1. Introduction

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In this issue of *The Commoner* we begin a discussion of *care work* and more broadly *reproductive work*, by which we refer to the complex of activities and services that reproduce human beings as well as the commodity labor power, starting with child-care, housework, sex work and elder care, both in the form of waged and unwaged labour. Our objective is to examine how the neo-liberal restructuring of the global economy, over the last three decades, has reshaped the organization of this work. In particular, we examine how it has transformed our bodies and desires, reconfigured our homes, our families and social relations and, most importantly, what are the struggles that women are making in response to the new conditions of reproductive labor and the new forms of cooperation that are emerging in this context. While focussing on reproductive work and care work in particular, we also revisit the feminist and Marxist body of knowledge that we have produced or inherited on this subject, testing its utility against the developments that have occurred in the field of reproduction with the increased mobility of women across borders, into cities, out of marriages, into paid work,

out of traditional gender roles, into old age and in and out of motherhood. We also examine the intersection of reproduction/care work and migration, gender, race, labour relations; and the changing nature of both the work that is performed in the "private" sphere and the subjects who perform such work.

We believe that it is important to engage in this analysis because the struggle over "reproduction" is central to every other struggle and to the development of "self-reproducing movements," that is movements that do not separate political work from the activities necessary to the reproduction of our life, for no struggle is sustainable that ignores the needs, experiences, and practices that reproducing ourselves entails. Moreover, the intensification and institutionalization of the global economic crisis poses with new urgency the necessity to construct an alternative to life under capitalism, beginning with the construction of more autonomous forms of social reproduction, for every day it becomes evident that neither the state nor the market can guarantee our survival. Thus, as people who are implicated in reproductive work (which we all are) we are eager to share ideas, questions and research with all those who are involved in social movements seeking to transform not only reproductive labour but also work in general and the home.

With this purpose in mind, we have selected a number of documents, interviews and articles that in no way pretend to give an exhaustive analysis of the re-organization of reproduction internationally, but help us investigate some of the questions most crucial for this task.

We begin by noticing that the concept of "care work" – which highlights the relational character of reproductive

activities – is to a great extent artificial, for all care work requires domestic work and all domestic work requires, to lesser or greater degrees, some care work. However, this distinction, which originated with the marketization of many reproductive tasks, has a practical purpose. It helps domestic workers in their negotiations with employers, to reach agreement on the tasks and activities for which they are employed and to enforce limits to what can be asked of them as part of their jobs. For instance, if I am employed to clean your house, it would be outside of my job description as a cleaner to look after your six year old who happens to be at home sick from school on the day that I clean. The articulation of care work as distinct from domestic work also highlights the various skills required for the different jobs of reproduction, presumably enhancing the social value of reproductive activities.

But the distinction should not be understood in exclusionary terms, as it is often done in current sociological literature. For it makes no sense empirically or theoretically to discuss the care, affection and relationality required to look after a child or sick person without also thinking about the tasks of washing, hanging up and folding away their clothes or vacuuming and mopping the floor on which they play or rest. Indeed, "care work" is an outstanding example of the impossibility to separate material from immaterial labor, whether it is done for pay or no pay.

That care work cannot be separated from domestic work is most evident when this work is done by family members, who cannot limit their work to the communicative, affective aspects of reproduction and delegate to others the more material ones. Indeed, the case of parents who have only "quality time" with their children, that is time

free from any material tasks, is a rarity found only in the upper classes. By privileging “care work” as the only focus of analysis we also risk contributing to the devaluation of domestic work and material activity, and making the unpaid domestic labor done in the home invisible again.

We treat “care work” therefore, as a particular aspect of reproductive work by which we refer to: household cleaning, shopping, preparing food, doing the laundry, paying the bills, providing intimacy and emotional support, such as listening and consoling; bearing children, teaching and disciplining them are also an important part of reproductive work. We must add the un-named, unnamable labor required to anticipate, prevent or resolve crises, keep up good relations with kin and neighbours, coping with the growing threats to our health –through the food we eat, the water we drink. This description still does not account for the work of millions of women and children across the planet who, in addition to the tasks outlined, must spend long hours fetching water, wood for fuel, making fire on open stoves. As Laura Agustín’s article highlights, a key component of “care work” is also sex work, an activity, she points out, that reproduces social life in the same way that other bodily services do, often including company, self-esteem boosting conversation, and as essential to our reproduction as eating food or keeping a healthy environment.

It was one of the theoretical and political revolutions brought about by the feminist movement of the 1970s to bring this work –traditionally invisible, taken for granted, performed for no pay outside of any social contract– to the foreground of political theory and organizing. Ironically, at the very moment in which they refused a destiny dedicated

to housework, many feminists discovered the crucial social function of this work, redefining it as work that produces labor-power and, as such, a precondition for every other forms of capitalist production. In our ARCHIVE SECTION we present some of the texts in which this analysis was first elaborated, as we believe that its significance cannot be overestimated.

This new feminist perspective rejected the common assumptions that domestic/care work is a personal service or a pre-capitalist form of labor, redefining it, instead, as a key aspect of social reproduction in capitalist society and value-creation. To posit housework as work that re/produces the workforce revealed the immense amount of unpaid labor at the heart of the wage relation and had a liberating effect especially for women. By unmasking the capitalist function of this work, by showing that domestic work reproduces us, but for the most part is performed under conditions not set by us, it helped dissipate the sense of guilt that women have so often experienced whenever they have wanted to refuse this work. Equally important, it uncovered a whole field of struggles, relations and connections previously unrecognized, like the relation between women's "refusal of procreation" in Europe after the Second World War and emigration, which is the theme of Dalla Costa's insightful essay in our ARCHIVE. For these reasons, despite the initial opposition it was met with, coming from different quarters (feminists, leftists, liberals), this Feminist Marxist approach has had such a profound influence on the radical and even academic political discourse that its main tenets have become common notions. Also the demand for Wages For Housework continues to have an appeal, as shown by the recent campaign

manifesto of the Socialist Feminist Collective (Turkey) included in the last section of this issue. Today, however, it is often asked if this perspective still holds given the changes that have taken place in the organization of reproductive labor over the last decades, with the massive entrance of women in the waged labor market, the ethnicization and marketization of many domestic tasks, and the feminist renegotiation of every aspect of family life.

Can we, it is asked, hold on to a perspective that looks at the world, capital, and male-female relations, from the viewpoint of women's unpaid domestic labor when so many women are now working for a wage, and so much reproductive work is performed outside the home on a commercial basis or in the home but by domestic "helpers" for pay? Isn't domestic work being already "valorized"? Further, how can we continue to claim that unpaid reproductive labor is a ground of commonality for women when the "globalization" and ethnicization of care have instituted between many of them a madam-maid relation? Hasn't the time come to go beyond gender distinctions and even the distinctions between production and reproduction, waged and unwaged labor?

Several of the articles that we have chosen touch on these questions, mostly arguing in support of the continuing validity of this perspective. Silvia Federici's "The Unfinished Feminist Revolution" points out that, even today, it is women, worldwide, who perform most of the unpaid work of reproduction, and as much reproductive labor has come back to the home (through the restructuring of health care and the spread of "informal labor") as it has been expelled from it with its reorganization on a commercial basis. She returns to this theme also in

her analysis of the crisis of elder care, which, in her view, poses with urgency the need for the creation of cooperative/collective forms of reproduction. Similarly, Mariarosa Dalla Costa "Women's Autonomy and Remuneration for Care Work in the New Emergencies" warns that, while the feminist analyses of housework in the 1970s ignored paid domestic work, the danger today is that the unpaid work women do in the home becomes invisible again. In turn, Viviane Gonik's "Is Housework Soluble in Love?" argues that that while the sexual division of labor has become more complex, there has not been any significant change in the relation between women and men.

There is no doubt, however, that we face a very different situation from the one feminists in the 1970s confronted and rebelled against. One crucial area of change has been the crisis of the "welfare state," that is, the drastic reduction of every form of investment in the reproduction of the work-force that, combined with women's massive migration to waged labor, has generated a reproductive as well as a political crisis. The dilemma – as often posed by social justice/anti-capitalist movements— has been whether to struggle to reconstitute welfare as we have known it, or to accept its crisis as irreversible, and even welcome it, as the ground on which to construct more independent forms of social reproduction, not tied to any productivity deal or the mediating representation of unions and parties.

This, however, as Camille Barbagallo and Nicholas Beuret point out, in "Starting From the Social Wage," may not be a practical alternative, in a context in which much of the wealth we have produced remains hostage in the hands of the state. The question, in their view, is not whether we should or not defend the "social wage," but

how to access and appropriate the resources held by the state –moneys, assets, services- without subordinating their acquisition and use to the state's control over our lives.

The article raises this question while examining the struggles that parents and childcare workers have organized in response to the British government's cut of funds for community-run nurseries, a first step towards the privatization of child-care. It argues that community controlled nurseries cannot be defended or expanded, without a broad mobilization involving different social groups, and without the articulation of a collective vision of the society we want to create, so that the struggle over childcare can become a public force for social change.

Exemplary in this context is the work of the Regeneración Childcare Collective of New York, an organization that since 2005 has provided child-care to low-income parents of color and queer parents in order to facilitate their participation in social movements groups. As they write in their manifesto, Regeneración members see their ally role as part of a broader project: demonstrating that interacting with children can be a creative activity enriching our life, producing a new kind of politics, and contributing to create a new generation of human beings who view cooperation as an essential part of our reproduction.

The same objectives structure the activities of the autonomous day-care center organized by *Mujeres Creando*, a feminist organization in La Paz, as described in an interview with Ana Rosario Adrián Vargas, one of the center's leading operators. The *Mujeres Creando* daycare center is sustained by contributions by the mothers themselves and by women who pay for the mothers who cannot pay. In this

way it can operate with a great degree of autonomy and can concentrate not only on liberating women's time but also on catering to the children's psychological, emotional, and physical development. As Vargas points out, this has required an intense process of consciousness raising, circulation of information, and production of knowledge, in which the mothers, and increasingly the fathers, of the children have been involved, defining the values and goals according to which the centre should be organized.

The experiences of the Regeneración Collective and the *Mujeres Creando*'s center contrasts positively with the testimony of Liliana Caballero from the *Madres Comunitarias* in Colombia, that typifies the predicament of family care providers and paid care/domestic workers in almost every country. Caballero denounces that the *Madres* in Colombia have been practically abandoned by the employers and the state and are so under-funded that they must even pay for the materials necessary for the care of the children they attend to out of their own meagre wages, while their licenses can be at any time terminated if their care is judged to be substandard.

Caballero's testimony is important because on one side it confirms that any initiative aiming to transform daycare into a creative activity and a children/adult "common" must be premised on a *valorisation of care / reproductive work*, in terms of remuneration and social recognition; on the other, it demonstrates that *by itself* the commercialization of domestic work, i.e., its organization as waged labour – the other major innovation in the organization of care/reproductive work – is not sufficient to put an end to the devaluation of this work.

The fact that this work has been for centuries and still is, considered as non-work, that it has been done for no pay and naturalized as "women's labor," added to its association with the history of slavery, colonialism, migration, weigh heavily on its social status.

But while the conditions of domestic workers remain abysmally poor, worldwide domestic/care workers' movements are growing to such an extent that today they are one of the leading forces in international feminism and the struggle against the devaluation of reproductive work.

We turn to these movements with several interviews with domestic workers in the USA, Bolivia, and Spain. The women who speak come from different regions but the problems they face are the fundamentally the same. For a start the individualised nature of care/reproductive work, and the isolation in which it is performed, create an emotionally charged, potentially explosive situation that especially in the case of live-ins easily turns into abuse. It is also very difficult for domestic/care workers to draw a clear-cut line between work and personal relations, as they work in their employers' homes and their work conditions include the caring of children and other people. Take the case in which the employer – likely another woman – comes home at night and treats the domestic worker as a surrogate partner, talking to her about her problems at work, while the live-in domestic might wish to go to sleep. Think also of what it means to work at a job that requires that you to become attached to the children you care for, while not having the power to intervene if their parents make mistakes, and knowing all along that your relationship with these children can be severed at any moment. As RJ Maccani reports, with an "uptight family" the stress

can become high. As a male day-care worker, Maccani enjoyed a somewhat special treatment, like not being asked to perform task routinely expected of female workers. He too, however, describes the experience as potentially nerve wracking. As a nanny you have to make unanticipated decisions, but have to imagine what the parents would do in the situation, for "if you choose something other than what the parents would have done you can get in quite a bit of trouble."

How difficult it is for domestic workers to establish satisfactory work relations, as long at they must negotiate them on an individual basis, is illustrated by Pascale Molinier in "Of Feminists and Their Cleaning Ladies," which describes the manoeuvres some Parisian feminists employ to limit their interactions with the domestic workers they hire. Though presumably committed to social justice and solidarity with other women, all the interviewed acknowledge being ill at ease in their relations with these workers and wishing them to be as invisible as possible. Part of the strain is that they clearly consider domestic work a dead end job and feel guilty delegating it to other women. But the outstanding reason is that they fear developing obligations and simply having to make space in their lives for women from whom they expect only work, and yet share their homes and inevitably develop personal relations with them. The result is a micro warfare – to mark territorial limits, pre-empt possible emotional claims, preclude remonstrations – all the more destructive as they are carried under the pretence of friendship and concern.

This is where a broadening of the stage and the subjects involved in the domestic workers labour contract

becomes crucial. This process is now well underway, as the interviews we present demonstrate.

This is especially true of domestic workers in Latin America where, in the words of Victoria Mamani of *Mujeres Creando* and activists in the national Domestic Workers Movement, "the new generations are more combative, know their rights and if they are abused they denounce it immediately." An expression of the new power domestic workers have built in this region has been their increasing tendency to become "external workers" rather than live-in maids. This move has enabled them to have an autonomous space, to become part of broader social networks (of neighbours, friends, political groups), and participate in social debates and struggles. However, the more evident sign of the new social power domestic workers in Latin America have gained is the legal recognition they have won in several countries (like Brazil, Uruguay, Bolivia), which varies from inclusion within current labour legislations to the recognition of specific rights, like a minimum wage, paid vacations, pension, maternity leave and severance pay. In Bolivia, for instance, as we learn from the interview with Victoria Mamani, the domestic workers' mobilization has led to the passing of a Bill in 2003 that recognized their right to 15 days of vacation, some severance pay, and an eight hours workday, something which domestic workers in the United States are still struggling for.

The same political transformation is visible among immigrant domestic workers across the globe. Wherever they have travelled, migrant domestic workers have formed transnational communities and associations providing new arrivals with different forms of assistance; they have

also fought to obtain the same rights as other workers and created social spaces where to meet, exchange information, break their isolation, and discuss demands. An example is SEDOAC (Active Domestic Work), an association of domestic workers mostly from Latin America but now working in Madrid that was formed in 2006. With other domestic workers' groups, SEDOAC has formed *Territorio Doméstico*, a social space, located in the self-organized feminist center Eskalera Karakola, where women's collectives and activists of various nationalities who work as domestic workers or are otherwise connected with the issue meet once a month. Together with Konstanze Schmitt – a German feminist artist who has conducted the interviews with Rafaela, Marlene, and Mary which we include – several SEDOAC members have also collaborated to an artistic project: the construction of "The Triumph of Domestic Work," a cardboard chariot on wheels, to be brought to demonstrations, exemplifying the principle that domestic work moves the world.

Meanwhile, in New York, Domestic Workers United is setting up community structures that are laying the foundations for new forms of collective bargaining, in a way constituting new "social commons." In November 2010, after years of mobilization, DWU was able to obtain the passing of a Bill of Rights extending to domestic workers the same right as other workers. But as Priscilla Gonzalez points out, the problem at present is its implementation. For this purpose DWU is attempting to construct neighbourhood-based networks of contacts and groups, capable of acting as reference points and intermediaries between domestic workers and the employers, providing information about the domestic workers' rights, ensuring

that agreements are fair and respected, and acting as a place where a common interest can be articulated. DWU also seeks the support of employers for its campaigns, convinced, as Gonzales argues, that it is in the latter's interest that the care workers they hire work under satisfactory conditions.

Dalla Costa as well (in the article previously mentioned) sees the possibility of a collaboration between employers and employees arguing that if properly remunerated and de-linked from the devastating economic policies now motivating female migration, paid care-work could be an acceptable job option, in the context of the alternatives currently available to women. While feminists at times have criticized women who hire domestic and care workers, Dalla Costa, like Gonzales, lays the ground for a politicization of the relation between domestic workers and their employers and a political recomposition among women, rooted in the realization that the devaluation of reproductive work is a common problem for women, and the shared need to force the state to place a broad range of resources at the disposal of this work.

No less than housework and other forms of domestic and care work, sex work has undergone a major restructuring since the 1970s, which feminists and sex workers movements are only beginning to analyse and mobilize around. We can safely say, however, that an aspect of this restructuring has been a significant expansion in the numbers of sex workers and the diversification of the types of commercial services available for purchase, as well as the internationalisation of the sex-workforce. There are several reasons for these developments, not least the reorganisation of work, gender relations and sexuality that neo-liberal

policies have produced. Clearly further research needs to be undertaken on such developments. What is certain is that the majority of sex workers today are immigrant women and also men and trans-gender people coming from Africa, South America and Eastern Europe.

Statistics concerning the number of sex workers in any one country or region are notoriously disputed, due to the clandestine and stigmatised nature of sex work. However if the sex industry is understood to include not only those who work as prostitutes but also dancers, porn models and actors, peep show and "nudie" bars workers, phone sex operators, and internet webcam workers, reception staff, security guards, drivers – the number of female, trans and male workers in the worldwide "adult entertainment business" is staggering.

With the expansion and diversification of the sex industry there has also been a change in the figure of the sex worker as a social subject. Both because of the increases in global migration, widespread worldwide impoverishment, and the weakening of the stigma attached to sexualised work and in particular prostitution, sex workers today, especially among migrants, include workers from diverse social and economic backgrounds. Migrant sex workers today are former teachers, factory workers, nurses, students, they are shop-keepers who cannot keep up with skyrocketing prices due to monetary devaluation, mothers who can no longer pay the school fees for their children or the high cost of health care now privatized. Many sex workers see their work as a temporary job, accepted or chosen to achieve specific goals: pay school fees, buy a house, open a beauty shop or some other businesses at home (Carchedi 2004), often added to other forms of em-

ployment, preferable in any case to working as domestic or care workers or in industrial sweat shops.

Thus, even within prostitution, the workforce is extremely differentiated ranging from fairly well-paid freelancing, self-employed workers, working in private apartments, with a high degree of control over their work, and providing a complex of services beyond "intercourse" (the girl friend experience, companionship, attending events, conversation) to the much broader category of prostitute, often migrant women, working in the streets or brothels, in assembly line conditions, tightly supervised and often in fairly risky situations. Keeping these differences in mind, it can be argued that the conditions of sex work have generally deteriorated in comparison to the late 1970s when the sex workers' movement took off. Worsening economic conditions and increasing competition within the sex industry have made it more difficult for sex workers to exercise the type of control that prostitutes had previously established over the conditions of their work. Many migrant sex workers are undocumented and due to tightening border regimes and immigration policies in Europe, they have had to rely on criminalised intermediaries to finance and organise their travel abroad and as a result, the violence and coercion that sex workers experience has escalated. In fact, sex workers and particularly those who work in prostitution are today penalized on three counts: as sex workers, as undocumented workers, and as victims of debt-bondage and exploitation.

Since the 1980s, a key fault line of conflict among feminists has been the question of "sex trafficking" which has divided feminist analysis of prostitution into two opposite camps. On one side, those convinced that prostitution

is a non-voluntary activity, one that no woman can ever make a free choice to do, propose to define all instances of prostitution as violence against women. On the other, there are those who argue that a position that constructs all prostitution as always-already violence jeopardises the safety of sex workers, in addition to being infantilising, moralistic and blind to the violence inherent in the alternative work options open to sex workers and generally to women, especially coming from countries that have been subjected to drastic forms of economic liberalization.

An extensive literature exists covering the various positions in the debate and in many ways there is little left to be said about trafficking in the sex industry. Instead of weighing in on a somewhat saturated debate we have included the article by Laura Agustin's[1] "Sex as Work and Sex Work", which argues that when we discuss sex work nowadays the focus is immediately on commercial exchanges, whereas we should give it a broader definition enabling us to realize that non commercial sex as well involves work (as well as other things).

To this day the controversy continues and has in fact reached a stalemate, partly because both sides mostly base their arguments on the motivations and responsibilities of individual prostitutes, debating whether prostitution is a result of coercion or spontaneous choices. The global sex industry, however, is not the result of millions of individual choices; it is a highly structured intervention by corporations (both legal and illegal) and international financial organizations. Thus, we cannot look at prostitution as presently organized as a set of individual transactions be-

[1] http://www.lauraagustin.com/

tween prostitutes and their bosses or between prostitutes and their clients. It is this broader context in which prostitution operates that decides the possibilities which sex workers have to gain more social power and the possibility for self-determination. From this viewpoint, sex-workers organizations are correct when they argue that prostitution is work; prohibition and criminalization can only worsens work conditions, making sex workers more vulnerable to police harassment and exposing them and indeed all migrants to the risk of deportation; commercial sexual work is not more violent or enslaving than many other jobs available in today's global labour market. Indeed, the increased incidence of slavery and indentured servitude is not unique to prostitution and cannot be eliminated by criminalizing sex work any more than chattel slavery in the 19th could have been abolished by prohibiting cotton picking.

It is also true, however, that the decriminalization of the sex industry will not be sufficient to improve the status of sex-workers, as in a world of increasing competition for survival the market itself becomes an instrument of violence. Nevertheless the argument that prostitutes are workers is more relevant now than ever; since increasingly the exploitation and abuse they suffer is on a continuum with that of other workers – migrant or not – internationally. Coercion, in fact, has become a key aspect of work in the present phase of globalization, that is reminiscent in many ways of the period of "primitive accumulation" when an *ex-lege* proletariat was formed (Federici 2004). This implies that the situation of sex workers cannot be transformed by an exclusive focus on sexual domination and sexual slavery, and by differentiating sex workers from

other workers, in the same way as we cannot address the question of reproductive work by focussing exclusively on care work. Precisely to the extent that sex work is often non-free labour, the sex worker is becoming the paradigm worker in the global economy, in the same way as underpaid, precarious, "informal" female labour is becoming the paradigm for all forms of exploitation. As in the '70s, today as well, the question is whether this realization will become the ground for a recomposition among different sectors of the female work force. Indeed, sex work, like domestic and care work, poses one of the most significant challenge to the currently existing feminisms.

A different question is on what grounds a recomposition can occur today between women and men. It is often argued that the commercialization of domestic/care work has in many cases been the "solution" to men's avoidance of housework, which remains the sore spot in many relations. It is also true, however, that the relation between men and women has to some extent been reconfigured or there is at least an expectation that it will be. While the structure of the nuclear family has been put into crisis by women's struggles and entrance in the waged labor market, and while the bulk of reproductive work is still done by women, it is true that men's relation today to reproductive activities is different from their fathers' who used to come home, open the paper and expect that dinner would be served. With respect to their fathers, many men live a contradictory situation, being expected to do their share at home and at the same time face more precarious but nevertheless more demanding jobs. This "identity crisis" has been the subject of much psychological analysis, but whether the change will foster a politics of resentment or contribute

to undermine gender based labor hierarchies remains to be seen. In this context, Gonik's "Is Housework Soluble in Love?" calls for the socialization of housework through the creation of associative, cooperative, self-managed networks and for its politicization, i.e. its placement at the center stage of political debates as the alternative "to becoming exhausted in the fight for the sharing of task at the couple's level."

Last, our discussion of care work looks at it from the viewpoint of the "energy question" and environmental crisis, which is every day more dramatic with the accelerating global warming, the proliferation of oil spills and other ecological disaster, wars included, and now the spreading of radioactivity through our skies and waters in the aftermath of the Fukushima disaster. The testimonies by the "enraged" mothers of Japan are eloquent on this point, showing what a nightmare life becomes when radioactivity is in the water we drink, the air we breathe, the food we eat, the ground on which children play – and no moment of "care work" is possible without a daily struggle. Not surprisingly, then, we find – in Ariel Salleh's impressive account, "Fukushima: A Call for Women's Leadership" – that it is women, eco-feminists in particular, who have most staunchly organized against the nuclear and chemical industry's assault on our environment. There is, obviously, nothing biological in this phenomenon. It is that women are the ones who do most of the housework and child-raising in the world, and face most directly the cost of the destruction of our environment for our reproduction. Appropriately then, Kolya Abramsky "Energy and Social Reproduction" reminds us that the most important form of energy is work, in particular women's reproductive labor

which, indeed, more than coal or wind-power, is to this day the energy that keeps the world moving.