

# THE OTHER SIDE OF THE CLASS RELATION: WOMEN, MONEY, AND COMMODITIES IN CAPITALISM

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Some recent feminist scholarship has rejected Marxian methodology (Folbre, 1994, Barrett, 1991, 1992). The argument here is that Marx has many insights to contribute to the analysis of women, even though it was clearly not his primary concern. Using his analysis of the capitalist system, I will argue that the role of women in capitalism can be elaborated within his framework to illuminate issues of contemporary concern and to further develop the critique of relations of domination.

Marx's methodology uses both the abstract and the concrete. His notion of "abstract" is similar to that of common usage in logic, which implies generalizing from a series of specific cases. It is also a concept which is particular to capitalism, a particular type of generalizing. Abstract exchange value in capitalism refers to a set of social relations in which individual producers are counted as part of a generalized quantity of social labor, "the expenditure of human labour in general" (Marx, 1967, Volume I, p. 44), whereas concrete useful labor is "a creator of use-value, ... a necessary condition, independent of all forms of society" (Ibid., p. 42).

The example of his method suggests that abstract analysis of economic forces is necessarily coupled with an examination of concrete historical conditions. For example, as part of the analysis of the value of the commodity "labor power" in the abstract, he included a focus on the concrete historical institutions of the labor process. Further, while analysing the role of money, the abstract symbol of value, he paid attention to its concrete characteristics, such as metal, paper, credit. Understanding the commodity as having both abstract exchange value as well as concrete use value enabled him to unravel some sources of the contradictions and crises within the system, such as valorization and realization (see for example, pp. 113-114, 138, Volume I, Capital).

In the discussion which follows, I will begin with a review and discussion of the use of abstract and concrete concepts in Marx, and then apply this analysis to women and the family. Then I will propose a framework for the analysis of women in capitalism, identifying the implications.

## II. THE CONTRADICTION OF THE ABSTRACT AND THE CONCRETE

The abstractions of money and value occupy a central place in Marx's critique of capitalism. While it is true that in all forms of society that physical production takes place to provide means of subsistence and means of production (Vol. I, pp. 76-77), it is only in capitalism that the social relations of the producers appears as the value of the commodities they produce, the value of things. Once commodity production becomes predominant, production is guided by the anticipated value of the commodities. The producers are employed only to the extent that the value of the commodities can be realized. In this way, "social action takes the form of the action of objects, which rule the producers instead of being ruled by them." (Vol. I, pp. 75, 81). That is, the abstraction of the money form which expresses the value of commodities determines the concrete useful relations between people (Vol. I, p. 78). The conceptual abstraction of value is necessary for the establishment of the self-regulating market (Smith, Polanyi).

With the emergence of capitalism and the institutional formalization of the labor market, the "right to life" is supplanted by the abstract laws of the free market (Polanyi, pp. 82-83). For example, in England, the Poor Law Reforms of 1834 replaced the Speenhamland system of 1795 which provided for subsistence family allowances and supplements to wages. The "freedom" of the allocation of private property to the purpose of expansion of value is coupled with the institutionally reinforced

discipline of the labor market, which makes contingent access to the means of subsistence. That is, the abstract laws of the expansion of value take priority over the concrete conditions of life and its renewal, as expressed and enforced by concrete institutional arrangements in capitalist societies.

Historians have addressed the question regarding the relationship of women to property and to class. According to Lerner (1986), the subordination of women and the objectification of their reproductive capacity occurred with the earliest written history, in Sumerian and ancient Hebrew civilizations. Slaves were the first form of property and women were the first slaves (Ibid., pp. 78-79). Laws of marriage and the regulation of sexual behavior and reproduction are found in the Hammurabic code of 1750 B.C., the Middle Assyrian laws from 15<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> century B.C., and the Hebrew Covenant in the ninth and eighth century B.C. (Ibid., p. 101). Women's class position was determined by the nature of their relationships with men. Sexually available women were in the lower classes, and sexually "protected" women were essential to the reliable transmission of property and connections in the middle and upper classes (Ibid., pp. 139-140). With the emergence of the wage labor relation, workers are transmuted into the commodity labor power; the person both is and is not a commodity. During the working day the worker sells himself, and the "productive consumption" of this commodity labor power is under the control of the capitalist employer. When the form of property is "property in the person", the apparent freedom of allocation of one's "own" property masks relations of domination (Marx, Vol. I, p. 176, MacPherson). Pateman makes a similar argument with respect to women. The male sex right allocates women's sexuality as property to men, in the marriage relation, a "sexual contract". The implications of the exchange of women as objects in marriage relations are explored in Rubin (see also Rich, de Beauvoir).

A question is to what extent the forms of domination of women changed with the advent of capitalism. With the separation of work in factories and the removal of production from households, the "home" must serve new functions. While the factory becomes a place of rationalized production of abstract value, the "home" is increasingly viewed as the locus of emotion, and the role of women becomes sentimentalized, specialized, and confined (later sexualized). The elevation and celebration of the home as the center of personal family relationships facilitates the removal of these unique concrete commitments from the abstract realm of production and exchange. The relegation of human reproduction to the private family also removes from the public sphere issues of human need. The concern with the "right to life" of his wife and children is the patriarchal responsibility of the male worker who is the head of the household. His role as worker is more valued than his role as provider, literally, as in the case of production of surplus value. The adequacy of his "family wage" for the intergenerational reproduction of the labor force is a "social and moral element", not an immediate concern to capitalist producers. Women, embedded in the concrete social and family relations of the "home", are made indirectly subject to the abstract laws of motion of capital.

### **III. ALTERNATE MODEL**

The position argued here is that there is no need to reject Marx's approach in order to incorporate the household into Marx's framework. Marx's value concepts build on a duality between the abstract and concrete. This same duality can be used to integrate the household and the role of women in an understanding of the capitalist economy, while also providing a tool to analyse the contradictions of that system. The discussion begins, however, with the abstract treatment of "commodities", "value", and "circuits" in Volume I of Capital, before turning to the concrete unique operations of the household.

#### **A. VALUE**

Marx begins Volume I of Capital with a discussion of commodities and their value. Like most measures which include both quantity and quality, the commodity has an incommensurate aspect, its utility or use-value, and a quantitative aspect, its exchange value. While seeing commodities as

necessarily possessing utility and made up of a material substrate provided from nature, the ratio in which commodities exchange with one another is determined by the quantities of “abstract human labor” which they incorporate. When commodity exchange is well established, the exchange value of the commodity is anticipated in production decisions, and commodities are items which are produced with the express intention of sale.

As early as Chapter I, Volume I, in *Capital*, Marx discusses the role of money, a concrete commodity whose use value is solely to express the exchange value of all other commodities. The presence of this expression makes obscure the nature of exchange value, which appears to be a characteristic of money itself, rather than a representation of commodities as the product of social labor.

### *B. THE COMMODITY “LABOR POWER”*

When commodity production is well established, wage labor is also institutionalized. That is, workers are “free in a double sense” (p.169), free to move from feudal obligations, and also without other means of support, such as ownership of means of subsistence independent of selling their own labor. The wage laborer is the owner of his own labor power (p. 168), and sells himself as a commodity on the labor market for its exchange value, the wage. The contradiction of the commodity labor power is that the person, while a full human being with emotional

needs and creative potential, is also a commodity, a “thing” for sale, an object which is rented by the capitalist employer and “consumed” in the process of production. This unique commodity labor power is also the origin of surplus value, and the power of capital to expand.

### *C. EXPANSION OF MONEY INTO CAPITAL*

Prior to the introduction of the commodity labor power, Marx introduces the notion of the “contradiction of the formula of capital” (Chapter V). That is, mutual gains in utility by the exchange of equal values cannot result in the expansion of value, unless one buyer can always buy low and sell high, which contradicts the requirement of the exchange of equal values. The unique commodity with that characteristic is labor power, which produces more value than it costs. That is, the exchange value of labor power is the value of wage goods necessary for its (re)production, while the value that it produces in the production process is greater (Chapter VII). The capitalist can always buy labor low and sell the value of its products high, so to speak, and so accumulate ever increasing value.

For example, Marx’s money circuit of capital is as follows

$$L(1) \quad M - C \dots\dots - C' - M' \quad MP$$

The interaction between purchase and sale of commodities of equal value results in the expansion of value due to the presence of the special commodity labor power available in the market for a wage. The consumption of this special commodity produces more value in its products, C’, than for its own purchase, C. The concrete process of production with the purchased commodity inputs is denoted by “.....” in the circuit above. This expanded value in the process of production, C’, is then realized when the commodity is sold for units of the money commodity, M’.

As early as Chapter I, Volume I, Marx develops the notion of “commodity fetishism”, in which the commodities express the “social” relation of having “value”, and the relations among people resemble objects. While it is widely agreed that the commodity which serves as money must be “socially recognized” (p. 66), it is not well understood that

the relations connecting the labour of one individual with that of the rest appear, not as direct social relations between individuals at work, but as what they really are, material relations between persons and social relations between things. (p. 73).

Because workers are viewed more as commodities for sale, only the products of their labor have “value”, a “social hieroglyphic”, according to Marx (p. 74). Because of the obscure role of money, its power to expand,  $M - M'$ , seems to be a mysterious quality of money itself, by virtue of its merely being wisely invested (by men, no doubt), or merely placed in a bank.

*D. REAL COMMODITY EXCHANGE*

Interlinked with this circuit of the expansion of money as capital is another one, as workers purchase commodities for their own means of subsistence and/or reproduction. They sell their own labor power as a commodity, at its value, and use the money proceeds to purchase wage goods of equal value. Although workers participate in commodity exchange, there is no expansion of value in their circuit, because they do not have the opportunity to purchase the commodity labor power. There is no process of production in this circuit, but only distribution.

(2)  $Clp - M - Cwg$

They sell their labor power as a commodity,  $Clp$ , in exchange for money,  $M$ , and purchase wage goods of equal value in the market,  $Cwg$ . Since the component parts of this circuit are the same and are likewise exchanges of equal value, it is not possible to easily distinguish this workers’ circuit from the expansion of capital in (1). The appearance that money can expand value is mystified by the intermingling of different types of circuits in the market exchange of equal value, and appears to be characteristic of money itself, while production of value is hidden in the “private” firm. That is, a highly mystified, abstract commodity, money, appears to reproduce itself in the sphere of circulation on an ever-increasing scale.

*E. THE HOUSEHOLD AND THE REALIZATION PROCESS*

There is another circuit which is consistent with Marx’s development, and can be added with no modification of the other two. The household provides labor as a commodity,  $Clp$ , to the commodity production sector, which after its consumption as labor power, returns to the household with diminished energies,  $Clp'$ , where  $Clp' < Clp$ . This sale of labor power results in the money wage,  $M$ , usable to purchase commodities,  $Cwg$ , of greater use value than use values produced in the home for the same labor time,  $Ch$ , or  $Cwg > Ch$ . Together with household labor,  $Lhh$ , and use values produced at home,  $Uhh$ , the diminished labor power,  $Clp'$ , is reinvigorated to reappear to the wage sector the next day (or next generation),  $Clp$ , restored to its original value.

$$(3) \quad Clp - \begin{matrix} Clp' \\ M \end{matrix} - Cwg \ \& \ \dots \ - \begin{matrix} Lhh \\ Uhh \end{matrix} - Clp$$

Here there is also a concrete process of “re-creation” designated by “.....” in the circuit above. This is different than the concrete process of commodity production in circuit (1) because this process is conducted with non-commodity inputs, household labor,  $Lhh$ , and home-produced use values,  $Uhh$ , as well as purchased commodities,  $Cwg$ .

One reason, then, for the dependency of the household on the commodity sector is the greater productivity in the commodity sector,  $Cwg > Ch$ , which results from the monopoly of the means of production. Nonetheless the smooth reproduction of the commodity labor power depends on the presence of these non-commodity inputs,  $Lhh$  and  $Uhh$ , as well as commodity exchange to obtain  $Cwg$ .

The labor power circuit can simply reproduce itself at the same level,

$$(4) \quad Clp - Clp' - Clp$$

and still achieve ever expanding living standard, Cwg, as long as the capitalist sphere becomes increasingly productive. As long as a given amount of value, Clp, can exchange for an increasing amount of real use values, Cwg, then mere repetition of the circuit in (4) can increase the real living standard of the workers, Cwg, such as

$$(2') \quad Clp - M - Cwg'$$

where Cwg' is greater use values than real commodities purchased with a previous wage, Cwg, although of equal value.

That is, a given remuneration of labor power, M, can purchase increasing real use values, Cwg, as productivity is enhanced with competition and technical change, and reduces the value of a given set of real commodities. Further, the household must be convinced to purchase this ever-expanding amount of commodities, in order to realize the expansion of money as value,  $M - M'$ , the first circuit in(1).

All three circuits, although appearing autonomous, are interlinked. Because of the labor market, labor power can be sold at its value for money. Because of the commodity market, workers can find wage goods available for sale. Because of typical productivity growth in the capitalist commodity sector (and the associated alteration of preferences to favor mass-produced goods like white bread), the commodities purchased with a wage, Cwg, are often of greater use value, both in quantity and quality, than the use values which can be produced in the home for the same time, Ch. And because of the productivity differential and the need to restore the diminished commodity labor power, Clp', to Clp, commodities can be sold to households.

As a result of the three interlinked circuits, capitalists can realize expanded value,  $M - M'$ , and the workers can raise their standard of living,  $Cwg > Ch$ . Partly for this reason, productivity growth is the elixir and sine qua non of the capitalist system (Lazonick), through increasing relative surplus value and improved living standards. The reproduction of the labor force also depends on the presence in the household of non-commodity concrete labor and use values, Uhh and Lhh.

#### *F. IMPLICATIONS*

The addition of the third circuit, (3) above, highlights several issues. First, money would not be able to expand as value,  $M - M'$ , without the realization process, most of which requires selling wage goods to workers. Second, capitalist development can and often does bring some real gains in living standard to workers, even in the context of exploitation and alienation at the workplace. Third, the capitalist commodity sector must typically penetrate the household sector in search of markets. To participate in the process of obtaining more and improved commodities, the household requires M, and so is linked inextricably with the cash nexus, securing its dependence on selling labor power to obtain M. The irony is that while the household is dependent on the commodity sphere for means of subsistence, the commodity sphere is dependent on the household for the availability of labor power and the realization of expanded value, a dual form of dependency which is often overlooked because of the relative devaluation of the household in the capitalist system.

#### *G. WOMEN AND MONEY*

These interlinked circuits have implications for the role of women as well. First, Marx presumes that the reproduction of the labor force is not problematic.

The continuous conversion of money into capital assumes this, [that] the seller of labour-power must perpetuate himself, 'in the way that every living individual perpetuates himself, by procreation.'

Marx, 1967, Volume I, pp. 171-172

Second, the importance of obtaining money, M, by selling labor power diminishes the social value of household labor, as it is not exchangeable for anything or valued by money. Third, due to the sexual contract (Pateman), the household is typically inhabited by women, and reproduction of families takes place in “privacy”, under the control of the male household head, a system of norms which predates capitalism (see also Marx, 1978, pp.159-160). Female sexuality is hidden and controlled in this private sphere of the household, the private property of the (male) worker (literally in first half of the nineteenth century in England (Staves, Shanley), and normatively afterward). Nonetheless, female sexuality is the underlying presence behind the ability of labor power to reproduce (on both daily and inter-generational basis) and also the power of money to expand, although masked by the interlinking circuits, and the social invisibility of both private spheres of the household and the firm relative to the public sphere of circulation.

Marx’s circuits as developed in *Capital* can be interpreted as having “denied and then reappropriated the labor of the mother in his historical and labor-based account of self-created man,” as Di Stefano observes (1991, p. 156). Yet this is also an accurate portrayal of the circuits of “capital” as they are traced with interlinking flows of money and goods. If Marx is guilty of “male appropriation of female reproductive powers” (Di Stefano, p. 162; a similar concept is found in Lerner), then so also is the capitalist system. Capitalism, as it operates, and as it is perceived by its participants, sees money as self-expanding value, with no awareness of the contributions of either male workers or female child-bearers and child-rearers. This mystique surrounding money is an essential component of the reproduction of the system, coordinating the behavior of participants to place the importance of the acquisition of money above social relationships, another example of the dominance of the abstract over the concrete in capitalism. A gendered “critique of political economy” is necessary to expose these invisible relationships.

#### *H. ABSTRACT AND CONCRETE*

All three circuits are in abstract value terms. Nonetheless, these circuits are embedded in concrete social and historical institutions (Granovetter) without which they could not be reproduced. For example, in *Capital*, Marx describes the historical conditions by which labor is available as a commodity, in which money is accepted as a universal equivalent form of value, and by which the capacity for labor must be restored in both a daily and generational basis. He does not try to explore, however, the historical development by which household labor is female, by which domestic production is replaced by commodity production in the development of a mass market, or the determinants of the growth of the population and labor force as a whole. Yet these are appropriate issues for concrete historical analysis, perfectly consistent with Marx’s work, and which might draw productively on the work of recent women’s scholars.

### **IV. CONTROL OF SEXUALITY**

It is important to define the role of sexuality in the process of production and expansion of capital, drawing upon the growing literature regarding the relations of domination of women in capitalism (see, for example, Hartmann, Foucault, Rubin, Lerner, MacKinnon, Pateman, Matthaei, Vogel, Fine, Secombe, Quick).

Women serve as

- 1) instruments of (sexual/sensual) pleasure;
- 2) means of human reproduction;
- 3) providers of social relations of human development.

In the last category are included provision of child and elder care, interpersonal facilitation, counselor/therapist, social organizer, teacher, nurturer, mentor (see Folbre and Himmelweit on “caring

labor”, for example). Just like the highly specialized division of labor at the work place results in de-skilling workers, so also the separation of spheres and concentration of production in the firm polarized and narrowed the functions served by women, whose normative gender roles became increasingly specialized in these three functions. Consequently a similar critique can be made of the alienation associated with narrowing roles and scope of concerns leading to restriction of the personal development of women.

Given the structure of the capitalist household, the reproduction of the commodity labor power in circuit (3) above cannot be accomplished without the presence of female labor in the household. These requirements include heterosexual, docile women as sex partners, mothers, and consumers. The normative role of women in capitalist cultures is disciplined to fit such prescriptions, a process vital but distinct from the disciplining of workers at capitalist production processes. Market provision of these same services exists as partial substitutes, with women serving in many of these same sex-segregated occupations, including day care, domestic workers, prostitutes, wait persons, home health care aids, and social workers.

In capitalist societies, there is a priority placed on the abstract circuits of the expansion of capital, over the concrete relations of persons. Consequently the service-related occupations of women, whether unpaid in the home or paid in the workplace, have less social value than those which involve control and investment money or the production and circulation of commodities, largely occupied by men, especially at the higher ranks of authority. These female-dominated occupations, even when paid, are typically low wage and less secure. This dominance of the abstract over the concrete is reflected in many dimensions.

#### *A. WOMEN AND THE FAMILY IN CAPITAL*

In Marx’s writings there are discussions of the role of women and the family, in both abstract and concrete terms, both in capitalism and in other forms of society. For example, in *Capital*, Marx mentions the concrete, historically varying forms of the family (*Capital*, p. 490), as well as other forms of social labor (pp. 76-80). For example, the “distribution of work and the regulation of labor time” in the patriarchal peasant family is seen as based clearly on differences in age and sex (p. 78), not disguised as “social relations between the products of labour” (p. 77), as in capitalism. The “Teutonic-Christian form” of the family, is mentioned, as is ancient Roman, ancient Greek, or the Eastern forms, which “taken together form a series in historical development”, no one of which is absolute and final.

In the historical chapters in *Capital*, Marx does discuss the concrete characteristics of male and female labor, and the effect of capitalism on the household and reproduction of labor power. He quotes factory inspectors, doctors, Lords, members of the Children’s Employment Commission, as well as male workers with expressed attitudes against the employment of women (although some employers preferred married women for their docility and low cost (p. 402)). In the discussion of the Factory Acts in Volume I of *Capital*, he points to the use of female labor to break the resistance of male workers, to concern with the morality of female workers, the impact female labor force participation on lowering male wages, and the general neglect of the morals and health of the children of the working class, and infanticide and dosing with opiates, particularly with working mothers (Chapter XV). In quite modern-sounding language, he mentioned that working wives reduce their “free labor at home..for the support of the family”, increasing the cost of the family as more wage goods must be purchased (p. 395).

## *B. GENDER IN CAPITAL*

The abstract categories of exchange value can refer to any type of human labor, including women and children, as Marx discusses. In fact, in periods of history in which women do work in large numbers, their wage labor is treated as any other, although lower priced, in most cases. In fact, this aspect of “abstract” labor has opened the possibility that women workers are treated “equally”, like any other type of human labor.

In Chapter One of Capital, in order to unravel the “commodity”, Marx had to discuss both the abstract and the concrete aspects of commodities, both use value and exchange value. The first three sections address the abstract nature of exchange value, and the last, in order to contrast with the fetishism of commodities, discusses concrete forms of social historical labor. It is only in this last section that gender is identified, as part of describing concrete forms of labor. Here the producers are “men”, whereas in the earlier discussions value is represented by “abstract human labor”. And in this last section, the free association of producers is described as “freely associated men [among whom production] is consciously regulated in accordance with a settled plan” (p. 80).

Finally, when the capitalist assumes the form of a concrete person, the “*dramatis personae*” who knows “the secret of profit making” is “Mr. Moneybags”, who has a masculine swagger (although the “timid” worker is also male) (Marx, 1967, Volume I, p. 176).

## *C. CONTRADICTION BETWEEN ABSTRACT AND CONCRETE ROLES FOR WOMEN IN CAPITALISM*

In the long run, women’s wage employment has dramatically expanded under capitalism. Nonetheless, institutional responses are usually forthcoming, as the traditional methods of control of female sexuality are then threatened. As Marx noted in Chapter XV, the “factory legislation, that first conscious and methodical reaction of society, [was] just as much the necessary product of modern industry as cotton yarn, self actors, and the electric telegraph.” (p. 480). Marx understood that abstract and concrete forms were inextricably tied. In this case, “modern industry...had also loosened all traditional family ties...by sweeping away the economic basis of parental authority..” (p. 489). As a result, concrete, historical institutional changes were “necessary”, in shifting coalitions of capital, labor, reformers, and others, to maintain the control of sexuality, a consideration that he does not explicitly articulate. He does understand, however, that the expansion of industry challenges “*patria potestas*, parental authority” (p. 489), and that “independent” women employed in traveling agricultural gangs left their children “*pining*” at home (p.399).

Marx assumed a system of control of women which was well in place at the time of his writing, but perhaps underestimated the ways in which capitalist development would require different institutional, and contradictory, arrangements. Women and children in the labor force at the time of the Industrial Revolution did threaten the ability of labor power to reproduce itself, until reformers and male unionists instituted “protective legislation” (Hartmann, 1981).

That is, Marx observed, but did not fully articulate, the contradictory role of women in capitalist system. Just as in the case of commodities and of labor power, there is a contradiction between the abstract and concrete roles of women. On the one hand, there are pressures for women to enter the labor force, as equal, “abstract” labor, capable of producing value and surplus value, only more cheaply. This labor force participation also helps women achieve a certain equality with men, more financial independence, and to contribute to the support of the family. On the other hand, this participation also undermines women’s “concrete” role in the household, where historically given relations of domination there help to reproduce the labor force, provide a motive and reward for the sale of labor power, and to realize surplus value. Marx sees the institutional response as “necessary” to restore that household authority,

but did not further analyse the conflicting social movements which took up the separate aspects of this contradictory role of women, including the women's movement itself.

Marx might have even been aware of the work of Mary Wollstonecraft, for example, who wrote in England in 1790 in the "Vulgar Political Economy" tradition, arguing for the "equal rights of woman" as well as "man". At the same time, her contemporary, Hannah More, was developing and disseminating the norms of the "domestic ideal", which described how the aspiring middle class homemaker would play the role of the "angel in the house" (Kowaleski-Wallace, Crow). This split in the woman's movement, which persists even today, is now referred to as the "equality/difference" debate (Sawicki), resonating with the abstract/concrete poles of the commodity labor power<sup>5</sup>. In a profoundly ironic twist, the phrase "right-to-life" now refers to a movement aimed at restricting access to abortion, aiming to reinforce domestic roles for women, rather than one aimed at assuring equal access to the means of subsistence.<sup>6</sup>

## **V. THE OTHER SIDE OF THE CLASS RELATION: WORK AND "HOME"**

Given the pull of women into the labor force to produce value and surplus value as "abstract" labor, it is difficult to understand the stubbornness of the "concrete" domestic arrangements which tie women to the home. Further examination of the Marxian concept of the commodity "labor power" can help to answer this question, where the role of women can be seen as vital to managing its contradictions.

The extreme gender polarities involved in the "domestic ideal", which developed along with the wage labor force in England (Clark, Davidoff and Hall), reflect the contradictions in the commodity "labor power", which both is and is not a "commodity". The normative concrete role of women in the household reflects the polar opposite of concrete relations among men in the workplace. As the male worker is an "object" which mechanically obeys rational rules at work, the female in the household embodies humanity, emotion, morality. That is, there is an institutional arrangement to support each pole of the contradiction of the commodity "labor power": the worker is an object at the workplace and a person at home. This duality is integrated over time in the circuit (equation (3) above) of the working day which includes both work and re-creation at home. This unity of disparate roles is maintained with difficulty, and is supported with ideological norms, which change over time in response to conflicts and challenges from people who resist the direction of their lives from the abstract principles of the expansion of capital.

This understanding of the role of women in capitalism goes beyond enumerating the concrete types of work actually performed in or related to the household. It examines the images which are widely "known" to describe women's labor (Barrett), and the methods by which these norms are spread, accepted, internalized, and enforced. This particular form of the control of women and their sexuality is posited as an integral part of the "class relation" of the commodity "labor power". Consequently, the norms and ideologies by which their behavior is circumscribed are just as fundamental to understanding the economy in a given period as is a detailed analysis of the labor process, that method of control of labor in the workplace, which occupies a prominent place in Capital.

The concrete transformation processes designated by "....." in the circuits (1) and (3) are both subject to contingency, beyond the bounds of the contractual value exchanges between commodities. In circuit (1), the extraction of labor from labor power has been subject to a comprehensive inquiry which has examined the concrete institutional detail of managing the labor process in the face of alienated working conditions (Edwards, Gordon, Edwards, Reich, Burawoy, Shaiken, as well as Marx). Similarly the concrete restoration of the capacity to labor in the household in circuit (3) is the subject of a new literature studying the norms and their dissemination regarding women in capitalism (Clark, Davis, Rose, Ryan, Valenze, Taylor, Pietrykowski).

## VI. CONCLUSION

Rather than see all human relationships in terms of prices and costs, even the “cost of children” (Folbre), a Marxist-feminist analysis can uncover the alienating and distorting lens of commodity fetishism, and provide a vision of human relationships in a coherent social whole.

The position argued here is that incorporation of the household need not require a redefinition of Marx’s concept of value in order to re-value the work of women. More useful is rather an addition of a circuit of household reproduction of labor power, and acquisition of use values. Retaining and expanding Marx’s circuits of money and capital highlight the mystification of the power of money to expand, and reveal the role of both women and men in that process. The addition of a circuit for the reproduction of labor power,

(4)  $CLP - CLP' - CLP$

helps elucidate the gendered contradictions of the circuit for the self-expansion of value and capital,

(1)  $M - C - M'$ .

The fetishism of money and commodities coordinates the behavior of participants in the capitalist system and assures its continuation. Unmasking its dual and contradictory nature requires concrete historical specification, including the analysis of the organization of sexuality and gender ideologies, as well as a critique of abstract symbols, such as money.

As “abstract” labor, women have been increasingly drawn into the labor force to produce value and surplus value. This contradicts their “concrete” role in the household, reproducing and motivating labor and “realizing” the expanded value of money through their consumer purchases. In ideological terms, women serve as the “dual” of the commodity “labor power,” representing the emotional connections and human caring which are repressed in male workers who sell themselves as “objects” to capitalist employers. Each pole has had representatives in the women’s movement since its inception in the eighteenth century, one pushing for “equal” rights as “abstract” labor, the other for protection, as guardians of the home and children.

Women are part of the class relation of the commodity “labor power”, even if not at the site of production. This can be illustrated by historical examples of the identity of participants, the content, and the timing of ideological discussions regarding the proper role of women, even as quoted in *Capital*. That is, both historical and contemporary examples will show that there have been prominent public discussions of women’s place, they tend to be divided between norms which keep women dedicated to roles in the family or fully participating in the labor force, and these discussions intensify when the economy is undergoing significant structural transitions.

The contradiction of women’s abstract role as labor in the capitalist workplace and women’s concrete domestic role in the home is related to the contradiction of abstract and concrete characteristics of commodities, money, and the commodity “labor power”. The abstract equality which women may have partially achieved in the workplace is now challenged by the ideological power of concrete institutional norms of their subordinate role in the home. The coupling of laissez faire policies and anti-feminist backlash in the contemporary period suggests that the presence of women in the home, at least normatively, helps to manage the contradictory effects of market hegemony. The ideological elaboration of gender norms is a necessary accompaniment to “economic” policies, in order to manage the contradictory roles of men and women in the capitalist system.

## FOOTNOTES

1. Protected from men or for men?

2.  $C_{wg}$  will be larger than  $C_h$  only under certain conditions: first, that productivity growth is greater than increases in the rate of exploitation; second that there is some minimum level of productivity in the capitalist firm which is greater than in the household.

Ch is not actually in value terms, since not a product of the capitalist workplace. Comparisons can be made with Cwg only by three criteria, use value, the number of hours of household labor, or common units of a standard commodity.

3. See Rich and Rubin, for example, for a critique of compulsory heterosexuality.

4. There is an extensive discussion of the lower valuations of women's work in the Comparable Worth literature (Remick, Aldrich and Buchele, Hartmann and Treimann, Figart), and limits to women's upward mobility in the Glass Ceiling commission report of 1991.

5. The split between equal rights feminists and "maternalists" who lobby within the context of the domestic ideal (Koven and Michel) can be documented throughout the history of the women's movement. See Sklar, 1991, for a discussion of the division within the women's movement in the early twentieth century U.S. In the 1960's, equal rights advocates such as Gloria Steinem and Betty Friedan were challenged by Phyllis Schlafly who defended the domestic ideal (S.J. Douglas). In the 1990's the contrast can be illustrated by the contrasting images of Hillary Clinton versus Martha Stewart (Talbot) and the anti-feminist backlash (Faludi).

6. Contrast with discussion of Polanyi above.

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