive system with their insertion in unpaid work at home, accumulating two workdays – or else, other salaried women, domestic servants with even lower wages. On all sides, dependent capitalism would mark the experience of women's oppression in Brazil.

Given the patriarchy-capitalism symbiosis, however, the goal of profit maximization is mediated by male supremacy. And it is in this way that, through the subordination of women to men and the priority allocation of women to the reproduction apparatus, patriarchy-capitalism guarantees, simultaneously, the reproduction of the working family and exploits the female workforce to a more intense degree, when needed and in the proportions needed [...].

As long as the patriarchy-capitalism system lasts, men and women will never be socially equal. As a result, the incorporation of the female workforce will always have specific characteristics, in which all sorts of discrimination can be recognized (SAFFIOTI, 1985, p. 138, our translation).

The theme of the symbiosis between patriarchy and capitalism – and, even more so, between patriarchy, capitalism and racism – will be further explored in the book *The Power of the male* (O Poder do macho - 1987) and in later works by Heleieth Saffioti.



Final considerations: the peripheral symbiosis

Saffioti set out to describe and explain the peculiarities of gender oppression in peripheral countries in most of her work. However, discussions about the unity between production and reproduction, and about the mutual determination between gender and dependence, began to become increasingly scarce from the 1980s onwards; so that few Latin American authors elaborated theories in this sense after Saffioti until before the beginning of the 2000s. This picture has changed recently, with the resurgence of Marxist-feminism and the rescue of the Marxist Theory of Dependency and the work of Saffioti.

Thus, it has been emphasized how categories such as transfer of value, division between spheres of circulation, sub-imperialism, enlargement of relative overpopulation and – mainly – overexploitation of work helps to explain the distinctive traits of gender relations under dependency, if articulated with a feminist-Marxist theoretical framework, with authors such as Díaz Lozano and Félix (2020), Teixeira and Zorgetz (2020), Costa and Nogueira (2019), Bittencourt (2014), Cecenã (1983). According Teixeira and Zorgetz (2020):

In the [Latin American] continent and in dependent countries in general, women tend to be domestic reproduction workers and also wage earners or participate in some labor activity in the public sphere. This distortion has a direct impact on the conditions of family reproduction and, therefore, brings direct costs to the increased exploitation of women in the domestic sphere, their weight in specific layers of the reserve army, as well as the need to fulfill double or triple shifts (TEIXEIRA; ZORGETZ, 2020, our translation).

Bittencourt (2014, p. 68, our translation) emphasizes how women's work in Latin America is characterized by “a greater intensity of the productive rhythm, lower remuneration, occupation in marginalized positions or underemployment, double working hours” and female responsibility for “functions that should be provided by the Welfare State (daycare centers, education, care, laundries, restaurants)”. These workers, in turn, are mostly black or indigenous.

In this sense, Saffioti contributes to the apprehension of the Latin American reality in its entirety, avoiding the fragmentation between oppressions and capitalist exploitation, instead, resorting to the contradictory and complex unity between social reproduction and production. Saffioti contributes decisively to this by thinking of a symbiosis – and then “knot” – between patriarchy, racism and capitalism that manifests itself in a particular way on the periphery of this single system.

The contributions of the current (Marxist) Theory of Social Reproduction (SRT) continue in this direction, arguing that it is not exactly a question of three or more oppressions with their own logic of domination and economic exploitation, which co-determine and merge.



Incorporating critiques from black, queer, and other feminisms, SRT argues that, in reality, it is the contradictory relationship between capitalist accumulation and social reproduction that sediments the foundations of exploitation and all forms of oppression: “From the point of view of capital, the social reproduction of the workforce is simultaneously indispensable and an obstacle to accumulation” (VOGEL, 2013, p. 156, our translation). Both unpaid domestic work at home and the exploitation of the low value of female labor in the productive sphere are moments of this relationship, of the capitalist need to simultaneously produce and erode life. Feminine oppression in modernity, then, is related to the systemic devaluation of social reproduction by capital – reproduction which, in turn, is demarcated as a female responsibility. Non-patriarchal spaces of reproduction, such as families headed by black women or LGBT people, or female dormitories in factories, are also essential to the logic of capitalist accumulation, as well as extralabor female work: the heteronormative family form is predominant due to its high efficiency in producing an exploitable life in a generational and cheap way. But sexism, racism, LGBTphobia and class domination are products and (re)producers of the same material matrix (FERGUSON, 2020; LEWIS, 2016).

The articulation between Saffioti's thought, MTD and SRT constitutes a powerful theoretical tool that has still been little explored as a whole. Such a conjunction can reveal, for example, that the experience of female workers in dependent capitalism is marked by an overexploitation of work, which is characterized by an even more deleterious appropriation of their life fund, since, in addition to receiving a payment of their workforce, which is lower than their real value, like most male Latin American workers, this real value is already lower than that of men due to its historical and social determinants; and furthermore, their time of rest and replenishment of energy is constantly used for the work of producing and reproducing their own workforce to be exploited by dependent and international capital.

In addition to the reproduction of the labor force exploited directly by capital, these women workers are placed as an obligation or moral duty to reproduce the lives of large sectors of the bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie itself through domestic employment; and, above all, the reproduction of a relative overpopulation greater than that in central countries, mostly composed of women, children, black and indigenous people, and LGBT people – groups systematically eliminated by state and civil violence in our region, in the service of dependent capitalist accumulation. Overexploitation itself and its intensification – which is expressed not only in less access to individual consumer goods, but also in the reduction of collective consumer goods offered by the State –, added to the magnitude of the population that is outside directly capitalist production, determines an extremely precarious social reproduction for



working people in Latin America and the Caribbean – which, as Bhattacharya (2019) points out – is capable of producing intense violence against women and other people with whom the reproduction of life is associated, precisely because the latter are blamed for the system's inabilities.

Finally, the issues of division between spheres of circulation and the very high concentration of income in the subcontinent are manifested in gender “split experiences” among people who belong to the same gender or sexual identity from the upper classes – upper strata of the petty-bourgeoisie and bourgeoisie – and these same of the working population; more intensely than in central countries. The contrast between the bourgeois woman and the non-white working women responsible for the social reproduction of the family in the first way domestic employment is the most illustrative example.

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