Love and Reproductive Struggles: A Feminist Politics of Care

by

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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Marxist feminist scholarship known as social reproduction theory and feminist moral philosophy called care ethics provide compelling accounts of how care functions to recreate hierarchical gender roles while at the same time providing women space to resist such norms by caring otherwise or not at all; however, both fields fail to articulate a notion of care as political praxis in relation to ongoing struggles for self-determination, especially those led by marginalized communities. In my dissertation, titled *"Love and Reproductive Struggles: Feminist Politics of Care,"* I propose a concept of "reproductive struggle" to name the development of collective, conscious action which intervenes in the conditions under which caring labor is demanded and performed. This concept seeks to clarify the role of care within feminist emancipatory politics by analyzing the ambiguity and mediation of caring labor by global capitalism. After outlining the interdisciplinary utility of reproductive struggle to address this gap, I apply the concept to the development of politics within Black feminism and queer theory around the family and the private household. Firstly, I propose, following Joy James, that a politics of function rather than identity better serves to contextualize the historical legacy of Black women's resistant caring labor from chattel slavery to the present. Secondly, I argue that queer politics in the US requires an analysis of the social reproductive unit of the family in order to be relevant on a transnational political horizon. In both its theoretical articulation and its application, I argue that feminist research on reproductive struggle indicates the necessity of a transnational politics of care as fundamental to emancipatory political projects.

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DEDICATION

To all those who found themselves in the streets in the summer of 2020 in honor of George Floyd and the countless others murdered, terrorized, and brutalized by the police and prisons systems. You will be my forever guidance in all things theory and praxis. Another world is possible!

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Chapter One: Introduction

I. Motivations and Justification

What does it mean to categorize a certain form of labor as feminine, or, women's work? Such categorization befalls a wide array of activities, including child-rearing, cleaning a house/dwelling, caring for elderly people, cooking for a family, and emotional care work such as listening, affirming, and supporting close friends and family members through emotionally taxing experiences. Additionally, paid professions are considered 'feminized' in so far as they are associated with feminine characteristics and employ a disproportionate number of women, such as teaching/education, nursing, and paid childcare. Why does such work belong to women? Why do women perform this work? Do they get something transformative or generative from it? How do the qualities and character of unpaid reproductive labor differ from that of paid reproductive labor? Some of the examples listed above involve caring attitudes and caring labors, but how central is care to women's work? Is there a difference between care labor and reproductive labor? And, finally, how fundamental is this labor to the definition of womanhood itself?

These and related questions have presented themselves to me as a person socialized to become a woman—a process which began almost as early as I can remember. While I have never felt quite at home in the category of womanhood, I have felt a sense of solidarity inherent to my relationships with women. I learned there was a history of women who came before me who also did not accept the category as it was imposed upon them. Some wanted to reclaim it. Others wanted to forgo it altogether.

These questions captured my attention from a young age and I moved through what I would now consider to be a preliminary stage of a feminist consciousness in which the feminine is celebrated and uplifted. As I got older and began my time in graduate school, I became more suspicious of this strategy. How can we celebrate a gendered performance of deference and

objectification? At the same time, I was not interested in policing women's behaviors as mine had been by those near and far with varying degrees of intensity. The constant policing of my body, my gendered expression, and the assumption that both of those parts of my human existence needed male attention to be valid instigated a rebellious annoyance at being told what to do. This part of my personality would become the basis for my nascent political consciousness which would soon include concerns that extended beyond gender oppression to include worry and oppositions to many forms of social domination and oppression.

In this project, as many feminists have before me, I bring under deep philosophical scrutiny the experience with which I struggle the most in my personal life. Care as one of the most well-recognized forms of women's work has caused me many moments of heartache and suffering in my romantic, platonic, and political relationships. At the same time, I have experienced the deeply transformative experience of caring for other people, being cared for by others, and caring for myself. Many of the hiccups associated with how to determine the appropriate care for another person and for oneself seem deeply embedded in the relationships of the child within the nuclear family as a unit of privatized social reproduction. In my adult life, I kept running up against these open wounds from a shortage of consistent or adequate care. I have come to understand care as adequate and potentially transformative when the processes and practices of care acknowledge and negotiate the dialectical relationship between dependency and autonomy. But even before I reached that conclusion, I experientially felt that care could be both good and bad, resistant and complicit. Yet, the feminism with which I had come in contact by the time I was in my mid-20s seemed to offer little by way of explanation for this phenomenon. Naturally, I sought to correct this problem.

In a now prominent subfield of feminist philosophy, the necessity of care as a universal feature of human embodiment is treated in detail. Care ethicists on the whole are committed to the acknowledgment that this universal human need is poorly managed in the current context of

Western liberal democracy.[1] Often, they find fault with prominent canonical figures such as Immanuel Kant and John Rawls. The forefathers of Western moral and liberal political theory were ontologically, and dare I say emotionally, attached to the sentiment of individuality upon which liberal democracy so fundamentally rests. But, this overblown notion of individuality belies the empirical fact of dependency. One way to put this: no one comes out of the womb fully-rational, grown, and ready to deploy the categorical imperative. In fact, for many years as an infant and then child, one is dependent on others around them to survive. This state of dependency may be temporary or it may be predominant throughout someone's life depending on the way their specific embodiment impacts their access to basic human needs and reproductive functions.

I am drawn to the universality of dependency which is illuminated through the work of care ethics. In my historical and cultural context, universalism has developed a bad reputation. The ways in which a universal subject or a universal history have been articulated have resulted in exclusionary conceptions of humanness. The dependency which demands care portrays both universality and difference simultaneously; however, I will claim that the correctives which care ethics proposes for liberal democracy are superficial salves to a structural problem. Many suggest to distribute care labor better,[2] to care about carers more,[3] to increase state-support for care workers,[4] and to forward an emphasis on care based on its feminine qualities in ethical theorizing.[5] While some of these suggestions might be helpful places to start changing care experientially from a burden to a process

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[1] Eva Feder Kittay, *Love's Labors: Essays on Women, Equality and Dependency*, 2nd edition, (Abingdon, Oxford; New York, NY: Routledge, 2020); Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development*. 2nd ed, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 2016.); Virginia Held, *The Ethics of Care: Personal, Political, and Global*, (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2006).

[2] Joan C. Tronto, *Caring Democracy: Markets, Equality, and Justice*, (New York: New York University Press, 2013).

[3] Held, *The Ethics of Care*; Kittay, *Love's Labor.*

[4] Kittay, *Love's Labor.*

[5] Gilligan, *In a Different Voice*; Nel Noddings, *Caring: A Relational Approach to Ethics & Moral Education*, 2. ed., Updated, (Berkeley, Calif.: Univ. of Calif. Press, 2013).

in which self-determination is more notable, care ethics as a field and framework of analysis fails to confront the product of care: human beings.

Human beings as they are individually and collectively reproduced through women's labor have long been an area of study for Marxist feminists, socialist feminists, and radical feminists. In the 1970s and 1980s Anglophone Marxist and socialist feminisms, there was a heavy emphasis on the question of domestic labor. What was the structural relationship between women's work, i.e. domestic labor, and the primary target of Marxist analysis—the capitalist mode of production? There were and continue to be a wide array of answers to this question and the debate remains open as to how to theoretically articulate the role of domestic work and reproduction with the accumulation of capital in general and the accumulation of surplus value in particular.

In my studies, one book pushed this conversation beyond the narrow confines of unpaid domestic labor in the private household and toward a broader analysis which situated women's work within the social totality that is capitalism. Lise Vogel's 1983 *Marxism and the Oppression of Women: Toward a Unitary Theory* 'stretched' the Marxist method in order to produce a theoretical powerhouse of a text which laid out the material basis of women's oppression. For Vogel, the material basis of women's oppression is not simply that domestic work is unpaid or that it is never-ending or that it is boring and maddening. Vogel identifies a structural relationship that women have with the accumulation of capital as both a matter of some biological reproductive capacities and their socialization as the primary, best, and natural caretakers. Capitalism relies on the reproduction of people, but that process of reproduction is not in itself a capitalistic production process. The human bodies which provide through their labor the value and energy needed for capitalists to accumulate wealth, power, and destroy the planet are produced non-capitalistically. And this (re)production gives women (and gender deviants) a particular relationship directly to capital outside of their relationship to wage labor.

Slowly but surely since the publication of *Marxism and the Oppression of Women*, a new Marxist feminist perspective termed social reproduction theory (SRT) emerged as an interdisciplinary framework through which to understand and evaluate this structural relationship that capital has with women.[6] Scholars who engage or deploy an SRT frame of analysis have written about childhood, the 'care' crisis, race and colonialism, gender expression, sexuality, and international feminist struggles against capitalism.[7] Much of the scholarship furthers Vogel's theoretical work and some gives concrete historical and contemporary examples of the changes in the mode of social reproduction within a given time period. In light of the Marxist assertion that theory without praxis is incomplete, researchers engaged in SRT tend to emphasize the strike as the most powerful tool in the arsenal of social reproductive laborer.[8] Both the legally sanctioned strikes of paid reproductive laborers and the symbolic or temporary strike of women's unpaid labor are used as common examples of the practical political import of an SRT perspective.

Because the unpaid social reproductive worker's strike is a temporary tactic lest survival be threatened, I find this to be an incomplete practical suggestion for how to transform women's reproductive labor under capitalism, which includes but also extends beyond care. To survive is a need of the first order. And when survival is the focus above all else, the status quo is often reproduced intentionally or not. If capitalism mediates not just our wage labor relations, but our

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[6] Maria Mies, Veronika Bennholdt-Thomsen, and Claudia von Werlhof, *Women: The Last Colony*, (London; Atlantic Highlands, N.J., USA: Zed Books, 1988). Mies et al have also claimed that colonized people hold this same structural relationship to what they consider an ongoing process which Marxists have called primitive accumulation. This claim is underdeveloped and would need its own lengthy discussion to prove correct. However, for the purposes of this manuscript I am interested in women globally (e.g. women of different races and nationalities) as well as queer people who may or may not identify as women but have been socialized into a particular caretaking role.
[7] Tithi Bhattacharya, ed. *Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentering Oppression*, First published (London: Pluto Press, 2017).
[8] Aaron Jaffe, *Social Reproduction Theory and the Socialist Horizon: Work, Power and Political Strategy*, Mapping Social Reproduction Theory, (London: Pluto Press, 2020); Cinzia Arruzza, Tithi Bhattacharya, and Nancy Fraser, *Feminism for the 99 Percent: A Manifesto*, (London ; Brooklyn, NY: Verso, 2019).

relations with our lovers, our friends, our partners, and ourselves, then we need a better political praxis to address the distorted form that these relationships take under a capitalist social totality.

In this manuscript, I argue that an adequate anti-capitalist politics requires a feminist politics of care. In opening up the possibility of such a politics, I seek to position forms of care and social reproduction as capable of being directed against rather than in service of capital's global domination. By drawing from the resources available within care ethics and SRT, I propose a conceptual tool for interdisciplinary feminist scholarship which tracks the agitational and oppositional forms of care and social reproduction which are levied against global capitalism by challenging and changing the conditions under which care is demanded and performed. I have named this concept in conversation with a dear friend and colleague,[9] "reproductive struggle." Reproductive struggle hopes to offer a theoretical frame through which practical struggles can be articulated, especially those which extend beyond the boundaries of the strike. Throughout this manuscript, I draw from historical examples of such oppositional caring practices in the hopes of gesturing towards current and future possibilities of care as political praxis; given my training in philosophy, I am also very invested in offering a robust theoretical grounding for the concept as well.

I aim to speak both to the individuals who would identify their political perspectives as somewhere on the 'left' as well as speaking more broadly to people who understand feminism to be more than a personal identity label. While I myself would fall into both categories, I have found

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[9] My PhD cohort-mate, union sibling, and close personal friend Tal-hi Bitton wrote a dissertation in which he deeply engages with SRT. We have identified the term reproductive or social reproductive struggle together through many hours of discussion both verbal and written on what is missing from the current SRT scholarship. Bitton's dissertation "Imperialism, Settler Colonialism, Social Reproduction: On Palestine/ Israel" uses an SRT framework to understand more deeply the capitalist influence on the social reproductive conditions of Palestinians living under Israeli occupation. At the end of his work, he engages the idea of social reproductive struggle to analyze the role of Palestinian women in anti- and decolonial movements.

experientially in leftist organizing spaces that care as political point of praxis is not taken very seriously. When there is a discussion of care, it is often couched in the terms of self-care and capacity and boundaries. Given the amount of burnout in grassroots organizing, that trend makes sense. But, care as a collective practice or process is not generally understood as political in nature. This way of framing care, in an apolitical or individualistic light, is deeply concerning and feeds on neoliberal discourses which aim to naturalize the burdens of care in order to profit from the commodified 'solutions' that economic markets are quick to provide. Such naturalization tends to disproportionately effect the people assigned to the most care labor—women and queer people.

II. Chapter Summaries

In the second chapter "Towards Reproductive Struggle: Contextualizing the Legacies of Marxist Feminism on Reproduction," I summarize the developments of Anglophone feminist perspectives on domestic labor, with an emphasis on the historical development of a Marxist feminist framework which came to be known as social reproduction theory (SRT). I discuss the emergence of a radical feminist position in the early days of the women's liberation movement. Following Alice Echols' impressive history of radical feminism, I demonstrate that the cultural feminist turn which supplanted radical feminism's dominance in the early days of the movement tended to naturalize and affirm women's labor or caretaking capacities rather than seek to transform them. I outline some of the differences between the Marxist feminists and the socialist feminists on the issue of domestic labor in the 1980s and argue that Lise Vogel's work charted a new path in positioning social reproduction as part of a capitalist social totality. Vogel identified two levels of social reproduction—the individual meeting their own embodied needs and the level of total societal reproduction—and the differential and overlap between these two levels is where agitational and oppositional care can be cultivated. I propose reproductive struggle as one way to understand the widening of the gap between the two levels so that our caring labors serve people and not capital or

capitalists. I conclude by offering a summary of the SRT field as it has developed since Vogel's influential text. I suggest that SRT's practical political demands are underdeveloped and that there is an over emphasis on the strike. I argue that this emphasis on striking should be supplemented by a focus on reproductive struggles which aim to transform quotidian experiences of care and social reproduction.

In the third chapter "Care Ethics and the International Division of Reproductive Labor: Towards Transnational Feminist Solidarity" I provide an overview of care ethics literature with a particular emphasis on Eva Feder Kittay's genre-defining text *Loves Labor: Essays on Women, Equality, and Dependency*. I discuss why care as a universal feature of human embodiment identifies an experience of relationality as fundamental to human sociality. I praise care ethics for its critique of the over reliance of liberal political and moral theory on a notion of independence and individuality as a fundamental characteristic of humanity. However, I also argue that care ethics over-determines the value of care as inherently good as well as inherently self-sacrificial in some sense. In the last section of the chapter, I engage with a feminist labor sociologist, Rhacel Salazar Parreñas who has done decades of research on migrant Filipina domestic workers. In this research, we can see the way paid care workers are exploited through the precarity of migrant work as well as affectively manipulated to some degree because of the over-valorization of care as more than labor. I argue that care ethics, while attempting to complicate that sentiment slightly, ultimately falls into the same trap and inadvertently contributes to the depoliticization of care labor. This depoliticization[10] does not

[10] When I talk about the depoliticization of care, I am using vernacular that comes from grassroots feminist and leftist organizing historically and presently. To say that care is 'depoliticized' indicates that processes or practices which are partly determined by the political and social orders are mystified, i.e. expelled from the political by appealing to naturalistic arguments. Many of these arguments include problematic and oppressive understandings of gendered and/or racialized behavior. One example which I discuss in my third chapter is about the capacity of a mother to perform the domestic labor of childcare better than a woman without biological children. Instead of understanding care as a set of discrete actions aimed toward the completion of an objective, i.e. giving a child a bath, it is understood as an expression of maternal knowledge and femininity. Arguments about human nature are depoliticizing because they appeal to an

help transform care and prevents what could be a possible moment of transnational feminist solidarity.

Chapters two and three set the foundation for the two sub-disciplines of feminist theory in which I position myself. For the second half, chapters four and five, I focus specifically on the family as a site of potential reproductive struggle. In the third chapter "Gender and Kinship in Black Feminisms: On Captivity and Maternal Politics," I highlight strands of Black feminist scholarship which discuss the role of Black women's labor and reproductive capacities during chattel slavery. In particular, I explicate the sometimes ambivalent position that Black feminists can take toward the family unit. In the wake of both left and right political factions extoling the sanctity of the family unit, I find that the particularity of the family as safe haven for Black subjects in an anti-Black world demonstrates the potential resistant quality caring formations can have. However, when survival is elevated above all else, the wider political context which demands and benefits from the particular kind of care work expected of Black women is elided. I follow the development of Joy James' analytic of the Captive Maternal as a way to track the political consciousness-raising of Black caretakers. James' work demonstrates that Black women's care work is essential for the maintenance of US empire. She sees this structural position as a moment of possible leverage and agitation. Her descriptive work on how that can happen is instructive for the development of reproductive struggles within Black communities in the US.

If the third chapter acknowledges the possibility of oppositional care within the family form especially for Black communities, the fourth chapter examines a position which is more antagonistic toward the family form especially in relation to the international dynamics of LGBT+ politics. In "Queer Politics and Reproductive Struggles in the Imperial Core," I situate recent scholarship on the

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essential fixity rather than highlighting the possibility of, indeed the necessity of, social transformation of these arrangements.

assimilationist tendencies of queer politics in the wake of neoliberalism. I engage with queer theorist Jasbir Puar's critique of a regulatory form of queer subjectivity which promotes American nationalism and imperialism. While I commend Puar's contribution of contrasting the gaining of rights for queer citizen subjects within the US against the 'War on Terror' following September 11th, I attempt to draw out more practical political directives for current queer politics from an alternative theoretical perspective. I illuminate the work of an emergent field of queer and transgender Marxists who are uniting under the prospect and perspective of family abolition. While I find that family abolition as a political demand does not necessarily have the kind of social purchase that its proponents are seeking, the position of family abolition as a theoretical account produces social theory which understands the family primarily as unit of privatized social reproduction. M.E. O'Brien's work provides a compelling grounding for family abolition as a theoretical framework. She argues that as long as the family form is a privatized social reproductive unit, its maintenance will not ultimately secure gender liberation for women or queer and transgender people.

III. Final Thoughts

In outlining the academic and theoretical perspectives offered by feminists' research in the areas of care ethics and social reproduction theory, this dissertation engages with years of feminist inquiry into the role of care, labor, and reproduction as fundamental features of women's oppression. In considering the family unit more closely in the final two chapters, I bring a renewed sense of antagonism to continual discursive reference to the family as a unit of society in need of protection by various actors and organizations which consider themselves progressive or leftist. This work is necessarily incomplete. I hope that this thread will flourish in my future research, and for interdisciplinary feminist research into care and politics more generally.

I have had deeply meaningful experiences of political community during my time as a graduate student and employee at the University of Oregon. I have participated in union organizing,

coalitional (Marxists and anarchists) organizing, and abolitionist organizing which exploded in the wake of the George Floyd uprisings in 2020. This work that I have produced is motivated equally by my theory and my praxis. I learned just as much in the streets as I did within the walls of the ivory tower. In particular, I felt and witnessed the depoliticization of caring relationships and the work of repair in supposedly far-left, radical spaces. It felt like masculine expressions of outrage and public displays were always elevated over the behind-the-scenes preparatory work or the reparative work of conflict resolution. In all of the forms of organizing in which I have participated, I find that care and repair is most central to abolitionists. The popular phrases shouted in 2020 such as 'we keep each other safe' and organizations which are named 'care not cops' demonstrate the centrality of care to the abolitionist dream/ demand for a different world. The work I have completed herein aims to elevate and honor this abolitionist sentiment.[11]

Another world is possible and we make it through struggling against the ruling class but also against the interpersonal harms that we experience as disunifying features of our class position. Without a politics of care, anti-capitalist politics will fail to confront the myriad of ways our relationships are mediated by capitalism which include but extend far beyond the wage-labor relation. Without a materialist account of the role of social reproduction within the lives of women and queer people, feminist politics will never confront what I take to be its primary enemies: capitalism, imperialism, and US empire. The urgency of such a task is demonstrated in what follows.

[11] This tradition of police and prison abolition is distinct from the theoretical Marxist demand for family abolition. A more detailed accounting of the divergences and convergences of these two projects would be a fruitful path for future research.

Chapter Two: Towards Reproductive Struggles: Contextualizing the Legacies of Marxist Feminism on Reproduction

I. Introduction

What role does care play in feminist political struggle today? In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, care has returned on the scene of political discourse as a hotly debated source of tension within the West, especially in US due to the neoliberal disintegration of what was once called the welfare state.[12] Not to mention the pop cultural commodification of practices of 'self-care' which aim to replenish the individual through participation in the beauty and wellness industry in order to create the stamina to brave the difficulties of oppression in the social world. How do governments and social institutions care for their constituents and to what end? What role does care play in the making and remaking of quotidian life? Does this quotidian care support or resist the dominations of capitalist social formations? And how, finally, should we conceptualize and actualize care within political struggles against domination, oppression, and exploitation? It would seem that care is both personal and interpersonal. Perhaps we might be inclined to say it operates at the nexus of both the personal and the collective, making its organization a rather political affair. Acknowledging and confronting the entanglement of the personal and political sphere is a well-worn feature of feminist activism. Given that the practices of care are deeply gendered, racialized, and internationally distinctive, clarifying the role of care within emancipatory feminist politics is an urgent matter.

In this manuscript, I argue that the politics of care cannot be divorced from a philosophical and political analysis of social reproduction. I argue that the Marxist feminist legacy which created a body of literature known as social reproduction theory (SRT) is a necessary foundation for the creation of a radical and emancipatory feminist politics of care. In this chapter, I outline the history of socialist feminism in the United States and, to a lesser degree, the United Kingdom to present the

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12 Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Silvia Federici, *Family, Welfare, and the State: Between Progressivism and the New Deal*, Second edition (Brooklyn: Common Notions, 2021).

historical and political context for the development of SRT. The intervention of an SRT framework into socialist feminisms pushed the conversation away from a narrowly defined arena of domestic labor toward a broader range of activities which are part of life-making and life-maintenance. This notion of social reproduction, then, encompasses both the individual household and public institutions which facilitate or fail to facilitate survival for a given population. This is not to diminish nor divert analyses of domestic labor; in fact, I consider the commodification of domestic labor since the 1980s within the global flow of migrant labor from the Global South to the Global North in the third chapter of this manuscript. It is paramount, however, that analyses of "women's work" do not begin and end with domestic labor and instead understand the dialectic between the production of persons and reproduction of society, with all its ills and advantages.

In offering a background against which to position my own philosophical research, I summarize prominent SRT scholarship which unpacks the relationship between the mode of reproduction and the mode of production within capitalist social formations. This research reveals that processes of social reproduction are the condition of possibility for capital's accumulation, and though they do not produce surplus value uniformly in the Marxian sense, as the material, human basis for the mode of production, social reproductive labor is informed and mediated by capitalism as well as forms of social oppression such as racism, sexism, and ableism (to name only a few) which serve the interest of the ruling class by dividing the propertyless class amongst themselves.[13]

The improvements made by SRT to the theoretical foundation of Marxist feminist political analysis are fundamental for the political tasks of our current historical moment, which I understand to be coalitional political organizing. However, more feminist research is required to offer better

[13] Much of this scholarship will be discussed in the coming pages, but this collection marks the foundational thoughts on this recent framework: Tithi Bhattacharya, ed., *Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentering Oppression*, First published (London: Pluto Press, 2017).

practical political directives around reproductive labor. Should we, and to some degree can we, refuse social reproduction? How viable are such refusals? What does it mean to fight for working-class gains within socially reproductive labor? In light of decades of feminist inquiry into the role and character of domestic labor within feminist and anti-capitalist social analyses, I argue it is necessary locate political action and agitation within socially reproductive labor in order to turn theory into praxis. In support of such an aim, I have constructed a conceptual category I call "reproductive struggle" which seeks to identify and analyze struggles around the conditions and materials of social reproduction as antagonistic working class struggle that is also simultaneously feminist. The concept of "**reproductive struggle" is meant to be both an invitation for present grassroots organizing and a lens with which to look at the past to uncover the long, robust histories of women, gender nonconforming people, colonized peoples, and people of color making the fight for survival a political contestation of capital's continued accumulation and global domination.** The goal of illuminating these oppositional strategies around caring labor and reproductive labor is to reintegrate agitation around the gendered divisions of labor back into the agenda of class struggle for the international working-class.

II. Capitalism and Patriarchy: Battle Royale

The origins of the women's liberation movement in the US context grew out of a period of widespread social unrest and upheaval in the 1960s. There is a mainstream narrative of the beginning of the women's liberation movement being connected to the 1963 publication of *The Feminine Mystique* by Betty Freidan and founding the of the National Organization for Women (NOW) in 1966 of which Freidan became the first president.[14] However, it is incumbent upon this project to

[14] "When and How Was Now Founded? - National Organization for Women." National Organization for Women -, February 10, 2014. https://now.org/faq/when-and-how-was-now-founded/#:~:text=NOW%20was%20established%20on%20June,The%20Feminine%20Mystique(1963).

uncover a different narrative about the early days of the women's liberation movement in the US, one which was decidedly anti-liberal and anti-reformist in nature. While I will argue, and many others have also claimed, that the radical feminist faction of the women's movement had some notable weaknesses theoretically, their initial interest in putting feminism on the agenda for the radical left of the 1960s and their commitment to comprehensive, revolutionary politics remain relevant for today's feminist political landscape in which liberalism and individual ascension to power within capitalist social formations reigns supreme. In what follows, I offer a brief history of the rise of cultural feminism, which became synonymous with liberalism feminism, in the 1970s. I follow closely Alice Echols' insightful intellectual and activist history in *Daring to be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-1975*, originally published in 1989.

Echols demonstrates that rather than responding to Freidan and the liberal feminists lobbying Congress in the mid to late 1960s, many soon-to-be radical feminists were heavily involved with the civil rights and anti-war organizing of the same time period. She recalls how part of the impetus of creating autonomous organizations in which women were organizing for revolution was due to the sexist nature of the predominant leftist organizations at the time, namely the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). In fact, Echols reveals that connecting folks' lived experiences of alienation and oppression with political analysis, embodied in the now ubiquitous[15] feminist slogan 'the personal is political,' was a notable feature of the New Left as demonstrated in the SDS foundational organizing document from 1962 "The Port Huron Statement."[16] Echols identifies several important events and

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[15] When I taught WGS 101 from AY 2022-23, I found that actually this phrase is not a ubiquitous as it felt to me growing up. My students had either never heard of the phrase or had some vague aversion to the conflation of morality with politics. However, I still think that for feminist organizers, this slogan continues to ring true throughout the bodies of people who seeks to fight against their own oppression in the so-called private sphere.

[16] Alice Echols, *Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America, 1967-1975*, American Culture. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota: 1989), 28.

conferences of the SDS in 1967 in which women raised issues of sexism and unequal gendered roles and expectations only to be publicly rebuffed or shut down. Despite ongoing conversations about racial divides within the New Left and the necessity of Black autonomy within organizing, Echols suggests that white men, "actively resisted women's attempts to raise the issue of sexual inequality."[17] Finally, after many thwarted resolutions to include misogyny as a political phenomenon in need of analysis and action, many women of the New Left, among them Shalumith Firestone, decided to create a space in which to organize women separately around women's issues.[18] Many of these women would become well-known figures of the radical feminist movement.

The height of the radical feminist influence within the women's liberation movement occurred from 1969-1975, though this influence was preceded by a period of marginalization. One of the early divisive features within the development of the radical feminist position was a spilt between the "politicos" and the "feminists." This division represented a set of differences both in theoretical inclinations as well as strategy and experience. The 'politicos' represented veteran organizers within the civil rights and anti-war movement, often with strong ties to leadership the SNCC and the SDS. Their position supported women's autonomous organizing such that it would eventually reconnect with and lend support to the wider "Movement."[19] Echols and the participants of these organizations whose interviews form a hefty chunk of the research materials evoke the term "the Movement" to indicate the various organizations and factions of the New Left, such as the SNCC and the SDS. I understand the Movement to be united in fighting against imperialism, capitalism and white supremacy, though with different ideas about the most effective tactics and strategies to achieve these goals. This fundamental valuation of the Movement as the primary

[17] Echols, 48.
[18] *Ibid.*
[19] Echols, 52.

director of various political factions also revealed a theoretical tendency for the politicos to claim that "women's oppression derived from capitalism, or the 'system' as they often called it."[20] The politicos valued conversations and concerns about strategic actions and seemed overall wary of putting too much emphasis on consciousness-raising as the political activity of primary importance. They also held concerns about the scope of gender (or sex as it would have been referred to at the time) as indicative of revolutionary subject position, worrying that if feminist struggles were disengaged from the larger Movement, they would inevitability fall into reformism.[21]

Ironically enough, reformism or capitulation was the furthest thing on the minds of the internal group opposing the politicos, whom Echols refers to as "feminists" and who would come to exemplify the radical feminist position. The feminists were extremely critical of the New Left for the intransigent sexism within supposedly radical and liberatory organizations. Echols writes that, "though they saw themselves as 'criticizing the *left from within the left*' for refusing to broaden its analysis to account for women's oppression," their continued disavowal of leftist organizations and strategies often came across as a complete dismissal of the entire Movement.[22] The feminist position claimed that women's status as women de facto represented a revolutionary subject position because the primary social antagonism underlying social oppression was that between men and women. They acknowledged after a few early actions that the task of awakening this consciousness within women to critically examine and refute the gendered nature of their various identities, e.g. as mothers, sisters, wives, etc., would be one of monumental difficulty,[23] and the project of consciousness-raising became key to actualizing this objective. While consciousness-raising circles were intended to undo years of gaslighting that women continued to face, the early radical feminists

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[20] Echols, 52.
[21] Echols, 79.
[22] Echols, 52, internal quote is from a private author communication with Ellen Willis.
[23] Echols, 58

insisted that it was not the same practice as therapy because "the purpose of consciousness-raising was to analyze male supremacy in order to dismantle it…" not to offer singular solutions of how to navigate patriarchy.[24]

Ultimately, the "feminist" contingent of the emergent group of radical women won political power within the various organizations that Echols includes in her study such as the New York Radical Women, Cell 16 in Boston, and Redstockings, but it by no means is a simple representation of the diversity of perspectives within each contingent. In fact, the lively disagreements about strategy, theory and practice continued throughout the period of influence that radical feminism had within the movement for women's liberation. The feminist sect was particularly defined by a type of politics that Echols calls expressive or prefigurative. The prevailing radicalism in the 1960s was unique insofar as it was less interested in reforming society and more intent on efforts to "prefigure the utopian community of the future."[25] This often led to radical feminist group being over invested in process-related tasks and achieving egalitarianism within the organization as a practice rather than a stated value. While such investment was a valiant attempt to correct the lack of practical egalitarianism in the New Left, the radical feminists were often unable to distinguish reforms (i.e. moderate gains within the current social form) from reformism (i.e. a commitment to a series of progressive changes within a system rather than revolutionizing or destroying that system altogether).[26]

Despite coming from a background of organizing against US militarism and anti-Black racism in the US, the radical feminist position as exemplified in groups like Redstockings had a weak understanding of the role of race within women's oppression. Black feminists in the 1950s and 60s,

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[24] Echols, 87.
[25] Echols, 16.
[26] Echols, 17.

many of whom were socialists such as Claudia Jones, had already articulated with more clarity the multiple forces of oppression that women faced based on gender, class, and race without falling into the reductionism which would ultimately define cultural feminism. The idea of 'double jeopardy' or triple oppression held influence through the 1960s and 70s. So much so, that the Third World Women's Alliance which began as a Black women's organization but shifted to become a multi-racial coalition of women of color against imperialism and racism called their periodical 'Triple Jeopardy.'[27] The Combahee River Collective is one example of Black lesbians desiring to simultaneously confront the homophobia, white supremacy, and sexism which shaped their lives. In their 1977 statement, they argue in favor to identity-based organizing because "we realized that the only people who care enough about us to work consistently for our liberation is us."[28] In highlighting a different form of mostly white radical feminism, I do not intend to elide the important contributions of Black women and women of color during the second wave. Instead, I attempt to trace a genealogy for what political perspectives with which the socialist and Marxist feminists were most engaged, whether in celebration, critique, or some combination of both. This is also not to claim that certain Marxist or socialist feminists did not discuss race in their work; given the breadth I am attempting, it proves difficult to account for both the dominant trends and the important outliers.

In offering a history of radical feminism that highlights its anti-liberal, utopian, and even reductive features, Echols aims to clarify the current conflation[29] of radical feminism with what she

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[27] Patricia Romney, *We Were There: The Third World Women's Alliance and the Second Wave*, First Feminist Press edition, (New York, NY: The Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 2021).
[28] Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, *How We Get Free: Black Feminism and the Combahee River Collective*, (La Vergne: Haymarket Books, 2017), 18.
[29] For Echols, I can see that with her writing in this text in the late 1980s, the misinterpretation of radical feminism as liberal, anti-left and categorically essentialist would have been the dominant narrative. But I think that this conflation still stands, and perhaps even more so now given that my students tend to dismiss all of the second wave of feminism as "white feminism" that merely needs intersectionality to be corrected on the question of race. Often, they do not even consider class or imperialism as features of the 'intersections' in need of examination. I myself held a rather disparaging

calls "cultural feminism."[30] Unlike cultural feminism, which ultimately became the province of liberal feminism, radical feminism aimed at deep societal transformation that was both psychological and material, even if there were disagreements on how to achieve material, structural changes that repudiated male supremacy. Echols traces the ascendance of cultural feminism out of radical feminism to a few prominent debates in 1973-1975 around ideas of non-cooperation with the state, the role of the leftist movement and its tactics of political opposition, and the creation of feminist institutions and businesses.[31] One important indicator of a shift in values and political strategy was the publication of "Mother Right" in 1973 by Jane Alpert, formerly associated with the New Left group the Weathermen. At the time of the essay writing and publication, Alpert was underground, hiding from the FBI for her role in bombing military and war-related buildings.[32] In "Mother Right," Alpert abandons the New Left and claims that her participation in the bombings was a result of manipulation by her lover—the primary organizer of the action. She also dismisses the deaths of 42 incarcerated people during the Attica rebellion because she states she is uninterested in mourning male supremacists. Finally, she "traced the 'power of the new feminist culture [and] the powers which were attributed to ancient matriarchies' to female biology, specifically women's reproductive capacity."[33] Alpert's text is instructive because it solidifies three primary qualities of cultural feminism: a shift toward cultural change over structural change, an essentializing view of woman's innate powers as emanating from their reproductive organs, and a complete and total denunciation

view of this subset of feminist politics and had to edit this chapter as the request of my advisor to offer a more nuanced history. In doing so, I've realized that the sanitized, liberal narratives of the women's liberation movement are incomplete at best, and counter-revolutionary at worst. While I don't intend to adopt the trans-exclusionary or reductive (i.e. gender as the primary social antagonism) dimensions of the radical feminist positions, knowing that their analyses and political action stemmed from a desire to refuse liberal placation in favor of deep social transformation demands a more complex accounting.

[30] Echols, 5, and 19.

[31] Echols, 281.

[32] Echols, 252.

[33] Echols, 250, quoting Alpert.

of the left as male chauvinist not just in personalities, but in political action such as violence against private property. In 1975, Alpert came out of hiding, turned herself over to the FBI, and publicly proclaimed to be in full cooperation with the state as part of her surrender. The extent of her cooperation was not well-recorded or publicized, but it ignited a fierce debate within the feminist movement about supporting women regardless of their actions and the principle of solidarity with other underground comrades and noncooperation with the state. Unsurprisingly, the nascent cultural feminist perspective felt that Alpert maintained integrity as well as her status as a feminist in cooperating with the FBI, and that any criticisms against her were 'anti-woman.'[34]

The story of Jane Alpert and the heated feminist discourse around her is instructive of the rise of cultural feminism and the submission of radicality within the women's movement to liberal politics of identity, purity, and inclusion; it is also instructive on the wide array of theoretical problems that remained dormant within radical feminism, but perhaps cannot be overdetermined in the analysis of the radical feminist movement's value and lessons for contemporary feminisms. One of the most well-worn critiques of the radical feminism of the second-wave is its penchant for essentialism, particularly biological essentialism.[35] While there are certainly biological determinations which are presented in Firestone's *The Dialectic of Sex* as transhistorical, it was also Firestone's utopian vision that mechanized gestation and biological reproduction would free women of her enslavement to the species, to use Simone de Beauvoir's turn of phrase.[36] Echols helpfully demonstrates that the radical feminists of the early 1970s ultimately wanted to 'de-gender' society, making gender categories less relevant to accessing material resources and experiencing harm and violence, rather than affirm the validity of femininity and claim that such an affirmation is the only

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[34] Echols, 282.
[35] Linda Nicholson, "Interpreting Gender," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 20, no. 1 (Autumn 1994): 79–105.
[36] Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution.* (London, New York: Verso, 2015); Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans., Constance Capisto-Borde, and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier, First Vintage Books (New York: Vintage Books, 2011).

path toward women's liberation. The turn to cultural feminism, exemplified in "Mother Right," involves an affirmation of gender *as it stands now*, without critical examination or transformation of any kind. And by rooting this affirmation in biology, cultural feminism asserted a deeply transphobic position (which was latent in some radical feminist work) as well as reactionary one. In making the divide between men and women biological and insurmountable, the only viable political strategy was separatism on the one hand or slow cultural transformation on the other. Either way, opposition, defiance, and refusal fell out of the feminist vocabulary, and became synonymous with 'masculine' styles of politics which were to be avoided at all costs.[37] And when masculine styles are to be avoided at all costs as the creeping enemy of all feminist progress, the conclusion of intensive transphobia towards trans women and the claim that trans men were aligning themselves with the oppressing class can only follow logically and tragically.

The sectarian tendency to separate over differences rather than attempt to incorporate or identify fundamental dimensions of a given critique echoed in the divergences and debates within contemporary socialist and Marxist feminism at the time as well. Much of the literature which dealt specifically with domestic labor and human reproduction as it pertains to women's emancipation engaged Marxism with varying degrees of partial or total incorporation of Marxian political economy. Firestone herself grounded the *Dialectic of Sex* in dialectical historical materialism. In this section, I revisit the work we can loosely call socialist and feminist being produced in the US and the UK during the 1980s. This scholarship centered around the theoretical clarification of the role of domestic labor within the capitalist mode of production, aptly dubbed the "Domestic Labor Debates." While some major theoretical obstacles have more or less been resolved within the history of feminist theories, some of the contradictions and tensions within these debates still persist today.

[37] Echols, 255.

For example, arguments about the surplus-generating dimension of reproductive labor are alive within current feminist scholarship on social reproduction.[38] For the purposes of articulating how 'reproduction' as a category is taken up within both socialist and feminist theory, particularly that which seeks to fuse the two, this history reveals some misunderstanding of Marxian political economy as well as the misogynistic and racist elements of socialist organizations in the 1980s. The brief history of radical feminism outlined above indicates the historical conditions in which Marxist and/or socialist feminists in the 1980s might have found themselves, and offers some context about the debate of 'dual-systems' theory.

In the volume *Women and Revolution: A Discussion of the Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism* edited by Lydia Sargent, Sargent identifies three types of 'radical left feminism' as the protagonists within this intellectual history: radical feminist, socialist feminism, and Marxist feminism. These micro-factions were sparked in part by a 1979 essay by Heidi Hartmann, "The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: Toward a More Progressive Union." Hartmann's "Unhappy Marriage" became paradigmatic of the unresolved contradictions within between radical feminism and the Movement. While the *Women and Revolution* volume tends to present a more critical engagement with Hartmann, other collections such as *Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism* explored later in this section detail many moments of correspondence with Hartmann's primary thesis. There are two primary takeaways from Hartmann's essay. The first of which is the adoption of what came to be known as 'dual-systems'[39] theory by a majority of women within the socialist, feminist and/or Marxist factions. The second of which is the inability of this type of analysis, exemplified by the dual-systems thesis itself, to employ a dialectical method of historical

[38] Alessandra Mezzadri, 'On the value of social reproduction: Informal labour, the majority world and the need for inclusive theories and politics', Radical Philosophy 204, Spring 2019, pp. 33–41.
[39] Lise Vogel, "Domestic Labor Revisited," *Science & Society* 64, no. 2 (Summer 2000): 151–70.

materialist analysis. My critique here is not simply that the feminists were not Marxist enough; rather, the dual-systems thesis demonstrates an ability to grasp the role of both totality and contradiction in the production and reproduction of capitalist social formations, both of which are necessary to sustain the accumulation of capital itself.

The dual-systems thesis claimed that patriarchy and capitalism are two 'semi-autonomous' systems of production in which there are overlapping interests and methods to maintain the perpetuation of each separate system but diverging operations of power. For dual-systems theorists, there is a capitalist mode of production and a patriarchal mode of production each of which corresponds with a social order, e.g. a capitalist social order and a patriarchal one. Put in other words, though these social systems are separate in objective terms—one produces people through sexism and one produces profit through exploitation—they reinforce each other to make each specific system more effective at its particular goal. Hartmann's proposal formalized this dual-systems approach, which was already being operationally utilized if not formally named before her essay was published. The dual-systems approach has had many critics[40] and it is generally not the preferred framework utilized by self-identifying Marxists feminists currently; however, the import of this framework in the 1980's and 1990's cannot be understated because it not only impacted work within socialist feminism, but also the 'outside' perspective on the viability of Marxist feminist endeavors. Even though Hartmann herself was not interested in abandoning Marxism, and in fact argued for an application of historical dialectical materialism to feminist inquiry,[41] that is how "Unhappy Marriage" was read and taken up.

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[40] The predominant critic of this formulation is Lise Vogel, whose work is featured as a primary textual engagement in the following section. There is also "disagreements" subsection of *Women and Revolution: A Discussion of the Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism* which includes contributions from Iris Marion Young, Vogel, Sandra Harding, and Azizah Al-Hibri.
[41] Heidi Hartmann, "The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: Towards a More Progressive Union," in *Women and Revolution: A Discussion of the Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism,* ed. By Lydia Sargent, (Montréal, Québec: Black Rose Books, 1981), 11.

The identification of dual-systems came in part from the dual function of domestic labor, namely that domestic labor of a wife for her husband serves both the individual man (e.g. husband) and the capitalist order of which the husband is a worker. Under this framework, there is not a connection between the labor in the home and the labor in the public sphere because the labor in the home, being mostly unwaged, is of a different nature than waged labor. Additionally, while Marxist feminists including Eli Zaretsky and Mariarosa Dalla Costa of the Wages for Housework movement, have articulated the relationship between housework and capital, they have, according to Hartmann underestimated, and perhaps obscured, the fact that men benefit from housework in the first instance. She writes that, "while Zaretsky thinks that women's work *appears* to be for men but in reality is for capital, we think women's work in the family *really is* for men – though it clearly reproduces capitalism as well."[42] For her, in identifying the mediation and benefit to capital's accumulation through women's unpaid domestic labor, Zaretsky and Dalla Costa erase the way in which men within the working class also benefit from that labor. She also argues that Dalla Costa's identification of housework within the production of surplus value grants legitimacy to women's struggle by proxy of their working-class role as producers in the production of surplus value.[43] From the very first page of the essay, Hartmann is most concerned and critical of the tendency of Marxism to take a "political stance [which] produces an analysis which absorbs feminism into the class struggle."[44] The history of the development of radical feminism provides much sympathy for this concern.

However, in this anxiety of the unjust subsumption of feminist aims and struggles into the movement for socialism, Hartmann seems unable to imagine a form of struggle which would be

[42] Hartmann, 7.
[43] Hartmann, 9.
[44] Hartmann, 2.

both feminist and anti-capitalist simultaneously. This is due in part to dual-systems theory because if patriarchy is a mode of production unto itself, attacking the capitalist mode of production may not address the patriarchal one. In an effort to find the material basis of patriarchy, an objective Hartmann praises in Juliet Mitchell and Shalumith Firestone's works, her primary interest is forwarding a feminism which exposes through emphasis on the relations between men and women the material basis of patriarchy. She offers the following definition of patriarchy: "we can usefully define patriarchy as a set of social relations between men, which have a material base, and which, though hierarchy, establish or create interdependence and solidarity among men that enable them to dominate women."[45] The material basis of patriarchy includes firstly "men's control over women's labor power,"[46] enabling both domestic labor, sexual repression, and isolation in the home through exclusion from wage labor. By stating that the material basis of patriarchy is men's control, rather than benefit, of women's labor power, it would correctly follow that women's struggles within the patriarchal mode of production would be against individual men and men as a 'class.' Hartmann is clear, building on Gayle Rubin's concept of a sex/gender system, that patriarchy is a social structure in which men rely on each other to continue their domination of women, even though there exists differences among the men in regards to the extent of power by determinations of class, race, and nation.[47] It is interesting that gay men are only mentioned peripherally once within the essay.

Hartmann states that capitalism creates hierarchies of workers, but cannot account for the process in which certain groups of workers are bestowed with relatively more power than others, as is the case with gender and race. She states that who fills the "places" created by capitalist social formations cannot be account for within Marxist theoretical analysis.[48] As such these processes are

[45] Hartmann, 14.
[46] Hartmann, 16.
[47] Hartmann, 18.
[48] Hartmann, 17.

not simply ideological but constitute a separate, secondary "aspect of our mode of production, the production and reproduction of people."[49] This emphasis on the processes of the production and reproduction of people as fundamental to capitalist society is a dimension of Hartmann's analysis which shines and deserves praise. Unlike other socialists and socialists feminist, Hartmann insightfully located a material basis of women's oppression not merely in the gendered division of labor, but in what that labor produces. However, when one wrests apart the products of the mode of reproduction (e.g. people) from the mode of production (e.g. commodities) as Hartmann does, it creates a schism in the social world between people and commodities which is not experientially felt since commodity fetishism and the commodification of reproductive resources (i.e. our basic biological needs of food, shelter, hygiene) tends to define cultural and personal relationships under capitalism. Additionally, it becomes impossible to confront both at the same time because "there appears to be no necessary connection between changes in the one aspect of production and changes in the other."[50] If an attack on one mode will not necessarily impact the other, the outlook for feminist struggle against both systems simultaneously seems bleak. It follows logically that one would have to be prioritized over the other at least temporally. Since this second aspect is mediated not only by the ruling class of capitalists but by an adjacent ruling class of men, women must necessarily organize separately from men because patriarchal interests under the guise of anti-capitalism could taint women's organizing.

This leads to an extremely limited version of feminism in which adjudication of proper feminist action is undertaken by a measure of purity that is not feasible or tenable in our historical situation. This assumes that women would be able to rid themselves of all patriarchal values (earlier called masculine styles by Robin Morgan) in order to judge their actions. Even with the most intense

[49] Hartmann, 18.
[50] Hartmann, 17.

consciousness-raising, unless that was matched with material and structural changes, I am unsure of how women would be able to achieve such an enlightened state of purity. Furthermore, by stating that struggles against the capitalist mediation of reproductive labor are not wholly feminist because they do not singularly emphasize the relations of men and women, but instead put those relations within the capitalist social totality in which we all live, Hartmann excludes important histories of struggle from the feminist agenda. Any Marxist feminist who does not ultimately contextualize class power relations through reference to a man-woman hierarchical power relation fails to be sufficiently 'feminist,' even if that Marxist feminist seeks to analyze and disrupt the mode of reproduction.

One might ask, what is the problem here? It is certain that a man benefits from the domestic labor of his wife. It is also not uncommon that he would expect it and therefore threaten or actualize violence should the wife and/ or mother refuse these 'natural' duties. It is a bit harder to see how capital would benefit directly from a woman making dinner… It is perhaps even harder to conceive of how the capitalist class as a whole would benefit from such an activity. There are two problems, the first of which one is an inconsistency within Hartmann's work and the second of which is an insufficiently dialectical approach to social critique. Firstly, Hartmann's concern about of reductive Marxian analyses is repeated in the inverse in her own analysis. By emphasizing the direct benefactor of women's labor as the **primary and, implicitly, most important** benefactor, she obscures the relationship of domestic labor to the (capitalist) mode of production. What follows from elevating the husband as the benefactor and therefore guarantor of the dominating man-woman relation, is that there is no direct link to how that relation is borne in the so-called public sphere, i.e. the wage-labor market, social services, forms of public political engagement, etc. It is almost as if because the man is the king of the house, he therefore becomes king of the world.

This is a sort of inversion of Marxism's alleged reductionism; in the final analysis, it always leads back to patriarchy as a social structure in which men collude to dominate women. In both forms of reductionism, class reduction and gender reduction, there is a lack of attempts to think dialectically, which is to say, to see contradictions as revelations of deep truths about our social world. It may be true, I will argue shortly, that struggles at the site of socially reproductive labor reveal that women's work is for both men and capital and its subversion reveals and challenges the connection between patriarchy and capitalism, rather than subsuming feminism struggle into class struggle.

The boldest, most problematic, and probably most influential claim to come from "Unhappy Marriage" is when Hartmann designates categories of political economy sex-blind (sic). Hartmann writes, "just as capital creates these places indifferent to the individuals who fill them, the categories of Marxist analysis, class, reserve army of labor, wage-laborer, do not explain why particular people fill particular places…. *Marxist categories, like capital itself, are sex-blind.*"[51] How certain groups of people come to fulfill different roles within the broader scheme of capitalist exploitation is a process and product of history—a major, if not one of the indispensable aspects of dialectical historical materialism. Furthermore, capital is a non-human entity. This is a central point of the Marxian critique of political economy. The logic of capital is an inhuman logic that somehow governs, organizes, and disciplines much of human sociality. Capital is 'sex-blind' insofar as it is a non-human entity but which somehow continues to structure and organize almost all of societies who find themselves under the capitalist mode of production. In his intervention into political economy through what came to be known as the theory of value,[52] Marx recenters humans agents as the

[51] Hartmann, 11, emphasis in original.
[52] Beverley Best, "Wages for Housework Redux: Social Reproduction and the Utopian Dialectic of the Value-Form." *Theory & Event* 24, no. 4 (2021): 896–921. https://doi.org/10.1353/tae.2021.0052.

producers of value as opposed to value being created through the processes of circulation of non-human commodities.

It is true that sufficient attention to the gendered and racial division of labor under capitalism and the way such social positions affect one's experience of capitalist alienation were underdeveloped; however, many have argued that Marx's project was a particularly humanistic project and the motivation of such a project seeks to center the possibility of overcoming alienation to secure human flourishing and interconnectedness in a new sociality.[53] Even though gendered and racial analysis was not dominant, it is not precluded by the method of dialectical historical materialism itself. Furthermore, Cinzia Arruzza argues that the appeal to a second mode of production, sometimes expanded to a third mode to account for racial inequalities, assumes a *deux ex machina* argument in which the authors assumed what needs to be explain. This is to say that by insisting Marxian categories were sex-blind, an additive analysis was required. This left the Marxist part of the analysis, i.e. the mode of production, basically unchanged and required a feminism that was firstly not concerned with capitalism (or else it would be similarly sex-blind) to be used as additional, not an integrated, corrective. Consequently, the gendered, racialized, sexualized, and international processes through which the accumulation of capital is secured are ignored by connecting those factors to separate social structures, inadvertently confirming that capitalist analyses are necessary 'sex-blind,' rather than a result of incomplete or underdeveloped applications of the method.[54]

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[53] For more on marxist humanism as coalitional struggle see the final chapter "By Way of Conclusion" in Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, Translated by Richard Philcox. 1st ed., new Ed. (New York: Grove Press ; Distributed by Publishers Group West, 2008).

[54] Cinzia Arruzza, "Functionalist, Determinist, Reductionist: Social Reproduction Feminism and Its Critics." *Science & Society*, Special Issue: Socializing Philosophy, 80, no. 1 (January 2016): 9–30, 13.

In an article which accounts for how class's disappearance from feminist analysis in the 1980s impacted the movement's ability to understand and organize in solidarity with sex workers, Brooke Beloso argues that Gayle Rubin's hallmark 1974 "Traffic in Women" essay clearly reveals the function of analogy in the earliest conceptions of the sex/gender system. Beloso claims that through the use of analogy (i.e. the sex/gender system is like capitalism) Rubin severs the social conditions which create class relations from the social conditions which create the gender of womanhood. In severing those relations, class becomes a stagnant identity category like gender or race, that while it is socially conferred and formed, refers to the ontological status of subject. Beloso points out that this notion of class-as-identity is not in alignment with Marx's notion of class a set of antagonistic, dynamic social relations, and leads to, "feminism's and queer theory's unwitting complicity with capitalism, manifested in a lack of attention to women's privilege and oppression not as women and sexual minorities per se but as workers, commodities, and even capitalists."[55] This led to an ability to think class, gender, and sex together. The growing attention to identities—even with suspicions around the ideological purity of such identities—resulted in class falling out of the feminism analysis since class is thought of as a structural position rather than an identity. Some work on the patriarchal mode of production produced compelling and complex accounts of production within the home, as can be found the work of Christine Delpy. Even when this research highlighted the way domestic labor facilitated a hierarchal relationship between men and women, it failed to produce **theory which understood how these semi-autonomous systems intersected—meaning there was not a discernable target for political opposition that featured in both systems.** It is not so much that a 'unitary' theory of women's oppression is primarily orientated around subsumption in terms of moral or political importance, but rather that a

[55] Brooke Meredith Beloso, "Sex, Work, and the Feminist Erasure of Class." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 38, no. 1 (September 2012): 50; https://doi.org/10.1086/665808.

logic of analogy is rather mystifying analytically. To say that some system is like another but different without fully capturing the way those differences operate leads to, as I have argued, political impasse around the appropriate target of feminist struggles. Hartmann's essay was met, albeit marginally, with some critical responses that suspected the inoperability of the dual-systems thesis.

Lydia Sargent's introduction to *Women and Revolution* identifies some of the historical conditions which inspired Hartmann's essay as well as the essays written in response, all of which contain apprehensions about the relationship between feminism and Marxism at both a theoretical and practical level. She writes, "can we as radical socialist, marxist, lesbian, anarchist, and black feminists achieve equality in a left/ progressive movement whose dominant ideology is Marxism and can we achieve equality in a future society which is organized around marxist theory and practice?"[56] This is not merely an analytical concern, and Sargent helpfully foregrounds the issues that women working with socialist political organizations faced as a result of sexism. The day-to-day political work not only reinforced gendered divisions of labor, but enacted micro and regular-sized aggressions against women due to sexism and misogyny. She discusses how women's issues were side-lined to women's caucuses, the lack of movement leaders who were women, the relegation of women speakers to 'women's issues' only, as well as the blatant dismissal of sexist behavior and the oft-heard retort that socialist women should simply re-read Lenin and Mao if they wish to improve their theoretical muscles.[57] It tracks that these experiences of harm toward women working with the socialist and Marxist New Left led many women to reassess the theoretical underpinnings being used to justify many of these behaviors.

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[56] Lydia Sargent, Introduction *to Women and Revolution: A Discussion of the Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism*, ed. By Sargent, (Montréal, Québec: Black Rose Books, 1981), xii.
[57] Sargent, xv-xvii.

Was Marxist theory itself actually 'sex-blind,' as was the terminology of the time, such that major overhauls were needed to enable it to function for women's liberation? Sargent taxonomizes the three different methods of feminist theory which attempt to address this and related questions, a combination of which informs many of the essays found in the volume: radical, socialist, and Marxist feminisms. Each of these three theoretical camps were responding to the problems within political organizing and all three perspectives informed each other while simultaneously having contradictory recommendations for strategic action and theoretical updates. Even though these distinctions often seemed "irreconcilable," one of the primary themes among all three was "the concern over reproduction and the sexual division of labor."[58] We have so far reviewed the radical feminist history in both the internalized factions and the perspective of radical feminism which triumphed temporarily until cultural feminism, with its trenchant biological essentialism and dismissal of leftism as male chauvinism tout court, came to define feminist consciousness in the late 20th century United States. I also summarized Hartmann's attempt to link, but not fuse, Marxist feminist analysis with the dual-systems thesis. Briefly, I consider below a different but adjacent attempt to articulate a synthesis between radical feminism and socialism by Zillah Eisenstein.

Eisenstein's introduction to the collection she edited *Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism* exemplifies the socialist feminist perspective on how to conceptualize capitalism and patriarchy together. For Eisenstein and many of the contributors to the volume, there is notable value to the radical feminist analysis which cannot be gleaned from Marxism alone, creating the demand for a fusion of both the Marxist and radical feminist theories. In fact, she positions Marxism as the "thesis" and radical feminism as the "anti-thesis" which fuse dialectically to create the synthesis which is social feminism. This formulation comes from an acknowledgement about the

[58] Sargent, xx.

reductive aspects of both forms of social critique. Socialist feminism "analyzes power in terms of its class origins and patriarchal roots," which supposedly refutes the autonomous claim of dual-systems thinking in so far as these systems are "in their present form, mutually dependent."[59] Part of the tasks of socialist feminism for Eisenstein was understanding oppression as a broader category of social harm than exploitation, arguing against the conflation of the two within Marxist analysis. There also appears to be a concern about wanting to untangle the material and ideological processes within capitalist patriarchy in order to combat the so-called dualism (read: reductionism) of the base/ superstructure model, toward understanding these disparate but related processes as part of an internal web.[60] This need to bring together two categories without subsumption of one into the other is best exemplified when Eisenstein writes

> Patriarchy (as male supremacy) provides the sexual hierarchical ordering of society for political control and as a political system cannot be reduced to its economic structure; while capitalism as an economic class system driven by the pursuit of profit feeds off the patriarchal ordering. Together they form the political economy of the society, not merely one or another, but a particular blend of the two.[61]

I am more amenable to this formulation of how to understand patriarchy and capitalism as a unified system of political economy, but there is still a lack of clarity about how this particular 'blend' co-constitutes sex, gender, and class. Just because patriarchal social relations predate capitalism does not mean that they are the primary social antagonism between men and women, forming the basic antagonistic unit of society. Apart from this theoretical disagreement, the practical consequences of these and adjacent claims muddle political organizing and cannot but result in separatist modes of politics, untenable for the current multiple crises we face in late-stage capitalist and imperialist hegemony. This method or framework of socialist feminism is therefore theoretically imprecise and

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[59] Zillah R., Eisenstein, "Developing a Theory of Capitalist Patriarchy and Socialist Feminism" in *Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism,* ed. By Eisenstein, (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1979), 22.
[60] Eisenstein, 25.
[61] Eisenstein, 28.

politically inoperable; however, as will be further elaborated in the final chapter of this manuscript, I applaud the radical feminist desire to focus on the material institutions of marriage and family as productive of women's subordination in society not merely because of a gendered division of labor, but because of what that labor produces. This means the family form is inflected with a expectations of a work discipline. Disclosing this feature of human sociality at a time when representations of families are becoming diversified is an integral part of bringing back the anti-liberal and anti-reformist spirit of the radical feminists.

What is less clear within the taxonomy of socialist and Marxist feminisms included in *Women and Revolution* are the women who fell into the third category of Marxist feminism in a self-avowed sense. Given the diversity of perspectives, some of which engaged or disavowed dual-systems thinking, some of which incorporated radical feminism to a lesser or greater extent, I imagine many of these women identified as Marxists and feminists even if not inclined to pull both of these words together. It is this third camp which first started to analyze social reproduction as an indispensable form of Marxist analysis. In what follows, I introduce Lise Vogel's work from the 1980's and the rich legacy of Marxist feminisms which has more recently taken up some of the necessary tasks articulated by Vogel. Vogel exemplifies the Marxist feminist position because she seeks to mobilize the method of historical materialism to improve Marx's critique of political economy in order to reveal the material basis of women's oppression. Perhaps unsurprisingly given some of the dominant trends of cultural feminism, Vogel's work largely circulated under the radar. Her analytical position which highlights and centers questions of social reproduction including but not only biological reproduction is the most productive position from which to make theoretical and practical claims about the function of women's labor in capitalism—particularly how we might begin to imagine disrupting and refusing its value-realizing function. Following the work of Vogel and the more recent attempts from the mid 2000s and onwards to take up her work, I argue that social

reproduction theory (SRT) is the most effective and salient way to position a multifaceted anti-capitalist politic that is non-reductive, expansive, and capable of explaining the distinction among workers based on gender, race, sexuality, nation, and many more social positionalities. More specifically, SRT offers indispensable insights on the mediation of care, caring labor, and caring attitudes which could, with a few slight adjustments that my dissertation aims to make, produce practical directives for women, femmes, and people of color who are disproportionately saddled with society's caring duties. SRT can also improve feminism by combatting its fetishization and commodification within the 21st century liberal co-optation of political movements from the late 20th century.

III. The Social Reproductive Intervention with Lise Vogel and the Marxian School

Missing from the Domestic Labor Debates was a more thorough-going consideration of how the reproduction of labor power within political economy marks a distinctive feature of the material basis for women's oppression under capitalism. It is not so much that radical and socialist feminisms overlooked the category itself, but rather the dual-systems thesis posited the reproduction of labor power as a unification point within two systems of production, patriarchal and capitalist. The dual-function of creating people and creating workers in a capitalist society was used as an example of two systems with two outputs, rather than looking more closely at just what the ambiguity of this labor means in the context of the totalizing effect that capitalism has on social formations. Integral to unpacking this analysis is Lise Vogel's 1983 *Marxism and the Oppression of Women: Toward a Unity Theory*. Vogel's insistence that Marxist feminism consider more seriously the categories of political economy and its gendered division of labor through the framework of total social reproduction completely flipped the terms of the 'Domestic Labor Debate.' Vogel suggested an analytical distinction between two levels of the reproduction of labor-power under capitalist social formations. The distinction lies between individually meeting our basic physical and social

needs, or what we might call individual reproduction, and the reconstitution and maintenance of social forms through the maintenance of individual subjects, or total societal reproduction. Separating these two features of domestic labor on a theoretical level marks one of Vogel's unique and enduring influences on SRT that I find requires further clarification in so far as I am invested in identifying concrete political directives implicated by SRT.

Consequently, in this section, I explain the reproduction of labor power via Vogel and then evaluate Vogel's legacy within contemporary Marxist feminist research about social reproduction. I also examine some of the Marxist feminists engaged in the Wages for Housework (WfH) movement as a related but distinct analysis of the reproduction of labor power. In all instances, this thread of Marxist feminist theory exposes a structural relationship between women, colonized peoples, and queer people and the continued accumulation of capital. What does this structural relationship feel like on an embodied level? Even if Vogel is identifying a distinction on a theoretical plane, that distinction is much harder to identify on a day-to-day level. Herein lies the primary obstacle for creating conditions for oppositional or antagonistic social reproductive practices. I close this section by centering this experiential level and offering some suggestions of practical political activities which might be taken up against capitalism but which meet human needs of the first level—individual social reproduction. A conceptual focus on **reproductive struggle can illuminate the ambivalent and oppositional activities in which women and queer people participate to demonstrate that alternative caring practices and formations gesture to possibilities for self-determination in a social totality over-determined by alienation and false freedoms**. Reproductive struggles recognize the structural relationship that capitalism has with care and social reproduction and attempt to refuse subsumption of those socially reproductive activities into capital's accumulation, even when the participants are not self-defined leftists or anti-capitalists. On a scholarly level, I hope that by identifying these collective antagonistic social reproduction practices,

leftist political organizing and political theory can understand that without a politics around care, our labor and our love will continue to be captured and twisted by capitalism.

Susan Ferguson and David McNally argue in their updated introduction to the 2014 reprinting of *Marxism and the Oppression of Women* that Vogel's theoretical framework moved beyond the limitations of Anglophone socialist feminist discourse from the 1970s and 1980s. Vogel was not interested, as the socialist feminists were, in fusing radical feminist analysis with Marxian political economy. Instead, Vogel sought to "extend" Marxist theory to provide the "theoretical guidance in the coming battles for women's liberation."[62] In so doing, Vogel grants primacy to the method of historical materialist analysis. Ferguson and McNally summarize materialism in the following helpful way: "theory grounded in human practices through which socio-material life is produced and reproduced."[63] The human practices under investigation are therefore extremely varied and include both the domestic labor which preoccupied socialist feminism, but also the labors which are waged and create commodities and services necessary to the continuation of our social order in its familiar capitalist form. As discussed, socialist feminism understood the 'practices' in need of intervention as largely confined to unpaid domestic labor by a wife-mother and accepted the radical feminist claims that this was an ahistorical feature of patriarchal oppression.[64] Even though Vogel's project is animated with deep political commitments to women's liberation, she identifies her task in *Marxism and the Oppression of Women* as a primarily theoretical one. She hopes to revisit and revitalize Marxist analytical categories to help "lighten the load" of theoretical ambiguity and inconsistency she finds in

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[62] Lise Vogel, Preface to *Marxism and the Oppression of Women: Toward a Unitary Theory.* Published in paperback. 2nd ed. Historical Materialism Book Series. (Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books, 2013), ix.

[63] Susan Ferguson and David McNally, Introduction to Lise Vogel, *Marxism and the Oppression of Women: Toward a Unitary Theory.* Published in paperback. 2nd ed. Historical Materialism Book Series. (Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books, 2013), xviii.

[64] Eisenstein, 16-17; to be clear, Eisenstein was critical of the way that Firestone and other radical feminists failed to put inequality into a 'social context' but she did agree with the notion that the submission of women around domestic labor is a feature of all patriarchal historical societies.

socialist feminism.[65] By foregrounding historical materialism and Marxist theory, Vogel was able to illuminate the structural relationship to capital's accumulation with more actionable consequences that account for women's differential position relative to capital. Such conclusions were previously occluded from feminist analysis by the universalization of the middle-class housewife in the Domestic Labor Debates.

Vogel refocuses her methodological development on the wide and varied practices of human creation and maintenance which include but also move beyond domestic labor. In so doing, she sees past the boundaries of the private household, contextualizing it as one piece within the processes of reproduction of the wider social order. Vogel's book has two major implications. Firstly, the category of social reproduction which she identified as central to the material basis of women's oppression inspired a now blossoming subfield of Marxist feminist analysis—SRT—toward which I hope this manuscript contributes. Vogel's book did not cause much of a stir in 1983. As the fracturing of feminist theory and the development of queer theory took major guidance from post-structuralist social theory, a small but mighty faction of historical materialists kept the book in circulation until its formal reissue in 2014.[66] This new field of analysis expanded the scope of practical activities relevant to a political analysis of women's oppression. Through this increased scope of analysis, Vogel is able to identify a structural relationship between women and the accumulation of capital which is influenced but not completely determined by the differences of biological reproduction. On this account, social reproduction encompasses the underpaid and unpaid work of human life-making as well as maintenance, including such varied institutions as healthcare and education, and individual practices like childrearing and emotional labor some of which are paid and some of which are not. These activities have a structural relationship to the

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[65] Vogel, *Marxism,* 8-9.
[66] Ferguson and McNally, xvii.

accumulation of capital which is related to but not determined solely by the realization of surplus value through the production process. It is this structural relationship, which was disavowed by Hartmann as reductive and misunderstood by socialist feminism via Eisenstein, that Vogel seeks to elaborate theoretically.

Vogel's suggestion that the production of the family, or more accurately, the social reproduction of the family denotes for women a direct relationship to the accumulation of capital is not reductive because she is not making a transhistorical claim. Additionally, since she is arguing that the capitalist organization of social reproduction forms a material basis for women's oppression which exceeds the family, she avoids some of the biological essentialist pitfalls in earlier iterations of some radical feminists. McNally and Ferguson write that "capital and the state needs to be able to regulate their biological capacity to produce the next generation of labourers so that labour-power is available for exploitation."[67] But, just because capitalists and state institutions discipline families into certain forms of socially-sanctioned reproduction does not mean that capitalism created the modern family or heterosexuality. Rather a struggle ensued between laboring people fighting for their kinship ties and the ruling class fighting for the security of capital through the disciplining of women's sexuality, often times by extremely violent and fatal means.[68] Under this model, the relationship between capitalism and patriarchy is founded on, "…[the] social articulation between the capitalist mode of production and working-class households, which are fundamental to the production and reproduction of labour-power."[69]

Since Vogel's argument rests on a deeper analysis of the Marxian category of labor power, it is beneficial to briefly describe how this term appears within Marx's critique of political economy. In

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[67] Ferguson and McNally, xxv.
[68] Silvia Beatriz Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*. 2., rev. (New York, NY: Autonomedia, 2014).
[69] Ferguson and McNally, xxvi.

his book *Social Reproduction Theory and the Socialist Horizon*, SRT scholar Aaron Jaffe discusses the way that for Marx labor power is not **only** tied into the capitalist mode of industrial production. Labor power is also the term that Marx uses to describe the production of use-values, which is how Vogel, Bhattacharya, and many SRT scholars characterize the output of reproductive labor. This means we use our labor power, which is to say our capacity to interact within our material environment, impact and be impacted by that environment, in order to meet our embodied needs, such as food, water, shelter, safety, among many others. Under this Marxian critique, labor-power is not bad; in fact, it is quite the opposite! Labor-power is part of what makes humans, humans, or in technical terms, part of our species being.[70] However, as Jaffe writes, "it is only under conditions of capital that workers are forced to expend their labor powers in ways that make capital valorize."[71] Labor power becomes alienated through its role in the mode of production because capital is valorized through the production process. The capacity to labor outside of the historical conditions which connect it to capital's valorization is not inherently alienating.

Marx's emphasis on labor power allows a new analysis of political economy to demonstrate that value comes from the concrete labor that goes into the process of production rather than the point of sale or exchange inherent to the commodity itself. By producing a commodity, the worker produces value, but not merely value in the abstract which is realized at the site of exchange. The worker creates value not at the site of exchange, but within the production process itself, and to distinguish this value from the exchange value (i.e. the price), Marx introduces the term surplus value. Surplus value is the 'extra' value not captured in the process of exchange, but which is

[70] Paul Santilli, "Marx on Species-Being and Social Essence." *Studies in Soviet Thought* 13, no. 1/2 (1973): 76–88. http://www.jstor.org/stable/20098547.
[71] Aaron Jaffe, *Social Reproduction Theory and the Socialist Horizon: Work, Power and Political Strategy*, Mapping Social Reproduction Theory, (London: Pluto Press, 2020), 30.

necessary for capital's valorization and growth.[72] Surplus value is how capitalists accumulate capital by exploiting the labor power of the working class. This revelation is crucial because it confronts the contradictions in the appearance form of our social order, which inheres value in processes of exchange in which objects and money are fetishized.

The category of labor power on Marx's account in *Capital Vol. I* is particularly unique because labor power is also a commodity (e.g. something bought and sold on the market by people dispossessed of land and owning only "themselves"), but it is the only commodity which is not produced capitalistically. The production of surplus value, that is to say the creation of additional value within the production process itself is the completely unique and revolutionary critique Marx issues to political economy. While it is beyond the scope of this chapter to delve more thoroughly into Marx's labor theory of value, the critical dimension of labor power from an analytical interest in reproductive labor is two-fold. Firstly, it is the value of the worker's embodied labor that produces the wealth in capitalist society. Secondly, this capacity to labor is both endogenous to the kind of creatures humans are and that which gets commodified in order to be sold at the labor market. This means that labor power is both 'naturally'[73] occurring human activity and a commodity. Labor power is, thusly, both alienating and potentially liberating, and its production process is distinct from the capitalist production process of other commodities. "The implications of this insight," Tithi Bhattacharya states, "are underdeveloped in Marx."[74]

Even though there is this potentially self-gratifying feature of labor power, it is important for Vogel that 'labor power' is not the same thing as merely having a body. She argues that it should be

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[72] Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, trans. David Fernbach, Reprinted in Penguin Classics, Capital, Vol. 2 (London: Penguin Books in association with New Left Review, 1992), Chapters 1-6, 115-270.

[73] Jaffe makes a note about how materialist analysis allows to attend to human biological constitution without making the 'essentialist' claim that human biodiversity and needs are universal across all historical junctures; Jaffe, 33.

[74] Bhattacharya, "Introduction" in *Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentering Oppression*. First published. (London: Pluto Press, 2017), p.3.

distinguished from the mere existential fact of embodied existence by claiming that labor power's "potentiality is realised when labour-power is put to use—consumed—in a labour-process."[75] Labor power is therefore embedded not within the mere fact of existence, but within tangible labor-processes and social relations. Such processes are determined by historical and material conditions in which a given form of social organization regulates the processes directing labor-power toward a given end. While, following Marx, every process of production entails in its occurrence processes of reproduction, Vogel argues that these modes are importantly distinct from one another. For her, this distinction relies on the product of each set of processes. Vogel argues, against the prominent perspectives of both socialist and Marxist feminisms in the 1980s that domestic labor indicates a secondary mode of production. "Despite the linguistic similarity of the terms production and reproduction" she writes, the processes of the reproduction of labor power and the processes of production of (other) commodities are "not comparable from a theoretical point of view." [76] Production processes involve some combinations of raw materials which are transformed through concrete labor, whose end result is a commodity; the destiny of which is to be sold. Reproductive labor on the level of individual reproduction is distinct from the production process, because its result is not labor power in abstraction, but various objects (physical and psychic) of consumption required for human survival such as dinner or a friendly conversation with a housemate. The result of reproductive labor is use-values which must be consumed or transformed again before labor power, or the individual's survival, is reproduced. But, this individual reproduction is not synonymous for Vogel with total societal reproduction.[77] Let us look more closely at the two levels of social reproduction in need of explanation: the daily individual processes of attending to one's

[75] Vogel, *Marxism*, 143.
[76] Vogel, *Marxism*, 144.
[77] Vogel, *Marxism*, 145.

immediate psychological and physiological needs and the larger processes of total societal reproduction.

Vogel states that individual consumption refers only to the individual reproduction of labor-power "at the level of the immediate production-process" but individual consumption cannot account for how "the totality of laborers are maintained and replaced."[78] The immediate production-process relates to the individual laborer's means of subsistence and the work put into those products to transform them into consumable resource. For example, the means of subsistence for a worker might be flour, eggs, butter, milk, sugar, and baking soda, but those commodities, which she purchased through the selling of her labor power, need a transformative activity of its own, baking, to turn those goods into an edible object, or pancake, which meets the workers biological needs. Vogel's point is that while the baking supplies necessary to make pancakes are a portion of one worker's or, more realistically, one family's means of subsistence, that in and of itself doesn't necessarily entail the reproduction of the totality of social relations—which is to say the cultural and hegemonic norms which form the social order in which individual workers find themselves. Said differently, there is not a one-to-one relationship between the reproduction of one worker and the reproduction of the global system of capitalism. Additionally, there is more than one way to reproduce laborers for Vogel, but one of the predominant modes within history is generational biological reproduction and is not internal to capital's accumulation, but is certainly shaped by its historical unraveling.[79] Consequently, Vogel distinguishes from human maintenance at individual level, which is to say day-to-day nourishment, rest, and hygienic practices, and the second level of social reproduction in which a whole society is made again.

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[78] Vogel, *Marxism*, 145.
[79] Vogel, *Marxism*, 146.

By distinguishing between these two levels of reproduction, Vogel locates the root of gendered divisions of labor not in the immediate subsistence needs of the worker or their family, but within the reproduction of society as a whole. The biological reproduction of human beings involves this second level of total societal reproduction. She writes, "the critical theoretical import of the biological distinction between women and men with respect to child-bearing appears, then, is at the level of total social reproduction."[80] Gender and sex are not necessarily entailed at the individual level of reproduction since one need not be gendered in order to cook, clean, and replenish themselves, but it is at the level of total social reproduction because the biological distinctions within child-bearing apparatuses occur across socially determined categories of sex and gender. By separating the individual and total processes of social reproduction, Vogel is able to identify the major theoretical issue within the 'Domestic Labor Debates.' By taking the family as the necessary site of total social reproduction, socialist feminists overdetermined the family's role in the material basis of women's oppression. The reproduction of one individual family does not immediately entail the reproduction of society as a whole. Certainly, these processes are connected. It is how this connection happens that most interests SRT feminists, and it is crucial to detangle them analytically in order to understand the relationship between patriarchy and capitalism. Vogel also identifies slavery and migration as important historical 'alternatives' to generational replacement of workers.[81] Because previous discussions about the reproduction of labor power had overdetermined the role of the family and the products of its productive activities, they were too far removed from a discussion about a "specific mode of production," meaning they are occurring at an "extreme level of abstraction."[82]

[80] Vogel, *Marxism*, 146.
[81] Vogel, *Marxism*, 147.
[82] *Ibid.*

One key demand of some radical feminists, notably Shalumith Firestone as well as others, was the demand to abolish the family. While the reliance of dual-systems thinking often produced a practical impasse on how to fight patriarchy and capitalism simultaneously, this demand coheres given the overdetermination of the role of the family within such analyses of the material basis of women's oppression. While it is not helpful to think that women or people with uteruses are transhistorically oppressed because of certain reproductive organs, it would not be accurate to say that human biological reproduction is without coercion by capitalist social formations. How to make gestational labor oppositional to capitalist accumulation has seen few treatments as compelling, transnational, and trans-inclusive as Sophie Lewis's *Full Surrogacy Now: Feminism Against Family*. Lewis' detailed account of surrogacy in India and the US as portrayed in Western and non-Western media reveals what she sees as a connection between discourses on sex-work and surrogacy: social stigma about making a naturally occurring bond of love and filiation into work and alienation.[83] Lewis chooses surrogacy as a case study, in my reading, because the gestators are paid employees and because the product, a human being, is also a commodity, not just in terms of capacity to labor in 16 years but the possibility of this subject's life was actually bought on a transnational surrogacy labor market. The position that Lewis articulates, one of family abolition, is treated in depth in chapter five of this manuscript as one possible way to frame reproductive struggle as a reformulation of care and kinship networks. What is relevant to note here is some underdeveloped thinking within this manuscript on the particularity of gestational labor within the wide arrays of practices which populate the capacious category of social reproduction. I am inclined to say that reproductive struggle as it relates to gestation in particular will require its own in-depth feminist analysis in order to consider how it might fit into a horizon of oppositional social reproduction.

[83] Sophie Lewis, *Full Surrogacy Now: Feminism against Family* (London: Verso, 2019), 41.

Some feminists in the 1970s and 80s were able to create the link between the individual reproduction of family and total societal reproduction by focusing on the surplus-value-producing character of domestic, or we can say following Vogel, reproductive labor. Susan Ferguson outlines two different perspectives of Marxist feminists which split over this question of the value of reproductive labor. Ferguson identifies Silivia Federici and Mariarosa Dalla Costa (two influential figures in the Wages for Housework movement) as well as Kathi Weeks as exemplifying a tradition of feminist Marxism heavily influenced by the Italian autonomist tradition.[84] These thinkers argue that in a technical Marxist sense women's reproductive labor produces surplus value since it contributes to the production of the special commodity of human labor power, an indispensable ingredient in Marx's formula for the accumulation of capital as previously discussed. Alternatively, the school of Marxist feminist thought which Ferguson calls the 'Marxian' school follows Vogel's argument, claiming that reproductive labor is productive of use-values but not surplus value, meaning it is not 'productive' in the technical sense.[85] Both schools, according to Ferguson, jointly agree that reproductive labor produces use-values, but the autonomist feminist school argues there is a transformation to those uses since the laborer who realizes the use-value is destined to sell their own labor power at the market and such labor power is partly derived from the aforementioned reproduction of use-values.

Ferguson points out that the issue of the commensurability of reproductive labor is one of the primary tensions in the autonomist feminist account. She uses Leonadra Fourtuni whose book *Arcane of Reproduction* is cited by Federici and many autonomist feminists as a central theoretical basis for their political work. Fourtuni argues, "the consumption of use values is a phase in capital's

[84] Mariarosa Dalla Costa, *Women and the Subversion of the Community: A Mariarosa Dalla Costa Reader*, ed. Camille Barbagallo (Oakland, CA: PM, Press, 2019); Kathi Weeks, *The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics, and Postwork Imaginaries* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).
[85] Susan J. Ferguson*, Women and Work: Feminism, Labour, and Social Reproduction*, Mapping Social Reproduction Theory, (London: Pluto Press, 2020), 123-130.

overall process of value creation *because the ultimate product, labour power, is a commodity*."[86] In order to ground this claim in a Marxist analytic, Fourtuni forwards two primary points. Firstly, that all socially reproductive labor whether it be paid, unpaid, or underpaid shares a "general character," and that secondly, as a result, any type of reproductive labor from one person is equal to that of another even if the actual activity itself (i.e. changing a diaper vs performing sex work) is distinct. Ferguson notes that identifying shared characteristics across a categorical instance does involve some level of abstraction, and she uses the example of trees: "If I say that all trees have trunks, I abstract from individual trees. But that abstraction proves nothing about the *value* of the tree or trunk."[87] In this way, we practically use abstractions to categorize and make sense of our daily phenomenological milieu. However, because the type of abstraction which concerns labor under capitalism, commodity abstraction, is about value, it is an abstraction of a different sort. This sort of abstraction involved in making commodities which are exchanged on the market is about making two distinct objects abstractly commensurate, which is to say exchangeable, even though the objects themselves do not have the same use-value. Even though the actual exchange value or the price might differ, the access of each object to be rendered commensurably intelligible and capable of being exchanged involves both objects being abstractly made commensurate. Since value renders two commodities, the apple and the knife commensurate, there must be a mechanism which determines the actual value and mediates this process of commensurability and that mechanism is the market. Reproductive labor, which is both paid and unpaid and therefore occurring both within and beyond the boundaries of the market, has no such mechanism to regulate commensurability across that distinction.[88] While formally paid reproductive labor might be regulated by market standards, unpaid or informally paid

[86] Ferguson, 123, emphasis original.
[87] Ferguson, 124.
[88] *Ibid.*

reproductive labor has no regulating mechanism within the economic market processes of capitalism.

Additionally, by claiming that reproductive labor produces value, the autonomist feminist school implies that all reproductive labor is commensurate through the aforementioned process of exchangeability and, consequently, collapses the two levels of social reproduction discussed in Vogel into one. Under this rubric, the totalizing logic of capital is achieved and reproductive labor is, just as wage labor is, fully subsumed by capital and its logic of accumulation.[89] This means there is no difference between feeding oneself and meeting your emotional needs and feeding capital's domination; they are equivalents. Even though there does seem to be a wider understanding within autonomist feminist work that this process of life-making and capital's domination cannot be simply a one-to-one relationship, the theoretical claims of the autonomist school does lead to this conclusion. For Ferguson, and the other thinkers inspired by Vogel, part of the special quality of socially reproductive work is this production of use-values, which supports life in the first-instance but is then mediated by capital in order to ensure total societal reproduction.[90] Just because we can use the two levels of social reproduction to parse out incomplete relations of domination within capitalism does not mean that the moments of mediation are immediately clear and necessarily distinct from this first level of individual needs-meeting. It is, in part, these incomplete moments of self-determination present in survival struggles under capitalism which I hope to clarify in this present work in order to facilitate the political possibilities derived from an SRT analysis.

Despite these theoretical limitations, I find it imperative to highlight some of the strengths of the autonomist feminist school: their agitation and incorporation of reproductive labor into class struggles. Some of the practical political concerns which undergird the autonomist feminist account

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[89] Ferguson, 125.
[90] Ferguson, 126.

of domestic, i.e. reproductive, labor are outlined in the 1973 pamphlet *Women and the Subversion of the Community* by Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James. It was the circulation of this pamphlet which created an international conversation among feminists who were frustrated with both the radical and liberal factions of the 'second-wave' feminist movement. Eventually, these women formed various chapters of the Wages for Housework (WfH) campaign in Italy, France, the US, and the UK.[91] This pamphlet is instructive because of the way it articulates the specifically political concerns that the WfH campaign had about housewives, or what they called non-waged workers. While the "universalization"[92] of the housewife figure as the universal class position for all women led to obfuscations in the domain of waged domestic labor, the explicit goal of the WfH campaign was to struggle against the conditions of housework in order to strive towards its abolition. This abolitionist stance I have seen falling out of certain understandings of social reproduction, especially those that concern practices of care.[93] The emphasis on the private household as a site of struggle, not merely, only, or primarily against a husband (as the radical feminists would have it), but against the boss, against capital itself, is instructive for my own purposes of mapping the terrain of political contestations within reproductive labor and practices.

Dalla Costa and James argue that Marxian political economy and, consequently, many working class organizations miss the way in which the wage organizes the exploitation of the non-waged laborers. This means that women's reproductive labor is seen as a "personal service outside of capital."[94] Dalla Costa and James uphold the basic formula proposed by Fourtuni, so their arguments around how reproductive labor produces value need not be rehearsed here. While it is

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[91] Silvia Federici and Arelene Austin, eds., *The New York Wages for Housework Committee: History, Theory, and Documents*, First Edition (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Autonomedia, 2017).
[92] Lise Vogel, "Domestic Labor Revisited," *Science & Society* 64, no. 2 (Summer 2000): 151–70.
[93] This will be the primary topic of discussion in the Chapter Two.
[94] Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James, "Women and the Subversion of the Community," in Women and the Subversion of the Community: A Mariarosa Dalla Costa Reader, ed. Camille Barbagallo (Oakland, CA: PM, Press, 2019), 23.

important to avoid the total collapse between the two levels of reproduction, their efforts at politicizing relations of love and care cannot be underestimated. On this front, there are two instructive lessons that the WfH campaign brings to the strategies around political movement-building. Firstly, the historical and technological developments which occur within the processes of industrial production such as the double-edged swords of automation or trade union organizing cannot be seamlessly applied to the struggles against reproductive labor. Secondly, borne out of the qualitative difference of reproductive labor, the most salient and problematic difference for non-waged laborers under capitalism is the isolation of the reproductive worker in the home. The housewife's isolation to the home deprives her of crucial social knowledge necessary to assert oneself as the subject of social revolt. Not only is the housewife alone at her place of work, she is indoctrinated to understand her exertion of labor power to be understood as love and therefore not subject to objective historical conditions. This primary concern shines through when the WfH organizers call to bring the struggle out of the factory into the home.[95]

Without such acknowledgment, both theoretically and practically, on the part of the labor movement about the necessary quality of women's reproductive labor,[96] class struggle will stall out and, on the account of these authors, fail to offer both waged or non-waged workers adequate strategies for liberation. If the family as a social mode of organization, which is to say that which generates and regenerates in a mediated fashion, is mistaken as mere superstructure or accidental to capital's accumulation, our organizing strategies will "always perpetuate and aggravate a basic contradiction in the class struggle, and a contradiction that is functional to capitalist development."[97]

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[95] Dalla Costa and James, 25.

[96] As aforementioned, for WfH organizers reproductive labor is productive of surplus value; I argue following Vogel against this position. However, reproductive labor is a necessary condition for capitalism's maintenance. Given the historical milieux at the time, what I want to highlight and uplift from the WfH position is that the working class needs a strategy to address reproductive labor even if the strategy they proposed needs revision. Without such a strategy, working class struggle will be incomplete and ineffective at adequately confronting capital.

[97] Dalla Costa and James, 30.

Instead, the authors suggest that we start strategizing and understanding the forms of struggle that break the housewife out of her isolation and embolden the social struggle. They acknowledge the practical consequences of their theoretical argument are not about doing domestic work better or more effectively. They write, "the starting point is … how to find a place as protagonists in the struggle: that is, not a higher productivity of domestic labor but a higher subversiveness in the struggle."[98] In this way, Dalla Costa, James, and other proponents of this autonomist feminist perspective on domestic labor foreground the practical political involvement of women in struggling against the conditions of their reproductive labor. This is the most beneficial and indispensable aspect of the autonomist school's work. Now, I will turn toward elaborating contemporary marxist feminist scholarship which seeks to further Vogel's foundational work. Representative of this Marxian school of social reproduction feminists are recent scholars such as Cinzia Arruzia, Tithi Bhattacharya, Sue Ferguson, Holly Lewis, David McNally, and others who return to both Vogel and Marxian political economy in order to more accurately define the terrain of social reproduction and its disparate processes and practices in efforts to make feminism anti-capitalist again.

Ferguson argues that the Marxian school helps unpack the different degrees of subsumption based on the relation different labor processes have to capital's mediation of their reproductive conditions. She writes that "labour resists total subsumption by capital precisely because there can be no labour without life—without a living human being, whose life needs can and will reassert themselves against capital time and again."[99] Neither wage labor nor unwaged reproductive labor is totally subsumed by capital, even though it can often feel that way for workers. SRT scholars such as Ferguson et al claim that because reproductive labor is unproductive of surplus value, it is less mediated and subsumed by capital's drive for accumulation. Socially reproductive labor can result in

[98] Dalla Costa and James, 130.
[99] Ferguson, 126.

more conscious subversion of the disciplinary norms of such reproductive labor. While I cautiously affirm this claim in the instance of unwaged reproductive labor, Martha Gimenez helpfully illuminates that the situation of waged domestic workers is markedly different.[100] I disagree with the claim that Gimenez makes about unwaged domestic work being unalienated labor as I think SRT helpfully demonstrates the direct link between this work and capital's continued accumulation; however, capital's disciplinary dictates around domestic labor do not, as mentioned above, come in the form of market discipline when that labor is unwaged.[101]

Consequently, it is precisely the Marxist feminist task to unpack the way capitalism and its safeguards in the state use social institutions such as education and social services as mechanisms to incentivize certain socially reproductive formations by disciplining those who do not conform. So while Marx incorrectly stated that the ruling class can safely leave the reproduction of the working class to our animal instincts, the ways in which the ruling class incentivizes certain kinds of caring formations is often a varied, historically-distinct process with changing norms.[102] While unwaged domestic labor is certainly not free from mediation by capital's interest, I am inclined to say that its features are distinct from waged socially reproductive labor. In the latter instance, surplus value can be created in the process of waged care labor, like in the US private healthcare and insurance systems. Ferguson notes that those who receive a wage for reproductive labor often have less capacity to negotiate more autonomy through reproductive tasks, as teachers and public sector workers are accountable to ruling class bureaucracy and paid domestic workers are often isolated without fellow workers or union support.[103] It is also true that the relative degrees of autonomy

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[100] Martha Gimenez, "Loving Alienation: The Contradictions of Domestic Work," *Marx, Women, and Capitalist Social Reproduction: Marxist Feminist Essays*. Historical Materialism Book Series 169 (Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2019), 257-273.

[101] This is less and less the case as waged reproductive labor and reproductive resources themselves (e.g. fast food) continue to become increasingly commodified in late-stage or neoliberal capitalism. This process is at the center of my concerns in the next chapter and will be discussed at length.

[102] Vogel, 155-156.

[103] Ferguson, 127-128.

within the family as one of the primary units of social reproduction is deeply influenced by the white supremacy of capitalism and the racism of the ruling classes as is evident within Dorothy Roberts's work on the family policing system.[104] The differences in the experience and mediation of reproductive labor is one of the strongest aspects of the Marxian school's perspective, but there remains some underdeveloped thinking on the difference between waged and unwaged reproductive labor. Even so, since not all socially reproductive labor is commensurate, the Marxian school can identify different degrees of subsumption and, consequently, make more strategic decisions about which reproductive tasks around which to mobilize a political project. Despite the fact that all reproductive labor reveals that structural relationship to capital, due to different degrees of subsumption there may be a myriad of tactics necessary to introduce and increase the levels of subversion present in different reproductive practices. Consequently, the contours of reproductive struggles will differ significantly along this axis.

The 2017 publication of *Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentering Oppression* asserted the recent relevance and influence of the interdisciplinary set of scholars who embrace the Marxian school perspective of SRT. In particular, Tithi Bhattcharya's contribution "How Not to Skip Class: Social Reproduction and the Global Working Class" highlights two primary goals of SRT scholarship: (1) firstly, to present a more intersectional and power-sensitive understanding of the dynamic and complex processes of class composition, in particular within the working class, in order to (2) secondly, offer practical suggestions of understanding struggles beyond the immediate point of production (i.e. the workplace) as part and parcel of class struggle. One of the "unique" aspects of labor-power is that while integral to the process of production, it is not produced by capital or

[104] Dorothy E. Roberts, *Torn Apart: How the Child Welfare System Destroys Black Families--and How Abolition Can Build a Safer World*, First edition (New York: Basic Books, 2022).

capitalistically.[105] But labor-power does not magically appear. It is not, contrary to the stories told to children about procreation, something a mystical being drops down from the sky onto the family unit's doorstep. Thus, Bhattacharya, following marxist scholar Michael Lebowitz, argues that when considering Marxian political economy, there is a "*missing* circuit of production and reproduction, that of labor-power."[106] When we engage this missing circuit of production, the one alluded to but not formally theorized in Marx's own work, the commodity is also revealed to have a secondary characteristic not visible from only one circuit of production. Commodities are not only that which is produced by the circuit of (industrial) production, but also the articles of consumption necessary for the worker to attend to her bodily needs.

Within this second circuit of consumption and production on the part of the wage laborer, she is interpolated by capital to an incomplete degree. It is within the circuit of the production of labor-power in which we can distinguish between the valorization of human capacity by capital and the presence of self-directed individual activities which are exemplary of "a process of self-transformation."[107] Bhattacharya writes, "the goal of this process is not the valorization of capital, but the self-development of the worker. The historically embedded needs of the worker, which themselves change and grow with capitalist growth, provide the motive for this labor process."[108] So, we have begun to parse out the presence of self-directed activities geared towards a transformative labor relation with the self, even while capital attempts and fails to valorize all human capacities. In this way, Bhattacharya acknowledges, as Marx claims, that the 'social needs' (which I have also been calling "reproductive resources") of the wage laborer are historically determined.

[105] Tithi Bhattacharya, "How Not to Skip Class: Social Reproduction and the Global Working Class" in *Social Reproduction Theory*, 80.
[106] *Ibid.*
[107] Bhattacharya, 81.
[108] *Ibid.*

However, the next step Bhattacharya takes is a departure from Marx, and in it we find what I argue is one of the fundamental insights of SRT—one I hope my own work can expand and deepen. The Marxian school argues that these social needs, a worker's access to them, and her understanding of their importance are also a result of enduring class struggles and political consciousness. The "basket of goods" which is required for the second circuit of production is not merely historically given or determined solely by the ruling class, but also in the struggles of the laboring classes to engage in the aforementioned processes of self-transformation. One infamous example is the struggle for the eight hour workday in the U.S. in the late 19th century. Due to a protracted struggle which included and exceeded burgeoning national unions at the time, including a riot with Chicago police in 1886 which led to eight anarchist men being sentenced to death for their alleged participation in a bombing, the working class of the time set the standard for the appropriate amount of time to rest.[109] And yet, while the eight hour workday was a positive change for living and working conditions of the industrial proletariat, as will be made clear in chapter four, it did further entrench gendered divisions of labor which came to define most of the 20th century in Western Europe and the US. We can understand this struggle as reproductive in nature, because it was about the resources needed while outside of the factory, including time to rest, have leisure, and recuperate. Now, we understand an eight hour day to be the standard in many industries, thought certainly not all. This standard of allotted non-working time is a result of historical struggle over reproductive resources from past working-class people.

In fact, Bhattacharya argues that because the entire process of commodity production relies upon a hidden circuit of production—the production of labor-power—struggles around social reproduction, arenas in which workers (waged and unwaged) fight for better childcare, healthcare,

[109] Haymarket Riot - Square Definition & 1886 | History, "Haymarket Riot - Square, Definition & 1886 | HISTORY," *HISTORY*, May 1, 2020, https://www.history.com/topics/19th-century/haymarket-riot.

community space, or rights for folks in marginalized social positions (such as transgender rights) may confront capital more directly and generally than a specific trade union's campaign against a particular boss. She argues that even though workplace struggles might have more easily identifiable antagonists, "where a struggle for a higher wage is not possible, different kinds of struggles around the circuit of social reproduction may also erupt."[110] Consequently, it is the struggles around processes of life-making which can demonstrate the limitations of trade unions in so far as trade-unions negotiate the wage-form as opposed to challenging its existence as such. The function of trade unionism to rebuff the revolutionary consciousness of the working classes have also been identified by those in the Marxist cannon such as Rosa Luxemburg in her famous pamphlet "Reform of Revolution."[111] While the history of trade unionism in the US[112] is a particular story about the relationship between anti-communism, imperialism, and neoliberalism, the limitations of trade unions as the Marxist strategy par excellence for political struggle also reveal the historical lack of meaningful attention paid to the sexual, gendered, and racial composition of the global working class.

It is worth nothing that this embedded circuit of reproduction, involving what Bhattacharya, Fraser, and Arruzza call "people-making" could be seen as a transhistorical feature of human sociality.[113] Processes of creating, maintaining, and nurturing human beings prompted SRT feminist such as Bhattacharya et al to mobilize the term social reproduction. This means that social reproduction, its intricacies, divisions of labor, and organization, is not a feature unique to the capitalist social formation. What is unique, and what positions socially reproductive activities as

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[110] Bhattcharya, 86.

[111] Rosa Luxemburg and Paul Le Blanc, *Socialism or Barbarism: Selected Writings*, Get Political 9 (London: Pluto Press, 2010), 46-68.

[112] Kim Moody, *US Labor in Trouble and Transition: The Failure of Reform from above, the Promise of Revival from Below* (London ; New York: Verso, 2007).

[113] Cinzia Arruzza, Tithi Bhattacharya, and Nancy Fraser, *Feminism for the 99 Percent: A Manifesto* (London ; Brooklyn, NY: Verso, 2019), 68.

potentially disruptive to capital, is the way in which the sphere of production conditions "social-reproductive work [to] produce and replenish 'labor power.'"[114] Another way to put this: under the capitalist totality, social reproduction and production are formally separated. This means that socialist projects informed by the SRT framework aim not to abolish social reproduction or even to say that the category itself carries a negative connotation. Because this way of analyzing social reproduction utilizes and extends the method of historical materialism, we can see the way historical developments impact socially reproductive labor processes which means that we can imagine what liberated caring relations of reproduction might look like under a class-less society. We might say that such a politics highlights this historically contingent mediation, exposing and (hopefully) negating the contradictions between the imperatives of human bodies and the imperatives of capital.

IV. Political Practice and Antagonisms in Social Reproduction; Concluding Remarks

So far, I have outlined the historical legacy of 1980s Anlgophone socialist feminism and the powerful intervention of the social reproduction perspective into Marxist feminist analysis. To conclude the chapter, I will describe some of the practical political dimensions of an SRT analytic toward which I have been gesturing in the previous section. While I see a lot of potential for organized oppositional political activity within reproductive practices, I do not think the possibility of broad coalitional organizing around reproductive labor has been well articulated in the scholarship under review in this chapter. Within the Marxian school of social reproduction feminists, there is an overemphasis on the feminist strike or strikes of waged reproductive workers like teachers as the first step in unlocking the role of individual social reproduction within total societal social reproduction. I propose broadening the scope of political activity beyond the strike by introducing reproductive struggle as a new conceptual category which can denote those class

[114] Bhattacharya et al, 68.

struggles around what reproductive resources are included in the 'basket' of social goods discussed by Bhattacharya. Reproductive struggle can help politicize ongoing caring and reproductive labors. It can, as I hope to demonstrate in chapters four and five, reinterpret the past instances of political contestations from colonized people, women, and queer folks over kinship formations, self-determination, and care within the framework of attempting to confront the structural dependence of capital on the reproduction of labor power.

Given my goal to create a conceptual tool to identify and agitate oppositional social reproduction, I am drawn to the explicitly antagonistic role that the autonomist feminist account creates for reproductive labor. They position reproductive labor as that which needs to be struggled through and against towards a comprehensive abolition—abolition, not of the practices of life-making and life-sustaining themselves, but of the degrading conditions under which such practices occur. This is a great strength of both their theory and their praxis, even while I do not find universal commensurability among all socially reproductive labor. I do not meant to indicate that some reproductive labor is more 'important' than others, but rather that there are higher and lower degrees of mediation and subsumption in various processes of social reproduction. Difference can be analyzed from a strategic rather than moralistic perspective. Crucially, what is needed then is a political strategy agile enough to identify these different degrees and issue strategic recommendations based on levels of subsumptions. Perhaps some aspects of social reproduction, while not totally subsumed by capital but still justified by its ideological apparatuses, will be harder to wrest free from capitalism's near total clutches.

In *Feminism for the 99%: A Manifesto*, Bhattacharya, Fraser, and Arruzza argue for a feminist political program which is intersectional in analysis and action, with the feminist strike as the epitome of an SRT informed political praxis. The *Manifesto* focuses on women's oppression in late stage capitalism and its differential international and racial dimensions, within women's role as the

bearers of the uneven burdens of social reproduction. In order to combat this, it is not enough to care better or more, but instead to disrupt and refuse the structural embeddedness of the various life-making activities that become mediated by capital's need for labor power. Some examples provided by Paula Varela include the teachers strikes of 2017 and a health worker strike in Neuquén, Argentina in which workers of different medical clinics and the communities they served came together to confront and block "choke points" of oil production in the region.[115] Bhattacharya et al also envision this process of refusal as deeply tied to wide-spread feminist strikes which move beyond the boundaries of individual workplaces into the collective social body as a whole. Because the feminist strikes in Argentina, referenced in the beginning of the *Manifesto*, demonstrate the fallacy that reproductive labor is free of capitalist disciplinary dictates, Bhattacharya et al claim that the new wave of feminist strikes can "overcome the stubborn and divisive opposition between 'identity politics' and 'class politics.'"[116]

Aaron Jaffe also emphasizes the role that demands around social reproduction can take within waged reproductive labor strikes, such as a teachers strike, as being emblematic of the broad range of organizing possibilities brought on by an emphasis on socially reproductive struggles. He writes of how the 2019 Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) strike had engaged in building relationships with community political organizations prior to the beginning of the official bargaining negotiations in order to " 'bring the communities' issues to the bargaining table.'"[117] As waged reproductive workers, members of the CTU sought to increase reproductive resources for their students' communities through an understanding that children's home environments directly impact the teachers' working conditions. Jaffe argues that the feminist strikes on International Women's Day in

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[115] Paula Varela, "Women Workers at the Heart of Social Reproduction Struggles: Theoretical Debates and Political Battles," *Workers of the World*, vol. 1, no. 12 (February 1, 2024): 44–51. https://doi.org/10.5281/ZENODO.10581469.
[116] Bhattcharya et al, 8.
[117] Jaffe, quoting Sarah Jaffe, 118.

2018 emphasized women's dual function as reproductive and productive labors, helping to "politicize women as both workers and as women at the same time."[118] This is an indispensable part of creating oppositional social reproduction; however, given the isolation of labor struggles to a particular worksite and a wide-sweeping disavowal contractually of solidarity strikes in many union won labor contracts in the US (my own contract with the University of Oregon is just one shining example), I do not believe the strike is going to be the political action which will unite waged and unwaged social reproductive workers. While the waves of labor strikes in the US during 2023 certainly have left the mainstream American media feeling an upsurge of support for labor,[119] these strikes, as Bhattacharya notes, often focus on individual bosses and corporations. In attempting to reveal the veritable egregious harms to workers from a specific company, there are fewer connections to wider struggles of social reproduction, especially those which occur outside of the market place. In fact, with mandatory bargaining creating a distinction between what is or is not relevant to a company or public institution engaging in contract bargaining with a labor union, the connection between the mode of production and mode of reproduction is disavowed time and time again and tacitly accepted by the institutionalized labor movement.

Bhattacharya et al emphasize the role of struggle as both "an opportunity and a school"[120] in the *Manifesto*. In struggling against the impositions of systems of oppression, exploitation, and domination, oppressed peoples not only identify a positive political project latent in their efforts toward self-determination, but they also learn new things and find new dimensions to their experiences as they seek to disrupt status quo reproduction. It is clear that those who are advocating

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[118] Jaffe, 112.

[119] Sainato Michael, "US Labor Movement Faces Big Obstacles despite Surge in Strikes and Union Wins," *Guardian*, October 31, 2023, sec. US News, https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2023/oct/31/union-labor-win-strike-obstacles.

[120] Bhattcharya et al, 55.

for uplifting the mass strike as a way to reanimate anti-capitalism within feminist politics know that strikes often engender lifelong lessons for committed organizers and even for "regular" workers. But the social reproductive strike is temporary by design, since meeting our individual needs over and over again eventually provides capital with the very raw materials we also need to survive, human labor power. Since we cannot stop meeting our need *tout court*, the socially reproductive strike is a gesture, one that certainly might engender new forms of consciousness. But, I think we need to find ways of articulating that germinal consciousness in modes that are ongoing; in moments that are mundane; and in moments that are epic political fights; we need a feminist politic which can refuse the liberal politics of purity without relapsing into the fractured particularism of post-structuralism. Reproductive struggles can be found in the feminist strike, but they can also be found in collective kitchens, romantic relationships, tenants unions, organizing for the abolition of police and prisons, and so much more. Urgently needed within leftist politics today is a unifying theme or analysis, but not one that subordinates all domination to class domination. SRT offers a way to actually explain how sexism and colonialism (as two examples) are informed by and also shape the experience of capitalist exploitation. Paula Varela begins to identify a third type of social reproductive struggle, stating that this type of struggle is heterogenous in nature, "whose demands are directly related to the possibility of the reproduction of life, even if they are not headed by social reproduction workers."[121] She lists French struggles against pension cuts, Black Lives Matter, and student revolts in Chile as examples. These are helpful places to start, but as she notes herself, often times these struggles are not considered in union organizing or labor organizing as legitimate forms of class struggle. And, in cases of reactionary union apparatuses, some of the organizers of such social struggles might even position themselves against forms of institutionalized labor organizing.

[121] Varela, 48.

The Marxian school allows us to see the ways that life-making escapes capitalist conditioning, even if only for sporadic moments in the past and present. This knowledge might assist feminist organizers in identifying which sites to infiltrate and radicalize before taking on other sites with higher degrees of subsumption to almighty capital. A communal kitchen for a student encampment in solidarity with Palestinian liberation might seem to be much less subsumed than a migrant domestic worker taking an extra 30 minutes to come home from grocery shopping. It is my intuition that while the same strategic interventions cannot be proscribed for both reproductive workers, there is an important connection between the two that can only go unacknowledged if we wish to continue to assume and affirm the divisions among the global working class. Ferguson claims that the Marxian school opens the possibility of organizing across the differently mediated practices of life-making under capital, which is to say waged and unwaged socially reproductive labor; she claims this to be a practical political benefit to this way of formulating reproductive labor.[122] I believe she is correct, but I contend that the overemphasis on the strike makes this an unfulfilled theoretical assertion. The emphasis on the strike as the best political tactic to agitate and organize socially reproductive labor might fail to account for anti-state political yearnings that are borne out of a large disregard for working class social reproduction by institutions of so-called social welfare. Not only might the strike fail to accurately criticize the state for its reproductive harms, but only focusing on the state-sanctioned strikes of waged reproductive laborers risks confining class consciousness within a system designed, ultimately, to limit and control working-class power. What we can learn from the autonomist feminists is less about theoretical debates about value, even though that clarity is crucial, but more about how to expand, complicate, and radicalize class consciousness. This would make it possible to bring people into a mass movement who might not

[122] Ferguson, 133.

even identify or find themselves within more narrow understandings of the Western, or in my own context, American labor movement. In her suspicion about the autonomist school, Ferguson is too dismissive of attempts to construct commons as discussed by autonomists feminists which seek autonomy from and opposition to capital. While this certainly cannot be the only organizing tactic for reproductive labor, as will become clear throughout the historical review of reproductive struggle, meeting community needs without the state's intervention can be an incredibly powerful way to begin to build the political consciousness needed for a mass movement. This and armed community defense was the primary task for the Black Panther Party in the 1960s.

I do not intend to deny the power of the strike as a tool of the working class, nor to refuse to consider the way labor unions and union activity in the waged socially reproductive sphere might demonstrate working class push back on capital's devastation of working class social reproduction. Rather, I would like to suggest that SRT is in need of a clearer theoretical tool which can identify disparate sites of a struggle over the means or conditions of social reproduction in an effort to unite those struggles as simultaneously socialist and feminist and, hopefully, anti-racist and anti-colonial. Therefore, the concept of reproductive struggle seeks to locate moments, historically and currently, of the development of collective, conscious action intervening in the conditions under which reproductive labor is demanded and performed. In the act of locating these struggles, coding them as strategies which deepen and expand class struggle, I hope the concept of reproductive struggle will also inform a feminist analysis of care, and its understanding of the so-called crisis of care. Questions of political economy have long fallen out of feminist discourse on care, which has unfortunately fallen prey to care's ideological and experiential comingling with love and survival. Reproductive struggles demonstrate the way that caring relations, practices, and labors are mediated by continued capitalist accumulation. Not only does it describe this as a fact of historical existence, but I want reproductive struggle to incite practical political application in grassroots organizing. Any

attack on capital which neither understands the hidden circuit of (re)production nor seeks to disrupt it will be insufficiently feminist and insufficiently anti-capitalist. Any politics of care which also does not attend to the structural chokehold capital has on care vis-a-vis the reproduction of labor power will fail to deliver the possibility of emancipated caring relations. The question of care and its role within reproductive struggles will now be considered.

Chapter Three
"Care Ethics and the International Division of Reproductive Labor: Towards Transnational Feminist Solidarity"

I. Introduction

Social Reproduction Theory (SRT) broadened the scope of Anglophone Marxist feminist analysis to move beyond its overemphasis on domestic labor in the 1980s. By identifying the way that socialized institutions of reproduction, such as schools and healthcare, have a structural similarity to unpaid domestic housework, SRT feminists proposed a dialectical materialist method to approach feminist research into "women's work" and its gendered, sexual, international, and racial divisions. This research was centered around the disparate set of practices which produce and maintain human beings. While some SRT feminists incorporate the concept of care and caring labor into considerations of socially reproductive labor,[123] positioning care as a point of political praxis does not emerge as a salient dimension of the literature heretofore reviewed. In efforts to understand reproductive labor as labor, SRT shifts its focus and rhetoric away from landscapes of care. Even though caring practices are just some of the pieces of the thousand piece puzzle that is total societal reproduction, discourses of care from other fields of feminist scholarship tend to elide material and historical conditions. This can inadvertently reproduce dominant narratives about women's 'natural' aptitudes for care.[124] In light of my attempt to use reproductive struggle as an analytic category to identify and instigate processes of social reproduction antagonistic to capital, an analysis of current caring labor—its ideological wrapping in mainstream American discourse, and its international, racial, and class distinctions—is crucial to locate the possibility of disruption and

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[123] M. E O'Brien, *Family Abolition: Capitalism and the Communizing of Care.* 1st ed. (London: Pluto Press, 2023); Nancy Fraser, *Cannibal Capitalism: How Our System Is Devouring Democracy, Care, and the Planet - and What We Can Do about It* (London New York: Verso, 2023).

[124] Nel Noddings, *Caring: A Relational Approach to Ethics & Moral Education*, Paperback ed., 2. ed., (Berkeley, Calif.: Univ. of Calif. Press, 2013). Nel Noddings is the author who most clearly demonstrates this pitfall of care ethics; however, throughout the chapter, it will become evident that this possibility pervades a lot perhaps the majority of the scholarship in care ethics.

refusal within caring practices. In particular, I review the subfield of feminist philosophy, care ethics, to evaluate whether the ethical imperatives proscribed fit into the current socioeconomic landscape of caring labor. In addition to offering transnational feminist perspective on how divisions of care labor are shaped by the commodification of domestic labor, I ultimately aim to ask the following: how might one reproduce themselves in opposition to the productions of life and death which mediate the neoliberal, white supremacist, and patriarchal logics latent in global capitalism?

The developments in globalization that would later be called neoliberalism have shifted the dynamics of reproductive and care labor, creating degraded living conditions in the capitalist periphery and an international division of reproductive labor. This division exacerbates the differences for women between the Global 'North/South'[125] divide.[126] Not only has an internationally and racially stratified division of labor intensified, but neoliberalism in the Global North has created a billion-dollar care industry which commodifies individual activities of reproduction and care, extracting profit from the needs of human embodiment.[127] In light of these changes, there is a renewed urgency to attend to the social, political dimensions of care within global capitalism as it continues to build upon and retrench racial, gender, national, and class domination.

In this chapter, I argue that the field of feminist moral philosophy known as care ethics has produced insightful contributions through emphasizing the role of relationality in ethics and the ubiquity of human dependency, which is to say that we will all at some point need someone to care

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[125] Throughout this manuscript, I have used the designations of Global South and Global North to denote different geopolitical positions within late-stage, neoliberal capitalism. While these terms have replaced the use First, Second, and Third world designations in Western academic research, I remain suspicious about the linguistic erasure of a very material hierarchy present between the countries with power and capital in the global capitalist order (the Global North) and those whose labor and resources are extracted and organized to meet the 'needs' of people in other parts of the world (Global South). Despite this suspicion, I am choosing both to follow academic convention as well as taking the cue from my interlocutors within the paper.

[126] Rhacel Salazar Parreñas, *Servants of Globalization: Migration and Domestic Work*, Second edition, (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2015); Silvia Federici, *Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction, and Feminist Struggle*, Second edition, (Oakland: PM Press, 2020).

[127]Premilla Nadasen, *Care: The Highest Stage of Capitalism*, (Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books, 2023).

for us in order to meet our most basic needs. However, care ethics alone cannot account for the mediation of life and death by global capitalism, and, as such, a transnational feminist politic of care interested in refusing co-optation into capital's death machine must seek out resources from developments in SRT. SRT feminists argue that the reproduction of life under capitalism involves a hidden circuit of production (e.g. that of reproduction) not directly addressed by Marx in his writings on political economy but demanded by the social totality that is capitalist society.[128] It is within this hidden circuit that the worker cares for and reproduces themselves, but not only through the commodity production process. The worker reproduces herself through consuming commodities like prepared food but also through activities such as sleeping and showering. Consequently, reproductive labor is both consumptive and generative. Within this process, the worker is firstly attending to her own embodied needs and also providing the capitalist with her labor power. Tithi Bhattacharya argues that as a result there is room for the "self-development" of the worker, or attending to needs that do not necessarily serve capital or produce profit.[129] Here the worker can care for themselves, and perhaps others, against the disciplinary dictates of capital. The question of how to distinguish reproductive labor that serves capital from reproductive labor which disrupts or antagonizes capital is the primary analytical problem that this manuscript hopes to address.

When care is understood as a part of social reproduction and therefore subject to changes in global market economies as well as ensuing class struggles, the recent historical developments in the changes to the global care economy and the international division of reproductive labor are clarified. My attempt to unite these two fields of research aligns with Premilla Nadasen's indispensable contribution in her publication, *Care: The Highest Stage of Capitalism*. Nadasen aims to re-politicize the

[128] Bhattacharya, "How Not to Skip Class," 80.
[129] Bhattacharya, "How Not to Skip Class," 81.

labor of care through critiquing the care economy, emphasizing the experience of women of color as waged domestic workers, and highlighting the radical care amongst grassroots political projects. I hope to bring her insights from a historical perspective to bear on philosophies of care, especially those which conflate the practices of unpaid and paid reproductive labor. Ultimately, I conclude that despite the insights from care ethics, many of the thinkers fall into the trap outlined by Nadasen in which feminist care ethicists fail to understand care as a labor relation and, unwittingly, forward a middle-class, heteronormative, and white feminine ideal as an ethical one.

Even though many aspects of social reproduction involve caring activities, scholarship within the SRT framework tends to avoid the language of care. This is a problem because mainstream discourses about care, especially as they have developed during neoliberalism, tend to individualize and commodify caring practices.[130] The necessity of understanding care as part of social reproduction, and therefore part of collective struggles for increased self-determination within those activities, is underdeveloped. To address this lacuna, I begin to cultivate such an account of a transnational feminist politics of care that is grounded in the current material and historical conditions of women doing the kind of labor that care ethics theorizes. By demonstrating the way that a majority of care ethics research fails to conceptualize care as reproductive labor, I turn to sociological research on international "care chains." This research examines a reproductive labor relation which is rife with precarity and internal hierarchies between women based on race, class, and citizenship status. By centering the experiences of migrant women of color who perform paid domestic work for mostly white families, we can see that even when gendered divisions of labor shift, they fail to be abolished or eradicated completely. This speaks to the indispensable role that care plays within capitalist social formations as well as the necessity of transnational feminist politics

[130] Nadasen, 14.

to reveal the insidious ways that colonialism, white supremacy, misogyny, and imperialism preserve the hegemony of global capitalist domination.

II. The Ubiquity of Care and its Affects

Care ethics opposes a dominant view in moral philosophy which relies on Kant's work to elaborate universal, rational principles through offering relationality and embodiment as essential features of effective moral reasoning. Initially presented as a distinctly feminine aspect of moral reasoning in Carol Gilligan's 1982 text, *In a Different Voice*, there are now many diverse applications and developments to the idea of care as an ethical, social ideal. Maurice Hamington in *Embodied Care: Jane Addams, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Feminist Ethics* distinguishes four important subthemes among care ethics literature: "care as (1) a feminine value, (2) a virtue, (3) an alternative to justice, or (4) something more than an ethical theory."[131] Within these themes, there is a shared emphasis on the relationality and necessity of caring relations as a consequence of human embodiment. Even though care is defined differently by different theorists, Hamington argues that we can think of care **metaphorically** as labor to emphasize its process-dependent nature and the effort it requires to perform care well.[132] The inclusion of metaphor here is particularly obfuscating because by claiming care is like labor, it is assumed that there is not a type of care which simply is a type of labor, like that of waged-labor domestic workers. I highlight the work of Eva Feder Kittay in *Love's Labor: Essays on Women, Equality, and Dependency* in this chapter because she conceptualizes care as not merely as practices, activities, and attitudes, but as labor—a labor bound up within relations of love.

Kittay claims in her path-making work of feminist philosophy that the relationship of dependency which occurs inevitably at some point in every human's life should be considered a

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131 Maurice Hamington, *Embodied Care: Jane Adams, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Feminist Ethics*, (Urbana Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 16.
132 Hamington, 35.

fundamental ground of moral reasoning. Not only does this relation of dependency pull from other feminist critiques of the liberal ideal of equality, but it offers something particularly unique. Kittay refuses to understand the goal of acknowledging the empirical difference in humans and advocating for the equal distribution of resources or assumed qualities of persons as contradictory.[133] Kittay creates a critique of liberal political theory through her understanding of what she calls 'dependency relations.' These relations entail a situation of dependence in which one participant cannot meet their most basic human survival needs without the assistance of another who does not require that same type of assistance (for example, like that of an infant). She calls this the 'paradigm case' of the dependency relation and acknowledges that it indicates a relatively narrow and specific set of relations.[134] However, she finds this to be a strength of her critique because if a theory of justice can incorporate the dependency relation in the most narrow sense,[135] it can more adequately address the relations of learned or, what I might call, socialized dependency. She gives the example of the dependency of a husband on his wife's domestic labor to eat, replenish his strength, and feel unburdened by childcare. For Kittay, an adult male capable of attending to those tasks by himself but who out of learned habit relies on his wife, perhaps to the point of learned ignorance (i.e. he does not know how to cook himself a sufficient meal), would not be this paradigm case; however, theorizing about the paradigm could reveal insight on this relation of learned dependency as well.[136] While Kittay notes that the paradigm case of dependency relations cannot incorporate all caring

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[133] Kittay, *Love's Labor*, 19.
[134] Kittay, *Love's Labor*, 36.
[135] It is worth considering how narrow this paradigm case truly is if all human beings will experience dependency at minimum of one point on their lifetime. More realistically, there are multiple periods of dependency and for certain groups of people with disabilities, these periods might be continuous throughout their lives. I think what is important to note from Kittay's account is the way in which certain 'dependencies' are socialized and therefore not warranting the same kind of moral consideration as an individual who cannot met their basic human needs without the assistance of another person.
[136] Kittay, *Love's Labor*, 42.

activities, there is a sense that all people will at some point in life be dependent, whether it be at a very young and/or very old age. This can give the paradigm case a ubiquitous dimension.

The paradigm case of the dependency relation issues an immediate critique to the concept of equality in liberal political theory. Kittay notes that fundamental to the creation of a democratic society is an idealized version of a self-possessed individual person who is independent and equal in quality of characteristics to everyone else within the social contract.[137] She draws from the dominant trends of feminist critiques of equality grounded in feminist legal theory which she calls the 'difference' critique, the 'domination' critique, and the 'diversity' critique.[138] While she finds strengths and weaknesses with each approach, she is particularly interested in creating a more robust response to the diversity critique which argues for equal inclusion and participation in society via democratic practices and institutions. In classical liberalism, the universal feature of human existence is that all individuals share properties of rationality and self-possession. This is the necessary condition which enables the actualization of democratic values. The 'dependency critique' also argues for equal inclusion, but states on the basis of human biological diversity that equality of character or kind cannot be assumed or utilized as a condition of possibility for democratic societies. Rather than emphasize the way in which material and cultural differences separate according to identity markers such as race, gender, sexuality, and national status which creates an impossible equality, Kittay's dependency critique seeks to identify a shared element of human existence. In other words, liberal theorists were correct to want to identify a shared, universal feature of human experience, but rationality and self-possession are not the appropriate characteristics because they are exclusionary

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[137] Kittay, *Love's Labor*, 9.
[138] Kittay, *Love's Labor*, 14.

of care givers and care receives within the dependency relation. She writes, "we are all–equally–some mother's child," to universalize the relationality of care.[139]

Equality could be a valuable feminist political category in so far as the quality which denotes humanness is not an abstract property of the human mind but a relation of giving, maintaining, and nurturing our own and each other's lives. She writes that, "if we begin our thinking not with persons as they are individuated nor with the properties that pertain to them as individuals, their rationality and their interests, but with persons as they are in connections of care and concern, we consider commonalities that characterize this relatedness."[140] The elevation of relationality to a status of ontological truth is a prominent feature of care ethics; even when specific thinkers disagree about the role of femininity within caring relations, whether care is an attitude or principle, and how to more equitably distribute care, all agree that the highly individuated and rationalistic accounts of moral theory reinforce masculinist logics and perhaps even further patriarchal domination. Because care is, in some important sense, endemic to the kinds of creatures that humans are, it is necessary in any and all sociopolitical and economic formations. Both care and social reproduction are transhistorical features of human sociality. In what follows, I summarize the way that care comes to be demanded of dependency workers, which highlights the structural qualities of vulnerability and coercion within the liberal management of caring obligations. Then, I assess whether care ethics' admiration and insistence on the concept of care resists or is subsumed by the neoliberal care economy.

The universal status of the dependency relation challenges moral theorists to refuse a conception of ethics as originating solely from a voluntary status, but relations of domination should not be valorized through appealing to a language of care. Kittay and many other care ethicists do not

[139] Kittay, *Love's Labor*, 31.
[140] Kittay, *Love's Labor*, 33.

want to classify caring obligations which are derived out of coercion as legitimate moral claims. Using the example of the learned dependency of slaveholders to the enslaved people who performed domestic and caring labor from Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*, Kittay identifies a situation in which dependency workers are immorally coerced to perform indispensable labor.[141] She argues that the way in which dependency unravels, for example under the inhuman conditions of slavery, impacts the moral validity of care claims. Despite the hopefully common sense response that a former slaveholder does not have a moral claim to receive care from a newly emancipated Black subject in post-bellum America, Kittay argues that some socially conditioned relations of dependance may in fact carry moral validity. Through her emphasis on justice for the dependency worker, Kittay is interested in expanding the possibility for dependency workers to feel empowered by their work rather than unjustly bound to it because of their gender, race, or class. Part of the problem with classical Western ethics is its reliance on a voluntaristic model that takes freely promised obligations to be the opposite of coercion.

The vulnerability of the dependency worker to the morally valid obligations of care work demonstrates the false binary between freely chosen obligations and coercion. If we bracket the historical and contemporary experience of enslavement or servitude, a large portion of unpaid dependency relations occur outside of contractual labor relations. Paid care work has increased significantly since the 1980's. The political and economic conditions which contribute to that phenomenon will be treated in detail in the following section. However, for the unpaid dependency worker in particular, the binaristic model of choice does not accurately reflect the perceived validity of caring obligations. It is a matter of historical injustice that women have been assigned a large portion of dependency work, but it is not merely this division of labor that needs rectification. Even

[141] Kittay, *Love's Labor*, 64.

though this forced gendered division of labor is unjust, Kittay does not argue women should or even can simply refuse this societal expectation, since it is a universal feature of human embodiment, meaning harm will be caused if forms of necessary and morally permissible dependency work are refused. The demand for care is socially proscribed through gendered divisions of labor on a societal level and on the individual level, and this demand for care is coming from the "other" in need of care and not the individual dependency worker themself.

Even though this demand for care on the part of the dependent is neither freely chosen nor originating from the dependency worker themself, the dependent's need for care is morally justifiable and, therefore, a public matter of concern for social organization. Kittay writes, "were we to refuse to take on responsibility in these nonvoluntary, but noncoerced relationships … we would throw into question our capacity for acting both decently and justly."[142] The dependency critique attempts to acknowledge but also resolve this ambiguity. Consequently, Kittay wants to flip the typical agent of concern within the dependency relation from the cared-for to the dependency worker or carer because the discourses which naturalize the vulnerability of the workers who are disproportionally feminized subjects (e.g. women, but in particular women of color and colonized women and people more broadly) create unjust living and caring conditions for the carers.

Part of the precarity experienced by the dependency worker is the sense of self required for effective dependency work. Kittay argues that a necessary feature of dependency worker's subjectivity is that the worker have a 'transparent self.' While acknowledging that no individual self is ever completely transparent, she defines the transparent self as necessary for dependency work, writing, "the demands of dependency work favor a self that is accommodating to the wants of another; that is, a self that defers or brackets its own needs in order to provide for another's."[143]

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[142] Kittay, *Love's Labor*, 68.
[143] *Ibid.*

Kittay gives the examples of a parent waking up in the middle of the night to feed a hungry infant. Even though the parent might be very tired and need to rest quietly in order to fulfill their basic human needs, there is a temporary override of the caretaker's own needs in order to fill the urgent need of the infant. In this instance, the caretaker overrides their own needs in part because the infant is unable to feed themself. Kittay emphasizes that this transparent self "when look[ing] to gauge its own needs, see[s] first the needs of another."[144] The other-directedness of this sense of self, often considered a feature of feminine subjectivity from a long line of feminist philosophers from Simone de Beauvoir to Luce Irigaray, is not a wholly positive attribute of the dependency worker; however, Kittay claims to be uninterested in the feminist debates about the reactionary or revolutionary character of this type of feminine comportment. Her goal is only to explain that dependency work requires this kind of self to be effective and morally permissible.

I am both compelled and troubled by Kittay's refusal to engage in a value-laden argument about the reactionary or revolutionary nature of the transparent self. Given her claims that moral obligations made upon a dependency worker which originate from social situations of injustice are not valid, I do not think she can shy away from the potentially damaging way that the late-stage patriarchal, imperial, and colonial capitalist hegemony relies upon features of a gendered feminine self which must be confronted, and perhaps refused. In a social world structured by a public ethic of care, which is called for at the end of *Love's Labor* as well as in more recent work, would the pragmatic need of the transparent self disappear? Would not the dependency worker be able to acknowledge her own needs simultaneous to that of her charge and have a social safety net such that she might be able to prioritize herself in a morally justifiable way? I do not intend to forward a two-dimensional understanding of feminine gendered practices and behaviors as only a result of

[144] Kittay, *Love's Labor*, 59.

oppression,[145] but confronting and refusing patriarchy might entail some amount of self-deconstruction for those of us coercively gendered as women. The sanctity of the self as the sole origin of morally defensible claims is also a feature of liberal theory that Kittay seeks to disrupt.

In contrasting the free and equal persons of a well-ordered society against the bondsman or slave, Rawls argues that part of the domination of the enslaved person is that the originator of 'valid' claims (i.e. the originator of moral and political decision) is not the person themself but the another, the slaveholder. The freedom guaranteed within the well-ordered society comes from the capacity to articulate and act upon your own subjectivity; similarly, even outside of the property relation that is slavery, any claims which originate in assigned social roles or expectations are not self-originating or self-authenticating claims for Rawls.[146] Within the dependency relation, the source of the valid moral claim to be cared for does not originate from the dependency worker herself on two accounts. The demand for care is socially proscribed through gendered divisions of labor on a societal level and on the individual level. It comes from the "other" in need of care and not the individual dependency worker themself. Even the move that Rawls makes in his later work to reframe the notion as self-authenticator, which is to say we can consent to the claims made upon us from the outside, still cannot account for the partially coercive nature of the dependency relation.[147] Kittay cites a number of cases such as professional healthcare settings, where there is a legal precedent to subordinate more just working conditions for healthcare workers due to the life-and-death nature of the care they are performing. For example, a nurse can be legally forced to work overtime in an 24hour rehabilitation facility if her scheduled replacement does not show up to work.[148] More importantly,

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[145] Leslie Feinberg, *Transgender Warriors: Making History from Joan of Arc to Dennis Rodman*, Second Edition, (Boston, Mass: Beacon Press, 2005).
[146] Kittay, *Love's Labor*, 103.
[147] Kittay, *Love's Labor*, 105.
[148] *Ibid.*

by utilizing a framework of rigidly-defined choice, the dependency worker is assumed to have voluntarily entered this labor and affective relation, reinforcing the idea that dependency work is not a matter of public concern. Kittay writes, "the contention that dependency work is freely chosen and results in self-authenticating, if not self-originating claims, pushes the problem of distributing dependency work back into the realm of the private—into private choice and so outside the purview of public demands of justice."[149]

Kittay argues that the transparent self is a necessary aspect of effective dependency work whether it is freely chosen or coercively socialized via modes of organization such as sexism, racism, or compulsory heterosexuality. There is an epistemological dimension to this feature of dependency work which is not directly addressed in Kittay's work. Namely, there are epistemological capacities which must be nurtured or diminished in order to recognize another person's needs. One must know what they are looking for, in a colloquial turn of phrase. Maurice Hamington foregrounds the epistemological structures which enable effective practices of care in his book *Embodied Care: Jane Addams, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Feminist Ethics*. He proposes that it is caring knowledge and caring imagination which emphasize the role of embodiment within practices and theories of care. This notion of embodiment demands that care move beyond the singularly moral dimension toward the question of sociality more broadly.

Hamington uses Maurice Merleau-Ponty's description of the embodied creation and acquisition of knowledge to detail how caring knowledge is created from the experience of and through embodiment. He then builds upon this notion of caring knowledge to develop the possibility of a caring imagination in which one can exercise the moral acumen of care without direct experience of receiving or giving such care on an individual experiential level. The caring

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[149] Kittay, *Love's Labor*, 106.

imagination expands in the final portion of the book to incorporate care as a social good through the work of Jane Addams. The cultivation of a caring imagination rooted in the shared human experience of suffering and flourishing serves as the foundation for the application of caring knowledge which can be applied both to immediate others (e.g. community members) and distant others (e.g. people in other geographical locations). In this way, Hamington's ethical considerations involve epistemological processes which are rooted in and based on the shared human experience of embodiment.[150]

Care requires knowledge on Hamington's account, "because it is difficult, if not impossible to care for someone or something that is entirely unknown."[151] This expresses the longstanding insight from care ethics that care as a philosophical category privileges relationality. Even so, caring knowledge is necessary but not sufficient for care. In this way, the motivation to care and in fact the practice of performing care involves the particularities of a "concrete other."[152] But, how might one gather this knowledge necessary to care for a particular other? Unlike the deployment of rational principles, caring knowledges are about a web of relational meanings, experiences, and affections which come together through habituation to direct our caring attention and labors. In fact, Hamington writes that, "the affective aspect of knowledge—the unarticulated, felt dimension—is what makes caring possible."[153] The collection of sensory information stored in our bodies, often at a pre-reflective level, directs us affectively toward the deployment or withholding of care. I understand this to be a type of inclination or attention within the perceptual field based on our habituated embodiment. How do we know when to dispense or withhold such care? Hamington suggests that attention to our own bodies direct us within these processes.

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[150] Hamington, 39.
[151] Hamington, 42,
[152] Hamington, 43.
[153] Hamington, 45.

In fact, the universality of human embodiedness is also that which makes attending to the body also attending to the world in which the body finds itself. Perception is the focal point of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological method and it is always oriented toward a given horizon, which is to say a concrete world. Hamington argues that Merleau-Ponty, "posits a theory of perception that is inherently sensitive to interconnectedness because perception cannot be separated from the body or the world."[154] This relational account of perception challenges the traditional division between knower and known. In Western moral theory, the agent of knowledge is the knower who acts within and upon a passive entity or environment which they seek to understand. Hamington suggests that Merleau-Ponty's theory of perception, also called the body-schema, creates the conditions for that which is attempting to be known, i.e. one's material environment, to also be an active agent in epistemological production. Furthermore, this dynamic account of perception which affords the world a more generative role in epistemology recognizes that habituated knowledges to direct or influence the attention of someone's perceptual field even if subconsciously. It is the pre-reflective influence of embodied habits of care that Hamington argues can be elevated to the status of ethical ideal. The cultivation of a caring imagination assists those moral agents without pre-reflective habituated knowledge of effective caring responses.[155]

The necessity of resisting the subject/ object distinction in classical epistemology also features in the way Merleau-Ponty's idea of flesh serves as a metaphysical grounding of ethics. The category of flesh emphasizes the universal experience of the embodiedness of human consciousness, and does so simultaneously at the metaphysical and material levels. When someone reaches out to shake your hand, for example, the embrace contains both a touching and touched dimension for both hands. Even if one hand initiated the embrace, the other accepted by 'shaking' back at the

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[154] Hamington, 48.
[155] Hamington, 49.

greeter. Here, again, we see the distinction between actor and acted upon (e.g. environment) being applied to intersubjective human relations, so that the acted upon is not merely a perceptual horizon, but another embodied consciousness. Hamington argues that, "because I share a corporeal existence with other beings, we to some extent share sensory perceptions and understandings."[156] The continuity that allows for two or more embodied consciousnesses to share perceptions and understandings is not a seamless transference or overcoming of the physical division of the two entities; it becomes "intercorporeal" insofar as it identifies the shared axis of "what it is to be other, and what it is to be me."[157] In the handshake, we are both others for another and subject for ourselves. Hamington identifies this as the body's reversibility—a mechanism which allows one to perceive their body both as an object in the world and as a subject which acts upon that same world. This capacity for duality comes from the perceptual horizons produced by our sensory capacities, which are contingent on the embodied consciousness of subjectivity both for ourselves and for others.

The structure of human consciousness indicated through this focus on the reversibility of the flesh provides the capacity to use a shared experience of embodiment to help understand the others who populate our perceptual horizons, but it does not give us particular content of another person's specific embodied experience. In order to bridge this gap of experiences that are not primordial to us, we have to mobilize the practice of empathy in order to develop a caring imagination. Building off of the work of Edith Stein, Hamington argues that empathy has a transcendental feature, allowing someone to surpass the limits of their own individual consciousness. He writes, "my body has primordial experiences that provide the imaginative basis for affectively

[156] Hamington, 52.
[157] *Ibid.*

understanding possibilities."[158] While embodiment provides a basis for a type of proto-universal knowledge that can surpass the individual consciousness, this claim demonstrates the way this capacity of imaginative understanding is ultimately grounded in one person's own primordial experiences, both in content and in form. Primordial experiences build up, or sediment as Merleau-Ponty describes it, to form habituated modes of embodiment. Oftentimes, these habits are born through primordial experiences, but they are not completely determined by them.

Because the environment (e.g. world) or the other (e.g. the reversibility of flesh) can be an active generator of knowledge within this epistemological process, caring habits can be adapted from immediate first-person experiences and extrapolated when even thinking about an experience of harm that one might not have access to from the first person level. Embodiment serves as a universal human characteristic, but cannot populate the particular content of another person's embodiment into one's own consciousness without the use of imaginative empathy. Hamington argues that for Merleau-Ponty, "imagination [is] intertwined with the body–a bond between the flesh and the idea."[159] Consequently, imagination becomes an enormous site of possibility which unites the facticity of flesh with the abstract world of ideas and non-immediate experience.

Because the facticity of one's body does not "explain that world," but merely presents it to us and us to the world, defining and mobilizing a caring imagination is necessary to move from personal ethic to shared social ethic.[160] For Hamington, this involves moving the circumstances of care from the known to the unknown. The caring imagination is the construction of a framework of meaning which builds on and expands current caring knowledge, which is to say, the habituated and embodied knowledge built up within someone's first-hand experiences as a giver or receiver of care.

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[158] Hamington, 72.
[159] Hamington, 74.
[160] Hamington, 75.

The example featured in his book is about sexual assault. Even though Hamington himself might not have experienced sexual assault, he can mobilize both his own experience of care when he was harmed (e.g. his caring habits) and his "imagination calls on the bodily resources I do have to give me a glimmer of understanding," (e.g. caring imagination) to respond in a caring manner to a story of abuse.[161] While caring imagination is often pre-reflectively instigated by empathy, Hamington also proposes a more intentional use of critical reflection to adapt to complex care situations. At this site of critical reflection, understanding the relational dynamics of a given moral dilemma may allow for a caring imagination via critical reflection to identify a unique solution to a social problem that the mere application of abstract principles would not be able to do.

Hamington highlights the work of American philosopher and activist Jane Addams' emphasis on listening in a non-judgmental and inquisitive way as one example of a caring habit that could be transformed into a shared social ethic. Addams' work with women coerced into sex work in late 19th-century Chicago represents meeting people in need of care on an individual basis, which foregrounds relationality. Hamington argues that through listening, Addams was able to meet sex workers where they were at without engaging in the dehumanizing social narratives of her time about the value and worth of women engaging in sex for money or material goods.[162] Through the use of her habituated knowledge at Hull House as well as engaging with individuals in their particularity, Addams was able to mobilize a positive orientation of care toward a social ameliorative goal. Hamington writes, "in other words, care can be understood not as a tool for the status quo but as disruptive moral knowledge that can infiltrate and transform existing social systems in the form of social habits."[163] This is one example that demonstrates Hamington's desire for positive caring

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[161] Hamington, 74.
[162] Hamington, 99.
[163] Hamington, 81.

attitudes and practices formed from a robust caring imagination to disrupt the ideologies and perpetuation of noncaring epistemologies, which currently structure our social world.

Both Hamington and Kittay's approaches to care ethics foreground embodiment in a way that emphasizes the material and physical practices of care, even though affective dimensions are clearly present in each of their work; however, Hamington's call for an embodied ethic of care is unable to extend a sufficiently material analysis beyond the first-person individual consciousness. This trap of egoism is particularly prevalent in Hamington's appropriation of Merleau-Ponty's notion of the reversibility of the flesh. If we recall the example of shaking hands, both the touching and the touched are said to, in that moment, be both subject and object of human experience. While this might be true within one moment of the overall handshaking experience, if we zoom out within a scene to contextualize why and how a handshake is occurring, we might find a different story. Often, people shake hands in professional settings, especially during evaluative professional situations like those of an interview. Is it true that both an employer and interviewee occupy this scene as both subject and object? Even if the interviewee asserts themselves with a strong, but not too strong, handshake, this does not ultimately challenge the power dynamics and asymmetry of a situation in which one person is evaluating another person's value as an employee—directly impacting their access to reproductive resources like food and shelter secured through the wage.

Furthermore, there is a strong critique of the use of empathy for supposed liberal or socially ameliorative purposes made by Black feminist scholars, in particular Saidiya Hartman. For Hartman, a primary 'afterlife' or legacy of the chattel slave trade is the fungibility of Black flesh. Due to decades of being rendered a commodity, which is to say a good to be sold on the market, Black subjectivity operates not as personhood proper but as flesh, mutable and inhabitable by white individuals. The empathy mobilized in early white abolitionist writings often compelled the white readership to put themselves in the shoes of an enslaved Black subject and, in so doing, promoted

more fetishization of Black bodies than valuable political sympathy.[164] Even if one argues that the ontological import of flesh for Hartman differs from Merleau-Ponty (which is not an argument I would make), because primordial experiences are so fundamental under this framework, there is the subsumptive process of identification latent in the empathy needed to produce the caring imagination. This subsumptive process, in which an individual relates all suffering against their primordial backdrop, benefits capitalism by reinforcing the difficulty of intragroup personal alliances. For example, there are some social harms, perhaps including the cited example of a woman experiencing sexual assault, that cannot be related to either 1) a different experience of violation or 2) the same experience from a different embodiment. The concept of empathy, as seen with Hamington, is taken as a de facto good within care ethics, but I find that this does not acknowledge that some features of social life are not intelligible to folks without that primordial access. The uncritical adoption of empathy as a social good is one example of care ethics' inability to comprehend the way that effects of care are matched with practices of harm under ideologies of capitalism, white supremacy, ableism, heterosexism, and misogyny.

Even when mobilizing a caring imagination, the examples that Hamington provides demonstrate the way a moral agent is ultimately always referring to their own habitual knowledge in the final instance. Hamington, who has never been sexually assaulted, needs to refer in some way to his own experience of harm in order to try to extrapolate a form of harm which is experientially unknown to him. His experiences form the basis for extrapolation, and when his experience isn't enough, he might understandably turn to cultural narratives. But in this instance, cultural narratives within capitalist patriarchal white supremacy will not offer particularly productive models of survivor-centered care. Even if Hamington can respond with some level of sensitivity to the

[164] Saidiya V. Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey along the Atlantic Slave Route*, 1st paperback edition (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2008), 35.

disclosure of a person sharing her experiences with sexual assault, framing that understanding as an extension of his own experience seems like an erasure, one which is already happening in the dominant misogynistic culture in the US. In fact, this model of care, one which subsumes the experience of alterity into the ego under the framework of imagination, is not disruptive, but productive of the very systems that Hamington wants care to unravel. Furthermore, Hamington's social ethics cannot contend with forms of sociality or social connection which are based on exchange and mediated by alienation. I do not think that I need to extend a social ethic of active listening to my employer, who is quietly literally profiting off of my inability to feed myself three meals a day because of my low wage.

In more recent work, Kittay engages with disability theorists and activists to unpack the way independence features discursively in the struggle for disability rights. In *Love's Labor*, Kittay highlights the vulnerability experienced by the dependency worker in order to suggest a stronger sense of shared social, moral obligations owed to those who perform care within a liberal democracy. This emphasis, as well as her critical orientation toward the concept of independence, has received some pushback from disability theorists and activists. Specifically, when forwarding a social model of disability, the environment is seen as what is "disabling" as opposed to an individual body; what needs to be rectified is built and material environments so that disabled people can assert more autonomy and self-reliance.[165] While Kittay will not argue against the necessity of changes to a built environment, disabled people like her daughter, Sesha, will still not be able to complete tasks of self-maintenance like hygiene and eating without assistance from another in all types of built environments. Kittay's point here is that certain embodiments require dependency work regardless of social transformation of values and physical transformation of space. She argues that a public

[165] Kittay, "Care and Disability", 417.

ethic of care is not counterintuitive to disability rights if it also focuses on the "taking up of care by the cared-for."[166] Within this exchange, we can see the way that care, even within movements for rights of marginalized people, becomes associated with a devaluation of the body, both of the individual who needs care but also for the person who provides it. The nature of dependency relations as both nonvoluntary and willfully assumed demands a public account of these relations in order to ensure justice for both the dependency workers and the people who receive care.

Though Care Ethics seeks to elevate the reality of human connectedness through acknowledging our material dependency on one another, there is little to no discussion about the way our physical, material needs, which persist at all stages of life, are privatized, commodified, and thus hoarded within our social systems. Sarah Clark Miller makes a distinction between the material and ontological precariousness of human existence, e.g. that we can at any moment suffer a fatal injury as mortal creatures, and the precarity of social systems which build on this ontological precariousness through social categorization and deprivation.[167] Hamington never outright claims that noncaring (harmful) or acaring (ambivalent) attitudes are morally pernicious, but it is clear throughout the book that his positive project is to care more and better, not less. Though he acknowledges the unequal expectations of care based on racial and gendered categories, he does not elaborate the ways in which a caring habit or imagination might rely upon submissive features of feminine comportment which are only allowed to certain kinds of women that fit the ideological norm, e.g. white, cisgender, middle-class and straight, and do not subvert any social narratives whatsoever. Hamington does attempt to attend to critiques of care ethics literature which argue that

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[166] Kittay, "Care and Disability," 428.

[167] Sarah Clark Miller, "From Vulnerability to Precariousness: Examining the Moral Foundations of Care Ethics." *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 28, no. 5 (October 19, 2020): 644–61. https://doi.org/10.1080/09672559.2020.1804239.

the contemporary divisions of care labor elaborate the way in which care is stratified and mobilized in order to uphold certain social hierarchies likes white supremacy and heterosexism; however, his "attention" to this literature merely states that the caring imagination would include a self-receptive facility in which the carer acknowledges themselves as a worthy site of care. He claims that the caring imagination need not erode a healthy sense of self,[168] but does not indicate how one might prevent that in a subject who is socialized to have an extremely underdeveloped sense of self to begin with, which is to say 'feminized' subject, which includes but extends beyond the category of self-identifying women. Eva Kittay's account of existing care relations as partially coercive and partially chosen provides a more dynamic approach to the ambiguities of care; however, she too fails to adequately address the intensity of the coercive socialization of women of color and white women into caring attitudes and practices that perpetuate racial hierarchies.

Since a lot of care work, and especially the dependency work which Kittay details at length, involves reproductive labor processes, we experience it through mediating processes of alienation. This alienating feature of dependency work is more clearly visible through Black feminist accounts of care, which attend to both the power and the burden of caring for a community that is constantly under attack by the state and individual racist actors.[169] I am inclined to say that there may also be a difference in degrees of alienation when juxtaposing waged care work and unwaged care work,[170] but an adequate extent and descriptive differences of these two categories fall out of the purview of this chapter as it currently stands. When we consider care a fundamental part of both individual and total societal reproduction, it is clear that simply valuing these processes more or even creating

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[168] Hamington, 82.
[169] Mekada Graham, "The Ethics of Care, Black Women and the Social Professions: Implications of a New Analysis." *Ethics and Social Welfare* 1, no. 2 (July 2007): 194–206. https://doi.org/10.1080/17496530701450372.
[170] Martha Gimenez, *Marx, Women, and Capitalist Social Reproduction: Marxist Feminist Essays*, Historical Materialism Book Series 169 (Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2019), 254.

mechanisms for state-sponsored care fails to confront the product of our caring labor: the special commodity of human labor power. Women, cisgender and transgender, white women and women of color, queer women and straight women, do not care endlessly for the sake of its own moral superiority. We care because we have to, because someone has to take the responsibility of keeping us alive them. For those of us in any way marginalized, either by race, class, sexuality, citizen status, ability, or gender presentation, the state relies upon the production of our death both as a tool of discipline and as a counter-revolutionary strategy.

For marginalized communities, especially Black communities, non-white migrant communities, and queer and transgender communities (and the intersections therein) a politics of life is not merely about life, but about death. Certain ways of inhabiting the world are disciplined due to their ideological status as dangerous and threatening. This creates actualized violence through public spectacle of Black and/or queer death as well as possible and less fatal forms of violence which place subjects in a proximity of death.[171] Within this framing, care might appear as the antidote to such sociopolitical determinations of life. Care appears as otherwise. Yet, our survival continues to produce workers, both waged and unwaged, ripe for global capitalist exploitation. When care is combined with a political analysis or demands for material and social change, the capitalist class forecloses care. When care is seen as women's duty globally, the global ruling class celebrates care. One well-worn example of politicized community care is the Black Panther Party from the 1960s and 70s. The US state, in particular the F.B.I., mobilized anti-Black racism in the form of extralegal state-sanctioned killing via the infamous COINTELPRO program directed at

[171] Eric A. Stanley, *Atmospheres of Violence: Structuring Antagonism and the Trans/Queer Ungovernable*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2021); Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California*, American Crossroads 21, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).

Black radicals explicitly as a counter-revolutionary mechanism to quell anti-racist dissent.[172] Because this care within marginalized communities is both threatening to global capitalism and its entanglements with white supremacy, colonialism, and misogyny, and productive of it, a transnational feminist politics of care necessitates an SRT framework capable of outlining the sometimes resistant and sometimes complicit, always necessary, work of care.

It is from within such a framework that I argue Kittay's primary failures lie in an overdetermined positive association with caring affects and attitudes as the corrective to liberal social orders, instead of understanding how care is productive of the liberal order itself. Even though she acknowledges that care is partially coerced and, therefore, often performed under oppressive conditions, the orientation of the transparent self, which produces good care within these unideal conditions, is not challenged. The proposition of a public ethics of care, which Kittay calls *douilia*, is not to change the nature or practice of caregiving currently, but to value it as a social good fundamental to liberal democracy.[173] In other words, the gendered division of this labor is not eliminated, but instead those overburdened with dependency work, whether by choice, coercion, or some combination of the two, receive extra social support in order to meet their own caring needs. The principle of *doulia* would achieve two things: firstly, it would ensure via social responsibility that the relations of dependency are "satisfactory" for both the dependency worker and the dependent; secondly, that social, political institutions would foster an attitude or ethic of care by fulfilling this first requirement in order to make sure that dependency workers are not unduly disadvantaged by their labor.[174]

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172 Dhoruba, Bin Wahad, Mumia Abu-Jamal, Assata Shakur, Jim Fletcher, Tanaquil Jones, and Sylvère Lotringer, *Still Black, Still Strong: Survivors of the U.S. War against Black Revolutionaries*, Semiotext(e) Active Agents Series, (New York : [s.l.]: Semiotext(e) ; Distributed by MIT Press, 1993).
173 Kittay*, Love's Labor*, 75.
174 Kittay*, Love's Labor*, 117.

The public ethic of care is exemplary of the conflation of unpaid and paid social reproductive work at the heart of Premilla Nadasen's critique of the care economy in *Care: The Highest Stage of Capitalism*. Nadasen contends that the current discourses of care as a celebrated social good actually obscure the dimension of the labor of care, unwittingly participating in eclipsing care-as-labor with the notion of care as an exceptional human activity rooted in love. The discursive dimension of the care economy applies the principles and affective expectations of the unpaid caring relation to a wage labor relation. Consequently, care (or dependency) workers are valued on the depth of their affect and self-sacrifice rather than their ability to complete the practical activities of care[175]. Additionally, these discourses of care completely obscure the primary power relationship operative in paid dependency work, that of employer and employee.[176] Because a dependency worker is being evaluated both on her ability to look like she cares as well as the practice of actually meeting an individual's biological needs, the performance of affect becomes both a requirement of this work and a justification for disciplinary action should the worker appear to be affectively disengaged or resentful.

Nadasen's argument suggests that it could be analytically useful to distinguish between the social meaning and, consequently, the social relations of paid social reproductive labor versus unwaged social reproductive labor, even if both forms of reproductive labor ultimately secure total societal reproduction. The inclusion of affective economies of love, concern, and attention create a dimension of exceptionalism within care work. Presenting care work or dependency work as more important than other forms of labor paradoxically devalues it as labor, because exceptionalism cannot be separated from the social context in which dominating and oppressive social relations are called 'natural' within hegemonic discourses as a way of obscuring the actual harm oppression

[175] Premilla Nadasen, *Care: The Highest Stage of Capitalism*, (Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books, 2023), 68.
[176] Nadasen, 77.

produces. Let us consider the following example: women are naturally good caregivers. If they love to care and are so good at it, why would we change such an effective gendered division of labor? Of course, we need to survive to do anything at all, but thinking about care as 'more important' than any other kind of work only flips the dualism of production versus reproduction instead of understanding how they are dialectically constitutive. The naturalizing maternal discourses about care have persisted under neoliberalism, as families looking to outsource their domestic labor statistically are more likely to hire a mother than a single woman due to the implication that a single woman might not possess the affective dimension of care that a mother would even if she could and did perform all the same tasks.[177]

Ultimately, I aim to detail the ambiguities of care and social reproduction in order to identify sites that are more or less mediated by capital accumulation for the purposes of feminist political strategy. SRT scholars want to emphasize the possibility of cross-locational organizing between paid and unpaid reproductive laborers, but tend to conflate conditions of one with the other. For example, Aaron Jaffee lauds the Chicago Teachers Union for a valiant strike in 2019 in which the CTU won indispensable community resources for their students, like additional mental health professionals, in concert with wage increases.[178] Though I take some issue with the claim that Nadasen forwards about paid social reproductive work as being directly productive of surplus value,[179] her argument to situate the waged-labor relations of care as unique from unpaid social

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[177]Rhacel Salazar Parreñas, *Servants of Globalization: Migration and Domestic Work*, Second edition, (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2015), 55.
[178] Jaffee, 106.
[179] Nadasen argues that paid reproductive labor comes from a history of slavery and colonialism in which labor and resources directly produce profit without the mediation of the wage. This is slightly distinction from the autonomist feminist position reviewed last chapter. While I agree that the racial division of reproductive labor (Glenn 2012) stems from the history of chattel slavery, the relationship between the 'raw materials' and labor power mediated by the wage is unclear in Nadasen's analysis. What I take to be her overall goal, and also important for my own concerns as well, is that that paid reproductive labor involves particular processes of alienation and domination not found within unwaged reproductive labor. I also think that due to the mediation of the wage, some forms of paid reproductive labor do create surplus value. Nadasen and I agree about the capacity of waged reproductive labor to create surplus value. I think that

reproductive work helps create an opening for a discussion of degrees of mediation. Practically, this means some forms of care are ripe for the inclusion of radical political principles, and others, not so much. Or, perhaps more helpfully, different strategies will be required to disrupt the material conditions of care based on the degree to which the mediation of the wage is present. In the following section, I examine a dependency relation which is mediated by the wage, internationally reproductive of global capitalism, and essential to the development of transnational feminist accounts of social reproductive struggles. Following Rhacel Salazar Parreñas, a renowned feminist researcher on migrant domestic laborers, I consider the obstacles and potential points of convergence that feminist research on "care chains" presents to transnational feminist solidarity.

III. The International Division of Reproductive Labor Prevents Transnational Feminist Horizons

Distinct from an ethics of care which attempts to be a catchall term for both paid and unpaid forms of caretaking, an SRT analysis of the care economy as proposed by Nadasen illuminates a particularly new and salient dimension of care under neoliberalism. As reproductive labor becomes increasingly commodified, the available reproductive resources tend toward emphasizing the consumption processes, i.e. purchase a fully consumable meal rather than the ingredients which would require the domestic labor of cooking in order to consume. Capitalist profit accumulates off of our human embodiednesss and the need for care that it entails through the development of the care economy. Nadasen argues that capitalism has always caused harm through dispossession and destruction, but now "the care economy parasitically feeds off pain; that is, some people's pain translates into other people's profit."[180] Because of the evisceration of the public sector

happens through the wage and she claims it is a feature of on-going accumulation and extraction particular to racialized and colonized populations.

[180] Nadasen, 15.

and the increasing austerity measures prompted by neoliberalism, social reproductive labor is both undermined and intensely commodified. While this commodification might, on the face of it, seem like an opportunity for worker-power through unionization or, at the very least, recognition of practices of care as work, what actually happens is a gig economy and contracts with migration middle-man companies which often resemble forced labor contracts.[181] Domestic work is a great example of a social reproductive activity that has been increasingly commodified due to historical changes in women's wage-labor employment and imperialist practices. Rhacel Salazar Parreñas tracks the international labor flows of the care economy in her research on a wide array of care workers, from migrant domestic laborers in the US to club hostesses in Tokyo. Her extensive and decades-long research gives voice to one of the overrepresented minority populations employed as domestic workers—migrant Filipina women.

In the 1990s, Parreñas began her dissertation research by interviewing Filipina domestic workers in Los Angeles and Rome; this research was updated with more recent 2010 interviews for the second edition of her essential text, *Servants of Globalization: Migration and Domestic Work*. Parreñas argues that the migratory pattern of Filipina women from Southeast Asia to Europe and the US indicates the emergence of an international division of reproductive labor.[182] This research was taken up by one of her dissertation readers, Arlie Hochschild, who coined the term "care chain" to describe this phenomenon. In the essay "Love and Gold," Hochschild engages rich social science research about the work of migrant domestic workers with transnational families, that is, families in which some members live in different countries and often different continents. The working conditions for migrant domestic workers described in the essay are rife with abuse and mistreatment, often at the hands of a white woman employer. However, Hochschild frames the

[181] Nadasen, 20.
[182] Parreñas, *Servants of Globalization,* 29.

problem faced by these migrant women workers less in terms of dehumanizing working conditions and instead says that it represents the extraction of "emotional resources" from the Global South as a form of emotional imperialism.[183] The workers who feature in Hochschild's essay and throughout the collection as a whole detail horrific and concerning patterns of abuse of workers who are frequently undocumented, or if there is a legal status, it is tied directly to the employer. Following Nadasen, I worry that by talking about an international division of reproductive labor as an 'international heart transplant' two things happen: 1) an employer and employee relation is shrouded in moral ambiguities of familial affect but also, 2) women's role as caretaker for biologically or extended kin is thought to be her appropriate social location such that if there was no pesky imperialism, the migrant women of color featured in her article would be caretaking their families in the Global South *as they should*.

Contrastingly, Parreñas's own research deals with the naturalizing aspects of motherhood and gendered expectations of care more dynamically because she aims to understand the international division of reproductive labor as a three-tiered process. She notes that most of the women she interviewed represent a marginally privileged economic class in the Philippines who end up hiring a domestic worker in the Philippines to fill the 'gap' left by their westward migration. In this way, "in both sending and receiving countries, most women have not achieved a gender-egalitarian division of household work; instead, they have used their race and/or class privilege to transfer their reproductive labor with responsibilities to less privileged women."[184] Instead of focusing on the one-directional notion of extraction like Hochschild, Parreñas presents a more complicated process in the constitution of "the subject-positions of migrant Filipina domestic

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[183] Barbara Ehrenreich and Arlie Russell Hochschild, eds. *Global Woman: Nannies, Maids, and Sex Workers in the New Economy*. First Holt paperbacks edition, (New York, NY: Metropolitan Books/Henry Holt and Company, 2004), 27.
[184] Parreñas, *Servants of Globalization,* 29.

workers in globalization" as directly related to global capitalism, racism, and patriarchy.[185] Many of the research participants identified gender-related constraints as part of the motivation for emigrating, including domestic violence and abuse, wage work opportunities being limited to low-wage, 'feminine' professions, and the predominant ideological position of woman as caretaker.[186] Because gendered constraints are in part the motivation for migration, Parreñas categorizes this migratory phenomenon as indicative of Filipina women refusing and negotiating patriarchal constraints. But these negotiations of patriarchy's material and ideological strongholds occur within the context of global capitalism and, therefore, only partially address gendered dominance. The women in her sample needed to have or be able to acquire enough personal financial means to emigrate, which is often very expensive (over $4,000). So, despite the hegemonic narrative of the poorest of migrants facing continued degradation upon arrival in the West, Parreñas' research demonstrates that for some migrant Filipina workers, their ability to choose work in the West over work in the Philippines involves a degree of class privilege. She argues that the migrant domestic workers in her sample occupy a contradictory class position.[187]

While the Filipina migrant domestic workers fill a real gap produced by increased labor-market participation by women in both Italy and the US, the international division of reproductive labor indicates that the gendered and racialized expectations of women's reproductive labor remain the same as before the 1970s. Migrant Filipina workers fill this 'gap' in reproductive labor in a way which reinstitutes a racial hierarchy and, I would add, serves the reproduction of specifically the white upper-middle and upper classes, some of whom are also members of the capitalist class. Parreñas writes, "the incorporation of migrant Filipina domestic workers into the labor market

[185] Parreñas, *Servants of Globalization,* 30.
[186] Parreñas, *Servants of Globalization,* 31-34.
[187] Parreñas, *Servants of Globalization,* 117.

constitutes a hierarchical and codependent relation with their mostly white female employers."[188] This relationship is codependent in two ways. The migrant women of color need their white female employers to retain their middle-class status in the Philippines and to hire a local domestic worker for their own family. Parreñas notes her research participants cited the following reasons for migrating to work as a domestic laborer in the West: private school education for their children and material goods like TVs and washing machines.[189] The white women depend on migrant women of color in order to alleviate their socially reproductive burden, while at the same time, this seemingly ameliorative process actually prevents white women in professionalized classes from making demands for a more gender egalitarian way to divide domestic labor.[190] Namely, men continue to avoid the responsibility of reproductive labor. Consequently, this international division of reproductive labor "refers to a social, political, and economic relationship between women in the global labor market" that ultimately bolsters and continues the neoliberal trend of devaluing women's reproductive labor.[191] This further stratified division of reproductive labor does not confront the participation of women in total societal reproduction, and, consequently, serves not only capital's accumulation but also disunifies women at the site of their (previously) shared reproductive burden. Even though there is a sense in which affects are an important dimension of this antagonism, the overemphasis on affect traps us in a conversation in which the consequences of this international division of reproductive labor are de-materialized.

Nadasen, in particular, is very concerned about this overemphasis on the affective dimension of paid domestic labor for many of the aforementioned reasons. However, in her concerns over the weight of affect in obscuring the nature of waged domestic labor relations, Nadasen completely

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188 Parreñas, *Servants of Globalization,* 39.
189 Parreñas, *Servants of Globalization,* 58.
190 Parreñas, *Servants of Globalization,* 40.
191 Parreñas, *Servants of Globalization,* 41.

disregards the affective dimensions of care. This dismissal does not actually represent the complexity of the experiences of Filipina migrant women as recounted in Parreñas's research. Not only does Nadasen dismiss the affective dimension of care, a discourse which can be internalized by the domestic workers themselves, but she is suspicious of the overidentification of the role of gender within practices of care. She argues that social science explanations of the devaluation of paid care work as a result of the devaluation of labor associated with femininity and womanhood do not apply to this history of the development of paid care work.[192] She cites the participation of men of color in paid care work and goes on to claim that social expectations and demands of this work stem from the extractive dimension of racial capitalism. In this way, paid socially reproductive work is akin to the seizure of environmental resources as the raw materials of capital. Some social reproduction feminists, like Silivia Federici, have also emphasized the way that sexual reproduction in so far as it produces, or sometimes produces, humans also produces the raw material of human bodies for capitalist exploitation.[193] While the racial division of reproductive labor as introduced by Evelyn Nakano Glenn's historical work, has its roots in chattel slavery and only slightly shifted during Reconstruction, the primary argument that Nadasen makes about the care economy is about commodified practices of care that produce profit.[194] Under capitalist social relations, paid care workers produce profit often through their wages and not as a 'raw material' for the capitalists. In the political economy of capitalism, raw materials represent a one-time or infrequent expense. And, as was the historical case of primitive accumulation, the state colluded with the burgeoning capitalists in order to seize land for free from its previous inhabitants, either indigenous or nomadic.

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[192] Nadasen, 61.
[193] Silvia Beatriz Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*, Second edition, (New York, NY: Autonomedia, 2014).
[194]Evelyn Nakano Glenn, *Forced to Care: Coercion and Caregiving in America*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2012).

What is so particular about the commodity of human labor power is that it is in some sense the human condition of possibility for capitalist accumulation at all.[195] So, even though the capitalist class can extremely limit the resources it devotes to social reproduction, the processes of social reproduction which ensure human survival will never be completely eradicated so long as humans continue to exist. This is a contradiction in capital's logic because the use of energy toward reproductive labor also impacts the availability of labor power for wage-labor. Different historical moments and the particularities in the struggle between the ruling class and the "bearers of labor power" will display distinct ways capitalism negotiates this contradiction.[196] Reproductive labor involves both market interactions, e.g. purchasing of commodities such as food or hygiene products, but also transformative labor, e.g. cooking and showering. The increased commodification of reproductive activities, as we are seeing with the international division of reproductive labor and the care economy, means that less generative labor may be required to meet our basic needs. This is a particular historical change unraveling within the rise of neoliberalism, impacting the formation of late-stage capitalism.

An easy example that comes to mind is fast food. Even while the neoliberal care economy will continue to attempt to present commodified ways to meet all our embodied needs, I argue that the urge to perform generative reproductive labor persists. This is the case because of the affective economies of care cultivate relationality and vulnerability within the wider capitalist social formation which attempts at every turn to dissolve such connections. Contrary to Nadasen's critique that paid care work is "erroneously"[197] associated with gender, I find that this implicates gender as a critical axis in which the multiplicity of human activity within and beyond capitalism is revealed. In fact,

[195] Vogel, 144.
[196] Vogel, 150 and 163.
[197] Nadasen, 49.

Parreñas's research clearly displays the way that gender is constituted and reconstituted at every tier or site of the international division of reproductive labor through and alongside racialized and national contexts.

Both Nadasen and Parreñas share concerns about care as an inadvertently depoliticizing discourse. They describe a distinction between care work as a face-to-face activity aimed at the development of the recipient—very reminiscent of Kittay's notion of dependency work—and the less physically relational tasks of other reproductive labor, such as cleaning toilets or doing laundry. Women of color, both migrants and citizens, have historically performed this non-nurturant or non-relational care work and, therefore, the analytic of care may inadvertently ignore a majority of the care activities which constitute their labors.[198] While we might call cleaning toilets domestic labor, it would ring strangely in our ears if one were to say they clean the toilet because they have a natural aptitude for care. Both authors advocate that the category of reproductive labor is more capacious and therefore more appropriate for the kinds of tasks which have historically been delegated to women of color. Parreñas also claims that the work on care chains centers the relationship between the Global South and Global North, ignoring the third tier of the international division of reproductive labor, which results in further class stratification based on gender within the Global South. She argues that the situation of Filipina women who can pay to emigrate for domestic work cannot be conflated with those who cannot.[199] She argues that this concept of the international division of reproductive labor demands the to "be analyzed from a gendered perspective of the political economy,"[200] contradicting Nadasen's dismissal of gender as a useful category for paid reproductive labor.

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[198] Nadasen, 57; Parreñas, *Servants of Globalization*, 47.
[199] Parreñas, *Servants of Globalization*, 46.
[200] Parreñas, *Servants of Globalization*, 50.

I find the question of gender to be especially important given the differentials based on race and nationality presented in the current iteration of the international reproductive division of labor because of the problems it poses to transnational feminist projects. In her book *The Force of Domesticity,* Parreñas thematizes the way the international division of reproductive labor presents an obstacle to transnational feminist solidarity. The phenomenon of outsourcing domestic labor for (mostly) white women in the US and Europe is not merely a result of an ideological shift due to second-wave feminist discourses, but is also prompted by the dissolution of state-sanctioned and supported access to reproductive resources. She writes, "looking at the migration patterns of migrant Filipina domestic workers, we find that the more countries keep care of the family a private responsibility, the greater the reliance on the low-wage work of migrant care workers."[201] Additionally, the women who are outsourcing their domestic labor in the face of inadequate support from the state simultaneously benefit from the lack of human rights afforded to migrant domestic workers from the very same state which is undermining social reproduction. The various obstacles to full-citizenship status, even after years of employment through a work visa, prevent the migrant domestic workers from being able to assert their own rights to social reproductive provisions and resources. Despite the fact that women who receive and provide care are both limited by state-level attempts to completely privatize social reproduction, "the shared burden imposed by austerity measures divides women much more than it unites them."[202] This state-imposed austerity creates hierarchical and unequal relations between women, but Parreñas argues that both groups of women could share a relationship of antagonism to the state which devalues and degrades the work necessary to reproduce themselves and their families.

IV. Conclusion

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[201] Parreñas, *Force of Domesticity*, 56.
[202] Parreñas, *Force of Domesticity*, 61.

Overcoming this obstacle to transnational feminist solidarity is no easy feat. Despite my moderate critiques of Nadasen, I find that a majority of her argument is a necessary intervention to current feminist scholarship on care. Firstly, the political stakes of everyday caretaking activities need to be clarified. This articulation requires highlighting, not ignoring, the ambiguities of caring labor. Should we want to articulate a politics of care, then rubrics of purity cannot be used as scaffolding. While many SRT scholars highlight and revere the practice of striking, it is clear from the experience of migrant domestic workers and the precarity of commodified social reproduction that striking with legal protection or support is not the only way to politicize and fight against capital's domination of care. It is precisely because capitalism not only benefits from our everyday practices of care but also created an entire billion-dollar industry through which to divert the political potential of care toward yet another site of consumption that we need to wrest our sense of self vis-a-vis care away from capital's deadly clutches. This is especially salient when we expand the field of political caretaking beyond the human and toward the multiplicity of beings with whom we share life on this planet. While it can be difficult, in a diffused, gig-economy to identify worker from consumer from employer, highlighting the capitalist class and their vampiric relation to non-normative and working-class networks of care is an imperative task for the neoliberal era.

This is not only important for anti-capitalist politics, but for transnational feminist solidarity. Nadasen introduces a notion of radical care at the end of her book, which denotes care that "…is collective and antihierarchical, sits outside capitalist profit-making structures, and contributes to long-term social transformation."[203] An essential feature of capitalist care is that it divides the carers and the cared-for in an exchange relationship or, in the case of unpaid labor, through hierarchical, gendered expectations about one's natural aptitudes. Nadasen argues that the horizontal features of

[203] Nadasen, 298.

radical care can allow for each participant to build upon existing strengths and skills in order to make room for a diversity of human embodiment.[204] Examples include the Black Panther Party Free Breakfast Program, #BlackLivesMatter organizers, police and prison abolitionists, street medics, and migrant rights organizations like Damayan Migrant Workers Association. Even though Nadasen remains skeptical of state-sponsored care provisions, she acknowledges the need for material support often gate-kept by the state. These examples are helpful guides for caring otherwise, but without broader recognition from leftist, grassroots organizing of everyday practices care as oppositional political activity on par with street protests or campaigns for increased reproductive resources, anyone who undertakes radical care may be burdened based on gender, race, and class positionality. And the caring labor that they perform in service of explicitly political aims might not be experienced as transformative but depleting. This is when solidarity needs to mean more than words of affirmation.

This mediation of care involved in the production of possibilities of life and death is unequally distributed to various parts of a given population based on race, nation, white supremacy, ability, colonialism, imperialism, gender presentation, misogyny, and transphobia. In highlighting the perspective of social reproduction as necessitated by our daily practices of care, I hope to demonstrate that the political dimensions of care are stratified not only by gender but racially and internationally. This demands a feminist politics which is at once anti-capitalist but also anti-imperialist and anti-colonialist. The international aspect of the division of reproductive labor, in part instigated by neoliberalism, is not considered in care ethics scholarship. While SRT is more attentive to the transnational element of feminist politics, they fail to articulate that through the rubric of care. In this chapter, I expose the value of philosophically produced accounts of care and relationality,

[204] Nadasen, 307.

while also illustrating that though care ethics gestures towards a politics, it does not produce one. SRT is the appropriate field from which to develop the gestural political concerns of care ethics due to its materialist, feminist, and internationalist concerns. While care ethics and feminist social science research on the international division of reproductive labor emphasize the human dimension of relationality, vulnerability, and enmeshment, these themes should be extended to relations with non-human animals and the environment more broadly, given the parallel function of the environment and women's labor within capitalism. To re-politicize care will take not only feminist scholarship, but active political organizing that can reorient the labor of care away from processes of market consumption and toward processes of (re)production—production of life not for, but against, capital.

In the last chapter, I highlighted through Alice Echols's work an emphasis on personal transformation within a broader political struggle for structural transformation as being a key insight from the radical feminists, one which was adopted from antiracist and civil rights organizers of the Black Power movement. Given the magnitude of the care industry and its tenuous relationship to overall social reproduction—that is to say this care industry can meet people's needs through a diffuse gig-economy or direct a workers needed for transformative reproductive labor toward product consumption—I believe new historical conditions demand revisiting the problem of care and its relationship to political imaginaries. Nadasen's analysis of radical care is a helpful place to start, but I do not think she goes far enough to connect this type of care specifically with and as a type of class struggle. The language of care is desperately needed within class politics, but that language cannot fall into the trap examined in this chapter in which radical care is demanded along gendered and racial divisions, implicitly affirming that 'natural aptitude' of certain bodies to give care. Social reproduction in opposition to capital's accumulation requires a collective project of internal and external confrontation of gender narratives about care. This process can reunite some

disparate social struggles together for a shared goal without the erasure of the differences and particularities of each project. While social reproductive struggle cannot itself overturn capitalist domination, it might have the ability to impact the mode of production through struggles in the mode of reproduction. In the following two chapters, I will apply an SRT analysis to two historical struggles within and around kinship and family formations in Black communities and the queer communities in the US.

Chapter Four: Gender and Kinship in Black Feminisms: On Captivity and Family Politics

I. Introduction

Thus far, I have demonstrated the way that the capitalist mode of production and the social relations it demands depend on a hidden circuit of production. This hidden circuit of production secures one of the key 'raw materials' needed for the accumulation of surplus value—human labor power. Since this circuit makes and maintains human life for both the individual existential purpose of life and for feeding into capital's death machine, I, along with many other Marxist feminists, call this circuit the mode of reproduction. It is distinct from and necessary to the mode of production. As we have seen in chapter two, the historical changes brought about by the neoliberal regime and the ruling class actors it seeks to protect and enrich have increasingly commodified socially reproductive activities through an expansion of low-wage, precarious, service-sector industries. Simultaneously, the creation of a billion-dollar care industry has shifted what can be transformative or life-affirming human activity into commodity consumption. Consequently, an adequate feminist politics of care needs to be able to account for the differential processes of paid and unpaid reproductive labor.

In the final two chapters of this manuscript, I zoom in on the primary unit of unpaid social reproduction for the vast majority of subjects within a capitalist social formation—the family. The family as an organizing unit of society is the primary unit of reproduction, though it is certainly not exclusively so. The family form facilitates human survival under capitalism and, as such, is the first place that most individuals living within a capitalist totality experience care. Care within the family, in particular the attitudes and affects of care which adults in a family demonstrate toward each other and young adults and children, is not always enabling of each family member's autonomy. The hierarchies produced by the archetypal 'nuclear' family are deeply gendered. For this reason, I understand the family to be fundamental to the reproduction of compulsory heterosexuality and the

gendered norms and performances necessary to sustain it. To be clear, a lot of important care work and reproductive labor happens within families, often at the hands of a woman (or more accurately, many women). And a lot of harm can happen within families, in part due to their rigid gender hierarchies and the legal and ideological persistence of children as property of parents.

The feminist politics of care I am formulating throughout this manuscript needs a critical analysis of the family form under capitalism. Part of this analysis means evaluating the racialized dimension of the family form and the different functions it might serve as a result. For this chapter in particular, I explore Black feminist analysis of the family form for Black communities in the US. It is clear from even a cursory investigation that the family form for Black communities performs the critical work of survival, as was discussed earlier, but that this work carries more of a resistant quality given the anti-Black social world in which Black subjects find themselves. For many Black feminists as well as liberal political pundits, protecting the family is integral for affirmative Black politics. Sometimes this protection comes in the form of resources, but since the historical changes of neoliberalism have largely gutted state-sponsored reproductive resources, extolling the importance of the family usually occurs at the level of discourse. The defenders of the family form occupy a wide array of political positions from conservative to liberal to centrist to leftist. It also seems that the reverence for the family occurs across racialized divides as well. For example, one image or symbol that is often mobilized in attempts to recognize the humanity of migrants crossing borders is the mother separated from her child. This is positioned as the primary political harm for migrant people—the separation of family—rather than the border itself or the degraded living and working conditions in the Global South. While a pro-family politics can offer meaning-making and respite from a violent and harmful social world, it cannot adequately assess the family as a privatized unit of social reproduction.

In this chapter, I argue that politics that affirms the abstract value of the Black family without attention to the processes through which care is demanded and performed will not secure the liberation of Black women or gender-diverse people. This is another way of stating what I argued in the previous chapter—that any politics of care requires an analysis of the processes of social reproduction in order to be antagonistic to systems of domination such as capitalism, imperialism, and white supremacy. In outlining a thread of Black feminist analysis which is critical of the symbolic order secured by the family, I illuminate a minority position within US Black Feminist academic scholarship of dis-ease and ambivalence to pro-family politics. My goal is not to argue that individual caring relationships or formations, which people call the family, are unethical and should be immediately disbanded. One cannot simply do away with the caring labor secured by the family under capitalist social relations. To advocate for such a goal would be to individualize the solution to a structural problem of the social order required by capitalism. Instead, my goal is to highlight the potential and actually existing moments in which care inside or outside the narrow confines of the private household becomes contested, collectivized, or altogether refused. These moments of intervention into the status quo mark moments of reproductive struggle. It is my contention that a feminist politics of care capable of addressing capitalism's mediation of care must instigate and proliferate these moments. Reproductive struggles will have different contours within different communities, especially those that are marginalized in multiple social orders of violence and harm. In this chapter, I gesture toward what some characteristics of reproductive struggle might be for Black women and queers.

To accomplish this goal, I first explore Black feminist perspectives which highlight the ambiguity of the family form and the historical context and impact of chattel slavery on Black affectional and caring relations. Because the impact of chattel slavery still resonates today, Black feminists such as Hortense Spillers, Angela Davis, and Saidiya Hartman produce nuanced accounts

of the way the family form can be read as a confining social form, especially for women who are overburdened with care responsibilities. Spillers in particular offers the notion that kinlessness is a fundamental feature of the social relations of chattel slavery, which is directly related to the ungendering that Black women faced during this time. In our contemporary moment in the wake of the Black Lives Matter social movement, the pain of aggrieved Black maternal subjects registers more clearly in the liberal political imaginary. However, that recognition is still paired with the implicit understanding that Black mothers are responsible for absorbing the sometimes deadly effects of white supremacy. This positions the Black maternal subject as tragic because this task is necessarily impossible for one person to complete. It also involves the proliferation of images and symbols of Black suffering as the pre-condition for social recognition, which Hartman argues actually re-inscribes the lack of ontological subjectivity for Black subjects. This individualized approach cannot actually secure Black women's liberation. In highlighting the ambivalence of some strands of Black feminist scholarship to political struggles that position the family form as indispensable, I demonstrate the limits of familial politics. As I have argued thus far, any appropriate feminist politics of care requires an analysis of the processes of social reproduction that are secured by care. In identifying that politics of care needs to evaluate but ultimately move beyond the family, I examine the particular implications of this claim within Black communities.

In the final section of this chapter, I turn to the work of Joy James, who presents an analysis of Black care work that emphasizes function over identity. James has forwarded an analytic that she calls the Captive Maternal to describe the social position that Black caretakers occupy within American democracy. She describes various stages of the Captive Maternal and the differently gendered subjects who occupy such a functionality. In James' work, I find a specific analysis of the development of political consciousness for a caretaker as a political subject. Even though there is not an explicitly proscriptive element in James' work, her categorization of the stages that the

Captive Maternal experiences highlights an increasingly antagonistic positionality toward the US state and the empire it seeks to protect. The Captive Maternal subject experiences and participates in reproductive struggle in some of the stages that James outlines, but not in all. The Captive Maternal as an analytic demonstrates that reproductive struggle is both a process of politicization of caring relations and undertaken as an intentional choice. Even though the Captive Maternal mobilizes a familial actor—the mother—as the primary political subject, James ultimately moves beyond the rigid hierarchies of the family since plenty of her examples of Captive Maternals are men or people without biological children. For both the oppositional stance that care can occupy as a strategy for rebellion and the expansive position of care beyond the family, James's work is crucial for the development of this feminist politics of care.

II. From Chattel Slavery to Present: Black women as "caretakers of a house of resistance"[205]

Within critical social theory in the US academy, the claim that the formal emancipation of enslaved Africans at the end of the nineteenth century in the United States did not amount to Black equality is well accepted. The are various formulations of this argument, from those rooted in legal theories about the prison-industrial complex[206] to understanding emancipation as a long durée, something toward which Black people are oriented but which has not yet been realized.[207] In order to understand what Saidiya Hartman has canonically called the 'afterlives'[208] of slavery for Black women, we must first highlight some of the conditions faced by Black enslaved women pre and post 'emancipation.' This involves understanding domestic labor under chattel slavery, grappling with the

[205] Angela Davis, "Reflections on the Black Women's Role in the Community of Slaves." *The Black Scholar*, The Best of the Black Scholar: The Black Woman, 12, no. 6 (December 1981), 9.
[206] Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, Tenth anniversary edition (New York London: The New Press, 2020).
[207] Rinaldo Walcott, *The Long Emancipation: Moving toward Black Freedom* (Durham London: Duke University Press, 2021).
[208] Saidiya V. Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey along the Atlantic Slave Route*, 1st paperback edition (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2008).

particular modes of violence faced by Black women related to their reproductive capacities, while at the same time attending to how gender tends to be undifferentiated in agricultural labor, the misrecognitions of the familial bonds formed within an enslaved community, and the juridical shifts in legal status after the formal emancipation of enslaved Black people in the U.S.

Much of the early Black feminist critiques regarding the Black family responded to the 1965 government-funded document titled "The Negro Family: The Case for National Action" colloquially known as "The Moynihan Report" after its author—Daniel Moynihan—the then Assistant Secretary of Labor. In the report, Moynihan argued that the primary cause of the Black communities' experiences of poverty and degraded living conditions was due to the persistence of matriarchal family structures. Accordingly, the antidote to the material precarity and violence faced by Black communities was to reinstitute this missing patriarchal order within the Black family. This report institutionalized and entrenched a mythical "Black Matriarch" as an antagonistic player in the quest for liberal equality. Tiffany Lethabo King notes that scholarship that contextualized the historical conditions of the report argued that it was "as much a response to Black radicalism, urban rebellions and white fear as it was a liberal response to Black poverty."[209] Much of the Black feminist scholarship took up a critique of the Black Matriarch archetype by highlighting the misogyny and racism key to such a figure; they also affirmed the value of Black women's labor and caring legacies as resistant to white supremacy and evocative of non-patriarchal, queer modes of sustaining Black life.[210]

Angela Davis's early 1971 essay, written while incarcerated in Marin County Jail, demonstrates the historical inaccuracy of the Black Matriarch trope while simultaneously providing

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[209] Tiffany Lethabo King, "Black 'Feminisms' and Pessimism: Abolishing Moynihan's Negro Family," *Theory & Event* 21, no. 1 (January 2018): 85 (footnote four), https://doi.org/10.1353/tae.2018.0002.
[210] King, 69.

one of the first reflections on the specific labors of Black enslaved women during chattel slavery. In "Reflections on the Black Woman's Role in the Community of Slaves," Davis argues that the domestic labor within the slave quarters was "the only meaningful labor for the slave community as a whole."[211] She notes the way that in the fields, enslaved men and women were treated with the same level of brutality and expected to fulfill the same level of production. Yet, when it came to the reproductive labor of survival, Black women were relied upon to cook, clean, care for children, and nurture a spirit of rebellion. Black women kept a spirit of rebellion by engaging, often daily, in subversive moments of sabotage. These activities were fundamental to the overall development of a broad-ranging struggle for freedom.[212]

Since 1971, Black feminist scholars have heeded Davis' call to produce more research about Black women's experiences during chattel slavery and to connect that historical experience to the contemporary violences, harms, and social stigmas faced by Black women. With her 1997 text *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America,* Saidiya Hartman makes a handful of foundational claims which have become familiar lines of inquiry in subsequent Black feminist scholarship. One key claim has to do with how the category of gender, specifically the category of womanhood, was and was not conferred on enslaved Black women. She builds on an essay by Hortense Spillers, in which Spillers argues that Black enslaved women were both gendered and ungendered within slavery as both commodity and private property. Secondly, Hartman suggests that the liberal subjectification required to shift the newly emancipated slave from dependent to independent participant in 'free' labor produced a type of burdened individuality in which Black subjects were ideologically cast as the cause of their own suffering. Finally, Hartman

[211] Davis, 7.
[212] Davis, 8.

identifies an affective economy of Black suffering in the pre-bellum white abolitionist texts that advocated for the end of slavery through a fetishization of anti-Black violence.

Hortense Spillers' 1987 essay "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book" directly proposes that Black women under chattel slavery experienced a form of ungendering. In this now-renowned essay, Spillers tracks the symbolic register generated by the regime of private property and unfree labor of chattel slavery through the term 'American Grammar.'[213] While the captive flesh is formally 'liberated,' Spillers argues that "the ruling episteme that released the dynamics of naming and valuation, remains grounded in the originating metaphors of captivity and mutilation…"[214] To understand the impact of those metaphors on the current conditions that Black communities face in the US requires identifying what is unique about American grammar. For Spillers, that uniqueness lies in chattel slavery as a state of kinlessness. This kinlessness becomes a key site for the misrecognition of Black women as ungendered due to the lack of socially sanctioned kinship relations. The 'family' was a legally protected entity for the slave holding class, but such legal recognition and protection would prove impossible for subjects who were themselves legally categorized as property. In identifying the ungendered, or unprotected, "female flesh," Spillers hopes to track the legacies of the mediation of life and death prominent within the American Grammar. There are two important and intertwined features of this symbolic order: the 'ungendering' of enslaved Black women and the kinlessness of enslaved communities.

In order to consider actually existing bodies and people who would identify themselves as women, Spillers forwards a view of gender as a set of social assumptions which are registered as valid or invalid onto an actual existing body. This view is not completely opposed to, but is distinct

[213] Hortense J Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book." *Diacritics* 17, no. 2 (1987): 68 https://doi.org/10.2307/464747.
[214] *Ibid.*

from the predominant performative view of gender taken up in feminist scholarship in the 1990s.[215] By unpacking the symbolic order in which extreme violence against enslaved women's bodies was justified, Spillers argues that the typical sense of feminine gender—that which elicits protection from patriarchal institutions and actors—is not granted to the flesh of the enslaved Black woman. Within this grammar, the ungendered flesh can provide "a praxis and a theory, a text for living and dying, a method for reading both through their diverse mediations."[216] One particular way that enslaved women and men become ungendered is through the refusal by the white ruling class to recognize relations of care, love, and affection, including those which result in biological human reproduction, as constructions of kinship. In this way, Spillers argues that while the condition of property pervades much of the analysis of Black enslaved person's experiences, the condition of kinlessness is connected to the experience of being property, which partially determined the social relations of enslaved communities.[217]

The child born of an enslaved mother is not orphaned in the typical sense of the word, but being born to a person with the subjective status of property creates a parent-child relation which can be invaded, annulled, rebuked, or accepted at any moment. What threatens to invade this parent-child relation is not necessarily the master's will but the property relation itself.[218] It becomes clear that the type of affectional ties, and what I would name as relations of care and survival, that happened within the enslaved community would not fit neatly into the picture of the nuclear family, which became a touchstone of both bourgeois and working-class politics at the turn of the 20th century.[219] Spillers is skeptical of calling these affectional ties 'the Black family' as scholarship at her

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[215] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Routledge Classics, (New York London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2015).
[216] Spillers, 68.
[217] Spillers, 74.
[218] *Ibid.*
[219] O'Brien, M. E. *Family Abolition: Capitalism and the Communizing of Care.* 1st ed. (London: Pluto Press, 2023).Following excellent work provided in O'Brien's book, I will offer an in-depth reading of how working-class and socialist efforts

time of writing was wont to do because, "it seems clear, however, that 'Family' as we practice and understand it 'in the West' … becomes the mythically revered privilege of a free and freed community."[220] Ways of categorizing affectional relations of enslaved peoples would seem at least as complex in their content as this 'mythically revered privilege.' Whether to call these relations family or not seems quite important to Spillers because to accept this categorical confinement of Black affectional ties as a proto-family would be to obscure the relationship between kinship and property which marked chattel slavery, the legacy of which is still faced by Black Americans today. By forcing the American Grammar onto practices and relations which challenge its very premise, i.e. the kinship formations of enslaved communities, one risks an analytical and theoretical subsumption of resistance to white supremacy into the very categories necessary to shore it up.

The condition of human-as-property defines the pre-capitalist relations of slavery which, many have argued, formed the historical conditions upon which capitalist expansion was possible. After the formal but not-yet-actual emancipation of Black people in the US, the condition of human-as-commodity will come to define capitalism. While there are some overlaps, the difference between formally free and formally unfree labor relations is noteworthy. Furthermore, the only relation in which human-as-property continues to persist under capitalist social formations is the legal status of children within the family. The agency that is possible under such status is complicated and limited; Black feminist work by Hartman, Spillers, Tera Hunter, and Davis, among others, charts a myriad of ways that Black enslaved women navigated this difficulty.

Despite building on Spillers' account of the uneven gendering of Black enslaved women, Hartman does not want to completely disavow the category of gender when trying to evaluate the

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during the turn of the 19th century led to the adoption of the bourgeois family form within the movement for worker's liberation.

[220] Spillers, 74.

afterlives of slavery for Black women. In unpacking the experience of sexual assault by enslaved Black women, Hartman resists categorizing this phenomenon as one in which the subject is ungendered or does not have "proper" access to womanhood which would protect her in the eyes of the law. She proposes that reading this archival data as indicating a lack of womanhood actually reproduces an analytical category of womanhood which is decidedly white and middle or upper class. Instead, she argues that, "the disregard of sexual injury does not divest slave women of gender, but reveals the role of property relations—the possession of the enslaved—and racial subjugation in the constitution of gender and sexuality. In this case, possession occurs not via the protections of the patriarchal family and its control of female sexuality, but via absolute rights of property."[221] Far from ungendering, then, Hartman argues that in fact it was the Black woman's specific relationship via property which conditioned the possibility of her sexual exploitation and that part of the construction of sexuality and gender within American Grammar is contingent on this historical relationship. In fact, instead of arguing for the Black female slave as the "outlier" of womanhood, Hartman's work asks us to consider what would change in feminist understandings of womanhood if the Black female slave and her fundamental relationship to property laws constituted an integral aspect of the meaning "female" gender?

I see value in both Hartman's position of retaining the category of womanhood so as to propose the idea that womanhood and private property are co-constitutive, as well as Spillers's position that the ungendering of Black women during slavery indicated a fundamental feature of the symbolic order which still shapes social relations today. For the purposes of unearthing the entanglements of familial politics within Black feminist scholarship on care and caring relations, the connections between gender and kin within Spillers's work are highly instructive. Because slavery

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[221] Saidiya V Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America*, Race and American Culture (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 100.

required a condition of kinlessness as a result of the human-as-property paradigm, we can see that property relations are not limited to land holdings, labor-power, or variable capital. In fact, it is precisely in the moment of reproduction—both of the physical human being and of the social order in which that person participates—that the family guarantees (and inversely, kinlessnesss disallows) the inheritance of property. Reproduction secures both the continuation of wealth hoarding on the part of the ruling class and deprivation on the part of the property-less class.[222] The transition from unfree labor for Black communities to free labor under capitalism did not ensure Black liberation nor even equality as was formally promised. Even though Black subjects were no longer the property of others, they became *property of themselves* and within the immediate contract leasing systems, and were confronted with moral imperatives that conditioned the experience of "free" labor such that coercion and market economies continued to dominate the experience of labor. The particularities of the Black codes, sharecropping, and vagrancy laws curbed the freedom afforded by the wage-labor relation. More broadly, under liberal democracy, the citizen-subject is entitled to a right of self-ownership or a 'property' in one's person. This is coupled with the free market economy in which while the worker does not own the means of production, they own their labor power or the capacity of their body to labor. And when they get a wage-labor job, they sell that power supposedly of their own 'free will.' This shift from being property of another to property of oneself is the key juridical and conceptual change during the economic and social changes from chattel slavery to universalized wage-labor.

[222] While the working class and the property-less class are not the same, the property-less class takes on specific connotations under the social formation of chattel slavery. Even in the fully capitalist social relations which followed the formal emancipation of chattel slavery, owning land or means of production is not the same as owning the means of production or even the means of subsistence. As Hartman outlines, land ownership at the time (and to this day) often involves debt relations which specifically impact the position and security as someone who is a home or landowner. I hope to emphasize the prominence of the relations of private property within the social landscape of the time while also hinting at the ways the remnants of such relations reverberate now.

Jennifer Morgan's *Laboring Women: Reproduction and Gender in New World Slavery* was the first in-depth historical analysis of women in the transatlantic slave trade, which emphasized the centrality of reproduction in the violence and conditions of their enslavement. Through a close reading of the historical records, Morgan details that at the onset of the seventeenth century, when England "joined in the transatlantic slave trade, assertions of African savagery began to be predicated less on consumption and cannibalism and more on production and reproduction."[223] Instead of depicting breastfeeding as a face-to-face encounter between a mother and a child, early Spanish colonial literature portrays Black female slaves breastfeeding with a child on their backs, suckling a breast from over her shoulder while she works, attempting to identify a fundamental difference in the gendered labor of reproduction for African peoples.[224]

Morgan reads slave owners' wills to reveal the way in which their "property" in the form of slaves was to be divided posthumously among their white kin. Within such divisions, the female slaves were always referenced alongside the notion of future "increase."[225] Here, the increase is the possibility of children born who would become future slave laborers. This type of language in the archive is suggestive because while denying the enslaved Black women what is thought to be constitutive of womanhood—being a mother—her reproductive potential and the differentiation of her body is extremely important. Here, we see a moment of gendering, or at least the sexualization of a body with a particular set of reproductive capacities. But can we say that the enslaved Black women representing a type of property-plus are ungendered? Whether she raises her biological child or an 'othermother' steps in, the care work needed for survival is also implied within the possibility of 'increase.' Because of the "inheritability" of the status of the slave from the mother's womb,

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[223] Jennifer L. Morgan, *Laboring Women: Reproduction and Gender in New World Slavery*, Early American Studies, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 40.
[224] *Ibid.*
[225] Morgan, 90.

Morgan argues that, "racial slavery, then, functioned euphemistically as a social condition forged in African women's wombs."[226]

Much of the Black feminists' scholarship discussed so far emphasizes a colonial legal doctrine originally passed in Virginia in 1662, but quickly spread to the rest of the colonies, called *partus sequitur ventrem*. This translates to that which is brought forth follows the womb. This legal mandate meant that any children produced during the time of chattel slavery would follow the social and racial status of the mother. Consequently, in some ways, the mother's status as liberated or enslaved mattered more than a child's own skin color. We find in this statute and its continual reference in Black feminist work a foundational relationship between the womb, reproduction, and social orders. Hartman notes the specific ways anti-miscegenation and rape laws "reveal not only the indeterminacy of rights but also the way in which these entitlements are used to secure, if not intensify, subordination."[227] If a white woman was raped by a Black man, her race would put her under the 'protection' of the law; if she had consensual sexual relations with a Black man, the law would put her offspring under official protection, though she and her child might be open to social and extra-legal harassment. This sustained white privilege. In either case, protection is less about keeping women safe and more about upholding property inheritance through white supremacist racial hierarchy, one in which a woman's womb becomes a primary site of racial classification. Here, we find white women's implicit, though not always entirely willful, complicity with such reproduction as well as how Black women's bodies were unwillingly organized in the reproduction of slavery.[228] Of further note is the way that sexual assault against Black enslaved women was not recognized in legal court cases at the same time.[229] These examples demonstrate the way in which

[226] Morgan, 56.
[227] Hartman, *Scenes*, 98.
[228] Both Hartman and Spillers and Morgan note extensively Black enslaved women's resistance to this position.
[229] Hartman, *Scenes*, 99.

women's bodies have been used as a means of securing a social order of utter domination, death, and destruction in differential ways in respect to race for many hundreds of years. In the case of *partus sequitur ventrem,* this use is literally codified into law.

The evocation of an afterlife of slavery prompts us to consider what lasting effects the historical, material realties of enslaved Black women have on our world today. In a more recent essay, "The Belly of the World: A Note on Black Women's Labors," Hartman directly addresses the role of Black women's labors and their relationship to reproduction on both the individual level and the structural level. She writes that the position of the Black women and, "the theft, regulation and destruction of black women's sexual and reproductive capacities would also define the afterlife of slavery."[230] In defining resistance to slavery and the legacy of such struggles, Hartman outlines the overreliance of the Black Radical Tradition, via W.E.B. Du Bois and CLR James, on the elevation of the slave to freed worker. It is not so much that Du Bois and James fail to problematize the conditions of the "free" Black worker, but more so that his most powerful political act is understood as the general strike. As I have discussed in the first chapter, an overemphasis on the strike as the primary oppositional tool for the working class cannot be as easily translated into social reproductive activities. While Hartman is not directly discussing the category of social reproductive strike, she is similarly skeptical that the notion of a shared strike of wage labor will empower the Black woman caretaker.

Hartman asks, "so where exactly does the sex drudge, the recalcitrant domestic broken mother, or sullen wet-nurse fit into the scheme of the general strike?"[231] Noting that reproductive labor is crucial to understanding the afterlife of slavery, Hartman illustrates the way Black women's

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[230] Saidiya. Hartman, "The Belly of the World: A Note on Black Women's Labors," *Souls* 18, no. 1 (March 14, 2016): 166. https://doi.org/10.1080/10999949.2016.1162596.
[231] Hartman, "The Belly of the World," 167.

domestic labors were parasitically robbed from their own communities' reproduction and survival and re-directed toward the security of the white family and its continued supremacy. Due to the illegibility of Black women's reproductive labor within the framework of the general strike, Hartman concludes by suggesting that the "impossible domestic" can figure only in the movement of the fugitive and not that of the worker.[232] And yet the ambiguity of reproductive labor, that "the forms of care, intimacy, and sustenance exploited by racial capitalism, most importantly, are not reducible to or exhausted by it,"[233] suggests a possible amenability to teasing out the care which supports empire and that which rejects it. Within such a framework, practices of care can become political and oppositional acts for both the paid and unpaid reproductive laborer.

Hartman's understanding of care and domestic labor here lacks a dialectical account for the way the circuit of social reproduction is a fundamental process within the capitalist mode of reproduction. Her dismissal of the category of the 'worker' is misplaced because she sees the women who occupy the impossible domestic as non-workers. But, even without a wage, their caring and reproductive labor serves a necessary capitalist function. If we can expand oppositional, antagonistic activity past the boundaries of the strike, then we can avoid the trap of dismissing care as apolitical in nature and not in need of structural reorganization and transformation. It is not quite clear in this short piece from what the fugitive flees. Are they fleeing the wage-labor relation? That seems a tall and impractical request. Is the fugitive fleeing sociality? Similarly, given the universal demands of care for which the best structures are collective and conscious, that also seems like a difficult request. Shortly, I examine the work of a different Black feminist, Joy James, who centers oppositional care as a 'maroon camp,' in a way that I find avoids the pitfalls of Hartman's suggestion that I have identified here.

[232] Hartman, "The Belly of the World," 171.
[233] *Ibid.*

After the formal abolition of slavery for Black people, new forms of social discipline related to work, debt, and morality emerged to produce docile workers and maintain racial hierarchy. Hartman's work reveals a continuity of Black subjection pre- and post-emancipation. Though the metrics of that subjection change under the law, one of the questions that Hartman poses is what new forms of bondage were enabled by the security of the "propertied self?"[234] Her work questions the autonomy of the self-made liberal subject, specifically through referencing the way discourses of self-fashioning and responsibility latched on to the newly freed Black subject through metaphorical and actual debt. Hartman's work prompts us to ask, when a former slave receives recognition as a human subject, how are they then seen as responsible for the domination inflicted upon them? Debt would become a defining feature of the liberal citizen-subject, especially in the changing neoliberal historical conditions. For Hartman, this debt was actual in terms of the intense vagrancy laws and convict-leasing system, which created coerced labor conditions for the newly emancipated Black subject to become a criminal and therefore indebted to society through forced labor. But, there was also a discursive element to this debt in which the newly emancipated Black subject was indebted to the US state for their freedom and therefore responsible for changing their behavior accordingly to become proper liberal workers.[235]

Hartman argues that a closer reading of the transition from 'chattel to man' represented in the freedman manuals at the turn of the century demonstrates a suturing of discourses of freedom and the creation of a "burdened individuality."[236] In highlighting the contradiction of liberal conceptions of freedom between the actual practices of contract labor and the ideology of duty inherent to American notions of individuality, Hartman makes a strong argument that formal

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[234] Hartman, *Scenes,* 6.
[235] Hartman, *Scenes*, 115.
[236] Hartman, *Scenes*, 121.

emancipation offered primarily a discursive shift. Formerly enslaved persons became both materially indebted and ideologically bound by a liberal sense of duty that individualized the overcoming of racial differences while at the same time affirming their 'natural' or biological reality. A shift from the Black subject as a subject of pain to the burdened individuality of freed person who is self-possessed and indebted rewrote a narrative of white supremacy amenable to the universal claims to freedom made by liberal capitalist democracy.

Hartman helpfully identifies the gap between liberal discourses of universal freedom and the actuality of coercion within the wage-labor system as exemplified in the postbellum US. Her understanding of debt as "the center of a moral economy of submission"[237] as well as the fashioning of individual 'responsibility' as culpability exposes how Black subjects were shaped through the social and material conditions of that time. She also argues that the forms of violence which forced supposedly free labors to sign labor contracts exceed "the coercion immanent in capital labor relations and instead relied on older forms of extraeconomic coercion."[238]

While it is true that forms of discipline or violence that enabled the compulsory signing of labor contracts exceeded the direct reach of the market, that does not mean that it exceeds the coercion inherent to wage-labor relations. Building on the SRT analysis, which I elaborated in chapter one through a close reading of Lise Vogel, we can understand capitalism as a social totality. This social totality is one entity but with many different moving parts or apparatuses. The compulsion placed upon the recently emancipated was not only out of a white supremacist desire for domination (though that is certainly a piece of it), but was to discipline a population under new conditions into working to produce and accumulate capital. Instead of reading this compulsion and coercion as outside of capitalist social relations, I read Hartman's work as demonstrating how older

[237] Hartman, *Scenes,* 131.
[238] Hartman, *Scenes,* 129.

forms of social domination (i.e. white supremacy and anti-Blackness) are manipulated by the capitalist class in times of social upheaval to steady the system when its cracks are showing.

III. Black Family Politics in the 21st Century and Why the Captive Maternal Can Help

Black feminist scholarship on the social relations of care and reproduction during the time of chattel slavery demonstrates the political dimensions of survival during those historical conditions. Even though domestic labor was a moment in which Black enslaved women were assigned specific tasks based on their gender, in other areas of plantation sociality, there was a lack of gender distinction between Black men and women. Because of the complex and contradictory ways that gender both was and was not conferred onto Black women, the Black feminist scholarship heretofore reviewed reveals the slipperiness of the category of womanhood. Under such a symbolic order as Spillers argued, the practical activities of subjects who exceed the categories of intelligibility risk being misconstrued when they are attempted to be incorporated into the operative logic, even with a differential qualifier attached (i.e. the Black family).

In what follows, I build off the insights of Spillers, Hartman, and Morgan in order to claim that an overemphasis on identity-based politics will not create the kind of antagonism or opposition that a feminist politics of care requires. There is a political energy around the Black maternal subject in the wake of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement.[239] There seems to be a possible moment of recognition of Black pain and suffering at the behest of mothers who have already lost children to police violence or who are particularly aware of that possibility. Black and Brown mothers have historically organized to support their incarcerated loved ones and each other during family separation on behalf of the state.[240] These are material ways that mothers experience and participate

[239] Jennifer C Nash, *Birthing Black Mothers* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2021).
[240] Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California*, American Crossroads 21, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 182.

in politics by proxy of their position as mothers. Despite my hesitance around the uncritical confirmation of the inherent value of the family form in progressive politics, a feminist politics of care cannot forgo being relevant to mothers and parents. This is the difference between discursive and practical politics. As I will demonstrate, the framing of Black maternal politics singularly around identity rather than care and/ or opposition is easily absorbed into the neoliberal discourse of crisis, in which crisis is highlighted (often by the circulation of gruesome images and statistics) but collectively rendered unsolvable. The solutions that are accepted as valid often occur on the aesthetic, affirmative, or discursive level.

I argue that the maternal politics that more helpfully support the development of an antagonistic feminist politics of care need to privilege function rather than identity-based political formations. Even if an identity or social location brings people together, their political campaigns and practical activities need to interrupt, divert, slow, or reorganize the social conditions and practices of care. Merely affirming the importance or possible pain of the Black maternal subject will not increase her self-determination nor protect her children, community, or herself from state violence. Jennifer Nash's account of Black maternal politics in the wake of the BLM movement is an integral intervention in understanding how Black maternal suffering is represented and digested in liberal American media. However, Nash's analysis ultimately relies on the subversive power of the Black maternal subject to come from her identity and tasks her with creating a non-crisis aesthetic style from which the Black maternal subject can be rearticulated.[241] In presenting a Black maternal politic as both limited by liberal affective economies which fetishize Black suffering at the same time as it offers a potential political caretaker around which to rally, I suggest, following Joy James, that

[241] Nash, *Birthing Black Mothers,* 105.

politics which privilege the function rather than identity of the carer are able to oppose US empire from within.

In my attempt to articulate a renewed feminist politics of care which is capable of both considering the differences among women and queer people globally while at the same time identifying their shared enemies, I suggest moving away from the identity-based politics which has become the popular representation of Black feminism in the US academy. In her deep dive into the US academic structures and engagement with intersectionality, Jennifer Nash argues that there is an internal defensive and proprietary way in which some Black feminists take up the sanctity of intersectionality as an analytical framework. She claims the spectre of the 'critic' as antagonistic to Black feminism's political projects and perhaps even antagonistic to Black women themselves, could alternatively be read as a way to deepen and expand Black feminist analysis.[242] The spectre of the critic is often couched in terms of social position or identity. I find that this reveals one of the political limitations of the way intersectionality is taken up. Often, social location or identity is taken a marker of epistemological value and does not provide a roadmap for cross-locational knowledge building. When cross-locational knowledge building is foreclosed, then coalition politics are rendered similarly problematic. When knowledge generated from a particular framework is treated in a proprietary manner[243], especially from people in marginalized social positions, it can become difficult to even engage with at a scholarly level, let alone act on in our own lives.

In my experiences teaching women's and gender studies classes as well as courses on feminist philosophy as a younger (for academic standards), white gay woman, there is a heavy sense of internal policing among students and faculty members. Mainly, the debate is regarding who is

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[242] Jennifer Christine Nash, *Black Feminism Reimagined: After Intersectionality*, Next Wave: New Directions in Women's Studies (Durham London: Duke University Press, 2019) https://doi.org/10.1515/9781478002253,35.
[243] Nash, *Black Feminism Reimagined*, 40.

allowed to make claims about a given social issue. As a producer of critical social theory trained in the history of Western philosophy, this does make some intuitive sense to me. Many white men in my discipline's cannon have famously made claims that naturalize slavery, dehumanize non-white peoples, and render white women incapable of reason. However, the way I see this also playing out is that students are afraid to ask questions. Not only that, but they are hyper-vigilant in policing themselves and each other's language. This attitude extends beyond academia and into the students' and faculty's wider communities. I cannot recall the countless political debates I have heard about or been a part of, which turned on the question of who is allowed to say what. I think the question is, instead, what are the implications of saying something from one's given social position or identity? For example, what are the implications of a white student asking questions about white supremacy when they come from a place of socially produced ignorance?

In a later book, Nash moves from the boundaries of US academic discourse and practices toward the cultural production of Black maternal subjects in the wake of BLM. The robust formation and participation of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, which formed after the 2014 murder of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri and the 2012 murder of Treyvon Martin in Sanford, Florida, has shifted cultural dialogues about systemic racism, policing, and Black suffering. Nash argues that a particular Black maternal subject became legible in the US political imaginary through an emphasis on grief and suffering. This subject is one in which precarity and anticipated loss or violence mark the conditions of her political subjectivity. Nash claims that advertisements, ongoing maternal health disparities faced by Black mothers, political organizations like Mothers of the Movement, and Black maternal memoirs demonstrate a deep enmeshment of Black Maternal politics to a form and condition of crisis.[244]

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[244] Nash, *Birthing Black Mothers*, 12.

Alongside the positioning as a potential or actual maternal victim in the crisis of anti-Black police violence and murder, Black mothers and pregnant people face a much more deadly medical terrain than white women and gestators. And yet, an emphasis on breastfeeding as the life-affirming action par excellence of a Black mother is lauded as one way to respond to both the medical and social crises facing Black mothers.[245] This is a problem, not because I am pro or anti-breastfeeding, but because the Black mother is now being located both as a potential or actual victim and as the agent responsible for changing systemic anti-Black racism. That this change is supposed to come from an action coded as deeply central to maternal nurturance and care should not be lost on us. Black women can neither gestate and give birth equally, nor can they raise their children in environments that ensure safety for their children, despite their impressive organizing efforts and the social expectations that they do so.

Within the crisis framework, it is the precarity, threat, and reality of anti-Black violence that makes the Black mother legible as a harmed or about-to-be-harmed political subject. At the same time that Black mothers are recognized for the actual or preemptive loss of their children, notably but not exclusively Black boy and men, they are framed in discourses about breastfeeding as having the "Black gold" required to nurture and sustain their children in order to protect them from the anti-Black violence of the social world.[246] This is a contradiction. On the one hand, we have the fetishization of suffering and, on the other, the ultimate culpability for the same suffering and, therefore, the responsibility to change it. Nash remains critical of a proliferation of images and symbols Black suffering as the primary mode of political representation, and she ultimately identifies in a disparate set of texts a style and possibility of Black maternal politics that refuse crisis without eliding suffering. She notes the memoir and activism of Michael Brown's mother Lezley McSpadden

[245] Nash, *Birthing Black Mothers*, 36.
[246] Nash, *Birthing Black Mothers,* 42.

as one such example in which the Black maternal subject uses truth-telling as a political ethic that is capable of holding both grief and rage. This is notable because, under the rubric of respectability politics rage, is not intelligible in the liberal representations of suffering Black maternal subjectivity.[247]

The fetishization of Black suffering and injury as fundamental aspects for redressing the misrecognition of the humanity of Black subjects is also found in Hartman's work. The shift of liberal political discourse away from the victim-blaming tone of the Moynihan Report towards a post-BLM proliferation of images, videos, and discursive acknowledgment of the overwhelming violence against Black people at the hands of the State impacts how grassroots organizing groups and individual actors advocate for and imagine justice. Hartman argues that pre-emancipation, white abolitionist texts would reproduce the images of Black suffering in order to produce a response of disgust from the audience. Oftentimes times the empathy which was mobilized involved a white subject envisioning or inhabiting the black flesh in order to feel pain. The experience of pain was intended to extend subjectivity to the dispossessed.[248] Paradoxically, by centering pain as the primary access to the humanity of the enslaved individual, the white abolitionists discursively reproduced the enslaved subject status as flesh or object and not as subject proper. Nash's analysis of the difficulty of the post-BLM political imaginary which centers on crisis, loss, and harm resonates with the conclusion Hartman draws. In a very real sense, Black subjects' experiences of injury and loss are prominent under an anti-Black social order. However, when those features of subjectivity are taken as the gateway for political recognition, we can get trapped in a loop of proliferating violent images, narratives, and videos which undermine the possibility of subject status.

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[247] Nash, *Birthing Black Mothers*, 165.
[248] Hartman, *Scenes*, 18.

This trap exists partially in the overdetermined role of the symbolic within this type of analysis. From a philosophical perspective, there may simply be a metaphysical gap between the reference and the referent. Because our embodied experiences exceed, as Spillers so helpfully describes, symbolic orders, be they oppressive or attempting some sort of affirmation, our politics must necessarily do the same. More important than saying the right thing is doing it. This is why there are more resources for the development of theoretical and practical models of reproductive struggles within the horizons of Black caretaking in the work of Joy James.

Joy James suggests that the insight of the Black maternal as a political force instead comes from its function. In a long entanglement with and tribute to the power of Black subjects as political caretakers, James has taken oppositional, celebratory, and suspicious orientations to both Black feminism and the institutionalization of the BLM movement. First appearing in a 2016 essay entitled "The Womb of Western Theory: Trauma, Time Theft, and the Captive Maternal," James has since written multiple books grounded in the 'Captive Maternal' analytic.[249] Because James' analytic of the Captive Maternal focuses on function rather than identity, her work closely aligns with my interest in articulating forms of political struggles around the distribution and demands of care work under capitalist social formations. Captive Maternals can engage in reproductive struggle as I aim to articulate it within this manuscript, but they will not necessarily do so given a particular social location or identity.

Western or "Womb" theory is the historical context in which democracy and slavery were sutured. James argues that one unintended consequence of such a union is the "Black Matrix."[250] At the moment when democracy and freedom were secured for one group of people and another group

[249] Another instructive book which is due out in 2026 is about the Captive Maternal and anti-fascism cannot be considered in this initial manuscript.
[250] James, Joy. "The Womb of Western Theory: Trauma, Time Theft, and the Captive Maternal." *Carceral Notebooks* 12 (2016): 256.

became enslaved, the transition from a colony to a representative democracy created a womb. With this rhetorical device, James articulates what she has previously identified as the connection between democracy and captivity.[251] Because the newfound freedom for the emergent ruling class in the former colonies of the US relied upon the subjection and abjection of Black enslaved people, a shadow is cast within Western political theory. This shadow called "Black Matrix" identifies a fulcrum within a triangulation of power. And James suggests that we might conceptualize this as a seesaw on a children's playground. The fulcrum upon which two children pivot back and forth, one going up and one going down, is the Black matrix. Focusing on either of the children's ups and downs without attention to the stabilizing work of the fulcrum produces an incomplete assessment of the movement of each party. Similarly, James suggests that the power of the Black Matrix to reveal the Womb and reclaim its regenerative capacity lies not in labels such as feminism, progressivism, or intersectionality, but in "leverage."[252] The subjects confined within the fulcrum of the Black Matrix that have the power to wield leverage are Captive Maternals.

Captive Maternals are "nongendered entities who function as caretakers and nurturers, protectors of communities, raising future generations," and they move through various stages in regards to their relationship to and position vis-à-vis the state apparatus which secures American Empire.[253] The stages of Captive Maternals include: conflicted caretaker, movement builder, maroon fugitive, and war resistor. These stages are not necessarily linear, as the Captive Maternals struggle against the material limitations of survival. There is a break between the movement builder and the maroon fugitive that I read as indicating taking up an explicitly oppositional stance toward US democracy and its necessary state and social apparatuses. Since the Captive Maternal is not an

[251] Joy James, *Seeking the Beloved Community: A Feminist Race Reader*, SUNY Series, Philosophy and Race, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2013).
[252] James, *Womb of Western Theory*, 257.
[253] Joy James, *In Pursuit Of Revolutionary Love: Power, Precarity, Communuties* (Winstone: Divided Publishing, 2022), 6.

identity, but a function, individual Captive Maternals can be state actors, elected officials, women, incarcerated men, low-level military personnel and hold a host of waged or unwaged labor roles within American Empire; what unites them is not a specific gender, but their compulsion into caretaking and consumption.

The conflicted or celebratory caretaker seems to be the first stage or initial function of Captive Maternals. In this stage, the captive understands the empirical and lived realities of anti-Black violence and white supremacy within the US. They see themselves as caring for or attempting to protect those who have been wounded and community members who are at high risk of state or interpersonal violence. This stage involves an emphasis on support and survival as James argues, "support becomes 'resistance' only when one/ the collective moves past the stages of conflicted or celebratory caretaker."[254] James also talks about this stage as being evocative of a hustling mentality, which primarily focuses on individual or immediate family survival.[255] In the next 'movement builder' stage, I read the Captive Maternal as making the struggle to survive a communal project. The Captive Maternals within the movement building stage can begin to recognize the constraints on their politics that the US empire will necessarily place, but they can fall back into the conflicted caretaker role in which individual survival of immediate family or loved ones is the focus.

Within this context, the practice of betrayal can greatly impact the movement between the stages of the Captive Maternal. As the Black Matrix fulcrum in the seesaw image discussed earlier, the Captive Maternal is not separate from the predatory nature of US empire. James is careful to distinguish predatory from pragmatic. She argues that, "violence is deeply embedded in this culture. This is not a pragmatic culture. What you're talking about is hustle. You can call it a pragmatic one.

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[254] Joy James, *New Bones Abolition: Captive Maternal Agency and the (after)Life of Erica Garner.* (Brooklyn, NY Philadelphia, PA: Common Notions, 2023), 126-127.
[255] James, *New Bones Abolition,* 108.

You're still hustling in a predatory zone."[256] This means in order to ensure survival the predatory dimension of US empire will offer trade-offs to return the Captive Maternal to stage one—the stage in which the empire is directly benefiting from their caretaking. Since the Captive Maternal is about function and not identity, if a Black woman is in the position of imperial engineer, then she is not captive. She is "operative," even if the language around her actions borrows from Black feminist or critical social theory in attempts to conflate individual exercises of free will in service of empire with collective liberation.[257] Kamala Harris and Condoleezza Rice are examples used by James throughout her work.

In different language, we might call this co-optation, but I find James' mediation on the disguise of the predatory within the so-called 'pragmatic' revealing. How often is the "pragmatic" solution contingent on selling out a group of more marginalized or less vocal people in struggle? When a win is 'easier,' what does that really indicate in relation to that action and the US empire's continued preservation? This goes past individual acts of complicity towards a whole generation. James states that the 'older' generation (the one I imagine she counts herself as part of) has betrayed the younger generation, inheriting the struggles of their fore-Captive Maternals in that they "lied by omission."[258]

The final two stages of the Captive Maternal is maroonage and war resistance. Distinguishing between these two stages is less clear than between the two couplings I have identified. The maroon camps, evocating a historical legacy of fugitivity from chattel slavery, involve functioning in zones of autonomy within US empire. James writes, "the question of the maroon is the question of autonomy."[259] James is not particularly clear about how these camps are physically

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[256] James, *Pursuit*, 180.
[257] Jams, *Pursuit,* 159.
[258] James, *Pursuit,* 162.
[259] James, *Pursuit*, 136.

constructed nor where they are. As with much of the analytic of the Captive Maternal, I read the maroon camp as a rhetorical device more than a physical designation. Because of James' own position as an intellectual working in the US academy, a lot of the themes discussed in *In Pursuit* are about the resistant potential within academia. It seems unclear to James if it is possible to build a maroon camp inside of the institutionalized knowledge, but she does not advise against it outright. The final stage of the Captive Maternal is war resistance. It would be decidedly international in character and perhaps move the maroon camps from one of sustenance, fugitivity, and survival to direct opposition. It is clear, though, that given its entanglement with the state and private business, academia is not interested in revolutionary language. In dismissing the language of 'dreaming' often cited by academically trained abolitionists, James asks if freedom dreams are "functional or dysfunctional care" for an unhoused mother bartering to provide reproductive resources (i.e. food) for her children.[260] Maroon camps will keep some people alive, but until US empire is cast as the opponent, the Black Matrix will not have realized the full extent of its leverage.

The Captive Maternal analytic is extremely helpful in understanding the amalgam of forces such as white supremacy, imperialism, capitalism, and patriarchy, which position Black women and feminized subjects[261] into a caretaking role which is overdetermined in comparison to white women. While it is true that class position most directly impacts the ability to outsource one's domestic labor, as demonstrated in the previous chapter, white women are not tasked with caring for a wider community, which is directly at war with state forces. James' analysis of Womb Theory and its product of American Empire is compelling to me because they trace wars within the arbitrary

[260] James, *New Bones Abolition*, 215.

[261] I have mixed feelings about using the term "feminized" to distinguish either the labor or subjectivity of non-self-identifying women. On the one hand, to simply equate "feminized" subjects as being devalued seems analytically imprecise. There must be a particular quality of that devaluation which makes it feminized. On the other hand, there are clearly groups of non-women such as Asian men who are unconsentually feminized due to racist cultural myths. I have not fully worked this out for myself, but I just note its usage here is steeped in my own ambivalence.

boundaries of the US as well as the wars abroad. While all working-class people face a particular kind of denigrated living conditions based on the privatization of the reproductive resources required to live, the institutions of order within the 'law and order' are particularly motivated by anti-Black racism and violence. In this way, Black communities within the national border of the US live under conditions of war. Captive Maternals are faced not only with keeping their individual families alive, but their broader communities as well, within a social structure which is predicated on their dehumanization.

James provides a myriad of examples of Captive Maternals throughout her interviews and her writing. However, in *New Bones Abolition: Captive Maternal Agency and the (after)life of Erica Garner*, James offers an in-depth reading of Erica Garner as Captive Maternal. Erica Garner is the daughter of Eric Garner who was murdered by the New York Police in Staten Island in 2014. This murder was sensationalized by a viral cellphone footage of officer Daniel Pantaleo putting Eric Garner into an illegal chokehold that led to his death. In opposition to the suturing of pain and grief to Black maternal subjectivity within liberal and multicultural politics, James fixes her focus on Eric Garner's daughter, and a mother of her own children, who became a fierce advocate against police brutality for four years following Garner's murder before she herself died of health complications. This premature death at age 27 was certainly not unrelated to the lack of access to adequate medical care and the immense physical stress of fighting against state violence.

Erica Gardner used consistent street protest tactics which included marching every Tuesday and Thursday following her father's murder. The march, sometimes attended by hundreds and sometimes only by a few, gave consistent political expression for her rage and grief at the same time. Garner as Captive Maternal did not align herself with the liberal politics that fetishize and reproduce Black suffering for political appeasement and profit while also refusing to work as a functionary of the racist state responsible for murdering her father—such a position represents what James calls a

comprador.[262] Erica Garner's politics pushed further and further left as James details through close readings of her tweets alongside the public erasure of a 2016 televised town hall debacle. Then President Barrack Obama hosted a town hall on police brutality in which Garner was invited to participate. But when it became clear to her that her image and presence were being utilized to imply alignment with the Democratic Party, Garner verbally protested and demanded an audience directly with Obama. Even though her request was honored in the movement of the event, such footage was cut out version of events that aired on CNN.[263]

Garner was motivated by what James calls Agape or, that which orients Captive Maternals toward revolutionary love. Revolutionary love, according to James, is not romantic or familial love and "it originates from a desire for the greater good which entails radical risk taking for justice."[264] During the making of US democracy, Captive Maternals had their transformative caretaking powers stolen and confined in order to secure a new social order which continued to be reliant upon Black suffering and death. In part due to the function of the early stages of the Captive Maternal to secure US empire, Revolutionary Love "can develop community-focused training grounds" and thrive even within the US imperial core.[265] Agape, the highest form of love, is key to Revolutionary Love because it "requires political will."[266] James discusses the case of Jonathon Jackson's deep love for his brother, which took the form of agape in his attempt to take hostages to barter his brother George out of prison. In this attempt, Jonathan, two accomplices, and a white judge were all killed by the state to thwart Jonathan's plan. While James does not advocate for violence, she states that what motivated Jonathan to act was this politically disciplined form of love through which he opened up for his successors a zone of possibility, even if they will not take quite the same high-risk

262 James, *New Bones Abolition*, 99.
263 James, *New Bones Abolition*, 105.
264 James, *Pursuit*, 4.
265 James, *Pursuit*, 5.
266 James, *Pursuit,* 154.

level of action against the US empire. She states, "we only need to know that one of us is capable of sacrificial love. We don't know the limits in terms of possibilities, because there's no limit to loving in a slave camp."[267]

IV. Conclusion

The dimensions of Black political caretaking and Black familial politics are indispensable parts of advancing the feminist politics of care through an emphasis on reproductive struggle that I undertake in this manuscript. Joy James' analytical tracking of the different stages of the Captive Maternal supports the development of oppositional and antagonist feminist politics of care. The different stages represent different locations within and entanglements among the modes of capitalist social reproduction. Both the conflicted caretaker stage—stage one—and the depoliticization and continued commodification of care, as discussed in the previous chapter, demonstrate the way that survival for survival's sake will continue to reproduce the double bind of care under capitalism. Whereas Marxist feminists (including myself) identify the way that meeting one's individual survival needs can leave room for the development of the worker's embodied needs first before they become capital's lunch, the conflicted caretaker demonstrates what it is like to be stuck on that first register within the familial or community setting of warfare. Even if this is stage one of the Captive Maternal, one which is hopefully superseded by the more oppositional stages, it still demarcates a moment of political insight from which to build.

The difference between conflicted caretaker/ movement builder and maroonage/ war resistance reveals an important dimension of reproductive struggle. I have initially defined reproductive struggle as the collective, conscious action that intervenes in the conditions under which care work is demanded and performed; it is clear that the collective aspect of that definition

[267] James, *Pursuit*, 170.

bears elaboration. While it is imperative to survive in order to struggle against capitalism and imperialism, it is also true that when survival becomes atomized as it does with the family unit as the privatized unit of social reproduction, it is easier for the state to make predatory bargains with the people off of whose lifeforce it feeds. The collectivity needed to forge a maroon camp takes us notably outside of the private household and outside of the kin-based blood relationships. Even though the Captive Maternal analytic is designated to understand Black non-gendered or many-gendered subjects who are coerced into caretaking and consumption, the 'community testing ground' of Revolutionary Love will be a coalitional endeavor according to James. This is a particularly salient, timely, and indispensable lesson for US feminist politics because those feminisms that have become dominant are also the ones whose interests most easily align with the interests of the US imperial state, because that's where US power accrues.[268]

While it will be an unfinished and gestural piece of the Captive Maternal puzzle, it is interesting that the initial 2016 essay about the topic centered its last section on the question of time, and, more specifically, time theft. Part of what gets appropriated from the Captive Maternals is their time—Erica Garner dying at age 27—but also through the theft of the time of their loved ones—Travyon Martin murdered at 16. This reorientation of time limits futural thinking when the future is not only existentially not guaranteed but politically foreclosed based on race and class. I cannot help but think that the reproductive struggle in the maroon camp would involve reconfiguring time. Not just opening up the future for mothers and non-gendered parents and their children, but also reincorporating the past into the present so that healing unravels in spirals. [269] The commodification of Black suffering through electoral campaigns, US news media, and social media creates not only a

[268] James, *New Bones Abolition*, 188.
[269] Understanding the temporal role of reproductive struggle would require deeper research into the affective and psychic registers of care and the historical experience and embodied knowledge of the oppression of the US empire.

desensitization to anti-Black violence but also warps the possibility of an authentic experience of suffering. Suffering is inherent to human consciousness and, in particular, human attachment which is often forged by bonds and labors of care. Shared experiences of suffering, grief, and rage outside of the liberal political imaginary might also be a task of reproductive struggles in the maroon camps.

In tracing an abolitionist Black feminist perspective through Spillers and Lindsay Kay, Tiffany Lethabo King argues for a new program of naming Black caring structures and affectional ties that do not carry the violence and degradation inherent to the filial and the category of human itself.[270] I end this chapter by asking how the Captive Maternal stuck as the conflicted caretaker could be seen as confined by an overemphasis on family politics. When the goal is simply to have more secure families but not a movement for liberation in which those without families could thrive, it would seem that the maroon camp is quite far in the distant future. At the same time, Black working-class families are clearly under threat from state institutions such as the Department of Child Services which serves to 'protect' by invading family homes, traumatizing children, parents, and kin, and making reunification an exceedingly difficult and pricey endeavor.[271]

I choose to orient my feminist politics of care not only around struggle but away from the category of the maternal because such discourses are easily repurposed for liberal multicultural identity parades.[272] Mothers receive care and sympathy when they are within the borders of US empire, not because of an inherent valuation of their humanity, but because of what they produce with their labor. Perhaps, it is more accurate to say that it is easy for a liberal politics of redress to cohere around a grieving mother without disrupting a) gendered and racial assumptions inherent to that specific mother and b) the function of the family as a privatized unit of social reproduction for

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[270] King, 72.

[271] Dorothy E. Roberts, *Torn Apart: How the Child Welfare System Destroys Black Families--and How Abolition Can Build a Safer World* First edition (New York: Basic Books, 2022).

[272] Since James' work is focused on maternal subjects as non-gendered political caretakers coerced into care and consumption, I do not find the same issue with her work on a 'maternal politics.

capitalist accumulation. In the following final chapter, I will unpack a recently renewed call from queer and trans Marxists to forward a political and social analysis which is organized around the abolition of the family. While I have some reservations about the political uptake of such a bold demand, I remain committed to expanding and exploding politics of care beyond the family. As long as feminist politics of care remain within the framework of saving or protecting the family, care will continue to be naturalized in such a way that creates a gendered, racial, and international division of labor. Instead, we need to think about care as a part of political struggles and political struggles as a part of care, such that both directions can support the opposition to US empire and capitalism, social movements for gendered liberation, and the abolition of white supremacy.

Chapter Five: "Queer Politics and Reproductive Struggles in the Imperial Core"

I. Introduction

In the previous chapter, we examined the maternal and familial dimensions of Black feminist politics, which reveal care as a core feature of resistance. In this descriptive work, I traced the lineages of Black feminist analyses of reproduction in relation to the specific harms and violences suffered by Black women during slavery and today in the "afterlives" of slavery. In illuminating this historical context, I suggest that Joy James' concept of the Captive Maternal proposes a functional politics of oppositional care rather than one rooted in identity. It is clear that state apparatuses are aimed at undermining the indispensable care provided for by Black women within familial structures, and those violations must be refused and organized against. Under such conditions, the struggles to survive provide fertile possibilities for the growth of political consciousness through collective struggles for increased reproductive resources without or in opposition to the increase of state disciplinary mechanisms. In order to move past the first stage of the Captive Maternal as a conflicted caretaker, feminist politics of care needs to reach beyond the individual family in order to account for the family unit's function as a privatized unit of social reproduction.

In this final chapter, I consider what kind of political analysis and demands might respond to the shifts in the family values related to queer politics in the US. Without an account of what kind of allegiances are secured through the family form necessitated by private property and global capitalism, queer politics fails to be international in scope and practically applicable for working-class queers. I seek to provide this missing account in order to elevate the political dimensions of kinship structures as one indispensable part of reproductive struggles, which could attempt to remake or refuse total societal reproduction. This struggle against the mode of unpaid reproductive labor within the family is a site in which queer politics can reunite with the demands of various iterations of the women's movement in the hopes of forwarding women's global liberation. The family form

under capitalism is an integral site for processes in which ideological and hegemonic values are instilled in developing subjects both consciously and unconsciously. The prior chapter on Black feminism highlighted the increased autonomy of domestic labor under chattel slavery, which fundamentally changed and, ultimately, diminished after emancipation, despite the fact that the form of productive labor, now waged labor, increased self-determination. While the family is a mode of social organization that has preceded the development of a capitalist mode of production and reproduction, its function has been irrevocably changed through capitalist development. In a moment in which family values are being touted by both the conservative right wings and the progressive left wings of American politics as morally righteous and under attack, feminist and queer political theories need to re-evaluate the role of the family within late-stage capitalism. This clarity is necessary on a theoretical basis, not only to distinguish the right from the left, but in order to transform the material practices with which we reproduce our lives. Centering the question of family politics within American queer communities, I will turn firstly to Jasbir Puar's work on homonationalism.

Jasbir Puar published *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* in 2007, in which she offered a new conceptual analytic of 'homonationalism' to denote a regulatory form of queer liberal subjectivity emergent during the War on Terror. Homonationalism is an aggregate word of 'nationalism' and 'homonormativity'—the latter being a term developed in the early 2000s to discuss the production of conservative and bourgeois moral ideals being touted as the pathway to gay acceptance.[273] Puar's analysis of this efflorescent regulatory form of queerness situated social processes which identified the acceptance of a liberal queer subject simultaneous to the emergence

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[273] Jasbir K. Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*, edited by Inderpal Grewal, Caren Kaplan, and Robyn Wiegman, Next Wave: New Directions in Women's Studies (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 2; I will discuss briefly the literature on homonormativity further along in the chapter, but it was first coined by Lisa Duggan in her essay "The New Homonormativity: Sexual Politics of Neoliberalism."

of a sexually deviant terrorist subject. In linking these two processes, Puar creates a transnational perspective that challenged some of the imperialist and nationalist themes implicit in US-based queer theory and politics.[274] Overwhelmingly, the US academy of the 1990s dubbed queer theory fundamentally anti-normative, which is to say the answer Michael Warner's question of "what do queers want?" was freedom from social norms. Even though the focus of much of queer theory scholarship was the violence of norms which disciplined, regulated, and repressed gender and sexual expression, the field and its analytic perspective became known as anti-normative *as such*. Puar's work insightfully demonstrates that freedom from some norms in the context of a global American empire means a re-entrenchment of other racialized and xenophobic norms. A strength of her Deleuzian assemblage method is her ability to characterize seemingly disparate practices and overtly contradictory ideological claims as fundamental to the maintenance of American empire. However, the multiplicitous nature of this analysis does not accurately account for why American empire, specifically the American state, would need such a wide array of practices to ensure its hegemony.

Puar's scholarship fails to account for the relationships within the ruling class of this empire, specifically those between state institutions and capitalists. In the interest of enunciating a radical politics of care, I juxtapose the function of the private domicile as private household as reproductive with the inclusion of gay subject-citizens within the legal protections of the private sphere in order to account for the interplay between discursive and material productions. The pro-family ideology of queer politics is not merely a discursive process; it is mobilized by the ruling class to secure the product of the private household—the production of labor-power. The production of subjectivities is the production of labor power. This nexus as it relates to the intertwinement of the ideological

[274] The following text will certainly be instructive on this point, but given its recent publication I was not be able to incorporate it into this chapter; Alexander Stoffel, *Eros and Empire: The Transnational Struggle for Sexual Freedom in the United States* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2025).

conditioning of subjects and the particular mode of production which determines those conditions continues to be undertheorized within feminist and queer critique. I support my reading of Puar with scholarship from Holly Lewis to emphasize the gendered and class dimensions of homonationalism that are underacknowledged by Puar. In doing so, I highlight some possible political implications for queer politics from the analysis of homonationalism by revealing that the formal, liberal acceptance of sexual diversity within US empire serves an integral function in securing the reproduction of the laboring classes—in both their reproduction of physical bodies to labor, but also their ideological commitment to American nationalism.

I argue that the relationship among the family form, global capitalism, private property and care demands a feminist and queer political analysis that has only been partially articulated among the various scholars and disciplines examined so far. In particular, I argue that in moving beyond the filial, radical, and feminist politics of care needs to separate the notion of 'kinship' from the 'family' to identify a positive caring schema around which reproductive struggles might organize. This involves highlighting a secondary use of the term kinship to denote affinity or shared characteristics or, I would add, shared liberatory visions. This semantic distinction honors the legacy of family abolition, which is explored in the second section of this chapter. I argue that recent work from trans and queer Marxists around 'family abolition' presents an analytical framework capable of distilling the political import of the complex web of care under capitalism, emphasizing its gendered, sexual, and racialized particularities. While the family abolitionist framework of analysis draws heavily from social reproduction theory (SRT) and Marxist theory, the practical political demands and forms of organizing that align with this political analysis are underdeveloped. There even seems to be disagreement among the primary theorists about whether or not family abolition is a political demand or an analytical framework.

Regardless of which position one takes up, finding pathways to realize the dissolution of the family form in favor of multiplicitous, dynamic, and freely chosen non-genetic kinship formations remains urgent. The concept of reproductive struggle, which seeks to demarcate between caring and reproductive labors that disrupt and refuse capitalist social reproduction from those that fundamentally upholds it, locates some transformative pathways for such political struggles. Furthermore, reproductive struggle as I have demonstrated in the previous chapters, hopes to reinvigorate the anti-capitalist dimensions of feminist theory and praxis weakened under neoliberal historical conditions. This final chapter, then, hopes to argue for the reunification of queer and feminist politics around caring rebellions to politicize survival and broaden the leftist notion of class struggle. Just as the popular chant of street protests rings to onlookers "Out of your house! Into the Street!," the work of reproductive struggle is in line with the goals of the Wages for Housework campaign, in so far as they seek to bring class struggle out of the factory and into the street, the home, the daycare, and the nursing home.[275]

II. Queer theory and US Nationalism

Queer politics in the US has undergone significant shifts since the first brick was thrown at Stonewall Inn in New York City in 1969. While the riot at Stonewall was hardly the first instance of queer and trans people struggling against their continued immiseration, it is widely heralded as the inception of the LGBTQ+ movement for liberation in the United States. As the development of Women's Studies and Black Studies programs became institutionalized within the American academy, so too did gay and lesbian theory become an emergent field of social research and

[275] Louise Toupin, Wages for Housework: A History of an International Feminist Movement, 1972-77, 1st ed. (London: Pluto Press, 2018), 154.

critique.[276] In the late 1990s among waves of interventions in feminisms, queer theory was inaugurated by theorists such as Judith Butler, Gayle Rubin, and Micheal Warner, among others, by pushing questions of gender and sexuality beyond the lesbian/ gay binary. Lesbian and gays were only some of the categorical deviants of compulsory heterosexuality and queer theory attempted to broaden its understanding of sexual and gender-based oppression to include more non-normative identities.

Queer theory was largely influenced by developments in post-structuralism and, in particular, Michel Foucault's work in *The History of Sexuality*. This meant that many of queer theory's early progenitors had a distrust of what might be considered linear and teleological arguments in favor or against certain forms of social life. In highlighting the confinement of gender and sexual diversity through various normative demands of how to inhabit public and private spaces, queer theory tends to identify the deployment of social norms as the primary obstacle to gender and sexual freedom. However, the group as varied as it is cannot unify around one particular queer identity (e.g. gay, bisexual, transgender, etc) nor against one particular oppressive norm (e.g. pressure to 'pass' for trans people, compulsory heterosexuality, gender binaries, etc.). Instead, the label "queer" becomes the identity category which is somehow against all social norms, conveniently failing to identify the subcultural norm(s) which created the group identity in the first place.

Foucault's problematizing method was useful for these early thinkers to unpack the web of assumptions and social norms around gendered expression and sexual orientation; however the identification of social disciplinary norms as the primary method for the policing and regulation of sexual practices and gendered expression made queer theorists wary of claims to have a systematic or objective knowledge of oppression. Instead, they seemed to argue that a fractured form of self-

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276 Kevin Floyd, Introduction in *The Reification of Desire: Toward a Queer Marxism*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009).

knowledge can create change in counter-cultural production and self-definition. Within this frame, discursive change through appropriate adoption of communities' self-definitional speech seems to be the primary political act.[277] In its attempt to broaden acceptance of nonnormative gender and sexuality identity markers, one unifying theme became the 'anti-normative' valence of queer life.[278] Put another way, regardless of any individual queer person's class, racial, geographical, sexual, or disability-related social identity, they were conceived as being against norms and the system which produced them. Answers as to what system that was and why it was producing such restrictive norms about gender expression and sexual activities varied among queer theorists or were not directly addressed.

Even though queer theory produced some thoughtful, critical social analysis, the lack of a materialist perspective led to an incoherent politics that cannot conceptualize the influence of material conditions—which is to say the organization of social life around embodied human needs—on disciplinary social norms. Cathy Cohen argues that the anti-normative disposition of queer theory combined with its overemphasis on the antagonism between straights and queers fails to account for the ways that subjects with other social identity categories are disciplined and harmed for failure to meet certain heteronorms, such as the experience of the Black 'welfare queen.'[279] This creates a contradictory political orientation in which people are reduced to two categories, e.g. queers and straights, which appear at odds with each other, but for which there is not a clear explanation about why that antagonism exists and how to overcome it or if that is even desirable.

Reproductive labor is one site at which subjects under capitalism are differentiated for different labor roles. This process is not necessarily mediated by the market and is determined by

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[277] Lewis, 20-21.

[278] Michael Warner, ed. *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory*, 8 print, Cultural Politics 6. (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2011).

[279] Cathy J. Cohen, "Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?" *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 3, no. 4 (May 1, 1997): 437–65. https://doi.org/10.1215/10642684-3-4-437.

social institutions that predate the historical rise of the capitalist mode of production. But, under capitalism, these institutions, such as the family and xenophobia, have been deeply, and perhaps irrevocably, transformed.[280] To create a queer politics which both understands and opposes the oppressive norms that fatally wound queers across the globe means identifying a theoretical framework that exceeds entrapment either in a politics of discourse or a politics of visibility. While Jasbir Puar's work cannot fully escape the limitations of a politics of discourse, it does expand the analysis of the social processes in which liberal queer subjectivity is produced to include the transnational and imperialist dimensions of that production.

Writing and published in the midst of heightened Islamophobia in the wake of September 11th, 2001, intensified U.S. surveillance technologies, and invasion of Iraq, Puar identifies a budding form of regulatory queer subjectivity which is informed by and, perhaps productive of, U.S. imperialism.[281] She calls this "homonationalism" and describes it as an "emergence of a national sexuality … that corresponds with the coming out of the exceptionalism of the American empire."[282] At the same time as certain factions of American queers gain rights in the legislative realm, imperialist practices including Islamophobic racial profiling, detention and torture continue to produce a racialized population of others. What an analysis of specifically homonationalism adds to this process is the racial, sexual politics enacted which produce both a free queer liberal subject and an unfree, racialized, sexually deviant potential terrorist. The capacity of Puar's work to cut across

[280] M.E. O'Brien, *Family Abolition: Capitalism and the Communizing of Care,* 1st ed. (London: Pluto Press, 2023), 195.
[281] Given the regulatory framework with which Puar describes the function of homonationalism and a later essay (2013) in which she argues against thinking about homonationalism as an identity, it is ultimately not clear whether the complicity of US lesbian and gay subjects is willful or ignorant or even the primary concern of Puar's text. It seems to be that Puar is more interested in tracking the heterogenous ways within a liberal queer politics that the acceptance of homosexuality for some subjects is dependent on the sexual policing and 'othering' of whole populations of subjects who are racialized and have a tenuous or non-existent relationship to state citizenship; Jasbir K Puar, "Rethinking Homonationalism." *Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, Special Issue: Queer Affects, 45, no. 2 (May 2013): 336–39.
[282] Jasbir K Puar *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*, Edited by Inderpal Grewal, Caren Kaplan, and Robyn Wiegman. Next Wave: New Directions in Women's Studies, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 2.

many different state institutions and the individual actors allows an analytical connection between practices that the ruling class wants us to understand as distinct and unrelated. The weakness of this frame is the unclear political implications that follow from it. Is it important for individual subjects or collective political campaigns to be anti-homonationalist? What is the use-value of such a descriptive analytic if it is divorced from practical, on-the-ground political struggles? To begin to answer some of these inquiries, I unpack some key ideas from Puar's work related to sexual exceptionalism and the "ascendency of whiteness" upon which US empire thrives.[283]

Puar claims the presence of a type of exceptionalism fundamental to US empire is at the core of the anti-normative and anti-identitarian dimensions of queer theory. She writes that "while liberal underpinnings serve to constantly recenter the normative gay or lesbian subject as exclusively liberatory, the same tendencies labor to insistently recenter the normative queer subject as an exclusively transgressive one."[284] In their claim to be free of norms in general or against sexual and gendered norms in particular, the properly queer subject is subjected to a norm, or demand, of transgression. The queer subject as exceptional, one which does not engage, endorse, or reproduce harmful social norms, mirrors the exceptionalism bestowed upon American empire qua democracy. The exceptionalism of the US's supposedly thriving representational democracy allows for exceptional violence in the name of furthering or securing democracy at home and abroad.[285] By falsely juxtaposing freedom and coercion as mutually exclusive categories—an analytical framework which I argue in chapter two cannot speak to the material reality of the organization of human dependency and autonomy under capitalist social relations—queer politics rooted within this affirmation of anti-normativity favors a notion of subjectivity made possible by liberal political

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[284] Puar, p.22.

[285] Puar uses Agamben's idea of the "state of exception" to support her reading here. I believe I have summarized the sexualized dimension of this exceptionalism enough to further my reading of Puar.

theory. This subject, Puar and others are arguing, need not identify as heterosexual, in order to be in compliance to implicit and insidious norms/ value systems which help entrench US imperialism. With her analysis of homonationalism, Puar brings a specifically racialized and imperialist dimension to queer scholarship on homonormativity.[286]

In the essay "The New Homonormativity: The Sexual Politics of Neoliberalism," Lisa Duggan analyzes an emergent political faction of gays and lesbians in the early 2000s whose rhetorical and cultural productions align themselves with the values of neoliberalism. This faction of American gays identified neither with the homophobic elements of cultural conservative politics nor with the left paradigm of sexual politics as radical insurrection. This new political contingency became identifiable through the emergence of new markets brought on by neoliberalism. The cultural values of this new political contingency are rooted in the sanctity of the public/ private rhetorical divide, especially in the separation of the private household from the public, which under neoliberal ideologies should be ruled by market relations.[287] Despite the similarity to the term 'heteronormativity' from which Duggan creates the 'new homonormativity,' she states that the terms are not "parallel" concepts since there are not such material structures of gay life which could compare to that which exists for protection and reproduction of compulsory heterosexuality via monogamous coupling.[288] However, the term does intend to identify an internal hierarchy within the LGBTQ+ community in which adherence to the ideological values of neoliberalism (such as family values and the sanctity of the private household) was pushed on queer communities members with less cultural and actual capital.

[286] Puar, 38.
[287] Lisa Duggan, "The New Homonormativity: The Sexual Politics of Neoliberalism," in *Materializing Democracy*, edited by Russ Castronovo and Dana D. Nelson, 175–94 (Duke University Press, 2002). https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822383901-007, 188.
[288] Duggan, 191.

Puar's work pushes the question of neoliberal sexual politics past a neoconversative constituency of white gays and lesbians to consider the ways that even American queers who might consider themselves further left or liberal participate in the maintenance of imperialism through a particular form of sexual exceptionalism. For Puar then, the homonormativity which threatens to invade queer political constituencies is not merely an economic project reliant on the inviolability of the private, but is also a particular racial project which mobilizes contradictory narratives about the homophobia and homosociality of Muslim men in service of American empire. Including an analysis of the Abu Gharib torture scandal of US military personnel torturing Muslim male prisons through forced sexualized acts, Puar is able to locate a budding 'free' liberal homosexual subject of US empire blossoming at the same time that narratives of sexual deviance, homosocial behavior, and abnormal sexualities are ascribed to the suspected terrorist subject. She writes, "in this double deployment [of sexual deviancy discourses], the emasculated terrorist is not merely an other, but also a barometer of ab/normality involved in disciplinary apparatuses."[289] The contradictory play of a "liberated" US homosexuality over and against a non-Western homophobia which becomes egregious to the point of justifying violation and humiliation demonstrates the way that US national gays and queer populations become distinguished from "racial and sexual others." Puar argues that the production of gay, lesbian, and queer bodies which maintains this racial sexual differentiation is an important part of the American nationalist project and a new regulatory form of queer identification.[290]

Through evaluating the multidirectional ways that sexualization appears within the discursive strategies of state apparatuses as well as individual liberal queer subjects, Puar argues that a fundamental feature of the Orientalist notion of the terrorist that emerges in the early 2000s is

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[289] Puar, 38.
[290] Puar, 39.

sexual deviancy. While the prospect of a threatening sexuality—as in threatening to the liberal status quo—was once assigned to various liberal queer citizen-subjects, the shoring up of nationalism in the War on Terror reformulates this deviancy as a feature of 'abnormal' sexuality and sociality of Muslim populations, specifically Muslim men. Conversely, but simultaneously, this process is not just a negative project of othering, but a positive project of normalizing so that the two populations, Muslim men and (white) gay men, become "disaggregated" in order to serve homonationalism.[291] While focusing largely on the way this shows up in queer politics and on-the-ground practices (i.e. American flags at gay pride parades in 2004 and 2005), Puar briefly considers some cultural feminist analyses at the time which attempted to understand gender a structuring feature of 'terrorism' but in doing so also contributed to the development of homonationalism.[292]

Bonnie Mann writes about the relationship between masculinity, American nationalism, and 'anti-terrorist' practices by the US military personnel and institutions. She argues that gender is a fundamental fulcrum through which American nationalism is secured. The gendered axis of this process does not simply align certain kinds of masculinity with imperialist violence, but also situates femininity and white women as key players in the array of practices that label Muslim sociality as deviant and abnormal. What Mann calls "national manhood" is a fictious but indispensable part of the justificatory function of American imperialist violence, and her project aims to track the movement of gender throughout this process.[293] While Puar worries about, and ultimately wants to prevent, queer theory's easy incorporation in homonationalism, Mann argues Puar seems less interesting in recuperating feminist thought away from such a fate. In my reading, Puar is not necessarily dismissive of feminist projects or perspectives, but similar to her analysis of certain queer

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[291] Puar, 38.

[292] Puar, 60. We will return the role of women's gender within the construction of Islamophobic American nationalism shortly.

[293] Bonnie Mann, *Sovereign Masculinity: Gender Lessons from the War on Terror*, Studies in Feminist Philosophy, (Oxford University Press: 2014), 11.

theories, she highlights the overlap of cultural feminist analysis with the "most conservative terrorist experts in the field."[294] It is not so much that the gendered dimension is overshadowed or lost, but rather that Puar is more focused on understanding the historical co-emergence of the rights-bearing homosexual subject with the suspected terrorist, as they both involve redefined discursive productions of sexual deviancy.

Puar creates this argument through a reading of two US court cases, one of which maintained the criminalization of sodomy in 1984 and the one which reversed that decision in 2003, less than one year before the Abu Ghraib torture photos hit American media. The *Lawrence-Garner vs Texas* decision overturned the criminalization of consensual adult male sodomy. In analyzing this case, Puar reads against the grain of the predominantly congratulatory academic praise of this court case. She focuses on noting the differences in rights violations in *Lawrence-Garner* and the case it overturned, *Bowers vs Hardwick*. Privacy and domestication as the features of citizen "rights" which allow homosexual men to engage in sodomy indicate a detachment between physical sexual acts and the homosexual identity.[295] However, this is distinct from the question of whether the U.S. government can regulate sexual activities, which was the legal question up for debate in the *Bowers* case. For Puar, this entails a separation of the sexual act of sodomy from homosexual identity, which is then supplanted with the right to have intimate relations in private.

In granting the decriminalization of consensual acts between gay male citizens through access to privacy rights in intimate relationships, the *Lawrence-Garner* case both secures the domicile for the homosexual subject receiving rights protection while also reifying the liberal ideological division between the public and private. This has a few consequences. Firstly, the private realm of the domicile is framed as a space free from state intervention, while practically we know that

294 Puar, 60.
295 Puar, 140.

government institutions like the Department of Child Services consistently violate the private domiciles of working-class families in the name of child welfare. Half of children in Indigenous or Black families will be visited by DHS in their lifetime. This is true despite the fact that the largest majority of poor people in the US is white people—in 2022, 24 million white Americans were living in poverty, versus the 9 million people of African descent (citizens and non-citizens).[296] Secondly, the concept of home is framed several times in the court case as the right to "sanctuary and property," conferring gay rights within a right to property as a condition for the possibility of a right to intimate relations.[297]

In securing the domicile as that which grants rights for consensual gay male sodomy for US citizens, the sexual act is cleaved from the sexual identity in the context of queer rights. Consequently, the struggle becomes absorbed into the right to form a private household rather than the right to choose and remake your kinship relationships as you see fit. In other words, gay cisgender men are not legally protected to have anal or oral sex as a right to freedom of sexual relations, but because they are free to secure a private space within which to intimately relate, intimacy here being a metonym for sexual practices. In foregrounding discourses of intimacy and privacy, the sexual act previously associated with homosexual identity—sodomy—is separated and hidden from the protection of legal rights and instead, subjects, homosexual or otherwise, are guaranteed rights to intimacy via property.

Gay citizen-subjects being granted the right to intimate relations within the private domicile happens at the same time that for the suspected terrorist subject, homosexual identity is conflated with sodomy and used as a practice of torture in the Abu Ghraib example. Puar denotes the flurry of

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[296] Dorothy E. Roberts, *Torn Apart: How the Child Welfare System Destroys Black Families--and How Abolition Can Build a Safer World*, first edition, (New York: Basic Books, 2022); Premilla Nadasen, *Care: The Highest Stage of Capitalism* (Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books, 2023), 239.
[297] Puar, 126.

US media articles of liberal and leftist postures that classified the forced oral sex of Muslim men as a homosexual act. Even in the immediate aftermath of the *Lawrence-Garner* decision which ideologically removed the sexual act from the sexual identity, the term "homosexual act" was used to describe the scenes of torture at Abu Ghraib. The reemergence of sodomy as the homosexual act par excellence reveals the slippage of hegemonic and progressive narratives of gay rights. She writes that, "sodomy as homosexual act is produced outside the ever-narrowing parameters of legitimate homosexual American subjects; those protected by *Lawrence-Garner* are now exempt from this fusing."[298] Simultaneously, the understanding of the Muslim detainee as inherently homophobic restitches the act of sodomy back to deviant sexuality. But now, the deviant sexuality is racialized and actualized through a form of torture which cements the superiority of American empire through sexual exceptionalism and the violability of the Muslim male body. This indicates that, despite the rhetoric of *Lawrence-Garner*, sodomy is still the homosexual act of the American imaginary and that the legal protection formally awarded to gay male homosexual citizen-subjects has still not disrupted assumptions about who engages in or is revolted by homosexual sexual practices. In defining what is inviolable, i.e. the private household for liberal queer subjects, it also calls into question which populations are violable based on sexual standards to which the rights-bearing-subject is no longer subjected.

The construction of a protected intimate space for the citizen-subject upon which rights are bestowed in the *Lawrence-Garner* case, also reveals a discursive production of the space of intimacy as sacrosanct for subject-citizens, while at the same time, the 2001 U.S. Patriot Act legalizes indefinite detention for suspected terrorist threats.[299] Puar argues that indefinite detention not only reorganized racial, diasporic, and religious categories but, also restructured kinship relations. When a Muslim

[298] Puar, 140.
[299] Puar, 142.

man within a family unit can be held indefinitely, and through the proliferation of surveillance technologies Puar insinuates it might as well be infinite rather than indefinite, then heteronormativity can remain out of reach even for the heterosexual family unit. This is at once "a perverse homosexual othering at work in the construction of the terrorist detainee and a vast widening of the gulf that fissures heterosexuality and heteronormativity."[300] The homosexual othering at work through indefinite/ infinite detention is contrasted by the colonial and imperial narratives that position colonizing nations as safe spaces for queers. Such narratives are then mobilized as justification for further colonial expansion, domination. The most well-known example of this phenomenon of "pink-washing" is the state of Israel using its supposedly pro-gay politics to validate the continued occupation of Palestine, an occupation which turned into a full-scale genocide in 2023.[301] The safety afforded by the private sphere and the possibility of intimacy within such a protected space, then, occurs within the continual development of U.S. empire and the social norms of the bourgeois nuclear family are levied against the racialized population who will necessarily fail at enacting such norms.

While Puar compliments certain strands of queer theory[302] for critically re-evaluating the possibility of intimacies which are excessive of the family or the private domicile, she states that an emphasis on sexuality and sensuality persists.[303] Rather, Puar gestures toward the way in which multiplicitious state practices and policies which justify such actions reveal within kinship formations

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300 Puar, 146.

301 Jasbir K. Puar, "Rethinking Homonationalism." *Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, Special Issue: Queer Affects, 45, no. 2 (May 2013): 336–39; Justin Salhani, "Genocide, Urbicide, Domicide – How to Talk about Israel's War on Gaza." *Aljazeera*, July 3, 2024. https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/7/3/genocide-urbicide-domicide-how-to-talk-about-israels-war-on-gaza.

302 Elizabeth A. Povinelli, "Notes on Gridlock: Genealogy, Intimacy, Sexuality," *Public Culture* 14, no. 1 (2002): 215-238 https://muse.jhu.edu/article/26275; Lauren Berlant, "Intimacy: A Special Issue," *Critical Inquiry* 24, no. 2 (1998): 281–88. http://www.jstor.org/stable/1344169.

303 Puar, 163.

and intimacies a racial and imperial underpinning of "who touches or should not touch whom."[304] By disavowing the liberal public-private divide and demonstrating that private domiciles for some are only secured by the violability of the domicile for racialized others, Puar demonstrates empirically that there is no intimacy for the suspected terrorist; therefore revealing the narratives which position increased access to intimacy as generalizable queer freedoms to be liberal fantasies. By revealing the multidirectional ways that homophobia and sexual exceptionalism appear within US imperial practices of Islamophobic racial profiling, indefinite detention, and torture, Puar levies a sobering critique to mainstream celebratory American queer politics. Not only does this emphasis on the approach of rights limit the political imaginaries of queer liberation that might have colored past gay militancy, but the rights secured in the example of *Lawrence-Garner* and (even in *Obergefell v. Hodges*) are rights to privacy and property. Fundamental to their actualization is the physical site at which both of these abstract rights can be realized: the private household.

As we have seen in chapters two, three, and four of this manuscript, the household, and the gendered, racialized, and sexualized labor it requires under capitalism, is not merely a site of rights protections; it also forms an indispensable circuit of reproduction within the capitalist mode of production. While Puar's analysis pushed queer theory onto an international horizon, a dimension which was sorely lacking, her theoretical commitments to 'assemblage' theories of state powers and individual actors cannot account for the (re)productive activity of the private domicile. It is clear that the union of homosexual and queer subjects with the American nationalist project hinges upon increased psychic but not state-sponsored material investment in the sanctity of this space. The state and its institutions are seen primarily as diffuse power modalities instead of functionaries of the ruling class that discipline marginalized communities into a certain kind of reproduction, for

[304] Puar, 164.

example, the kind that upholds American nationalism and participates in the sexual othering of Muslim men. While Puar emphasizes the production of regulatory subjectivities, what her work lacks is the explanation of what those subjectivities produce with their embodied reproductive labor.

At the time of publication, 2007, *Terrorist Assemblages* offered an extremely compelling case for why the goals of the mainstream liberal struggles for equal rights for all queers who fall under the LGBTQ+ umbrella were not international in scope and perhaps actually further secured US empire within its own boarders and abroad. Now that gay marriage has been legalized in the US, queers oriented around humans rights discourses and cases have focused on the many anti-trans bills and policies which have been put up to congress in 2024 as well as hate-crime legislation.[305] Queer politics as evinced in the proliferation of "Pride" related parties and merchandise during the month of June have become commodified and, consequently, inflected with an experience of commodity fetishism as a replacement for political community.[306]

In *The Politics of Everybody: Feminism, Queer Theory, and Marxism at the Intersection,* Holly Lewis provides the first Marxist analysis of the convergences and divergences of both queer theory and feminism. In so doing, she offers a compelling account of the historical developments in each analytical perspective. Lewis argues that the poststructuralist focus on discursivity and problematization impacted queer theory's infatuation with the analytic of normativity. And yet, any subgroup or culture being anti-normative *tout court* is perhaps logically inconsistent due to the fact that some norms will, in fact, define group belonging in the first place. For that group to remain non-dominant or subversive, they would need to continue to reproduce their shared norms as individual projects of countercultural production and not as a unified attempt to destigmatize their

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305 "Mapping Attacks on LGBTQ Rights in U.S. State Legislatures in 2024," American Civil Liberties Union, December 6, 2024, https://www.aclu.org/legislative-attacks-on-lgbtq-rights-2024.

306 Rosemary Hennessy, "Queer Visibility in Commodity Culture," in *Profit and Pleasure: Sexual Identities in Late Capitalism.* Second Edition. (New York: Routledge, 2018) https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315270142.

shared group norms.[307] This form of social change is in some ways an anathema to organized political projects, whether they claim to be invested in political progress, traditional values, moderate reforms, or even, revolutionary changes. Even though Lewis recognizes heteronormativity as a useful concept to describe the experiences of violently enforced gendered and sexual norms, she finds the turn to homonormativity as an elision of the international, material social conditions which actually underlie the oppression of queer people.

In the 1990s, the AIDS crisis reached its height at the same time that neoliberal restructuring of capitalist relations and the entrenchment of imperialist relations occurred. AIDS activism, most notably by grassroots organizations such as ACT UP, returned a militant cultural spirit to gay political actions, even though their demands were not for revolutionary changes. Instead, they mobilized direct actions campaigns for modest but essential reforms that would help slow the immense death toll on queer people enabled by state inaction on AIDS.[308] The feminist movement at this time was also undergoing a thorough internal critique and reframing around the appropriate scope of analysis and action, moving from the global to the local while also diversifying the women represented within Western feminism through engagement with intersectionality and 'third world' feminisms.[309] The labor movement, caught within a network of increased outsourcing of industrial production and deregulation policies of the 1980s, lost ground on mobilizing labor action. All the while, the War on Drugs combined with deindustrialization led to an intense escalation of policing in Black and brown neighborhoods and created the conditions for exponential growth of mass incarceration of Black men, women and queers.[310] It was within this particular context that social

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[307] Holly Lewis, *The Politics of Everybody: Feminism, Queer Theory, and Marxism at the Intersection,* (London: Zed Books Ltd, 2016), 229.
[308] Lewis, H., 206.
[309] Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "'Under Western Eyes' Revisited: Feminist Solidarity through Anticapitalist Struggles." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 28, no. 2 (January 2003): 499–535. https://doi.org/10.1086/342914.
[310] Ruth Wilson Gilmore, "Fatal Couplings of Power and Difference: Notes on Racism and Geography" in *Abolition Geography: Essays towards Liberation*, Edited by Brenna Bhandar and Alberto Toscano, (London New York: Verso, 2022).

struggles became isolated from each other. Simultaneously, the struggle to survive for the working-class was made more difficult, while the rhetoric of the academy became more idealist in both diagnosis and prescription.

Lewis argues that theories of homonormativity erase the persistence of class conflicts across lines of difference in favor of a cultural, moral indictment of queers attempting to be made intelligible to what Monique Wittig would have called the "straight mind."[311] Heteronormativity is a "false generic,"[312] as Puar notes in her analysis of indefinite/ infinite detention, since it is not achieved even by those who identify or engage in heterosexual coupling and kinship formations. But homonormativity does not denote a false universal and obscures the ability to understand the function of class as a material process rather than an identity.[313] Lewis argues for a notion of 'full-spectrum dominance' in which the capitalist class will shift its cultural values to incorporate marginalized political constituencies and/or cultural phenomena in order to produce profit.[314] Under this view, it is not necessarily remarkable that some groups of the queer community are poised for assimilation while others are not. This is the shifting terrain of the tensions between the mode of reproduction within the capitalist mode of production. The problem for Lewis comes when the elevation of the 'normative' within analyses of homonormativity masks these class antagonisms.[315] Even though Puar adds a racial and transnational dimension to this research through the concept of homonationalism, the attention to how class and race co-constitute each other falls out of her analysis. In an insightful reading of marriage equality and the successful efforts to repeal of the Don't Ask Don't Tell policy in the US military, Lewis claims that working class people (queers and non-queers alike) have always had a more tenuous relationship to the machinations of the state

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311 Monique Wittig, *The Straight Mind and Other Essays*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992).
312 Lewis, H., 227.
313 Lewis, H., 229.
314 Lewis, H., 203.
315 Lewis, H., 228.

including access to the reproductive resources distributed by legal marriages and subsumption into the imperialist war machine. Under this reading the only queers that can abide anti-normative political dictates are those not caught in the struggle to survive by their materially determined class position.[316]

The emergence of a distinctive homonationalism within US empire is an important conjuncture for American queer politics in late-stage capitalism. It challenges the ability of critical academic theories to speak to actually existing historical conditions for millions of people inhabiting the globe. While the reference "queer" is a Western concept that has notable social purchase within a particular boundary,[317] human sexual and gender diversity exists across historical epochs and geographical locations, exceeds such confinement, and also suffers at the hands of various modes of social organization. It has long been a Marxian inclination to argue for class-based organizing even in the face of intensive dis-unification strategies on behalf of state apparatuses and the capitalist class. Given the further ideological reinforcement directing homophobic energies toward non-white communities and the current explosion of transphobic panic across the American right-wing factions, this is no easy feat. Furthermore, the recent bombardment of explicitly transphobic and misogynistic federal policies from the political right, which is supported by certain working-class demographics, paints an even bleaker picture. However, I hope to demonstrate that care and its role in both individual and total societal social reproduction might be a promising place from which the international working-class can begin to realize the aspirational dimensions of class-based organizing and, in doing so, to confront the forced divisions created by capitalist social formations.

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[316] Lewis, H., 230.
[317] Lewis, H., 231.

Lewis's contends that the evidence of history available to us would demonstrate that queer sexuality in itself cannot become a "material force capable of challenging capitalism"[318] and, empirically, that rings true. And, I am still interested in understanding how to incorporate and agitate around gendered divisions of labor within political struggles for liberation. Kinship formations which materialize around our sexual and romantic relations form a circuit necessary to the capitalist mode of production—a circuit which entails the production and reproduction of human beings. This marks kinship formations with the potential for disruption and opposition to capital's death machine. If they are essential to capital, then they can and must become sites of class struggle. While we cannot collapse these interlocked circuits, as I have argued in the second chapter of this manuscript, changes in one might beget changes in another. Furthermore, opening up the circuit of reproduction as a site of struggle could be one way to attend to the not-yet-realized solidarity practices between queers and other marginalized groups facing discipline and violence and engaging in life-sustaining care in the not-so-private domicile.

It is then incumbent for the annunciation of a queer politics capable of navigating national, imperial, racial, and class antagonisms to ask just what the family produces historically and today and how that production is maintained. Another way of parsing that question is: just what does the private domicile, the family unit, do for capitalist accumulation?

In the first chapter of this manuscript, I traced the historical lineage of Marxist feminist accounts of domestic labor by focusing on Lise Vogel's and social reproduction theory's (SRT) demand to situate domestic labor within larger societal processes through which the totality of capitalist social relations is reproduced. Now, to close, I zoom back in on the domestic through more recent scholarship from queer and trans Marxists who wish to reinvigorate the abolitionist calls of Marx

[318] Lewis, H., 236.

and Engels by demonstrating how the abolition of the family is part and parcel of the abolition of class society. In highlighting this scholarship, I invite contemporary forms of leftist, socialist, feminist, and anti-imperialist struggles to consider whether their family politics are serving or opposing capital's accumulation. Rallying around increased protections, safety, or resources via access to a state-recognized family (i.e. biogenetic or legally authorized relationships) or, worse yet, that members of a family are somehow more worthy of human rights than an individual human being traps progressive movements into capitalism's dehumanizing matrix in which we are qualifying some group's access to survival based on their participation in a social form. Instead, I demonstrate that expanded kinship networks based on affinity and consciously-negotiated care relations are a more positive political community to uplift in our struggles against capitalism. Like many of the family abolitionists that I engage with herein, I am not making a moral argument about how working-class people should form their care networks, nor am I advocating for state intervention within individual family units. I aim to make a strategic point about class struggle and its absolutely indispensable relationship with gender liberation.

In the following section, I summarize some of the notable theorists of family abolition, focusing in particular on M.E. O'Brien's 2023 historical and utopian treatise on the subject, *Family Abolition: Capitalism and the Communizing of Care*. While family abolition does not purport to be a practical political demand, I argue that the contribution of 'reproductive struggle' alongside O'Brien's identification of insurgent social reproduction can help concretize what kinds of changes are supportive of an abolitionist horizon. Fighting the reproduction of the liberal private domicile, or as O'Brien calls it, the private household, cannot occur merely on the discursive level as in critiques of homonormativity. We need to strategize ways to disrupt and refuse the (re)production of the private household through a radical, practical politics of care. By grounding such a politic in care, I hope to

use both a universal and concrete, contextual experience of human embodiment to restitch together the political movements that have fragmented in the face of neoliberalism.

III. So, you want to abolish the family?

Family abolition is both a framework of analysis at the same time as a utopian political demand. Kathi Weeks recently joined the renewed calls from trans and queer Marxists to abolish the family and offers insightful remarks on the theoretical frame and common themes among family abolitionists. Weeks notes that abolitionism's theoretical framework produces two distinct aspects of its analysis: (1) Firstly, she writes that abolition aspires "to systems thinking with a focus on social structures," and (2) secondly, to refuse reform as a viable political path.[319] Such an analysis examines the work the family does in relation to wider systems of social organization, creating an analysis that refuses individual solutions to institutional problems. In a sense, family abolitionists are making a structural claim about the organization and privatization of care under capitalist social formations, . To the second point, family abolition mobilizes a utopian, or not-yet-fully realizable, demand as the orientation point of political activity. We might say something like, family abolitionists want to create a world in which the family is no longer the primary provider of love and essential care necessary for the reproduction of human beings. In keeping with the anti-liberal sentiments of both Marxist and radical feminists, current family abolitionists find that only a radical break and ultimately the destruction of the institutionalized family can facilitate liberation for women and queers.

In *To Abolish the Family: A Manifesto*, Sophie Lewis argues that the emancipation of caring relations from the containment and distortion found within the family-form should be fundamental to socialist struggles. Lewis's text is instructive on many fronts, namely because it attends to some of

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[319] Kathi Weeks, "Abolition of the Family: The Most Infamous Feminist Proposal." *Feminist Theory*, May 18, 2021, https://doi.org/10.1177/14647001211015841, 3.

the misconceptions about feminist critiques of the family, especially those which formally demand its abolition. Far from advocating for state intervention to separate current family formations, family abolitionist literature actually seeks to liberate the caring and socially reproductive role of the family from its institutional form. The goal is not to diminish or continue to devalue and deprioritize the care it takes to maintain human life, but in fact, to multiply our abilities to meet our most basic human needs, such as feeding, clothing, cleaning, and housing ourselves. Lewis argues in favor of a sort of utopian vision, but in keeping with critical utopian thinking, the cracks and fissures of the present reveal the real possibility of a world in which care is no longer mediated by global capitalism. While Lewis does not present the historical rise of the nuclear family form as the individualized unit of social reproduction under capitalism, this history will be discussed in detail shortly. Lewis elaborates her understanding of utopian politics by writing, "but like all utopias, too, that world already nestles latently in the present. It has its wispy sprouts in nooks and crannies wherever people, against all odds, are seeking to devise liberatory and queer—which is to say, anti-property—modes of care."[320] In this way, family abolitionist literature attempts to mobilize the already existing oppositional and nontraditional networks of care toward a common goal. Given the earlier discussion of homonationalism, it might be the case that Lewis's invocation of queer as anti-property is resting on a slightly idealized version of queer politics in the US. The question of how to confront and refute logics of property within our personal relations is one that I seek to open up through the lens of reproductive struggle, but cannot answer within the confines of this project.

Many critics of family abolition cite the oppositional and non-dominating relations within which families can thrive, especially for folks in marginalized social positions, as a reason to 'save' or extol the family. Lewis, attentive to her critics, answers the proposition that some families be saved

[320] Lewis, S., "*To Abolish the Family*," 33.

with a resounding no. She carefully presents a case for family abolition with support from Hortense Spillars and Tiffany Lethabo King, arguing that the oppositional and indispensable role of the family in Black communities as essential to survival in a world built on Black suffering and death cannot be glorified as the ideal alternative family form. In fact, to qualify that it is only the white settler bourgeois family that requires abolition misses the way in which all families are measured as legitimate or illegitimate against this impossible standard. She writes that

> Obviously, nonwhite households represent a planetary majority. Many families aren't straight, nor even cis-sexual, nor part of a program of colonizing settlement. But while whiteness, empire, and heterosex have lots to do with the family, the family's most fundamental feature, as Kathi Weeks insists, is that it privatizes care: a process of enclosure in which all kinds of families unintentionally participate.[321]

This concern is also at the heart of King's argument that merely affirming the queer Black mother might foreclose the possibility of other forms of identification, particularly impacting any subject who might not want recognized or redemptive motherhood.[322] This refusal to qualify the demand for abolition highlights the way that remaking care is in fact, the central concern of family abolitionists. Not only is remaking care the primary goal, but also understanding that relations of reproduction and divisions of caring labor exacerbate and uphold white supremacy and heteropatriarchy in the continued service of capital's accumulation. By forwarding this view, family abolitionists also politicize the practices and labors of care as integral to revolutionary political struggle.

Family abolitionists' work is helpful insofar as it brings into hyper focus the privatization of care within capitalist social reproduction. While SRT, especially the variants reviewed in chapter two, has a clear emphasis on the way that care is organized within the socially reproductive circuit of the

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[321] Lewis, S., "To Abolish the Family," 48.
[322] Tiffany Lethabo King, "Black 'Feminisms' and Pessimism: Abolishing Moynihan's Negro Family." *Theory & Event* 21, no. 1 (2018): 68-87. muse.jhu.edu/article/685970.

capitalist mode of production, the political demands and imperatives that the proponents of SRT embrace often focus on waged social reproduction workers, even though there is a claim to unite unwaged and waged workers in feminist class struggle.[323] There is not as much emphasis on how to remake the unwaged caring relationships, which seems like a more difficult and ambiguous task because, without those relations or unfettered access to the commodified alternatives, people will not survive. The politicization of survival, as I have argued elsewhere,[324] has been a key component of political struggles in the 1960s and 1970s. Clarifying this possibility and the attendant political injunctions which follow from an SRT analysis, I argue, requires engaging with the folks using an SRT framework, such as advocates of family abolition, to talk about care, especially unwaged caring labor and kinship formations. Michelle O'Brien's *Family Abolition: Capitalism and the Communizing of Care,* published in 2023, provides the most in-depth theoretical and historical account of how the family has been a social institution transformed by capitalist social relations into a fundamental feature of capitalist social domination. Consequently, the politics of the family cannot be separated from an account of capitalist social relations, despite a surplus of social narratives on the family being about love, gender, nature, and interpersonal relationships.

There are three important contributions of O'Brien's book. Firstly, she details extensively the history of the changing family norms in the US and Europe, as well as the ideological shifts which accompanied those historical changes. Secondly, she brings forward a critique of prominent socialist and communist organizing institutions from the 1890s – 1970s, which illuminates their problematic acceptance of bourgeois family norms as appropriate and desirable standards for the industrial working-class. Finally, O'Brien goes beyond Sophie Lewis's invitation to see glimpses of a

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323 Aaron Jaffe, *Social Reproduction Theory and the Socialist Horizon: Work, Power and Political Strategy*. Mapping Social Reproduction Theory, (London: Pluto Press, 2020), 112.

324 Rhiannon Lindgren, "The Limits of Mutual Aid and the Promise of Liberation within Radical Politics of Care." *Krisis | Journal for Contemporary Philosophy* 42, no. 1 (December 8, 2022): 3–17. https://doi.org/10.21827/krisis.42.1.37884.

family abolitionist future and actually outlines what practices of insurgent and communist social reproduction might look like. For the purposes of articulating what forms queer and anti-capitalist reproductive struggles might take or have already taken, O'Brien's work is extremely instructive. She portrays struggles against privatized socially reproductive labor as intersectional class-struggle, while emphasizing the way that race, gender, and nationality inflect negotiations of the divisions of caring labor. Importantly, O'Brien's historical discussion of the rise and fall of the male-breadwinner family form within socialist movements demonstrates one historical instance of the working class social movement fomenting its internal divisions, such as racism and sexism, in order to win material gains for some sections of the class at the expense of others. Especially unique to her work is the invitation to imagine some components of communist social reproduction as a visionary horizon upon which a fuller commitment toward family abolition can rest.

In her theoretical account of the function of the family within total societal reproduction, O'Brien emphasizes the "family as a private household, a unit of privatized care."[325] Situating the family as a unit of privatized property as well as caring labor, O'Brien hones in on the role of the family within the circuits of the capitalist modes of production and reproduction. Despite being fundamental to capitalist development and necessary for its accumulation, O'Brien argues that changing ideological norms about the so-called 'nuclear family' as well as its relevance for working class families today are a result of shifts in capitalist production and the ensuing class struggles by working class people in which people fight for their survival against capitalism's incessant drive for accumulation.[326]

She outlines three dominant family forms which correspond to roughly four historical periods of capitalist development: 1) bourgeois, white property-owning family, 2) "respectable,"

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[325] M. E.O'Brien, *Family Abolition: Capitalism and the Communizing of Care,* 1st ed. (London: Pluto Press, 2023).
[326] O'Brien, 24.

white working class family with a male 'breadwinner' and head of household and 3) diversification of the family "but persistence of the private household."[327] O'Brien argues that during the 1830s – 1880s, the hegemonic family form, that against which all kin-based relationships were measured and judged, was the bourgeois, white property-owning family. This family form was largely unachievable for the working class in the onset of capitalist industrialization and was criticized by both Marx and Engels. In fact, Marx and Engels predicted the demise of the family with the growth of industrial capitalism. Both in the home and within the institution of marriage, this family form was to be overcome with the overcoming of capitalism.[328] Despite an early commitment to family abolition, Engels in particular still forwarded some ideas about the freedom found within the romantic, sexual, and caring relationships of the working class, which fail to fully account for patriarchal attitudes, behaviors, and gendered divisions of labor that working-class men of the time relied upon, benefitted from, and ultimately, perpetuated.

As conditions the working class faced in the end of the 19th century began to shift and institutions of the working class organized to change their living and working conditions, the family politics forwarded by communist and socialist parties and movements shifted away from overcoming bourgeois family norms toward their acceptance. O'Brien unpacks the development of the male-breadwinner norm that was taken up by the industrial working class in the end of 19th century by forwarding a lesser-known subfield of Marxist theory called communization theory. The "workers' movement" under this conception denotes a unified, though varied, global proletarian struggle against capitalism which spanned in many factions and forms from 1890s to 1970s. The dominant trends in this movement's organizing and theoretical writing reveal some important features of family politics within the history of socialism. In particular, using this framework to

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327 O'Brien, 10.
328 O'Brien, 70-71.

analyze the politics of family helps unpack the way that racism, sexism, and misogyny became prevalent in leading socialist and communist organizations.

The proponents of communization theory, namely Théorie Communiste and the *Endnotes* collective, claim that the institutionalized workers' movement, which began to take shape in the 1880s and 1890s, relied on a sense of working-class identity to unify the movement. The emergent working-class movement envisioned a socialist society ruled by the working class. As a part of that vision needed to articulate who the working-class subject was and what kind of values they held. O'Brien writes that, "rather than destroying the capitalist system of value, abstract labor, and wages, the workers' movement argued that these forms could provide the basis for workers' emancipation."[329] Key to developing the argument that the working class was actually capable of such a task was a moral argument about the capacities of the class itself as being upright, respectable, and moral; one way to secure that argument became the campaign for the family wage reliant upon an unwaged housewife and a waged male "breadwinner."[330] By uplifting the working-class family form as functionally a mirror of the bourgeois nuclear family form so abhorred by Marx and Engels, the workers' movement was establishing its own respectability by contrasting itself with poor and racialized people whose very existence could not be incorporated into the nuclear bourgeois family norm due to white supremacy.

The emphasis on an affirmative family politics in the workers' movement became an alliance among the trade unions, liberal bourgeois social reforms, and employers, from which the workers' movement effectively campaigned for numerous impactful changes in quality of life. In the 1880s and 1890s, trade unions in Europe and the US actually won a series of rulings that excluded women from certain forms of employment and, consequently, continued to increase real wages. An increase

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[329] O'Brien, 111.
[330] O'Brien, 113.

in wages through the exclusion of women and children from wage labor was one way that the workers' movement actively won better conditions of social reproduction, in addition to the increased wage campaigns that were not formally dependent on women's exclusion from wage labor. They also organized for increased municipal structures in order to improve the hygiene, organization, and transportation of working-class neighborhoods.[331] There were additional changes in capitalist development, namely the rapid expansion of industrial production, which provided cheaper commodities, making wages go further in terms of covering the cost of reproduction. From 1873-1914 according to family budget data, all strata of the working-class in England saw drastic improvements in the family income provided by the male wage from 70 to 80 percent.[332] The conditions faced by the industrial working-class of Engels' late writing were substantially improved through these working-class organizations and campaigns, which held as its ideological and practical fulcrum the male waged worker within the family form, which is to say a waged worker as a husband and father.

Ironically enough, just as the bourgeois family form in the earlier 19th century was assured through the destruction of the possibility of family through attacks on working class social reproduction as we saw with the social relations of chattel slavery, the male breadwinner family form of the workers' movement served to exclude many other features of capitalist social domination as irrelevant in developing working-class identity. In particular, the respectability afforded to the white working-class was won from recognition by the state and liberal bourgeoisie of certain acceptable forms of sexuality and gender expression, which helped in turn to identify and demonize those which were unacceptable. O'Brien details how slavery and settler colonialism, as twin projects of

[331] O'Brien, 114-115.
[332] O'Brien, 116.

racial capitalism, were also dependent on a particular form of familial politics.[333] During slavery and throughout westward expansion and settlement in Canada, Indigenous and Black kinship structures were threatened with separation and dissolution at the whims of the white slave owning ruling class and in Canada throughout the forced boarding school programs.[334] In both the US and Canada, the government made marriage requirements a part of the eligibility for land tenancy (and sharecropping in the case of the American South) and, in Canada, male heads of household were offered land plots through the Allotment Act in efforts to weed out matriarchal kinship formations.[335] By failing to confront the bourgeois family form present in the campaign and defense of the male breadwinner working class family form, the workers' movement not only neglected to acknowledge these previous histories, but actually built a working class identity that was dependent on conformity to bourgeois family values for participation. This conformity came to indicate adherence to the white supremacist distinction between 'civilized' white and 'uncivilized' non-white populations within the working class movements for liberation.[336]

Even though the primary party apparatuses forwarded campaigns for increased wages around the male-breadwinner family form, there were women (and men) within the workers' movement for whom the question of capitalism's relationship to women's oppression was up for debate. Perhaps some of the most notable are Clara Zetkin and August Bebel, both members of the German Social Democratic Party and Alexandra Kollontai the first woman commissar in the USSR after the October Revolution. While Zetkin helpfully clarified the role of the proletarian woman's oppression as distinct from women of the bourgeois and capitalist classes,[337] she ultimately romanticizes the role of the unwaged proletarian housewife as an appropriate ideal for which the

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[333] O'Brien, 77.
[334] O'Brien, 82-85.
[335] O'Brien, 78.
[336] O'Brien, 117.
[337] Lewis, H., 137.

party should struggle.[338] Kollontai forwards a more robust family abolitionist perspective in her writings and work within the Bolshevik government, attempting to provide universal créches as socialized childcare. However, within such a vision, the institution of wage labor and the socialist state came to replace the reproductive function of the family in such a way that O'Brien does not find particularly productive if we take the ultimate goal of the working-class to be its self-abolition.[339] Kollontai's writing and biographical information contains a lot of deeply compelling accounts of the specific violence of capitalism to women in regards to both sexuality and reproductive labor, which deserves further illumination than the present chapter can provide.

These socialist and communist positions on the family persisted in the dominant currents of the workers' movement until the 1960s or, what O'Brien calls the Red Decade.[340] The various strands of grassroots movements, radical feminism, gay liberation, and Black women's organizing within the Red Decade began to confront "the male-breadwinner family form and the gender and sexual regimes it implied."[341] Street-based sex workers, many of whom were trans women of color, involved in Compton's Cafeteria riot in San Francisco in 1966 and the Stonewall Riot in 1969 in New York City, revolted against the intense police violence they faced on a daily basis.[342] In the second chapter of this manuscript, I offered a summary of the radical feminisms in the 1960s as distinct from cultural feminism of the 1970s in which antagonisms against the nuclear family towards its complete abolition were common. Black women's organizing against welfare austerity in

[338] O'Brien, 120.
[339] O'Brien, 125.
[340] O'Brien also talks about queers, including trans femmes and gay men, who were rebelling at the time that the workers' movement's dominant forms continued to organized around the male breadwinner family wage. For the sake of scope and brevity and to focus on the most dominant strands of socialist and community organizing, I cannot detail these within the confines of this chapter. In future projects focused more specifically on the harms and mediation of sexual practices and identities by capitalist social formations and social reproduction, I intend to engage in Kollontai's oeuvre more fully.
[341] O'Brien, 128.
[342] O'Brien, 129.

the late 1960s through the formation of the National Welfare Rights Organization centered on a demand for government support for social reproductive costs which enabled them to refuse wage labor on the market as well as organizing against the 'midnight raids' to which welfare recipients were subjected to ensure the lack of male presence, husband or not, in homes receiving government assistance. O'Brien summarizes, "in advancing a critique of the coercive binary gender expression and normative gender expectations, the Red Decade Radicals … saw the struggle to abolish the family as necessitating direct personal transformation in one's expectations and behavior towards others…".[343] This was salient for all the strands of rebellions O'Brien identifies, but I would like to pause briefly to consider the impact of the sex radicals and queer deviants whose historical, material conditions required moving beyond the biological kin-based familial unit in order to survive due to estrangement and violence.

O'Brien discusses the queer notion of 'chosen family' through examining by the ballroom culture of poor Latinx and Black communities in the US in the 1980s and 90s. Young trans and queer youth of color would join a 'house' in order to enable receiving mutual aid and support from the other house (or family) members. Being part of a house also allowed house members to contribute to the various gender-subversive performances in community balls and secure the necessary support and knowledge to transition. In these houses often with a trans woman or gay male drag queen at the helm as 'house mother,' young queer people of color shared survival tips and resources for working or living on the streets. While participation in these particular houses of the 1980s ballroom culture or other forms of chosen family can be seen in some sense as an exercise of choice, they are chosen under the conditions of poverty and blocked access, due to racism and transphobia among many other factors, to the privatized function of social reproduction, i.e.

[343] O'Brien, 140.

survival, that the private household ensures.[344] Because the chosen families, even as they offer refuge from the violence of one's biological family, combine dependency and care within a capitalist social formation, they can also become spaces for violence and abuse.[345] In O'Brien's understanding of the relationship among the family, social reproduction, and violence, I read this connection between care and coercion to be the primary feature of the harm and violence found within the family under capitalist social relations. This is not to say that previous historical iterations of the family were non-violent, but that it is the fact that the family ensures one's survival through care without their consent, which determines its predominant oppressive quality under capitalism. Put another way, just because the family is chosen does not mean that it effectively refuses the functional reproductive aspects required for survival; in fact, one is choosing that non-genetic family in order to guarantee it.

Even though the rebellions of the Red Decade evoked a spirited call for family abolition, this change was envisioned as an individual subcultural shift rather than a society-wide restructuring of caring and kinship formations.[346] O'Brien argues that this was due to the persistence of the visionary horizon of the workers' movement even within countercultural leftist critiques. Even though these leftist movements demonstrated the exclusionary and oppressive conception of working-class identity upon which the workers' movement was being articulated, they still remain confined within the freedom-through-work narrative of which O'Brien and her referents within communization theory are so skeptical. The family could feasibly be dissolved through access to market relations and commodified social reproduction, so long as one held a waged labor job.

From the perspective of social reproduction theory (SRT), this is also a failure to understand the relationship between the family and the market as constitutive, two interlocked circuits of

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[344] O'Brien, 175.
[345] O'Brien, 177.
[346] There are notably a few exceptions to this within the radical feminist movement such as Shalumith Firestone, as discussed in chapter one.

production required for capital's accumulation and domination. As detailed in chapter two of this manuscript, neoliberalism has hastened the commodification of almost all socially reproductive labor (including gestational labor in the form of surrogacy)[347] and this has not resulted in more equitable gender relations. Rather, it has increased the differential living conditions for women in the global north and south, continued to secure a gendered division of labor that relieves cisgender men of expectations of care work, and, I argue, poses a significant threat to transnational feminist solidarity. As reviewed in the previous section, some cultural queer critiques have attacked the adoption of 'homonormative' values which often entail acceptance of nuclear family norms by upper-class and perhaps also middle and working-class gays and lesbians. Though these critiques can criticize the uneven distribution of social resources based on marital status as a problem, they rarely discuss the role of the family as a private unit of social reproduction. And further, even when queers refuse to produce or procure children to fit the norm, coupling up without children or an official marriage certificate still performs social reproduction for capital's benefit.

Even though family abolition seeks to overcome the family as private household in the final analysis, immediate campaigns for further social reproductive support from government institutions are clearly historically relevant and perhaps in some ways align with the family abolitionist goal of expanding rather than limiting caring schemas. Building off police and prison abolitionist literature, O'Brien suggests that those for whom family abolition provides compelling political values, a type of nonreformist reform could be useful within immediate campaigns for relief of socially reproductive burdens under current capitalist formations. Well-known critic of racial capitalism and leading academic abolitionist, Ruth Wilson Gilmore suggests that a nonreformist reforms might be legal measures which do not immediately produce prison abolition but which "unravel rather than widen

[347] Sophie Lewis, *Full Surrogacy Now: Feminism against Family* (London ; New York: Verso, 2019).

the net of social control through criminalization."[348] One example provided by the abolitionist grassroots organization Critical Resistance is suspending the use of paid administrative leave for officers under investigation. This nonreformist reform would reduce funding, challenge the conflation of safety with the police force, reduce tools, tactics, and technology available to the cops, and reduce the scale of policing.[349]

In the context of family abolition, O'Brien offers the possibility of "progressive anti-family reforms" which might expand the network of possible chosen kinship formations without threat of violence for those for whom the bourgeois familial norms are unachievable, undesirable, or both.[350] Examples include certain forms of universal basic income which are not connected to marital or work status, free universal childcare, and universal homecare for disabled and elderly people.[351] Whether one agrees or disagrees with any one particular proposal, understanding such provocations as properly socialist, communist, and anti-capitalist in character poses a considerable shift in the family politics of the left at present.

Family abolition, according to this position and framework, is not a political demand to be immediately realized. Family abolition is not possible under the persistence of capitalist social relations. What I find particularly compelling about O'Brien's commitment to family abolition as the larger horizon of gender and sexual liberation is her interest in forwarding revolutionary ideas. She writes

> Revolutionary ideas can only take on mass appeal during revolutionary moments. The rest of the time, they can only gain traction among marginal and disaffected sections of society. But even when unrecognized, they speak to persistent and deep-set social contradictions, widespread dissatisfaction, and social problems with no obvious pragmatic solutions. Developing and maintaining revolutionary ideas between

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[348] Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California*, American Crossroads 21, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 242.
[349] https://criticalresistance.org/resources/reformist-reforms-vs-abolitionist-steps-in-policing/.
[350] O'Brien, 170.
[351] O'Brien, 172.

> revolutions, as I and other contemporary abolitionists are attempting to do, is a necessary task.[352]

This commitment to that which is not yet feasible reveals some of the utopian leanings of the family abolitionist literature. Sophie Lewis's first book, *Full Surrogacy Now: Feminism Against the Family,* is also utopian in its call for the gestational commune, something that might be totally beyond the current political imaginary when researching actually existing surrogacy as she does in the text.[353] The gestational commune, keeping in the utopian cadence of family abolitionist literature, imagines a space where gestation and pregnancy are freely given and collectively organized by community values in which the exchange of human bodies via private property is unthinkable. But Lewis's own readings of the radical feminist tradition in both its commitment to what Alice Echols calls prefigurative politics[354] and its lack of gender expansive ways of imagining reproduction, biological and otherwise, disclose the necessity of such demands against the programmatic reduction of the present. Lewis's work demonstrates that the deep, complex web of relations and emotions that can accompany gestational work is not so easily predicted or assumed. In the gestational commune of the future, there should be room for surrogacy of many stripes which might enable a world, once dreamed by lesbians of color Barbara Carey and Mary Peña in the feminist periodical Off of Backs, in which children are owned not by a state or a parent, but only by themselves.[355]

O'Brien defines communist social reproduction as "the generalized practices necessary to directly meet human needs without the mediation or domination of capitalist relations."[356] She then

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352 O'Brien, 187.
353 Lewis, S., *FSN*, 26.
354 Alice Echols, *Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America, 1967-1975*. American Culture, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota press, 1989), 16.
355 Alexis Pauline Gumbs, China Martens, and Mai'a Williams, eds. *Revolutionary Mothering: Love on the Front Lines* (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2016), p. 28.
356 O'Brien, 194.

goes on to describe a classless society in which there is unconditional access to the means of survival, shared joy and pleasure, confrontation of the public and private divide of liberal society, appropriate love and care, no private property, and a balanced (dialectical?) relationship between dependency and autonomy.[357] Using the example of trans and gender nonconforming individuals, O'Brien demonstrates that the dependency on the private household in youth can restrict a child's ability to explore and question their gender expression. If they are able to make it out of that private household alive but perhaps unwell, they are then subjected to the norms of the wage labor available on the market, which practically enforces binary gender norms, often barring trans people from access to stable, legal employment. Engagement in illegal industries places trans people at higher risk to both police and interpersonal violence and contact with the criminal justice system, which is far from accommodating to gender diverse people. In this way, she argues, "gender freedom relies on the widespread accessibility of a means of survival and reproduction that does not rely on the family, wage labor, and the state."[358] She then goes on to use the example of a protest encampment as one example of the possibility of this demand, meeting people's needs without the family, wage labor, or the state, calling it "insurgent social reproduction."[359]

She centers her primary example of insurgent social reproduction on protest encampments. O'Brien discusses how insurgent social reproduction opens up a collective space of prolonged, but not indefinite, confrontation with the state and capital, which necessitates creating practices to meet the participants' embodied needs so that protest can continue. Within an encampment, practices of eating, sleeping, procuring hygiene products, and daily activities of leisure and planning require public reproductive labor which would under status-quo conditions typically be performed by

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[357] O'Brien, 195-198.
[358] O'Brien, 200.
[359] O'Brien, 206.

feminized members of the family or kinship formation.[360] Though we might think of O'Brien's example of protest encampments as insurgent social reproduction as a type of commons,[361] the protest encampment is temporary by design and therefore distinguishes itself from the commune. Unlike a commune, the protest encampment does not need to figure out long-term survival under capitalism, which means necessarily engaging in some features of institutionalized or commodified social reproduction.

Despite their transformative nature, protest encampments are not magically spaces in which participants are free from interpersonal harms such as racism, bigotry, or, particularly, sexual assault and violence against women. O'Brien notes that different protest encampments have different processes for dealing with sexual assault when it comes up, including expelling accused persons, covering up abuse, engaging in collective accountability circles, and reporting behavior to the police. While she claims that many of the protest encampments she has visited or participated in all could have benefited from a deeper reckoning of gendered relations especially in regards to socially reproductive practices, she also argues that, "survivors at protest camps, even when unsupported by hostile leaders, are in a much better position to find allies and caring support in the midst of a large camp than when assaulted by a family member or lover at home."[362] I am more inclined to say that this would depend on the affective dynamics within the encampments as well as the diversity of participants, but I can understand why insurgent social reproduction should open up larger pathways for redress than those available within the private household. I am not sure, however, that this 'should' always produces the intended results.

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[360] O'Brien, 208.
[361] Silvia Federici, ed. Peter Linebaugh. *Re-Enchanting the World: Feminism and the Politics of the Common*s (Oakland, California: PM Press, 2019).
[362] O'Brien, 212.

Student encampments exploded all across university campuses in the United States in May of 2024 after the continued genocide of Palestinians by Israel which has a long history, but was notably intensified after October 2023. Different encampments took different routes to a nationally shared goal of BDS—boycott, divest and sanction—any university investments that profit from or enable Israeli apartheid. Some encampments occupied buildings, many sites were brutalized by military police, and some engaged in formal university negotiations in order to reach a mutual agreement to incite a 'peaceful' end to the encampment (colloquially known as de-camping). I noticed that within these encampments, and especially the one I was able to observe up close, there was certainly transformative socially reproductive labor taking place. Communal meals, free education, free libraries, collective prayer services after dinner, town halls to decide the campaign's next steps, calls for community support with supplies and sometimes bodies, and even a karaoke night occurred. What I also observed was a deep-seated penchant for intra-group policing, admonishment, and classical infighting among the radical and more centrist flanks. Most concerning to me was the lack of a conversation about how to bring care into radical politics, what it might mean to think of care as praxis in the face of all this insurgent social reproduction, and what it means to be on the same "side" of an anti-imperialist and anti-capital struggle. Even in the space of collective or insurgent social reproduction, reproductive labor was unequally divided, often along gendered lines, as well as considered less important than strategizing or shouting in the streets.

IV. On Multiplying Caring Rebellions

O'Brien's concept of insurgent social reproduction is in a non-genetic kinship with reproductive struggle—the concept which I use to denote the collective, conscious action which intervenes in the conditions under which care work and reproductive labor are demanded and performed. I might say that insurgent social reproduction is one type of reproductive struggle, but not all reproductive struggles are insurgent social reproduction.

Reproductive struggle aligns with scholarship on family abolition due to the emphasis on care as a feature of social reproduction, one which necessitates both politicization and transformation in the process of anti-capitalist struggle. My own research also hopes to speak to different strands of feminist scholarship and activism, which may not necessarily see capitalism as a primary opponent in need of confrontation. In this way, reproductive struggle can hopefully be useful to those concerned with liberation but who may have a tenuous relationship with what is called colloquially the political "left" in the US.

Insurgent social reproduction in attempting to secure social reproduction without the state, the family, or capital via wage labor certainly gestures towards the collective joy and pain of a family-free future; however, the standards of this concept are too rigid to be applied in our quotidian forms of social reproduction because often we simply must engage either the state, the family, or capital via wage labor lest we die. In this way, my soft critique toward O'Brien's notion of insurgent social reproduction mirrors my concerns with SRT's overemphasis on the legally protected or symbolic social reproductive strike. Reproductive struggle challenges us to find sustained and prolonged forms of insurgent, oppositional networks of care, love, rebellion, and healing in the face of what might be at times insurmountable odds. Interdisciplinary scholarship on reproductive struggle also invites us to find such instances in surprising places in history and contemporarily.

My own interest in understanding the contours of reproductive struggles lies in both the revolutionary future and the-far-from-revolutionary present. Until feminism and the socialist left understand social reproduction and the care it entails as a fundamentally linked the capitalist mode of production, we will fail to liberate those relations which are called our most intimate and precious. In fact, these very relations are the most intimate and precious not because ideology tells us so, but because these relations keep us alive within a social world

which is largely apathetic to our individual existence or openly hostile to it as can be seen with queer and trans people and Black communities. This line of argument that I propose is markedly different from the workers' movement position on the so-called woman question at the turn of the 20th century, which argued that socialism might prefigure gender liberation. Gender and sexuality, and racial and national formations, must be transformed within the socialist or communist struggle itself. Care is one site at which capital differentiates certain bodies for certain labors, and that process must be understood, confronted, and refused in our multivalent struggle for liberation. This feels of the utmost importance not only because these labors divide us unevenly based on gender and sexuality, race, ability, and national origin/ geographical location, but because they are also practices which are rooted in the prospect of survival. And while I have definitely not demonstrated myself as a Kantian in any way throughout this manuscript, the ends of socialist or communist struggle cannot justify the means. Until we bring back the insight from the Red Decade that our personal relationships must necessarily transform within our political projects, struggles, and dreams of a classless and propertyless future, we will not make the project of liberation one around which a varied, diverse working and propertyless classes can unite.

Chapter Six: Conclusion: On Feeding and Being Fed

Consciousness grows in spirals. Growth implies feeding and being fed. We feed consciousness by feeding people, addressing ourselves to their needs, the basic and social needs, working, organizing toward a united national left. After the people have created something that they are willing to defend, a wealth of new ideals and an autonomous subsistence infrastructure, then they are ready to be brought into "open" conflict with the ruling class and its supports.

--George Jackson, *Blood in My Eye*[363]

I. Summary

In the above quote, George Jackson is discussing how the structures in which we meet our embodied needs can create the fertile ground for the growth of political consciousness. In fact, he is not only saying that this creates the possibility for consciousness, but a united coalition of people struggling for liberation. Jackson's life, his writing, his incredible determination and perseverance in the face of unrelenting state repression, which ultimately was the cause of his death, has become a surprising source of instruction and inspiration for me. Even though Jackson is not using the words of Marxist feminism or care, it is clear in this citation that building something that the people will be 'willing to defend' entails remaking our processes of social reproduction and, in so doing, the relationships which sustain them. Growth is embodied and metaphysical. Despite the well-reviewed efforts to divide the working class from each other, the people remain hungry. This hunger can devour us, or we can feed ourselves and each other.

The processes of social reproduction and the various forms of caring and reproductive labor that they entail form a unique component of the social totality that is capitalism. Processes of social reproduction often stratify the working class, creating internal divisions around race, gender, nationality, and ability. Following Lise Vogel, the particular shifts in the level of conflict, self-determination, and access to reproductive resources within the mode of social reproduction are a

[363] George Jackson, *Blood in My Eye*, (Baltimore, MD: Black Classic Press, 1990), 84.

product of class struggle between the capitalists and the bearers of labor power. The historical changes of neoliberalism have notably shifted the experience of reproductive and care labor. De-industrialization and the gutting of social welfare programs in the 1980s denigrated the living conditions of the American working class. These shifts were felt by all members of the working and precariously working classes, but there was a particular racialized element that the Black community and migrant worker communities of color faced due to the exponential increase in incarceration for Black people with the rise of the Prison Industrial Complex via the War on Drugs. The gap between the working and the non-working class, sometimes called the lumpen-proletariat, widened as new markets were created in the face of a lack of free or state-sponsored access to basic material goods.

In chapter three, I discussed through engagement with Premilla Nadasen these changing conditions of neoliberalism on the practices and experiences of care. Nadasen, in particular, identifies the creation of a billion-dollar care industry as one notable development of these historical changes.[364] This industry is a huge obstacle to the politicization of practices of care. While individual reproduction does involve processes of consumption (i.e. most notably food), there is also the possibility of experiences that involve transformative or generative labor (i.e. cooking the food) that can accompany consumption. The more the care industry creates commodified alternatives to social reproduction, the lower the possibility of a subject engaging generative labor to meet their embodied needs. This is not to say that we should morally or politically boycott commodified social reproduction; boycotting fast food might be good for your health, but it does not in itself entail an expansion of generative labor. It is also worth noting that boycotts without direct connection to striking workers or impacted parties can inadvertently diminish the workers' role in anti-capitalist struggle by elevating the consumer as the primary actor.

[364] Premilla Nadasen, *Care: The Highest Stage of Capitalism*, (Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books, 2023).

This shift in political and material conditions, spurred by the development of neoliberalism, has impacted the narrative and ideological discourses on care. In the second chapter of this manuscript, I demonstrated through reading some strands of feminist thought and organizing present in the second wave that domestic labor was thought to be a primary enemy of women's liberation. While I think that its primacy as the material root of women's oppression was overdetermined, the idea that caring or domestic labor should be struggled against in order to be transformed into something radically different was an essential part of the vision for women's liberation. Such an antagonism toward domestic labor has seemed to fall out of the feminist agenda. This is a grave error for both feminist and anti-capitalist politics alike.

In outlining the theoretical and practical dimensions of 'reproductive struggle,' I advocate for the expansion of generative and transformative labor within social reproductive processes. This is what Tithi Bhattacharya means when she says that the first level of social reproduction, the individual level, can involve the worker directing her labor power toward her own self-development. This can be felt as especially poignant when social reproduction is expanded to include emotional social reproduction, which often involves building interpersonal relationships.[365] When emotional social reproduction is a consciously chosen activity, like within a friend group or a group of political allies, it can entail new forms of social relations that are founded on care and affection as a conscious negotiation. This can be both a collective experience and lead to the self-development of the individual.

As I demonstrated in chapters four and five, it is rarely one single individual who is being reproduced by their daily labor. More often than not, it is something resembling a family unit. And for those laborers who are younger, it is understood that some family form—diverse as it might

[365] Alva Gotby, *They Call It Love: The Politics of Emotional Life*, (London, UK: Verso, 2024).

be—is the ultimate goal of their relational activity (and to some degree their wage-labor as well). Family politics are so difficult because they exist at both levels of social reproduction, the individual level and the level of total societal reproduction. Once we are reproducing not just one self-directed person, but a unit of people who are assigned varying roles with differential degrees of authority and power, then we are in part reproducing social systems that sanction such designations. This does not mean one can conflate the two levels as some radical and/or socialist feminists did during the 1980s. Reproducing a family is not the same as reproducing society, but the precise relationship between these two levels demands further investigation. As I demonstrated in the final two chapters, the primary site of care under the current capitalist social formation is the family unit. Even though I am suspicious of the political efficacy of advocating for family abolition as a political demand, I remain equally as suspicious of progressive discourses that extol family values as such or deem people in need of protection according to their assigned role within the family (i.e. mother or child).

II. Implications

There are several theoretical and practical implications of my research. The first of which is centered on the changing historical and material conditions of social reproduction under late-stage capitalism and neoliberal ideological and economic commitments. Social reproduction, as I demonstrated in chapter three, is being increasingly commodified such that less generative labor is required and, instead, the experience of individual social reproduction is more focused on consumption. Care is a prime example of this phenomenon as the development of the billion-dollar care industry frames the arduous work of survival in the discursive terms of wellness, beauty, and personal growth. This and other new markets, which cater to social reproductive needs, were created in part as a response to the gutting of government-supported reproductive resources known as welfare programs in the 1980s. These changing conditions resulted in a depoliticization of care overall. Despite the recent resurgence of care within American liberal discourse in the wake of the

COVID-19 pandemic, the duty to care is nearly always individualized as a moral imperative. Even in the governmental messaging around masking and social distancing, there was no acknowledgement about the lack of adequate care within the social and political structures that organize our lives.

While I have maintained a framework of feminist politics as the horizon within which my project rests, I additionally intend to speak to organizations and individuals who understand themselves as progressive or on the 'left' of the political spectrum in the US/ West. I contend that class struggle without reproductive struggles will not only be insufficiently feminist, but also insufficiently oppositional to capitalist expansion and domination. In my experience in leftist spaces, it is no longer popular (or generally thought to be acceptable) to openly cast the demands of women, migrants, Black communities, queer communities, and other marginalized groups as secondary to class struggle. And yet, what is said as contrasted by what is done is perhaps more revealing. It is not enough for anti-capitalism to be discursively in favor of feminism, queer liberation, or Black liberation. Commitment to such struggles needs to be seen in the on-the-ground organizing strategies taken up by a specific group or based on their coalition commitments. These on-the-ground strategies need to move beyond guilt, shame, and language policing. They need to be materially felt. This can look like treating interpersonal harm and repair as subject to group norms an feedback. Similarly, I urge those of you who are feminists but who fail to understand capitalism and imperialism as an enemy to pay attention to their embodied experiences of care. Then, I suggest, think about what obstacles might be in your way that prevent even small changes in the way you are expected to care for yourself and your loved ones.

One way in which I think feminisms and anti-capitalism talk past each other, so to speak, is the lack of affective dimensions in certain kinds of structuralist social theory. I, myself, have fallen victim to an overdetermined commitment to structural clarity, which leads to an underdeveloped sense of how these systems of domination and harm actually feel for the subjects being produced in

and through them. Reproductive struggles from the histories of resistance to oppression demonstrate that in order to change the structural elements of society's organization, we must also simultaneously change the interpersonal social relations that were produced by and maintain such structures.

Part of the reason that I am so drawn to care as an object/ process of study is because in my own life, it has been the source of great joy and sorrow. I wanted theoretical clarity, which I in some part received, but I still feel complex and contradictory ways about my caring relations. I do not find it politically useful to proscribe emotional states in terms of what happens within the confines of class struggle; however, as a descriptive tool, it can be extremely informative and strategic to understand when essential reproductive labor feels alienating and when it feels like conscious self-directed activity. I am tired and annoyed at the idea that all political activity is hard and struggle is hard because it is struggle. I have grown too old to entertain such a position. If we want to forward a dialectical view about the structural mechanisms of our social orders, then we must also apply that to our struggles against them. Resistance to capitalism and imperialism can be joyful, exhausting, hopeful, distressing, confusing, and deeply affirming. Focusing on rational politics at the expense of at least naming the full spectrum of human emotion, which goes into struggles for liberation, will certainly limit the political horizons upon which to realize our freedom dreams.

Finally, feminism with any grit must necessarily unfurl across a transnational perspective. The third chapter demonstrates that changes in the processes of social reproduction materially demanded by changes in the mode of production, but ideologically justified as forward momentum for women's equality, can result in women's global stratification based on their geographic location and country of origin. Women in the Global North and in the Global South are both structurally bound by capital's demand for the production of human beings. The notable difference since neoliberalism is the access to resources, which can outsource reproductive labor. But this labor is

not outsourced to just anyone. For the upper-class women in the Global North, it is certainly not being outsourced to men in their community. Instead, it is outsourced to migrant women of color, who become 'part of the family' by having an extremely precarious labor situation understood in terms of motherly devotion and feminine affect. Transnational feminism is, in my view, one of the most demanding conclusions of my analysis. This is in part due to the fact that our daily reproduction in the Global North involves the consumption of necessary commodities produced under horrific working conditions in the Global South. I do not claim to have a singular solution—only the insight that just because political problems seem difficult does not mean they should be ignored.

III. Concluding Remarks

Feminism in the 21st century has been deeply impacted by shifting material and historical conditions as well as the feminist 'waves' of the past centuries. In the US, as briefly discussed in chapter two, a radical feminist discourse emerged the onset of women's liberation struggles in the late 1960s which gave way to cultural feminism, as an ultimately liberal, reformist form of feminism centered on equal opportunity as the primary goal of feminist politics. As discussed in chapter five, LGBT+ politics also had a militant and riotous beginning, which slowly became distilled through the non-profit industrial complex into a rights-centric approach to equality.[366] Ultimately, I think that queer politics became again too invested in equal opportunity to participate in the capitalist social order rather than seeking social transformation. Not to mention, the separation of the analytics of sex and gender in Women's Studies, Lesbian and Gay Studies, and then Queer Theory, had the unfortunate result of tending to isolate the concerns of the LGBTQ+ community from straight women despite the practical overlap as individual people invested in the goals of sexual freedom and

[366] Myrl Beam, *Gay, Inc: The Nonprofitization of Queer Politics*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018).

liberation. All of this would paint a bleak picture about the possibility of a constitutive politics that seeks both individual and collective transformation without a reliance on market interaction and consumption to reach such goals.

And yet, social struggles internationally escalate. In the middle of the onset of the COVID-19 global pandemic in May of 2020, a momentous uprising in honor of George Floyd against police brutality and the murder of Black people and in support of Black lives resurged from its earlier 2013 and 2014 iterations. In September of 2022, a national movement against feminicide and state-sanctioned misogyny in Iran began in honor of the life lost of Masha Jina Amini, who was arrested and murdered by the Iranian morality police. In October 2023, Israel escalated their colonial occupation of historical Palestine into a full-fledged genocidal war against Palestinians, killing over 50,000 people. In May of 2024, a student encampment movement in the US erupted in support of Palestinian liberation and was often met with brutal police retaliation sanctioned by Ivy league universities colluding with militarized police forces or violent reactionary mobs. Now, three months into Donald Trump's second presidency, international student protestors are being snatched by ICE agents, put in detention centers, and have sometimes been unable to contact their legal representatives for days. Protestors with citizenship status are being fired or having their diplomas revoked months after the encampments ended.

I say all of this not only because it has all happened since the course of my graduate education, and these have been meaningful political events for me personally. These events remind me that political consciousness is always nascent so long as crises reign and that this is particularly true for the international working class. All of these struggles are, in some form or another, a part of class struggle, and this is a claim that cannot be understated. Some Marxist terms or organizations may seem or historically have been exclusionary. But to give up on the possibility of class struggle is to let the multicultural ruling class win. I highlight these events in particular because they

demonstrate the necessity of the international horizons feminist and queer politics must take. It is true that the work of those in the imperial core will not be the same as in the capitalist periphery, but our struggles are necessarily linked. Our living and working conditions are empirically and experientially different in quite notable ways. They are also linked and conditioned by each other. The predominant feminist position of equal opportunity will not stand up to the historical conditions of imperialism and colonialism, where one part of the globe is purposefully underdeveloped in the service of the overdevelopment of a different part of the globe.

Struggle is multiplicitous and requires many, many fronts. I chose to think more deeply about class struggle in relation to practices and labors of care because processes of social reproduction are the activities that are often overlooked in political campaigns or even deemed apolitical and therefore not of concern. It is also a site of analysis in which feminists and anti-capitalist or leftists split apart and refuse meaningful engagement with each other's theories, campaigns, and experiential realities. However, I want to be exceedingly clear that this front is neither more important nor more essential than all the other fronts of struggle. We have but one human embodiment, and we cannot participate in all fronts at all times. True solidarity in action rather than just in language means learning to strategically relate to others struggling for emancipation, to respect their autonomy while building our interdependency. It is a lesson that I think is particularly well-positioned to be learned through the development of a feminist politics of care with transnational horizons and anti-imperialist and anti-racist commitments.

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