

Conclusion

Building on the theory of western Marxism, socialist feminists consider that in order to realize women's experiences and necessities, it is necessary to analyze the interactive relation between public production and private reproduction. The latter is involved with the private sphere such as family life, sexuality and childrearing. In fact, every dimension and aspect in society is based on gender and thus shapes the public and private life on women's oppression. On the one hand, feminists depict the interaction of economic exploitation and hierarchical structure; on the other hand, they analyze the interaction of sexism and sexual division of labor. In the aspect of fulfillment, feminists link the concern of economic problems of traditional Marxism to such problems as violence against women, childrearing and the unfair treatment women suffer in economic activities. Thus, they consider that the sites they should resist are not limited to nations and workplaces but inclusive of the psychology of people. Hence, revolution should start from the reform of people's mindset in sexuality, marriage, and childrearing. Mitchell points out that for the purpose of women's liberation, these four traditional structures, production, reproduction, sexuality, and socialization of children, definitely have to be transformed.

It is the function of ideology to present these given social types as aspects of Nature itself. Both can be exalted, paradoxically, as ideals (Mitchell, 297). Ideology teaches women that there are some must-have processes for them to go through: going into the marriage and being an altruistic wife and mother for the rest of their lives. The coincidence is that women do "buy the story" and "internalize" these plausible virtues. With the escort of patriarchy, it helps ideology to be deeply rooted in women's minds. The patriarchal system was retained and maintained by the new economic mode of production—capitalism (Mitchell, 307). That is to say, patriarchy is an accompaniment of capitalism. While Marxist Feminism and Socialist Feminism both consent to overthrowing capitalism in order

to achieve the dissolution of all kinds of oppression, it seems that the principle “A chain is no stronger than its weakest link” is unlikely to happen in the short term. After all wherever we see capitalist countries outnumber communist countries.

After exploring why and how women are oppressed and exploited from such aspects as housework, children, husband, and work, the sole and possible solution points to “education.” There is no doubt that the revolution should start within especially from “the socialization of children.” The emphasis of familial ideology has shifted from a cult of the biological ordeal of maternity (the pain which makes the child precious, etc.) to a celebration of mother-care as a social act (Mitchell, 311). The ideology of mother as “a socializer” of children confines women to be tightly bonded to family and prohibits them from obtaining as much freedom as men. Mitchell regards daycare centers with trained nurses as a possible way to liberate women. Observers of collective methods of child-rearing in the kibbutzim in Israel note that the child who is reared by a trained nurse (though normally maternally breast-fed) does not suffer the back-wash of typical parental anxieties and thus may positively gain by the system (Mitchell, 312). Decrease of mother-care not only gives mothers more free time of their own but also works out well and unexpectedly. But what it does reveal is the viability of plural forms of socialization—neither necessarily tied to the nuclear family, not to the biological parent, or rather to one of the biological parents—the mother (Mitchell, 312).

Here a point needs to be clarified: what Mitchell emphasizes is the early stage of child-rearing but what I would like to supplement is the latter socialization of school-age children. Schools need to take measures to counteract gendered socialization. They should avoid teaching materials that perpetuate gender roles (children’s books, for example, which show women cooking and men being doctors), and they should educate both boys and girls in the challenges of combining household labor and work outside the home. In addition, they should teach girls not to assume that child-rearing is their main destiny, and

teach boys not to assume that someone else will care for their children. As in real life, women and girls are working both within and outside the home. But—also as in real life—men are not doing much caregiving work. This shows there is still much to be done (Saul, 41).

Like her grandmother Beulah, Rita Dove suffers the double oppression due to sexism—as a woman, and racism—as a black, and even the triple oppression compared with black men—as a black woman. However, she herself is also a very good living example in facing and solving sexism and racism. Virtually Thomas and Beulah is a postpartum book for the most part. After giving birth to her only daughter, Rita Dove and her husband were living in Arizona at the time, and both were terrified that parenthood was going to obstruct their creation. In Elizabeth Alexander's "An Interview with Rita Dove," Rita Dove once answered:

So we made up a schedule: one of us would take care of her for a four-hour period, then the other one would take care of her for the next four hours, and then Parent #1 would take over again. The next day we would switch the order. . . . Then we realized we rarely saw each other. So we amended it to four hours apiece with a four-hour segment in the middle where all three of us played together. We kept up this schedule for a long time. It allayed our initial fears, but it also helped both of us learn what it is to be alone with parenting. (4)

With the background of education, Rita Dove is able to break the conventional sexism and reach a common consensus with her husband for both of them are well-read literates and know the necessity of meeting each other the half way. Moreover, thanks to the lesson of her grandmother, Rita Dove is able to perceive the hardness and tiredness Beulah suffered when nurturing four children alone and avoid following in her footsteps.

The other ever-present problem Rita Dove faces and conquers is her race. Arnold

Rampersad in “The Poems of Rita Dove” observes that “She writes of black experience, but mainly in the course of ‘ordinary’ things—where a given human situation is recognizably black but not defined even in part by the tension that many of us see as ever-present between the races” (3). Rita Dove writes few poems about racism today. Sensitive to the demands of her art, she perhaps is wary of what she perceives as the trap set by race for the black writer. Anyone bearing a visible difference to the mainstream society cannot decide when to be noticed. Talking of attending a party, Rita Dove in Robert McDowell’s “Rita Dove: Poet at the Dance” remarks:

Like most of African Americans in academia, it is not unusual for me to be the sole “representative” of my race—and I use that word [brown] deliberately, since often the gazes I must navigate through will register me as symbol first, especially the gaze from a stranger or someone not very familiar with me. For a shy person, such curiosity can be terrifying, and therefore, long ago, I decided to preempt it by making an entrance . . . in other words, confronting the observer so there would be no chance to be confronted with any evidence that I was being viewed as “the black woman in the room.” (34)

Instead of dodging and shying away from others’ strange eyes, Rita Dove chooses to confront them positively and aggressively, which is always the attitude she takes. Although she deals with the problems of racism and sexism, she does not adopt the polemical voice of either a black nationalist or a feminist poet, and therefore she does not let indignation, anger, and protest control her verse (Georgoudaki, 2). That is why in Thomas and Beulah Rita Dove solves the “color question” here by having everyone in the central story be black except in part controlled by a white context appearing only on the edges of the story. The gender question is treated in the poem even-handedly even though sometimes gender inequality can be read between the lines. By re-remembering and fictionalizing her grandparents’ lives and

talents, Rita Dove acts as a preserver of her racial-cultural heritage. By combining facts and fiction and by identifying with both male and female consciousnesses, Rita Dove balances opposites and bridges such conventional divisions as public-private, white-black, male-female, high-low class, and past-present, and above all, she transcends boundaries of space and time in Thomas and Beulah.

