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Politics of Love, and Love of Politics: Towards a Marxist Theory of Love

Abstract

Romantic love, like many other kinds of love, appears to be just a relationship between two individuals, but upon closer analysis it is more than that. Love is a deeply social process. It is also more than a spontaneous neuro-biological impulse. Love involves conscious activity, both subjective and material. Love is a social process both at the level of human society and at the level of class society, including capitalism. Private property relations and related logics of accumulation in all forms of class society shape relations of love. Love *in* capitalism reproduces *love* with capitalism. Because love is social, it is political. It is political in part because it has a role to play in the fight against capitalism and in the construction of socialism. Love must be rescued both from the principle of love of two humans, as in romantic love in modern societies, and from the principle of love of all humans. In place of these principles, there is a need for new principles of love that promote or advocate love of class brothers and sisters, within the context of love of the struggle against class enemies, in a manner that does not ignore erotic love between individuals and that does not make exaggerated claims about the political power of love. A critical examination of love from the standpoint of materialist dialectics makes it possible to address the question what kind of love might exist under communism, and how it might be different from love under capitalism, and why?

Keywords

Love; Capitalism; Neuroscience; Love-consciousness vs Class-consciousness; Alienation; Communism/Socialism; Marx; Engels; Lenin; Kollontai; Hardt and Negri; Alain Badiou; Erich Fromm

Introduction

Love seems like a mundane thing which everyone seems to understand. Closer analysis indicates that love is actually not so. It is a much more complex process. Love ‘carries the possibility for truly symmetric, mutual relationships between people’ (Kovats, 2015: 5), yet love relations are often unequal and/or help reproduce inequality in the wider society. This is because love often occurs in an unequal – patriarchal – relation between men and women (Beauvoir, 2011). This is also because love is constrained by material conditions that do not meet the needs of men and women. So, how we think about love has ‘far-reaching consequences’ not only ‘for the gender relations and for the societal practices amongst which we get socialised and rear our children’ (Kovats, 2015:5) but also for the functioning of society as a whole. While love is a ‘real need in every human being’, the love that many people need is said to be missing, says the Marxist psycho-analyst, Erich Fromm. ‘To analyze the nature of love is to discover its general absence today and to criticize the social conditions which are responsible for this absence’ (Fromm, 1956: 133).

There have been a lot of writings on love, romantic love.¹ The increasing intellectual interest in love is a part of what Eva Illouz (2010) calls ‘an emotional turn in all of the social sciences and even the humanities’. Love has been an important theme in Marxism. Classical Marxists – Marx, Engels, Kollontai, among others – had important things to say about love. In this paper, I build on them. I also selectively build on writers influenced by Marxism such as Badiou, Negri and Hardt, Fromm, Gilman-Opalsky, as well as authors from neuroscience, psychology and sociology, although I do not necessarily share all of their world-views or their politics.

Love, in the sense of romantic or passionate love, is generally considered to be a private matter between two *individuals*. And, love is supposed to be driven by spontaneous feelings, propelled by neuro-biological drives. These views are problematic. Individuals are inherently conscious and social creatures, so how can their love be just a private, individual and spontaneous matter? A Marxist examination of love allows us to address questions such as the following. What is the connection between love as a form of consciousness and class consciousness? And if love *is* a social matter, does it not matter politically?² Is there a difference between two people in love who just care about each other vs two people in love whose lives are devoted to the creation of socialist democracy? What kind of love might exist under communism, and how it might be different from love under capitalism?

Section 1 of the paper briefly discusses some general ideas about love in the literature, and it also presents a critique of these ideas. In sections 2-4, I present a Marxist theory of love, one that considers love dialectically, at the level of human society and in terms of historically-specific social relations. These sections deal with the social (and supra-individual) nature of love; love as

¹ I will generally not discuss other kinds of love between individuals (e.g. love between parents and children, mentors and proteges, and so on).

² The word ‘social’ encompasses many things such as culture, economy, state, etc. Also, acknowledging that we are social creatures and that love is a social relation doesn’t make one a Marxist.

a conscious 'labouring' activity; love in class societies, including love in capitalism (i.e. love as it is shaped by material conditions as well as certain forms of consciousness promoted by capitalism); and proletarian conceptions of love appropriate for both the fight against capitalism and the construction of socialism.³ The concluding section summarizes the paper.

1. Selected ideas in the existing literature, and a Critique

Scholars have written about love from many perspectives: conceptualizing what love is; the question of why/how people fall in love; and the relation between love and politics, and so on.

Plat's *Symposium* contains some interesting ideas about love. Here we learn that: 'The generic concept [love] embraces every desire for good and for happiness (Plato, 1956: 85), so the generic name is used for many 'kinds of love' (p. 85). This means that love shares with other things passionate desire for something that is good and happy. '[W]e must ask in what way and by what type of action [people] must show their intense desire if it is to deserve the name of love'. 'The object [or the function] of love... is to procreate and bring forth in beauty', because 'procreation is the nearest thing to ...immortality that a mortal being can attain' (87). Love indeed creates two kinds of progeny, physical (children) and spiritual (wisdom, virtue, etc.), which we leave behind when we die (p. 86).

Love in its physical sense is a 'lower' (or poorer) form or stage of love. If a person 'is to make beauty of outward form the object of his quest', then he/she will realize 'that the beauty exhibited in all bodies is one and the same', and then they 'will become a lover of all physical beauty, and will relax the intensity of [their] passion for one particular person' (p.92).

Love in its physical sense is a 'lower' (or poorer) form or stage of love. 'A person who falls in love with another person based on physical beauty' will realize 'that the beauty exhibited in all bodies is one and the same', so 'he will become a lover of all physical beauty, and will relax the intensity of his passion for one particular person' (p.92). 'The next stage is for him to reckon beauty of soul more valuable than beauty of body; the result will be that, when he encounters a virtuous soul in a body which has little of the bloom of beauty, he will be content to love and cherish it and ...in this way he will be compelled to contemplate beauty as it exists in *activities and institutions*' (p. 92; italics added).

Indeed, Plato's second stage in love has received attention when scholars understand love to be fundamentally a matter of acknowledging and responding to the unique qualities of the people we love (Velleman, 1999). In contrast, there are others who think that caring about the loved person for their own sake and feeling the pain if they are hurt is a part of what being in love is (Soble 1990; White 2001). Giles, a Canadian philosopher and psychologist, says that love involves the expectation that if I love someone, 'I want that person to love me back' (Giles, 1994: 341). Love implies vulnerability: being in need. When I am in love, my desire includes not only reciprocal emotional vulnerability and care but also 'reciprocal physical vulnerability and care': i.e. the need 'to be bare before the one I love in order to be caressed, and have the beloved bare before me in order to caress her' (p. 352).

³ In this paper, 'socialism' and 'communism' are used interchangeably.

According to the American psychologist, Robert Sternberg (1986), love has three components: intimacy, passion and decision/commitment (p. 119). Intimacy encompasses the feelings of closeness, connectedness, and bondedness ‘that give rise, essentially, to the experience of warmth in a loving relationship’ (p.119). Passion encompasses the drives that lead to romance, physical attraction, and sexual consummation. Decision/commitment encompasses, in the short term, the decision that one loves another, and in the long term, the commitment to maintain that love.

The question is: why/how do people fall in love? There are biological and social-psychological explanations. We have seen Plato’s explanation for love: physical and spiritual procreation. From a modern evolutionary biology perspective, love is said to keep human beings together against external menaces and to facilitate the continuation of the species (Fisher, 2004). Love ensures the survival of individuals and their species, as love is a joyful and useful activity that encompasses wellness and feelings of well-being (Esch and Stefano, 2005). Neuroscience says that romantic love and sexual attraction/arousal have common neural basis. Not surprisingly, people refer to sex as *making love*. This also makes evolutionary sense since they are both species-survival mechanisms: we copulate to have offspring and we fall in love to better care for them (Castro, 2014). The experience of romantic love is associated with three major neurotransmitters (dopamine, oxytocin and vasopressin) as responsible for creating and sustaining the feeling of love (Zeki, 2007).

From a nonbiological angle, love as a social explanation -- human beings’ need for union (see Solomon, 1988). Fromm (1956:88) says that ‘love and marriage’ are seen as an important source of ‘a refuge from an otherwise unbearable sense of aloneness’⁴ This idea is contradicted by Marcuse (1955) according to whom love has a repressive social function in modern society. ‘Underlying the societal organization of the human existence are basic libidinal wants and needs... T]he libidinal impulses and their satisfaction (and deflection) are coordinated with the interests of domination and thereby become a stabilizing force which binds the majority to the ruling minority’ (Marcuse, 1955). So, love, along with other emotions such as anxiety, etc., ‘serve the economically structured relationships of domination and subordination’ (ibid.). Approvingly discussing Freud, Marcuse says that ‘love, in our culture, can and must be practiced as “aim-inhibited sexuality,” with all the taboos and constraints placed upon it by a monogamic-patriarchal society. Beyond its legitimate manifestations, love is destructive and by no means conducive to productiveness and constructive work. Love, taken seriously, is outlawed: “There is no longer any place in present-day civilized life for a simple natural love between two human beings.” ’ (ibid.).

Badiou (2012) develops his theory of love through a series of concepts: encounter; difference and identity; and truth procedure. Love begins as an encounter between two people, and gradually they become one in love: they are ‘incorporated into ...the [unitary] Subject of love that views the panorama of the world through the prism of [their] difference’, including sexual difference (p. 26). Love thus involves a ‘truth procedure’ as it ‘is a quest for truth’, in the sense

⁴ Of course, love can have an exploitative aspect in part because of an intersection of norms defining and regulating notions of romance, gender, race, labour, etc. (Gregoratto, 2017).

that love produces answers to important questions such as: ‘[W]hat kind of world does one see when one experiences it from the point of view of two and not one?’ (Badiou, 2012: 22; 38). Two people with different identities, whether these are based on ‘class, group, clan or country’ (p. 28) can fall in love: ‘identities in themselves aren’t hurdles to the creation of love’ (p. 62-63).

In their book *Commonwealth*, which devotes many pages to love in a wider sense, Hardt and Negri (2009) say that society’s ‘institutions silently compel individuals to follow established patterns of behavior’ in their everyday life (p. 358). This implies that love can be corrupted. This happens when: one loves one’s family but not the needy people outside or one loves one’s own ethnic or religious community and hates others. Another form of corrupt love is romantic love which ‘requires that the couple merge in unity. ...Marriage and family close the couple in a unit that subsequently...corrupts the common’. (p. 183). Love also appears in its uncorrupt form, which constitutes the common or the multitude or the poor.

This brings us to the relation between love and politics. There are at least two approaches to this. I call them an ‘indifferent approach’ (love is indifferent to politics), and a ‘positive approach’ (love contributes to emancipatory politics). For Badiou, ‘love and political passion should never be confused’ (p.70). He says: ‘I don’t think you can mix up love and politics’ (p. 57). Why? In politics, people inevitably need to identify their ‘real enemy’, i.e. ‘an individual you won’t tolerate taking decisions on anything that impacts on yourself’ (p. 58-59). ‘In contrast’, in love, ‘there are no enemies’ (p. 59). Even if love is communistic,⁵ there is no relation between it and communist politics.

Opposed to Badiou’s approach is that of Hardt and Negri. ‘To understand love as a philosophical and political concept, it is useful to begin from the perspective of the poor’ (p. 180). Aspects of love such as solidarity, care for others, building a community, and cooperating in common projects, constitute for the poor ‘an essential survival mechanism.’ (p.180). Hardt and Negri say that ‘Love is the power of the poor to exit a life of misery and solitude, and engage the project to make the multitude.’ (Hardt and Negri, 2009:189). There are: ‘three operations or fields of activity for the power of love’. ‘First, and primarily, the power of love is the constitution of the common’. In the second field of operation of love, ‘the power of love [is]... a force to combat evil’, which includes the corruption of love. In this field, ‘Love ...takes the form of indignation, disobedience, and antagonism’. Finally, ‘These two first guises of the power of love—its powers of association and rebellion, its constitution of the common and its combat against corruption [of love]—function together in the third: making the multitude’ (Hardt and Negri, 2009:195). Thus, there *is* a politics of love.

As we have seen, love is often considered to be a relation which is confined to two individuals. In my view, the idea that love is a relation between two people, whether advanced by neuroscientists, philosophers, psychologists, etc., is not entirely wrong. Love involves intimacy which is generally between two individuals. But this view is inadequately social. Love is more

⁵ Love is communistic in the sense ‘that the real subject of a love is the becoming of the couple and not the mere satisfaction of the individuals that are its component parts’. So ‘another possible definition of love [is]... minimal communism’ (Badiou, 2012: 90).

than about a relation two individuals. This is partly because the individuals-in-love, including their conceptions of love, are social products. Love is often wrongly confused with desire and sex. This is not entirely wrong. But the conscious and decision-making aspect of love is underestimated. What makes people fall in love is often confused with what makes love enduring. That there are neurotransmitters behind the act of falling in love cannot *themselves* adequately explain that act or how that act happens, because the neurotransmitters themselves are shaped by how people feel and act, as neuroscience itself says.

To the extent that socialness of the act of love *is* acknowledged, its class character is not: the subjects of love (the lovers) are assumed to be non-class subjects, as if lovers' class position and related social consciousness do not matter. Badiou, for example, says that two lovers who 'don't belong to the same class, group, clan or country' (p. 28) can love each other and form a subject of love. Love has the power to blur boundaries across classes (p. 29).

As well, the political character of love is either denied (as in Badiou's work) or under-conceptualized (as in Negri's). For Badiou, politics involves fighting enemies while love recognizes no enemy. So, love has nothing to do with politics, let alone, class-politics. Badiou forgets that alliance building (i.e. connecting to like-minded people) is crucial to politics, and that such act of connecting potentially connects love to politics. His approach would suggest that a worker can have an enduring love relation with a bourgeois *as a bourgeois*. It would be consistent with his approach to argue that when a person with a working class consciousness and one with a socialist consciousness, are in love, they can produce 'a Subject of love'. One would be compelled to ask: what would be the class character of that love subject?

Hardt and Negri's approach is not satisfactory either. The reasons are because of the broader problems with the kind of Marxism they advocate, a Marxism that is idealistic and that papers over dialectical contradictions. There is no explicit statement about the revolutionary class subject (i.e. the working class) or revolutionary politics in relation to love. It is not clear how it is that it is not class relations and class consciousness, but love that makes their political subject called 'multitude' and that combats the evil. Is love-consciousness more important than class consciousness? Does the recognition of importance of love allow one to ignore the supreme necessity for conscious action and organizing in the fight for socialism? As Cidam has said: Negri has supplemented the notion of 'love' for his earlier emphasis on antagonism to address autonomist Marxism's unresolved question of political organization. 'Negri's understanding of love as a productive force helps him evade this thorny issue by erasing the process of political contestation and mediation from his accounts' (Cidam, 2013: 42).

Given all the problems with the way love is conceptualized, there is a need for a more adequate theorization of love. In the next 3 sections, I will present a Marxist theory of love. Like everything else, love must be seen at multiple levels, i.e. trans-historically, and historically, in relation to class societies. As a trans-historical process, love does have a natural/biological aspect (e.g. physical drives). But it is also a deeply social process: it cannot be reduced to the physical drives and neuro-transmitters. Even if the latter *are* important, love is more than about the relation between just two individuals. As a social process, love as a form of consciousness is impacted by class relations. Because love is a social process, it is a political process in a society that is class-divided. It is made use of in the reproduction of specific forms of class society, and

it can have a moderate role in the fight for a class-less society. These points will be briefly explained below.

2. Love at a trans-historical level

2a) Love as a social relation

In a wider sense, love refers to a strong attraction and a feeling of caring towards others. Romantic love is a form of love in this wider sense. I use 'romantic love' to refer to all forms of love where there are some emotional ties and where there is potential or actual physical passion. Romantic love (henceforward, love, unless otherwise stated) exists because human beings possess a need for love and they have the causal power to love. Love is an emergent effect of warm emotions and physical attractions in the sense that it is a product of both while it cannot be reduced to either. Romantic love is 'an intangible affective compound that is based in 'bodily needs and desires [and drives]' (Arnett, 2011:82). There is scientific basis to suggest that the neurons responsible for warm emotions and those responsible for sex are in proximity in the brain and this partly explains how warm emotions and sexual desire are inter-related (Zeki, 2007).

If it is assumed that most people are dominantly heterosexual, then Marx's following statement is relevant to the understanding of love as a social process. Marx says: 'The direct, natural, and necessary relation of person to person is the *relation of man to woman* and such a relationship 'is the *most natural* relation' between two human beings. That relationship 'reveals the extent to which' human beings' 'need has become a *human need*' and 'the extent to which, therefore, the *other* person as a person has become for him a need – the extent to which [a person in their] individual existence is at the same time a *social being*' (Marx, 1844:43; italics added).

The two main components of love – emotional act, including what Sternberg calls 'intimacy' and 'decision/commitment') and physical drive – are social processes. Consider the social and conscious character of love as a mental state in relation to neuro-plasticity. The latter means that the brain (especially, its neural circuits implicated in social and emotional behavior) is constantly changing, that among the influences on brain structure and function that are most powerful in inducing plastic change are *social* influences, and that *social* and emotional characteristics of people can be educated and altered just as people's knowledge about the world changes through cognitive learning, so the alteration of the *brain* is a *social* process (Davidson and McEwan, 2012). Davidson (2003) himself has shown, based on his neuroscientific research, that love for family members and strangers and even difficult people can be cultivated. It is also proven that love, often considered blind (and there are neural reasons for this as we have seen), can be regulated by a conscious thought process: people can 'down-regulate their love feelings by thinking about negative aspects of their partner and/or relationship and imagining negative future scenarios' (Langeslag and Strien, 2016).

Consider the social aspect of love as a mental state from the standpoint of historical materialism which says that: ultimately, it is not human beings' consciousness 'that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness' (Marx, 1859). This

principle applies to love too in so far as love is a part of culture or consciousness. To the extent that love is based on a need for intimate emotional connections and involves thoughts, love is impacted by wider social forces, including social relations of production and associated economic development and their politics (these will be discussed below).

Love between two human beings raises the question concerning the very essence of a human being. Marx (1845) says: the essence of human beings 'is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its reality it is the ensemble of the social relations'. Indeed, there is no such thing as 'an abstract – isolated – human individual'. People are what/who they are because of their relations with others. This is an important principle of Marxist dialectics. *Before two individual human beings encounter each other, and begin to develop a relation of love, they are already social creatures.* Our body, our abilities, activities, etc. are social products, the products of supra-individual social relations.

There is no society without individuals. But society is more than the sum of individuals. It is an emergent effect of the sum total of relations among individuals. Society is a mighty reality independent of individuals, a reality created by the interaction among individuals as bearers – embodiments -- of social relations. Society has numerous qualities. These qualities are present in given individuals in different combinations. These *combinations* of social qualities are unique to individuals, and this is what makes individuals somewhat unique. Different individuals represent society differently. An individual's views on love are influenced by their perception and evaluation of these qualities in others. One individual loves rose, and maintains a distance from (low-income) workers. Another individual mingles with the workers to observe them in their everyday life (like Engels did), dislikes flowers and loves hockey. All these are deeply *social* qualities which are present in different individuals in different combinations and which may appear to be traits of an individual as an individual. Individuals are like places on a 'map' that is society. Just because not all individuals have the same characteristics does not mean that their characteristics are not social. When one says, 'I love this individual', what one says, more or less, is that one loves an ensemble of social relationships (and qualities as products of social relations) that the loved individual represents.

Love between two individuals is a deeply *social* process, even if it is also an *individual* process. As Lotz (2015: 132) says: 'love is a form of being social in which the sensual life is as complex as the social world, and not simply an abstraction from the latter'. Or, love is based in 'bodily needs and desires' which are 'seasoned with a particularity of orientation that arises out of the condition of our individuality', which is '*itself a historical product*' (Arnett, 2011:82; italics added). 'To have faith in the possibility of love as a social and not only exceptional-individual phenomenon, is a rational faith based on the insight into the very nature of [human beings]' (Fromm, 1956: 133). In fact, 'Love is not primarily a relationship to a specific person; it is an attitude... which determines the relatedness of a person to the world as a whole, not toward one "object" of love' (p. 46).

2b) Love as a conscious activity

As a social process, love is a transhistorical act of labour which can be analyzed by carefully following Marx's approach to materiality of life and to the trans-historical nature of labour.⁶ First: love can be seen as what Marx (1845) calls a '*sensuous human activity*'. Second: it can be described by suitably paraphrasing Marx's (1887:127-130) view of labour process as a relation of production between human beings and nature and between/among human beings. An act of labour, love is, in the first place, a process in which two human beings, as embodiments of human consciousness (intentionality) and natural drives, participate. This is a process in which human beings of their own accord start, regulate, and control their natural need for warmth and sexual contentment.⁷ An important aspect of an activity is imagination. Marx (1887: 127) says: 'what distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees', which can construct beautiful cells, is this, that the architect raises his structure in *imagination* before he erects it in reality'.

The love act involves a labour process or at least an act that is like labour process. It is an act where the loving-architect raises their structure of the love relation in *imagination* before he or she erects it in reality. Love does involve conscious thinking. Love as a material act of labour involves bodily activity too, as we have seen. 'It is the project, naturally including sexual desire..., including the birth of a child' (Badiou, 2012: 23).

As a process, love is the act of *loving*. And the act of loving is also an act of *giving*. Love means giving without the intention to receive. How can I say 'I love you', if I do not care if you have been eating well while I have been enjoying my food? As Fromm (1956: 22) says that 'Love is an activity, not a passive affect ...[T]he active character of love can be described by stating that love is primarily giving, not receiving'.

There is more to love as an activity than giving: 'Beyond the element of giving, the active character of love becomes evident in the fact that it always implies certain basic elements, common to all forms of love. These are care, responsibility, respect and knowledge.' (Fromm, 1956: 26). We can express this idea more precisely as follows: when X loves Y, that means that: X cares for, shoulders responsibility towards, respects, and understands, Y. So love is hard work, but it is also the most rewarding kind of work.

Labour process develops the slumbering powers of human beings and transforms them, according to Marx. In the process of interacting with the natural impulses towards loving, conscious human beings effect a change in their lives. People in love develop their 'slumbering powers', i.e. new ways of loving and new conceptions of love, beyond those primitive instinctive forms of the labour of love that remind us of the mere animal. Love not only transforms the conditions of the loved because the latter is cared for, understood, respected and so on. But as an activity, love transforms the loving person himself/herself. Love involves giving, and 'In the very act of giving, I experience my strength, my wealth, my power. This experience of heightened vitality and potency fills me with joy' (Fromm, 1956: 23). This is in line with the modern neuroscience literature that says that love makes one happy (Castro, 2014). The concept

⁶ The 'social' in the social character of love as discussed here exists in two ways: the social as opposed to purely/dominantly individual, and the social as opposed to the natural (i.e. biological impulse).

⁷ This does not rule out the fact that to an extent love springs from unconscious thought process.

of love as an activity draws attention to the fact that the people in love are inter-dependent: one's flourishing or happiness depends on another. Therefore: 'If you love without evoking love in return – if through the vital expression of yourself as a loving person you fail to become a loved person, then your love is impotent, it is a misfortune'. (Marx, 1844: 43)

Giles (1994), a Canadian philosopher and psychologist, says: 'in being in love with another I want that person to love me back. ...[W]hat persons in a social relationship want is that the ratio of their own inputs to outcomes is equal to the ratio of the other person's inputs to outcomes' (p. 341). Thus, to be in love with someone would be to engage in the activity of investing 'a high amount of input into a relationship which, if the other person did not reciprocate to an equal level, i.e. show love back, would naturally lead to an uncomfortable dissonance'. So 'love wants love in return' (p. 341-342). In an authentic love relation, the two people in love recognize (and ensure) that their beloved is a free subject and is appreciated as such (Beauvoir, 2011).

Love as a mental state, of course, encompasses feelings. But this is only a small part of love as an activity. If two strangers 'suddenly ...feel close, feel one, this moment of oneness is one of the most exhilarating' and this feels like a miracle (Fromm, 1956: 4). However, as they 'become well acquainted, their intimacy loses more and more its miraculous character', and gradually, 'their antagonism, their disappointments, their mutual boredom kill whatever is left of the initial excitement' (ibid.). When one views love as 'the outcome of a *spontaneous*, emotional reaction', one 'sees only the peculiarities of the two individuals involved' (p. 56; italics added). As a result, one's love object (who one can love) get confined to a few. As well, when love is merely a spontaneous act, 'One neglects to see an important factor in erotic love, *that of will*' (italics added):

To love somebody is not just a strong feeling—it is a decision, it is a judgment, it is a promise. If love were only a feeling, there would be no basis for the promise to love each other forever [or for a long duration]. A feeling comes and it may go. How can I judge that it will stay forever, when my act does not involve judgment and decision? (ibid.).

The commitment to love is materialized through loving actions such as giving, caring, being responsibility, respecting, understanding, etc. These loving actions occur over space, in 'love-spaces': college campuses, study trips, factory floors, union meetings, parks, restaurants, beaches, reading group meetings, prison cells shared by comrades, etc. And, they happen over a period of time which includes a series of moments. The act of loving indeed requires a 'duration of time necessary for it to flourish' (Badiou, 2012: 32). There is scientific research to suggest that: 'it takes ~2 years for enduring attachment bonds to become established', so 'newly in love individuals may not reflect physiology of full-blown attachment bonds' (Acevedo, et al 2012).

Because love is more than biological impulse and because it therefore involves activity which requires conscious thinking, love allows, and entails, decision-making. And if love involves decision-making, it can involve *political* decisions: it is possible – and it will be argued later that it is necessary – to consciously think about who one can be in a love relation over a long period, in line with one's own politics.

3. Love in Class society

We have so far dealt with love at the level of humanity while abstracting from the historically changing forms of society. Love as an activity is human action with an intentionality – i.e. the production of emotional and physical enjoyment. It is the everlasting nature-imposed condition of human emotional and biological existence. It is therefore independent of every social phase of that existence, or rather, is common to every such phase of human life. But the form of love-as-an-activity will be different in different forms of society (e.g. feudalism, capitalism, socialism, etc.), as we will see now. An immeasurable interval of time separates the state of things in which human beings equate love to the love between two people in long-term monogamous relation (which has traditionally been married love), from that state in which human labour of love was still in its first instinctive stage. Indeed, as social life and culture have changed, ‘a web of emotional and intellectual experiences has come to surround the physical attraction of the sexes’, making love ‘a complex state of mind and body’ which is ‘separated from its primary source, the biological instinct for reproduction’ (Kollontai, 1923).

3a) Love in pre-capitalist societies

At a very early stage of human history, when the state was still in its embryonic form and class relations were being formed, love between two members of the same tribe, linked by mental and emotional ties, i.e., love-friendship, was of utmost importance (Kollontai, 1923). It was more important than love between man and woman (wife). This was because at that time the interests of the society as a whole required the accumulation of contacts not between two married people but between fellow-members (usually, males) in defense of the tribe and its political organization (state). Marriage was based not on love but for convenience (ibid.).

In feudal societies, love was not the basis of marriage either. Engels (1884:41) says that: ‘For the knight or baron, as for the prince of the land himself, marriage is a political act, an opportunity to increase power by new alliances’. Love was contracted according to the interests of the family, which were to be prioritized over individuals’ personal feelings. ‘Sexual intercourse both within and outside marriage lacked the softening and inspiring element of love and remained an undisguisedly physiological act’ (ibid.). ‘In certain situations,...love can act as a lever propelling the man to perform actions [of bravery etc.] of which he would otherwise have been incapable’ (ibid.). ‘The social factor of [platonic] chivalrous love operated where the knight loved a woman outside the family and was inspired to military and other heroic feats by this emotion’ (Kollontai, 1923). So, love as a mental state ‘could be used to the advantage of the feudal class’. The family was held together firmly by the traditions of nobility and birth but not by emotional ties. For peasants or artisans, and unlike the industrial capitalists, the family was an economic labour unit. This means that its members were so firmly held together by economic circumstances that bonds based on emotional ties were of secondary importance.⁸

⁸ A fuller treatment of love in pre-capitalist societies will require a presentation of non-Marxian accounts of love in these societies. Also, my treatment is schematic and omits ancient western and eastern civilizations.

3b) Love in capitalism

The working class that capitalism needs is one that has specific cultural traits apart from its abilities to efficiently produce commodities (on the basis of average socially necessary labour time). Given the importance of love in life, including its implication for the reproduction of future labour power and for the confinement of property within the capitalist class, capitalism produces specific forms of love-couples, or people-in-love, in a way that is broadly compatible with the long-term reproduction of capitalist relation. Love in capitalism must generally reproduce love with capitalism.⁹ The bourgeois system has created physical and electronic means of communication which allow people to communicate much more adequately, and capitalism has removed some of the societal barriers to the freedom to love. Yet, bourgeois relations restrict the scope of, and ability to, love. Love is deeply linked to major traits of capitalism as a class relation. These traits are commodity production, propertylessness of workers, production of value and surplus value, and reproduction of labour power (Das, 2017).

Capitalist property relation, and commodity fetishism

An important trait of capitalism that the excellent work of Kollontai on love fails to explicitly draw attention to is the ‘separation of labour from ...the objective conditions of labour’ as ‘the real foundation’ and as ‘the starting-point of capitalist production’ (Marx, 1887: 403). Dispossessed of access to means of production, people are economically compelled to work for a wage: ‘The dull compulsion of economic relations completes the subjection of the labourer to the capitalist’ (p.523). ‘Direct force, outside economic conditions’ is not used on a regular basis, in people’s everyday life, as capitalists do not necessarily need physical violence against workers to exploit them. Thus the separation of ordinary people from means of production leads to another separation: the nominal separation of the political from the economic (Wood, 1981; Das, 2022). With the latter *separation*, what were kept separate under feudalism (i.e. sex and love, and love and marriage)¹⁰ were united under capitalism. Capitalism has also removed the power of the feudal ruling class to exercise violence against ordinary people, including their everyday life.¹¹ But love is narrowly defined in capitalism because its moral code is ‘often dictated...by economic considerations’.

To the extent that capitalist property depends on family savings, a man’s savings need to be handled with care and skill, so the family has to be based on the co-operation of all its members which entail ‘strong emotional and psychological bonds’ (ibid.). Therefore, the ‘new moral ideal of love ...embraced both the flesh and the soul’ (i.e. physical and mental aspects of love) (ibid.). Besides, there is also a need to ‘prevent the distribution of capital among illegitimate

⁹ ‘Far from being a ‘haven’ from the marketplace, modern romantic love is a practice intimately complicit with the political economy of late capitalism’ (Illouz, 1997: 22).

¹⁰ The feudal world had divided love into the sexual act (relations within marriage or with concubines) on the one hand, and spiritual or platonic love (as in the relations between the knight and his beloved).

¹¹ That does not mean that capitalism is a peaceful affair. It is based on the dispossession of direct producers, the history of which is written ‘in letters of blood and fire’ (Marx, 1887:508). Besides, the state acting on behalf of the capitalist class is essentially a violent institution.

children' (ibid.). So, the ideal is the married couple [or a couple in long-term love relation], working together to improve their welfare and to increase the wealth of their particular family unit' (Kollontai, 1923). In a sense, 'modern love as connected to marriage was invented by capitalism' (Cozzarelli, 2018). The married love is important from the standpoint of the need for efficient reproduction of labour power too, through 'necessary labour' performed by women 'in the private sphere' (Vogel, 2013; Das, 2021; Gimenez, 2019). (ibid.).¹²

Given the importance of married love, it is important from the standpoint of capitalists that 'we care about our spouse and our children more than other people in our community and significantly more than other people in the world' (Cozarelli, 2018). Capitalism is based on individualism and competition (among capitalists, among petty business owners and among workers). By being an efficient consuming unit that also reproduces labour-power cheaply, 'the family ensures competition externally, as well as selflessness [selfless love] internally, particularly in the form of women's unpaid labor'. 'Love outside of marriage is *antagonistic* with capitalism' (ibid.).¹³

In a bourgeois society, it is generally the case that the things we need are available only in the form of commodities. It is a society of what Marx (1887) calls commodity fetishism: this means that things that we need behave as if they inherently – naturally -- have the quality of being bought and sold for a profit, a quality which is very much social and historically-specific. Commodity fetishism cannot but have some influence, direct or indirect, on everyday life, including love. The natural desire aspect of love is often over-emphasized at the expense of its social aspect. Love is seen as a relation only between two individuals rather than a relation that involves many, just as in a commodity exchange, the relation is seen as one that is merely between two people. And, what is a historically specific form of love – the bourgeois form of love -- is considered to be historically universal.

People see each other in the way they see commodities. 'For the man an attractive girl—and for the woman an attractive man—are the prizes they are after. "Attractive" usually means a nice package of qualities which are popular and sought after on the personality market. (Fromm, 1956: 3). And the package of qualities – the qualities one looks for in another person – is narrowly defined. These qualities are those that support – and that do not challenge -- the reproduction of bourgeois society and family. Besides, the quality and depth of love are often judged by the commodity form of material exchange, i. e. presents that lovers give one another: the expensive or exotic the present, the better is the love relation, it is often assumed. It is as if relations between the two people in love are less important than the relation between things exchanged between them. Besides, as Illouz (2011) point out, to the extent that capitalism is characterized by practices that enable the quick withdrawal from a transaction and the quick realignment of prices and the breaking of loyalties, such a tendency is reflected in love life where there is a tendency of love relationships to fade and dissolve, i.e. a tendency towards unloving, or

¹² The new moral ideal serves the interests of those who live off income from property, from labour or from a combination of the two (peasants and artisans also).

¹³ In reality, 'Love constantly escaped from the narrow framework of legal marriage relations set for it, into free relationships and adultery, which were condemned' (ibid.).

the unmaking of social bonds.¹⁴ People love and unlove merely to meet their personal needs, in isolation from commitments to a wider society.

Alienation

Capitalism reproduces human beings as alienated. It begins with the sale and purchase of labour power as a commodity. Workers compete with one another for work and therefore, there is no solidarity *among them*. They are separated – alienated -- from one another. There is alienation following the sale and purchase of labour power too. Workers produce surplus value that is appropriated by capitalists who convert it into capitalist property which in turn exploits workers. Thus, workers' exploitation is 'the alienation of the worker [from] ...*the products of his labor*' (1844:30). This alienation or 'estrangement is manifested ...in the *act of production*, within the *producing activity*, itself' too, over which people have no conscious collective control (ibid.). The upshot of all this is that people's productive life (work life) is a miserable life, as Marx says. At work, people do *not* 'affirm' themselves; they do *not* feel 'content', they do *not* 'develop freely [their] physical and mental energy', and they do *not* feel at home. Their work 'is merely a *means* to satisfy their economic need, but not a joyous need itself. Their alienated labour is 'a labor of self-sacrifice'. Their labour 'is not their own, but someone else's'. When at work they belong not to themselves but to another (the capitalist).

It is no wonder then that the sphere of married love (or a long-term love relation) that is isolated from society becomes an opium of alienated life. Ordinary people (workers) rely on bourgeois concept/practice of love including, especially, married love in the family (or some such 'long-term' relation). The family, including married love, is where: people can enjoy some solidarity and avoid the pressure of competition; people can hope to affirm, and not deny, themselves; they feel content and not unhappy; they feel at home, and do not feel outside themselves; they do things (e.g. cooking; loving; DIY) for meeting their needs directly, and not treat activities as a means to an end; they do things for themselves, and not engage in self-sacrifice to benefit others (capitalists), and they belong to themselves, and not to someone else, and so on.

An important aspect of alienation is the fact that ordinary people do not have direct access to means of subsistence to meet their needs, leading to poverty, which puts objective constraints on human beings' ability to show fine sentiments and display genuine love. As Marx (1844:46) says in his *Paris Manuscripts*: 'For the starving man, it is not the human form of food that exists, but only its abstract existence as food' so much so that 'it would be impossible to say wherein this feeding activity differs from that of animals'. Similarly, 'The care-burdened, poverty-stricken man has no sense for the finest play' (Marx, 1844:46). Likewise, I would argue, the care-burdened, poverty-stricken person would have 'no sense' for the love as a part of a web of finest emotions and intellectual experiences.¹⁵ A poor person's love often bears the same relation to the love experienced by a rich person, as the relation between, as Marx (1857) would say in *Grundrisse*, quenching hunger by eating 'raw meat with the help of hands, nails and teeth' and quenching hunger by eating 'cooked meat eaten with a knife and fork'. No matter how much

¹⁴ And this tendency goes against the tendency for capitalism to require a stable love relation in a marital form.

¹⁵ A care-burdened, poverty-stricken (old) parent cannot truly love their grown-up children if they materially depend on their children and their spouses, in terms of money and care-labour.

love there is within a family and between families, love is not a solution to poverty/destitution because lack of love is not the main reason for poverty/destitution. Alienation and other objective conditions are. Indeed, ‘with destitution the struggle for necessities and *all the old filthy business* would necessarily be reproduced’ (Marx, 1845:11; italics), so the beautiful human emotion called love is not possible, except superficially. Within a family, when X fails to meet Y’s material needs, then the love relation is attenuated.

Love is an attempted escape from alienation.¹⁶ But it cannot fulfill its promise: the logic of alienation in capitalist economy permeates bourgeois relations of love. Alienation partly explains the importance of the two-in-one subject of love: two people in love who care for themselves only (and their little children), and no one else. Thus, people’s private matters – as a negation of negation -- remain *alienated (separated) from the wider society*.¹⁷ Negation of negation can be a positive accomplishment.¹⁸ Negation of the negation of negation is a negative accomplishment. The sphere of bourgeois relations of love (e.g., married love), as an escape from alienation, represents a negation of the negation of negation. This point can be represented schematically:

- a. Non-alienation: Human beings’ interests are in meeting their material and cultural needs through democratic control over means of production, production and outputs of production, and in an enjoyable productive activity where they feel at home.
- b. Capitalist alienation: the negation of human being’s real interests and needs →
- c. Negation of negation: the form of love possible in capitalism as an attempted negation of the first negation →
- d. Negation of negation of negation: capitalist love itself represents a form of alienation, so it fails to produce negation of negation of capitalist alienation →
- e. Non-alienation needs to be accomplished in the sense of a) above as the only solution to the problem of alienation in the sphere of love and outside

A major form of alienation in capitalism is experienced when people freely working in their self-interests are separated from one another. In capitalism, individuals are free ‘but free among other things to be constantly at another’s throats’ (Eagleton, 2011:86), and such an alienation is a constraint on genuine love.

(Class) Consciousness

It is not just capitalist *economy* that has promoted specific ideas about love in capitalism. The consciousness that capitalism produces helps to reproduce a working class which tends to,

¹⁶ ‘Romantic love is one of the ways of overcoming alienation, instrumentalism and final reification of our work in the factories and organizations, and consumer society’ (Mazeikis, 2015: 22).

¹⁷ ‘Love is a means to escape the solitude of individualism’ but people become ‘isolated again in the private life of the couple or the family.’ (Hardt and Negri, 2009: xii).

¹⁸ Capitalist private property is a negation of small-scale scattered private property. Socialist property will be a negation of this negation, and therefore, a positive accomplishment.

more or less, accept capitalism as natural (Marx, 1887: 523), and such consciousness impacts love which itself is a form of consciousness too.

In capitalism, there is something called spontaneous consciousness which represents a larger cultural tendency: capitalism's reproduction is guaranteed by the fact that people are concerned about the surface elements of society and not with its underlying structures (relations of production and alienation; class nature of state power, etc.). Spontaneous consciousness keeps separate people's everyday life from their conception of, and practical attitude towards, society's underlying structures. In the sphere of work, people fall for spontaneous form of class consciousness, a lower form of consciousness which is different from a higher form of consciousness (socialist consciousness or class consciousness proper) where people are conscious of capitalism's deeper structures and of the fact that it is incompatible with the interests of common people. Similarly, in the private sphere, people fall for what I would call *spontaneous love consciousness*: this is when two people are in love based on qualities that are reproductive of capitalism. Just as spontaneous political consciousness of a group of workers relates them only to their employers and not to all employers as a class and to overall society, spontaneous love consciousness relates one lover to her/his beloved and not to the whole society. Chance encounters, physical attractions or attractions based on relatively superficial common qualities (e.g. the fact that two people love outdoor picnics, etc.) that are not political in any serious sense become the spontaneous basis for love, which is separated from the totality of society. When two people in love only care about themselves, and when their love has no relation to the fight for a better world in which they live and love, that love is the love that is spontaneously shaped by bourgeois ideology. That love provides an 'escape' from the need to develop progressive consciousness (democratic consciousness, trade union consciousness and socialist class consciousness). As long as I am in love with my partner, I don't care if Muslims or Blacks are being lynched or if predatory wars, driven by military industrial complexes and justified by military-academic complexes, are destroying nations or if working class children are deprived of a good education. When two people are attracted towards one another, they are attracted on the on the basis of 'a nice package of qualities which are popular and sought after on the personality market' (Fromm, 1956: 3). These qualities help reproduce capitalism by reproducing people as unconcerned about wider societal matters that confront humanity. Love becomes 'apolitical'. Decision concerning love is not affected by progressive consciousness because most people lack it or where it exists, their conception of love (including the decision about who to have an enduring love relation with) separates it from love.

It is not just that the qualities one consciously looks for in one's partners are the qualities that are not a threat to capitalism and that indeed reproduce capitalism. It is also the case that bourgeois form of love – considered a private matter based on spontaneity – has no difficulty in uniting, for example, warmongers and bigots as partners.¹⁹ Capitalists and upper-middle class people (super-rich wage-earners) as a class-stratum fall in love, and marry within that stratum, and thus reproduce themselves. To the extent that love is consciously politicized, that politicization is informed by the regressive consciousness. Given capitalist crisis and inability of the system to meet the needs of the people, there is a tendency towards the right-wing, post-truth politics which aims to keep the masses divided and in check. The right-wing resorts to various

¹⁹ Bourgeois love allows a politician who is a spouse and a parent, to love their children and spouse but not worry about their policies killing millions of children and their parents in a poor country. Consider Madeleine Albright.

ideological and political mechanisms. Consider ‘love jihad’ (love war), a Muslim war against Hindus by means of love. Love jihad as a notion is the false and conspiratorial belief among fascistic Hindu groups that when a Muslim man falls in love with a Hindu woman, his purpose is to convert the woman into Islam, as a part of the Muslim effort at the demographic domination over Hindus (Rao, 2011).

The bourgeois system not only tears apart people as workers from the conditions of production and product of their labour and so on. Through the ideology of married love, it also tears apart the inner being of a person, ‘a division of the inner emotional world involves inevitable suffering’. There is no recognition that in a society where two love partners satisfy each other’s emotional etc. needs, ‘[a] deep intellectual and emotional involvement in one’s work may not be compatible with love for a *particular* man or woman [italics added]’ (ibid.). ‘[L]ove for the collective’, i.e. the society as a whole, ‘might conflict with love for husband, wife or children. Consider another example.

A woman feels close to a man whose ideas, hopes and aspirations match her own; she is attracted physically to another. For one woman a man might feel sympathy and a protective tenderness, and in another he might find support and understanding for the strivings of his intellect. To which of the two must he give his love? And why must he tear himself apart and cripple his inner self, if only the possession of both types of inner bond affords the fullness of living? (Kollontai, 1923).

Bourgeois ethical code does not recognize all this. Instead:

Bourgeois ideology has insisted that love, mutual love, gives the right to the absolute and indivisible possession of the beloved person. Such exclusiveness was the natural consequence of the established form of pair marriage and of the ideal of “all-embracing love” between husband and wife [or between two sexual partners]. (Kollontai, 1923).

Overall, ‘The bourgeois ideal of love does not correspond to the needs of the largest section of the population – the working class. Nor is it relevant to the life-style of the working intelligentsia’ (Kollontai, 1923).²⁰

4. Love in a socialist society (and in the socialist movement within capitalism)

Masses do not just experience alienation and suffering. They do not just fall prey to bourgeois consciousness. Sections of the exploited class do possess progressive consciousness and fight to change their conditions. It is in proletarian interests that love be seen as a conscious and social process and that love be a process that is shaped by progressive consciousness which will contribute, however modestly, to greater proletarian solidarity.

²⁰ Kollontai seems to suggest that the very notion of ‘exclusiveness’, which seems essential to the love relationship between two people, is necessarily bourgeois and antagonistic to the needs of the workers, and that this would be the case even if the partners had the right socialist or progressive values. Capitalism is a constraint on comradesly romantic love.

Love has a class dimension. There is class love. Hatred is the opposite of love.²¹ There is class hatred. The exploiting class members and their politicians/ideologists have class love among themselves, which is often translated into marriage or such longer-term relationship. And, they have class hatred against the masses. This is expressed in the form of their brutalities against the exploited especially when the latter fight against exploitation and oppression. Class love among the masses and among their organic intellectuals and between the two strata exists in the form of class solidarity. Class love also exists when under certain conditions this solidarity develops into red romantic love between two workers or between a worker and an organic intellectual (Marxist) or between organic intellectuals (Marxists). Masses also have class hatred against their exploiters: there exists 'a mood of hatred towards' capitalists' on the part of 'the broadest masses' (Lenin, 1964: 210). Class hatred on the part of the masses is a part of their class consciousness which is a response to class hatred on the part of the ruling class.

If love is a decision and not an impulse, then it means that at least some of the forms of progressive consciousness (discussed earlier) must have a role in deciding how we maintain an enduring love relationship while freely meeting our physical and emotional needs. X loves Y because X, like Y, wishes to contribute to the socialist movement, and this 'individual' quality is a deeply social thing, and social in a political sense. A person with progressive consciousness would search for a partner with such a consciousness, or would at least, try to help their partner develop one. A class-conscious proletarian cannot have an enduring love relation with someone for whom production and exchange based on capitalist private property is the only form of society people can live in, or that it is acceptable for business owners to pay starvation wages while they vacation in their yachts. If a romantic relation, which may begin with a degree of spontaneity, ultimately becomes a fetter on the development and/or expansion of progressive consciousness, the relationship must weaken or break, at least as far as class-conscious proletarians are concerned.

Spaces of proletarian love – just like glimpses of a socialist society -- are already in existence as very small islands of communism (or as sparks of communist consciousness). These are evident in parents' love for their little children. 'I do not give my kids food and shelter in exchange for work' or anything else they do for me (Gilman-Opalsky, 2021a).²² More generally, 'islands of miniature communism can be found in different love relations', the relations with not only partners but also 'family, friends, or anyone with whom we are happily connected for other reasons than money [or self-interest]'. 'If you and your partner', or indeed, if members of a Marxist reading group or a communist organization, 'measure every chore and favor you do for one another on a spreadsheet to ensure an equal exchange, you'll be on a fast track to resentment' (Gilman-Opalsky, 2021a). A major characteristic of islands of spontaneous communistic love is that these are 'no-go zones for capitalist exchange relations'.

²¹ This is not to deny that: love exists in complex interaction with non-loving relationships including those based on force, coercion, domination, and hatred, including socially constructed and propagated hatreds against minorities defined on the basis of race, sexuality, religion, caste, etc.

²² This means that capitalism sets limit on what we can do but does not completely determine our lives in accordance with the needs of the capitalist class and its state.

It is in the capitalists' interest that the sphere of human interaction that does not obey exchange relations be restricted, but it is in the proletarian interest that the existing islands of miniature communism, i.e. the islands of communism of love, be expanded. Such expansion, in the process of the proletarians' struggle against capitalism, would consist of acts like building relations with people with progressive consciousness; and expanding one's knowledge about the world from a progressive angle, as well as solidarity in a material sense. In the proletarian ideology of love, 'every member of the working class [is] to be capable of responding to the distress and needs of other members of the class, of sensitive understanding of others and a penetrate consciousness of the individual's relationship to the collective' (ibid.). Love should indeed involve reasoned care and commitment and one must be critical of love in its merely romantic form (Evans, 2002; Brooks, 2019). Love in a wider sense 'socializes a unique polyamory beyond the structure of the romantic relationship', a polyamory that 'is not about having multiple partners, and is not primarily sexual or romantic, but is instead the polyamory of a communist affection for others' (2021b), which can take the form of communist romantic love. 'Love activates a sensibility about being with other people that is antithetical to capitalist reasons for being-with-others' (Gilman-Opalsky, 2010). Love is an anti-capitalist sentiment.

Under communism, 'love-solidarity will become the lever that competition and self-love [are] in the bourgeois system'. 'Collectivism of spirit can then defeat individualist self-sufficiency, and the "cold of inner loneliness," from which people in bourgeois culture have attempted to escape through love and marriage, will disappear.' (Kollontai, 1923). Of course, the privateness of romantic love is not going to disappear under communism. Relations based on love, care, and compassion for everyone will flourish. If people wish to confine love to marriage, they will be free to do so. As well, in the proletarian or communist ideology of love: people give love as per their emotional-biological *abilities* and receive love as per their emotional-biological *needs*. But there is no necessary imperative to put our romantic partners first before 'the love for your friends, your neighbors, and your family.' (Cozzarelli, 2018). The love in proletarian theory does not seek to possess anyone. No more "be mine," no more trying to own anyone's body or desires. Proletarian ideology cannot accept exclusiveness and "all embracing love." 'No one person can be our other half, fulfill all our needs, and heal all our wounds, despite capitalism's insistence that they can' (Cozzarelli, 2018). Given that capitalism reinforces patriarchy which in turn shapes love, one must bear in mind the following principle: 'The day when it will be possible for the woman to love in her strength and not in her weakness, not to escape from herself but to find herself, not out of resignation but to affirm herself, love will become for her as for man the source of life and not a mortal danger.' (Beauvoir, 2011: 708).

Under communism, it will not matter 'whether love takes the form of a long and official union or is expressed in a temporary relationship. The working class will voluntarily subordinate romantic love to 'the more powerful emotion of love-duty to the collective. '[M]en and women will strive to express their love not only in kisses and embraces but in joint creativity and activity.' (Kollontai, 1923). 'Comrade love will only be hegemonic in communism, when the family as it exists today is a distant memory and there are material conditions to enter and exit relationships, to experiment, to mess up, to get your heart broken and to fall deeply in love with friends, lovers and everything in between' (Cozzarelli, 2018). As Kollontai

argues, already within capitalism, love is not confined to marriage; from friends to extramarital affairs to love triangles, love is bursting at the seams.

In modern society, if for most of the people, their romantic love life revolves around their relation with their partners, in abstraction from the sufferings of the masses, objective conditions including alienation, are responsible for this. So, to paraphrase Marx (1843), to call on people to love humanity, to reject the concept of romantic love as practiced in a class society, and to give up their illusions about love, is to really call on them to *give up a condition that requires them to conceive love in that manner*. The criticism of the restricted form of love in modern society is, therefore, *in embryo, the criticism of that vale of tears* of which their private love life is the *halo* and an escape route and a source of the solution to their problems. Moralizing about love and advising people to be selfless under heartless conditions is not the task of communists.

If theory is a form of class struggle (as Althusser and others have said), then the Marxist theory of love is potentially an aspect of class struggle. ‘It is the struggle to build free and equal relations of love, sexuality and comradeship in which desire is neither simply sexual nor exclusive, but involves a solidarity of multiple connections and interrelations to others as well as to the work and welfare of the collective. These are relations that cannot be developed in a social formation dominated by property [or commodity] relations as the signifier of individual freedom’ (Elbert, 1999). Under communism, and unlike under capitalism, social life is organized in such a way that ‘Only through others can we finally come into our own. This means an enrichment of individual freedom...It is hard to think of a finer ethics. On a personal level, it is known as love’ (Eagleton, 2011: 86). Love in the wider sense requires communism. Communism requires love in the wider sense. So, the fight for the conditions where one can truly love is a part of the fight for communism/socialism.²³ The proletariat must reject the modern (bourgeois) concept/practice of romantic love because modern love ‘absorbs the thoughts and feelings of ‘loving hearts’ and isolates the loving pair’ from the wider society’ (Kollontai, 1923).

While romantic love is important, one must reject the idea of love of all (love of humanity) in a class society, and exaggerated claims about the power of love. About the love of humanity, Mao rightly says: ‘there has been no such all-inclusive love since humanity was divided into classes. All the ruling classes of the past were fond of advocating it, and so were so-called sages and wise men, but nobody has ever really practiced it, because it is impossible in class society.’’ (quoted in Labayne, 2020). Therefore, strictly speaking, Fromm’s following statement is not accurate: ‘If I truly love one person I love all persons, I love the world’ (Fromm, 1956:26). What does love for landlords and peasants or love for capitalists and workers or love for imperialist powers and oppressed nations mean? Love of/for humanity only makes sense when humanity or humankind or human race or human beings is seen as the exploited and oppressed masses.

The proletarian view is critical not only of love of humanity *in a class society* but also of extravagant claims (deification of love’) about love in a class, of the type Negri, etc. make. Love is ‘a great creative force’ as ‘it develops and enriches the psyche’ of the persons in love (Kollontai, 1911). Yet, ‘love [is] not the main goal of our life’ and in the process of construction

²³ Fromm correctly says: ‘important and radical changes in our social structure are necessary, if love is to become a social and not a highly individualistic, marginal phenomenon’ (Fromm, 1956: 132).

of socialism, ‘work and the longing for love can be harmoniously combined *so that work remains as the main goal of existence*’ (Kollontai, 1926).

5. Conclusion

This paper is a response to the following ideas: that romantic love is driven by the pleasure-drive, that it is mainly a relation between the two love-partners, that love is therefore a private matter, and that it has little to do with politics. The paper argues that love is a deeply social process²⁴ and therefore it is a political process too. Love is not the private matter it might seem at first sight.²⁵ Like everything else in society, love is connected to class relations: as class relations have changed, the concept and practice of love have changed. Love relations can contradict the interests of the ruling class or support these interests, so love relations are regulated by society. The matter of love is an appropriate topic for class theory.

The paper builds on Marx and Kollontai as well as other Marxists. It also draws on not only psychology and sociology but also neuroscience (Marxism indeed must make use of modern science in all its forms). It draws out implications of Marx’s political economy and social theory for understanding love. In the process, the paper politicizes love under capitalism in a stronger way than Kollontai and others do in terms of the relation between love and class struggle. The paper also puts the ideas of Kollontai, who has written about love more than any other Marxist, on a more firm basis in the Marxist theory of class and capitalism than she provides.

Economic forces of capitalism -- commodity fetishism, alienation, property relations and accumulation and the need for cheaper reproduction of labour power -- have a deep impact on love relations. The different forms of consciousness promoted by capitalism impact love too: progressive forms of consciousness (democratic consciousness, spontaneous, trade union consciousness, socialist class consciousness) have a different impact on love as a form of consciousness than do capitalist values of competition and egoism, etc. do. Love at first sight may produce the first encounter and an initial interest, but love does involve cognitive thinking and decision-making. Love is more than an impulse and functioning of certain neurotransmitters, so people in love do consciously think about qualities in each other and do alter the impact of the initial encounter on their feelings. The people in love are like Marx’s architects: human beings erect the reality first in imagination before it is in existence. When people fall in love based on certain common qualities, apart from physical attraction, it is usually the case that progressive forms of consciousness do not inform the choice of these qualities just as progressive consciousness, thanks to the operation of the capitalist system, does not generally inform many other areas of life. Capitalism discourages and impedes progressive forms of consciousness and especially, class consciousness. Similarly, capitalism is incompatible with a concept of love that is shaped by progressive consciousness and that is therefore in the interest of the masses, i.e. the love based on class-solidarity.

²⁴ However, unlike marriage (or marital form of love), love as such doesn’t – and should not -- require recognition by the state (which is why love jihad – love war – mentioned earlier is to be fought against).

²⁵ Of course, one can agree that the romantic relation *is* private in the sense that it typically involves some intimacy between the individuals that isn’t shared with others, and this exclusivity is essential to such a love-relation. So while it isn’t “just private,” there still is a sense in which it is private.

Love has specific implications for the fight for socialism. A common interest in fighting against racism, fascism, capitalist exploitation, imperialism, war and climate breakdown, etc. and the consciousness associated with these fights, can, and should, bring two people together in a relationship of erotic love and reinforce whatever else (e.g. physical attraction, etc.) makes them closer. So, romantic love becomes a part of love in a wider sense. Also, the fight for the conditions to experience genuine erotic love based on class-solidarity, must be a part of the demand for the fight for communism/socialism. In the class society, people cannot freely fall in love (as in pre-capitalist societies), or love is narrowly confined to two individuals as a private matter and is not free from its subjugation to economic imperatives (as in capitalism). The conception of love prevalent in the class society must be replaced by a conception of love under communism, where love – romantic love -- is not only erotic but also a social matter and serves the lives and struggles of the masses.

Human beings have hitherto fallen in love in the world in various ways. The point, however, is to change that world. And the act of changing the world must include the act of changing the ways in which we think and fall in love.

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