

**It's About Time:  
Rethinking Fairness and Justice for Women in the Economy**

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## ABSTRACT

In American households, it is mostly women — as mothers, wives, elder daughters, grandmothers, or domestic workers — who do the work required to maintain and increase the wellbeing of everyone in the home. Their unpaid work, which can include taking care of the young and the old, packing school lunches, preparing meals, and more, is time consuming and has become an added burden for women working outside the home. In this paper, I frame the household as a site of production and describe women's household labor as feudal, subject to the feudal form of exploitation. Women's involvement in household labor production overdetermines their participation in the capitalist workforce. Too often the outcome for women working outside the home is an increase in exploitation of both capitalist and feudal forms. Women's augmented exploitation engages them in class struggle, one that is created and sustained by the time demands of performing both feudal and capitalist work. Women's vulnerable position in the political economy is precipitated by institutions that involve embedded inequities. I offer potential interventions workplaces or the government can make to remedy the troubles they have created for women.

*Keywords: women, low wages, time poverty, class struggle, exploitation, feudal households*

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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCING THE REVOLUTIONARY CLASS**

“Behind every great man, there stands a woman” appears as an outdated, heteronormative common saying. It prompts an image of the successful male, backed by his encouraging female partner. It implies women’s passiveness through their placement in the background to men’s success, which is not a very empowering characterization of the support they provide to not only men, but also other women. Everyone benefits from the emotional, financial, physical, and moral support provided by women.

Behind any person with the potential for greatness, there is a woman who does not have to take anyone’s side. Women’s supportive roles have been naturalized; it is societally expected of them to be caring and sacrificing for others. This has broad implications on the lives that women lead, and has often meant that they have faced pressures to remain on the sidelines, rather than flourish as “great” men have. Women’s contribution to others’ wellbeing is work. They have been responsible for it but the delegation of this role has been unfair and unjust.

The site where women’s support has made the most impactful contribution is the household. It is the environment in which women form and

fortify their relations with romantic partners, children, siblings, and parents. Every task they could possibly do for others – washing, dusting, vacuuming, cooking, making beds, preparing meals, recycling, checking mailboxes, paying bills, wiping countertops – maintains the household’s wellness. But it comes at a cost to the women performing these domestic services. Women’s ties to their households are not always compatible with their aspirations to work outside the home. This situation is not unheard of; the struggles women face to balance work and home have been previously identified, but they have not been solved.

This paper examines the household as a major contributor to the challenges women face with achieving gender equality. Using a Marxian-feminist theoretical foundation, I frame the household within the context of the political economy and characterize it as a site of production that operates under the feudal mode of production. The patriarchal, feudal social relations that emerge in households explain women’s struggles in the home that carry over to capitalist sites of production. Conceptualizing the household as a site of production initiates the claim that women face exploitation (a feudal form) at home.

I also examine paid domestic service as a capitalist form of household labor. Doing so illustrates the undervaluing of “typical women’s work” that occurs through paid domestic workers’ capitalist form of exploitation. The availability of domestic service on the capitalist market emphasizes the

demand women and households have for saving time that would be spent on unpaid work, which will be described in greater detail. Paid domestic workers' labor in households has enabled more women to participate in market labor outside the home.

That being said, women are an exploited class at home, as well as in the capitalist workplace. The dual forms of exploitation women face underline their class struggle in all arenas of social life. The transition of feudal to capitalist modes of production in the household is abound with tensions that overdetermine class and gender inequalities women face. What are the contradictions and crises that occur in the transition from a feudal to capitalist mode of production in the household? These are explored in my second chapter, in which I introduce time as a resource inherent to exacerbating women's class struggle. Time poverty is an unjust condition they face as a result of their participation in feudal and capitalist labor. This paper's argument is that for women, class struggle is inherently a matter of time and how to allocate it between unpaid and paid work. The household in combination with other institutions perpetuates women's conflict with time.

Women's time conflicts and ergo class struggle is engendered by social institutions such as the government. In my third chapter, I reveal the numerous means through which government actions have given rise to gender injustices rather than resolve them. I offer feedback on how the unfairness working women experience can be rectified. There is hope for better



conditions for women in the U.S. political economy. It will require the reorganization of feudal and capitalist structures that overdetermine the other.

That women have been subject to poor treatment in society is not an innovative claim. But the mistreatment of women, especially those involved with low wage work, in both feudal and capitalist sites of production should urge everyone to consider what they owe to the very individuals who have produced and reproduced the necessities and conditions that allow others to prosper in social life. Women have been the sufferers of the demanding nature of the capitalist system. “The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world, in various ways,” Karl Marx wrote. “The point, however, is to *change* it” (Marx, 1845, p. 145). Changes are in order for ensuring social justice. If women follow the same revolutionary scheme as the proletariat class Marx’s sympathy laid with, then their reclaiming of power begins with addressing their tensions at home.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **RETHINKING THE HOUSEHOLD**

On the surface, the household is a unit of individuals living in the same home together (Sweet and Bumpass, 1987). Some examples that describe a household are two siblings who live together, a trio of roommates, or a married couple. The United States Bureau of Census breaks down households by type: family or nonfamily. In other words, American households are either families or individual householders. 2010 Demographic Profile Data indicates that the majority of households are families (66.4 percent). Moreover, nearly a half (48.4 percent) of family households are husband-wife families. Although the traditional American family included a married couple with children and perhaps a pet, today the family may comprise of an interracial marriage, children born to unmarried women, or lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender adults (Krogstad, 2014). Changing social norms have impacted the composition of households. The modern family is likelier to be more diverse than what was once imagined in America. However, the heteronormative assumptions made about families (such as romantic relationships are between men and women and follow a heterosexual structure) still loom large in the minds of people imagining the typical American household.

Beneath the surface, the household is an incredibly important and impressionable institution. Household members are economic agents inside the home. In addition, their production and consumption decisions impact the economy outside the home, and simultaneously, the larger economy impacts the household's choices. Members are informed by "cultural or institutional circumstances" surrounding the household (Hodgson, 2000, p. 327). The household is an indoctrinating institution that teaches members how to interact with the world. Feminist philosopher Sandra Harding (1981) points out the importance of the family, a unit composing the household, as "the location of the processes whereby it is insured that this generation's interests in class, gender, race, and obligatory heterosexuality will be inherited by the next generation" (p. 157). The fact that contemporary capitalist societies rely on households to perform so much of the work of acculturation and the transfer of human and social capital suggests that as long as hierarchical masculine and feminine roles are produced, consumed, and reproduced in the household, it will be the site of social and class processes that maintain gender-based inequalities inside and outside the home.

## **2.1 Households as A Sphere of Production**

Marxian economics theorizes class as the most significant aspect of society. Class is a social process dealing with the production and distribution of surplus labor. Surplus labor is the extra labor provided by workers who sell

their labor power to capitalists (owners of the means of production) so that they can achieve a quality of life they prefer for themselves. Members of households are the ones who provide labor and surplus labor in the capitalist mode of production. In Marx's view, the labor provided by households is a necessary and important feature of capitalist production because labor is the source of *value* (and, Marx argues, *surplus value*).

In Marx's labor theory of value, direct laborers participate in the labor process by using their labor in combination with other resources to create value and surplus value in the form of goods and services that are ultimately exchanged. Marx describes necessary labor as the value of labor embodied in the production of commodities that ends up reproducing laborers. Marx argued, however, that the expenditure of necessary labor required to keep the direct laborer working – the wage package – is not all that direct laborers produce. Direct laborers also produce a surplus of value in the form of commodities by contributing more direct labor than is necessary to the production of commodities. This extra amount of labor is surplus labor. When Marx discusses class, he refers to the “economic processes of producing and distributing surplus labor” (Wolff and Resnick, 1987, p. 144). Workers contract with the owners of the means of production to sell their labor power in exchange for a payment, or wage. This payment is in the form of a portion of the labor they provide. Those who produce surplus labor are a class Marx calls “workers,” while those who appropriate the surplus labor produced by

workers are called “capitalists.” These two groups structure the basic social relations of capitalism within which households operate.

The household is an entity with an enormous role in how individuals – workers and capitalists, both of whom come from and return to households each day – participate in the production and distribution of surplus labor. The paid and unpaid labor in the capitalist workplace is often reproduced in the form of paid and unpaid labor in the household. Unpaid labor in the household is necessary for well being and “is fundamental to any economic system” (Waring, 1990, p. 28). Unpaid work can be the host of domestic tasks like cooking, cleaning, caretaking, tutoring, dressing, budgeting, and grocery shopping. It is vital to the maintenance of a household. Marx argues that unpaid household labor is an important condition of existence of the production and appropriation of surplus labor in the capitalist workplace. The importance of household labor becomes disguised and undervalued by capitalism, which “others” non-capitalist economic forms (Gibson-Graham, 1996, p. 57). Household production is complementary to capitalism. Other household members benefit from the availability of unpaid work (Quick, 2008). They may not have an exchange value, because these services are not offered on any markets to be sold, but such work has significant value. It has a *use value*.

Marx defined use value as the “utility,” or usefulness of an object (in this case, an activity or service) (Marx, 2001). The use value of unpaid work

at home is the production of the conditions necessary for the reproduction of labor power, described by Marx as an important commodity in the capitalist mode of production. This household production benefits capitalism and ensures that individuals can engage in class processes.

The primary household member responsible for undertaking unpaid work is most likely to be a woman. For most of American history, unpaid work in the home was central to women's daily lives (Cohen, 2004). It has been and continues to be delegated to women. The incidence of this normative assignment is based off the sexual or gendered division of labor (Lyonette, 2013). Domestic chores are not "*inherently* gendered" (Coltrane and Shih, 2010, p. 403). Yet there is some reason – nature, tradition, religious belief, efficiency – why women are subordinate to men and are subject to this gender struggle. Feminists, including Marxist feminists, have looked at histories of housework and found that throughout modern societies this gendered division of labor is more of a reflection of male power and patriarchal privilege than any reason having to do with the nature and purpose of sex differences. In recent history, many feminists have argued against naturalizing unpaid domestic labor as "women's work." They have also insisted that that housework should be paid work because it is socially significant and necessary for GDP growth (Gilman, 1899; Fox et al., 1980). For example, feminist economist Nancy Folbre (2001) has argued persuasively that annual GDP estimates that form the basis of micro and macro policies systematically

undervalue the contribution of women by not including unpaid domestic work. One consequence is that the contribution to GDP of men's work (usually outside the home) is overvalued, with men possibly being overpaid.

Dominant approaches to the study of paid and unpaid work that privilege wage labor in capitalist enterprises, however, subsume this feminist insight, and instead valorize gender inequality. Folbre and others have argued that the recognition that women perform surplus labor outside the home is not enough (Waring, 1990; Hartmann, 1981). The awareness that women do it specifically for men must be pointed out. Otherwise, Marxism dominates feminism (Hartmann, 1981). There is a system of relations between men and women under capitalism, which both shapes and is shaped by the household, that allows men to control women in and outside the domestic sphere. Marxist analyses, in their emphasis on wage labor in capitalist enterprises, contribute to the reproduction of gender inequality by inadequately accounting for patriarchy (Hartmann, 1981).

An important question is raised by the union of Marxism and feminism, especially in rethinking the household as an institution that is both the cause and consequence of why women do the work they do. "We know that patriarchal relations gave rise to the feminist movement, and that capital generates class struggle – but how has the relation of feminism to class struggle been played out in historical contexts?" (Hartmann, 1981, p. 30). Analyzing the household and its developments over time will be key to

understanding how patriarchy and capitalism affect women's lives. Is the marriage between Marxism and feminism a happy and productive one? Does it enhance or increase gender justice for women? Or, is women's well-being subsumed to the cause of enhancing economic justice through the elimination of exploitation? Is the status of women's paid and unpaid work better understood as a form of economic exploitation or as an expression of patriarchy? Is there an overdetermined, mutually causative relationship between the two?

Femi Harding (1981) responds to Hartmann's (1981) claim that the marriage between Marxism and feminism is an unhappy one. She aims to understand how this marriage may be repaired. According to her (1981), the mere acknowledgment that the "economic aspects of the division of labor by gender in the family maintain both patriarchy and capital" is inadequate – instead, Harding calls for an alternative understanding of the material base (p. 137). Through a radical framework, Harding (1981) critiques feminist economist Heidi Hartmann and argues that patriarchy and capital are economic and ideological institutions that are not diseases but symptoms of an illness involving "gender-based personality differences created by the material conditions of infant care" (p. 139). She claims: "family life is structured by a lot more materially based social relations than merely economic ones" (Harding, 1981, p. 143). Harding argues that Hartmann's Marxist explanatory scheme misses the notion that the material base of social relations produces



different kinds of individuals in the family. Class oppression involves the social relations developed within the family. Economic categories cannot suffice as explanations of social relations of family life. Except, the material conditions of the division of labor in the family have not been thoroughly studied, because the gender role appears natural (Harding, 1981). Women have naturally been the person in charge of childcare. Marxist theory has treated this as natural phenomenon and has not deconstructed the delegation of work like childcare to women.

Harding (1981) suggests that the material base is comprised of the actual physical division of labor by gender and the subsequent physical and social relations of the infant to its environment (the household). Gender decides a division of labor, which infants experience. In adulthood, the division of labor emerges and encourages men to want to dominate others. The infant's experience is crucial to understanding the material base of patriarchy and capital. The household is the classroom in which individuals learn to expect women to do certain (in other words, unpaid) work.

It has been argued that the household is more than a physical space occupied by individuals. It is an institution through which people form their political, economic, and gender ideologies. The household is a production site of unpaid work, and through that work, knowledge. Its importance has been underappreciated in comparison to capitalist workplaces. The next section will discuss paid work and its implications on the household. It will describe both

feudal and capitalist forms of exploitation as an inequitable circumstance women are vulnerable to.

## **2.2 Class Struggle at Home**

Household members, who may be beneficiaries of unpaid work, are able to engage in paid work outside the home. Individuals who participate in the labor process (“the expenditure of human muscles, nerves, and brain power to transform objects in nature into goods and services satisfying human needs and wants”) are direct laborers (Wolff and Resnick, 1987, p. 144). They sell their labor power, as a commodity, in order to receive wages, or “the means of subsistence necessary for his conservation or continued reproduction” (Marx, 2001, p. 312). In other words, an individual who sells labor power has to put in enough work that is the equivalent to the value of the bundle of goods needed for his or her wellbeing. This is necessary labor time.

There comes a point when labor time is no longer necessary and produces surplus value. Marx found the capitalist’s appropriation of this surplus value produced by the worker as problematic and called it exploitation. He regarded it as a form of social theft.

Hence is it that in the history of capitalist production, the determination of what is a working-day, presents itself as the result of a struggle, a struggle between collective capital, i.e., the class of capitalists, and collective labor, i.e., the working-class.  
(Marx, 2001, p. 338.)

For Marx, the struggle over the working day was class struggle, because workers did not own or access all of the surplus value they created.

Women in households who perform unpaid work face class struggle as a result of the appropriation of their surplus labor. Even in the home, household members engaged in domestic labor participate in a class process (Fraad, Resnick, and Wolff, 1994). Heteronormatively assuming the household follows a husband-wife structure, suppose the wife is responsible for cooking at home. As a direct laborer in the home, she takes raw materials, such as the ingredients for a dish, and uses some means of production, like a stove or microwave, to create a meal that is enjoyed by herself and her family members. Her meal has a use value. It has satisfied the hunger of members in her household. It has also satisfied her own hunger – the component of her production that is necessary. The use value she has produced for the other members of her household is surplus labor, because it is beyond what was necessary for herself. Her husband, through his consumption of the prepared meal, has appropriated her surplus labor. Both the wife and husband have participated in a fundamental class process at home (Fraad et al., 1994, p. 6). Marx's description of exploitation as the appropriation of surplus labor is relevant to the household as a site of production. However, this household exploitation is unlike the appropriation of surplus labor that would occur in a capitalist mode of production.

The capitalist form of the fundamental class process includes a unique aspect: the market (Wolff and Resnick, 1987). The production of surplus labor performed by a woman in the household does not involve buying or selling labor power. The husband and wife are not making an exchange in the labor market. Although he appropriates the surplus value generated, he does not take it to the market and sell it for profit (Fraad et al., 1994, p. 6). Fraad et al. (1994) categorize the class process described here as feudal. “The feudal form is appropriate because it requires no intermediary role for markets, prices, profits, or wages in the relation between the producer and the appropriator of surplus labor” (Fraad et al., 1994, p. 7). As the serf had obligations to the lord of a manor in medieval Europe, a wife is also serving her husband under the binding of marriage, tradition, ideology, and patriarchy in this household (Fraad et al., 1994, p. 7).

### **2.3 Feudal Mode of Production**

What characterizes a feudal mode of production? Duty is intrinsic to the social relationships that arise from a feudal mode of production. In the household, women and men may yield to gender roles, which prompt them to organize themselves into the feudal-like relationship of working and producing value out of obligation to another economic agent. Under feudalism, the producer has an obligation to an overlord to fulfill economic demands (Milonakis, 1993). In marriages or families, wives or mothers may

feel motivated to care for their husbands and children. It is the expectation of altruism that suggests women do unpaid work out of marital or parental duty. Furthermore, feudal systems involve “the personal dependence of peasants on lords” (Milonakis, 1993, p. 393). Although this dependence sounds similar to the capitalist versus the worker dynamic under a capitalist mode of production, there is a crucial difference. The distinction between the two modes of production has to do with how under capitalism, the worker does not own or possess the means of production. Feudally, the lord owns land and the means of production, but the peasant working for him could possess the land, as well as the tools for production. This fittingly describes any household as a site of production; the direct laborer does not necessarily have to have legal liability for the home, but she is still at the helm of the production of surplus labor and use values. Moreover, the peasant’s possession accrues through his continued use, granted by custom and traditions of feudal society (Milonakis, 1993). Notably, the “lord’s ownership over land on its own does not guarantee absolute control over its use and appropriation” (Milonakis, 1993, p. 395). The peasant’s familiarity with land granted him more jurisdiction over the production that occurred on it as opposed to the worker under the capitalist system, estranged from the products of his labor (Marx, 1844). Men in the household exercise power over women. Men’s power is supported by several societal conditions of existence, including religious vows and traditions, tax and property laws that constrain marriage and divorce, patriarchal conventions

that confer esteem and virtue, and relations of love and romance that often naturalize male dominance and privilege and female subordination.

Household production was a big part of feudal society and made up a large amount of feudal labor time (Quick, 2010). Though, the household production the medieval peasant woman was responsible for did not closely resemble the use values produced by “the contemporary working-class woman in advanced capitalist countries” (Quick, 2010, pp. 165-66). The peasant woman’s work was likely to center around agriculture. The production of grains, as well as vegetables and poultry, on arable land was important for caloric consumption and commerce (Quick, 2010). It is clear that women have been performing essential work since feudal times.

Land ownership is an important aspect of the transition from feudalism to capitalism. The relationship between the ruling and peasant class transformed to one based on wage labor, no longer based on a land-related connection. The peasant class became the working class out of the necessity to produce the means of subsistence, and thus became dependent on the ruling class to pay them. Though, wage labor was not the key distinction between feudalism and capitalism. The structure of production changed such that a few members in a peasant household “supplemented their household production by engaging in wage labor,” which became “the dominant form of relationships with the ruling class, with the wage “supplemented” by household production” (Quick, 2010, p. 170). Under capitalism, the ruling

class is not connected to the household through land anymore. Instead, the ruling class's primary relationship is formed, based on employment, with the wage laborer of the household. Women, then, become characterized as dependents of their husbands' wages under this system. This characterization demonstrates the patriarchal nature of the feudal household, as men were the wage earners, heavily supported by and reliant on the unpaid work women were performing.

#### **2.4 Transitioning to a Capitalist Mode of Production**

For the early Marxists, capitalism turns women into wage laborers by drawing them into labor force participation under the mask of liberation. They believed that labor force participation suggested women were liberated and on equal footing as men. Realizing this was not the case, women would join the working class, whose oppression was caused by capital and private property (Hartmann, 1981). Early Marxists' perspective is limited, because they did not study the differences (such as women's characterization as cheap labor or reserve supply of labor as examples) between men and women under capitalism. Early Marxism tends to see men and women uniting under capitalism, addressing the struggle against capital, ignoring or subordinating gender struggle. However, women's labor force participation conveys disparity within men and women's experiences with paid work. Although women entered the labor market at increasing rates in the 1960s through the

2000s, there have been class and gender based differences among men and women. One example is the shift from manufacturing to service sectors creating a demand for more women who were willing to supply their labor (as cited in Juhn and Potter, 2006). Although there is greater involvement with paid work, women are overrepresented and underpaid in service sector jobs like education services and human resources (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2011). Paid work – what it is and how much it actually pays – is an integral component of gender uplift that early Marxists have not fully accounted for.

The alternative to this perspective is the approach led by contemporary Marxists, who acknowledge that women’s labor force participation under capitalism did *not* mean they were on equal footing with men. “Rather capital has created a separation between the home, family, and personal life on the one hand and the workplace on the other” (Hartmann, 1981, p. 5). If capital has created a separate public/private sphere distinction, then it has also influenced the form the relationship between the spheres follows. The relationship between the public and private spheres is such that there are concurrent repercussions experienced by the respective sphere when something occurs in the other. For example, a woman’s paid work outside the home may require her to increase her hours there, but this compromises her ability to spend time with her children, or in other words, unpaid work. Each



sphere influences and is influenced by her decision. In this regard, capital and the household are not so separate from each other after all.

Women's participation in the labor force outside the home has brought notable changes. It has changed the composition of marriages and families in households, inspired new markets in the economy, spurred job competition by gender, altered childrearing and parenting patterns, reshaped resource distribution within families, and influenced technological developments to address home maintenance costs to name a few (Costa, 2000, p. 102; Lundberg and Pollak, 1996). Women have been spending more time outside the home (Patten, 2015). What happens to unpaid work in the household? Time saving technology has been useful. Coltrane and Shih (2010) point out that the advent of the washing machine encouraged people to wash their clothes more frequently, because the new technology saved time that was spent on handwashing and scrubbing. In a household where the member most likely to do unpaid work is busier with paid work, appliances like the washing machine is advantageous. Yet, this did not save any time spent on other tasks like "shopping, child care, and household management" (Coltrane and Shih, 2010, p. 404). Presently, in households where both parents work full time, women are still more likely than men to produce labor with use value in the home. When there are children in the picture, women are more likely to be involved with managing kids' schedules and caring after them when sick. Parenting has made it difficult for women to achieve career advancement,

which women have often sacrificed in order to spend more time at home (Patten, 2015). This reflects an institutional bias against mothers in the workplace, which leaves more women at home and more vulnerability to class struggle.

However, households are finding it difficult to rely solely on one income earner, which is why more women have been entering the workforce (Ehrenreich and Hochschild, 2003). More women participate in capitalist class processes outside the household. This can be burdensome for women, who are responsible for labor both inside and outside the home. One solution to this dilemma is the hiring of a paid domestic worker.

Women tend to dominate paid domestic work across the world according to the International Labor Organization (2013). While men also do work in the domestic labor sector, they tend to be involved with less feminized work as “drivers or butlers” (ILO, 2013). Women domestic workers primarily work for households and receive pay for what was previously unpaid work under a feudal mode of production.

The paid domestic worker’s employment in the household complicates the feudal mode of production. Previously, when someone in the feudal household performed unpaid work, she produced use value, but not exchange value, since she did not sell her labor power for wages. The paid domestic worker’s employment in the household transforms it into a capitalist mode of production. She offers her labor power, a commodity on the market, to an

owner of money who wishes to buy it. The owner of money, or the household employer, purchases her labor power, which now has exchange value because there is a price involved. Hence, the domestic worker and household member(s) enter into an employee-employer relationship.

The domestic worker is prone to a capitalist form of exploitation. Burnham and Theodore (2012) conducted a survey of 2,036 domestic workers in 14 metropolitan areas and found that among the biggest challenges for these workers are long workdays (p. 13). While occupations like nannies, caregivers, and housecleaners' wage rates vary, the workers in the industry are susceptible to low wages. Over half (56 percent) of the domestic workers surveyed work more than 40 hours a week for their employers, and many of these workers tend to be paid a flat rate that does not adjust for extra hours worked (Burnham and Theodore, 2012, p. 18). For live-in domestic workers, controlling working hours is even more difficult because the household is both home and workplace. Moreover, the U.S. Department of Labor annually establishes the Lower Level Standard Income Level (LLSIL), which is adjusted regionally for cost of living (U.S. Dept. of Labor; Burnham and Theodore, 2012, p. 22). A "Low Income Individual" may be someone whose income earned in a six-month period "does not exceed the higher level of the poverty line or 70 percent of the LLSIL" (U.S. Dept. of Labor). Burnham and Theodore's (2012) survey found that nearly half of the domestic workers studied were paid an hourly wage that falls below 70 percent of the LLSIL in

the region of their employment (p. 22). If these workers are unable to support themselves, their labor is appropriated to an unjust extent.

It is a travesty that low wage domestic workers spend so many hours caring for their employers' households, considering the incomes they earn. Domestic workers produce surplus value and may not even receive an exchange value equivalent to the bundle of goods necessary for their subsistence. They are victims of theft. The implication of their exploitation is that their work remains to be undervalued, and because domestic workers' work is "women's work," all women are affected by this unfairness. Sociologist Arlie Hochschild (2003) argues that the low value ascribed to domestic workers' labor "results from a cultural politics of inequality," as the low wages they receive "keeps the status of the women [who are domestic workers] – and, ultimately, all women – low" (p. 29). Though not all women are involved in the line of domestic work, they are still subject to the same ideologies and politics that work against women. As Hochschild (2003) illustrates,

If First World middle-class women are building careers that are molded according to the old male model, by putting in long hours at demanding jobs, their nannies and other domestic workers suffer a greatly exaggerated version of the same thing. Two women working for pay is not a bad idea. But two working mothers giving their all to work is a good idea gone haywire. In the end, both First and Third World women are small players in a larger economic game whose rules they have not written. (p. 20)

The analogous unfairness faced by women of different classes raises an important point – to examine the lives of women, and how they are shaped

by the economy, traditional neoclassical economic theory will not suffice. Each of the women under review are unique individuals. Neoclassical economics' assumption that individuals make rational choices does not accommodate the complexity of daily decision making in reality. Identity is an important, yet unfamiliar, feature of economics (Davis, 2009). It is through women's personal identities do they make economic choices. A woman who struggles to balance working long hours outside the home with taking care of her young children at home may feel additionally conflicted because of her maternal inclinations as part of her personality.

Rethinking the household requires special attention to several points. The household is a social environment that influences people's identities. Their identities, in turn, lead them to make economic decisions that are unreservedly tied to the household. Also, decisions are often driven by motivations and obligations that are not tied to one's own self-interest (Staveren, 2015). There are social causes and consequences of economic behavior in the home.

Marx would claim that capitalism breeds class struggle because it encourages people to enter exploitative relationships (Wolff and Resnick, 1987). The transition from a feudal mode of production to a capitalist mode of production in the home indicates that there are tensions specific to class and gender involved. Inherent in these contradictions are explanations for why

women remain to be marginalized by the economy, a source of power and change in society.

## CHAPTER 3

### WOMEN'S CLASS STRUGGLE

There is a crucial crisis at the heart of women's class struggle. This chapter will explore the contradictions that lead up to and emphasize this crisis through an examination of the transition from a feudal to capitalist mode of production.

#### **3.1 Exploring Contradictions in the Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism in the Household**

Households are complex social institutions that play a large role in daily life in the United States. They are of fundamental importance in not only the consumption of goods and services distributed in the macroeconomy, but also in the production and reproduction of economic agents. To better understand maldistributions of opportunity and earnings in the macroeconomy, this chapter examines economic organization of households. My main goal in this chapter is to describe the sources and conditions of existence that maintain and reproduce household social relations in contemporary American life.

The household is an institution that is feudal in form and practice. It is heavily structured by relationships of obligation based on power. Patriarchal

households, where men are in command of household dealings, encapsulate a feudal mode of production. Such households are institutions informed by gender ideologies that pressure women into performing surplus labor for the children and men in the home. Women perform labor beyond what is necessary for the maintenance of their own well-being. The surplus use value a woman creates becomes appropriated by household members. Women's labor power in the feudal household is not commodified and not sold on any markets in exchange for wages. Only when someone receives payment for her domestic services does the household become capitalist.

What are the contradictions or crises that occur in the transition from a feudal to capitalist mode of production in the household? In other words, in analyzing paid domestic service in the home, what is notable and should be altered? Anthropologist David Harvey (2014) best describes contradictions as the outcome of “when two seemingly opposed forces are simultaneously present within a particular situation, an entity, a process or an event” (p. 6). There is some tension occurring as the result of these oppositional forces. Contradictions matter, because they illuminate issues worth paying attention to and resolving. The opposing forces contribute to social frictions and disruptions that often lead to crisis. Recognizing the forms that contradictions take can benefit the development of social changes (hopefully those that are preferred). Sigmund Freud (1930) outlines a crucial contradiction in *Civilization and its Discontents* for example; individuals want autonomy over



their actions but they are subject to repression imposed by society. Household practices of traditional gender roles embody this contradiction. Women's unpaid work in the home is considered natural but that does not mean they want to perform this labor. Many women who deviate from the expectations of motherhood and childbearing face stigma (Lisle, 1996; Park, 2002). Even a psychological contradiction leaves economic consequences, as women duty-bound to motherhood perform feudal labor and keep the macroeconomy flowing.

Crisis is a feature of economic modes of production. Crisis is a major form that change or impermanence takes in the realm of political economy. Economists from Adam Smith to Marx to Thorstein Veblen, John Maynard Keynes, and Joseph Schumpeter have argued that crises and contradictions are inherent in capitalist modes of production. Capitalism is prone to complications arising from production and distribution of goods and services. The feudal home assumes a capitalist mode of production when it welcomes a paid domestic worker, hence there are contradictions that arise as a result.

The feudal mode of production also involves contradictions and crises. Fraad et al. (1994) demonstrate that social processes (cultural, political, and economic elements affecting social life) contribute to the contradictions in feudal modes of household production. The authors offer some of the many contradictions occurring in this mode of production, such as the clash between women's work outside the home and their work inside the home. To alleviate

the tension caused by this contradiction, many households employ domestic workers, but this employment sets up further contradictions. These contradictions underline class differences, a source of oppression for the women under review.

One of the notable contradictions to emerge from the transition from a feudal to capitalist mode of production is the ambiguous, seemingly undefined relationship that forms between the domestic worker and her employer. There is a pull towards establishing strict borders between the employer and employee as is typical of a wage labor contract, because this is intended to be a professional relationship. Yet, an intimacy forms between the worker and the employer, due to the nature of the household; it is a safe space for comfort and support. The household is space to retreat from work for employers of domestic labor. At the same time, it is the site of work for the paid domestic laborer. Both attitudes exist. The employer's attitude may influence him or her to treat the domestic laborer's as more exploitable, as there may be an expectation that the domestic is supposed to work as an unpaid laborer would, both in terms of the quality of work performed and in terms of willingness to extend beyond the terms of the contract. Also, the domestic worker's presence and employment compromise the privacy of the household in a way it would not if in an industrial or office workplace. It is a clash of an environment that is supposed to be professional for one and personal for another.

Domestic workers are employees who become very close to household members. Writer Nancy Cheever's (2003) interview with one nanny points out employers' expectation of a professional, businesslike performance from domestic workers. The nanny explains, "It's hard to be businesslike when you're going into someone's house and taking care of their children" (Cheever, 2003, p. 36). The closeness forged among the household, domestic worker, and household members pulls the employer-employee relationship further away from businesslike mannerisms and towards bonds of intimacy. The domestic worker learns so much about a family. She could learn about financial problems, marital conflicts, stress, physical ailments – the list could go on. The intimacy involved in the private sphere of the home blurs the lines between professionalism and amicable confidence that the domestic worker offers. Alternatively, another interesting dynamic formed within the relationship is that hirers, often middle-class citizens, are unaware that they are employers (Altmann and Pannell, 2012, p. 301). They see themselves as consumers rather than employers. They do not perceive of themselves as managing someone else's wages.

Moreover, proper working conditions are essential to ensuring employees' needs are met in the workplace, and this is a condition that should be applied to the household as a site of production. Domestic workers serving as nannies often form attachments with the children they care for, making it difficult for them to speak out against unfair working conditions, like

unreasonable expectations or hours (Bapat, 2014). It is hard to demand better pay or hours, or else workers run the risk of being fired and losing their connection to their care recipients. The attachment factor strongly impacts the social relations that form in the household. On one hand, a nanny may suffer antagonism from her employers, yet on the other, if she were to leave her job in that household, the children become devastated (Cheever, 2003). Many relationships that involve closeness and care are difficult to leave, but are even more devastating when exploitation is concerned.

The care drain, conceptualized by Arlie Hochschild (2003), is a contradictory process driven by migrant domestic workers who come from abroad to work in countries like the United States (p. 17). Women who would, hypothetically, be employed in their home countries (which happen to be poor) and would care for their families and/or others move to rich countries instead and work for families who need help with household labor (Hochschild, 2003). These women make the difficult choice of leaving their own families to take care after another's. Few people would not find this tragic. While employment improves the economic conditions of these women somewhat, they still participate in a system created by private domestic work that reproduces power dynamics between the rich and the poor (Hochschild and Ehrenreich, 2003). There is the poor, sending country supplying domestic labor, and the rich, receiving country demanding it. This practice hurts women

when it comes to gender, class, and race. Feudal and capitalist relations coexist, overdetermining and shaping each other.

The problem that surfaces from the private domestic worker's employment is the maintenance of relations characterized by inequality in the household. "Because many hired domestic workers are poor women of color, this system perpetuates class and race inequalities and socializes privileged children to expect to be waited on by disadvantaged women" (Coltraine and Shih, 2010, p. 416). This observation supports the household as a site of production of unequal social relations. The contradiction here is one "between reality and appearance" (Harvey, 2014, p. 9). On the surface, domestic workers support the daily lives of the families they're employed under. The reality is that these workers have mostly been women of color, doing the dirty work no one else wants to do and enabling families to pursue and participate in capitalist class processes. Not only do domestic workers maintain the conditions necessary for the reproduction of others' daily lives, but also the notion of a dominant group privileged by the hard labor of a subordinate group.

It has been apparent that employing domestic workers supposes a situation where women are both helped and hurt. There is no doubt that professional, full-time working women benefit from the labor they appropriate from domestic workers. Women entering domestic service also gain from the employment opportunity. However, racial and class differences are highly

emphasized in many relationships formed between domestic workers and their employers. Race and class are interlocking systems of oppression for women (Collins, 2000), and these differences work against them as they alienate themselves from each other as a result. It is difficult for a domestic worker to feel united with her employer when her job is charged with racial and class connotations.

### **3.2 Crisis as a Result of Contradictions**

The previous section discussed tensions such as the ambiguous relationship formed between employer and domestic laborer, the resistance from employees to voice concerns over working conditions, and the advantages hiring households enjoy from the labor of disadvantaged women that generate contradictions and crises in the domestic sphere. These are tensions that ought to be resolved in order to maintain justness and fairness in the household. However, I will make clear that these contradictions will be difficult to resolve if one particular tension, formed by capitalist crisis, cannot be rectified.

These contradictions reveal an unjust crisis: for women, class struggle revolves around time. Its role in creating and maintaining class struggle is subtle, but powerful nonetheless. How to manage time between unpaid and paid work is central to the contradictions that arise from the transition from a feudal to capitalist mode of production in the household. Although

socioeconomic status or race heavily influence how much time individuals can enjoy, women have endured the burden of reconciling unpaid and paid work time. Domestic service (as a market) thrives on women's conflict over time allocation between leisure and labor time.

The emergence of capitalist markets for "saving time" emphasizes the importance of time. Take for example Merry Maids, a provider of cleaning services. The business sells its services by claiming: "Cross a major chore off your to-do list by letting us take care of the house cleaning" (Merry Maids). It anticipates the assumption that households value the time devoted to unpaid work and prefer to distribute responsibilities to a third party offering labor power. Another similar product sold on the capitalist market for time-saving is TaskRabbit. Its gimmick is: "We do chores. You live life" (TaskRabbit). While the consumers of the service acquire and enjoy surplus leisure time, the employees of any organization like TaskRabbit continue to sell theirs for wages. The demands of capitalist workplaces add time burdens on households, particularly women, and create the conditions necessary for the need to outsource household labor.

Which households are the primary consumers of amenities like TaskRabbit or Merry Maids? The answer is those who can afford to contract out household labor in order to save time. Time is a distinct feature of one's class position. Class can decide one's ability to forego hours spent on paid work in order to enjoy more leisure time. It also affects the ways individuals

can save time, such as access to sufficiently staffed hospitals, supermarkets with healthy food choices, or amply resourced schools. People with money can save time that would be wasted on transportation; such capability is a luxury not afforded to many individuals in the lower classes. Time is valuable, because it influences the choices people have. Philosopher Martha Nussbaum (2011) supports that protecting leisure time for women is integral to a socially just society (p. 11). The central questions the capabilities approach (as per Nussbaum's (2001) interpretation of economist Amartya Sen's (1985) conceptualization) asks are what is a woman in a position to do and what are her opportunities? These answers rely on time. Do women have the time to seize opportunities? A crucial distinction among classes (and gender) is how an individual experiences time.

Time is allocated to everyone in an equal amount: twenty-four hours. However, not everyone gets to forego chores for comfort. Some people need to work long hours in order to support themselves while others can afford working part-time and enjoy hobbies on the side. The difference between a domestic worker and the employer is that one's task is to ensure that the other's time devoted to unpaid work is minimized as much as possible.

### **3.4 It's a Woman's Struggle**

Women work a lot. They continue to give up much of their leisure time for others. Their surplus labor time becomes appropriated by men, family



members, and workplaces. “Just as there is a wage gap between men and women in the workplace, there is a “leisure gap” between them at home. Most women work one shift at the office or factory and a “second shift” at home” (Hochschild, 1989, p. 4). The majority of men today avoid putting in a second shift. Most of men’s time allocation towards work is their paid work outside the home (Patten, 2015). Men can earn more money outside the home, since the gender pay gap still exists (White House, 2015). Thus, men are in a more economically empowering position. Working women are not the sole beneficiaries of paid domestic workers’ labor. Some nannies working in households think, “In these marriages, the mothers depend on us so that they can work, and the fathers sometimes get off scot-free – a lot of the time it’s as if they didn’t even have children” (Cheever, 2003, p. 38). An assertion such as this suggests that men are not conflicted over balancing work and home life in addition to gaining from the inequities in the household. Time is not as severe a struggle for many men.

Women’s contributions to the household remain more far-reaching than men’s despite the latter’s increasing involvement in the home. Bianchi, Milkie, Sayer, and Robinson (2000) found that women’s paid work outside the home causes their time doing housework to decline, as men’s time devoted to housework has increased. However, a 2011 reevaluation of the authors’ findings acknowledges that they did not pay attention to unpaid work such as childcare, which women continue to contribute to most in households. They

contend that childcare is an important component to household tasks, and it is a time consuming one, too. Women continue to face gender norms assigning them the responsibility over childcare. Bertrand, Kamenica, and Pan (2015) examine how gender norms affect economic outcomes for households and find that women who earn more than their husbands take on more housework. There is an ideological process going on here that pressures women to put in the second shift.

The fact that women are working outside the home in greater numbers and hours is fantastic. The path to gender equality requires that women are able to take the same opportunities as men, as well as claim access to the spaces men dominate. Working outside the home, or increased labor force participation, is a tenet of second-wave feminism (Biklen et al., 2008). The ability to participate in the public sphere is important for women, but it is not always easy.

Anne-Marie Slaughter, current president and CEO of the think tank New America, left her job at the State Department because it was difficult to balance the demands of her career with her responsibilities to her family at home. Her (2012) article in *The Atlantic* “Why Women Still Can’t Have It All” reveals the struggle women with career (or class) aspirations face when childcare presents itself as a barrier. The struggle women face is over time, because there is simply not enough of it when a significant portion of the day has to be spent caring after other people. The struggle over time is gender

inflected class struggle, because it is a class process taking place during the production and distribution of a woman's labor produced during some number of hours.

Time has created a gender-inflected class struggle because despite the progressions of the economy today, women must do the majority of unpaid work in the home while working many hours outside the home. The post-industrial era of capitalism led to the outsourcing, or contracting out, of many industrial jobs to other countries and to the widening gap between the rich and the poor (Ware, 2015, p. 112). The need for women to join the workforce increasingly grew, but the U.S. has not been able to harmonize women's conflict between work and home compared to European counterparts. Plus, wage stagnation has forced household members to work longer hours per week on average (Mishel et al., 2015). Workers – women included – have been producing more than what they are paid for, underlining that they have not been justly compensated for their time.

### **3.4 The Importance of Time**

The importance of time must be stressed. Class demonstrates one's experience of time, or the privilege of having autonomy over how one spends time. How someone spends time is fundamental to understanding women's oppression all over the world. In the United States, time poverty continues to be a condition of paid employment for numerous women. It is an even greater

challenge for low wage workers, who are predominantly women. The Bureau of Labor Statistics (2015) examined wage and salary workers paid hourly rates with earnings at or below the prevailing minimum wage in 2014. Current Population Survey (CPS) data (which does not indicate if Fair Labor Standards Act or individual state or local minimum wage laws covered surveyed households) show that more women had wages at or below the prevailing minimum wage than men (5 percent compared to men's 3). Looking at the percent distribution of total paid hourly rates, 65.6 percent of workers were paid hourly rates *below* the prevailing minimum wage. These workers are women. How do these women, who may receive less than the current minimum wage (\$7.25), spend their time? How much flexibility may they enjoy when planning their day and what choices do they have, considering their purchasing power? Their choices are limited.

Time is of great importance because it is an indicator of women's agency. Exposure to inequality and unfairness compromises women's agency and their power to influence the material conditions of their lives. Amartya Sen (2000) writes, "To see individuals as entities that experience and have well-being is an important recognition, but to stop there would amount to a very restricted view of the personhood of women" (p. 190). Taking Sen's message further, it must be said that women's economic achievements like labor force participation are commendable but not enough. Their paid work outside the home and the time inequities they face as a result reduce women's

agency over the development of their personhood. This indicates that there is still work to be done in the U.S. to ensure that women can enjoy freedoms to the same extent men do.

The reality is that the United States remains an unequal society. Despite its enormous wealth, there are still inequities such as the gender pay gap or racial tensions that create and maintain the conditions for class struggle. Due to this, Nussbaum (2011) would categorize the U.S. as a developing nation. Developing nations are those that “contain problems of human development and struggles for a fully adequate quality of life and for minimal justice” (Nussbaum, 2011, p. 16). Because inequality is the root cause of oppression, it is something societies need to address and reduce. How is this done?

The capabilities approach questions what opportunities a society offers to individuals in order to gauge a sense of what they can do or be (Sen, 2005, p. 153). What choices do people have? An element of human and economic development is the freedom of choice, Sen argues. Do women have the agency to freely decide what to do with her own time? The capabilities approach illuminates that two people could have very different opportunities despite sharing similar means to achieve them (Sen, 2005, p. 154). Consider that men and women have 24 hours each. However, economic prospects and gender ideologies structure those hours for the two groups in very different ways. If women are low wage employees who need to work a substantive

amount of time in order to make rent, for instance, she is presumably not spending many hours leisurely reading Dickens. Human capabilities are an important feature of individual freedom (Sen, 2005).

### **3.5 Being Overworked: The Plight of Capitalism**

In order to fulfill human capabilities, women need more leisure time. Developing one's self requires the ability to spend time on reading, learning, knitting, running, gardening, rock climbing, singing, film watching, dancing, art making, attending parties or concerts, writing – the list is endless. Yet there are individuals, women especially, who lack the agency to give up paid and/or unpaid work hours to undertake any of the activities listed above. If women cannot find and maintain new interests or relations, they are not leading fully free lives. The goal is to live in a socially just world, which means enhancing the lives of people everywhere by protecting the opportunities to fulfill capabilities.

In Marxian theory, one critical question is: how long should the workday be? “The fact that half a day's labour is necessary to keep the labourer alive during 24 hours, does not in any way prevent him from working a whole day” (Marx, 2001, p. 279). In other words, workers can produce the value of the means of their subsistence in less time than the duration of their actual workday. Nonetheless, people work beyond necessary labor time and produce surplus value, appropriated by capitalists. Marx (2001) writes that it

is the determination of the working day that antagonizes the capitalist class and the working class (p. 338). Capitalism is a system contingent on making people work longer hours than necessary, paying them less than what their time is worth, and profiting from this injustice. Social units, like the working class and the capitalist class, emerge from the existence of exploitation. Labor and capital become characteristic of social groups. Balancing paid and unpaid work has become descriptive of working women's lives. This is their class struggle.

Class struggle degrades workers. Their minds and bodies suffer for the sake of capital accumulation. Capitalism produces an existence in which individuals face conflicts over access to resources like time. There is no doubt that capitalism created leisured societies, but it raised the price of time (Schor, 1993). Not everybody has the time to fulfill their capabilities, and this is why there is inequality and human misery. Class struggle, which is intrinsic to the capitalist mode of production but is also involved in the feudal mode, is alienating.

When people are overworked, they are prone to alienation, a structural situation that is a symptom of exploitation. Alienation is what occurs when labor power – appropriated or supplied – comes to arrange social life. It is about estrangement as a result of human beings becoming inputs for production. Capitalism meant to be freeing and improve the lives of everyone,

but alienation underlines the frustrating nature of overworking and the misery workers face.



## **CHAPTER 4**

### **INSTITUTIONALIZED INJUSTICES AGAINST WOMEN**

In this chapter, I frame the United States as a nation facing challenges because of the rampant inequality. I address some of the drivers of gender injustices, such as legal statutes, and discuss potential remedies. The U.S. faces the challenge of gender justice because women face institutionalized injustices – meaning, their vulnerable position in the political economy is systemic. As long as these conditions remain, women continue to face class-based tensions.

The household, where class processes are in motion, is the site where feudal relations help and harm women. They can help when women form the familial and romantic bonds integral to emotional well-being or through the financial support provided by household members. On the other hand, the feudal relations innate to household production counts on women to perform more of the unpaid labor. When low wage paid women workers perform tasks previously done by wives, mothers, or domestic partners, they are exploited in a wage labor system of capitalism that households become reliant on. These are considerable facets to the reshaping, not reduction, of gender injustice.

One component of gender injustice is time poverty. Women are more subject to it than men, partly due to the division of labor in the households that make women susceptible to feudal exploitation. It is necessary to address this because time poverty affects the capabilities one can enjoy in her lifetime. When there is a large proportion of the population disadvantaged in some way, social injustice persists. True social justice is not without gender justice. “The challenge of gender justice,” writes Nussbaum (2009), is not only a political challenge, but also a theoretical one (p. 95). Political and economic thought have not adequately addressed women’s issues. If confronting poverty and development is the goal, then it is imperative that feminist inquiry be applied to executing theories of social justice (Nussbaum, 2000). Justice is incomplete and mediocre when the demands of women are not met.

As it has been argued, how much time women can afford to spend on themselves – or the temporal wealth they have – is of great importance to equality. To consider what can be done to resolve time poverty, it is important to understand what is responsible for women’s class struggle. When people critique the source of inequality, they usually point out disparities in wages, income, and economic opportunities. While that is a valid approach, assessing institutions and policies by examining the capabilities they offer to society members can highlight class and time disparities and how they may be addressed.

Women face special circumstances in the political economy, and many social policies have either been inconsiderate or have had unintended consequences. For example, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 made employer discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, and national origin illegal (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission). Affirmative action, the favoring of minorities or historically disadvantaged groups, is a provision of Title VII, but it has not been totally effective because of the lack of its enforcement (Branch, 2011; Cancio et al., 1996). The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission failed to enforce antidiscrimination laws, and this is important because it has allowed organizations to pay workers less for equivalent work without penalty (Cancio et al., 1996). Title VII was profound because it protected workers from the unjustness of discrimination under the basis of race or gender. Although it was an important moment in women's liberation movements of the 1960s and 1970s, it has not been seamless because of inept enforcement.

The above illustrates the notion that policy does not always thoroughly tackle inequities. One argument for some inequality in society relies on the fetishism of incentives. There is profound importance placed on incentives as motivation for all to pursue economic interests. The dominant ideology asserts that hard work will pay off for those who are willing. Society needs the rich to model admirable work ethic. It has been argued that redistribution from the rich to the poor blunts economic incentives (Johnston, 2004, p. 136). The idea

that income inequality inspires those who are less well off to work harder is romanticized to the extent that the poor are often dismissed as “lazy” when their economic prospects appear unpromising. The “incentives” argument is detrimental, because it diminishes the urgency of policy that can improve societal welfare. It also fails to recognize that some people do not have access to economic opportunities because of class disparities (Gintis and Bowles, 2011). For minimum wage workers, earned income is often not sufficient (Edin and Lein, 1997; Ehrenreich, 2001). When individuals are able to work but choose not to search for employment, further exploration on why and how to alter behavior should take place.

Social policy is an instrument of change, intended to promote individual and societal well-being (Titmuss, 2008). Designing social policy seldom goes without heated debate over whose interests policies will serve and whom the beneficiaries are. One question that may arise among policymakers is whether policy should be targeted or universal; in other words, should they aim to benefit the poor specifically or all citizens in the state? (Korpi and Palme, 1998). Some believe that in order to achieve equality, societies need to tax and use the revenue to make resources available to all citizens. Conversely, “universal programs that also benefit the nonpoor are a waste of resources” (Korpi and Palme, 1998). The effect of redistribution is lessened by universal policy. Targeted or universal – policies should protect the human capabilities of society's members. They should go beyond

considering poverty with regards to income and evaluate the lives people can choose to live.

If intending to protect the lives working women can enjoy outside of waged labor time, Sen (2001) believes the state can play a supportive role in enhancing the freedoms enjoyed by individuals in society. “In providing public education, health care, social safety nets, and good macroeconomic policies,” the state can enable individuals’ agency, or their capabilities in thinking and acting within the social and material conditions they find themselves (Sen, 2001, p. 513). These means – provision of public education or health care – matter heavily in the context of the feudal household. If classrooms are not engaging children effectively in their learning, or if families are unable to receive quick health care from doctors, then the burden to tutor someone or nurse family members back to health falls unevenly onto women. The appropriation of their feudal household labor is an extraction of their time.

It is of utmost importance that the state enacts social policies that consider women’s welfare, because so far it has not aptly done so. The vast majority of women depend on governments that promote general welfare “by providing initiative and support where necessary” (as cited in Morris and Deprez, 2014). Ideally, the state upholds its supportive capabilities. It is the government that helps and hurts across all classes, races, and genders.

Government skepticism is not a recent development. In “The German Ideology,” Marx (1845-46) writes,

Since the State is the form in which the individuals of a ruling class assert their common interests, and in which the whole civil society of an epoch is epitomized, it follows that the State mediates in the formation of all common institutions and that the institutions receive a political form. (p. 187)

Marx asserts that the state primarily promotes the interests and ideologies of the ruling class; in other words, the privileged and powerful. They control how institutions like education or marriage take form in civil society. Such institutions end up reflecting the ideologies of the ruling class, which thus determines the dominant knowledge shared and expressed throughout society.

Because the state works in favor of the ruling class, the working class does not have the political leverage to participate in a civil society that best meets its needs. Marx advocates for communism, because it would be a system in which everyone – not an elite group – has control over the material conditions (the means of production) of life. It is an ideal but unviable solution to social inequality in a society embracing capitalism. The ruling class’s eclipse of the state antagonizes itself with the working class and sets the stage for class struggle. Power differences create the conditions for social inequality. The problem is that gains are collected by a minority while losses are experienced by a majority. In 20th century U.S. history, women’s struggles reflect a similar dynamic. Favoring an elite group of individuals is

detrimental to women, because in many parts of the world, they are still treated as second-class citizens (Durako, 2000; Okin, 2013).

The injustices women face in the political economy have class implications, because their economic opportunities and class positions are interrelated. With the exception of an elite few, women are at class warfare with the institutions that influence political economy. Opposing interests result in class tensions. The way to alter institutions is through policy. The importance of public policy lies in the ambition towards a fair and just society for all. There have been some problems however. Political and economic institutions have not improved all women's lives, which is why women are at the receiving end of social injustices. Much legislation hurts women. In the United States, the government has promoted rather neoliberal interests that spark a class war against women. When social policies reflect the interests of the powerful and privileged, women are disadvantaged in ways that affect households. Since households are an integral component of economic decision-making, there are repercussions. In consideration of households with children, women's problems become the entire household's problem.

The government has been shy to address the concerns of the private lives of its citizens. Neoliberalism has been the dominant expression of social policy in America, where privatization and free-markets are emphasized (Johnston, 2004). Individual incentives and the pursuit of self-interest are privileged by the ideology, but not everyone responds to those. It "is

destructive for the vast majority” (Saad-Filho and Johnston, 2004, p. 4).

Women suffer from cuts in public spending. Their ability to “outsource” care responsibilities, for example, is hampered by policies that limit funding for public schools, welfare receipts, or public transportation.

The source of class struggle imposed by neoliberalism and the need to privatize everything can be outlined. It is found in the law, the workplace, and the politics regarding reproductive health care. Reviewing these institutions are necessary, because they will illuminate the ways in which women continue to be pressured into feudal household production, which imposes class struggle onto their lives. Women’s lack of agency over their own time has been institutionalized.

#### **4.1 Women and Property Rights**

Examining the role of legal institutions in sustaining gender inequality presents the ways women are at class warfare with the state that makes and sustains laws. The law is an important area of focus for macroeconomic well-being and economic development. In fact, economic development esteems strong legal institutions that protect property rights and enforce contracts (Dam, 2006). These are hallmarks of a strong, functioning political economy. Establishing property rights is important since no one will have to worry that land is being forcefully taken away. Contract enforcement is necessary because it obliges multiple parties to adhere to their commitments. Knowing



that the law can protect citizens' interests is innate to a good society. It has not always protected women's interests however.

The law is responsible for women's exploitation in and outside the home. Legality has previously severely hurt women. Early American history points out women's subjugation to the household. Prior to the nineteenth century, women were legally dependent on their husbands (Library of Congress). A married woman would have to rely on her husband "to file suits on her behalf or to defend her from legal attack" (Norton, 2015, p. 27). Clearly, women lacked the agency to battle the courts on their own. They were subordinate to men. Property rights are necessary for securing gender equality in societies. Women, at this time, did not have these rights. Consequently, men controlled women's material possessions, or wealth.

From French-anarchists like P.J. Proudhon (1840) who proclaim "Property is Theft!" to economist Bina Argawal (1994), who argues that gender inequality in South Asia rests on women's inability to command land ownership, the discussion of property suggests it is an arena of struggle. In the U.S., men used to be the owners of women's inheritances (Norton, 2015). As a result, women experienced class struggles in the household. They were completely alienated from their own land. This situation was totally legal. Property ownership creates class distinctions, but husbands or fathers, with the backing of the law, should not enforce class conflict in the home. Only until the nineteenth century did the U.S. begin to enact laws that would protect

women's property as their own through the Married Women's Property Laws (Library of Congress). Prior to this act's legislation, the law fostered women's participation in the household under a subordinate position.

The absence of land ownership rights in women's lives emphasizes the government's engendering of feudal relations in households. Everyone can agree that a situation in which men could legally claim entitlement over their wives' property and wealth illustrates an unfair structural arrangement of the household. The social relations in this historical context are parallel to those in medieval feudalism, where they center around land. The lord and husband own it, though it is more central to the daily lives of the serf and wife who perform labor for the landowners. Without legal recognition, women are inclined into a position of massive dependence on their husbands for support. Consequently, women must perform more feudal labor in order to call on their husbands to legally represent them. This is not limited to a historical context; women continue to face inequality as a result of their responsibilities of feudal labor.

#### **4.2 Inadequate Labor Protections**

I turn to the workplace as an institution sustaining women's class struggle, because it structures a sizeable portion of one's day, and in essence one's time. Women enter the capitalist workforce and thus, enter into exploitative relations with their employers. But exploitation occurs at home,

too. The organizational structure of workplaces, such as the typical workday hours, impacts the ways women are involved at home. It might even intensify the feudal exploitation women endure, if considering an example of a woman working more than 40 hours per week, who is also responsible for picking up her kids from school or daycare centers and for preparing dinner afterwards. Managing these responsibilities is no easy feat.

The workplace seizes time from women and it has been able to partly due to the substandard or violated labor rights in the U.S. The legislation of labor laws like the Fair Labor Standards Act or National Labor Relations Act have been fundamental to granting workers protections and rights. Ideally, they alleviate the exploitation workers face in capitalist production sites. Labor rights demonstrate that workers should be treated humanely; there must be limits to profit maximizing motives or else workers could face unfair treatment. Workers have greater agency through labor rights to express discontent with the status quo of work environments. For low wage earners, this is significant.

Wage theft is an unwelcome violation that harms working women because they perform unpaid labor under both feudal and capitalist sites of production. It is what occurs when employees are not entirely paid for the number of hours put into work. Employees who are not paid minimum wage, not paid for overtime, or forced into working off the clock are victims of wage theft (UCLA Labor Center). Labor protections against wage theft are

especially important for low wage workers, because economic insecurity indicates class struggle. Labor rights intend for individuals who choose to work to also be capable of leading fulfilling lives outside the workplace. Decent pay and manageable hours are essential to ensuring that workers can.

Wage theft is an institutional problem that unfairly affects households. Because strict enforcement does not exist, employers find it easy to get away with violating labor rights. It is difficult to maintain the wellbeing of household members without secured income. The lack of enforcement against wage theft allows the capitalist form of exploitation to occur. Not only does wage theft affect workers, but also government revenue when payroll taxes are left uncollected as a result of employers failing to pay employees. This can mean public programs lack potential funding. If schools are lacking resources like textbooks or if towns do not invest in reliable transportation systems, someone – usually a woman – will have to take time out of her day to compensate for these losses, through tutoring or chauffeuring. All of this suggests that time, though everyone experiences it, does not really belong to women for themselves. The wage theft some women experience amplifies the problem with time poverty. Hours are extracted from women both in feudal households and capitalist workplaces, the latter owing them monetary payment for their time.

The existence of wage theft underlines the importance of contractual employment, which sets the terms and conditions for being hired at a

workplace. For any developing nation, contractual employment is essential because contracts protect working conditions and working hours (Nussbaum, 2009). Employees are likelier to enjoy working under protective laws and be more productive. Their work hours become more worthy of their time and efforts. For women whose struggle is over time conflicts, this is of importance. Providing women with good work environments promotes productivity and compensates them for their time commitments. It is a reasonable, fair reward for their labor.

The study of domestic workers emphasize class struggle experienced by women, because they are unique laborers who are paid under capitalist conditions to perform feudal labor. Domestic workers do not fully benefit from labor rights. The lack of employment protections granted to them reflects an undervaluing of those who perform “women’s work.” There is an underlying assumption that women’s work is not highly valued *because* it is work performed by women (American Journal of Sociology, 2000). Domestic workers’ labor is an expected product in feudal households, but it should not be paid poorly when offered on the capitalist market.

The Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 (FLSA) was an advancement in labor rights promoting social justice in the political economy, but it was not entirely fair. It protects workers’ wages and hours (Dept. of Labor; National Alliance for Domestic Workers). Until 1974, the act did not cover domestic workers, and Southern lawmakers heavily influenced this lack of coverage

(Bapat, 2014). In the early 20th century, the majority of domestic workers were black. This was not only a gender issue, but also one of race. Southern legislators did not want blacks to receive the same wages as whites. They did not want to grant equal rights. The racial discrimination behind this legislation must not be ignored; it too bears consequence on women. This is an example of the government treating women unfairly on the basis of race. Furthermore, many domestic workers are exempt from receiving minimum wage or overtime compensation because of the “companionship” clause in the FLSA. If the basis of their employment is “companionship services for individuals who (because of age or infirmity) are unable to care for themselves,” the FLSA does not cover them (National Alliance for Domestic Workers). Companionship may be grounds for performing feudal household labor, but the domestic worker is engaged in capitalist labor and should be paid accordingly. It must not be forgotten that domestic workers have their own share of feudal household labor to perform during their “leisure time” (the time not spent on paid work). For work that is written off as “low skilled,” it creates a challenge for many women to manage their schedules to avoid time poverty.

The class conflicts women face today have been entrenched in policymaking over labor rights and opportunities to work. One example explored by sociologist Enobong Hannah Branch (1983) contends black women have been historically restricted to low wage jobs that have made

them vulnerable to poverty to this day. One of those low wage jobs has been as domestic workers.

Domestic workers are also excluded from the Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA). It establishes some health and safety standards employers are required to meet, but OSHA does not apply to domestic workers. The work expected of domestic service – such as cooking or cleaning – need safety regulations in place, because workers are exposed to harmful chemicals and other dangers (Bapat, 2014). It is ridiculous to hire someone to clean homes and buildings and not consider ensuring their safety. If an accident were to occur on the job, it would be the domestic worker's responsibility to take care of the problem whereas the employer should compensate for the damages caused. This contributes to the unfairness many women experience with labor market participation.

There are many employed women in the U.S. The U.S. Bureau of Labor estimates that 57 percent of the labor force (in 2014) are women. Where women are overrepresented, however, is specifically in low wage jobs. The National Women's Law Center estimates that women make up two-thirds of the "nearly 20 million workers in low wage jobs" (which the report categorizes as paying \$10.10 or less per hour). It is particularly disheartening to see low wage earners unable to benefit from or be covered by fundamental labor rights. This is an indicator of an external agent, the government,

participating in an injustice towards working women. It emphasizes the intensified exploitation low wage earners in the capitalist workplace suffer.

### **4.3 Gendered Wage Gaps**

The capitalist workplace, in which women perform paid work, is governed by policies that do not fully meet the requirements for gender justice. In 1963, President John F. Kennedy signed into law the Equal Pay Act. The legislation would guarantee that women and men would be paid equally for the same job under the same employer (National Equal Pay Task Force, 2013). It would encourage women to enter the paid labor force and increase their participation in the public sphere. It would also signify women's important role in society outside the feudal household. However, the Equal Pay Act of 1963 did not eliminate the pay inequity women in the economy face today. Calendar days like Equal Pay Day (April 12th) are not celebrations but reminders of the capitalist exploitation women face.

An undeniable component of women's class struggle in America is the gender pay gap they face. "The pay gap is the difference in men's and women's median earnings" (Hill, 2014, p. 5). Women are on the low end of the earnings received by workers in the labor force. As of 2014, women are paid only 79 percent of what men are paid (Hill, 2014). The wage gap itself is 21 percent. Women would have to work more in order to earn the same income as men. It is a structural bias against working women. Gender pay



gaps are particularly problematic when considering families have been shifting from the male breadwinner model to dual earner households (Lewis, 2001; Blossfeld and Drobnic, 2001). Today, there are more households with women breadwinners (Wang et al., 2013). If women are not rightly compensated for their work, they are not the only ones who suffer from insufficiencies. Children, elders, and significant others face the troubles as well. Many women sacrifice their time and labor for others' wellbeing.

While women's involvement with paid work impacts the feudal labor they perform in the household, their participation in feudal class processes affects the pay gap experienced in the capitalist workplace. When mothers take time off from work or temporarily leave the workforce for parenthood duties, their earnings take a negative hit (Hill, 2014). Women face pay gaps amongst themselves as income earners. Pay inequities are not only between men and women. Women face the "motherhood penalty," which compares women who do not have children with those who do to see the effect of children on worker's earnings (Budig, 2014). This is a gendered discrepancy among parents and one experienced differently according to social class too. Sociologist Michelle Budig (2014) finds "there is a wage penalty for motherhood of 4% per child that cannot be explained by human capital, family structure, family-friendly job characteristics, or differences among women that are stable over time" (p. 13). Moreover, low wage workers suffer the motherhood penalty the most while "the top 10% of female workers" do

not incur such cost (Budig, 2014). Another expression for the wage differential between mothers and non-mothers is the “family gap” (Waldfogel, 1998). These entrenched inequities women experience among all classes put them in a frustrating position; the class struggle in the household transfers over in the workplace. There seems no escape.

To boot, the gender gap persists across all educational levels. Higher education can help individuals earn higher income, but it has not sufficiently battled the perseverance of the gender pay gap. “At every level of academic achievement” – less than a high school diploma, high school diploma, some college or associate degree, bachelor’s degree, or advanced degree – “women’s median earnings are less than men’s median earnings” (Hill, 2014, p. 13). In fact, comparing the median weekly earnings of men and women indicate that women with advanced degrees earn only 74 percent of men’s earnings (Hill, 2014). This gender pay gap appears unavoidable to women. Women who graduate with college degrees “are less able to pay off their student loans promptly” (Hill, 2014, p. 15). Thus, women’s loans accumulate higher interest and they remain in debt longer than men. Debt places incredible burdens on women and weakens their class aspirations. It is a sad irony that higher education is believed to be an essential investment because of its returns (Oreopoulos and Petronijevic, 2013). Despite women’s efforts to cultivate their human capital, they fare worse than men.

Gender segregation of occupations plays a large role in the pay gap faced between men and women. Jobs that have traditionally been dominated by men pay better than jobs that have traditionally been dominated by women (Hill, 2014). Male-dominated sectors experience higher returns, so the gender pay gap remains wide (Blau and Kahn, 2006). Many of these sectors, like the STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) fields, have not attracted or been welcoming towards women (McNeely and Vlaicu, 2010; Bellas et al., 2001). Women's work is undervalued still and has not earned wages equivalent to men's. Women can have the same intellectual skills, or comparable human capital, as men and still be adversely affected by pay.

Wages are essential to examine because workers are paid for their time. When women earn less than they deserve, they lose time they could be spending on alternative human development activities. Again, the ideal is that everyone in society is free to access the opportunities for a fulfilling life. The appropriation of feudal surplus labor is often acceptable because of the conditions under which they may be performed. Assuming a mother loves her children, she cares after them out of love. In the capitalist mode of production, workers are disconnected or alienated from the recipients of surplus labor. It is a fact of life that the majority of human beings need to work to meet basic needs, but their lives outside of work are supposed to be less grueling. Women need time and equitable pay for that to hold true.

#### 4.4 Leave Policies

Often, something comes up in one's life that makes taking leave from work necessary. They get sick or the children do, there is a special occasion that should not be missed, or someone passes away – a number of events may occur that prevent people from attending work and push for participation in unpaid work instead.

There is a protective law for this. The Family and Medical Leave Act “entitles eligible employees of covered employers to take unpaid, job-protected leave for specified family and medical reasons with continuation of group health insurance coverage under the same terms and conditions as if the employee had not taken leave” (U.S. Dept. of Labor). The FLMA applies to *eligible* employees, which means they must have worked for their employers for at least 12 months prior to requesting leave. Some of the entitlements employees have are twelve workweeks of leave in one year if she has given birth, has a health condition compromising her ability to work functionally, or has to take care of a family member. Employees have approximately three months of leave available to them, but it is unpaid. It is difficult to go three months without earning income. For low wage earners, the leave is unaffordable. While employees can choose (or employers may require) to substitute collected paid leave days (sick or vacation days) to cover the period under FMLA protections, the ability to do so depends on the terms and conditions of the employer's leave policy (U.S. Dept. of Labor). People are

entitled to time off for their personal needs, or obligations to feudal household labor; this is why FLMA is significant. But low wage earners suffer because they cannot afford to take unpaid time off while managing to make ends meet. Unpaid leave is an option if it is necessary but oftentimes, circumstances such as low income turn it into a limiting option.

How legalized leave affects workers, specifically low wage workers, is crucial to understanding gender inequality in the context of the political economy, because the largest low paid occupations in the U.S. are dominated by women. They comprise 76 percent of workers in the top ten lowest paid jobs (Entmacher, Robbins, and Frohlick, 2014). Unpaid leave does not account for the personal lives of women and their families. Approximately one-third of women in low wage employment are mothers (National Women's Law Center, 2014). Low wage labor makes the pressures of feudal household labor more frustrating because of how prevalent exploitation in these women's lives is.

The remedy to unpaid leave would be paid leave, but the U.S. lags behind other competitive, industrialized countries. The U.S. has been concerned with the economic costs of providing leave and flexibility (Earle et al., 2001). Opposition against paid family leave posit it as being at odds with goals of maintaining productivity and competitiveness. Thus far, Congress has responded with: what is the financial feasibility of paid leave? Earle et al. (2011) look at economic performance indicators (like global economic

competitiveness and national unemployment rate) to determine whether paid family leave is economically feasible and find that it is. The authors show that the world's most competitive countries (their list includes: Australia, Austria, Canada, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Japan, Netherlands, Norway, Singapore, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom, and the United States) have the working conditions necessary for making parental leave a guarantee to employees. Many of these countries have policies like breastfeeding breaks that allow parents to pursue the goal of children's healthy development.

According to Jane Waldfogel (1998), maternity leave coverage increases women's pay, because it raises women's retention over the childbirth period, increases their work experience, and raises wages. Yet there is still concern over discriminatory practices during the hiring process, when some employers do not want to hire employees who will potentially take time off. Discrimination against workers who need to do feudal work is unhelpful to the pursuit of gender justice because it punishes them for their personal commitments to family. Moreover, "The Economics of Paid and Unpaid Leave," a report published by the White House (2014) suggests that businesses would not suffer if they grant workers paid family leave. It is a workplace policy that reduces worker turnover. When employees leave and are replaced by others, businesses incur the cost of hiring and training new workers. Policies that promote the wellbeing of loved ones tend to boost workers' morale and their productivity. The publishing of this report suggests

that the United States government is interested in making paid leave an option for women and families. This is an important and necessary step if society wants to balance feudal labor with capitalist workforce participation without the risk of losing jobs.

#### **4.5 Reproductive Control**

Demands of childcare exert pressure on households to produce more feudal labor. The responsibility falls on women to provide it but managing employment outside the home amplifies their lack of control over time. Paid paternity and maternity leave would remarkably assist workers in terms of job security and time allocation between paid and unpaid work. Maternity leave coverage, for example, benefits households, because it raises women's retention over the childbirth period, increases their work experience, and raises wages (Waldfogel, 1998). Workers will always have families to support. Relieving the pressure to balance private life with work will remain challenging for working women as long as the public sphere chooses not to accommodate parenthood.

There are also those who prefer not to participate in parenthood. For many, family support or childcare is out of the question because of personal preferences or financial feasibility. The U.S. Department of Agriculture projects that the younger child born in 2013 into a husband-wife family (part of a low-income group, whose before-tax income is less than \$61,530) with

two children will cost \$176,550 in 2013 dollar values from birth until the age 17 (Lino, 2014). Unpaid work for the maintenance of another human being has a large price tag, emphasizing the necessity of granting women reproductive rights and access to birth control to provide them with the choice to avoid feudal labor. If it is too burdensome, parenthood should not be mandated to individuals. Women are entitled to the choice to have families and agency over the feudal labor they produce.

Reproductive rights are an essential human right women have and they are an important element of reducing feudal exploitation. They are necessary for women's economic independence. Sen (2000) writes about women's education, employment, and ownership rights as considerable social features that facilitate the pursuit of economic independence. They are necessary to all societies promoting justice and freedom, as they also enable women to pursue various choices. Sen suggests that the loss of the ability to pursue any of these social features is detrimental to social justice efforts. So when women lack choices regarding education, employment, and ownership because of a lack of autonomy over reproduction, something has gone wrong. It is within the inequality in health care "that gender inequality manifests itself most blatantly and persistently in poor societies with strong antifemale bias" (Sen, 2000, p. 194). When women cannot access health care services (like abortion) they face constraints.



Development economists like Sen (2005) would argue that family planning is integral to involving women in more economic activities. When women have children, their time outside the home becomes compromised with parenthood responsibilities. They perform more feudal labor and face exploitation inside the home. Women's empowerment overdetermines their ability to be financially independent. If they must forgo paid work in order to perform unpaid work, women's class struggle becomes illuminated by their obligation to feudal household production.

While it is true that economists discuss reproductive control as a means of freedom and development in developing countries like Bangladesh, access to women's health care and reproductive rights requires progress in developed countries like the United States as well. According to the Guttmacher Institute, a research and policy organization devoted to sexual and reproductive health in America, "During the 2015 state legislative session, lawmakers considered 514 provisions related to abortion; the vast majority of these measures—396 in 46 states—sought to restrict access to abortion services" (Nash, Rathbun, and Ansari-Thomas, 2016). Legislative blocks to birth control impede efforts to enhance women's power in society as well as coercing them to perform more feudal labor. It is essential that women can have agency in family planning, otherwise they lose autonomy over the feudal household through the appropriation of their surplus labor. It has been noted

that children are expensive; additional members to one's household means additional surplus labor will be appropriated.

#### **4.6 Furthering Feudal Demands**

The transition from a feudal mode of production, where women perform unpaid labor, to a capitalist mode of production, where women become wage-earners, has involved struggles. There is gender struggle, as women are continued to be expected of reproducing the workforce through childrearing and caring. And there is class struggle, as the labor women produce are appropriated by others both in and outside the household. Inherent in the interlocking oppressions women face on the basis of class and gender are the external demands over their time, which is increasingly out of their control. Women's class struggle is a result of their personal time being appropriated by unpaid and paid work.

Time demands that women experience and are held back by are institutionalized. There have been laws that are biased against women, especially low-earning workers. The result of this is inequality perpetuated by legal institutions. What should be done? As long as there is inequality in society, the United States needs to develop policies that can achieve and secure social justice. The government has been responsible for the exploitation women face; this is made clear by many of its policy interventions. Government policy has supported patriarchal subordination of women in the workplace and in the household. Women's reproductive rights,

women's privacy rights, women's employment opportunities, educational ambitions, and women's comparable worth in the workplace – all are supported by the state in a way that reproduces and deepens disadvantage for women and produces more injustice rather than more justice.

Women's class struggle is a political matter with consequences on their personal lives. Another rehearsal of how the government has been a disappointing actor in the pursuit of gender justice: according to the bipartisan advocacy organization First Focus, from 2011-2015, there was a 9.4 percent decline in federal spending on children (0-18 years of age). The authors (First Focus, 2015) describe spending as the allocations towards programs specifically for children and families with children in addition to programs that are benefitting children as overall recipients (one example would be Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP). What happens when there are cuts in spending for children? Families must compensate. When children's lives in schools, for instance, are impacted by cuts in government expenditure, labor becomes "*in-sourced*" to the household, where parents, siblings, babysitters, or legal guardians neutralize the inefficiencies. Because the government chooses not to invest, many women end up investing their own time to take matters into their own hands. Women lose their time, and the government benefit from the sacrifices they make for their families.

There is something to be said about women's diminished ability to buy more leisure time as a result of the pay gap, unpaid leave policies, or

legislative blocks to reproductive health services. It is that women's participation in capitalist development in conjunction with the extraction of their feudal labor in households has been inequitable.

#### **4.7 What Now?**

How to address the tensions women face? Time-saving mechanisms, which were briefly described in my second chapter, are not new to the capitalist market, but they do not eradicate overdetermined class conflict experienced by women. Paid domestic service exemplifies an answer to households struggling to balance unpaid with paid work, but it only displaces the key issue onto others (and in this case, other women). The question is whether feudal households can become less appropriative of women's labor. It can, if more men pick up their share of domestic tasks that need to be taken care of. Women and men collectively performing necessary and surplus labor in households would mark the transition into a communist mode of production (Fraad et al., 1987, p. 33). For this to happen, ideologies on gender must shift so that men would cease to rely on the appropriation of women's surplus labor. It is a hefty task to rely solely on social change. It must be precipitated by some other process.

For too long, women have accommodated others – the government, their children, and their employers – using their own personal time. The superstructure must commence its attempts to stop reinforcement of women's

participation in the feudal mode of production in households. The pressures women face to revert to feudal production have been the consequence of policy insufficiently addressing inequality. One approach the United States should consider, if it is determined to improve the lives of working women, is gender mainstreaming.

#### **4.8 Gender Mainstreaming**

Gender mainstreaming is a policy approach that addresses inequality through deconstructing the “genderedness of systems, procedures, and organizations” (Verloo, 2005, p. 12). It examines how institutions may inherently disservice women, as this paper has also demonstrated. Gender mainstreaming is a political process that prioritizes gender and women’s concerns (Verloo, 2005). It aims to institutionalize equality through policy (Daly, 2005). According to economics professor Diane Perrons, sometimes goals to tackle gender inequality come second to another, as a result of concentrating on the economy’s productivity (as cited by Walby, 2005). Prioritizing productivity has clearly not always benefited women.

Many European Union countries have utilized gender mainstreaming as a policy tool. For example, city planners in Vienna, Austria have recognized that mainly women travel using public transportation or by foot. They took this into consideration of their urban planning goals (Stadt Wien). In addition, the Austrian Institute of Economic Research examined the city’s

approach to promoting labor force participation through gender mainstreaming. The state assumed duty over achieving equality between men and women (Biffli, 2008). In contrast to some Scandinavian countries like Norway, Austria has not made affirmative action compulsory. Instead, the city trusts employers in the private industries to encourage women's participation in careers (Biffli, 2008). However, it has been in the Scandinavian countries (that have made affirmative action compulsory) where high employment rates among women and low gender employment gaps have been achieved. For example, in Sweden, the percentage of women in the labor force, according to the World Bank's national estimates, was 69.1 percent in 2014. Also, the gender pay gap in the public sector in Sweden is 12.9 percent and 12.4 in the private (Eurostat). Compared to the United States, Sweden is performing better in gender equality within the political economy. Affirmative action towards encouraging women to become more involved with labor force participation has helped.

The United States should pursue similar initiatives. Public policy should designate that private individuals and firms be responsible for promoting gender equality, because it is on everyone to participate in the resolving of inequalities. It may take decades for all women to receive equal pay for equal work, but there must be a social change in attitude to accept forthcoming shifts.

#### **4.9 Temporal Flexibility**

Workplaces should consider being more family-friendly in order to reduce the inequities women face due to household duties. Harvard professor and economist Claudia Goldin (2014) suggests that what must occur for women to reconcile their unpaid work with paid work is the reduction in the cost of “temporal flexibility.” The dual goals of career and family need not be on a collision course if the cost of having flexible work schedules can be reduced. *All* employees should be able to arrange their work hours such that they can perform their feudal obligations without too many costs or compromises. There should be linear pay with respect to hours worked. This is gender mainstreaming – it is an improvement in working conditions that would allow women more freedom with their time spent on feudal obligations or personal needs.

Goldin and Katz’s (2011) research on workplace flexibility shows promise for this amenity that can balance the feudal household’s demands with the capitalist workplace’s. Firms in the sectors of healthcare, retail sales, and real estate are among those that include many women. These are also firms that signify increasing willingness of flexibility. Employees in these sectors are better substitutes of each other; it is not costly when new mothers or fathers must take time off to attend to parental obligations, because another employee can perform the same skilled labor. As a result, more linear payment schedules emerge (Goldin, 2014). However, there will always be

certain jobs that bear little room for temporal flexibility. These are jobs that require employees to always be on call, like the President of the United States. Women in the corporate and financial sectors, unfortunately, may find the inflexibility of work hours to be “insurmountable” (Goldin and Katz, 2011, p. 58).

#### **4.10 Paid Family Leave**

Additionally, the U.S. should consider mandating paid parental leave. So far, California, New Jersey, and Rhode Island are the only states that have enacted paid family insurance laws (National Partnership for Women and Families). In California, the benefits workers received are 55 percent of their weekly wage, the maximum limit being \$1,129 in 2016. Research on California’s Paid Family Leave Program demonstrates its benefit to low wage earners (Appelbaum and Milkman, 2011). One key finding was that workers in low quality jobs (which pay \$20 or less per hour as described by the researchers) benefitted most from paid family leave. 83.8 percent of those low-quality job holders “received at least half of their usual income while on leave, compared with just 31.2 percent of those who did not use” paid family leave (Appelbaum and Milkman, 2011, p. 22). This policy helps low wage workers through income support that would otherwise be unavailable through the Family and Medical Leave Act mandate.



California's policy implementation can serve as a model for the rest of the country determining similar strategies. Employers surveyed by Appelbaum and Milkman (2011) expressed minimal effects on their business operations (p. 7). The paid family leave in California is funded by employee's payroll taxes; there are not direct costs to employers. Businesses fear that productivity levels would diminish if employees take time off, but when Californian employers (from small businesses with less than 50 employees to larger establishments with hundreds of workers) were asked about profitability and performance, 91.0 percent of those surveyed (n=175) in Appelbaum and Milkman's (2011) study noted a positive effect or none. Results such as this are encouraging for businesses who would like to offer their employees paid leave but are worried about losses.

Moreover, women who take paid family leave express stronger labor force attachment. Houser and Vartanian (2012)'s research examines employees who took paid leave due to pregnancy or the birth of a child and found that women who worked at least 20 hours per week during pregnancy were 93 percent likely to return to work post-childbirth within 9 to 12 months (compared to women who did not take leave). Paid leave shows positives for gender equality. Women's jobs are secured and they retain their participation in the labor force. The preservation of job-specific human capital also emphasizes women's significant roles in their workplaces (Rosin-Slater et al., 2011).

The case for paid leave rests on the pursuit of social goals like reducing gender inequality (Dahl et al., 2013). It would reduce the cost of performing household labor under a feudal mode of production, whether the costs be measured by time spent or wages lost. It would also mitigate the capitalist exploitation workers face, since paid leave grants them more control over their work hours. Importantly, paid leave eliminates the apprehension of job insecurity, which would be a huge feat for low wage employees who rely on their earned income to meet basic needs. In sum, women would not be punished for engaging in feudal labor; they acquire agency over their time; and, the fear of losing their jobs diminishes. All of these benefits would come at a low cost to employers.

The suggestions above are impossible to enact overnight, but they are important steps towards gender and economic equality. They are meaningful, as they would relieve women throughout the country of the burdens they bear in trying to make ends meet for not only themselves, but also their families. Women have always accommodated others. They have been pressured to care for others for a long time, but the time has come for everybody else to begin caring for women.

## CHAPTER 5

### THE COMING UPHEAVAL

Despite the many gains women have made towards gender equality over history – the right to vote, own property, attend school, participate in the labor force – they remain at a disadvantage compared to the majority of men. The twofold exploitation women face – feudal and capitalist – consigns them to time poverty. The intertwining of patriarchy and capitalism, power structures that overdetermine the ways women perform surplus labor, creates class struggle that is inherently about time. For women, class tensions revolve around how they are able to spend their time, the 24 hours they are endowed with daily but do not enjoy to the extent they deserve to.

Legal structures in the United States have been responsible for embedding patriarchal thought into social institutions that pressure women into performing more feudal household labor while struggling with capitalist exploitation. I have explored how the early absence of women's property rights frame their position in the household as parallel to serfs and the feudal manors they worked on; how subpar enforcement of labor rights makes working women's involvement in capitalist work an unhappy experience; how gender pay gaps, despite mandates to eliminate them, continue to exist and

oppress women; and how social policies regarding reproductive rights and health care further women's constraints to households. All of these circumstances contribute to the alarming rates at which women in the economy are exploited.

Women's position in the political economy must not be doomed however. Gender mainstreaming is a policy approach that has shown success in European countries. The U.S. can address inequality by seriously considering amenities like temporal flexibility or paid leave at work. These benefits would improve the material conditions of women's lives by offering them more control over the labor they produce and the time they spend at the sites of production. Time is important for everyone to have and enjoy, because it signals one's agency over the productive sites of her life.

Women's class position is clearly a contentious feature of social life. The struggles they have faced are formidable, because they have been the ones responsible for keeping the macroeconomy flowing through the vital social reproduction work they perform in the feudal household. "Women's work," underappreciated and underpaid, is demanding and important. Second-wave feminism, which looks at the family and the workplace as facets of gender injustice, remains an important theoretical influence on social changes necessary to occur for women's liberation in the U.S. political economy.

Marx believed the oppressed classes' suffering would lead to a call for change, a revolution. Workers of the world would challenge capitalist

development. Women are united through the class struggle they experience as an inability to seamlessly balance their unpaid work with paid work. The indignation at the unfairness and injustice they face in the political economy is completely reasonable. Women's anger with the feudal and capitalist systems that have done them wrong is completely valid. They are the class who have made the greatest contributions to historical development, but economic, political, and social processes have not rewarded them in kind. It's about time that they do, because the upheaval – the call for real, effectual changes – is underway.

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