

# WOMEN IN CLASS SOCIETY



HELEIETH I.B. SAFFIOTI

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## Women in Class Society

by Heleieth I.B. Saffioti

Introduction by Eleanor Burke Leacock

In this important theoretical and historical work, Brazilian sociologist Heleieth Saffioti deals with the interaction between the universal division of society based on sex and the capitalist division into classes. She focuses on two forms of capitalist society, the advanced and the emerging, with attention to the role of international capitalism in determining the particular problems of any minority in a dependent country.

The first section of the book is a theoretical analysis of the woman question, including a discussion of class and status in stratified society, which is then extended to the position of women under capitalism; of woman's labor and its relationship to the question of levels of consciousness; and of a possible socialist perspective. This sets the framework for the second section, which provides a detailed analysis of the Brazilian experience as it relates to women, especially in terms of their changing roles in the economy and their long struggle for equal education.

The final section integrates the foregoing into a broader framework, the goal of which is to demystify the way in which social science assimilates bourgeois practice. It begins with two short essays, one on Freudian theory and the other on the anthropological theory of cultural relativism as they have treated women. The major issue that emerges from these essays—the nature of the linkages between occupational and kinship structures under capitalism—is then explored in depth. Finally, the position of women is placed within a dialectical perspective. Throughout, Saffioti's argument is based on a Marxian analysis supplemented by the insights of Weber and the French structuralists.

**Heleieth I.B. Saffioti** is a Brazilian who holds a Ph.D. from the Faculty of Philosophy, Science, and Letters of Araraquara, Brazil, where she has been a full-time professor since 1971. She has written extensively on the issues of women and class for Latin American journals and has participated in feminist conferences in the United States, as well as in Canada and Brazil.

"It is important for English-speaking readers to have Heleieth Saffioti's analysis of women in capitalist society made available. . . . The book not only presents a broad theoretical statement on women's oppression and the perpetuation of capitalist relations generally, but deals with women in one country, Brazil, in the kind of historical detail that is much needed for all areas.

"At present the maintenance of bourgeois power relies heavily on divisions within the working class, and between it and its potential allies. Nationally, regionally, and locally, people are being pitted against each other according to race, sex, nationality, religion, and increasingly age as well. A strong international coalition of socialist-oriented women could play a critical role in helping to clarify and overcome these divisions. To build such a coalition, however, requires understanding of variations in women's position in different countries and different classes. Such understanding, in turn, requires for discussion studies that have the scope and rigor of Saffioti's work."

—*from the Introduction*·  
by Eleanor Burke Leacock

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