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Mulvaney, Kelly

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FREIE UNIVERSITÄT BERLIN

HUMBOLDT-UNIVERSITÄT ZU BERLIN

Kelly Mulvaney

For what it's worth: An examination of the persistent devaluation of "women's work" in capitalism and considerations for feminist politics

Zusammenfassung

„For what it's worth". Eine Untersuchung zur anhaltenden Abwertung von „Frauenarbeit" im Kapitalismus und Folgerungen für feministische Politik

Der Beitrag untersucht die Entwicklung der geschlechtlichen Arbeitsteilung im Kapitalismus und skizziert die Transformation von „Frauenarbeit" von Fordismus zum Postfordismus und der gegenwärtigen Reproduktionskrise. Mit Rückgriff auf die Arbeit früher marxistischer Feministinnen, die die Produktivität von weiblicher Reproduktionsarbeit im Haushalt aufgezeigt haben, fragt er nach den Mechanismen, die zur anhaltenden Abwertung von Frauenarbeit und zur geschlechtlichen Arbeitsteilung beitragen, die dazu führt, dass Frauen weiterhin die Verantwortung für un- und unterbezahlte Pflege- und Reproduktionsarbeit übertragen wird. Die vorliegende Analyse kommt zu dem Schluss, dass der analytische Rahmen marxistischer Feministinnen, der die Beziehung zwischen Arbeit und Wert fokussiert, nicht als alleinige Erklärungsgrundlage für das Fortbestehen von geschlechtsspezifischer ökonomischer Ungleichheit herangezogen werden kann. Geschlecht muss auch als weiter gefasste soziale Institution über Arbeitsbeziehungen hinaus in den Blick genommen werden, in der Frauen als den Männern unterlegen definiert werden. Ansätze zur Aufwertung von Frauenarbeit sind nur dann erfolgsversprechend, wenn sie mit Bemühungen zur Emanzipation von Frauen verbunden werden.

Schlüsselwörter
Fürsorge, Feminismus, Reproduktionsarbeit, soziale Reproduktion, Verwertung

Summary

This article examines the gender division of labour as it has developed under capitalism, sketching the transformation of "women's work" from Fordism to post-Fordism and the pending crisis of social reproduction of the present. Drawing on the work of early Marxist feminists who revealed the productivity of women's reproductive labour in the home, it investigates the mechanisms that contribute to the persistence of the devaluation of women's work and the gender division of labour which continues to hold women responsible for unpaid and underpaid care and reproductive labour. This analysis leads to the conclusion that the analytical framework of the Marxist feminists, which focuses on the relation between labour and value, cannot fully account for the persistence of gender economic equality. Attention must also be given to the broader social institution of gender beyond labour relations, which defines women as inferior to men. Thus, efforts to valorize women's work will only succeed in combination with struggles to liberate women.

Keywords
care, feminism, reproductive labour, social reproduction, valorization

Introduction

In the 1970s and 80s, Marxist feminists provided invaluable insights into the relationship between capitalism and gender by revealing the productivity of the gender division of labour for capital (Von Werlhof/Mies/Bennholdt-Thomsen 1983; Dalla Costa 1972; Fortunati 1981). The household work performed primarily by women, they showed, functioned to reproduce labour-power, the source of capitalist profit. The accumulation of capital necessary to perpetuate capitalism was thus shown to occur not only through the exploitation of the wage labourer, as Marx would have it, but also through the exploitation of the unpaid reproductive labourer. More recently, feminist scholars have built on this tradition to expose the ways in which neoliberalization has exacerbated inequalities related to the gender division of labour and resulted in a 'crisis of social reproduction' – a state in which the means for a society to regenerate itself are no longer available – both on a global (see Federici 2010; Wichterich 2011) and national (for Germany, see Becker-Schmidt 2011; Jürgens 2010; Winker 2011) scale. According to these scholars, the social and economic devaluation of reproductive labour, which is still performed primarily by women, is both the central cause of crisis and intimately linked to the social subordination of women. The question as to how reproductive labour can be valorized is, therefore, decisive for feminist struggles and of immediate general social relevance.

The point of departure of this article is that this question has up to now not been sufficiently theorized. On the one hand, studies of economic relations between genders have tended to leave uninvestigated gender as a social institution (see Martin 2004; Risman 2004) and the broader functioning of gender, its production and reproduction, in relation to labour and resource distribution. On the other hand, theories of the production and reproduction of gender, focused on images, practices and identities, and frequently informed by discursive analysis and theory, have rarely analyzed the role of material, economic relations in the social construction and lived reality of gender. Drawing on both bodies of work, this article approaches the question of valorizing reproductive labour by asking how the gender division of labour, as the hierarchy that devalues 'women's work', functions and is reproduced. As demanded by the subject matter, a global perspective informs the analysis; the detailed focus, however, lies on social realities in Western Europe and, in particular, Germany.

The first part of the article, encompassing sections one to three, explores the contours of the social relations of production and reproduction from historical and theoretical perspectives. It identifies developments in specific characteristics of the gender division of labour and the reality of 'women's work' through the transition from Fordism to post-Fordism and up to the current crisis, drawing on insights from the Marxist feminist tradition, post-operaist theory[1] that builds on this tradition and debates surrounding the

1 Post-operaism (or 'post-workerism') refers to the theoretical and political current that emerged in the 1990s in Italy and built on the tradition of *operaismo* (autonomist Marxism) that was developed in Italy in the 1960s and 70s. Post-operaist theory has made significant analytical contributions to understanding post-Fordist capitalism, not least through the introduction of new terms

crisis of social reproduction and care. The second part, comprising sections four and five, inquires further into the particular mechanisms by which labour performed by women is both socially and economically devalued. It investigates the perpetuation of the gender division of labour, concluding that both gendered labour forms and relations and the social institution of gender, simultaneously internal to and transcending labour relations, play a role in reproducing the gender division of labour. Gendered labour relations and the broader social institution of gender are intimately related, each contributing to the (re)production of the other in a mutually-enforcing relationship. Understanding this relationship is a critical step in approaching the valorization of women's work, yet the analytical frameworks offered by Marxist feminism and gender theory do not fully account for the gender division of labour in this sense. To this end, the article sketches an expanded theoretical framework for understanding the devaluation of women's work by drawing on Louis Althusser's theory of ideology in the reproduction of social relations under capitalism. The article concludes with a brief note on the perspectives this framework opens for feminist struggles to valorize reproductive labour and emancipate women from gender subordination.

1 Capitalism and the gender division of labour

The history of capitalism is defined by spreading commodification, a development in which use-oriented production is absorbed into market relations and transformed into the profit-driven production of commodities (Marx 1867/1976), and the subsumption of the labour process under capital, as the labour process itself is taken hold of and ultimately transformed by capital (Marx 1863/1994). It is, moreover, marked by the transition from a social organization in which subsistence, or the means of social reproduction, is socially produced within and by all members of a community to one in which subsistence is produced in family households (Bennholdt-Thomsen 1983b). Thus, the onset of capitalism can be described as a material, spatial and conceptual reorganization of social production and reproduction.

Feminist scholars have shown that the gender division of labour as we know it arose with industrial capitalism (Bock/Duden 1977; Bennholdt-Thomsen 1983b; Dalla Costa 1972). As the market became the 'paradigm of social relations' (Caffentzis 2002), labour was re-organized along a series of apparent dichotomies, including productive/non-productive, profitable/non-profitable, public/private, male/female and, with the combined effect of these divisions, relevant/irrelevant. Labour engaged in the production of commodities became commodified itself, a good to be bought and sold on the capitalist market. Performed primarily by men, this work came to be considered socially relevant. The market-oriented spaces in which this labour was performed, moreover, became social space, the public sphere. Labour engaged in social reproduction remained

such as immaterial labour, cognitive capitalism and affect. For an overview of these theoretical developments, see Mezzadra 2009.

subsistence-oriented, became socially devalued and was displaced from common spaces into the household (Bennholdt-Thomsen 1983a). In this new constellation, women came to be responsible in private households for housework – a concept unknown before the seventeenth century (Bock/Duden 1977).

With these transformations, the bourgeois family model, the concept of the heterosexual nuclear family, replaced other models of kinship. As capitalism developed, this model became increasingly important for production, with domestic labour emerging in the late nineteenth century as the 'key engine for the reproduction of the industrial workforce' (Federici 2010: 3). In the twentieth century, with the rise of the welfare state and growing strength of labour unions, the 'male breadwinner' family model, in which the adult man works for wages that provide financial support for the family while the adult woman provides the reproductive needs in the home, turned from cultural ideal into material reality.[2]

The new material, spatial and conceptual organization of society brought about due to capitalism designates to women a form of labour – reproductive labour – that is deemed less relevant and made socially invisible. Both women as economic subjects and women's work are attributed little social value, and these two instances of non-valorization – that are inseparable and mutually constitutive of each another – work to perpetuate one another. Those performing socially less relevant work are socially irrelevant, and the work of socially less relevant subjects is devalued in society. Further, labour performed by gendered subjects becomes gendered labour, and people performing gendered labour become gendered economic subjects. The gender division of labour along the lines of the male breadwinner model that arose with capitalism left women devalued and invisible as economic subjects, while women's work was non-valorized as well as socially atomized and unseen.

Early feminist analyses of capitalism did not merely uncover the form of structural gender inequality it brought about. Working against the naturalizing claim that housework was performed 'out of love', feminists fought to recognize the role of housework in upholding capitalism, unmasking the gender division of labour, gender hierarchies and the value-producing nature of unpaid women's work. In their engagement with Marx's analysis of capitalism they revealed a major analytical gap in his work. While Marx claimed that value was produced solely in the production of material commodities, feminists argued that the (immaterial) labour necessary to (re)produce the labour force constitutes a primary field of value production that serves capital accumulation (von Werlhof/Bennholdt-Thomsen/Mies 1983; Dalla Costa 1972; Fortunati 1981).

The feminist critique of Marx centres on a deconstruction of two dichotomies that are central to his analysis of capitalism, namely production/reproduction and material/immaterial. For Marx, 'productive' labour is the labour involved in commodity production (Marx 1867/1976). In brief, commodity production is characterized by a production relation in which a worker invests labour-time in the production of a material good, and that labour-time is of greater value than the wages the worker earns for the labour-time.

2 In prosperous post-war Germany, this model spread to the working class (see Jürgens 2010).

While the value of a non-commodified good is limited to its 'use-value', or its qualitative utility that is 'only realized in use or consumption' (Marx 1867/1976: 126), the surplus or unpaid labour-time invested in the production of a commodified good allows it to be sold on the market for an 'exchange value' greater than the cost of its production. This capacity to generate surplus value, or profit based on unpaid labour, is the defining element of capitalist productivity according to Marx.

Because Marx did not consider reproductive work to be involved in commodity production, he did not define it as productive labour.[3] His concept of reproduction is limited to the claim that commodity production necessitates the reproduction of required material items, labour-power and the particular social relations of production that shape the way in which the good is produced. With respect to the reproduction of the labour-force, Marx claims that 'necessaries' must be consumed in order to reproduce the 'muscles, bones, nerves and brains of existing labourers', and that new labourers must be born (Marx 1867/1976: 717). The consumption necessary for reproduction, he argues, takes place on the basis of 'drives for self-preservation and propagation' (718).

This account of reproduction fails to account for the reproductive labour of women: 'Marx acts as if the wage-laborer were to stand alone in the world, and as if consuming a certain quantum of food per day would suffice for his survival, which he moreover appears to consume in the same raw form in which he purchases it' (von Werlhof/Bennholdt-Thomsen/Mies 1983: 84). Further, as Dalla Costa (1972) makes apparent, Marx neglected to recognize that this reproductive labour is productive according to his own terms. Reproductive labour is invested in the production and reproduction of labour-power, the commodity upon which all production rests. In assuming that the value of a commodity can be traced to the labour-time of the worker engaged directly in the production of material commodities, Marx overlooks the labour-time invested in the (re)production of that worker (Fortunati 1981). This analysis exposes the social surplus created by reproductive labour, 'the secret of all capitalist life' (Caffentzis 2002: 14).

The work of the Marxist feminists reveals how supposedly objective, analytical definitions of production and reproduction function as political and social mechanisms with material consequences that disadvantage women – and brings to the fore that such categories are, not least, outcomes of cultural negotiations. Departing from the early Marxist feminist critique, scholars and activists have made efforts to call attention to the productivity of reproductive labour. The recognition that unpaid women's labour served as the backbone for capitalist production provided the basis for 'wages for housework' campaigns during the 1970s in Western Europe and North America (see Federici 2011).

3 For extended considerations on Marx's exclusion of reproductive labour from his analysis of capitalism, see Federici (2004).

2 'Women's work' in neoliberalism: Precarity and autonomy, desire and necessity

The 'wages for housework' campaigns took place within the political context of the second-wave feminist movement.[4] This movement articulated a critique of the male breadwinner model that both called attention to the value of women's work in the household and urged women to engage in paid labour outside of the household. Yet as women entered the workforce en masse, labour conditions themselves were changing. As especially post-operaist feminist scholars, including Federici (2011), have pointed out, the second-wave women's movement and mass entry of women into the workforce must be understood in the broader context of political economic transformation in the 1970s. This was marked, on the one hand, by a transition of capitalism from Fordist to post-Fordist production and accumulation forms and, on the other, by a transformation in the relationship between the state and the market from 'state-organized capitalism' (Fraser 2009) to neoliberalism. In the Fordist production of industrial capitalism, the factory and other industrial spaces were the central places of capital accumulation. Production centred around material goods and work was performed during fixed shifts. Long-term contracts between employees and employers on an individual level, and between labour unions and corporations or industry associations on a collective scale, were ensured through the corporatism of state-organized capitalism, a configuration of negotiations and contracts between business, labour and the state that provided for set, long-term labour relations.[5] While collective bargaining made it possible for workers to secure 'breadwinner' wages, the post-war Keynesian social welfare state heavily regulated labour relations and workers and families were insured with public unemployment, disability, retirement and health insurance. Feminist critique revealed the gaps in this narrative, showing that the household was no less a site of production than the factory. Women's labour in the household produced material and immaterial goods, they claimed, that yielded surplus value and served capital accumulation, and this labour was not regulated, paid or considered to be work at all.

The 1970s marked the transition from Fordism to the post-Fordist regime of 'flexible accumulation… [which] rests on flexibility with respect to labour processes, labour markets, products and patterns of consumption' (Harvey 1989: 147). Intimately tied to this transition was the replacement of the doctrines of state-led capitalism in the 1960s and 1970s with neoliberal political ideology, which 'seeks to bring all human action into the domain of the market' (Harvey 2005: 3). As rates of profit in industrial economies fell from the late 1960s onwards, governments responded with policies of labour market liberalization, deregulation and privatization, triggering long-term trends of declining wages and the increasing flexibilization, individualization and precarization of the wage labour force. Alongside the slow death of the 'breadwinner wage' and the rise of the

4 The 'second women's movement' or *zweite Frauenbewegung* in Germany.

5 Different forms of regulation and welfare systems emerged across countries and these differences have led to variations in the gender division of labour that cannot be accounted for in detail in this article. For an analysis of different welfare systems in capitalism, see Esping-Andersen 1990.

'adult worker model', in which all adults are expected to work regardless of family situation, sustained attacks were initiated against the social welfare state. Over time, these resulted in massive cuts in healthcare and childcare provisions and unemployment, disability and retirement security.[6] Simultaneously, capital created new spheres for accumulation. This occurred in capitalist industrial societies with the commodification of the production of immaterial goods (see Lazzarato 1996; Morini 2007), including information, communications, technology and care services, and in former colonies through neoimperialist schemes. In this context, structural adjustment programmes implemented through the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which effectively dismantled local economies, forced state social welfare systems in the global South to be slashed (Federici 2012). Similar logics could be witnessed as Western-led processes of privatization in former state-socialist countries similarly created a situation of declining wages coupled with the hollowing out of state welfare programmes. Thus, in diverse local particularities, women have taken up wage labour around the globe caught between a desire for autonomy on the one hand and economic necessity on the other.

According to Fraser, neoliberalism has twisted feminist demands, 'turn[ing] a sow's ear into a silk purse' (Fraser 2009: 110) in its manipulation of feminist struggle in order to serve capital by making the expansion of the labour force appear desirable. According to Federici, women 'entered the "workplace" at the time of a historic, worldwide attack on workers' wages and employment levels… Not surprisingly, the jobs awaiting them have been at the bottom of the work-scale, among the most monotonous, hazardous, least secure and lowest paid' (Federici 2012: 188). For Fraser, the mass entry of women into the labour market 'serves today to intensify capitalism's valorization of waged labour' (Fraser 2009: 111). On the other hand, precisely because capitalism valorizes waged labour, taking up employment has allowed women social recognition, increased financial independence and an undeniable increase in freedom – albeit within limits.

As Jürgens has claimed with reference to the German context, the erosion of the breadwinner model that has accompanied labour market liberalization and the increase in women's employment is 'despite all emancipatory avowals… in no way motivated by equal opportunity policies' (Jürgens 2010: 565). A brief overview of the gender stratification of labour in Germany points to the perpetuation of gender economic inequality. Seventy-one per cent of women in Germany were employed in 2011[7] (Federal Statistical Office 2012). On average, they earned 23 per cent less per hour than their male counter-

6 It is important to note that post-Fordist forms of capitalist production and accumulation and neoliberal political and social policies have resulted in a broad diversification of economic life forms: Post-Fordism did not replace Fordism in a one-to-one manner; rather, post-Fordism, itself characterized by a diversity of malleable forms, has become the paradigmatic mode of production alongside continuing relations that fit the Fordist prototype. Similarly, the 'adult worker' model has not fully replaced the male breadwinner model, but rather policies, opinions and practices informed by both prototypes shape contemporary society. This paradigm, which is certainly marked by identifiable logics yet is never without contradictory examples, is reflected in the incredible diversity of 'women's work' at present.

7 Women between the age of 20 and 74. For that same age group, 81 per cent of men in Germany were employed.

parts. Of these employed women, 45 per cent worked part-time, compared to 10 per cent of employed men. Of employed women with a child under the age of 18, only 18 per cent worked full-time.[8] Women made up 77 per cent of the healthcare and social work sector and 69 per cent of the childcare and education sector – two sectors characterized by lower-than-average salaries. A comprehensive evaluation of the current contours of the gender division of labour in Germany would go beyond the scope of this article, yet the above statistics highlight two points that are important for understanding the devaluation of women's wage labour: First, sectors that involve care and reproductive work are both dominated by women and relatively underpaid. Second, the large number of women working only part-time points to the persistence of the male breadwinner model that holds women responsible for care and reproductive labour and highlights the fact that women responsible for care tasks must choose between their dependents and their own career prospects. That women often opt for the former is reflected in the fact that in 2011 women held only 30 per cent of managerial positions and a mere three per cent of seats on the executive boards of the 200 largest German companies (Holst/Busch/Kröger 2012).

Globally, women's employment not only subjects women to the generalization of precarity that characterizes neoliberal capitalism on official employment markets, it has driven women into the economic margins of gendered labour in the informal sector, including sex work and domestic labour, where extreme precarity is exacerbated by social isolation. In the worst cases, and not infrequently, it has driven women into the violent, criminal zones of the global sex and trafficking industries. Overall, women's employment lengthens women's working days, as they are still responsible for unpaid reproductive labour, and, in light of the immense gender wage gap, contributes to the feminization of poverty[9] (Federici 2012).

The transition to neoliberalism was distinguished by new spheres of capital accumulation and a reconfiguration of the capitalist organization of time and space as described in the previous section. Workers became increasingly subject to irregular working hours and are required to be available during official non-working hours. Flexible working hours allow many women to work and at the same time remain responsible for reproductive labour. However, by squeezing wage-working hours into gaps in the day while children are at school, after children's bedtime or at the weekend when other working adults can pick up care responsibilities, the increased pressure to be available during non-working hours piles stress onto working mothers and forces them, for example, to respond to work emails while cooking dinner or to find childcare at a moment's notice.[10] Further, replacing fixed employment relations with temporary contracts contributes to the generalization of precarity, which is characterized by a lack of security that becomes

8 This statistic refers to 2010. All others relate to 2011.

9 N. B.: not just in terms of income but of opportunities (a qualitative index).

10 Furthermore, under these conditions every child's sickness causes a minor crisis for a working mother, who has a last-minute scramble to find alternative childcare or a way to be absent from her own place of work without unbearable consequences. On account of a lack of better options women sometimes have to resort to taking children to work.

even more stressful when a steady income is needed to cover the needs of a household. Individualized and in competition with one another, post-Fordist workers must be continually and constantly engaged in self-optimization in order to ensure future employment, for example by taking continuing education classes, fostering relationships in professional networks and even taking up hobbies perceived as attractive by employers (see Bröckling 2007). For women with care responsibilities, this not only means that wage labour cuts into what would otherwise be leisure time, but also that tough choices have to be made between caring for dependents and advancing their own income prospects.

Not only the temporal and spatial distinctions between work and leisure time, workplace and home have become blurred: the 'separation between work and the worker' has been broken down and work has become 'part of *active life* rather than "just work"' (Morini 2007: 87 – italics in original). Operating according to the logic of performance optimization through self-control and self-responsibility, the contemporary labour process exploits the physical, psychic and mental energies of workers (see Becker-Schmidt 2011). While the generalization of precarity and the spread of performance logic under neoliberalism certainly affect all genders, these developments tend to have exponential consequences for women workers, who are more likely to work under flexible, insecure conditions and are required to maintain the physical and emotional capacities to take care of others.

Hardt and Negri refer to 'labour of the head and heart' to describe the 'forms of service work, affective labour, and cognitive labour' that characterize contemporary production (Hardt/Negri 2009: 133). If we consider not only the 'experience brought by women which stems from their historic function in the realm of reproduction and domestic work' (Morini 2007: 42), but also the social forces that perpetuate specific forms of female socialization related to women's continuing responsibility for care tasks, it becomes clear that these forms of production are especially exploitative of women's capacities, as women bear more responsibility than men for emotional tasks in the workplace. According to Hardt and Negri, women are held accountable for such work: 'In fact any woman who is not willing to do affective labor on call – smile appropriately, tend to hurt feelings, knit social relationships, and generally perform care and nurturing – is viewed as a kind of monster' (Hardt/Negri 2009: 134).

Acknowledging such demands in the 'productive' sphere calls into question those same dichotomies – material/immaterial, productive/reproductive, work/leisure, workplace/home – the early Marxist feminists deconstructed by analyzing reproductive labour. In the same way as feminist analysis in the 1970s revealed that 'material and immaterial labour are distributed along a continuum of interaction whose boundaries cannot easily be demarcated' (Alessandrini 2011: 13), so Hardt and Negri now claim that capitalist production 'emphasizes the increasingly blurred boundaries between labour and life, and between production and reproduction' (Hardt/Negri 2009: 134). They propose that labour is '*becoming biopolitical*' (Hardt/Negri 2009: 134 – italics in original), that the primary site of capital accumulation at present is in the production of life itself and that this form of production contains resistant and creative potential. The

subversive nature of biopolitics, defined as 'the power of life to resist and determine an alternative production of subjectivity' (Hardt/Negri 2009: 57), is central to their thesis. The potential unleashed by this concept for feminist politics will be revisited at the end of this article.

Arguing against the optimism of Hardt and Negri, Federici points out that 'DEATH-POWER is as important as BIO-POWER in the shaping of [contemporary] capitalist relations' (Federici 2010: 11 – capitalization in original). From a global perspective, capital accumulation today occurs not only through the generation of sociality, but also, simultaneously, in its destruction. Wars, forced migration and the slashing of health and education budgets exemplify not only the destruction of life in pursuit of profit, but also place a disproportionate burden on women who are responsible for care work.[11]

3 Precarity and devaluation advanced: The pending crisis of social reproduction

Despite the massive increase in women's employment, women remain largely responsible for household reproduction. Moreover, the demands of household reproduction have increased with the political economic reconfigurations brought about by neoliberalism: 'Even in the most technologically developed countries, housework has not been reduced, instead, it has been marketized, redistributed, mostly on the shoulders of immigrant women from the South and former socialist countries' (Federici 2010: 12). As the state budgets providing care and services for children, the elderly, the sick and disabled are cut, these tasks are effectively pushed back into the private household, where mostly female household members or paid domestic workers assume the burden.[12] While reproductive work has been partly commodified, it remains economically and socially devalued, low-paying, low-status and atomized. Alongside the commodification of care work – the increase in care work performed against wages for 'others' – women continue to carry out the bulk of reproductive labour in their own households.

Gabriele Winker (2009) has provided more differentiated insight into the conditions of women in the current organization of social reproduction with her three 'ideal family models'. These models are based on the German case but are relevant to a broader context of post-industrial societies. In 'economized' families, two working parents earn above-average wages and do not have time to provide child-rearing and care tasks, a gap they fill by employing caregivers. According to Winker, such caregivers are 'primarily

11 Feminists have further criticized Hardt and Negri's biopolitical analysis by pointing out that it is limited to evaluating affective labour in commodified spheres, which has little to do with the unpaid reproductive labour that in many ways remains bound to women (Fortunati 2007; Federici 2006, 2010). According to Federici (2006), this perspective 'strips the feminist analysis of housework of all its demystifying power'.

12 Furthermore, across the globe children are increasingly taking up household responsibilities (Silvia Federici, personal communication, May 5, 2013).

illegalized migrants from Eastern Europe, but also from Latin America and Asia, who perform these services in the households' (Winker 2009: 56). In 'precarious' families, the income earned from the full-time employment of one parent has to be supplemented by a second income, usually through part-time work done by the woman, and the terms of employment of one or both working parents are insecure. In these families, it is mostly women who are subject to the double pressure of precarious employment and performing the majority of care work for the family, and all family members experience limitations due to the insecurity of the situation. Finally, in 'subsistence-oriented' families with no secured basic income who depend on state support, women tend to assume care-related tasks while also expending extra energy on creating a minimum standard of living in the household that basic income cannot provide on its own.

Winker's models show how the current social organization of production and reproduction results in 'reproductive gaps' that take on different forms according to socioeconomic reality. The accumulation of reproductive gaps within and across societies leads to a situation in which conditions are no longer in place for a society to reproduce itself – a crisis of social reproduction. Federici (2010) has noted that the state of crisis in social reproduction has long been a reality in the Global South. In recent years, more and more scholars have taken up this language to describe the state of social reproduction in wealthy countries, including in Germany (see Becker-Schmidt 2011; Demirović et al. 2011; Jürgens 2010; Winker 2011).

At the macro-level, a crisis of social reproduction indicates not only a society's inability to revitalize in terms of regenerating life-power and labour-capacity, but equally a failure with respect to the reproduction of social cycles that hold the social structure together as a whole (Becker-Schmidt 2011). Social reproduction, then, refers to 'social generativity in the broadest sense': the sustainability of the population with a view to standards of civil society, the passing-on of cultural experiences and conditions for socialization in which humane manners of coexistence are learned (Becker-Schmidt 2011: 10). In the 1970s, feminist scholars attributed falling birth rates in post-industrial societies to a 'procreation strike' on the part of women seeking emancipation from the household (Dalla Costa 1972; Federici 2010). Today, given the generalization of precarity and lack of state support, it is time to reanalyze this claim, asking whether low birth rates in countries like Italy and Greece, estimated at 1.41 and 1.40, respectively, for 2013 (Central Intelligence Agency 2013), have more to do with the fact that growing sections of these populations lack the means necessary to support children.[13]

At the micro-level, a crisis of social reproduction relates to a gap between reproductive needs and capacities that results in the impossibility of reproducing the household and the self as demanded by individual and social needs. Reproduction of the self refers to ensuring one's own physical, psychic and mental well-being. In neoliberal capitalism, this must occur with a view to continual self-optimization – and parallel to, enmeshed in or despite the exploitation of physical, psychic and mental energies that takes place in

13 This insight arose in an exchange with the feminist activist-researchers Claudia Bernardi and Sabrina Apicella.

wage labour relations. As social and economic demands on the individual increase, so do expectations of parenthood: Parents, de facto mostly mothers, must ensure that their children accumulate enough of the appropriate social and cultural capital to survive as part of the globalized labour force.

Crises of reproduction set off global chain effects. As reproductive gaps in countries like Germany are filled by employing migrant care workers, the crisis is effectively exported, transferring reproductive gaps to the migrants' countries of origin (Wichterich 2011). Within a country, reproductive gaps are also transferred from the wealthy to the poor, for example, as wealthy families employ working-class domestic workers.

4 The persistence of the gender division of labour

To the extent that the pending crisis of social reproduction is structured by precisely this gender division of labour and devaluation of care and reproductive labour, the question of how to overcome the gender division of labour and valorize work performed by women is of critical social relevance. Moreover, the social and economic devaluation of women's work seems to contradict Hardt and Negri's claim that at the heart of capital accumulation today lies the production of life itself, especially given the concentration of women in sectors invested in this very activity. Yet the question raised by this contradiction – *how to account for the perpetuation of the gender division of labour and the persisting devaluation of women's work* – reaches beyond the analytical framework of most accounts of contemporary capitalism. Thus, this section is devoted to exploring the reproduction of economic equality along gendered lines, which will be followed by closing considerations on feminist strategies for countering the crisis of social reproduction. As will be shown, the challenge when it comes to understanding the perpetuation of the gender division of labour forces theorists to build on the insights of the Marxist feminists and consider in relation to these insights the function and mechanisms of gender as a broader social institution extending beyond labour relations.

A central insight of the early Marxist feminists was that 'capitalist value is produced and determined [as] a process rather than an imperative or irrefutable logic' (Alessandrini 2011: 18). Encarnación Gutiérrez-Rodríguez has examined this process more closely by taking up Marx's suggestion of thinking about value as a 'social hieroglyph'. She points out that the ways in which we conceive of value and the monetary value of things at given times are 'outcomes of historical processes, social relations, and cultural negotiations' (Gutiérrez-Rodríguez 2010: 91). This perspective reveals a new dimension to the processes by which value is determined: 'value has a twofold character as, on the one hand, it relates to the material conditions of production, and on the other, to a cultural script of production' (Gutiérrez-Rodríguez 2010: 93). Following Gutiérrez-Rodríguez, the devaluation of women's work can be thought of as a record of the historical processes, social relations and cultural negotiations that have resulted in and reproduce its devalued status. This approach forces a methodological shift away from

considering the devaluation of women's work solely in terms of economic relations, towards a broader examination of the 'cultural script' of gender in which women's work is devalued as such.

In her own ethnographic study of domestic labour in Western European countries, Gutiérrez-Rodríguez traces the devaluation of domestic work to its discreditation as 'unskilled' labour that is 'socially devalued through its cultural predication as feminized and racialized labour' (Gutiérrez-Rodríguez 2010: 3). Her study, moreover, provides insight into the (re)production of the gender division of labour. In the dual-earner families Gutiérrez-Rodríguez studied, women tended to remain primarily responsible for the household: 'Even in some cases where the male counterpart was working at home and spent more time in the household than his partner, women were central to the household management' (Gutiérrez-Rodríguez 2010: 104). According to these findings, a reconfiguration of the economic and spatial dimensions of the division of (wage) labour – in terms of who works more hours outside the home – alone does not suffice to redistribute reproductive labour tasks in the household: domestic work remains stuck with women. This gender division of labour persists even when women attempt to overcome it: 'Liberal discourses on alternative gender arrangements, albeit integrated in the household members' self-perception, are in stark contrast with the arrangement of routines in which feminity and masculinity are reiterated through the clear or even fuzzy gendered division of household tasks' (Gutiérrez-Rodríguez 2010: 106). Women's continuing primary responsibility for domestic labour thus not only perpetuates the gender division of labour, it reproduces ideas of gender that provide the structure for this division. The difference between actual gender arrangements in the household and household members' self-perception appears to be evidence of a contradiction between the actual and ideal gender division of labour.

Similar evidence has been found in a study on the division of labour in married couples who claim to be committed to feminist ideals (Risman 1998). In her analysis of the results, Risman distinguishes between reflexive claims and non-reflexive expectations to explain how, despite a commitment to gender equality and similar incomes, both the men and women she studied have not succeeded in overcoming gender inequality. This perpetuation of gender inequality, she argues, can be primarily traced to gender-associated, cultural expectations that inform social interaction on a non-reflexive level. Her conclusion that 'the expectations of unequal worth are attached to the sex category itself' (Risman 1998: 34) resonates with the 'devaluation thesis' found in sociological research on the gender wage gap, which holds that because women are culturally undervalued relative to men, activities performed by women are less valued than they would otherwise be (England 1992; England/Budig/Folbre 2002; Kilbourne et al. 1994).

Returning to the question of the reproduction of the gender division of labour, then, we might ask how gender itself 'as a modern social institution [whose purpose] is to construct women as a group to be the subordinates of men as a group' (Lorber 1994: 35) is reproduced in relation to the gender division of labour. Considering the historical, social, cultural and institutional reality of gender, lived and experienced as a form of social

inequality on a daily basis, highlights the fact that it is insufficient, as many Marxian theorists do, to understand the specificity of women's oppression in terms of relations of production and reproduction. Rather, gender must be understood as a social institution which, for analytical purposes, can be abstracted from relations of production, yet nonetheless plays an important role in the social institution of the gender division of labour. It follows that gender as a social institution and the gender division of labour must be approached and studied as mutually-enforcing institutions insofar as each determines the other, by virtue of their difference.

5 Expanding the framework: the return of the subject and biopolitical perspectives for feminist struggles

What follows is a proposal for a theoretical framework for analyzing this interrelationship. It is suggested that the Marxian tools of the Marxist feminists must be expanded to account for Louis Althusser's (1970/1971) extension of Marx's theory of the reproduction of the social relations of production to account for ideology, or the role of ideas, images and practices that at first glance to not appear to be directly related to economic and labour relations. Returning to Althusser may seem questionable given that Althusser himself did not consider gender. Yet by adding the gender perspective to Althusser's theory of ideology, it becomes a theoretical lens that helps make the mutual relationship between gender as a social institution and the gender division of labour intelligible.

The relevance of Althusser's theory for understanding this relationship is threefold. First, it accounts for subjectivation, the process of submission and subjection to the gender order that individuals undergo in becoming gendered subjects. Subjection, according to Althusser, occurs through *interpellation*. In this process, individuals are 'hailed' by ideology, by the ruling ideological order, and recognize themselves as subjects according to this order in response. We can, therefore, think of gender as an ideology in Althusser's terms, recalling that gender serves to construct women as a group subordinate to men as a group. In gender interpellation, females are called upon as women, subordinate to men, and recognize themselves in this inferior subject position.[14]

The second relevant element of Althusser's theory is its account of the reproduction of skills of production, giving insight into the mechanisms by which women, rather than men, tend to assume caring work. To this end, Althusser claims that when thinking about how labourers are reproduced, we must consider the reproduction of the skills of labour, on the one hand, and the worker's subjection to the ruling ideas of the established order, on the other. To this, he adds: 'it is not enough to say "not only but also", for it is clear that *it is in the forms and under the forms of ideological subjection that provision is made for the reproduction of the skills of labour power*' (Althusser 1970/1971: 133 – italics in original).

14 I would like to thank James Murphy for contributing to this formulation.

In terms of reproductive labour or care work, it follows that the passing on of care skills from one generation to the next – and the learning of these skills by a new generation – takes place within and through a framework of ideas, notions, concepts and norms that constitute status quos of gender and sexuality. This framework is marked by the two-gender system and heteronormativity, as well as by the historical subordination of women in society, the persisting notion of an 'inherent' or 'natural' female emotionality and designation of household work and affective tasks to women. The fact that female infants grow up as girls to become women who are able and willing to perform reproductive labour is contingent upon the material persistence of such ideas and associated social expectations. The processes of subjectivation by which individuals are continuously formed as gendered, labouring subjects – learning and incorporating certain kinds of labour as bodily practice – occur, if we follow Althusser, within and through this ideological framework. The gender division of labour is thus reproduced by ideas, imaginaries and practices of gender – by gender ideology.

This links in with the third relevant aspect of Althusser's theory, namely his argument that ideology does not exist outside of practice and practice must be understood as ideology. As such, ideology is material. It exists in and is expressed as social practices. To illustrate this, Althusser cites Pascal: 'Kneel down, move your lips in prayer, and you will believe' (Althusser 1970/1971: 168). This insight into the connectedness of idea and practice, transcending a material/immaterial dichotomy, is key to understanding how the gender division of labour persists at once as a cultural idea(l) and daily bodily practice. The mechanisms at work in the reproduction of the gender division of labour and the process by which ideas, as practices, persist and change, must be a task for future research. The central contribution, however, of bringing Althusser's considerations on ideology and subjectivation into the analysis of the gender division of labour, is the addition of one further analytical dimension to the framework constructed by the Marxist feminists. While their analysis was informed by studying the complex relationship between labour and value, we can now add the subject as a further site at which practices and negotiations at the intersection of gender and economics are carried out.

In closing, I will touch briefly on what this extended analytical framework could mean for feminist struggles. Feminist strategies informed by the theory of the Marxist feminists call for the valorization of care and reproductive work and the re-organization of social reproduction from an individualized to a collective venture. According to different imagined relationships with the state, these propose steps ranging from self-valorization through the creation of care networks to a revamping of state infrastructure for social reproduction (see Alessandrini 2011; Federici 2010; Feminist Fightback Collective 2011; Precarias a la Deriva 2005; Winker 2011; Wichterich 2011). While such steps form a primary element of a feminist strategy to valorize 'women's work', as long as production and reproduction are organized along gender lines (whereby gender implies an implicit hierarchy), the work performed by women will not be able to break out of the historical, social and cultural forces that register it as second-rank. The claim made in this article is that in order for feminist struggles for the valorization of reproductive and

care labour to be successful, the gender division of labour must be overcome – and for this to happen, gender itself must be transformed. Because the gender division of labour and gender as a broader social institution mutually constitute one another, their transformation must occur simultaneously. Changes in one will bring about changes in the other, but transformation must be advanced from both perspectives. With respect to gender as a social institution, in the same way that questioning the distinction between productive and reproductive labour was necessary to call attention to the value of women's work, a critical examination of the political functioning of the categories 'man' and 'woman' as constitutive of the ruling ideology of gender can help us address the devaluation of women as labouring subjects and the devaluation of women's work. These categories themselves must be questioned, contested and rid of their historical hierarchy, and feminists must adopt practices that destabilize social and cultural expectations related to gender in a way that does not deny (historical) differences in experience.

Looking forward, we can recall the potential of a biopolitical understanding of (re)productive labour as a site of resistance in which the existing order can be disrupted and where *new forms* can be produced (Hardt/Negri 2009). These new forms must aim not only at communalizing or collectivizing care work and giving recognition to the productivity of this work by creating new models and practices of living together. In work as caregivers, employers and employees, partners and friends, feminists must also explore the subversive potential of their production. With the goal of improving the social status of women and simultaneously denying the fixed category of woman as it functions to define women as secondary to men, feminists can aim to (re)produce subjectivities that invent new forms and practices of relating to ourselves and each other as labouring subjects, projecting images of utopia as their horizon.

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Zur Person

Kelly Mulvaney, Humboldt University Berlin, Institute of European Ethnology. Research: gender and labour, capitalism and crisis, transnational social movements.
Kontakt: Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Institut für Europäische Ethnologie, Mohrenstraße 41, 10117 Berlin
E-Mail: kmmulvaney@gmail.com