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9. *Ibid.*, pp.242-43.
 10. Audre Lorde, "Poetry Is Not a Luxury," in *The Future of Difference*, ed. Hester Eisenstein and Alice Jardine (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1980), p. 126.
 11. *Ibid.*, pp. 126-27.
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THE ANTI-SOCIAL FAMILY

Michèle Barrett and Mary McIntosh, *The Anti-Social Family*. London: Verso Editions/NLB, 1982.

The authors of *The Anti-Social Family* have already made significant contributions to feminist theorisations of sexual relations, the social construction of gender and gender hierarchies, and women's oppression (McIntosh, 1968; 1978; 1981; Barrett and McIntosh, 1980; Barrett, 1980;1982). This new book throws down a challenging gauntlet to social theorists, feminists and socialists. It is an important and exciting work which promises to provoke rigorous debate.

In *Women's Oppression Today* (1980), Barrett synthesized existing debates about the oppression of women in capitalist society. Based on an analysis of two central concepts — ideology of gender and the sexual division of labour — that book summarizes and critiques current knowledge and theories about the two and their power to construct the situation of women. In this new co-authored piece, Barrett and McIntosh continue a theme begun in *Women's Oppression Today* by focusing directly on "the family". Like the former book, one strength of this work is that it recapitulates existing debates on "the family". For this contribution alone the book is very important. But its value goes far beyond its synthesis.

The motivation for the book is the political battle currently raging over the social institution called "the family". The authors note that powerful right-wing conservative "pro-family" forces in Europe and North America are rallying around a position which calls for the compulsory institutionalization of the heterosexual couple in which the power of the breadwinner husband/father is assured and the economically dependent wife/mother is responsible for performing, unpaid, a whole range of necessary social services. To date, they point out, socialists and feminists have not been systematic in their opposition to these right wing mobilizations. Indeed, at present, not only is there no socialist and feminist consensus on issues related to family, sexuality, and child

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bearing and rearing, but some elements within both socialist and feminist currents are also claiming to be "pro family".

Barrett and McIntosh are adamantly opposed to such a position. They argue that "socialists and feminists must develop a political consensus on the family" (7) and then organize to combat the right wing attacks. Arguing that the precondition for such a development "is more open debate" (7) their book is intending to promote such discussion.

Their first assumption is that "the family" must be understood at two levels; as "a social and economic institution" (7) and as "an ideology" (8). Within this framework, they examine disparate topics and proceed on different levels of analysis. As a result, the book is somewhat disjointed and uneven. They are, for example, able to present an excellent and profound analysis of "the ideology of familialism" (129); their discussion of the material social and economic institution is much weaker.

Their central argument is that "just as the family has been socially constructed, so society has been familialized" (31). In contrast to dominant sociological notions of "the family" as a private institution, separate from the rest of society, and currently in crisis and decline, they argue that "the family remains a vigorous agency of class placement and an efficient mechanism for the creation and transmission of gender inequality". It is also "the focal point of a set of ideologies that resonate throughout society".(29). They then demonstrate the way familial ideology permeates all levels of society from scientific ideas about human nature (34-40), the sexual division of paid work (29;70) and domestic labour (61-65), and the media (31-34).

In developing this analysis, the authors present scathing critiques of the majority of contemporary family theorists, particularly Donzelot (1980) and Lasch (1977). To give, briefly, one example, Barrett and McIntosh show how both Donzelot and Lasch defend what they consider to be the positive aspects of the privatization of "the family". Both men mourn the loss of independent authority of families and warn of increasing psychic devastation as a result. They both attribute this crisis in "the family" to the threat of loss of privacy posed by the state, market forces and feminism. As Barrett and McIntosh demonstrate, such arguments are implicitly anti-feminist: "The authoritarian patriarchal family is mourned, and women are blamed for the passing of this organic basis of social order." (104). Such an analysis they argue, ignores the fact that women are the victims of the privatized patriarchal family. As a result, despite Donzelot's and Lasch's claims to the contrary, both books are linked to the right-wing "pro family" arguments.

Barrett and McIntosh are most brilliant when they argue that "the family", touted ideologically as the bedrock or foundation of society, is in fact fundamentally anti-social. In contrast to social ideologues who accuse all those who live outside "the family" of being deviant and anti-social — single mothers, lesbians, homosexuals, for example — Barrett and McIntosh demonstrate how the most basic structures of "the family" divide people from each other and prevent the development of more collective, social forms of human interactions and institutions.

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First and foremost "the family reproduces class relations both covertly as children's class position is largely determined by their parents' position, and overtly through patterns of upper class marriage and inheritance which "serve to reproduce the concentration of wealth in a small class of people" (47).

Secondly, conservative ideology conflates the concepts of family and individual. Arguing that individuals must be self-supporting, conservatives would tie through "the family", those who cannot be self-supporting in a capitalist economy to those who can. Thus women and children should be supported by a wage-earning husband/father. Ironically, of course, while fighting to reduce state intervention into the private life of families when this means providing support to those unable to care for themselves, conservatives insist on bolstering state intervention in the process of enforcing and privileging particular family forms.

Because it is identified as the only place wherein altruism, cooperation, emotional and sexual intimacy, sharing and nurturing child rearing may be experienced, "the family" retains mass appeal. The authors point out, for example, that the fact that people are unable to choose their kin provides them with a kinship network which is both familiar and relatively secure. No other relationships in capitalist society are guaranteed structurally to continue for life, no matter what the individual does.

Precisely because "the family" is reputed to be the locus of personal life, two dynamics are set in motion. All other social institutions are based on the assumption that they cannot (and must not) provide better alternatives. As a result, "the family sucks the juice out of everything around it, leaving other institutions stunted and distorted" (78). The authors insist, "caring, sharing and loving would be more widespread if the family did not claim them for its own" (80). For example, because sexual activity is ideally contained within the family, any sexual encounters outside the family (such as pre-marital sex, adultery, lesbian and homosexual sex, group sex and so on), are cast in a distorted and negative light.

Simultaneously, the legitimacy and privacy of "the family" mask the oppressive relations engendered by the economic dependency of women and children on the breadwinner male. The authors present a very good analysis of the implications of breadwinner power and women's dependency and the distortions of female/male relations which result. As the women's movement has documented, "the family" is no haven for the all too many women and children who are emotionally, sexually and physically abused by other family members.

Barrett and McIntosh are correct in their analysis of "the family" as a social entity whose social privilege makes it powerfully all pervasive, but which isolates small clusters of people and sets them against each other. However, there is a conceptual confusion in their argument which they occasionally acknowledge but do not confront. While they recognize that what they refer to throughout as "the family" is an ideological construct and an ideal type, they fail to separate the ideological concept from the social and economic institution. Too often they conflate family and household, confusing the social and

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geographic locus of co-habitation with ideas about how people should live. Despite a caveat at the beginning that they are not dealing with "the several family forms of the different ethnic groups" (8), they never confront the fact that the majority of households do not conform to the ideological norm. As a result, this remains untheorized.

Also untheorized is the fact that the private household is the locus for the reproduction of labour power, and consequently, the social relations of the household and the labour which goes on within it are part of the cycle of capital accumulation. In this regard, the household (often, though not necessarily a family-based household), is indeed an essential institution of capitalist society. Despite their assertion that social history is essential to any analysis of this sort, they do not examine the core relations of social reproduction — child bearing and rearing and the reproduction of family and household forms from generation to generation.

It is their failure to deal directly with the social and economic institution of "the family" which results in what I consider to be the greatest weakness of the book. In the introduction they note the absence in their work of an analysis of sexual preference and its relation to the family. They explain that this absence occurs because: "we believe the present ideology of the family to be so steeped in heterosexism that any realistic engagement with familialism must locate the discussion within that framework" (9). However, household formation and the relations of child bearing and child rearing are, in this society, determined by the constraints of compulsory heterosexuality. By developing their analysis entirely within that framework they are unable to theorize the relation of sexuality to social reproduction. Thus sexuality is presented as something separate from, rather than central to the reproduction of social relations.

Barrett and McIntosh conclude their book with a section on strategies for change. Their long term goals are "a major social transformation that will displace the family as the sole and privileged provider of moral and material support and spread these good things more widely through the community" (133). Their strategy for working towards this is two-pronged: "(1) we should work for immediate changes that will increase the possibilities for choice so that alternatives to the existing favoured patterns of family life became realistically available and desirable; (2) we should work towards collectivism and away from individualism" (134). Central to such efforts "must be to change all the state policies that currently privilege 'the family' at the expense of other ways of living" (148).

At the tactical level, their argument is weaker. They call for more variety and experimentation in living arrangement, for public campaigns against the state, and for the boycotting of friends' marriages. They do not, however, address the political struggle their book begins with; that is, the increasing mobilization of right wing political and religious groups.

The ability of the right-wing to mobilize particularly working class women in defense of a family form that is so oppressive is evidence of Barrett and McIntosh's point that the family has mass appeal because people have no other vision of how they could have what the family now (supposedly) provides.

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Barrett and McIntosh have provided us with a clear and thorough analysis of why this is the case. The task now is to go beyond their excellent summary and critique to develop new insights into the politics of sexuality, male domination and the oppression of women.

Meg Luxton
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CONTRADICTIONS IN MATERIAL FEMINISM

Dolores Hayden, *The Grand Domestic Revolution*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1981.

This ground-breaking book begins with descriptions of utopian socialist communities in the 1820s and 1830s, and ends with a map showing all the locations of Kentucky Fried Chicken outlets in the Los Angeles area. An unlikely plot line? Not really, when one considers that the topic of this history is the rise and fall of collective solutions to the housework problem. Remedies for the isolation and overwork suffered by housewives have come to be largely monopolized by fast food empires and other profit-making industries; these