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Marxist and Socialist Feminism

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Abstract

Beginning in the 1840s, Marxism has analyzed unpaid, reproductive “women’s work” as an integral part of capitalism. Marxist feminism historicizes reproduction in relation to production to better understand women’s exploitation and oppression in capitalism. Marxist feminism also theorizes revolutionary subjectivity and possibilities for an anti-capitalist future. Particularly important to Marxist feminism are its theories of imperialism and primitive accumulation, or theft, of land, resources and women’s unpaid labor to the reproduction of lives and generations.

Keywords

Social reproduction
Primitive Accumulation
Imperialism
Feminized Work
Global Division of Labor
Value
Reproductive labor

Tenets of Marxist Feminism

The writings of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels created a new continent of thought about social life. Marx demonstrated how capital was able to grow by the exploitation of labor. With the rise of industrial capitalism in the beginning of the 19th century, workers, with no other property except their own power to work, had to resign themselves to working for capitalists. But when the exhausted workers went back home from the factories and the fields, they had to resuscitate themselves with their meager pay packets through unpaid reproductive labor at home. In *The German Ideology* (1845-6), Marx and Engels described the misperception of workers' relations of reproduction. "The production of life, both of one's own in labor and of fresh life in procreation, now appears as a double relationship: on the one hand as a natural, on the other as a social relationship" (Marx and Engels 1964, 41). Reproductive labor had social forms that organized it, such as marriage and the family; but the labor itself was seen as biological. Women who performed this labor were also naturalized, as biological beings unable to effect changes in these social orders.

Marxism historicized social reproduction as labor, arguing that it exists *within* the relations of capitalism. Behind every capitalist social relation - that of the capitalist and the worker - lay another buried social relation, that of the household - between husband and wife. In the newly privatized household, as a result of inherited gender roles, women did the bulk of all reproductive labor under the control of men. Women, therefore, reproduced workers - including themselves - to return the next day ready to sell their labor power to the capitalist. The use value of this reproductive labor is the workers' daily and generational renewal. The exchange value of women's work in the family, however, is nothing at all.

The Marxist definition of a class society under capitalism describes how one class controls the means to produce goods. Wealth accumulates to this small group of owners because they hold what Marx calls the means of production – the elements that harness profit, including intellectual rights, labor, land, natural resources, raw materials, markets, and systems of distribution. All of these facets are privatized, all of them owned, since private property anchors a class society. In addition, that ownership class dictates how everyone else can use these resources. Those that own the means of production hoard for themselves alone the surplus value (profit) from the production of commodities, those socially useful goods that are bought and sold for the reproduction of life. In capitalism, workers receive wages, capitalists take the profit from their work, and those who reproduce daily and generational life receive no recognition for their labor, in wages or in social value. As subjects in capitalism, they are rendered invisible or a burden to the system.

Marx and Engels developed their insights about the social, historical character of reproduction between the 1840s and 1880s. Friedrich Engels' *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884) elaborated the evolving social relations of production and reproduction. Capitalism, in Engels' argument, hollowed out the productive realm of the family's labor under feudalism for its own use. Women's work of handicrafts, spinning, subsistence farming, livestock rearing, and other agricultural labor gave way as common lands became enclosed, and rural survival depended on wages alone. Under capitalism, Engels argued, "(h)ousehold management lost its public character. It no longer concerned society. It became a private service: the wife became head servant, excluded from all participation in social production" (Engels, 1942, 65). Women's subordination was neither biologically natural nor God-given; instead, the class relations of capitalism enforced the gender hierarchies that anchored women's oppression. His solution to end women's oppression is a central tenet of

socialist feminism: women must join the proletarian struggle against capitalism as women workers, not solely as women. Only as full members of the waged proletariat could women effectively fight the patriarchal values and social orders that differentially structure gender relations *within* classes as well as between them.

Socialist and Marxist feminism expanded these insights in the 1880s through the 1920s to ask how divisions of reproductive labor and productive work reproduced capitalism as a whole.¹ In particular, Rosa Luxemburg argued that imperialism relied upon reproduction to more intensively exploit workers, new markets and natural resources (Luxemburg 1951). As a field of analysis, socialist feminism demanded a better understanding of how reproduction *became* women's work and demanded the end to monogamous marriage and objectification in the family (Bebel 1910). As a praxis, socialist feminism criticized the strict separation between the private family/home and the public workplace (Krupskaya 1899). In campaigns to organize women during the 1880s, the praxis of socialist feminism developed explanations for why women's work was paid less than men's work. It challenged the fiercely policed domain of factory work as necessarily men's work; and sought entry for women workers into the collective bargaining units of workers' associations and unions (Zetkin 1976).

Engels and Zetkin criticized the family as the site of women's oppression, used for the further extraction of women's (and to a lesser degree men's) unpaid reproductive labor by capitalism. They also targeted marriage as a religious and state institution that enforced women's subordination to men and to capital. Neither, however, substantively theorized how control over women's bodily integrity and sexual desires were also constitutive facets of capitalism. Alexandra Kollantai, who joined the Bolshevik Party in Russia (later the USSR) from 1899 to her death 1952, raised precisely these questions. In her 1908 introduction to *The Social Basis of the Women's Question*, Kollantai agreed that "woman" is a class-divided group

within capitalism; therefore, the vote alone was not enough to ensure all women's liberation. Women's franchise did nothing to advance the power of workers for themselves; instead, it heightened the class power of some women over others. Instead, working class women must join the proletarian revolution in solidarity with working class men to overthrow capitalism.

Over the course of Kollantai's life, particularly in the USSR after the 1917 revolution, she argued that women's liberation had multiple facets that could not be won solely as workers. Private property, she agreed, is the underlying cause of women's oppression. However, without the active transformation of morality, sexuality and the family constitutive of state socialism, women would never gain full emancipation. Kollantai formed the Women's Bureau in 1919 and led it for over two years between 1920 and 1922. She developed programs of state support for children and mothers, such as paid maternity leave and childcare institutions. She changed divorce laws, civil marriage laws, and laws for illegitimate children's rights. During the 1920s she fought to liberate oppressive mores of sexuality and the family in her position (Kollantai 1920). Sex, desire and pleasure, she argued, should also propel revolutionary horizons. These alternate emotional and ethical orders took shape primarily in her novels, such as *Love of Worker Bees* (1923) and *Red Love* (1927). In these works, the revolution, the will of the people, and the desire to live fulfilling lives shared a libidinal ethos with bodily autonomy and women's right to experience sexual pleasure as they wished. She described collectivist family forms that could create new egalitarian social relationships, amply supported by state socialism. Kollantai, too, faced resistance to her ideas, but emancipatory and revolutionary sex, love, care, and desire remain bedrock principles in Marxist feminism.

Current Debates in Marxist and Socialist Feminism

Marxist and socialist feminism theorizes how gender ideologies of femininity and masculinity structure production in capitalism. They challenge capitalist value, both the exchange value in wages and the surplus value of profit by making the use value of reproductive labor visible. Today, Marxist feminism grapples with two central questions: how is the political economy gendered in late capitalism? And, how does the social reproduction of people and communities renew capitalism, rather than support anti-capitalist praxis? The first question addresses imperialism today, what Lenin famously called the highest stage of capitalism. As a system based on profit over people's needs, capitalism constantly seeks new markets for its goods, what Marx calls commodities, due to the crisis of overproduction – making more things than people can buy. Imperialism refers to the aggressive solution to this crisis that creates new markets and new pools of waged workers to increase the profitability for the owning classes of capitalism. Marxist feminists argue that imperialism in the twentieth and twenty-first century relies not simply on women to solve the crisis of overproduction (as workers, consumers or both), but also on oppressive ideologies of gender. Imperialism captures new markets through the mobilization of extant ideologies of gender oppression to force new workers into waged work, decrease wages and working conditions and to exploit previously untapped resources.

The Marxist feminism that emerged from these struggles integrated an attention to feudal social forms of gender relations in order to better understand imperialist strategies for capitalist accumulation. Late capitalism spawned a two-fold method: the systematic disarticulation of production from one region or location, so that factories roam the earth in relentless search of unorganized workers, coupled with the global integration of capital in time, money and space. Workers have lost power as capital has gained. Imperialism in late capitalism mobilized rural women from subsistence agricultural economies as workers,

through land eviction and policies of peasant immiseration. As a result of mass migration from small landholdings, away from livelihoods based on subsistence farming, those previously marginal regions formed the basis for new markets as they became more fully integrated into global capitalism. In the words of Patricia Fernandez Kelly, the question about the gender relations of the political economy asked, “how women were becoming the new face of the international proletariat” (Fernandez-Kelly 2007, 509).

The second question about social reproduction as a site for both capitalism’s renewal and its downfall focuses on the ongoing centrality of primitive accumulation – variously called tribute, debt payment, theft, resource extraction, and oppression, depending on the context – to the accumulation of surplus value (or profit) in capitalism (Federici 2012). Social reproduction looks to the lives of workers beyond the workplace: of leisure, vices, love and ethics. These pursuits outside of the sphere of production are still threaded with ideologies of capitalism and their commodification, including emotions, pleasure and family. Social reproduction as a site of analysis seeks to better understand these linkages between workers and their lives. Theories of gender and political economy necessarily overlap with those about social reproduction in vital ways, not least because imperialism is predicated upon the primitive accumulation of unpaid work and the earth’s resources (Simpson 2009). But they tend to occur within Marxist feminism semi-autonomously of each other. These central problematics of Marxist feminism, imperialism and primitive accumulation, require greater dialogue and integration.

Social Reproduction: mid-century challenges

In the early 20th century, the social wage emerged to bridge the divide between paid productive work and unpaid reproductive labor. The social wage sought to give material value to reproductive labor. Kollantai’s early work to provide greater state

support for reproductive work, spread from the USSR in the early twentieth century to nations across Europe, Iran, Cuba and other state socialist governments (Moghadam 2013; Bier 2011). Paid time off for childcare, maternity leave, subsidized food for childbearing women, and other pro-maternalist policies emerged from Marxist feminist analyses, particularly in socialist state formations of the USSR and Eastern Europe (Ghodsee 2015). Efforts to collectivize reproductive labor, also championed by Kollantai, through state-run childcare and collective living arrangements sought to encourage women's political participation and lessen their workloads spread to China in the 1950s and Tanzania in the 1960s.

The Value of Reproduction to Capitalism

In the 1930s and 1940s, another strategy to link production to reproduction developed in the United States. In the late 1930s, Mary Inman, an American communist challenged the Marxist feminist focus on women as workers. She argued that the reproductive labor of middle class women should be recognized as productive work (Inman 1940). While her analysis did not change the Communist Party's position on the woman question, she continued to write about the importance of women's reproductive labor to waged work through the 1960s (Weigand 1999). Marxist feminists from the Caribbean, Italy, Germany, France, UK and India revived Inman's recognition of reproductive labor as productive work (Benston 1969; Mies, Bennholdt-Thomsen and von Werlhof 1988). Like Inman, they directly challenged the separation between production and reproduction in traditional Marxist feminism. "Labor power is a commodity produced in the home," wrote Selma James. "Women are not marginal in the home, in the factory, in the hospital, in the office. We are fundamental to the reproduction of capital and fundamental to its destruction" (Dalla Costa and James

1972, 19). Beginning in Italy, demands for payment in the Wages for Housework movement sought the downfall of capitalism through bankrupting its reliance on women's unpaid reproductive labor. The movement also sought to collectivize women who were atomized by the work's invisibility hidden within the domestic sphere. Women, as the primary subjects of this labor could realize their own power as a collective force to dismantle the capitalist system that exploited them.

The Social Wage e' Mode of Production Debate

Movements to expand the social wage, through paid parental leave and government-provided childcare among other collective support for reproductive work, are long-term components of socialist feminism (Fraser 2013). These movements spurred innovations within Marxist feminist social reproduction theory. Marxist feminist analyses of free trade zones began with the admission that class politics are central to questions of social reproduction and the gendered oppression of women (Fernandez Kelly 2000). Marxist feminist scholars did not simply expand the definition of "production" to include unpaid and racialized reproductive labor as its hidden center, but asked what it revealed about capitalism as a whole. Marxist feminist scholars of women in the postcolonial Third World demanded increased attention to the landlessness of rural women, a large proportion of rural women, and the erasure of their work on subsistence family farms (Agarwal 1994). This erasure had two components: first, women's subsistence agricultural work folded into the logic of reproductive labor at large, as work unremunerated by land title, wages, ownership of goods produced, or social value. Second, economic measurements of the rural economy used the family as the primary economic unit and erased the lives, labor and value of rural women (Beneria, Berik and Floro 2003; Sen and Grown 1987).

Patriarchy and Capitalism in the Mode of Production Debate

In the 1980s, Marxist feminists in Euro-America questioned whether patriarchy was intrinsic to capitalism in what was called the mode of production debate (Kuhn and Wolpe 1978; Vogel 1983). The debate centered on whether patriarchy was an “extra-economic” force used for labor control under capitalism, whether it was the systemic tool at hand to maximize capitalism’s efficiency, or whether it was systemic to capitalism (Barrett 1980; Brenner 1984; Gibson-Graham 1986). The corollary of this debate was a political one for working class women; whether the overthrow of capitalism was a necessary first step for women’s liberation and freedom (Delphy 1984). Poststructuralist feminist thought framed women workers’ class struggle as a betrayal, or at best, an unnecessary distraction. Instead they argued that women’s oppression was primarily an ideological force that produced “woman” as a category of subjection (Laclau and Mouffe 1985). Marxist feminists today have taken up the unitary or integrated theory (rather than the ‘dual systems theory’) for ongoing analysis that integrates patriarchy with capitalism.

Values, Exchange Value and Surplus Value in Capitalism

Gayatri Spivak proposed an alternative reading of reproduction and production to shift the question of patriarchy and capitalism to questions of value. In her article, “Scattered Speculations on the Question of Value,” she emphasized the imbricated quality of use value to exchange value in the international division of labor. Spivak reframed the binary opposition between economics and culture that was embedded in the mode of production debates about capitalism and patriarchy. Instead, she emphasized, “the complicity between cultural and economic value-systems.” She cited the centrality of women in the international division of labor beginning in the mid-

1960s that relied on patriarchal social relations to produce women as super-exploited workers (Spivak 1985, 83). She emphasized the “*affectively* necessary labor (that) brings in the attendant question of desire” (Spivak 1985, 80). Himani Bannerji raised another question about cultures of resistance that linked them decisively to the relations of production. In her critique of subaltern studies as culturalist, Bannerji says, “any project of decolonization which separates property and power from moral proprieties, avoids the issue of social justice” (Bannerji 2001, 72). These interventions stressed the necessary porousness of conceptual divisions between reproduction and production. Marxist feminists demanded a more careful analysis of how the affective, libidinal and moral realms functioned in the service of capitalism. They sought to clarify the relationship between value, particularly exchange value and surplus value, and values, including ethics and use value, in capitalism to better attend to the desires and needs beyond that system.

Social Reproduction Theory

Spivak’s and Bannerji’s attention to morality and affective labor raised concerns now included within social reproduction theory. Social reproduction theory attends to cultural and economic analyses of reproduction in global capitalism. In Tithi Bhattacharya’s description, it “is primarily concerned with understanding how categories of oppression (such as gender, race and ableism) are coproduced in simultaneity with the production of surplus value” (Bhattacharya 2017, 14). Two key insights mark Marxist feminist debates about social reproduction in capitalism: first, the blurred distinctions between reproduction and production for the accumulation of capital on the one hand, and an accumulation that immiserates workers’ lives on the other (Nash and Fernandez Kelly 1983; Ong 1987). The second key insight of social

reproduction theories systemizes Marxist feminist attention to social relations of racism, sexism, casteism, and religious bigotry as central relations that fuel the capitalist accumulation of wealth (Cooper 2017; Mojab 2016).

Affective Economies and Anticapitalist Feeling

As economic relations and as embodied cultural logics, these forces affect women differentially between and within genders, on the basis of race, ableism, caste and citizenship-status. Affective economies include the shadow work, of deference, and the emotion work, of affection, in waged reproductive work and sex work (Boris and Parrenas, 2010; Hochschild 1983). It also includes emotion and the erotic as necessary resources to reproduce resistance to capitalist regulation (Lorde 1981). Affective necessary labor, as Rosemary Hennessy's writes, "permeates the circuit of nature-bodies-labor through which needs are met and social life is reproduced" (Hennessy 2013, 66).

Queered theories of sexuality raise possibilities for explicitly anti-capitalist politics of embodiment and social organization that refuse normative social forms of belonging and desire (Ahmed 2006; Pitts-Taylor, 2016; Povinelli 2011). Roderick Ferguson, in his definition of queer of color critique, emphasizes its recognition of the displacement of normative regimes of gender and sexuality under capitalism, even as they are systemically co-constituted. "As capital disrupts social hierarchies in the production of surplus labor, it disrupts gender ideals and sexual norms that are indices of racial difference" (Ferguson, 2004, 17). Marxist feminists theorize how dominant regimes of gender alongside embodiment, ability and disability are enforced through laws and prison (Ahrens 2008; Gilmore 2007; Spade 2011). Yet these differential theories of embodiment challenge the state and industries that profit from oppressive

regimes of nationality, race, class and gender. Anti-racist transformations of reproductive technologies and sex practices seek to dismantle reproduction as the critical site for the replenishment of capitalist profit (Briggs 2017; Roberts 1997; Willey 2016).

Current Marxist feminist debates question “reproduction” as configured by relations of life-being under capitalism; what Melissa Cooper calls *Life as Surplus* (Cooper 2008). The embodied, affective and material sites of life-being demand attention to inter-species coalitions and planetary values of existence (Hawthorne 2002). As Marxist feminists assail the environmental plunder of capitalism, as intrinsic to its ongoing primitive accumulation, they seek answers outside global commodity exchange (Tsing 2005; 2015). They have begun to theorize an alternative ecologically synergistic economy led by reproductive workers in their greatest numbers, including domestic and care laborers, peasant farmers and indigenous hunters-gatherers (Salleh 2011).

Peasant Women and Anticolonialism: mid-century challenge

Anticolonial women’s movements, from Sri Lanka to South Africa, developed nuanced revolutionary strategies to organize women against imperialism (Jayawardena 1986; Mohanty 2003). In India during the 1900s, women like Kumari Kumudini Mitra advocated revolutionary terrorism against British colonial occupation (Bhattacharya and Sen 2003). These struggles solidified into anti-imperialist fights that sought more than the end of colonialism, but the end of global economic expansion on the backs of workers across the world. Anti-imperialist women involved in organizing in Africa, the Caribbean, Latin America, and Asia organized rural women alongside informal women workers in cities to join the struggle against capitalism (Chakravartty

2011). They fought for reforms such as universal human rights, against Euro-American, white supremacist assumptions about differential humanness. They sought leadership by rural women for a renewed revolutionary movement that joined women and men around the world at the forefront of anti-capitalism (Armstrong, 2016).

The anticolonial women's movement developed a praxis that linked imperial wars overseas, particularly in Asia and Africa in the early to mid 20th Century, directly to the women of imperial countries. Women like Cai Chang, a founding member of the All China Women's Federation in 1948, and Baya Allouchiche of the Algerian Women's Union pushed for a praxis of anti-imperialist relationality (Wang 2016). In the mid-twentieth century, the anti-colonial praxis against imperialism sought global campaigns of socialist feminists and all other women that supported armed resistance to occupation as well as direct action to stop colonial militarism. Socialist feminists from colonized and newly independent nations as well as the socialist states of the USSR and East Europe sought to use the United Nations to confront women's commitment to peace in the face of colonial occupation and wars of aggression against liberation movements (Antrobus 2004; Jain 2005; Pietila and Vickers 1990).

Gendered Capitalism and the Global Division of Labor

As colonized nations gained political independence, new forms of imperialist control emerged alongside bare aggression. Loan agreements between newly independent countries and former colonizing countries to build infrastructure and national production carried hidden demands set by the G7 nations of the Global North. These loan coda demanded "structural adjustments" of governments that prioritized debt repayment over every other priority: democracy, social programs and wealth redistribution. National ownership of key industries and protection for

emerging national economies disappeared under the weight of loan conditions and loan default demands. Socialist feminist scholars of capitalist development critiqued the ubiquity of “development” to mean capitalist development using neoclassical assumptions of individual choice and the hidden hand of the market (Barker and Feiner, 2004). They also emphasized the importance of structures of land privatization from the colonial period onwards to the current gendered division of labor. Beneria and Sen wrote, “the close connection between processes of accumulation and changes in women’s work and forms of their subordination” mark the current period of capitalist expansion (Beneria and Sen, 1981, 288). Methodologically, socialist feminist scholarship interrogated the unit of the family when measuring the effects of capitalist development projects. As one example, the poverty line as a measure of need erases the deeply gendered lived effects of scarcity by women, men, girls and boys in a family (Kabeer 1994).

Marxist feminists in Asia, Latin America, and Mexico detailed the new forms of global production that broke factory labor into its smallest, least skilled parts. This taylorization of work across the world was made possible by communication, technological, and transportation innovations (Ong 1988). These disarticulated methods of production directly pitted women workers against each other from across the globe, since factories could move their operations the instant workers organized in one location (Elson and Pearson 1981). These methods in the labor-intensive production of commodities from technology to garment industries spread across service labor, such as phone call centers and nannies, and the intellectual labor of computer programming (Bannerji 2009). Scholars of the gendered global chain of production analyzed how gendered ideologies shaped imperialist appropriation of

wealth as workers around the world more fiercely competed against each other for the lowest wages and worst working conditions with little protection from the nation-state (Parrenas 2008). These capitalist relations of gender also, in Cynthia Enloe's terms *made* women a cheap and docile global workforce through state, legal, and physical coercion (Enloe 2007). Global capitalist processes relied on women for their workforce; particularly women pushed into the stream of migrants moving from rural locations to the cities and towns built for factories.

Gendered ideologies of paid work produced *feminized* relations of production that structure paid work for all workers (Candelario 2007; Kang 2010; Ho 2009). Feminized relations of production do not refer simply to the increase in paid women workers, but also to the increasing atomization of all workers through migration, home-based work and work's precarity (Wright 2006). The distinction between paid and unpaid work becomes increasingly blurred, so that "capital increasingly calls upon the affects, activities, and conditions associated with women's reproductive labor in all forms of work" (Berg 2014, 164; Morini 2007). Debt in its material and ethical forms becomes the primary motivation for work (Joseph 2014). Overt coercion and increased brutality define the current phase of capitalism, marking a return to the racialized and gendered techniques of primitive accumulation of forced and unfree labor, genocide, and theft of land, resources and intellectual property (Sassen 2014; Dunbar-Ortiz 2015). Endemic femicide marks the overt misogyny of this turn, what Rita Segato calls "a pedagogy of cruelty" (Segato 2014, 345).

Socialist feminist scholarship does not merely condemn late capitalism, but seeks to understand how the increased global relationality of women workers fostered new subjects to demand revolutionary and reformist change (Mies 2014; Wichterich

2000). Neoliberalism rendered the workplace a fragile place to build solidarity and the power of worker collectivities and unions ebbed as a result. New formations of worker solidarity movements based in neighborhoods and non-governmental organizations that included workers' rights alongside civic activism provided some oxygen for social changes (Ngai 2005; Beckham Mendez 2005). Direct money transfer and microcredit schemes promised to upend the repressive relations of patriarchy through progressive finance practices that targeted women as beneficiaries. However, many socialist feminists detailed the deep structural limitations of atomized solutions such as microcredit schemes that deepened rather than undermined working people's reliance on finance capital (Karim 2011). Similarly, non-governmental organizing addressed neither repressive governmentality nor economic redistribution while further coopted grassroots women's movements (Beckham Mendez 2005; INCITE! 2007). Marxist feminists detailed the new politics of imperialism that produced new markets from untapped sources, stripped resources from the earth, and reconfigured social relations to meet its needs. They provide sharp analyses of how, as Marx described this process in capitalism, all that is solid melts into air. The political dead end of many socialist and Marxist feminist critiques of neoliberalism was two-fold: women were victims, though certainly not passive ones; and the conditions of feminized, precarious work prevented meaningful opposition to emerge (Eisenstein 2009; Fraser 2013). Who, then, were the leaders Marxist feminists were waiting for?

Social Reproduction, Imperialism and Revolutionary Subjects of Marxist Feminism

As neoliberalism solidified its global hegemony in the 21st century, Marxist feminist debates frame revolutionary struggles from women returning to the commons, in revolutionary collective forms of land-based survival. The Zapatistas in Chiapas,

Mexico and the Landless Workers Movement in Brazil have developed Marxist feminist critiques of global capitalism (Desmarais 2007; Zapatista Women of the Caracol of the Tzotz Choj Zone, 2018). They combine older reproductive forms of subsistence farming and home-based production of basic goods, without patriarchal gender relations. In Argentina, worker-collectives revived stagnant factories with profit sharing and worker-based ownership of the means of production rather than consolidation of wealth into the hands of a few. As theories of praxis, these examples of solidarity economies address two interconnected sites of struggle. First, they combat imperialism through their refusal to give up land, labor and lives to the capitalist demand for new markets. Second, they fight against the primitive accumulation of their lands, refusing to cede the remaining commons through maintaining cooperative land holdings and the shared means of production. In Iran, Iraq and Syria, the Kurdish Workers Party, through its regional semi-autonomous governance in northern parts of West Asia, has sought to redefine the family, foster equitable decision-making, and support women's independence (Ocalan, 2013). Divides between home and work, private reproduction, and public production overlap in many of these alternatives to capitalism.

Anarchist and syndicalist feminists, mainly from Brazil, Argentina, Italy and the US theorize the emergence of new political subjectivities and new collectivist projects residing within neoliberalism's contradictions. These scholars theorize a subject of resistance that hollows out the compliance of the ideal subject of neoliberal capitalism: the entrepreneur. As Miranda Joseph and Carla Freeman describe, the entrepreneurial subject is configured as autonomous from its social fabric and thus flexible, with time, space, self and survival (Joseph 2014; Freeman 2014). Lynn Marie

Tonstad raises the possibilities of ending capitalism through queering the entrepreneurial practices of self, including “risk-taking, vulnerability, openness to failure, unexpected forms of affiliation” (Tonstad, 2018, 227). Cristina Morini suggests that women workers in particular provide ideal subjects for navigating the precarity of these entrepreneurial conditions of work, making them both “more resistant and more reactive” (Morini, 2007).

When capital meets the limit of mechanizing the working subject’s experiential knowledge, the possibilities for liberation from work begin. For Kathi Weeks, the precarity of work mutates into the post-work state of finance capitalism (Weeks 2011). In this context, the politics of anti-work can imagine new horizons for collectivity, value and revolt. Heather Berg explores the refusal of “social necessity debt,” that is, how workers “are evaluated based on the perceived necessity of their work to the reproduction of society” (Berg, 2014, 163). Anti-productivism, for Berg rejects how feminized labor demands greater sacrifice from workers due to this social necessity debt of these workers’ affective reproductive labor. Instead, these theories recenter the demands of workers, particularly those in the service sector, to hold capital, rather than workers, accountable to the burden of work left undone.

As a politics, anti-work centers those subjects that were at the margins of industrial capitalism: the landless, rural communities, women, the indigenous, the incarcerated. Sandro Mezzadra and Veronica Gago herald autonomous politics of the flexible revolutionary subject as the engine for new political forms that exist on the razor’s edge of neoliberal capitalism. These revolutionary subjects balance between shoring up the crises of capitalism and creating new collectivist social forms in its wreckage (Mezzadra and Gago 2017). As Gago argues extensively, an alternative of

what she calls “baroque economics” arises from creative forms of collectivism across informal and formal economies, paid and unpaid work, affective and material economies (Gago 2017).

Intersectional Organizing

Experiments with popular front movements in Europe and the Americas in the 1910s through the 1930s spawned a theory of Marxist-feminist praxis that organized wide coalitions built on the recognition of differences among people, and took into account the oppressive character of these relations. Beginning in the 1930s, Louise Patterson, a Harlem-based activist in communist circles led the mass campaign for the Scottsboro defendants (Howard 2013). Against the NAACP’s legal strategy of defense, Patterson built an international movement to demand justice for the seven black young men who were accused of sexually assaulting two white women on a train in Alabama. To build a mass movement for their release, Patterson had to undermine centuries of racial segregation based on abject violence, cross adversarial class lines and bridge thousands of miles between urban and rural communities, all the while keeping the movement’s leadership in the hands of African American working people in rural areas.

Patterson developed a theory of Marxist feminist praxis that held that in the context of US capitalism, black women faced multiple oppressive relations that resulted in their greater exploitation under capitalism: of class, race and gender (Gore 2011; McDuffie 2011). In her essay, “Toward a Brighter Dawn,” she wrote, “(o)ver the whole land, Negro women meet this triple exploitation – as workers, as women, as Negroes” (Patterson 1936). Claudia Jones, a communist party member who worked on the Scottsboro campaign, further elaborated Patterson’s invocation of historically

specific relationships to exploitation (Davies 2007). Jones saw these complex relations as locations for greater strength among workers, rather than solely sites of division to be overcome by class solidarity. “The bourgeoisie is fearful of the militancy of the Negro woman, and for good reason. The capitalists know, far better than many progressive seem to know, that once Negro women begin to take action, the militancy of the whole Negro people, and thus of the anti-imperialist coalition, is enhanced” (Guy-Sheftall 1995, 108). Jones argued that Marxist feminist struggles should be shaped by what Patterson called “triple exploitation,” that is, the systemic theft from African American women as workers, as African Americans and as women. Jones envisioned struggles defined by the multi-faceted exploitation shouldered by black women, as the visionary way to lead the communist movement for liberation for all. As an early theory of intersectional praxis, Patterson and Jones proposed a Marxist feminist politics guided by the differential sites of oppression and exploitation faced by women of color, rather than simply by women workers. In 1977, the Combahee River Collective members theorized the liberatory possibilities for this praxis: “If Black women were free, it would mean that everyone else would have to be free since our freedom would necessitate the destruction of all the systems of oppression” (Guy Sheftall 1995).

The praxis of intersectional organizing on the left informed movements for reproductive justice and the movement for welfare rights, led by poor women of color in the United States in the 1960s (Ransby 2003). Both movements attacked ethics of women’s place in dominant regimes of heterosexuality, marriage and the family (Tillman 1970). The reproductive justice movement sought bodily autonomy for women’s reproductive decisions, and material state support to fully realize those

choices (Ross and Solinger 2017). In addition, it linked reproductive justice to dismantling the carceral state that strictly policed (as it constituted) the class politics of gendered, raced and ethnicized embodiment within capitalism (Davis 1981). The welfare rights movement demanded a basic income from the US state that historically had excluded them from the postwar social wages for single mothers. These sites of praxis further pushed Marxist feminism as a theory to analyze different histories of oppression as co-constitutive in sites of reproduction and production.

In India, Australia and South Africa, indigeneity and caste as well as race shaped Marxist feminist praxis: what the All India Democratic Women's Association called inter-sectoral organizing in the 1990s (Armstrong 2014). Marxist feminists based in South Asia theorized the centrality of landless and land-poor farmers' unfreedom to the working class and agrarian politics of women in particular (Patnaik 2007; Ghosh 2009). They argued that Marxist feminist movements should begin in rural areas, with the demands of the masses of women leading feminist politics as a whole (Karat 2005). Whether called inter-sectoral or intersectional, these methods of organizing that emphasize acute sites of oppression have fostered land-based social movements in coalition with labor movements as a means to connect agricultural workers to the industrial proletariat (Deere and Leon 2001; Tsing 2005). Intersectional organizing actively develops movement leaders among women from oppressed communities, and seeks goals prioritized by the most dispossessed people (Dunbar-Ortiz 2014).

Conclusion

Marxist feminism currently grapples with old questions: how does capitalist production mobilize social reproduction to the gain of capital? How do revolutionary

movements undermine capitalism through collectivizing and socializing the work of reproduction and production to the benefit of all? In the latter half of the twentieth century, women workers have become universal to the workplace, but feminized, unpaid reproductive labor hasn't dissolved. It has not disappeared through the commodification of reproductive work; nor has it dispersed through its more equal distribution between men and women. Marxist feminist theories of social reproduction sought to understand how the integration of reproduction into capitalism led to "the socialization of production and its private appropriation on an international scale" (Carpenter and Mojab, 2017, 117). Social reproduction debates develop possibilities for revolutionary forms of sociality writ large: of family, sexuality, desire, embodiment, and pleasure that demand radically altered practices of value, ethics, morality and being (Kabeer and Huq 2014; Nnaemeka 2004; Spillers 1987).

Rural agricultural women and men, not industrial workers as Marxism had predicted, led the anticolonial fight against both feudal social order and capitalism. For Marxist feminists today, these ongoing facets of struggle in rural locations of Mexico and Western Sahara lead them to demand new theories of revolutionary subjectivity. To better understand new revolutionary horizons, Marxist feminist theories link labor to desire, need to sensation through an attention to affective relations in capitalism (Hennessy, 2006, 388). Imperialism, as capitalism's dynamic core for wresting further profit, informs Marxist feminist ecological visions for the planet. Questions about scientific epistemology and ontology sustain Marxist and socialist feminist challenges to capitalism's reflection of the world as atomized (and competing) parts, in order to see its systemic whole (Barad 2012). Ecological imaginaries include revolutionary forms of the commons that reshape gender norms to foster collective solutions to resource depletion (Maathai 2010). Their revival of the politics of vulnerability,

shared needs and mutual reliance support an inter-species environmentalism as well as new scientific theories of being (Clare 2017; Haraway, 2016).

Marxist and socialist feminist debates widen coalitional possibilities for liberation through analyses of who faces the greatest impacts of capitalist brutality. An intersectional Marxist feminist politics does not dismiss race, caste, religion, or sexuality as distractions to the centrality/unity of the proletariat in class politics. Instead, they rely upon a careful understanding of how these forms of domination sustain ongoing exploitation. Strategies for resistance lift the sites of greatest exploitation to better imagine strategies for liberation. Across a range of locations, Marxist and socialist feminism theorizes forms of solidarity that transgress classes, gender affinities, and communities to better envision a future that dismantles the values of capitalism and knits our collectivities anew.

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ⁱ In this essay, I use socialist feminism interchangeably with Marxist feminism because even when scholars disagree, these fields of analysis share critical Marxist concepts to understand capitalism.