

Contemporary feminist political economy (PE) and feminism as a sphere of analysis emerged through the women's movement in the 1970s. Feminist political economy PE is concerned with bringing women's economic role and contributions to the fore. This was necessary as the two dominant theories—neoclassical economics and Marxian political economy PE—were seen as unable to provide a framework to consider how gender relates to the economy (Tong, 2009, 116). This short paper will outline why neoclassical economics continues to be incompatible with feminist political economy PE analyses. However, it will be argued that feminist political economy PE is not incompatible with Marxian political economy PE.

The unit of analysis and core organizational concept for neoclassical economics is the utility-maximizing, rational individual. The economy is seen as being steered by the aggregate impact-effect of individuals acting in their own material interest through the market (Marshall, 2003, 121). This entry point is fundamentally at odds with the feminist approach to women as an economic and social group, and its concern with women's collective economic contributions. Neoclassical economics cannot account for large-scale patterns of gendered exploitation in the workforce. This is because it regards labour as a "factor of production," and, through applying marginal analysis to show that each factor is "rewarded" with returns corresponding to their productivity (Stilwell, 2012, 195), there is no room for an enquiry into women's lower wages, or why women's "returns" are lower than those of men for the same jobs as men. Moreover, a great deal of women's labour takes place occurs in the household. This work is seen as "outside" of the market and thus outside the realm of analysis for neoclassical economics (Nelson, 1996, 141).

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Neoclassical economics argues that the economic behavior of individuals is determined by the desires and wants of humans beings (Resnick and Wolff, 1987, 240). It must hence conclude that women's "nonmarket" work is a product of choice. Therefore, neoclassical economics is steeped in biological essentialism—for instance, the idea that women are inherently caring and suited to domesticity, and while men are naturally competitive and thus better suited to "real" market engagement. It is this very ideology that feminism seeks to challenge, emphasizing the social construction of gender. Methodologically, the deductive, positivist approach of neoclassical economics cannot be reconciled with feminism's normative, value-laden agenda.

Marx himself did not specifically analyze women's oppression. However, his work provides powerful tools for revealing the structures underpinning the oppression of women (Gimenez and Vogel, 2005, 6). Locating these structures, Engels ([1888]; 1977) developed a comprehensive analysis of the significance of the family unit to the capitalist economy. An integral contribution to Marxian political economy (PE), this approach confirms that it is also possible to analyze the way that manner in which the relations of production construct and differentiate society's members based on gender. Marxist feminists have drawn upon this work and continue to make significant contributions to this approach in our contemporary context (see Gimenez, 2005 and Vogel, 1995).

There are two interrelated, core "grounding points" that can be identified, which that provide a structural framework for feminist PE analyses. Firstly, Marx and Engels recognized

that the root of women's oppression was in the family unit—an essential economic unit of class society (Engels [1888]; 1977). Arising alongside the development of a society divided into classes, the family privatizes the costs of reproducing the workforce and protects the privately-owned wealth of the capitalist class. Secondly, the gendered division of labour that stems from women's relationship (or lack thereof) to the means of production defines their primary responsibilities as within the family. ~~This means that, relegating their women's~~ role as waged workers ~~is to~~ secondary position. Women have thus historically formed the majority of the working class and a “super-exploitable” layer due to, ~~and through~~ their struggle for financial independence. They are, as Marx ([1844] 1959) described, a “reserve army of labour” for the capitalists. The Marxian analysis of the family allows for an understanding of the gendered constitution of class. It means that an independent analysis of women's public and private labour is possible; ~~whilst drawing upon, and basing this analysis based on within,~~ class relations.

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In relating to Marxian PE's analysis of class and class struggle, there is a widely-held misconception that feminism is incompatible with Marx's “two class binary” (Stilwell; 2012: 362). However, the emphasis Marxian PE places upon the proletariat and bourgeoisie relation is due to its objective aim of producing a general theory that captures the totality of social and productive relations, of which class is the primary organizational concept. Marx ([1844] 1959) of course recognized the complexities of intersecting oppressions in creating material divisions within the working class (Marx [1844], 1959: -). Denying the gendered constitution of class means that relations that produce patriarchy are partitioned from those that transform people and things into commodities under capitalism – ~~there are thus~~ two distinct systems of oppression are thus proposed. Beloso (2012: 53) argues that if a wedge is driven between patriarchy and

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capitalism, then class is no longer an epistemological relation, but a static identity. ~~Rather than seeing class~~ must be seen as a dynamic process as rather than a rigid, ahistorical binary, ~~it must be seen as a dynamic process~~. Therefore, political movements and theoretical analyses, ~~which that~~ seek to organize against those existing material divisions are paramount to an analysis of class struggle.

In summary, this discussion shows that feminist PE is not only compatible with Marxian PE, but it can also play a significant role in contextualizing Marx's analyses of class and class struggle. It can ensure that Marxism is a living and breathing theory that relates to current economic, political, and social conditions. Conversely, feminist PE analyses are incompatible with neoclassical economics.

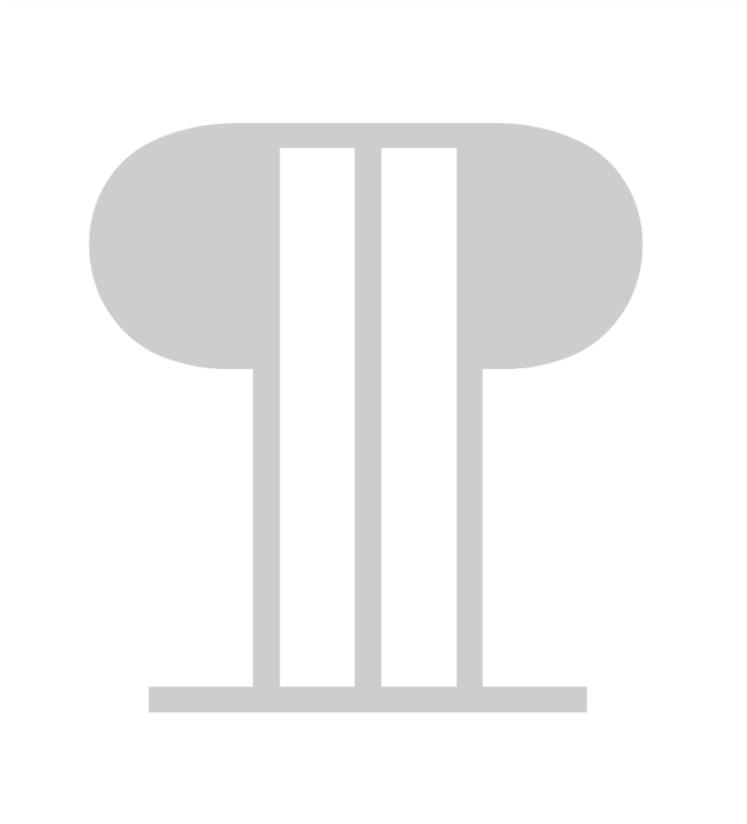
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~~Engels, Frederick. ((1888)); 1977.) "The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State." In *Marx, Karl and Engels, Frederick, Selected Works: Volume Three, by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, 204-334.* Moscow; Progress Publishers, pp. 204-334.~~

~~Gimenez, Martha E. (2005.) "Capitalism and the Oppression of Women: Marx Revisited." *Science and Society*, vol. 69 (no. 1); pp. 11-33.~~

~~Gimenez, Martha, and Vogel, Lise Vogel. (2005.) "Marxist-Feminist Thought Today: Introduction." *Science and Society*, vol. 69 (no. 1); pp. 5-10.~~

~~Holstrom, Nancy. (2003.) "The Socialist Feminist Project." *Monthly Review*, vol. 54, no. (10); pp. 38-48.~~

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~~Marx, Karl. ((1844); 1959.) *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844.* Moscow; Progress Publishers.~~

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Matthaei, Julie. (1996.) "Why Feminist, Marxist, and Anti-Racist Economists Should Be Feminist-Marxist-Anti-Racist Economists." *Journal of Feminist Economics*, vol. 2, no. (1), pp. 22-42.

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~~Marx, Karl. (1844, 1959) *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, Moscow, Progress Publishers~~

Nelson, Julie. (1995.) "Feminism and Economics." *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, vol. 9, (no. 2), pp. 131-148.

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Tong, R. (2009.) *Feminist Thought: A More Comprehensive Introduction*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

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