

CRITICAL INQUIRIES IN LAW, PHILOSOPHY AND GLOBALIZATION

# A Feminist Crisis Perspective: Between Exploitation and Politicisation

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### ABSTRACT

Starting from a short reconstruction of the ongoing social reproduction crisis, with this article proposal we present an analysis that aim to investigate the close connection between globalisation and reorganisation of the patriarchal domination, that set out the social reproduction (and the reproductive work) as a crucial research ground to comprehend the current extensive and subjective process of both capital and labour. Specifically, we want to focus on two mutually dependent elements of analysis. Firstly, we will try to investigate the methods of operation through which the extractivism and the neoliberalism take root on the social reproduction, as "body-territory" of the crisis, that reconfigures the dispossession's and the exploitation's shape itself. Secondly, we want to remark the feminist and directly political character of the social reproduction as a common ground of departure, clash and conflict between capital and "*potencia feminista*", that opens up to interesting scenarios to rethink the shapes of commons life.

Keywords: social reproduction, conflict, neoliberalism, finance, extractivism

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### 1. Introduction

The ongoing global context is characterised by an overwhelming social reproduction crisis that affects multiple aspects and dimensions of human life. Privatisation, welfare deregulation, financialization of social reproduction, continuous enclosures of lands and raw materials, are just some aspects of the ongoing social crisis that is becoming an increasingly common condition of daily routine. These many practices and forms of valorisation, that constitute the crisis as a daily life condition, should not surprise (Mezzadra, 2008). Instead, it is necessary to understand the time and space of the crisis as immanent condition of capitalist development, closely connected to the continuous expansion of the capital (Federici, 2012; Fraser, 2017, 2023; Gago, 2019; Mezzadra and Neilson, 2014). *Videlicet*, to the capital's neverending tendency to widen and expand its boundaries of valorisation, exploitation and expropriation, on the world.

The continuous tendency of the capital towards accumulation and crisis is not a mystery. Since the 1990s, an intense debate has developed in critical Marxist thought about the relevance of primitive accumulation. That is the violent process of separating the producers from the means of production and reproduction, that Marx locates at the origins of capitalism, that ended the common, political and reproductive use of the land and left a large number of workers, both men and women, into a condition of absolute poverty never known before, assuming as the only way to live and survive, the sale of their labour power as a commodity to the capitalist (Marx, 2007). Accumulation by dispossession (Harvey, 2005), Capital polymorphism (Mezzadra and Neilson, 2020) and Bio-political Capitalism (Negri and Hardt, 2010), are just some of the theoretical frameworks used to problematise the present continuity of primitive accumulation. In other words, to problematise this capital's continuous tendency towards self-valorisation and crisis, towards continuous accumulation and expansion of its valorisation borders, which

advances undaunted through wars, continuous land enclosures and welfare privatization, the use of pedagogical cruelty against women's and feminised bodies (Segato, 2016) and a global reorganization of work and reproduction, that make inequality, misery, poverty and exploitation indispensable and structural conditions, eternally recurring, in the everlasting continuous process of capitalist accumulation (Federici, 2021). In these processes, it is the relationship between people and land, welfare and social services that are being reconfigured. It is the very forms of exploitation and labour that are becoming more precarious, feminised and informal through the intensive and extensive action of debt and finance. However interesting, in this article we cannot analyse the Marxist debate on accumulation and crisis in its thoroughness. Instead, in order to problematise this issue, we adopt a specifically focused perspective that will investigate the close connection between accumulation and reproduction, between globalisation and gender relation in the processes of valorisation, presenting them as intensive and extensive grounds for the articulation of the contemporary crisis. When talking about social reproduction, it is worth emphasizing, we refer to various interrelated aspects and activities (reproductive labour) that are essentials for the very existence of capital, as a totality of production and reproduction. Specifically, we mean domestic and biological labour, classically understood, necessary for the production and reproduction of labour power, and its specific modalities of differential inclusion in valorisation processes in terms, for example, of continuous invisibility and concealment, (whose transformations directly affect the production and reproduction of value, species, and community bonds); social reproduction in its expanded dimension. That is, that heterogeneous and articulated set of networks, economies, processes of self-organisation of labour, largely informal, unpaid, and with a strong female and migrant composition, as well as social welfare systems which, in a continuous struggle over the appropriation and production of value, allow for the daily social reproduction of life in the long term. Within this context, care and reproductive work transcend domestic

boundaries and become direct ground of action and organization of labour. In this light, the crucial role played by social reproduction for the development of capitalism becomes clear. What emerges is the social, public and productive dimension of reproduction necessary for capital's self-valorisation and continuous accumulation, of which it seems to be "uninterested". In other words, we propose considering capitalism as a productive and reproductive system, whose continuous valorisation inexorably passes through an overall reorganization of the modalities of species reproduction, labour power reproduction, and the reproduction of social bonds and care resources, that constitute reproduction as an intensive and extensive ground of valorisation and articulation of the contemporary crisis (Casalini, 2018; Cielo, Bermúdez, Guerrero and Moya, 2016; Picchio, 2020).

In that sense, the reading of feminist economics is particularly interesting for our analysis. It solicits us to read social reproduction and gender relation as key points for understanding contemporary forms of valorisation. For instance, Silvia Federici, interprets globalisation and world-wide enclosures as a direct and unprecedented attack on social reproduction that drastically reorganises the methods of contemporary exploitation and the forms of reproductive and domestic labour (Federici, 2012; Federici, 2021). An attack on social reproduction that reconfigures the concrete and materials possibilities of life and opens up a new configuration of social and labour relations. As we will analyse throughout this article, it is not only the social and collective welfare systems and commons lands that are exploited, but also, the very forms of productive and reproductive labour itself, intensifying the differential exploitation within reproductive and domestic labour.

At the same time, a particularly interesting reading is proposed by the Argentinian feminist sociologist Veronica Gago who, in dialogue with Silvia Federici and Luci Cavallero, invites us to analyse the neoliberal processes of dismantling and privatisation of welfare in their complementary and combined articulation with the intensive and extensive processes of indebtedness of popular life, which open up to a new configuration in the relationship between capital and reproduction, between debt and exploitation (Cavallero, Federici and Gago, 2021; Cavallero and Gago, 2022). According to the author, a new cycle of accumulation emerges that connects directly finance and rights, debt and reproduction, extraction, expropriation and exploitation, which transforms each moment of one's life into a moment of intense valorisation (Gago, 2019).

Similar, although having some theoretical differences, is Nancy Fraser's analysis who, describing capital's continuing tendency towards self-valorisation and crisis, shows the patterns of a socio-reproductive crisis that is gradually undermining the material and concrete possibilities of reproduction in the long term (Fraser, 2017). According to the author, what is at risk in the current financialised and neoliberal phase of capitalism are the ecological conditions, the natural processes and the political systems; as well as the ensembles of affective, cognitive, and socio-cultural relations - known as care and reproduction - that enable the expanded reproduction of life (Fraser, 2023).

Another key aspect to consider is the interplay between technological advancement and social reproduction. Specifically, how technological progress is radically restructuring the ways in which society reproduces itself, thereby transforming contemporary exploitation and labour practices. As capitalism collides with the Earth's limits and the finiteness of global boundaries, individual and collective bodies, conceived as territory, become the object/subject of valorisation. This occurs both in terms of an intensive production of subjectivities, desires, and new reproductive needs; and in material terms, as valorisation extends to the entire biological process of material reproduction of life and the species (consider cloning, DNA, etc.). Historically, capitalism has always exploited the biological dimension of labour, as seen in the functionalization and naturalization of procreation and women's bodies (slaves and wet nurses) for productive purposes. However, we are currently witnessing a qualitative and quantitative shift, characterized by the direct intervention of capital on the human and no human bios. This is leading to a proliferation of extractive practices on bodies and the emergence of new forms of global bio-labour that are radically altering the modes of reproduction of the species, the labour force, and value on a global scale<sup>1</sup> (Cooper, 2013; Cooper and Waldby, 2015; Haraway, 1995).

In that sense, throughout this article we suggest a situated analysis of crisis and accumulation, that aims to comprehend and investigate the centrality of social reproduction and reproductive labour within the coordinates of contemporary exploitation, expropriation and valorisation. Therefore, we propose to understand the social reproduction ground as the main scene through which to problematise and investigate the continuous capital's extension, and, consequently, the multiplicity of labour and value forms that exceed the direct wage relation. This allows us to directly interrogate the contemporary experience and meaning of exploitation. To be more specific, we want to examine the operational modalities through which finance and neoliberalism take root on social reproduction, including the effects they produce in terms of the reorganisation of productive and reproductive labour and the intensification of gender differential. Highlighting this issue has a clear political significance, directly linked to the class and conflictual dimensions of feminism and reproduction. In other words, it means understanding the specific place that reproduction (and reproductive labour) occupies in processes of accumulation and uncovering the contemporary forms of its valorisation.

Secondly, we propose to analyse the neoliberal and financial configuration of social reproduction within a political frame. That is to say, as a direct and violent response of the capital to the "*potencia feminista*" (Gago, 2019) to the power expressed by the feminist movement and informal economy networks with a strong female and migrant composition. To put it another way, we want

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Donna Haraway's "A Cyborg Manifesto" (1995) offers a significant contribution to this discussion, inviting us to analyse the relationship between technological development and reproduction through a dual lens: as exploitation of women's biological labour and bodies, on one side, and as a dynamic of liberation on the other. This complex issue, which deserves further exploration, raises a central question in feminist debate: the relationship between the development of productive forces and social reproduction.

to emphasize how this neoliberal and financial restructuring of social reproduction directly targets the processes of politicization of social reproduction and the bodies and places of women's power that explicitly challenge the terms of capitalist valorisation. To be more specific, we refer to the struggles opened by the feminist movement in Italy during the 1970s; and to the more recent proliferation in Africa, Asia, and Latin America of processes of self-organization of reproduction and labour that are challenging the production-reproduction dyad and its associated gender roles. Focusing on this political dimension allows us to explore two interconnected elements. Firstly, the political, organizational and conflictual dimension of social reproduction, as a common ground of departure, clash and conflict, in terms, for example, of wage claims and social policies. Secondly, makes evident the political nature of capital, the political dimension of its contemporary operations that dissolves its supposed neutrality.

### 2. Neoliberalism, Finance and Social Reproduction

As already mentioned above, in this section we analyse the operational methods in which neoliberalism and finance take root on social reproduction, through continuous processes of privatisation and financialization of welfare, expropriation of commons lands, and reconfiguration and disciplining of labour, through the intensive and extensive action of debt and finance. A set of processes that are redefining the spatial and geographical coordinates of contemporary exploitation and expropriation. To achieve this, it is necessary to explore the deep connection between neoliberalism and extractivism, understood both in its literal dimension of privatisation and extraction of lands and commodities; and in its financial dimension (Mezzadra and Neilson, 2020; Mezzadra and Gago, 2015). Basically, it is a matter of understanding the connection that exists between enclosures, job insecurity and processes of indebtedness of popular life in the reconfiguration of labour on a global scale. This combined analysis directs our attention to the

operational modalities through which capital reorganises social reproduction, gender differentials and forms of expropriation and exploitation. It also reveals the heterogeneous space of capital and the heterogeneous, multiple and polymorphic dimension of its contemporary operations (Mezzadra and Neilson, 2020). Furthermore, it is important to emphasize that adopting social reproduction as a privileged ground of analysis does not imply marginalizing the transformations taking place in productive processes. On the contrary, it means conceiving capitalism in its totality and unity of production and reproduction, where this relationship changes as processes of valorisation evolve and in response to social conflicts. For instance, in the ongoing global context, where value production permeates all aspects of life, both productive processes (assuming a biopolitical character) and social reproduction are undergoing profound transformations, revealing a complex and multifaceted landscape of exploitation and expropriation on a global scale. Within these violent extractive, neoliberal, and financial processes, the very modes of reproducing life, labour power, and capital are being reconfigured.

### 2.1. Neoliberalism and Extractivism

A first key aspect to focus on is the continuous processes of lands enclosure and expropriation occurring in the world-wide. Enclosures, both material and immaterial, promote a violent separation of producers from the means of production and reproduction, leading to a drastic reorganization of social reproduction that affects different aspects of life. Firstly, the relationship with land and resources changes from being means of subsistence and community life to private property in the hands of global capital. That is, they become central means of accumulation and exploitation, whose enclosure reconfigures the modalities of access, in terms of exclusion. In this context, collective strategies for the expanded reproduction of life are also destabilized. Specifically, those networks and subsistence economies, with a strong female and migrant composition, which through a collective and political use of land and resources allows the expanded reproduction of life (Carrasco, 2016). As a matter of fact, privatizing and enclosing land means depriving communities of the means of subsistence, leaving no other option but to migrate; it means "making millions of people dependent on monetary income, even in the absence of access to paid employment" (Federici, 2012, 94)<sup>2</sup> and on relationships of exploitation and oppression; it means multiplying the time of life necessary to obtain water and food; it means an exponential increase in poverty and exploitation. Essentially, it means completely reorganising the forms of reproduction and tying up it to money and monetary ties, migratory processes, and the meshes of exploitation.

Depriving a community of water for use by mining companies' forces [...] to go to the city to fetch water, pay for the bus ride there and back plus an extra fee for each canister transported, make the effort of the journey, organize to go with children or leave them in someone's care, carry the canisters on foot for a stretch of the road. Of course, all in the name of "development" (Gago, 2019, 90-91).<sup>3</sup>

In that regard, what comes to light in this continuous process of enclosures is the destructive and creative power of capital. It is the capacity of capital, in the process of its continuous expansion, to destroy everything around it and to create and propose a new configuration of social and labour relations. This finds in the privatisations, enclosures of lands and in the attack on the material means of social reproduction decisive grounds for amplifying and modifying the meshes of exploitation and dispossession on a multi-scalar level.

The centrality of the enclosures and expropriation of lands and resources in the contemporary phase of accumulation is not accidental. On the contrary,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> "Facendo dipendere milioni di persone dal reddito monetario, anche in assenza di accesso a un'occupazione salariata" (*translated by the author*).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> "Despojar de agua a una comunidad para que sea utilizada por las empresas mineriarias obliga [...] ir a buscar agua a la ciudad, pagar el omnibus ida y vuelta màs un plus por cada bidon que se transporta, hacer el esfuerzo del viaje, organizarse para ir con ninxs o dejarles al cuidado de alguien, cargar los bidones a pie un trecho del camino. Por supuesto, todo en nombre del "desarrollo" (*translated by the author*).

we encourage to read them in relation to a qualitative and quantitative change occurred in the processes of expansion of advanced capitalism that "increasingly requires larger quantities of raw materials and energy for its maintenance, exerting greater pressure on natural resources and territories" (Svampa, 2019, 18).<sup>4</sup> This results in a never ending and always expanding race for the land, extending the frontiers of extraction and expropriation towards territories previously considered unproductive from the perspective of the capital. Indeed, if at first the processes of enclosures were mainly linked to the Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) promoted by the IMF and the World Bank, aimed at the extension of monetary relations and the extensive commercialization of agriculture, today they must be read in relation to the extractive framework and the mega-projects that configure territory and resources as spaces of continuous valorisation. Some tangible examples include: the construction of large hydroelectric dams and waterways, the expansion of oil and energy frontiers with the use of highly invasive practices such as fracking and the intensive expansion of monocultures linked to agribusiness, such as the case of soy in Argentina (Federici, 2021; Mezzadra and Neilson, 2020; Svampa, 2019). A set of processes that generate imminent damage to the reproductive cycles of nature, and not only, configuring the territories crossed by these processes as spaces that are "socially variable and disposable depending on profitability and commodification" (Svampa, 2012 b, 6).<sup>5</sup>

In simpler terms:

Neo-extractivism presents a specific territorial dynamic whose tendency is the intensive occupation of territory and land grabbing, through forms linked to monoculture or single-product production, one of whose consequences is the displacement of other forms of

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> "Exige cada vez más para su mantenimiento mayor cantidad de materias primas y energías, lo cual se traduce por una mayor presión sobre los bienes naturales y territorios" (*translated by the author*).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> "Socialmente vaciables y desechables en funcion de la rentabilidad y la mercantilización" (*translated by the author*).

production (local/regional economies), as well as populations. In this sense, at the beginning of the 21st century, neo-extractivism redefined the dispute over land, which pits poor and vulnerable populations against powerful economic actors, interested in implementing transgenic crops linked to soy, palm oil, sugarcane, among others (Svampa, 2019, 23).<sup>6</sup>

A significant contribution to this discussion is provided by eco-feminism, which, in problematizing the relationship between humans and nature, highlights a hierarchical and dependent relationship that is concretely expressed in violence against territories and natural bodies. This violence is a direct expression of a capitalist-patriarchal system that informs and hierarchizes the lived experiences of women and nature in everyday life, manifesting in a directly violent, patriarchal, and androcentric dimension<sup>7</sup> (Barca, 2018).

Focusing on extractivism to understand the contemporary relevance of enclosures on a global scale does not in any way diminish the relevance of ongoing neoliberal processes of land dispossession, which facilitate the progressive commercialization of agriculture and the monetization of social relations. On the contrary, it means considering these two dynamics, and their effects, in their combined articulation. In reality, from the alliance between extractivism and neoliberalism emerges a comprehensive reorganization of access to land that transforms the very act of living and reproducing (accessing water, means of subsistence, etc.) into modes of exploitation. In this sense, we can understand the current processes of enclosures on a global

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> "El neoextractivismo presenta una determinada dinámica territorial cuya tendencia es la ocupación intensiva del territorio y el acaparamiento de tierras, a través de formas ligadas al monocultivo o monoproducción, una de cuyas consecuencias es el desplazamiento de otras formas de producción (economías locales/regionales), así como de poblaciones. En esta línea, a inicios del siglo XXI, el neoextractivismo redefinió la disputa por la tierra, lo cual enfrenta de modo asimétrico poblaciones pobres y vulnerables, con grandes actores económicos, interesados en implementar cultivos transgénicos ligados a la soja, la palma de aceite, la caña de azúcar, entre otros" (*translated by the author*).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> To delve deeper into this issue, we refer to the work of Stefania Barca (2018), *Ecologies of Labour: An Environmental Humanities Approach*, in S. Cristiano (Ed.), *Through the Working Class: Ecology and Society*, Edizioni Ca' Foscari, Venezia.

scale as an expression of an extensive and intensive articulation of accumulation and valorisation processes that drastically redefine the organizational modalities of social reproduction, forcing more and more workers, both men and women, to migrate in order to survive - nomadism becomes the objective condition of labour - and obliging them to assume their own reproduction, often falling into relationships of oppression and exploitation. It can be argued that "never have so many people been attacked on so many fronts simultaneously" (Federici, 2021, 27)<sup>8</sup> by this destructive violence of capital, which, at the same time, creates new territories, new extensive and intensive processes of valorisation.

### 2.2. Neoliberalism and Finance

A second key aspect for understanding this neoliberal and extractive reconfiguration of reproduction and class relations is represented by the progressive disarticulation, privatization, and dismantling of social welfare systems (education, healthcare, pensions, etc.), which opens up to a privatized-domestic return of care and reproduction at the expense of families and communities, in a context where more and more women are employed in paid work. This general process of welfare dismantling must be read in its combined articulation with the profound transformations that have occurred in the labour market in terms, for example, of a drastic attack and reduction of real wages which "tend to fall below the socially necessary costs of reproduction" (Fraser, 2023, 77),<sup>9</sup> with the consequent increase in the "number of hours of paid work required to support a family and triggering a desperate race to offload care work onto others" (Fraser, 2023, 79).<sup>10</sup> Wage cuts, which goes hand in hand with a general process of deindustrialization (of de-centralization of salaried and contract work), is accompanied by the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> "Mai così tante persone sono state attaccate e su così tanti fronti contemporaneamente" (*translated by the author*).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> "Tendono a scendere al di sotto dei costi socialmente necessari della riproduzione" (*translated by the author*).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> "Numero di ore di lavoro retribuito necessarie a mantenere una famiglia e innescando una disperata corsa a scaricare il lavoro di cura su altri" (*translated by the author*).

proliferation of increasingly precarious, black market, underpaid or poorly paid employment contracts.

The job insecurity and the reduction of wages, coupled with the privatization of welfare, having made lifespans increasingly fragmented and employed in multiple activities to ensure one's own reproduction. This issue is described in terms of a general process of feminization of labour<sup>11</sup>, that is, increasingly precarious, differentiated, and socially invasive jobs (Del Re, 2008; Del Re, 2018). Indeed, with the job insecurity and processes of welfare dismantling, which shift the entire cost of reproduction onto families and communities, what emerges is a processual and differentiated conception of time that does not follow a specific linearity but becomes multitasking. Time divided into multiple activities involving reproductive and domestic labour, generally unpaid, such as childcare and elderly care - activities that were guaranteed by the State through, for example, public nurseries, social centres for the elderly etc -; remunerated work - increasingly precarious and underpaid -; and finally, leisure time. Ultimately, in this context a different conception of time takes shape, that radically changes the approach to life and work:

One of the characteristics of the feminization of labour that I want to highlight, in addition to the demand for empathetic attitudes, is the modification of the use of time. Time, from linear, becomes processual, meaning that multiple things enter it simultaneously without hierarchies. Those who take care of people's reproduction are accustomed to moving from one time to another in daily life, a mother knows this. There are, in fact, different times in care, some compressible, others that can be moved, others that cannot be delayed. The traditional dichotomy between public and private time is challenged in this new paradigm [...] Women are trained in these

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> The term further denotes a comprehensive shift in production processes, wherein the skills of reproductive labour, such as empathy, availability, attention to human needs, and today to customer's needs, have permeated the broader landscape of social production and post-Fordist capitalist management.

non-linear times, on different levels. Now this training is being transferred to all workers (Del Re, 2023).<sup>12</sup>

At stake, in these violent transformations, there is a double process that we can define as intensive and extensive. That is, the finance-driven capitalism that promotes global disinvestment in social reproduction areas - education, health, youth policies -, with the burden of these activities falling on families and communities, while promoting a drastic reduction in wages and an overall precariousness that reduces the time spent in reproduction (Fraser, 2017). What emerges is a dual organization of reproduction, where care becomes commodified for those who can afford it, increasingly outsourced to the market or global care chains, through the employment of domestic workers and caregivers, who are overwhelmingly poor and racialized women; and left to the responsibility of individual families or households in other cases, with the paradox that the latter will take care of the reproduction of the former in exchange for low wages. This dependence on the market (or the private sector) for care services reproduces gender, race, and class inequalities on an ever-larger scale, exacerbating exploitation and oppression<sup>13</sup>. This has direct and immediate consequences for the organization and reorganization of both productive and reproductive labour. In this sense, as Nancy Fraser argues, this widespread privatization and global disinvestment generates a "care deficit"

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> "Una delle caratteristiche, che però voglio sottolineare, della femminilizzazione del lavoro, oltre alla richiesta di attitudini empatiche, è la modificazione dell'uso del tempo. Il tempo da lineare diventa processuale, cioè vi entrano più cose contemporaneamente senza gerarchie. Chi si occupa di riproduzione delle persone è abituato a trasferirsi da un tempo all'altro della vita quotidiana, una madre lo sa. Vi sono infatti tempi diversi nella cura, alcuni comprimibili, altri che si possono spostare, altri ancora che non hanno possibilità di dilazione. Salta la dicotomia tra tempo pubblico e tempo privato, tra il tempo del corpo e i tempi sociali [...]. Le donne sono addestrate a questi tempi non lineari, su piani diversi. Ora vengono trasferiti all'addestramento di tutti i lavoratori" (*translated by the author*).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> The emergence of global care chains is a prime example. These involve caregivers, primarily women and migrants, who follow differentiated migration routes and shoulder the burden of reproductive and care work in host countries (childcare, eldercare, sex work). This labour, previously performed by more privileged women, is now transferred onto the bodies of migrant women. The formation of these care chains has enormous social, economic, and emotional costs for migrant women, both for themselves and for their communities and/or families of origin, as they shift their reproductive burdens onto even poorer subjects, "who in turn will do the same, creating ever-longer global care chains" (Fraser, 2023, 79).

(Fraser, 2017; Fraser, 2023), which undermines the conditions of possibility of adequate care, reactivating a socio-reproductive crisis that is progressively undermining the material and concrete possibilities of reproduction in the long term. In essence, this intensive and extensive action of capital on the ground of reproduction intensifies the intrinsic contradiction of capitalism between economic production and social reproduction:

While the previous regime (Fordist regime) encouraged States to subordinate the short-term interests of private enterprises to the long-term goal of sustained accumulation, in part by stabilizing reproduction through the provision of public services (high wages and consumption), the current one allows financial capital to discipline States and the public sector in the immediate interest of private investors, not least by demanding disinvestment in social reproduction. (Fraser, 2023, 77).<sup>14</sup>

Consequently, we are witnessing a comprehensive reconfiguration of social reproduction that increasingly follows neoliberal trajectories of exploitation and expropriation on a global scale. Moreover, it becomes evident that the continuous production of value does not exclusively concern the productive sphere. On the contrary, it inevitably involves a comprehensive reorganization of reproductive labour and social reproduction, finding in global care chains, in women's and migrant labour, intensive and extensive trajectories of exploitation that radicalize racial and gender inequalities and lead to a widespread invisibility of reproductive labour and the costs of reproduction on a global scale. In this sense, to analyse the crisis of care and the neoliberal and financial reconfiguration of social reproduction means to

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> "Mentre il regime precedente (regime fordista) incoraggiava gli Stati a subordinare gli interessi a breve termine delle imprese private all'obiettivo a lungo termine di un'accumulazione sostenuta, in parte stabilizzando la riproduzione attraverso l'offerta di servizi pubblici (alti salari e consumo), quello attuale consente al capitale finanziario di disciplinare gli Stati e il settore pubblico nell'interesse immediato degli investitori privati, non da ultimo, richiedendo il disinvestimento nella riproduzione sociale" (*translated by the author*).

connect these issues to migration and informal work, and to problematize the links between reproductive/feminised labour, race, and gender, and their relationship to welfare systems, migration regimes, and the processes of global valorisation, exploitation and expropriation (Casalini, 2018).

In order to fully understand the radical nature of these transformations, it is necessary to delve deeper into an additional analytical element closely linked to what is written above. In this sense, we suggest reading neoliberal processes of welfare privatization and precarious employment in their complementary and combined articulation with processes of indebtedness and financialization of popular life, which constitute debt as a necessary mediation for consumption and access to citizenship rights (Gago, 2019). It is no coincidence that in many parts of the world (United States, Latin America, Africa) the dismantling of the welfare state is simultaneously accompanied by a generalized financialization of social reproduction, forcing millions of people to take out loans and get into debt with financial institutions in order to access rights (healthcare, education, food, etc.) that were once guaranteed by the State. When millions of people are forced to borrow money in order to access healthcare and education, or even just to pay bills and buy the essentials, a new equation emerges between finance and rights, between debt and reproduction, transforming the very act of living into a ground of accumulation and valorisation. What emerges is a financial colonization of social reproduction (Cavallero, Federici, and Gago, 2021) that invades domestic environments, homes, and community life, structuring debt "as a daily mandate under the formula of going into debt to live" (Cavallero and Gago, 2022, 17):<sup>15</sup>

We define this process as the financial colonization of social reproduction [...] That is, the dispossessions and privatizations forced by state debt translate into forced indebtedness for the subaltern sectors, who now access goods and services through the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> "Como mandato cuotidiano bajo la formula de endeudarse para vivir" (*translated by the author*).

mediation of debt. This changes not only the relationship between income and debt but also between debt and rights. The aim is to turn life into a sum of debts: the one we pay for our countries and the one we pay personally (Cavallero, Federici and Gago, 2021, 12).<sup>16</sup>

So, debt is transformed into a device that organizes social reproduction, structuring financial intermediation as a condition for access to social and citizenship rights. This daily connection with banks and credit institutions (or even informal lenders) simultaneously opens the doors to a new type of exploitation that we can define as "financial exploitation" (Cavallero and Gago, 2020 a). That is, a present and future type of exploitation that links working conditions to debt repayment, forcing people to accept any job - both formal and informal - in order to pay off future obligations. Thus, a new cycle of accumulation emerges, a cycle that connects the material possibilities of social reproduction with financial capital and neoliberal privatization processes, opening the doors to an exploitation of labour (under the command of debt) that radicalizes and exacerbates precarity, poverty, informality and life uncertainty:

Debt operates by producing and intensifying future labour and existential precarity as a condition to come. This is because debt structures a compulsion to accept any job to pay the future obligation. In this sense, it dynamizes precarity from 'within'. Debt sets in motion the exploitation of creativity at any price: it does not matter what one works on; what matters is the payment of the debt. (Cavallero and Gago, 2020 b, 53).<sup>17</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> "Llamamos a este proceso colonización financiera de la reproducción social [...] Es decir, los despojos y privatizaciones a los que obliga el endeudamiento estatal se traducen como endeudamiento compulsivo hacia los sectores subalternos, que pasan a acceder a bienes y servicios a través de la mediación de la deuda. Esto tiene el efecto, tanto de modificar la relación entre ingreso y deuda, como también entre deuda y acceso a derechos. El propósito es convertir la vida en una suma de deudas: la que pagamos por nuestros países y la que pagamos personalmente" (*translated by the author*).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> "La deuda funciona produciendo e intensificando precarización laboral y existencial a futuro, como condición por venir. Esto se debe a que la deuda opera estructurando una

In this context, it is the creation of a neoliberal image that becomes hegemonic, redefining emancipation itself and the material and concrete possibilities of the production and reproduction of life in terms of the market, in terms of individuals investments, in terms of debt, dispossession and exploitation. From this perspective, we should understand the proposals presented in Argentina about turning women involved in reproduction into entrepreneurs of themselves through debt and microcredit (Cavallero and Gago 2020 a, 2020 b; Gago, 2019). Similarly, the proposal to introduce "financial education curricula" in schools opens up to a present and future dispute over the production of subjectivity, which directly informs and crosses the increasingly financialised reproductive ground.

### 3. Over-exploitation and Housewifization of Reproductive Labour

Given the global dimension of these transformations, we want to reflect on the specific and singular condition of women and feminized bodies. We want to understand how these violent transformations reorganize the forms of domestic labour, and its differential exploitation, leading to further changes in the sexual division of labour and gender roles.

We focus in particular on the dimension of overexploitation of domestic reproductive labour and on the constant and continuous overlap of different times and spaces of life, of different working days, all co-present, which constitute the material and relational living conditions of women and feminized bodies. Indeed, while it is true that the shift from the Fordist system of production and reproduction to a post-Fordist one has led to an increase in women's employment in paid work, this has by no means meant a liberation of reproductive-domestic labour on the part of women and feminized bodies (Del Re, 2008; Del Re, 2018; Federici, 2012; Federici, 2021). On the contrary,

compulsión a aceptar trabajos de cualquier tipo para pagar la obligación a futuro. En este sentido, dinamiza la precarización desde "adentro". La deuda pone en marcha la explotación de la creatividad a cualquier precio: no importa de qué se trabaje, lo que importa es el pago de la deuda" (*translated by the author*).

if we analyse these transformations in articulation with the processes of privatization and financialization of welfare, we notice an opposite effect. That is, a tendency towards the overexploitation of reproductive labour that falls on women and feminized bodies, who with their labour have compensated for the deterioration of economic conditions produced by the continuous cuts to social spending and public policies. What emerges is a tendency towards the intensification and multiplication of labour, in terms of a contingent overlap of different working times and spaces, all absolutely copresent, between remunerated work – often informal and/or underpaid –, reproductive labour - in homes or community – and, more generally, lifetime:

It should be added that in every country, women still perform most of the domestic labour, both remunerated and unremunerated. Not only that, due to cuts in social services and the decentralization of industrial production, the amount of domestic labour performed by women has likely increased, even when they are employed outside the home (Federici, 2012, 103).<sup>18</sup>

In fact, if the deterioration of economics conditions, precariousness and welfare cuts have led to a general impoverishment and additional workload for families and communities, these conditions have undoubtedly landed in a more violent form on the bodies of women and feminized subjectivities, who have been the true social shock absorbers of these transformations. That is to say, of this neoliberal experimentation that proposes a progressive return of reproductive labour to homes or communities, with the annexed moralization and re-proposition of gender roles (Gago, 2020). This is particularly true, for example, in countries subjected to structural adjustment programs, where violent cuts to healthcare spending, education, access to basic necessities,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> "Va aggiunto che in ogni paese sono ancora le donne che fanno la maggior parte del lavoro domestico, pagato e non pagato. Non solo. A causa dei tagli ai servizi sociali e del decentramento della produzione industriale, la quantità di lavoro domestico che le donne svolgono è probabilmente aumentata, anche quando le donne hanno un lavoro extradomestico" (*translated by the author*).

etc., have led to a multiplication of the time needed to collect water, to obtain food, or to treat illnesses. A set of activities and "reproductive tasks" that fall mainly on women or feminized bodies. Or again, in Western countries, such as the United States, following cuts to public spending, all expenses related to recovery times or post-hospital care are directly demanded in households. Similar processes are taking place in Italy, Greece, Spain, etc., and it is primarily women, mothers, grandmothers who take care of them (Del Re, 2008). Ultimately, it can be stated that the intensification and expansion of neoliberal processes is leading to an acute crisis of social reproduction. This crisis is sustained by a contemporary and brutal increase and overexploitation of the labour of women and feminized bodies who, through their daily work in homes and communities, replace public infrastructures without any recognition or remuneration:

A few years after the debate on post-neoliberalism in the region, we are facing a renewed conservative neoliberal onslaught. The deepening crisis of social reproduction is sustained by a brutal intensification of feminized labour, which replaces public infrastructures and is implicated in dynamics of overexploitation. The privatization of public services and the restriction of their scope mean that these tasks (health, care, food, etc.) must be supplied by women, lesbians, trans as unremunerated and mandatory work, alongside widespread indebtedness in lower-income sectors" (Gago, 2020, 38).<sup>19</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> "Unos años después del debate sobre posneoliberalismo en la región, estamos frente a un renovado embate neoliberal conservador. La profundización de la crisis de reproducción social es sostenida por un incremento brutal del trabajo feminizado, que reemplaza las infraestructuras públicas y queda implicado en dinámicas de superexplotación. La privatización de servicios públicos y la restricción de su alcance se traducen en que esas tareas (salud, cuidado, alimentación, etc.) deben ser suplidas por las mujeres, lesbianas, travestis y trans como tarea no remunerada y obligatoria, junto con un endeudamiento generalizado en los sectores de menos ingresos" (*translated by the author*).

Within this neoliberal and extractive reconfiguration of social reproduction, there is a reactivation of the housewifization<sup>20</sup> of the labour process (Mies, 2019), which makes the home and reproductive labour as the neuralgic centre of production, as a second hidden and invisible pole of capitalist valorisation, externalizing the entire cost of reproduction onto women's bodies and feminized subjectivities. What becomes evident is an enhancement of women's subordination to reproductive-domestic labour, which increasingly binds them to reproductive tasks and to specific gender roles, which become more and more necessary for the expanded reproduction of life. In essence, neoliberal, extractive, and financial policies have recentred the family and domestic sphere as the primary sites for social reproduction. This renewed emphasis has exacerbated the invisibility of reproductive labour and its associated costs on a global scale. This element emerges even more clearly in the current financialized phase of capital, which, by linking reproduction and finance, enables a multiplication of debt conditions, that inevitably spread into the homes, exacerbating and radicalizing the specific condition of women's oppression and exploitation, linking them to violent relationships with husbands and undermining any possibility of autonomy and liberation:

A feminist reading of debt aims to uncover how debt is linked to violence against women, lesbians, and trans. From the concrete narrative of indebtedness, its connection to sexist violence emerges. Debt is what prevents us from saying no when we want to say no. Debt ties us to violent relationships that we want to escape. Debt restricts one's ability to sever ties, forcing us to remain in broken relationships due to financial obligations. Debt is what blocks

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> Maria Mies uses this term to describe a process that devalues and marginalizes women's work. She emphasizes the crucial role of the division between public and private spheres in these processes, relegating women and reproductive labour to the domestic realm and denying their social and economic value.

economic autonomy, even in heavily feminized economies (Cavallero and Gago, 2020 a, 20).<sup>21</sup>

### 4. Social Reproduction and Conflict

Another way, perhaps more political, to read and understand these phenomena is to analyse this neoliberal and extractive reconfiguration of reproduction as a direct response of the capital to a feminist political protagonism that is express in various labour, union, and territorial contexts, which enrols social reproduction as a common ground of departure, clash and conflict, as a place of organisation of labour. In other words, it is a direct response of the capital to those processes of politicization of social reproduction that have challenged the artificial division between productive and reproductive labour, between the public space of organization and the domestic sphere, undermining the sexual division of labour and gender roles that confine reproductive labour and women to the domestic realm, to a biological and unproductive dimension. This element also allows us to highlight the political dimension of capital and its contemporary operations, which do not take place in a neutral space, but rather within an evident class conflict that encompasses multiple dimensions.

A prime example of this is represented by the feminist struggles of the 1970s and the International Wages for Housework Campaign, which opened the door to a politicization of social reproduction in terms of both wage demands and the recognition and subsequent rejection of reproductive labour as exploitation, manifesting in both theoretical and practical terms the class

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> "Una lectura feminista de la deuda se propone detectar cómo la deuda se vincula a las violencias contra las mujeres, lesbianas, travestis y trans. De la narración concreta del endeudamiento surge su vínculo con las violencias machistas. La deuda es lo que no nos deja decir no cuando queremos decir no. La deuda nos ata a futuro a relaciones violentas de las que queremos huir. La deuda obliga a sostener vínculos estallados pero que continúan amarrados por una obligación financiera a mediano o largo plazo. La deuda es lo que bloquea la autonomía económica, incluso en economías fuertemente feminizadas" (*translated by the author*).

and conflictual dimension of feminism (Archivio Lotta Femminista, 2015; Austin and Federici, 2019). In this sense, we argue that neoliberal and financial transformations of social reproduction, which since the 1970s have permeated common and collective lives, are the result of a direct and immediate response by capital to the struggles of "housewives workers" and to the wages for housework campaign (Dalla Costa, 2021; Federici, 2020; Federici, 2022). The 1970s were years, in fact, when more and more women, in Europe and around the world, challenged the Fordist system of production by refusing domestic reproductive labour and the domestic discipline associated with it, leading to a "break with the model of reproduction that had been the pillar of the Fordist pact" (Federici, 2012, 89).<sup>22</sup> That is, of that specific unity of production and reproduction that constitutes homes and bedrooms as an extension of the factory in society. These were years in which women's condition and struggle "were no longer invisible" (Federici, 2012, 90)<sup>23</sup> but expressed in a fierce and open rejection of the sexual division of labour and all that it entailed, such as: the total economic and wage dependence that had contributed to the construction and production of the woman-poverty binary; the home as a ghetto of existences and marriage as the ultimate professional aspiration; home economics and gender roles that constituted reproductive labour as non-labour, as an activity of love; to the lack of wages for reproductive labour performed daily in homes, which constituted women's bodies as natural resources that could be used freely and at no cost, including a sexualization of their daily tasks; and finally a clear rejection of the control that capital and the State exercised over procreation and female sexuality (Dalla Costa, 2021; Del Re, 2018; Federici 2020; Federici, 2022). These years are thus described by Alisa Del Re:

For Italy, this refers to a very specific period: the 1960s and 1970s. During these years, laws on divorce, new family law, and abortion

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> "Rottura con il modello di riproduzione che era stato il pilastro del patto fordista" (*translated by the author*).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> "Non erano più invisibili" (translated by the author).

were passed. The practice of wage autonomy went hand in hand with the acquisition of a series of civil rights. The discourse on reproduction and the reproduction wage, which at that time passed through the male breadwinner's wage, no longer holds (Del Re, 2008, 114).<sup>24</sup>

In this sense we suggest that these ongoing transformations represent a direct response of the capital to these processes of women's organization and politicization, which, in demanding wages, rights, and autonomy, have progressively challenged the hidden dimension of reproductive labour and the profitability of its exploitation within valorisation processes.

A second example of this politicization of social reproduction is expressed by the networks of subsistence economies, with a strong female and migrant composition, that have emerged in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. These networks have deployed a series of strategies and practices of struggle in order to confront privatizations and the absence of wages, such as land occupations, the creation of urban and rural *"asentamientos"* (Zibechi, 2012) and exchange networks, opposing a firm refusal to a type of production and use of land destined for exports. For example, in Africa, women often refuse to help their husbands in the production of crops for export and for the international market, defending a type of agriculture destined for daily subsistence and, with this, a different way of using the land and organising labour, transforming many villages into places of resistance to the models and development plans proposed (imposed) by the World Bank for the commercialization of agriculture (Federici, 2021).

A similar phenomenon is occurring in Latin America with the emergence of Popular Economies in urban, metropolitan, and rural spaces. This is a complex network of productive and reproductive activities, largely informal,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> "Per l'Italia si tratta di un periodo molto preciso: sono gli anni Sessanta/Settanta. In questi anni passa la legge sul divorzio, sul nuovo diritto di famiglia, sull'aborto. La pratica dell'autonomia salariale va di pari passo con l'acquisizione di una serie di diritti civili. Il discorso della riproduzione e del salario di riproduzione che allora passava attraverso il salario maschile del capofamiglia non regge più" (*translated by the author*).

that has emerged in response to the crisis. These economies occupy public spaces as a means of survival and structure social reproduction and daily life as a collective and political grounds for social organization and conflict (Gago, 2014). Specifically, this is a heterogeneous proletarian landscape with a strong female and migrant composition. In the face of material scarcity, these communities have developed multiple strategies for organizing life. These range from self-organized work initiatives, such as recovered factories, textile cooperatives, and community-managed agricultural projects, to sociocommunity work in neighbourhoods, including communal kitchens, community centres, and health clinics. These practices articulate and organize daily micro-politics and provide essential infrastructures for the social and political production and reproduction of life (Fernández, A., Pacifico F, and Señorans, D, 2019). The emergence of these processes and networks contributes to a feminist reconfiguration of urban space. Both the home and the knowledge associated with reproductive labour transcend domestic boundaries, creating public infrastructures (Gago, 2019; Gago and Quiroga, 2014). These networks provide and compensate for basic rights that are no longer guaranteed, such as access to housing, utilities, healthcare and food, particularly in marginalized communities:

In this sense, the social reproduction of life appears to both remedy and replenish, and at the same time critique, the dispossession of public infrastructures. Popular economies are currently building common infrastructure for the provision of services that are considered basic but are not: from health to urbanization, from electricity to education, from security to food (Gago, 2019, 132).<sup>25</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> "En este sentido, la reproduccion social de la vida aparece subsanando y reponiendo y, al mismo tiempo, criticando el despojo de infraestructuras publicas. Las economias populares construyen hoy infrarstructura comun para la prestacion de servicios llamados basicos pero que no son tales: desde la salud hasta la urbanizacion, desde la electricidad hasta la educacion, desde la seguridad hasta los alimentos" (*translated by the author*).

The political and social processes set in motion by the networks of popular economies challenge two central elements of contemporary valorisation. Firstly, they highlight the radical nature of contemporary exploitation and expropriation, which characterizes both individual and collective lives. This is countered by collective strategies of subjectivation and political organization that problematize the paternalistic perspective that often characterizes discourses on vulnerable populations. Secondly, they very clearly demonstrate the political and directly conflictual dimension of social reproduction, openly challenging the social, spatial, and gendered division between productive and reproductive labour, between the domestic and the public sphere, in order to rethink political organization. In other words, what emerges in these spaces is the political, organizational and conflictual dimension of social reproduction, which breaks with the assumed unproductiveness and marginality of reproductive labour and transforms the activities of organizing daily life into moments of collective encounter, into a central ground of encounter-clash-conflict with local and global capital, opening up interesting scenarios for the organization and reproduction of life:

Starting from the crisis, the status of domestic-reproductive labour enters processes of social recognition and political valorisation of great impact. [...] This has fostered the creation of a new urban spatiality, characterized by non-state public spaces that are central to the production of social value and the emergence of alternative economic models. (Gago and Quiroga, 2014, 13)<sup>26</sup>.

We believe that these political processes of self-organisation of labour and reproduction, which directly challenge patriarchal mandates and processes of expropriation and exploitation, are the privileged targets of the current

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> "A partir de la crisis, el estatuto del trabajo doméstico-reproductivo entra en procesos de reconocimiento social y de valorización política de gran impacto. [...] En la ciudad estas dinámicas producen una nueva espacialidad a través de lo público no estatal, la cual se puso de relieve como lugar decisivo de producción de valor social y fundamento de otro tipo de prácticas económicas" (*translated by the author*).

neoliberal and extractive-financial configuration of reproduction, through continuous processes of privatisation and financialization of welfare, precariousness of labour and enclosure of common lands. A set of processes that exacerbate the current social crisis, breaking social bonds and making inequality, poverty, exploitation and expropriation as objective and subjective conditions of work and life.

### 5. Conclusions

With this article, we aimed to emphasize the centrality of social reproduction as a dynamic ground of valorisation and conflict, opening up to interesting areas of analysis, in order to understand and problematize both, the contemporary forms of valorisation that transform every aspect of human life into a moment of intense accumulation; and the forms and processes of selforganization of labour and welfare that challenge the pervasive effects of the crisis, opening up to innovative forms of organization. What is yet to be understood is the actual strength and durability of these processes of selforganisation of labour, with a strong female and migrant composition, in the face of the advance of reactionary and fascist forces. The road is long, and the path is still undefined. However, we believe that these processes of politicization of work and reproduction are and will be a force, a compass and devices for organization, subjectivation, and alliances between multiple bodies, in the face of the advancing darkness.

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