

Rethinking the Categories of Feminist Theory:  
the Relevance of the Rise of the Market Economy.

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### Abstract

Feminist theory is often articulated as a series of categories such as liberal feminism, socialist feminism, Marxist feminism, psychoanalytic feminism, etc. These categories have aided the initial development of feminist thought, but their prevalence limits discussion to predictable parameters.

At the same time, feminists often have notably divergent responses to the rise of the market economy. In particular, there is a difference of opinion about the liberating possibilities of participating in a free market economy. Some feminists emphasize that the market economy provides an opportunity for women to free themselves from gender restrictions expressed in family and kinship traditions. But many other feminists, are (from varying perspectives) skeptical that participation in the free market results in freedom for women (or other benefits to women, men or the world). The argument draws on work by Linda Nicholson and Karl Polanyi to show that thinking through the historically changing relations between market, family and politics provides a thought-provoking basis for re-interpreting the main lines of feminist argument. This conceptualization can help to destabilize old categories and to recast often divisive debates (for example, over issues such as prostitution, pornography and housework).

Feminist theory is often articulated as a series of categories of thought: liberal feminism, radical feminism, socialist feminism, Marxist feminism, postcolonial feminism, psychoanalytic feminism and so on. These categories have aided the initial development of feminist thought; they provide a convenient framework for understanding the history of feminist thought and therefore, for teaching it. An early source of this approach was Alison Jaggar's clear and rigorous 1977 essay, "Political Philosophies of Women's Liberation." In her 1983 book, Feminist Politics and Human Nature, Jaggar further developed her thinking about the distinctions, describing four approaches: liberal feminism, Marxist feminism, radical feminism and socialist feminism.<sup>1</sup>

This division of categories and its later elaborations and additions have influenced many thinkers and shaped the organization of hundreds of courses. But the categories have their limitations, they can confine debate to predictable parameters, and they have acquired an authority which can impinge on the clarity of debates.

For example, consider the use of the distinction between liberal and radical feminists, so prominent in North American feminist discourse. The terms are often juxtaposed, a liberal feminist is assumed to be more moderate than a radical feminist. But in some contexts, to be a liberal feminist is to be a very radical opponent of the status quo. This might be true of liberal feminists in a theocracy, for example. (Cf. Eisenstein 1981.)<sup>2</sup>

The term 'radical' in the phrase 'radical feminist' is also ambiguous; a speaker might implicitly use it to refer to the pace of change involved or to the magnitude of change sought. But sometimes feminists seek to make substantial changes gradually. In addition, sometimes students of feminism use the term quite loosely to refer to the level of commitment involved. These different uses may have importance and resonance for the speakers who use them but their unconscious conflation or confusion can cause misunderstanding.

The categories also have some pedagogical limitations. When I first began teaching feminist theory, I used the distinctions to organize an introductory course. Some students repeatedly asked whether a given writer's work is liberal feminist or radical or socialist, and so on; employing the categories to organize the course seemed to mislead them into thinking that distinguishing the types of feminist theory is the main point of the field. I now organize the course by themes rather than by types of feminist theory. In part, this is because I have worried that overuse of the divisions impedes our ability to grapple with a writer's work in its uniqueness and to assess its idiosyncratic strengths and weaknesses.

Lastly, the categories do not accurately describe the contours of some important feminist debates. For example, liberal feminists, like classical liberals in general, are said to be opposed to increased state interference in the private affairs of individuals. (Jaggar 1977, 259; Tong 1998, 11) On the key issue of pornography, one might therefore expect

liberal feminists to be anti-censorship, but many in fact favor it. (Clark 1980) Meanwhile, the term “radical” fails to tell us much about the position of feminists on the issue of pornography. Many radical feminists are strongly in favor of censorship – perhaps the most famous radical feminist, Catharine MacKinnon, is famous as a champion of state-generated censorship regulations. Other feminists who have been characterized as radical are strongly against such actions. Gayle Rubin, for example, opposes the censorship of non-violent pornography and defends the rights of sexual minorities. (Rubin 1984) She has been called a pro-sex feminist or a feminist sexual libertarian -- a term I will return to later. Similarly, some radical feminists are critics of legalized prostitution (MacKinnon 1989; Pateman 1988) and others, who might see themselves as both radical and feminist, endorse it.

For all these reasons, it makes sense for feminists to consider alternative ways of conceptualizing feminist discourse. The present article suggests an alternative conceptualization based on feminist responses to the market economy. It begins from the observation that feminists often have very different opinions about the liberating possibilities of participating in a free market economy. For example, some feminists emphasize that the market economy provides an opportunity for women to free themselves from gender restrictions expressed in family and kinship traditions. Other feminists are (from varying perspectives) skeptical that participation in the free market results in freedom for women (or other goods for women, for people in general or for the world). Of course, one wants to avoid creating rigid new labels and making the false universal claims that have marred too much feminist theory.<sup>3</sup> But thinking about these new conceptualizations can destabilize old categories and help to recast some divisive debates (over issues such as prostitution, pornography and housework) that have been shaped by them. In what follows, I attempt to provide clear descriptions of tendencies that leave room for thinkers who might use them to express the eclecticism of their own thought. This might involve hybridization, ambivalence, nuance or all of the above. But my main argument is that contemplating the rise of the market economy and its dominance over kinship and political structures generates a new perspective on diverse feminist approaches to policy and action.

The argument is inspired by thinking through descriptions of the historically changing relations between market, family and politics found in the work of Linda Nicholson and Karl Polanyi. We will examine their theories before turning to the main lines of feminist argument about whether the free market frees women.

### The Liberation of Market Economy

Why is the liberation of the market economy of such significance to feminist theory? My argument was prompted by thinking through descriptions of the historically changing relations between market, family and politics found in Linda Nicholson’s important essay, “Feminism and Marx: Integrating Kinship with the Economic.” In this essay, Nicholson analyzes the strengths and weaknesses of Marxist theory when it comes to understanding gender. She draws on the work of Karl Polanyi on market capitalism to argue that an accurate understanding of women’s position requires understanding both the historical emergence of an economic sphere separate from the domestic and political spheres and the dominance of the economic sphere over those spheres. She alleges that

both of these developments are features of market capitalism and both have major effects on gender relations and women's status.<sup>4</sup>

In her earlier book, Gender and History (1986), Nicholson had argued the importance of an historical approach to understanding gender. In "Feminism and Marx" she brings this historical perspective to bear on Marxist theory in order to assess its ability to illuminate gender. She argues that when the Marxist approach is attentive to the historical changes in relations amongst the family, state and economy, it can be helpful in learning about gender. But the theory does not always maintain this attentiveness; Nicholson suggests that some Marxist categories are implicitly rooted in capitalist relations and are applied uncritically to pre-capitalist cultures. Because of this problem, she contends, Marxist theory is not as useful in understanding gender as it could be.

Nicholson's thesis in "Feminism and Marx" is that while Marxist theory assumes the economic sphere is separate from kinship relations and organizes them, this is a feature of capitalism alone. Capitalism requires the separation and primacy of the economic. Marxist theory erroneously projects the separation and primacy of the economic sphere that is characteristic of capitalism on all societies. This, she contends, explains the weakness of the theory in analyzing gender in both pre-capitalist and capitalist societies.

Pre-capitalist societies, in her view, cannot be understood through the separation and domination of the economic sphere over kinship because within them gender, childrearing and economic roles are structured above all through kinship. It is kinship that "decisively structures" other human activities and not economics. In fact, in Gender and History, Nicholson defines kinship as "a principle of relation, especially by blood, which governs the social whole."<sup>5</sup> In pre-capitalist societies, kinship rules regarding marriage and sexuality shape both a gendered division of labor and women's degree of "control over the means and results" of the production of food and objects. ("Feminism and Marx" p. 25). We will consider the case of gender in capitalist societies shortly.

Nicholson's larger argument about how the rise of capitalism shapes women's status relies Karl Polanyi's work. In The Great Transformation (1944), Polanyi argued that a market economy based on the motive of gain is a singular departure in human history; such an economy tends to create the dominance of its key principle, the price principle, over other social principles such as those from the political sphere (or as Nicholson notes, the familial sphere).

### The Distinctiveness of the Market Economy and Its Impact on Women

In The Great Transformation, Polanyi argues that the modern free market economy tends to foster the dominance of the economic sphere over the political sphere. The market economy pushes, as it were, for the removal of the kind of state regulation that prevailed within feudalism and mercantilism. As we will see, these systems sometimes featured extreme control over labor.

Polanyi's most interesting arguments stem from early nineteenth century England, which he sees as the pivotal setting for understanding capitalism's emergence. "Market society" he contends was "born in England." (2001, 32). In a particularly resonant passage, Polanyi recounts the tale of the emergence of the Speenhamland Law. With the rise of industrial production, English authorities developed a series of wage

supplements based on the price of bread which impeded the early development of capitalism. The justices of Berkshire, assembled at Speenhamland, near Newbury, crafted the Speenhamland Law of 1795; it provided for wage subsidies such that all male workers could purchase three loaves of bread per week. (Each loaf was a gallon loaf). If a gallon loaf of bread was one shilling, a single male worker must be paid three shillings a week and was guaranteed this much money. The male worker was also paid enough to allow for one gallon loaf for his wife and for each dependent person in the family. This meant that the worker did not have to work too hard; the wage was the same regardless of the level of productivity. Many workers took the wage subsidies and barely subsisted. Polanyi speaks of the resultant pauperization and debasement of the people of the countryside. Productivity plummeted. By 1834, a consensus developed that a market economy would require market control of the workforce according to the principle of price.

Polanyi, a socialist, is not celebrating this fact. He argues that the market economy involves an “insane dislocation in the name of progress.” He describes how early capitalism in England raised the standard of living but “ground men into masses.” (35). But his point is that the market economy *involves* a pressure to free labor from state restraints. In pre-capitalists societies, in feudal and tribal settings, he contends that the economic order is controlled by the social order. In capitalism, the economy is separated or liberated from other institutions and, once this happens, the society is forced (at least initially) allow the market economy to function by its laws. Other spheres, such as politics, become subordinate and function according to the market’s rules. Land and labor become commodities. Polanyi thinks that a well-organized society of the future would feature markets; he argues that markets should not be dispensed with because they help to foster independence of thought and moral freedom. But he envisages social control of labor and land and prices.

Nicholson focuses on the separation and dominance of the economic over the domestic sphere that accompanies the rise of the market economy in the nineteenth century England. During this period, she argues, production moves from the domestic context (where it is organized through kinship) to the public sphere:

Indeed, when we think of what is pivotal about industrialization it is that the production of goods ceases being organized by kinship relations and an activity of the household. The creation of goods by members of the household for the purpose of use by the household and organized primarily in accordance with family roles becomes replaced by the creation of goods by members of many different households for the purpose of exchange and organized in accordance with the profit motive. The commoditization of the elements of production means not only, as Polanyi notes, a withdrawal of control on the part of the state over these elements but also a withdrawal on the part of the family. When labor remained at home, its content and organization was primarily a family matter; when it left only its consequences, wages, remained such. (p. 23).

The movement of the production of goods out of the household has varied implications for women around the world. For one thing, when capitalist industrialization draws women into work in the public economy, it brings commodities into households.

(See Rowbotham 1973, p. 108). Even so, when women are drawn into the public economy, numberless tasks involved in running a household remain. (And, in this sense, labor never totally leaves the household). The labor of cooking, cleaning, washing clothes and caring for children is on-going. When women work outside the household, the tasks involved in maintaining the household continue to be performed, often by these wage-earning women in a double-day and/or by nannies, housecleaners and domestic workers (most often women, and very often, in North America, women of color). But many women across the world work in the informal economy; some sell products made in their homes, others sell wares in markets, and others work in family businesses without pay. (Chen,2002). Women in the informal sector have still another experience of industrialization and the rise of the market economy.<sup>6</sup>

Now, turning back to Nicholson's conclusions, one might think that since Marxist theory works from assumptions that derive from capitalism that it could adequately explain gender relations within capitalism; after all, capitalism requires separate and primacy of the economic. But Nicholson argues this is not the case. She suggests that the legacy of kinship-based gender arrangements endures and lingers within capitalist societies: "capitalist society contains aspects of precapitalist societies within it that are highly relevant to gender." The economic sphere becomes more autonomous within capitalism but capitalist economies themselves "grew out of and continue to be affected by "noneconomic" aspects of human existence." (p. 26). She concludes that a more adequate Marxian theory would reveal the *historical* process of the "domination of the state and later the market over kinship" and the changes in the situation of women that ensue. (p. 26)

### Rethinking the Categories

As we have seen, Nicholson's goal is to analyze the usefulness of theoretical tools for providing accurate descriptions of women's status throughout history and across different cultures. The goal of the present article is to consider how contemplation of the rise of the market economy and its dominance over kinship and political structures generates diverse feminist approaches to policy and action. Therefore we will now shift the focus from the question of the impact of the rise of market economy on women's status to the question of what feminist responses to the market economy have been and should be. For example, should feminists seek to maintain the separation of the economic sphere and its dominance over kinship or family structures and political institutions? Or should they challenge the separation and dominance of the economic? Or should they maintain the separation of the economic but strive to overcome its dominance? These questions are certainly broad but considering them helps to generate alternative conceptions of the lines of feminist argument.

Some feminists see the rise of the market economy as an opportunity to free themselves and other women from gender restrictions stemming from kinship traditions, including those transmitted through the family in the household. For these feminists, women's liberation requires or involves women's exercise of free choice to enter the market and public sphere and compete and participate on an equal footing with men. Entering the market for pay provides women a wage and with it the possibility of greater economic independence which might serve as the grounding of other types of freedom. In

North America, many people in the general population espouse this view. Perhaps a version of it achieved particular prominence in the 1970's embodied in what some called "power feminism."

But a view that women can liberate themselves through participation in the market economy is by no means limited to the industrialized West. Naila Kabeer has written that although the work of Third world women in factories is very exploitative and underpaid, women often choose this work because it is superior to the alternatives available to them. Kabeer maintains that her interviews with female garment workers in Bangladesh reveal that even highly exploitative market capitalism can confer notable advantages on the workers:

My own research and that conducted by others in Bangladesh suggests that along with the many grievances the garment workers expressed, they had also made significant gains. Women valued the satisfaction of a "proper" job in contrast to the casualized forms of employment that had previously been their only options. Their ability to earn on a regular basis gave them a sense of self-reliance, of standing on their own feet. They also valued their access to new social networks on the factory floor, which replaced their previous isolation within the home; the greater voice they exercised in household decision-making because of the value of their economic contribution; their enhanced sense of self-worth; and, in some cases, greater personal freedom and autonomy. (2004, p. 18)

Kabeer documents how women workers in Java, Turkey and China have also articulated the economic and personal benefits of factory labor to them. A study of women clothing workers in Turkey, for instance, showed that "the overwhelming majority had made their own decision to enter factory work, for reasons that varied from wanting to make use of their skills to seeking to escape the control exercised by family and neighbors." (Kabeer, 2004, 19).

Kabeer also reminds us of the argument women that in Western countries often secured liberation through factory work in the early periods of western industrialization. She cites Nancy Fraser who criticizes the presumption that capitalist wage work is simply "wage slavery" as follows:

To be sure, it was painfully experienced in just that way by some early nineteenth-century proletarianized (male) artisans and yeoman farmers who were losing not only tangible property in tools and land but also prior control over their work. But their response was contextually specific and gendered. Consider, by contrast, the very different experience of young single women who left farms – and open-ended work hours, pervasive parental supervision, and little autonomous "personal life" – for mill towns, where intense supervision in the mill was combined with relative freedom from supervision outside it, as well as the increased autonomy in personal life conferred by cash earnings. From their perspective, the employment contract was a liberation.

(Kabeer, p. 20, Fraser, 230)

For women wage workers who engage in social reproductive labor in the domestic sphere without remuneration, Fraser adds, the wage can function as “a resource and a source of leverage.” (Fraser, 230).<sup>7</sup>

Women in many societies have also been restricted from participation in wage labor. At times, legal rules excluded all women from participating in given trades and professions. At other times, cultural norms prevented middle class women and wealthy women from working for wages. Participation in wage work can help establish or solidify women’s right to work in the formal or informal economy.

There is also a libertarian strand to feminist arguments for women’s wage labor participation. It is true that to some the term libertarian will suggest an anti-statist *laissez faire* apologist of capitalism.<sup>8</sup> But the libertarianism I have in mind is expressed in a definition offered by Roger Scruton. He defines it as “the form of liberalism which believes in freeing people not merely from the constraints of traditional political institutions, but also from the inner constraints imposed by their mistaken attribution of power to ineffectual things.” Among those things he includes the “institutions of religion, and the family, and customs of social, especially sexual conformity.” (1996, 315).

Those feminists who see women’s participation in the market economy as a means to free women from family and sexual restrictions might, then, be thought of as libertarians. Alternatively, they might be called free market opportunists. But it should be noted that feminists who see themselves as free market opportunists are not always free market enthusiasts. The assumption is that one can take advantage of an opportunity while having reservations about the system that creates it.

Consider a controversial, theoretical version of this view. The contested, and, for me, often highly questionable, discourse of Camille Paglia is of real interest here. I have several objections to Paglia’s account of date rape. In the early nineties, she repeatedly wrote that young women who get drunk in fraternities and are subsequently raped, deserve what they get and should not complain of the result. (1992) I think she underestimates the feelings of grief, betrayal or violation date rape can entail and fails to distinguish between responsibility and blame.<sup>9</sup> And in light of her discourse on date rape, some will find Paglia’s continuing insistence that she is a feminist hard to credit. Nonetheless, I think her approach does provide an extreme but revealing example of one type of libertarian feminism. Her repeated argument is that it is a good thing that American women have been freed from traditional restrictions on sexual choice (imposed by the family and society before the 1960’s) and that, once freed in this way, women should take responsibility for all the consequences of their decisions. This is clearly a libertarian approach.

Paglia, a registered Democrat, argued in Salon that capitalism, though flawed, has advantages for women:

Capitalism, which spawned modern individualism as well as the emancipated woman who can support herself, is essentially Darwinian. It expands any society's sum total of wealth and radically raises the standard of living, but it leaves the poor and weak without a safety net. Capitalism needs the ethical counter-voice of leftism to keep it honest. But leftists must be honest in turn about what we owe to capitalism -- without which Western women would have no professional

jobs to go to but would be stuck doing laundry by hand and stooping over pots on the hearth fire all day long.<sup>10</sup>

While Paglia here overlooks class differences amongst Western women, nonetheless this statement exemplifies the approach of a free-market opportunist, someone who advocates profiting from a free-market capitalism she criticizes in other respects.

### Free Market Skeptics

Many feminists might characterize themselves as free market skeptics. This skepticism takes a lot of different forms. Here the argument necessarily advances in very broad strokes but let us try to accurately describe various tendencies.

Jean Bethke Elshtain's views on feminism and the family are of particular interest here because she explicitly opposes the free-market approach of feminist libertarians. In her essay "Feminism, Family and Community," she critiques versions of feminism inspired by a free-market model that "proclaims all constraints of individual expression to be coercive." According to Elshtain, feminists should defend a non-oppressive version of the traditional family which could serve as a source of resistance to corporate power. She contended that a feminist defense "a particular ideal of the family to create a more humane society" was needed to respond to right-wing defenses of family values. (1982, p. 445). In "Antigone's Daughters" Elstain defends the "standpoint of Antigone" who resists Creon's decrees against the burial of her brother. She describes Antigone's "bold voice" as that of "woman as guardian of the prerogatives of the *oikos*, preserver of family duty and honour, protector of children, if need be their fierce avengers." (1998, p. 372).<sup>11</sup>

Other feminists have sought to defend the values that they believe emerge from women's activities within the family, and/ or household. Sara Ruddick defended the "maternal thinking" which arises from the social practice of motherhood. She described motherhood as governed by interests in the preservation and growth of children. Ruddick advocated bringing "a transformed maternal thought into the public realm to make the preservation and growth of all children a work of public conscience and legislation." (1980, 36) There are some interesting examples of the political uses of maternal concern. The protests of the Argentinean mothers of the disappeared, the *Madres de Plaza de Mayo*, during the 1970's are one (Robinson 2003).<sup>12</sup> Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, the president of Liberia and a mother herself, has suggested that "Liberia needs a mother's care." (Sonne 2006) Numerous feminist writers have argued that the devaluation of women's traditional values is a feature of sexism itself. (Young 1990). Carol Gilligan's argument that women have distinctive ways of making moral decisions (1993) has, of course, spawned a huge and varied literature.

Marxists feminists are different sorts of free market skeptics. Obvious opponents of market capitalism, they have consistently argued that the economic functions of the family should be performed collectively. In The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State, Engels famously wrote that when wives have legal equality to husbands "it will be plain that the first condition of the liberation of the wife is to bring the whole female sex back into public industry and that this in turn demands that the characteristics of the monogamous family as the economic unit of society be abolished."(excerpted in

Jaggar and Rothenberg 1984) Marxists feminists who are true to such a vision advocate the industrialization of tasks often performed within the family. In her classic Marxist feminist article, “The Political Economy of Women’s Liberation,” Margaret Benston envisions an industrialization of housework. The family, she suggests is a “pre-industrial” production unit. She advocates socialist but not capitalist industrialization. “Industrialization is, in itself,” she writes, “a great force for human good; exploitation and dehumanization go with capitalism and not necessarily with industrialization.” (1969, 243).

The Ecofeminists, however, focus their skepticism on industrialization itself. (Shiva, 2005). This growing body of work critiques the subordination of both women and nature. (Sandilands 1999; Eaton 2005). There is also a large literature critiquing the impact of neo-liberal economic policy on women, especially poor women, in the developing world. (See, for example, Elson in Molyneux and Razavi, 2002).<sup>13</sup>

Other feminists have articulated the need for democratic control over economic decision making and have advocated the liberatory potential of women’s participation in democratic organizing and politics. Lourdes Beneria calls for “subordinating markets to the objectives of truly democratic communities. The goal is to place economic activity at the service of people-centered development and not the other way around or to strive for productivity and efficiency not for their own sake but as a way to increase collective well-being.” (Beneria 2003, p. 128; cf. Young 1990; Mohanty 2006) This democratic control might be had through holding democratic representatives accountable or through local participation or both. In addition, many grass-roots feminists organizations have used direct democracy and experimented with methods of collective deliberation. These thinkers are contributing, I think, to a modern, democratic recasting of socialist feminism.

Of course, many feminists will have eclectic views of these questions. I am describing certain predispositions that provide some options and approaches which might be combined in various ways. It is also possible that a feminist might favor one approach in a given society and historical period but think it useless or harmful in another.

There is a parallel to be made between the question of feminist debates about the market economy and the question of feminist debates about technology, particularly reproductive technologies. (Regarding the latter, see Minow and Shanley 1996). In addition, the separation and dominance of economic is, I would argue, a key feature of the global form of capitalism known as globalization; the analysis of feminist responses to separation and dominance of the market economy is a grounded way of considering debates about the impact of globalization on women.<sup>14</sup>

The current article provides a lense for describing the work of some previous feminist writers. Some of these writers have been more successful than others at avoiding false universalization and attending to the diversity of women’s experience. But my hope is that this lense for regarding the debate will provide tools for nuanced, careful and – for that reason-- powerful analyses of women’s positions and struggles, globally and locally.

The template inspired by Nicholson’s work arises from a direct focus on gender, the family, the market and the state. The categories of liberal feminism and Marxist feminism have been grafted onto previous political theories. Liberal feminism is a feminist development of liberalism; Marxist feminism, a feminist development of Marxism, to take some obvious examples. These categories emerged as responses to

other theories. They are theories responding to theories. They did not emerge as a direct feminist response to the terms of reality women around the world face, terms such as gender, the household, the family, the market, and the state. This difference is significant in assessing the strengths and weaknesses of each approach.

My goal in this paper has not been to sweep away the older categories but rather to supplement them and to suggest the need to refine them. It is still less to impose a reified set of definitions on the work of others. But I hope to have shown that thinking about feminist disagreements regarding the potential of the market economy to liberate women is a revealing way to approach feminist debates.

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<sup>1</sup>With some qualifications and additions, the divisions served as the organizing principle for the later anthologies she helped to edit, the Feminist Frameworks series. Jaggar presented the first version of her 1977 essay to the American Philosophical Association in 1972. It was included in Women and Philosophy, Sharon Bishop and Marjorie Weinzwieg, eds. (Wadsworth, 1979) Cf. the various editions of Rosemarie Putnam Tong's Feminist Theory: A More Comprehensive Introduction. The most recent is 2008.

<sup>2</sup> In The Radical Future of Liberal Feminism, Zillah Eisenstein suggested that early liberal feminists worked from the radical assumption that women were a sexual class excluded from the rights of citizens.: "This recognition of women as a sexual class lays the subversive quality of feminism for liberalism because liberalism is premised upon

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women's exclusion from public life on this very class basis. The demand for the real equality of women with men, if taken to its logical conclusion, would dislodge the patriarchal structure necessary to a liberal society." (p. 6)

<sup>3</sup> Others might seek a consistent approach across cultures. And a dialectic between the two is another alternative. There have been a number of promising developments in recent feminist thought; some have suggested the need for approaches which attend to the intersections of oppressions of race, class, sex, sexual orientation, age and ability. (see, for example, Bunch, 1990; Crenshaw, 2004). Others have argued that sensitivity to local differences and to women's agency can result in more nuanced critiques of the larger contexts of oppression. (1991, Mohanty et. al) And still others suggest that the experiences of oppression provide an epistemological advantage for building more complete forms of knowledge. (Harding, 2003). Among the most important critiques of false universalization in feminist theory are hooks, 1984; Lorde, 1984; Moraga and Anzaldua, 1984; Mohanty et.al, 1991; Frye, 1992.

<sup>4</sup> There is a debate about whether or not Polanyi believed that the economic sphere became separate or disembedded from the rest of society with the rise of the market economy in the nineteenth century. In his introduction to the 2001 edition of The Great Transformation, Fred Block writes that "Polanyi does say that the classical economists wanted to create a society in which the economy had been effectively disembedded, and they encouraged politicians to pursue this objective. Yet he also insists that they *did not* and *could not* achieve this goal. In fact, Polanyi repeatedly says the goal of a disembedded, fully self-regulating market is a utopian project; it is something that cannot exist. On the opening page of Part One, for example, he writes, 'Our thesis is that the idea

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of a self-adjusting market implied a stark utopia. Such an institution could not exist for any length of time without annihilating the human and natural substance of society; it would have physically destroyed man and transformed his surroundings into a wilderness.” (p. xxiv-xxv). In a more extended analysis of this question, Professor Block argues that the disembodied economy is simply impossible; he suggests that because The Great Transformation was written quickly and Polanyi developed and altered his thinking about certain deterministic Marxist formulations while he wrote, there are internal tensions regarding this issue within it. For Professor Block, Polanyi “glimpsed the idea of the always embedded economy but he was not able to give that idea a name or develop it theoretically because it represented too great a divergence from his initial theoretical starting point.” (Block, 2003, p. 2) And yet, Professor Block argues, the embedded economy provides the best basis for making sense of Polanyi’s core argument.

I am still considering these issues but it seems to me Polanyi’s wording in the passage quoted above is likely quite important. He writes that a self-adjusting market economy cannot exist “for any length of time” without destroying human beings and the environment surrounding them. It may be that he thinks that the separation of the economic sphere was attempted by some agents for a short period but that it is both undesirable and unsustainable. He thinks of the totally self-regulating and separate market economy as a dangerous ideal which provokes dangerous initiatives which commodify labour, land and money. His descriptive analysis of the attempts to put this ideal in practice can be distinguished, then, from his normative judgments about their deeply problematic character. (Cf. The Great Transformation, 2001, p. 35, 60 and 74-

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75). I would like to thank Professor Block for his comments on an earlier version of the paper.

<sup>5</sup> Gender and History, p. 135. In that work, she traces the development of the modern conception of the family through which it comes to be defined as kin who live together in the domestic sphere.

<sup>6</sup> It is important not to generalize in ways that distort variety of experience of women around the globe. As Louise Lamphere has pointed out, there are limits to the applicability of the public/domestic distinction cross-culturally (1993). Nonetheless, since globalization features an exportation of industrial capitalism to the countries in global South, it is pressing to understand its impact on women's changing labor, production, status and situation. I would like to thank Gopika Solanki and Francine D'Amico for their comments on this section of the argument. Many thanks also to Fiona Robinson who read the essay and made many thoughtful suggestions.

<sup>7</sup> Fraser's remarks occur in the context of her review of Carole Pateman's book, The Sexual Contract. She argues that Pateman problematically understands the wage contract, marriage contract and prostitution contract on a master/subject model. Contra Pateman, Fraser opposes the "assimilation of contract to subjection." But note her caveat: "My aim is not to defend contract as inherently emancipatory but, rather, to open a space for nuanced thinking about desirable alternatives to contemporary modes of domination." (1997, 227).

<sup>8</sup> It is striking how few feminist thinkers take an unqualified pro-capitalist *laissez faire* point of view.

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<sup>9</sup> The fact that Paglia frequently uses *ad hominem* arguments, of course, complicates matters. Regarding the question of her underestimation of the feelings of grief, betrayal or violation of date rape, compare Mary Gaitskill's "On Not Being a Victim." (1994). Regarding the distinction between responsibility and blame, see Chesire Calhoun's important 1989 article, "Responsibility and Reproach". For a thought-provoking argument that encourages rape victims to their actualize agency through discourse and deliberation, see Mardorossian, 2002. )

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.salon.com/opinion/paglia/2007/03/14/coulter/index2.html>

Accessed August 2007. Cf. *Sexual Personae*, p. 37, where Paglia writes "It is capitalism that has given me the leisure to sit at this desk writing this book."

One might fruitfully compare and contrast Paglia's arguments with those of the so-called pro-sex feminists, the advocates of the rights of sex trade workers and defenders of the rights of sexual minorities. These feminists are sometimes called sexual libertarians. They would be very unlikely to agree with Pagila's opinions about date rape but, like her, they do reject coercion by the state or family authority over matters of sexuality. (Bell 1994; Rubin 1984) However, feminist sexual libertarians are not necessarily nor, I think, usually, opposed to state intervention in the economy in order to promote economic equality.

<sup>11</sup> Elshtain's definition of the family is, to my mind, unnecessarily and harmfully restrictive. She includes single-parent families in her definition but has opposed gay marriage. See "The Future of Marriage," in *Commonweal* (Nov. 22, 1991), 685-687. For her exchanges with critics on her view of the family see *Dissent*, Spring, 1983, 247-256.

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For defenses of legalizing same-sex marriage, see, for example, Calhoun, 2000 and Young, 1997.

<sup>12</sup> I would like to thank Ashley DeMartini for drawing this point and this article to my attention.

<sup>13</sup> For example, Diane Elson writes that “There is reason to be concerned that it is poor women who are particularly adversely affected by neo-liberal policies, either directly in the present, or in terms of adversely affecting the prospects for the progressive realization of their economic and social rights.” (Molyneux and Razavi, 2002, pp. 91-92). For feminist critiques of some of the premises of the idea of development, see the essays in Saunders, 2002.

<sup>14</sup> Chandra Talpade Mohanty has suggested that globalization entails not only to “borderlessness” but a wide-ranging complex: “What was referred to in the 1960’s, 1970’s, and 1980’s as the “military-industrial complex” has now transmogrified into the “military/prison/cyber/corporate complex.”” (2003, p. 172).