

# **THE TRANSFORMATIVE MOMENT**

Julie Matthaei, Wellesley College  
Barbara Brandt, Independent Scholar

From Richard Westra, ed.  
*The Political Economy of the Present and Possible Global Future(s)*.  
New York: Anthem Press, forthcoming

Slightly Revised; June 2007

## **THE TRANSFORMATIVE MOMENT<sup>1</sup>**

We are living in one of the most exciting times in history. It is a time of crisis and breakdown, and a time of potential transition to a new and more evolved economic and social stage. Diverse and vibrant movements for social transformation are springing up all around the world. The United States, while playing a reactionary role through its imperialist state policies and globalizing corporations, is also a locus of significant post-modern transformation. We call this time in the U.S. “the Transformative Moment,” to emphasize its potential for paradigmatic and systematic economic and social change.

The Transformative Moment can be understood as a deep-seated and many-faceted response to the imbalances, inequality, and lack of freedom created by the reigning economic and social paradigm, a paradigm which we call the Hierarchical Polarization Paradigm. In the first part of this paper, we will analyze the core elements of the Hierarchical Polarization Paradigm. In the second part, we will discuss the seven transformative processes that various U.S. social movements are participating in now, processes which are beginning to construct a new, more balanced, free, and equal paradigm of economic and social life.

Our goal in this paper to provide the reader with a new conceptual framework which will help them understand the transformative potential of the present historical conjuncture in the United States—the Transformative Moment. The conceptual framework presented here builds on the fundamentals of Marxian economics, particularly as interpreted by David Levine (1977, 1978, 1981). It also builds on over forty years of anti-oppression/anti-discrimination action and research by Civil Rights, feminist, anti-

---

<sup>1</sup> Heartfelt thanks to Donna Bivens, Janice Goldman, and Germai Medhanie for their help. A shorter version of this article was presented at the Rethinking Marxism conference in Amherst, October 2006.

racist, lesbian/gay, and other scholars, especially hooks (1984), Nelson (1996), and Folbre (2001). We have stood gratefully on their shoulders as we have created this overarching analysis. Our conceptual framework is also built on our own histories: we have each been researching and writing about gender, race, and economics for over thirty years (Matthaei 1982, 1996, 2000; Brandt 1995; Amott and Matthaei 1996), and we have been working together on this conceptual framework for seven years (Matthaei and Brandt 2001, forthcoming). Finally, we have both been active participants in the movements we are describing: Barbara, in the Civil Rights, feminist, ecology, and new economics movements, and Julie in the anti-war, feminist, lesbian/gay, anti-racist, and ecology movements.

#### The Hierarchical Polarization Paradigm

To understand the present historical conjuncture in the United States, we have created the concept of the “Hierarchical Polarization Paradigm,” building on the concept of hierarchical dualism developed in the work of John Hodges, Donald Struckmann, and Lynn Trost (1975), Rhonda Williams (1993), and Ann Jennings (1993). We use the word “polarization” instead of “dualism” here to emphasize that the Hierarchical Polarization Paradigm polarizes universal dualisms such as male and female, masculine and feminine, light and dark, parent and child into extreme and rigidly opposed, mutually exclusive categories.

The Hierarchical Polarization Paradigm preexisted capitalism, and was built into the U.S. capitalist economic system in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. It still undergirds U.S. economic and social values, practices, and institutions today, and is so deeply engrained in our ways of thinking, being, and acting that it is difficult for us to even see it.

The Hierarchical Polarization Paradigm divides people and life itself into a number of distinct, purportedly independent, “hierarchical polarities.” Each hierarchical polarity is composed of two polarized, mutually exclusive, and unequal groups. Most of the hierarchical polarities create divisions among people: men vs. and over women, whites vs. and over blacks, heterosexuals vs. and over homosexuals, U.S. citizens vs. and over foreigners, et cetera. Another set of hierarchical polarities divide realms of life: man vs. and over nature, God vs. and over man, materialism vs. and over spirituality. We summarize some of the various key hierarchical polarities in U.S. and European history in Figure 1. In this paper, given space limits, we will focus our discussion on two key hierarchical polarities: gender and race.

While there are many differences between the various hierarchical polarities, we believe it is helpful to discuss them together, analytically. Such an analysis helps us:

- 1) understand the commonalities among the various, distinct hierarchical polarities
- 2) understand the ways in which the different hierarchical polarities reinforce one another as part of the Hierarchical Polarization Paradigm
- 3) identify the underlying processes which create each hierarchical polarity
- 4) recognize the similarities in the transformative processes undertaken by the various, identity-based and other social movements against the different hierarchical polarities
- 5) understand the ways in which these various movements are increasingly coming to support one another and are beginning to undermine the Hierarchical Polarization Paradigm itself
- 6) begin to envision a world which is free from the inequality, oppression, and violence inherent in the Hierarchical Polarization Paradigm.

## HIERARCHICAL POLARIZATION PROCESSES

The Hierarchical Polarization Paradigm views the process of domination and subordination, and the various hierarchical polarities through which it is played out, as inevitable and God-given. However, the various hierarchical polarities are actually economic and social constructs. We call the social concepts, values, practices and institutions, which produce and reproduce hierarchical polarities, “hierarchical polarization processes.”

Here we will focus on the hierarchical polarization processes which create, polarize, and “unequalize” groups of people. We have identified nine such processes, which are present in nearly all of the various hierarchical polarities which have occurred in U.S. history. In order to discuss the essence of these processes, we refer to past forms of gender, race, and other polarities, forms which had not yet begun to be broken down by transformative processes. The nine hierarchical polarizations processes are as follows:

Categorization: The Hierarchical Polarization Paradigm creates mutually exclusive categories of people, along a variety of different criteria: white or Black, man or woman, colonizer or colonized, heterosexual or homosexual, American or foreigner, et cetera.

Ascription: Each person is assigned to one category in each hierarchical polarity at birth, based on some aspect of their being that they cannot control, such as biological sex, disability, skin color, sexual orientation, or parents’ group assignment/s (race, religion, nationality, aristocracy). Each of these group assignments is made integral to the social identity of the person: for example, a gay white disabled U.S. man.

Polarization: Within each hierarchical polarity, the two categories of people are treated differently. They are assigned different personality traits and different, mutually

exclusive, work and social activities, and in this way, are made to be socially different and opposite.

Hierarchization: Within each polarity, one group of people is viewed as superior to the other, in terms of its way of being, its traits and its work.

Domination/Subordination: Within each polarity, the group of people that is seen to be superior is given political and economic power over the other group, in terms of citizenship, civil rights, property rights, and pay.

Violence: The dominant group uses violence, both overt and institutionalized, to create, maintain and reproduce its domination; the subordinated group often rebels violently against its subordination, only to be “put down” with more violence.

Rationalization: Each hierarchical polarity is justified by religious dogma (as “God-given”) or by science (as “natural”).

Internalization: Authoritarian parenting, education, and other social institutions cause people to internalize each hierarchical polarity, i.e. accept its dictates and expectations of them and of others. In this way, groups that are oppressed can come to “internalize their oppression.”

Stigmatization: Social stigmatization, such as teasing, ostracism, and in extreme cases, group violence, punishes those don’t conform, i.e. who don’t behave according to their assigned roles.

Figure 2 summarizes the nine hierarchical polarization processes. Based on a belief that people are naturally different and unequal, these processes indeed make people different and unequal, according to a variety of different socially-created categories.

How do the hierarchical polarization processes relate to class? A key part of the Hierarchical Polarization paradigm is the economic exploitation of the subordinated group by the dominating group. Economic relationships and processes are organized to transfer property and output from the subordinated group into the hands of the dominating group, and to protect these accumulations from being redistributed back to the needier, subordinated group. Some examples of economic domination/subordination include slavery (whites/African Americans), land grab and displacement (whites/Native Americans), nonpayment for their work (white men/white women), and segregation into the lowest paid jobs (white men/white women, and men and women of color). Economic power feeds political power, and hence cements systems of domination, especially in terms of race and colonization, for it can finance the weapons and prison system to enforce domination/subordination. Marx called such processes, and the struggles that ensued from them, "class." However, in order to distinguish between the ascribed aspect of hierarchical polarizations and the potential freedom of upward mobility present in capitalism, we use the term "class" only to refer to the latter.

#### INTERDEPENDENCE OF THE VARIOUS HIERARCHICAL POLARIZATIONS

While the various hierarchical polarizations appear to operate independently, they in fact coexist and codetermine the economic and social values, practices, and institutions of our country. They also coexist within each individual, whose social status is codetermined by the various hierarchical polarizations, according to his or her assignment to one or the other pole of each. Most individuals are dominators in some hierarchical polarizations, and subordinated in others. Finally, the different hierarchical polarizations

tend to support one another, in that they embody and rationalize the larger Hierarchical Polarization Paradigm's logic of polarization, domination/subordination, et cetera.

The Hierarchical Polarization Paradigm treats and talks of its constructs – woman, man, white, black – as universal categories. However, the coexistence of the various hierarchical polarizations and their codetermination of economic and social life is such that the meaning of each hierarchical polarization's categories varies according to a person's position within the others. What it means to be a woman, for example, varies, according to whether one is white or black, aristocrat or commoner, heterosexual or lesbian, rich or poor (Spelman 1988, Mohanty 2003). Nevertheless, the category remains, and has social significance.<sup>2</sup>

#### TRANSFORMATION OF HIERARCHICAL POLARIZATION

Because hierarchical polarities restrict freedom, and cause deprivation and inequality, they usually engender resistance in many forms, from slave revolts to anti-colonial struggles to women's liberation movements to consciousness-raising groups and therapy. This resistance to particular hierarchical polarizations is usually initiated by members of the group oppressed by that hierarchical polarization – although people from the oppressor group sometimes join them.

Often, the oppressed are drawn into violent struggle as a reaction to violent domination by their oppressors, and their movements for freedom and self-determination also take a violent form. This in turn can intensify – and be used to justify -- the violence of the dominating group. Each group views the other as its enemy, and as a threat. This tense situation creates a pervasive sense of insecurity and fear for both

---

<sup>2</sup> Brien (2006, 272) employs the notion of a “concrete universal” to understand the existence of socially meaningful categories that do not, however, describe a shared experience.



oppressors and the oppressed that can intensify the polarization and domination/subordination process.

Starting in the nineteenth century, and growing rapidly over the last 50 years, new, nonviolent approaches to resistance to hierarchical polarization have been developing, approaches which reject violence in favor of other modes of social power and transformation. We call these new types of resistance to hierarchical polarities, and to the Hierarchical Polarization Paradigm, “transformative processes.” The remainder of this paper is devoted to exploring the different transformative processes which are at work in the United States today.

#### The Seven Types of Transformative Processes

We have identified seven distinct types of transformative processes currently at work in the U.S. healing a variety of individual hierarchical polarizations and the Hierarchical Polarization Paradigm itself. These transformative processes are creating the basis for an economy and society based on solidarity, cooperation, freedom, democracy, economic and social justice, diversity, and sustainability. We will discuss each process briefly here, putting more emphasis on the latter processes, which are more recent and less understood.

These transformative processes are at work both in organized social movements, and in individuals’ everyday, personal and work lives. Civil Rights, feminist, gay and lesbian, children’s rights, anti-colonial, anti-racist, ecology, and other movements all embody one or more of the transformative processes discussed below. At the same time, peoples’ individual struggles for healing, wholeness, connection and liberation from the restrictive dictates of the Hierarchical Polarization Paradigm are also an important part of

these transformative processes, as we will see. Individual transformation and organized movements for social and institutional transformation complement one another.

The different transformative processes have emerged more or less sequentially, each process building on the preceding ones. The first five transformative processes focus on healing particular hierarchical polarizations; the last two begin to integrate the issues raised by the different hierarchical polarizations, and, through their transformative actions, to replace the Hierarchical Polarization Paradigm with a new, nonhierarchical, more just and sustainable paradigm. We summarize them in Figure 3.

### 1. Questioning Processes

The questioning process challenges the rationalizations, and internalization of these rationalizations, that undergird the Hierarchical Polarization Paradigm, by asking questions about aspects of a hierarchical polarity that are taken for granted. Questioning processes are supported by self-conscious reflection, and by true scientific investigation and education.

Here are a few examples of transformative questions:

Are women, blacks, gays, poor people naturally inferior in their abilities, or have they been made such by our economic and social institutions?

Do we all experience equal opportunity, regardless of our gender or skin color?

Are white women, and men and women of color, or even white men, really rewarded according to their productivity?

Are gay people really biologically and morally inferior to heterosexuals?

Is U.S. culture really the highest stage of civilization or could we learn from “underdeveloped” societies?

And, above all, do innate differences among people make them naturally unequal and in conflict, or would it be possible to construct a diverse, harmonious, and cooperative country and world in which everyone could live in safety and peace?

Questioning processes are the sine qua non for the transformation of hierarchical polarities, and of the Hierarchical Polarization Paradigm. For this reason, the ability to think for oneself, and to think critically about social roles, values, practices and institutions, is key to the Transformative Moment.

## 2. Equal Opportunity Processes and the Capitalist Class System

Equal opportunity processes are struggles by members of the subordinated groups, and their allies, to gain political and economic rights, social treatment, and economic opportunities equal to those of the dominating group. Equal opportunity processes challenge every hierarchical polarization process, and are a key force in breaking down the injustices, imbalances, and lack of freedom of the Hierarchical Polarization Paradigm.

The United States itself was established as part of an equal opportunity process. With their famous, liberatory claim that “all (white) men are created equal,” the Founding Fathers not only declared political independence from their British colonizers, but also formally overturned the aristocrat/commoner hierarchical polarization.

With historical hindsight, the “all men are created equal” statement can be understood as an assertion of equal opportunity for white men. This assertion forcibly rejected one pillar of the then-current Hierarchical Polarization Paradigm – aristocratic political and economic domination -- while accepting all of the others. In particular, the hierarchical, domination/subordination view of economic and social life, along with the

race, gender, God/man, and man/nature polarities, were maintained and built into the developing emerging capitalist economy. However, the hierarchy among white men, instead of being based on ascription and aristocratic privilege, was replaced by a flexible, semi-meritocratic hierarchy.

The developing capitalist economy became a competition among white men to dominate or “better” each other in their struggle for wealth, a process called “breadwinning.” A white man’s wealth and ability to support a full-time homemaker, not his pedigree, became the measure of his worth or level of success, rather. The true winner in this new system was seen to be the “self-made man:” the man who, through his own effort, earnings, savings, and investments in expanded production, worked his way up the economic hierarchy from entry-level worker to head of a large and powerful firm (Matthaei 1982, Ch. 5).

The new flexibility in the economic hierarchy – that is, the freedom of white men to increase their economic status and power through their own efforts as workers and entrepreneurs -- let loose a flurry of effort and invention which, coordinated by the market, fueled a new, dynamic economic system we call capitalism. The competition of white men to dominate one another in the market was institutionalized in capitalist firms. By the end of the nineteenth century, this process had created a new, immortal individual – the corporation – which abstractly embodied this competitive struggle for profits and growth, and in turn harnessing self-interested, competitive white men to its service, as managers and workers, in complex internal labor markets.

White women and people of color, of course, were excluded from this declaration of equality, and from the economic competition based on it. They were segregated into

subordinate non-capitalist forms of labor like slavery, and/or into lower paid work and unpaid reproductive work. However, white women, and Black men and women, participated in their own equal opportunity processes over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Black men and women (with some white allies) fought for the abolition of slavery in the nineteenth century, and against educational and employment segregation in the twentieth. White women fought for (white) women's suffrage and property rights, and then (with some women of color) for the right to enter the higher paid higher status white men's jobs (Amott and Matthaei 1996). In the second half of the twentieth century, the gay and lesbian and disability rights movements also participated in equal opportunity processes against discrimination and for equal-opportunity in the labor force.

Each of these equal opportunity movements has made major strides in eliminating the particular discrimination it is targeting. All continue their fights today, because discrimination and segregation persist.

All of these equal opportunity movements are based in "identity politics" in the sense that their members are overwhelmingly members of a particular subordinated group – i.e. they are Blacks, women, gays, or disabled people – fighting for equality with a particular dominant group – i.e. with whites, men, heterosexuals, or able-bodied people.

Finally, each of these identity-politics equal opportunity movements tends to give rise to a counterbalancing processes, which we call "valuing the devalued."

### 3. Valuing-the-Devalued Processes

Valuing-the-devalued processes tend to accompany, or come on the heels of, equal opportunity processes. A key part of the Hierarchical Polarization Paradigm is the

devaluation both of the people placed in the subordinate group, and of the traits and activities associated with them. A central aspect of Civil Rights, feminist, gay, and disability movement has been the fight against this devaluation. The Black-is-beautiful movement, including the celebration of one's African heritage with holidays like Kwanzaa, is an example of this process. The wages for housework movement and organizing for paid maternity leaves are also examples of the valuing-the-devalued process, because they work to achieve financial compensation for unpaid work in the home. Native American nations' movements to recuperate and maintain their languages and cultures are a third example.

These and many other examples of the valuing-the-devalued process both respond directly to the devaluation created by the Hierarchical Polarization Paradigm, and also compensate for imbalances created by the equal opportunity process. In the equal opportunity process, as we have seen, subordinated groups struggled for equal rights and opportunities. However, the equality they struggled for was equality with white, able-bodied, heterosexual men. Thus, in their very nature, equal opportunity struggles tended to set their sights upon gaining what the dominant group had, or becoming like the dominant group. For this reason, the equal opportunity process, as embodied by processes of individual transformation and different social movements, has tended to implicitly accept and even reinforce the reigning social and economic devaluation of people and work that are located in the subordinated category. As Martin Luther King once commented about the Civil Rights movement: "We're integrating into a burning house." (Belafonte 2006).

---

For example, when second-wave feminists fought for access to and success within high-status, male-dominated jobs, they implicitly or explicitly accepted and reinforced the reigning devaluation of the work of mothering and of full-time homemakers as “just housewives” (Matthaei and Brandt 2001). The valuing-the-devalued process redresses this problem, by noting how crucial reproductive work is to our economy and society, and advocating for public support of it through paid parental leaves, parental education, and the like. One prominent example is feminist economist Nancy Folbre’s thorough and convincing analysis of the need to value caring work in The Invisible Heart (2001).

#### 4. Integrative Processes

Integrative processes bring together people, characteristics, or activities that were polarized and made opposite by the Hierarchical Polarization Paradigm. As we have seen, U.S. economic and social values, practices, and institutions separate and differentiate people, human traits and ways of being, and spheres of life. We are supposed to be different from, and do different things than, those in the opposite categories. We are supposed to be either masculine or feminine, white or Black, heterosexual or homosexual. “Man” is seen as different from and in control over Nature. Our economic decisions are supposed to be ruled by financial, materialistic considerations; however, while in our religious institutions, spiritual values takes over. People and social movements engaged in integrative processes, individually and/or in groups, reject one or more of these polarities as restrictive, unbalanced, and unhealthy, and set out to combine things which were previously seen to be mutually exclusive.

Equal opportunity processes often set in motion integrative processes in two ways. First, they “integrate” previously all-white or all-male enclaves with Blacks and

women, respectively. This integration breaks down race and gender polarization, and disproves the assertion that the races or genders have inherently different abilities and traits. Second, equal opportunity processes, especially feminist ones, have led to the combining of types of work that had been mutually exclusive under the Hierarchical Polarization Paradigm. For example, when feminists won access into white men's jobs, many of them sought to continue women's traditional mothering and homemaking work as well – to be traditionally masculine and feminine at the same time. And in couples where both husband and wife are employed full-time, many husbands have begun to take on women's traditional mothering and housekeeping work along with their masculine work.

Whenever we see what was previously polarized being combined, we have the integrative process at work. When people marry across race, and interracial people acknowledge all of their heritage, the integrative process is at work. When consumers, workers, and managers bring their spiritual values – values like justice, equality, sustainability – into their economic decisions, the integrative process is at work. By transforming the way people are and act, integrative processes begin to qualitatively restructure social values and institutions (Matthaei and Brandt 2001).

---

## 5. Discernment Processes

Whereas integrative processes combine what was polarized, discernment processes subject each pole of each hierarchical polarity, and the values, practices and institutions constructed around that those polarities, to serious critical evaluation. In particular, the discernment process involves identifying and redressing the distortions and injustices caused by polarization and domination/subordination.



The polarization of people, works, and traits into mutually exclusive categories distorts and unbalances humanity. As feminist economist Julie Nelson has shown, the combination of previously polarized traits allows more positive forms to emerge (1996, Ch. 2). For example, when polarized between men and women, the basic human traits of directivity and receptivity degenerate into the arrogance, insensitivity, and domination, for men, and self-effacement, oversensitivity, and subservience for women. These distorted traits are then built into unbalanced and dysfunctional economic and social institutions. The integrative process, which we discussed above, combines poles and transcends polarization; the discernment process follows up as we redefine ourselves and our work, freed from restrictive polarizations. A key current area of the discernment process is occurring as a result of work/family integration; efforts to combine the two are leading to the redefinition of both.

The second major type of discernment addresses the distortions and injustices caused by domination/subordination. Those who belong to dominant groups have been actively or passively involved in unjust and oppressive economic and social institutions, which they have benefited from. In the past, they were able to rationalize their actions and privileges, because of the racism, sexism, and other forms of bigotry which they had internalized. However, the many-faceted identity-based organizing of subordinated groups through the first four transformative processes has changed the experience of people in dominator groups. Knowledge about the various oppressive and unjust hierarchical polarization processes has been expanded dramatically. Further, personal experiences with members of subordinated groups in equal opportunity workplaces and desegregated schools have also eroded dominator group members' beliefs in their natural

superiority. The family is also a site of discernment for members of dominator groups, as their children come out, and/or marry people of color, and/or adopt children of color, and as men's dominance is challenged by their wives and daughters.

For these reasons, more and more people are rejecting the dominator roles which they have been assigned to by the Hierarchical Polarization Paradigm, and becoming active in the feminist, anti-racist, and GLBT (Gay Lesbian Bisexual Transsexual) movements. Many of these changes are on a very personal level, in everyday actions which acknowledge and reject one's special privileges, treat members of subordinated groups as equals, and challenge others in the dominated group who do not. White feminist Peggy McIntosh's widely circulated article, "Unpacking the Invisible Backpack" (1989), about her realization of the privileges she enjoyed by virtue of being white, has educated scores of whites about their unjust racially-based privileges. Also, across the country, white people have been actively involved in organizing and giving anti-white-racism trainings, as part of grass-roots anti-racism groups, academic institutions, and religious organizations (Groot 2006).<sup>3</sup> Many men are renouncing male privilege, and confronting sexist men. For example, the White Ribbon Campaign: Men Working to End Violence Against Women was started by Canadians in 1989 in response to an anti-feminist man's massacre of 14 women. Today, there are Men Against Violence Against Women "White Ribbon" groups in 52 countries around the world, including the U.S. (Minerson 2006). PFLAG (Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays)

---

<sup>3</sup> Some examples are The Center for the Study of White American Culture in New Jersey ([www.euroamerican.org](http://www.euroamerican.org)), Challenging White Supremacy in California ([www.cwsworkshop.org](http://www.cwsworkshop.org)), European Dissent in New Orleans ([www.pisab.org](http://www.pisab.org)), and Community Change in Boston ([www.communitychangeinc.org](http://www.communitychangeinc.org))(Groot 2006).

organizes actively against homophobia and for gay rights; it has over 200,000 members and supporters and over 500 affiliates in the United States.

One final, and important set of examples of discernment by members of a dominator group are the new anti-class-privilege movements. For example, wealthy people are working in a group called Responsible Wealth against the widening class divide by organizing against the repeal of the estate tax ([www.responsiblewealth.org](http://www.responsiblewealth.org)). In cities and towns across the U.S., the non-poor have joined their low-income neighbors in successful campaigns to provide all workers with Living Wages ([www.livingwagecampaign.org](http://www.livingwagecampaign.org)), and in the November 2006 elections, voters in six states passed increases in the minimum wage.

Discernment takes different forms for people in subordinated groups. A person in a subordinated category tends to be more critical of the hierarchical polarity that oppresses them, and more active in struggles to transform it, than those in the dominator group, as we have seen in our discussions of previous processes. However, people in subordinated groups cannot escape internalizing the hierarchical polarity which oppresses them, in subtle ways. For example, for millennia, femininity has been intertwined with subordination, and women have internalized this as active self-subordination. The valuable feminine activity of caring for others, structured as unpaid and devalued work done under the control of one's husband to fulfill social mandates of "proper behavior," has become equated with self-sacrifice and self-subordination to the needs of others. Mothering has been defined as the unquestioning socialization of children into the oppressive dictates of Hierarchical Polarization Paradigm.

For women (and men expressing their feminine sides), the discernment process here means developing and expressing a positive sense of femininity, both through individual behavior and through institutional changes. For example, positive femininity defines the feminine activity of caring for others as a valuable social activity, which requires support through public policy. Positive feminine caring heals and empowers both others and oneself. And finally, positive femininity, expressed in mothering, rejects the unquestioning transmission of ones' cultural heritage, replacing it with a critical awareness which evaluates reigning social mores. Thus positive feminine mothering (and fathering) affirms and transmits to ones children those values and practices which one finds to be healthy, just, and life-affirming, and rejects and reshapes values, practices, and identities which are oppressive. An excellent concrete example of the latter is the work by the Center for a New American Dream to help parents resist the hypermaterialism that is being cultivated in their children by advertising.

\* \* \*

The first five transformative processes seek to heal the various hierarchical polarities both within individuals, and as they are manifested within economic and social institutions. These transformative processes also support one another in key ways. These represent a huge step forward in economic and social development.

However, the first five transformative processes tend not to challenge the separations among specific hierarchical polarities, and so the various movements which embody these processes tend to be based in single-issue, single-identity politics, such as

anti-racist, or feminist, or pro-worker, or environmental, or gay rights, or disability, etc. To be fully effective, transformative social movements need to incorporate the last two processes, the combining and diversifying/unifying/globalizing processes.

### The Combining Process

The combining process connects and combines together consciousness-raising and social action vis a vis two or more hierarchical polarities. In this way, it begins to break down the compartmentalizing aspect of the Hierarchical Polarization Paradigm, laying the foundation for the systematic transformation of our economy and society into a higher stage. The combining process is a natural outcome of the other processes, because the various hierarchical polarities are all interconnected as intertwined aspects of the Hierarchical Polarization Paradigm. We will present the combining process briefly here, using the example of second wave feminist organizing starting in the 1970s.

Women of different classes, racial-ethnicities, and sexualities came together in the grassroots “women’s movement” that swept the U.S. in the 1970s. However, when women came together to raise their consciousnesses, fight sexism, and liberate “WOMEN,” women who were working class, and/or of color, and/or lesbians were marginalized, and their political issues were downplayed or ignored. These excluded groups of women reacted with anger and disaffection. Many felt the need to split off from the white-heterosexual-middle-class-dominated mainstream feminist movement, forming groups of their own, and creating feminist theory and practice that spoke to their issues (Moraga and Anzaldua 1981; Joseph and Lewis 1981; Hull, Scott and Smith 1982; hooks 1984).

---

This set the stage for the complicated, many-faceted combining process, which began to extend feminist movement beyond the compartmentalization of polarities, issues, and identities created by the Hierarchical Polarization Paradigm. For example, the combining process taught many white middle class heterosexual feminists (ourselves included) about racism, classism, and homophobia. Based on this learning, many feminist groups have subsequently become multi-issue movements that aspire to truly address the issues of all women. Indeed, the National Organization of Women now lists on its platform of key issues “racism, lesbian rights, and economic justice.”<sup>4</sup> Julie has participated in a similar combining process in the class-centered Union for Radical Political Economics. Groups which have expanded their focus as a result of the combining process also actively seek to work in coalition with other groups working on issues which affect their constituency.

A second source of the combining process is the coming together of movements because they have a shared goal or “enemy.” The economic dislocation and environmental destruction brought about by corporate globalization, with its neoliberal agenda of Free Trade and new institution, the World Trade Organization, has brought together diverse, grass-roots movements from around the world. For example, the famous Seattle anti-WTO protest of 1999 brought together for the first time organized labor and environmental groups, who have usually been in conflict in what has become a “blue-green coalition.” This marked the coming of age of a vibrant anti-globalization movement which unites a broad range of groups around the world against corporate

---

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.now.org/history/history.html>, accessed 10/26/2006

abuses, a process which has been called “globalization from below” (Brecher, Costello and Smith 2000).

---

In these ways, the combining process has been creating ties of understanding and solidarity among people involved in different social movements, across the globe, laying the groundwork for the last process, the diversifying/unifying/globalizing process.

### The Diversifying/Unifying/Globalizing Process

The first six processes, as they have developed and interacted over the past 250 years, and especially over the past 50 years, have begun to birth a new kind of consciousness, and new types of political and economic organizing. This new consciousness is making it possible for people to begin directing and coordinating all of the other processes in a wonderful symphony of systemic personal-and-social healing and transformation, which we call the diversifying/unifying/globalizing process. The diversifying/unifying/globalizing process is the newest of all the transformative process, so it is only beginning to be expressed. Nevertheless, it has already spawned entirely new concepts and forms of movement capable of achieving the transition to a post-Hierarchical-Polarization-Paradigm country and world.

The first six processes have begun to make it possible for people to become deeply committed to transcending all of the hierarchical polarities in their lives. Because of these six processes, people are now better able to resist the ways in which society tries to subordinate them (for being of color, working class or poor, gay, not American, not Christian, female, and/or disabled). And equally importantly, as we have seen, people are now better able to refuse the privileges accorded to them of being a dominator or

exploiter (because of being white, upper-class, heterosexual, American, able-bodied and/or male).

The diversifying/unifying/globalizing process represents the concrete living out of this new consciousness, a consciousness which leads people to try, in all of their actions, to live according to the principles of equality, justice, democracy, mutual respect, and freedom. This process expresses, calls for, and works towards -- a socially responsible “citizen of the world” way of being and acting which is based on unity or a sense of oneness with all human beings, and indeed, with all of life. People involved in this process acknowledge and defend civil and human rights, economic justice, freedom, and democracy for every human being in the world, while acknowledging and embracing the diversity of ways to construct free and equitable people and institutions. Such people actively seek balance, connection, integration, equalization – of the parts within themselves, and of all the rich diversity of people and life forms on earth.

Such a consciousness does not flow from a sense of self-sacrifice, but rather out of an understanding that one will not be fully healed, whole, and fulfilled if he or she is not positively engaged in living his/her larger life in such a manner. People with this new consciousness embody the questioning process, listening to their inner voices, to the voice of conscience, the voice which rejects any and all social mandates and structures which go against their core inner values. A person with this new consciousness listens to all who are protesting, evaluates their concerns, and, if she finds them to be justified, takes them on as her own. And rather than fitting into and furthering the global capitalist economy, people with this new “global citizen’ consciousness seek and promote positive economic transformation.

---



At the root of our current globalizing economic system, with all its wonders and its deadly destructiveness, is the Hierarchical Polarization Paradigm. The U.S. economy has been structured on the superexploitation of subordinated groups and of nonhuman nature, and on narrowly self-interested, materialistic and exploitative competition among white men and any others who can compete their way into the game and play by its rules. In this capitalist class system, money -- and the material goods and power over people and nonhuman nature which it buys -- is the ultimate goal of life, and striving for domination over polarized "others" is seen as the inexorable way of life. However, the diversifying/unifying/globalizing process is leading people all over the world to reject these prevailing values and say no to business as usual in all that they do. As the Zapatistas say, "Un solo no, un million de si:" a shared, unified "no" to the global capitalist economic system, and a million "yeses" to the multiplicity of different positive alternatives that people all over the world are constructing.

What are the yeses? As the diversifying/unifying/globalizing process develops and extends across our country, and the world, it is inventing new economic and social values, practices and institutions which can heal the individual and social wounds and imbalances created by the Hierarchical Polarization Paradigm. We'll discuss a few key examples here.

One example of the diversifying/unifying/globalizing process is the new economic concept of stakeholders. Traditional, profit-motivated firms are expected to serve their stock-holders, period. The interests and well-being of the many other people who have a stake in what the firm does are ignored, such as workers, suppliers, the local community, government, and nonhuman life. The stakeholder concept challenges

managers, and boards of directors, to find win-win solutions that benefit all of their firm's stakeholders, not just the stockholders (Kelly 2001, Blair and Stout 2001).

A related economic concept, which has emerged in tandem with the stakeholder concept, is the concept of socially responsible economic behavior. Socially responsible decision-making has come to mean making decisions that are good both for the narrow self-interest of the decision-maker AND for others and society at large. The concept of socially responsible decision-making represents an alternative economic value system to narrowly self-interested, money- and profit-maximizing decision-making which motivates our Hierarchical-Polarization-Paradigm economy. This new value system charges and empowers not just the managers of firms, but ALL who engage in economic activity, to help make our economy more just and sustainable through their decisions as consumers, workers, investors, citizens, and entrepreneurs. This trend includes the continually growing movements for socially responsible investment (Social Investment Forum), for corporate social responsibility and social impact management (Gentile 2006),<sup>5</sup> for socially responsible work (Graduation Pledge Alliance; Idealist.org) and for socially responsible consumption (Co-op America, Center for a New American Dream).

A third example of the diversifying/unifying/globalizing process is a new form of political organizing for peace, justice, democracy, and sustainability, exemplified by the annual World Social Forum, and the hundreds of other similarly-organized forums that now take place yearly throughout the world. These forums build on the combining of groups in response to the many destructive, oppressive, and life-threatening aspects of our global capitalist economic system, discussed above. People working in the vast

---

<sup>5</sup> See [caseplace.org](http://caseplace.org) for an excellent collection of journal articles and cases in the fields of corporate social responsibility and social impact management.

diversity of social and political movements have begun to come together, to work together to begin to envision and create new economic and social structures. Under the motto, “Another World is Possible,” experienced progressive activists created the World Social Forum, a type of “movement of movements.” This movement of movements is bringing together people of all ages, classes, genders, sexual preferences, race-ethnicities, and nations who are engaged in social and economic justice, environmental, peace, and democracy activism. The focus is on listening to one another, learning from one another, forming cross-country alliances, and creating and advocating for new values, practices and institutions which respect all of life. The World Social Forum is committed to nonviolence. The underlying assumption for the meetings is a shared commitment to eradicate any injustices and to preserve the beautiful planet which we inhabit together. In particular, the World Social Forum connects together feminist, anti-racist, worker, disability, ecological, spiritual, gay, and peace movement who are sharing their knowledge and experience with the goal of building institutions which serve us all ([www.forumsocialmundial.org.br](http://www.forumsocialmundial.org.br); Fisher and Ponniah 2003). A jointly written book, Alternatives to Economic Globalization: A Better World is Possible, has emerged from these meetings, and the groups which they have catalyzed, which lays out what is becoming a growing consensus around the necessary direction for economic transformation out of global capitalism into a post-Hierarchical-Polarization-Paradigm economy (Cavanagh and Mander 2004).

In these and similar ways, the diversifying/unifying/globalizing process holds out the promise of what Martin Luther King called “the beloved community.” Beloved community is a “society in which every person [is] valued and where all conflicts [can]

be reconciled in a spirit of goodwill and mutual benefit...where all of us can live together in a climate of understanding, cooperation and unity” (Coretta Scott King 2004)

\* \* \*

The seven transformative processes, developed and honed through over a century of struggles, provide us with the tools to dismantle the Hierarchical Polarization Paradigm, and build more egalitarian, peaceful, loving, free, and democratic economic and social values, practices and institutions. We are blessed to have been born into such an historic, transformative moment, and it is up to each of us to do what we can to help guide our world to this possible future.

---

Figure 1. Hierarchical Polarities Present in the United States and Europe

| <b>Hierarchical Polarities between Groups of People</b> |                                             |                                                                                                               |
|---------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                         | <b>Superior, Dominant Group</b>             | <b>Inferior, Subordinated Group</b>                                                                           |
| Authoritarian Parenting                                 | Parents                                     | Children                                                                                                      |
| Gender                                                  | Men (people with male sexual organs)        | Women (people with female sexual organs)                                                                      |
| Aristocracy                                             | Aristocrat (parents are aristocrats)        | Commoners (parents aren't aristocrats)                                                                        |
| Nationalism                                             | Citizens of our country                     | Citizens of another country, or group of other countries                                                      |
| Colonialism                                             | Colonizer                                   | Colonized                                                                                                     |
| Religious Intolerance                                   | Christians                                  | Heathens or Pagans or Muslims or Jews                                                                         |
| Race                                                    | Whites (people of European "blood")         | Blacks (people with any African "blood")<br>OR Native American "savages" OR<br>Non-White/Colored People, etc. |
| Sexuality                                               | Heterosexuals                               | Homosexuals                                                                                                   |
| Ability                                                 | Normal                                      | Disabled                                                                                                      |
| <b>Other Hierarchical Polarities</b>                    |                                             |                                                                                                               |
|                                                         | <b>Superior, Dominating Group/Principle</b> | <b>Inferior, Subordinated Group/Principle</b>                                                                 |
| Religion                                                | God (white man in the sky)                  | Man (all human beings)                                                                                        |
| Man/nature                                              | Man (all human beings, especially men)      | Nature (nonhuman beings and life; to some extent, women)                                                      |
| Secularism                                              | Material life                               | Religion, Spirituality                                                                                        |

Figure 2. The Nine Hierarchical Polarization Processes, as Applied to Race and Gender

|                                                 | <b>Race (white/Black)</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | <b>Gender</b>                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|-------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Categorization</b>                           | Two mutually exclusive racial categories are created: “whites” (people of European heritage with less than 1/16 African heritage), and “Blacks” (people with 1/16 or more African heritage)                                                                            | People are separated into two groups: “men” (those with penises) and “women” (those with vaginas)                                                                                                    |
| <b>Ascription</b>                               | At birth, people are assigned to one category or the other based on their parents’, grandparents’, or greatgrandparents’ race, or on their skin color and features. People are assigned a racial identity, white or Black; mixed heritage people are assigned as above | At birth, people are assigned a gender identity based on their sexual organs, as per above; people who can not be easily categorized in this way are assigned as parents/medical authorities see fit |
| <b>Polarization of People, Traits, and Work</b> | Whites are the opposite of Blacks, have different traits, and do different work                                                                                                                                                                                        | Men are the opposite of women, “opposite sex;” men are masculine, women are feminine; sexual division of labor                                                                                       |
| <b>Hierarchization</b>                          | Whites and white abilities and traits are viewed as superior to Blacks and Black abilities and traits                                                                                                                                                                  | Men are household heads; represent household as citizens;                                                                                                                                            |
| <b>Domination/Subordination</b>                 | Whites are given legal and economic power over Blacks, in terms of citizenship, civil rights, property rights, pay for work                                                                                                                                            | Men are given legal and economic power over women, in terms of citizenship, civil rights, and property rights, pay for work                                                                          |
| <b>Violence</b>                                 | Beating and killing of slaves; lynching; imprisonment, and threats of above                                                                                                                                                                                            | Wife beating, rape, murder, and threats of above                                                                                                                                                     |
| <b>Rationalization</b>                          | Racial theories which racialize people, and claim that whites are superior to Blacks and other peoples of color                                                                                                                                                        | Religions teach gender roles and men’s dominance as head of family; science claims women lack brain capacity, are overly emotional                                                                   |
| <b>Internalization</b>                          | Parents, schools, and religious institutions teach children (and adults) the above, and train them into their prescribed Hierarchical Polarization Paradigm roles                                                                                                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| <b>Stigmatization</b>                           | Parents, siblings, authority figures, and peers stigmatize and “make an example of” anyone who doesn’t conform, that is, of anyone who deviates from their prescribed Hierarchical Polarization Paradigm roles, as delineated above                                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                      |

Figure 3. The Seven Transformative Processes

| <b>TRANSFORMATIVE PROCESSES</b>                                                                                                   | <b>ASPECT OF HIERARCHICAL POLARIZATION PARADIGM CHALLENGED</b>                                                                                                                      | <b>BASIC THRUST OF TRANSFORMATIVE PROCESS</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Transformative Processes that Challenge the Various Hierarchical Polarities</b>                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| <b>Questioning</b>                                                                                                                | View of social identities and relationships as natural or God-given, i.e. ascription (can also challenge Hierarchical Polarization Paradigm itself)                                 | Why are things this way? Isn't that particular social practice or institution unfair? Are people really naturally different as categorized? Are people inevitably unequal and violent?                                                                                      |
| <b>Equal Opportunity</b>                                                                                                          | View that certain people are naturally superior to others; resultant restriction of rights, privileges, and occupations of subordinated group                                       | All are created equal; members of a devalued group should have the rights and privileges that the valued group has, including access to the higher-paid higher-status occupations                                                                                           |
| <b>Valuing the Devalued</b>                                                                                                       | Devaluation of subordinated peoples, along with their traits and activities                                                                                                         | The values, traits and works of the devalued group are important and valuable, and need to be recognized and revalued                                                                                                                                                       |
| <b>Integrating</b>                                                                                                                | View that certain kinds of people, ways of being, values, character traits, and works cannot/ should not be combined; polarization/segregation of people, traits, and types of work | It is healthy and balanced to integrate social spaces and relationships; to combine the two poles of a hierarchical polarity in a person and in an activity; and to combine in one's life activities that previously were polarized, such as active parenting and paid work |
| <b>Discernment</b>                                                                                                                | Negative aspects of ways of being, values, character traits, and works resulting from hierarchy and/or polarization                                                                 | Critical reexamination of the basic building blocks of our social order – including masculinity, femininity, spirituality, materialism, whiteness, nature, success – so as to free them from their distortion by hierarchization and polarization                           |
| <b>Transformative Processes that Challenge Multiple Hierarchical Polarities and the Entire Hierarchical Polarization Paradigm</b> |                                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| <b>Combining</b>                                                                                                                  | Assumption that hierarchical-polarity-created groups are homogeneous, and disconnected from one another                                                                             | Expansion of social movements beyond single-issue, identity-politics-based awareness and organizing; expansion of one's sense of solidarity in standing against the oppressions suffered by others                                                                          |
| <b>Diversifying/Unifying/Globalizing</b>                                                                                          | Inevitability of polarization, domination, and violence; fragmentation of individuality and of social movements; the Hierarchical Polarization Paradigm itself                      | Solidarity amidst diversity; globalization from below; socially responsible economic behavior, constructing a new paradigm                                                                                                                                                  |

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Amott, T. and Matthaei, J. A. (1996) *Race, Gender, and Work: A Multicultural Economic History of Women in the United States*, Boston: South End.

Belafonte, H. (Oct. 27, 2006) Bill Maher Show, Politically Incorrect.

---

Blair, M. and Stout, L. (1999) "A Team Production Theory of Corporate Law," *Virginia Law Review*, 85, 2.

Brandt, B. (1995) *Whole Life Economics*. Philadelphia: New Society Publishers.

Brecher, J., Costello T., and Smith, B. (2000) *Globalization from Below: The Power of Solidarity*, Cambridge, MA.: South End Press.

Brien, K. M. (2006) *Marx, Reason, and the Art of Freedom*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, New York: Prometheus Books.

Cavanagh, J. and Mander, J. eds. (2004) *Alternatives to Globalization: A Better World is Possible*. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler.

Center for a New American Dream, [www.newdream.org](http://www.newdream.org)

Fisher, W.F. and Ponniah, T., eds. (2004) *Another World is Possible: Popular Alternatives to Globalization at the World Social Forum*, London: Zed Books.

Folbre, N. (2001) *The Invisible Heart: Economics and Family Values*, New York: The New Press.

Gentile, M. C. (2006) *Social Impact Management*, [www.caseplace.org](http://www.caseplace.org), accessed 11/20/06.

Graduation Pledge, [www.GraduationPledge.org](http://www.GraduationPledge.org)

Groot, Meck (2006) Co-Director of Women's Theological Center. Interview on November 20, 2006.

Hodges, J., Struckmann, D., and Trost, L. (1975) *Cultural Bases of Racism and Group Oppression: An Examination of Traditional "Western" Concepts, Values and Institutional Structures Which Support Racism, Sexism and Elitism*. Berkeley, CA: Two Riders Press.

hooks, b. (1984) *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, Boston: South End Press.



Hull, G. T., Scott, P. B., and Smith, B. eds. (1982) *All the women are White, all the Blacks are men, but some of us are brave : Black women's studies*, Old Westbury, N.Y. : Feminist Press.

Jennings, A. L. (1993) "Public or Private? Institutional Economics and Feminism," in Ferber, M. A. and Nelson, J. A. (eds.) *Beyond Economic Man: Feminist Theory and Economics*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Joseph, G. and Lewis, J. (1981) *Common differences : conflicts in black and white feminist perspectives*, New York : Anchor Press/Doubleday.

Kelly, Marjorie (2001) *The Divine Right of Capital: Dethroning the Corporate Aristocracy*, San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler.

Levine, D. P. (1977) *Contributions to the Critique of Economic Theory*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Levine, D. P. (1978) *Economic Theory. Volume I. The Elementary Relations of Economic Life*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Levine, D. P. (1981) [The system of economic relations as a whole](#), London ; [Routledge & K. Paul](#).

Matthaei, J. A. (1982) *An Economic History of Women in America: Women's Work, the Sexual Division of Labor, and the Development of Capitalism*, N.Y.: Schocken Books.

Matthaei, J. A. (1996) "Why Marxist, Feminist, and Anti-Racist Economists Should be Marxist-Feminist-Anti-Racist Economists." *Feminist Economics* 2, 1.

Matthaei, J. A. (2000) "Beyond Racist Capitalist Patriarchy: Growing a Liberated Economy," in Baiman, R., Boushey, H., and Saunders, D. (eds.) *Political Economy and Contemporary Capitalism: Radical Perspectives on Economic Theory and Policy*, Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe.

Matthaei, J. A. and Brandt, B. (2001) "Healing Ourselves, Healing Our Economy: Paid Work, Unpaid Work, and the Next Stage of Feminist Economic Transformation," *Review of Radical Political Economics*, 33.

Matthaei, J. A. and Brandt, B. (forthcoming). *The Transformative Moment*.

McIntosh, Peggy (1989) "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Backpack," available at <http://stickyrice.itgo.com/whiteprivilege.html>

Mies, Maria (1986) *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale: Women in the International Division of Labor*, London: Zed Books.

Minerson, T. (2006) "From Canada, Some Thoughts on Organizing against Femicide," PEACEWORKS, November.

Mohanty, C. (2003) *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*, Durham: N.C.: Duke University Press.

Moraga, C. and Anzaldúa, G. eds. (1981), *This bridge called my back : writings by radical women of color*, Watertown, Mass.: Persephone Press, c1981

Nelson, J. (1996) *Feminism, Objectivity and Economics*, London: Routledge, 1996.

Nelson, J. (2006) *Economics for Humans*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays, [www.pflag.org](http://www.pflag.org)

Scott King, C. (2004) "Building the Beloved Community,"  
[www.jewishpost.com/jp1001/jpbr1001e.htm](http://www.jewishpost.com/jp1001/jpbr1001e.htm)

Social Investment Forum, [www.socialinvest.org](http://www.socialinvest.org).

Spelman, E. (1988) *Inessential Woman: Problems of Exclusion in Feminist Thought*, Boston: Beacon Press.

-----