

# Powerful Women Around Karl Marx—Examined Using the Figure of the Continuum\*

Christel Baltes-Lühr

University of Luxembourg, Luxembourg

Based on the treatise by Gerhard Bungert and Marlene Grund published in 1983, titled *Karl Marx, Lenchen Demuth and the Saar*, author Gisela Hoffmann, who lives in St. Wendel in the Saarland, Germany, which is the birthplace of Helena Demuth, wrote the play “Powerful Women Around Karl Marx”. It has been performed multiple times, the latest of which is on the occasion of International Women’s Day on March 8, 2018 in Trier, Germany. Along with presenting research on Helena Demuth as a historical person, this article will examine how Helena Demuth, as a historical and literary figure, can be said to embody a dynamic between exitus and new beginnings, changes and interferences. The article also examines how the figure of the Continuum, with the four dimensions physical (body), psychological (emotion), social (behavior), and sexual (desire), can be used to illuminate the person of Helena Demuth in all her facets, not the least of which are her connections to Jenny and Karl Marx.

*Keywords:* gender relations, female figures, Helena Demuth, breaking points, Continuum

## Biographical Turning Point

A look at the numerous publications on the occasion of Karl Marx’s 200th birthday on May 8, 2018 reveals a change of the discourses around Karl Marx, which can be understood as a biographical turning point and which, in connection with new insights into the historical context of Karl Marx’s life and work, changes the classification of its impact. On the anniversary of Karl Marx’s 200th birthday, two important discursive changes can be distinguished: Karl Marx is viewed as a private individual as well as author of his work, for example in the exhibition “Karl Marx 1818-1883. Life. Work. Time” (Bouvier & Auts, 2018) in Trier, Germany. The exhibit’s catalogue includes a commentary by Trier’s Mayor Wolfram Leibe, which among other topics discusses the need to “make (Karl Marx) visible as a person behind the icon” (Leibe, 2018, p. 12). The German Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier writes in his welcome address: “But the more we collect and learn about him, the more we understand him as a person of his time, the more we succeed in opposing the formation of legends and ideological stereotyping” (Steinmeier, 2018, p. 6). In her May 2018 speech on the occasion of the opening of the exhibition in the Konstantinbasilika in Trier, Germany, Malu Dreyer, Minister-President of the German Federal State of Rhineland-Palatinate, just as President of the EU Commission Jean-Claude Juncker, pointed out that Karl Marx cannot be held responsible for the crimes

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Christel Baltes-Lühr, Ph.D., Professor, Faculty of Humanities, Education and Social Sciences, University of Luxembourg, Luxembourg.

committed in his name, contrary to political figures such as Lenin, Stalin, Mao, and Hitler. Here a new classification of the impact of Karl Marx's work becomes apparent. If it becomes clearer and clearer that Karl Marx does not carry the responsibility for the political systems established in his name, then this insight into the importance of the historical context of his writings outlines a new view on his works: the importance of the time in which he lived can come into focus with all its facets and effects. This biographical turning point allows a perspective on contradictions and continuities in Karl Marx's life as well as on the people who lived and worked with him.

### **The Figure of “Gender as a Continuum” as an Analytical Tool**

Based on the question how the diversity of genders can be articulated theoretically beyond femininity and masculinity, the figure of the Continuum, introduced by Baltes-Lohr (2018a; 2016; 2021; 2018b) in 2014, offers a possible answer. This figure contributes to the dissolution of binarities by breaking up, among others, traditional ideas of gender as well as the idea of two separate and inherently static gender poles of “female-male”. If inter\* and trans\* identities outside of the female-male binary such as nonbinary, queer, and agender are manifest in lived realities in addition to female and male, then the figure of the Continuum offers a space in which all genders can be seen as equal and in which it can at the same time be clear that the gender order, which is oftentimes still assumed to be “natural”, and the language pertaining to 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th or additional gender positions can be understood as consequences of societal relations of power and hegemony. The figure of the Continuum assumes that there is no “natural” reason to view any gender forms as “superior” or “inferior” in relation to one or all other genders. An abolition of superiority and inferiority such as this accompanies not only an abolition of the idea of “naturally” dominant or marginalized genders, but also the dissolution of positionings of certain genders as “in-between”, which is used to mean between the powerful and restricting, limiting poles of “female” and “male”. In addition, the figure of Gender as a Continuum allows the recognition and association of connections between assumed contradictions and oppositions within certain gender groups as well as between the different gender groups of trans\*, inter\*, female, nonbinary, male, queer, and agender.

The figure of the Continuum contains the four dimensions of the physical, the psychological, the social, and the sexual. These dimensions can be summarized as follows (see Table 1):

Table 1

#### *Dimensions of Gender as a Continuum*

Dimension	Encompasses	Often called
Physical/body	Physical morphology, gonads, chromosomes, hormones	(Biological) sex
Psychological/emotion	Feelings about the self-ascribed gender, gender assumed by others, and appropriated gender	Gender identity
Social/behavior	Behavior according to certain gender roles; gender-appropriate and non-gender appropriate behavior	(Social) gender
Sexual/desire	Sexual desire, practices, forms of relation	Sexuality

“Localized” in the physical dimension are the configuration of “X” and “Y” chromosomes, the amount of estrogen and testosterone, ovaries, testicles, seminal ducts, uterus, fallopian tubes, vulva, penis, breasts, and body hair.

The psychological level includes feelings such as agreement as well as disagreement with the gender assigned at birth; feelings of belonging to a certain gender group; feelings of non-belonging to a certain gender

group; feelings on a scale from very positive to very negative about one's own morphology and physicality; rejection of or joy about body parts with gender connotations such as breasts, vulva, penis; feelings of contentment or discontentment concerning physical developments like the start of menstruation, growing breasts, emerging or absent body hair, erections and ejaculations.

The social dimension of behavior allows everyone, regardless of established stereotypes of a "real" girl/woman or a "real" boy/man, and irrespective of individual identification (either self-ascribed or ascribed by other people) with labels such as trans\*, inter\*, nonbinary, queer, and agender, to be emotional, rational, passive, active, compassionate, hard, soft, strong, connected to nature and culture, physical, intellectual, dependent, independent, attached, detached etc. The female, male, trans\*, inter\*, nonbinary, queer, or agender behavior does not exist, just as the female, male, trans\*, inter\*, nonbinary, queer, or agender person does not exist.

The dimension of sexual desire gives space to diverse sexual orientations, practices and forms of relationships. Sexual orientations can be monosexual, asexual, bisexual, homosexual, heterosexual, and pansexual, and might also change over the course of a life. One cannot ascribe the one, particular sexual practice to any one sexual orientation. Concerning forms of relationships, we can differentiate broadly between monogamous and polygamous relationships. In a binary setting of "female-male", a differentiation is between polygyny (one man with multiple wives), polyandry (one woman with multiple husbands), and polygynandry (multiple women and men). This categorization is to be expanded to include trans\*, inter\*, nonbinary, queer, and agender persons. All people, women, men, trans\*, inter\*, nonbinary, queer, and agender persons can choose monadic, dyadic, triadic, tetradic, or simply polyadic forms of relationships with the people they engage with. This dimension also presupposes that the universal and universally practiced relationship expression, no matter which, does not exist.

### **Horizontal and Vertical Variability of the Dimensions of the Continuum**

On each of the four dimensions, a variety of possible positions are located, which can be described as the horizontal variability of the Continuum. More concretely, this means that not all so-called men with a penis also have a narrow pelvis, broad shoulders, testicles and seminal ducts, and a set of XY chromosomes. The variation in the feeling and experience of one's gender is also vast for different people and different gender groups, and might be quite different depending on the specific person's age and situation. First, one's self-assumed ascription to a certain gender can change; second, people cannot feel exactly as male, trans\*, inter\*, nonbinary, queer, or agender in any given situation as in the next—even if their self-ascription to a gender or gender group does not change; and third, not all women, men, trans\*, inter\*, queer, or agender person exhibit a homogenous "group" behavior as compared to other persons belonging to the same gender group. Sexual desire, sexual orientations, and sexual practices show a great breadth of variability as well.

Aside from the horizontal variability, we can also see a vertical variability concerning positions in the four dimensions. An example: A person born with a vulva and assigned female at birth, finds out she has XY chromosomes and see herself as an intersex person or an XY woman, and behaves gently, compassionately, assertively, rational, strong, weak, scared and brave. Let's call this person Paula. Paula desires people regardless of their gendered morphology and has monadic as well as polyadic relationships, and has two children with a trans man who retained his ovaries, fallopian tubes, uterus, and vulva. They live in a marriage-like community with a heterosexual couple who themselves has two children, and also share a living space with the grandparents of the four adults.

This vertical variability is also used to mean that the four dimensions of the Continuum cannot be considered to have a clearly definable relationship to one another, as still prevalent ideas of stereotypical femininity and masculinity would have us believe. Here we have to emphasize that the figure of the Continuum is able to dissolve stereotypes of the real trans\*, inter\*, nonbinary, queer, or agender person as well. Vertical variability of the four dimensions of Gender as a Continuum also means that one person's positions in the four dimensions might shift and that they, at a certain point in their life, might well exhibit a gendered behavior that is ascribed to a "typical" girl, but have biologically male sex characteristics, define themselves as a girl, and want to initiate erotic relationships with a so-called boy, who is biomorphologically as well as chromosomally male and feels erotically attracted to another so-called boy.

All of these four dimensions are characterized by not being clearly definable in their intra- and inter-dimensional relations. They (can) influence and interact with one another, but there does not exist a causal relationship similar to a cascading consequentiality between certain or even all of the dimensions. The variety of "combinations" is vast and the complexity only increases when including diachronic and cultural perspectives. It is evident that the understanding of what positionings can happen or are happening in which dimension of the Continuum can vary over time, just as the effects of cultural contexts (Independent Lens, 2015) on the four dimensions of the Continuum.

The figure of "Gender as a Continuum" thus opens a space for the expression of actually lived and existing variability and complexity of gender forms, not only here and now, but also yesterday and in another place.

### **Karl Marx (1818-1883)—a Diverse and Multi-Faceted Personality**

Many roles are ascribed to Karl Marx. He is regarded as a historian, anthropologist, economist, sociologist, philosopher, political scientist, as a poet, analyst, journalist, as a migrant, exile, someone politically persecuted, a stateless individual, as a colleague and friend, as a son, brother, husband, brother-in-law, son-in-law, lover, father, father-in-law, and grandfather (Raphael, 2018; Sperber, 2013; Stedman Jones, 2017; Neffe, 2017; Marx, 2017). All ascriptions seem to agree that Karl Marx can be considered a seeker throughout his life, and that all his actions and all the facets of his personality recall the sentence modeled after Descartes: "De omnibus dubitandum—We must doubt everything" (Raphael, 2018, p. 127)—which, as an aside, would also mean that the doubt itself can or even should be questioned.

In her introduction in the exhibition catalog of the 2018 Karl Marx exhibit in Trier, the Minister-President of Rhineland-Palatinate, Malu Dreyer, emphasizes that analyzing Karl Marx's letters opens up the perspective to "dive into a fascinating, analytical mind, human abysses, well-worded criticisms and sharp irony, remarkable affection and magical confessions of love" (Dreyer, 2018, p. 8). An example of the last point:

My heart's beloved. I am writing you again, because I am alone and because it troubles me always to have a dialogue with you in my head, without your knowing anything about it or hearing it or being able to answer. (...) There are many females in the world, and some among them are beautiful. But where could I find again a face, whose every feature, even every wrinkle, is a reminder of the greatest and sweetest memories of my life? Even my endless pains, my irreplaceable losses I read in your sweet countenance, and I kiss away the pain when I kiss your sweet face (...) Good-bye, my sweet heart. I kiss you and the children many thousand times. Yours, Karl. (Neffe, 2017, p. 288; Deeken & Herfurth-Uber, 2018)<sup>1</sup>

Annette Deeken and Beate Herfurth-Uber dedicated themselves to the private correspondence between Jenny and Karl Marx and recorded excerpts from it onto a 78-minute CD in an audio project in cooperation

<sup>1</sup> MEW 29, 532ff., Karl Marx an Jenny Marx (Karl Marx to Jenny Marx), 21.6.1856.

with the Faculty of Media Sciences, University of Trier, Germany (Deeken & Herfurth-Uber, 2018). A 2018 production of the Theater im Museum (Theater in the Museum; TIM) in Trier brings the correspondence between Jenny and Karl Marx onto the stage in a reading titled: “Jenny und Karl: Pfandhaus und Champagner. Ein Briefwechsel” (Jenny and Karl: Pawn Shop and Champagne. A Correspondence). The gay-lesbian center Schmit-z e.V. in Trier, in cooperation with the Karl Marx Exhibition Society and QueerNet Rheinland-Palatinate, gay lesbian bi trans\* inter\* network e.V., organized a series of events in 2018 titled “Karl Marx. Queer gedacht” (Karl Marx. Queer Perspectives) including lectures, workshops, and films<sup>2</sup>. On May 22, 2018, the Rathaus-Zeitung (Town Hall Journal) in Trier included a dedicated page about the “Karl Marx Year”, which featured the family of Karl Marx. In the lead article, Björn Gutheil writes: “Karl Marx was not only a revolutionary and a polymath, who read countless books and literally wrote history with the Communist Manifesto. He was also a father and family man” (Gutheil, 2018, p. 7). In 2018 in Trier, there was “Karl Marx bread”, mugs, t-shirts, stamps, and even Karl Marx traffic lights.

In 2010, the artist Gisela Kaufmann gifted an acrylic painting to Karl Peter Salm, the director of Trier’s Karl-Marx-Haus (Karl Marx House). The painting was titled “Karl Marx—sein Kapital” (Karl Marx—his Capital) and showed “Marx as a pale macho” (Morgen, 2010)<sup>3</sup>, with him and Friedrich Engels surrounded by “his” women (see Figure 1). Here the artist Gisela Kaufmann deconstructs the stereotype of the “strong” man; however, a glance at an 1865 entry in his daughter’s autograph book exhibits a strict adherence to the binary gender order. Marx identifies his favorite male virtue as “strength”, his favorite female virtue as “weakness”<sup>4</sup>.



Figure 1. Gisela Kaufmann: Karl Marx—sein Kapital (Karl Marx—his Capital), acrylic 2011.

<sup>2</sup> More information at <https://www.schmit-z.de>.

<sup>3</sup> Thanks to my colleague, Prof. Dr. Hannelore Faulstich-Wieland, who discovered the painting in the Karl-Marx-Haus in 2018 and researched its provenance.

<sup>4</sup> Author not named: *Die Familie Marx: Der Enge Kreis der Familie Marx schreibt in das Poesiealbum von Tochter Jenny* (The Marx Family: The close circle of the Marx family writes in daughter Jenny’s autograph book). Zeit Online on August 27, 2009, <https://www.zeit.de/zeit-geschichte/2009/03/Poesiealbum-Jenny-Marx/komplettansicht>, last accessed on November 2, 2020.

### **Jenny Marx (1814-1881)—More Than the Woman at His Side?**

Jenny Marx, Karl Marx's wife, notes her favorite male virtue in her daughter's autograph book in March 1865 as "tenacity", and her favorite female virtue as "affection"<sup>5</sup>. These ascriptions, as well, can be read as an expression of traditional ideas of gender orders.

In his biography of Marx, Neffe dedicates an entire chapter to Jenny Marx, titled "Being Jenny Marx. The Tragedy of the Gifted Wife" (Neffe, 2017, pp. 274-294). There were also full biographies of Jenny Marx published on the occasion of her husband's 200th birthday. The biography by Marlene Ambrosi titled *Jenny Marx. Her Life with Karl Marx* (Ambrosi, 2015) was published in its second edition, and a second work by the same author titled *Jenny Marx: An Important Woman* (Ambrosi, 2018b) was published in 2017. In his 2018 publication *Jenny, Helene, Marianne. Karl Marx's Three Women* (Pilgrim, 2018)<sup>6</sup>, Volker Elis Pilgrim connects Jenny Marx with Helene Demuth and her half-sister Marianne, which will be discussed further later in the article.

Jenny von Westphalen and Karl Marx married on June 19, 1843 in Kreuznach, and lived in Paris, Brussels, Cologne, and London. They visited their families in Trier often and had seven children together, of which four died at the ages of nine, two and one year and shortly after birth. Ambrosi described Jenny Marx as follows: She is not only "the woman at the side of an extraordinary man, but also a remarkable and independent personality with a strong wish to live her life unconventionally" (Ambrosi, 2018b, p. 4). She not only married a man four years younger and middle-class, herself being of noble birth; she also "showed determination when she decided to go into exile rather than betray her political goal, which was the liberation of the working class" (Ambrosi, 2018b, p. 4). At the same time, Jenny Marx shows her emotions in difficult and demanding situations. In a letter to Amalie Daniels from September 9, 1865, Karl Marx apologizes for his wife's grief-stricken silence and writes: "She cries and wails like a child" (Ambrosi, 2015, p. 200)<sup>7</sup>. Jenny Marx regularly produced clean copies of Karl Marx's texts; she is an active member of the political movement, has independent correspondences, attends meetings, takes the floor and acts "as an equal political partner among all the men" (Neffe, 2017; Marx, 2017, p. 294). Thus, it shouldn't surprise that the only preserved page of the first draft of the Communist Manifesto from 1847 contains a hand-written note by Jenny Marx. In 1852, she wrote to Adolf Cluß: "My husband has made me his deputy today" (Marx, 2017, p. 293). In a retrospective view, she comments this form of supporting her husband's work: "My memories of the days on which I sat in Karl's room copying his scrawly essays are among the happiest of my life" (Marx, 2017, p. 293).

### **Helena, Helene, Lenchen Demuth (1820-1890)—More Than a Housekeeper?**

Helena, Helene, Lenchen Demuth is regarded as another important person in the life of the Marx family and its different members. She was born in St. Wendel in the Saarland, Germany, daughter of a baker, farmer and day laborer, who died early in 1826. Helena Demuth's mother receives public relief payments for her and her four children, which allows Helena to more or less regularly attend school until 1834 (Geiger, 2018, p. 40)<sup>8</sup>. From age 14 onwards, Helena works as a nanny, maid and nurse for the von Westphalen family in Trier,

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> This is a revised edition of the 1990 title *Adieu Marx. Gewalt und Ausbeutung im Hause des Wortführers* (Adieu Marx. Violence and exploitation in the leader's house).

<sup>7</sup> MEGA III, 7 Marx to Amalie Daniels on September 6, 1865.

<sup>8</sup> On the situation in St. Wendel see Geiger (2018). After the French occupation and the first years of the Principality of Lichtenberg, all children aged 6-13 were required to attend school.

Germany. After the death of patriarch Johann Ludwig von Westphalen on March 3, 1842, she stays with the family and moves with them to Bad Kreuznach, where Jenny and Karl married on June 19, 1843. Jenny and Karl Marx moved to Paris, where their daughter Jenny was born on May 1, 1844. Because her daughter fell seriously ill, Jenny returned to Trier with her, where Helene Demuth shared in the infant's care. When Karl Marx was expelled from France in 1845, he and Jenny, who was pregnant with their second child, travelled to Brussels, to the "German colony". "The loyal, good Lenchen" came to Brussels (Ambrosi, 2018b, p. 74) and followed the Marx family to Cologne, Trier, Paris, and finally London in 1849, where she remained living with Friedrich Engels after Karl and Jenny's deaths and died on November 4, 1890. Friedrich Engels wrote to Adolph Sorge on November 5, 1890:

Today I have some sad news to pass on to you. My good, dear, loyal Lenchen fell peacefully asleep yesterday afternoon after a short and for the most part painless illness. We had spent seven happy years together in this house. We were the only two left of the old guard of the days before 1848. Now here I am, once again on my own. If Marx was able to work in peace over a period of many years as I have during the past seven, it was largely thanks to her. How I shall manage now I do not know. Another think I shall sorely miss is her marvelously tactful advice in party matters. Cordial regards to your wife; would you please pass on this news to the Schlüters. Your F.E. (Geiger, 2018, p. 174)<sup>9</sup>

### **Responsibilities of Helena Demuth in the House of Marx**

As Friedrich Engels' letter from November 5, 1890 clearly shows, Helena Demuth is not just responsible for the housework, taking care of the children, handiwork, entertaining guests, playing chess, and taking care of the pets. Since Helena Demuth is respected and held in high esteem by all family members, we can consider her a member of the family rather than a subordinated employee. She also had a special relationship with Karl Marx, since, according to Wilhelm Liebknecht, she seemed to be the only one in the house who "called him out on his behavior so thoroughly that the lion became tame as a lamb" (Ambrosi, 2018b, p. 74). Ambrosi concludes that Helena Demuth "ruled those she should have served—and whom she did serve" (Ambrosi, 2018b, p. 74). Serving and ruling, combined in the person of the housekeeper, show a perspective of dissolving established ideas of sub- and super-ordination, of relationships of lord/lady vs. servant, which seems to have been practiced in the house of Marx as early as the 19th century.

The multi-faceted personality of Helena Demuth is also exhibited in the aforementioned autograph book of Marx's daughter Jenny (see Table 2).

Table 2

#### *Entry of Helena Demuth in Jenny Marx's Autograph Book (1865)<sup>10</sup>*

Questions in Jenny Marx's autograph book:	Entry of Helena Demuth (1865):
Favorite virtue:	Decisiveness
Favorite male virtue:	Bravery
Favorite female virtue:	Good spirits
Primary quality:	My love for the small Marxs
Definition of happiness:	To eat a dinner which I did not prepare myself
Definition of unhappiness:	To be dependent on others
A vice which I can excuse:	Wastefulness
A vice which disgusts me:	Egotism

<sup>9</sup> MEW 37, p. 498.

<sup>10</sup> See: Marlene Ambrosi: *Jenny Marx—eine bedeutende Frau* (Jenny Marx—An Important Woman). Trier: Weyand, 2018b, p. 118; the book also contains a thorough analysis and commentary on the separate entries.

Table 2 to be continued

What I reject:	Greed
Whom I can't stand:	Lassalle
Favorite thing to do:	Daydream
Favorite hero:	My biggest pot
Favorite heroine:	My coffee pot
Favorite poet:	The one whose works I know the least
Favorite author:	Eugène Sue
Favorite flower:	Rose
Favorite color:	Blue
Favorite meal:	Pork
Maxim:	Live and let live

A hunger for knowledge shines through in the question about her favorite poet, and the desire for independence becomes apparent.

### Helene Demuth's Motherhood

Helena Demuth becomes a mother for the first and probably only time in May or June of 1851; her son is named Heinrich Friedrich, Henri Frederick Demuth. Friedrich Engels claims to be his father. The boy is transferred to a foster family after several weeks and his family name is changed to Lewis. The consensus in research literature is that Karl Marx is the child's biological father. Jenny Marx, who is herself pregnant for the fifth time, is staying in Holland at the possible time of conception, where she is asking a relative of Karl Marx for financial support; her request is rejected. The assumed erotic relationship between Helene Demuth and Karl Marx is described in very different terms by various biographers. The Jenny Marx biographer Krosig (1975), for example, speaks of a mistake on account of Marx. Volker Elis Pilgrim (2018) wrote that Karl Marx took advantage of Jenny's absence.

Something happened there, an eruption, a discharge, an empowerment, broadly speaking a rape. Karl, disinhibited and free from the consideration he had to show towards Jenny for months, Helene defenseless—the relationship between Karl and Helene nothing more than a sexual use of the maid by the “lord”. (Pilgrim, 2018, p. 143)

According to Pilgrim, sexual desire is directed from the lord towards the maid, and thus fully corresponds with the stereotype of the forcefully subordinated woman. However, when applying this logic, Helena would have either had to procure an abortion or would have been relieved of her position. Nothing of the sort happened. Jürgen Neffe offers a different perspective when he writes that Helena Demuth might have “seduced” Marx as well, which reverses the stereotyping structure of desire. But Neffe also does not provide any hints to a possibly equal sexual relationship between the two persons Helene Demuth and Karl Marx. Neffe concludes: “whether he forced her or she seduced him... in both cases: the situation is sufficient to commit the offense of sexual exploitation, which Marx himself vehemently denounced” (Neffe, 2017, p. 281). Ambrosi does offer a hint as to Helene possibly desiring a sexual congress with Karl Marx: “(Helene) wanted to get involved with him; because if he had made advances against her wishes, she would have rejected him” (Ambrosi, 2018a, p. 92). Ambrosi does ascribe a potentially extortive power aspect to this assumed relationship between Karl and Helene, which Helena could have used against the family, but there is no proof for this. In current biographies, the question keeps appearing: “What did Jenny know?”. In Neffe's text, it is assumed that Jenny Marx knew about her husband's possible relationship and fatherhood. Neffe concludes that Jenny was aware of what was



going on, and that she “forgave” Helena earlier than her husband. According to Neffe, Jenny and Karl Marx remain emotionally distant until 1852, when Jenny asks Karl Marx for forgiveness. For the biographer Neffe, this is an expression of a “world on the other side of the looking glass”. In June 1852, Jenny writes to Karl Marx, who is staying with Friedrich Engels: “My dear, precious heart. Do not be cross with me anymore” (Neffe, 2017, p. 284).

We will probably not be able to outline how exactly the relationships between the adults in the Marx house were conducted, at least without any new and unresearched correspondence and/or other sources. However, it has to be mentioned that there are three layers to consider in regards to the gender relationships in the Marx house: first, the actually lived relationships, including erotic ones, between the adults, which is to say Jenny Marx, Karl Marx and Helena Demuth. Second, the written commentary in letters by the acting parties in regards to their own behavior as well as their assessment of the behavior of other people who either lived in the household or were very close to it, such as Friedrich Engels or Wilhelm Liebknecht. And third, the scientific analysis of the thus documented and reconstructed gender relations in the Marx house, and the researcher’s position, which in turn influences their interpretation, on questions such as: What is gender? How are gender relations configured? What is seen, with more or less reflection, as “normal”? Why does Neffe speak of a “world on the other side of the looking glass”? Which normative ideas of romantic relationships are expressed here? Is it not possible that in the Marx house, very traditional ideas such as the ones expressed in 1865 by Karl Marx in his daughter’s autograph book, when he names his favorite male virtue as strength and his favorite female virtue as weakness, coexist with other ideas and perspectives that are seen as “normal”? Further, is it not possible that the potential erotic relationship between Helena Demuth and Karl Marx had neither a coercive nor an exploitative nor a paternalistically subordinated connotation, but that there were simply three people loving each other, with all the ups and downs that often come with relationships based on emotions? Did Jenny Marx, Helena Demuth, and Karl Marx implement a form of life that went beyond the normed family unit, and which also permanently included Friedrich Engels? These might be new perspectives for future research on biographies of Jenny and Karl Marx, Helena Demuth and Friedrich Engels. Did they potentially live new relationship structures and co-parenting in the 19th century and under conditions even more restrictive than today’s?

But back to the known and proven facts: Helena Demuth stays in contact with her son, who resembles Marx “to a ridiculous degree”, according to one of Friedrich Engels’ secretaries; after Karl Marx’s death in 1883, Helena Demuth works in Friedrich Engels’ household. Her son Friedrich visits weekly, and when on his deathbed in 1895, Friedrich Engels is said to have written on a chalkboard: Frederick Demuth is Marx’s son.

A 2017 comic by Johannes Saurer and Ulrike Albers titled *Karl Marx. The Power of Ideas* shows how differently the question of the father of Helena Demuth’s son is portrayed today (see Figure 2). In a chapter titled “London”, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels are walking down a street in London. Marx tells Engels: “I will explain the relation between value and material. And how the machines that are supposed to make work easier just add to the workers’ burdens” (Saurer & Albers, 2017, p. 23). Marx turns to Engels with a slightly desperate expression and says: “There is another problem. Lenchen, our housekeeper, is expecting a child”. Engels reacts happily: “Well, who’s the happy father?”, to which Marx, whose dismay is electrifying his whole body and making his hair stand on end, confesses: “Me!”. Engels replies with a worried and likewise slightly dismayed expression: “Oh dear! What did Jenny say?”. In the next frame, Marx puts his hands on Engels’ shoulders in search of support: “Nothing, she doesn’t know. I’m afraid she’ll leave me”. Engels replies with a

slightly reproachful look: “Shouldn’t you have thought of that earlier?”. The next picture shows Karl Marx, already more alert and hopeful, turning to Engels: “Can’t we just say you’re the father?”. In the next frame, both of them are walking out of the scene: they are shown from behind, and Marx has his hand on his friend’s back. Engels replies: “Okay, but only because I couldn’t stand it if Jenny and you broke up” (Saurer & Albers, 2017, p. 23).



Figure 2. Johannes Saurer, Ulrike Albers: Karl Marx. Die Macht der Idee (Karl Marx. The Power of Ideas). Chapter “London” 1848, pp. 21-27, here p. 23, translation of the text in the balloons see above paragraph.

### **Marianne Kreutz (1835-1862), Helena Demuth's Half Sister from St. Wendel**

Marianne Kreutz also worked for Jenny Marx's mother Caroline von Westphalen in Trier, Germany, from 1847 until Caroline's death in 1856. In 1857, she went to London to join the Marx household. Jenny Marx describes her as "sincere and loyal, hardworking and very competent in matters of the household" (Ambrosi, 2018a, p. 106), and Ernestine Liebknecht writes that she is "the dear, good, loyal creature with a childlike cheerfulness and a deep attachment to all of us" (Ambrosi, 2018a, p. 115). Marianne Kreutz died on December 23, 1862 in the Marx house. The cause of death is documented as "heart disease". The biographer Pilgrim, however, suspects that Marianne fell pregnant by Karl Marx during Jenny and Helena's absence in September 1862, underwent an abortion, and died of its aftermath (Pilgrim, 2018, pp. 159-331). In November 1862, Karl Marx writes to Lassalle:

I confess to you, sans phrase, that I, as a man on a powder barrel, permitted myself to be swayed by circumstances in a manner unbecoming to an animal rationale. But, at all events, it would be ungenerous of you, as a jurist and prosecutor, to hold against me a status animi in which I would have liked nothing better than to blow my brains out. (Ambrosi, 2018a, p. 113)

In April 1864, the Marx family moved again within London, and Jenny wrote about this event to Ernestine Liebknecht: "You won't believe how terrible the old house was to me after our little Marianne's death, and how happy we all are in the new, cheerful lodgings" (Ambrosi, 2018b, p. 300). The biographer thus asks: "Did guilt weigh ... on the old apartment?" (Ambrosi, 2018b, p. 300). Did the unclear relationships have clear consequences? This question, as well, will only be answered if new material comes to light.

### **First Summary in Light of the Continuum**

In regards to the physical dimension of the Continuum we can, considering the facts we have about them and according to today's terminology, call Marianne Kreutz, Helena Demuth, Jenny Marx, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels cis men and cis women. All of them accepted the gender assigned to them at birth. In the psychological, felt dimension of gender, we can detect ambiguities in Karl Marx: on the one hand, he adheres to the normative gender ascriptions of the 19th century, but on the other hand he regards his wife Jenny as his companion and co-worker on his writings, and not only in the sense of someone who performs administrative or typing duties. He also seems critical and reflective about himself and his emotions. Karl Marx's gendered behavior can be described as ambiguous, since his relations with other men and women vary from paternalistic to amicable, equal, seeking help and support as well as offering them. So far we can only conclude heterosexual desire when it comes to sexual orientation; however, the lived relational forms transcend normative and pervasive monogamy. Similarly, Jenny Marx does not move in the classic female sphere of the 19th century. She is an equal partner to her husband; her relationships with many of Karl Marx's compatriots are based on equality, left aside her social standing in her decision to marry and live with Karl, but accept her mother's support, for example when she recommends Helena Demuth as a housekeeper. Jenny Marx's feelings regarding the assumed fatherhood of Karl Marx concerning Helena Demuth's son are both hurt and apologetic; in the sexual dimension, we can so far only assume a heterosexual orientation. There is too little known about Marianne Kreutz's biography to be able to say more than that she possibly also chose to live different gender relations than would have been typical for the 19th century. Concerning Helena Demuth, we can also conclude that she did not in any way fulfil the classic role of the maid, the housekeeper. Rather we can presume diverse

variations on the emotional and social levels of gender which transcend the norms of her time. In regards to the dimension of sexual desire, we must once again point out that everything that is known about her so far hints at a strictly heterosexual structure of desire, but that the social and erotic relationships with Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels and Jenny Marx were both voluntarily chosen and actively shaped by Helene Demuth.

### Helena, Helene, Lenchen Demuth Today—in the 21st Century

It has become apparent that Helena Demuth, often called the world's most famous housekeeper, goes far beyond the role of a housekeeper and makes contributions to the private and also to the political lives of the people around Karl Marx.

For a time, a school was named after Helena Demuth in her birthplace St. Wendel in the Saarland, Germany. In 2012, an almost life-size bronze statue, created by artist Kurt Tassotti, was erected in Helena Demuth's honor near what used to be her parents' house in St. Wendel. It shows Helena Demuth as a pregnant woman, looking almost adoringly at a picture of Karl Marx that she is holding in her left hand, while her right hand is lovingly placed on her pregnant belly<sup>11</sup> (see Figures 3 and 4). This illustrates how a luminous life has been reduced to the traditional female roles of mother and childbearer.



Figures 3 and 4. Right: Bronze statue of Helena Demuth in St. Wendel, Germany; left: the portrait of Karl Marx that she is holding, with a comment by Lukas Kowol: Wer ist der Vater? Ein Denkmal für Marx' Haushälterin (Who is the father? A memorial for Marx's housekeeper). In: Saarbrücker Zeitung, May 14, 2012, p. 7.

Just in time for the anniversary, the Saarländische Rundfunk produced a documentary fiction film directed by Klaus Gietinger and titled *Lenchen Demuth and Karl Marx*. The film was broadcast on April 26, 2018 and described as “a mixture of a local documentary investigation, interviews with historians and fictional, newly-written sequences” (Elss-Seringhaus, 2018, p. 5). It shows Helene Demuth as a person who cannot be defined by the category of “housekeeper”.

<sup>11</sup> Saarbrücker Zeitung (SZ), Monday, May 14, 2012, p. 7.

In their work *Karl Marx, Lenchen Demuth and the Saar*, Gerhard Bungert and Marlene Grund wrote down the 1983 radio play “The Ballad of Lenchen Demuth” by Ludwig Harig. The text is framed by the song: “Auf einem Baum einKuckucksfuß” (“A cuckoo sat upon a tree”), which strongly suggests an allusion to Helena Demuth’s son Frederick. Helene Demuth is portrayed as fairly equal to Karl Marx. She beats Marx at chess (Bungert & Grund, 1983, p. 43), and this dialogue about “bad times” follows:

“Marx (emotionless): The proletariat is suffering, and thus it will fight.  
 Lenchen: Oh, it’s like us but the other way around.  
 Marx: How so?  
 Lenchen: We’re fighting, and that’s why we’re suffering.  
 Marx (laughs, quietly): Hegel.  
 Lenchen: But it’s true.” (Bungert & Grund, 1983, p. 45)<sup>12</sup>

What follows is a very discreet description of the affair and several renditions of the cuckoo song. Helene Demuth’s child is born, and Jenny is assumed to be fully aware of the whole picture, angry, disappointed, and confronting Marx with his own contradictions: “No, don’t try to calm me ... Here, listen to what you wrote, not three years ago: ‘The alleged female community of the communists.’ That’s what you write. And how do you act? Like a bourgeois!” (Bungert & Grund, 1983, p. 55). The child is given to a foster family, Friedrich Engels assumes its fatherhood. The radio play ends with the following remark by Friedrich Engels: “Lenchen survived Karl Marx by seven years ... I shall sorely miss her wonderfully tactful advice in party matters” (Bungert & Grund, 1983, p. 67). Afterwards Helene Demuth sings the last verse of the cuckoo song.

### **Theater Play “Powerful Women Around Karl Marx”**

In March 2011, the Katholische Deutsche Frauenbund St. Wendel (German Catholic Women’s Association St. Wendel) enacted Helene Demuth’s life as a “real woman of the people” during a dialogue between Jenny Marx and Helene Demuth in a café in St. Wendel. Jenny and Helene discuss the situation of the Marx family, but also about Karl Marx’s fatherhood and his relationship to Helene Demuth, who—per the enactment—assures Jenny Marx upon her request that she will not return to her family in St. Wendel. A theater play about the life of Helen Demuth titled “The Extraordinary Life of an Ordinary Housekeeper” was performed on October 27, 2011 in the library of St. Wendel. Elisabeth Zimmermann supplies the idea and the costumes; the texts are written by Gisela Hoffmann. Daniela Roessler provides a musical backdrop for the event in the form of texts by Bertold Brecht, musically adapted by Hanns Eisler.

After the completion of the statue in 2012, another scenic performance occurred on February 17, 2014, this time in the presence of artist Kurt Tassotti. On March 8, 2018, this performance was showcased as a theater play titled “Strong Women Around Karl Marx” in the Broadway Film Theater in Trier, Germany, on the occasion of International Women’s Day. The event is organized by the city’s commissioner for women’s affairs and is met with public interest.

On the content of the play: The dialogue between Jenny Marx and Helene Demuth from 2011 has been expanded by a scene in Jenny Marx’s parental home in Trier, set in 1846. Apart from Jenny and Lenchen, the play features Jenny’s mother Caroline and her brother Ferdinand. Jenny’s mother and brother are trying to convince her that it would be best for her and her children to stay with her family in Trier and to leave her

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<sup>12</sup> These passages are written in the St. Wendel dialect.

husband Karl. Jenny emphasizes her irrevocable love of Karl and her enthusiastic and necessary support of his political actions and writings. This clear position as a loving, thinking woman who feels solidarity with her beloved husband is questioned by her brother Ferdinand, who dismisses her feelings as he thinks love has made her blind. However, Jenny remains steadfast, even through the pain she knows she will cause her mother by leaving her home town, and asks for understanding of her position. When Jenny proves adamant and dismisses her brother's allusions to her husband's alleged unfaithfulness and roguishness, the solution that Lenchen could accompany Jenny and her children is proposed. Jenny is overjoyed, and her brother also seems to overcome his disapproving stance. Shortly before leaving, Jenny says: "My dear brother! Since our father's death you have tried to influence me to fit into your model of the good and obedient sister. But I am an independent person. I know what is best for me"<sup>13</sup>. After their arrival in London, Jenny and Lenchen discuss the financially precarious situation of the Marx family, and it is Lenchen who encourages Jenny time and time again. Helene accidentally mentions her son Friedrich, and Jenny confesses that she cannot bear her humiliation through Karl: "That Karl could do this to me—a child with you". Accusingly she recounts everything she gave up for her husband, and demands of Lenchen that her son will have to leave the house. Lenchen agrees but emphasizes her innocence: "But the boy and I, it's really not our fault". Jenny seems reassured and mentions her husband's near irresistible charm, which hardly any woman can escape. The two then move on to discuss political questions. The willingness to help in any situation, which is connoted as typical for people from the Saarland, is emphasized multiple times, and Lenchen is posed as a clever political thinker and an important person in the political movement by Jenny. Lenchen's idea to move back to St. Wendel with her son to prevent a separation leaves Jenny aghast. Lenchen promises to stay. Her half sister Marianne is mentioned, and her importance to the well-being of the Marx family is emphasized when Jenny says: "You are really the best thing that could ever have happened to us"<sup>14</sup>.

### Conclusions and Final Thoughts

Neither Karl Marx nor his wife Jenny and Helene, Helene, Lenchen Demuth can be filed into strict, static, and stereotypical gender categories. When looked at closely, Karl Marx can be recognized as a seemingly very contradictory person with many facets, from a loving and romantic husband to a rejecting and hurtful partner. He cannot assure the financial stability of his family and constantly relies on allowances, which he receives principally from Friedrich Engels. On the one hand, Jenny Marx conforms to the stereotypical gender ideas of her noble birth and the rising middle class of the 19th century, but on the other hand clearly transcends the role of the middle-class wife and mother. Helene Demuth does not just fill the role of the obedient housekeeper; more and more evidence points to her equal participation in private and political matters in the Marx household.

The relationship between these three people also does not correspond to common ideas of middle-class systems of order being established in the 19th century. These three people, individually and in their relationships to one another, show a broad spectrum of emotions, behavior and desire which can be discovered in all its facets by using the figure of the Continuum to re-check and analyze the available documents.

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<sup>13</sup> From the manuscript of the play, graciously provided by Gisela Hoffmann.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

## Outlook

If multifacetedness is illuminated with the figure of the Continuum then it might be able to prevent new, future idealization. If it becomes clear that people do not fit into static, binary categories or systems of categories regarding, for example, their ascription to a certain gender, if variety is actually recognized, then it can become clear that one's own perspective is and can only be one of many (which could also cause the end of universalism, objectivity, positivism and ahistorical approaches) then the desire for one's own perspective to be respected also includes respecting all other possibilities that can be more accurately portrayed with the figure of the Continuum. Exiting a certain system of roles also always includes a potential new beginning. The acceptance of diverse expressions of physical and psychological variation, of diverse social behavior and also of diverse forms and expressions of sexual desire and the following diverse forms of relationships can be considered the "lived dimension of Gender as a Continuum". The superimpositions, the overlap that follows from this can evoke changes and, as described earlier, can let idealized historical figures such as Karl Marx or Friedrich Engels in a new, multifaceted light. Jenny Marx, Helene Demuth and Marianne Kreutz are to be regarded as people who shared their lives with Karl Marx and/or with Friedrich Engels. They are not "minor characters" or subordinates, but have to be considered as independent, self-confident, and self-assured people, who—if the current research is sufficiently open-minded—can make new insights possible.

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