Repression and Resistance on the Terrain of Social Reproduction: Historical Trajectories, Contemporary Openings

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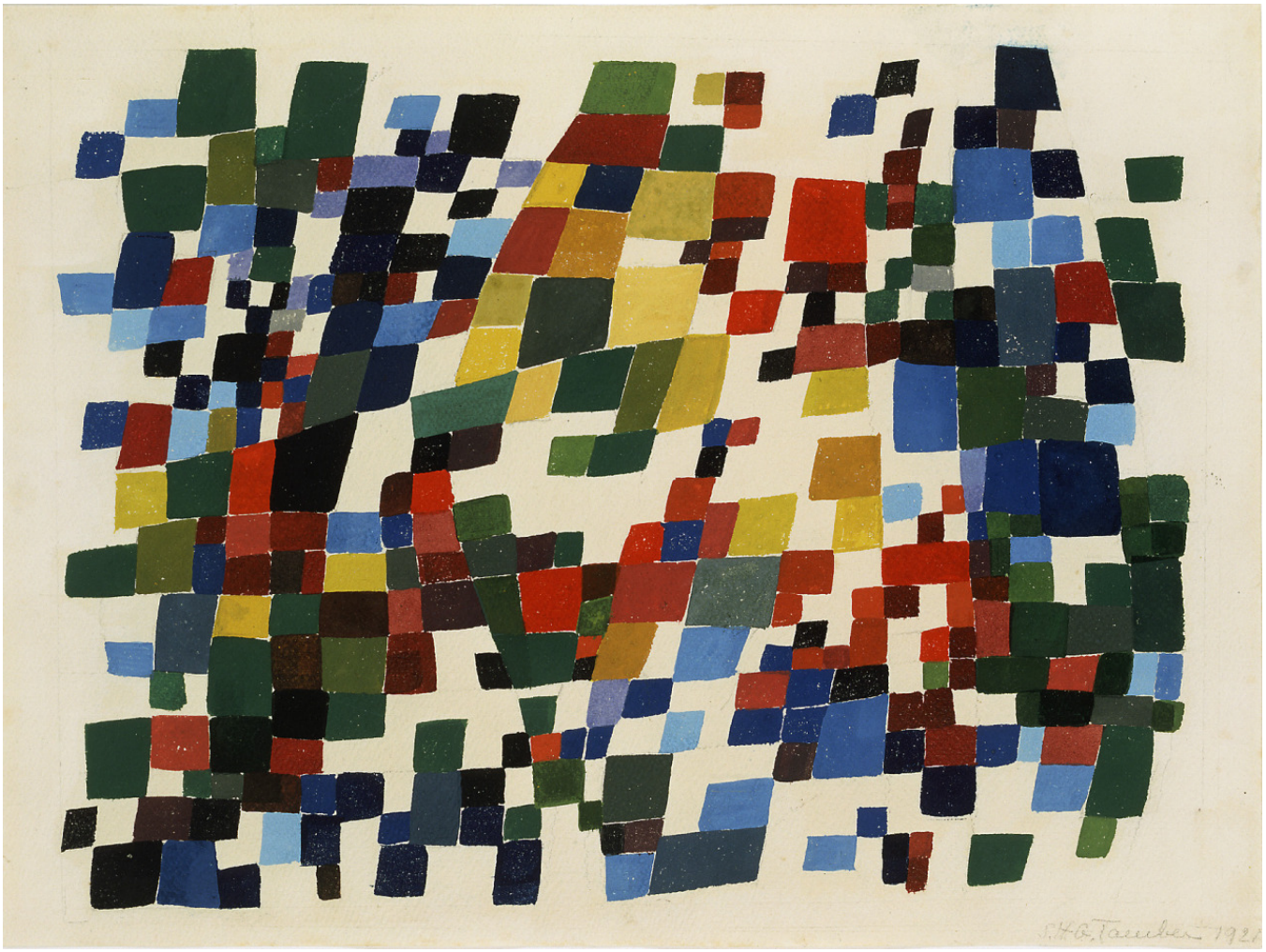

Sophie Taeuber-Arp, Composition in Dense, Polychrome, Quadrangular Spots (1921)

While the idea of social reproduction is most often associated with Marxist feminist literature from the 1970s, considerable work was done around that concept in a wide range of rather disparate bodies of work throughout the 1960s and 1970s. [1] In addition to Marxist feminism,

social reproduction became a main focus for Italian autonomists, anti-Stalinist socialist humanists in post-Stalinist Eastern Europe, “anti-humanist” critics of orthodox Marxism such as Louis Althusser and Michel Foucault, in studies on slavery, race, and urban development, and by postcolonial and Third-World feminists.

In these bodies of work, social reproduction has acquired a wide array of meanings and has been put to many different uses. Some take the term to mean the material means of subsistence and survival, both immediate and infrastructural, from water and food to housing and health care. Others use the concept to underscore reproduction as a particular kind of labor involved in the regeneration and well-being of others, as in domestic, care, emotional, affective, and sex work, which have historically fallen mostly to women. More recent literature has focused on the commodification of reproductive labor and the global economies and transnational chains of domestic, care, and sex work.

In these and other writings, the body has become an important focus: the body as a site of biological reproduction, the regulation of sexuality, and the reproduction of the gender binary. The reproductive and reproducible body figures as a kind of resource – a resource for labor but also for producing more bodies and lives, for workers. It becomes mobilized by population control projects and by medical and administrative technologies of regulation towards the reproduction of heteronormativity, of racial and class control, and towards social normalization projects.

Yet some political organizers and theorists have taken social reproduction to mean the public and social institutions that reproduce social relations at large: the state, the school, the factory, and the family, the hospital and health institutions. For example, struggles around access to higher education have revealed universities as sites of reproducing class and social inequality, while underscoring their role in forging social mobility. Further, work coming from critical urban studies has explored cities, urban environments, and geographies of

infrastructure as sites for reproducing labor power and class and racial inequalities.

In other words, the range of writings on social reproduction, which appeared more or less coevally in the late 1960s and the 1970s, were not necessarily in dialogue with each other and do not form a coherent theoretical or political body of work. However, they all came to the concept of social reproduction at the particular juncture of the crisis of Stalinist Marxism, to criticize orthodox Marxist analyses of labor and exploitation and expose the blind spots in orthodox conceptions of working class struggle. To a degree that has perhaps gone under-recognized, “reproduction” was a central concept of non-orthodox and anti-Stalinist Marxist work in the 1960s and 70s. The concept played a prominent role in the work of anti-Stalinist Marxist humanists, particularly in the socialist countries, from studies on gender inequality, to education, leisure, the socialist family, the socialist person, and the “socialist way of life.” Anti-Stalinist Marxist humanists in the 1960s turned to the early, humanist works of Karl Marx, which Stalinist Marxism had repressed, to recover the agency of ordinary people, and to move away from the Stalinist “base-superstructure” framework. But critics of this humanist turn such as Louis Althusser also used the concept of social reproduction to critique the limitations of the Stalinist notions of state power and attend to processes of subject formation under capitalism. In short, social reproduction became both a standpoint of feminist critique of productivist Marxism and a lens for developing new critiques and theories of state power in the context of the liberal welfare and socialist states.

The political uses of the concept are not entirely coherent either: some of these works aimed, each in their own fashion, to make visible the ways in which social reproduction had become a site of social control, of gender and racial subjugation, of the reproduction of heteronormative social forms, which opened new terrains for political resistance against capitalism and the state. Others saw social reproduction as a promising site for state-driven projects of social equality and social mobility,

deploying apparatuses of reproduction as instruments of regulation within capitalism, and with the help of the state.

What can we learn today from the theory and political experiences of the 1970s? And vice-versa, how do our struggles against the neoliberal restructuring of education and social infrastructure, against policing and the carceral state, and against racism, xenophobia, Eurocentrism, heterosexism, and transphobia – under capitalism, but also in anti-capitalist and anti-state organizing – allow us to develop a new historical perspective on the 1970s? And, perhaps most importantly, how can we think of autonomy and militant struggle on the terrain of social reproduction today?

In this essay, we would like to explore the spectrum of ideas and arguments on social reproduction beginning in the late 1960s and offer a sort of genealogy of the different meanings, political uses, and critiques of the category, while testing the promises and limitations of these various approaches for thinking social reproduction in the present.

Further, by revisiting Althusserian and Foucauldian critiques of capitalism and the state from the standpoint of reproduction, as well as Black, Third-World and postcolonial feminist critiques of Western Marxist and socialist feminism, we hope to broaden existing historical narratives of social reproduction.

Historical Genealogies of Discourses of Social Reproduction

In their pioneering work from the 1970s, Marxist feminists in Western Europe and the United States identified social reproduction as a field of productive, generative activity. For them, patriarchal relationships and the subordination of women in the home appeared as a precondition to capitalist exploitation. What stood for labor, namely wage labor and industrial production, was a product of a white male political imaginary unable to account for the work of social reproduction relegated to the home, the “private,” and other spheres outside the factory. [2] The work of

domestic labor, biological reproduction, and the reproduction of labor power were all ignored by “traditional” Marxist accounts, which confined their notion of labor to the factory. In other words, the critique of the “capital-labor” relationship excluded the sphere of the home and the domestic, where women were responsible for all the work of reproduction of labor power through domestic work, and for the reproduction of the working class more generally, by bearing and caring for children. Marxist feminists showed how these disavowed, invisible, and unrecognized forms of work were absolutely necessary for the existence of the wage-labor form and the “sphere of production” in the first place. Moreover, they showed how women’s work in the home was central to the survival and reproduction of labor power and to capitalist relations more generally. Further, the question was what counted as “work” and “labor,” and who was the subject worthy of what they envisioned as “freedom” from necessity. They fought against the social invisibility of reproductive, affective, and care work and the ways in which these were entangled in naturalized notions of women’s bodies and their affective social lives.

In short, the Marxist-feminist uses of social reproduction in the 1970s became a useful feminist lens for showing how patriarchal social organization was a structural element in capitalist exploitation, and further, how the history of working class struggle had effectively mirrored and reproduced patriarchal relations and gender norms under capitalism. All these became points of feminist critique of the male-dominated Marxist left as well as a focus of feminist organizing against exploitation and capitalism.

However, this body of work had significant limitations. Even though Marxist feminists provided a solid account of how women’s sexuality and the nuclear family became a function of capitalist relations, they essentialized women’s bodies and generally worked with a static notion of the body, took for granted the gender binary, and, to a great extent, accepted the heterosexual premises of both the labor movement and the women’s movement. As contributors to the materialist-feminist journal

LIES have recently written, “We find untenable the failure of largely second-wave Marxist feminism to consider gender fluidity and multiplicity under capitalism, to grapple with the forms of exploitation and violence that undergird these categories, and the political consequences of these facts.” [3]

Marxist and socialist feminists had no account of the kinds of technologies involved in the production of gendered subjects, sexed bodies, and in the regulation of sexuality, and how these may be tied to wage labor, the logic of capitalist accumulation, and the private property regime. Subsequent work in gender studies and queer theory used an alternative path – through Althusser and Foucault – to address these questions, turning to the ways subjects are made and remade, and to the institutions, technologies, and material practices of regulating and policing sexuality, the body, and the gender binary. Much of the subsequent scholarship influenced by Foucault, however, has lost sight of the question of how the body has become a setting for the reproduction of capitalist relations and class inequality, even as these links, we think are addressed in parts of Foucault’s work. [4]

Further, writing from the United States and Western Europe, Marxist and socialist feminists concerned with issues of reproduction and domestic labor for the most part did not acknowledge prior legacies of women of color organizing around issues of social reproduction, in particular housing and welfare. [5] It is perhaps no surprise that black feminists in the United States and the United Kingdom responded critically to them. Drawing genealogies of social reproduction from the perspective of black women’s experience, from slavery to the racist politics of the welfare regimes, black feminists demonstrated that the domestic confines of the housewife was the problem of white working- and middle-class women. Some of these ideas were first articulated in Claudia Jones’ germinal 1949 essay, “To End the Neglect of the Problems of the Negro Woman,” where she coined the idea of a triple oppression of working-class black women. She showed that, having had to work alongside their men, black women were never confined to the

“domestic” sphere alone. [6] Writing in the 1970s and the early 1980s from opposite sides of the Atlantic, Angela Davis and Hazel Carby continued the line of thought articulated by Jones. “Throughout the country’s history,” Angela Davis wrote in partial response to Wages for Housework, black women toiled together with men under the whip of plantation overseers, suffering “a grueling sexual equality at work.” [7] After slavery, Davis continues, black women were employed in vast numbers in a range of industries, from tobacco and sugar, to lumber and steel. Although Davis does not adequately address the question of white immigrant women’s labor in a number of industries, she shows how black women’s labor was mobilized in the reproductive realm as well as in the manufacturing and service industries long before discourses of the “double burden” emerged in white feminist thought. As wives and mothers, workers and breadwinners, notions of black womanhood often revolved around strength, resilience, and independence rather than femininity and subordination, the white middle-class norms of womanhood. Yet Carby had also pointed out that ideologies of black womanhood and constructions of black women’s sexuality did not stem just from the material conditions of oppression and the way they shaped the black family: “The way the gender of black women is constructed differs from constructions of white femininity because it is also subject to racism.” [8]

Moreover, as both Davis and Carby argue, for black communities the home was historically a site of autonomy and resistance. Davis showed that, paradoxically, domestic labor, that “expression of the socially conditioned inferiority for women,” was in fact “the only meaningful labor for the slave community as a whole.” [9] Women’s authority in the home made them the backbone of resistance movements against slavery, colonialism, and racism. Carby argued that “the black family has functioned as a prime source of resistance to oppression” and a “site of political and cultural resistance to racism.” [10] Immigrant and Third-World women, as we will discuss later, similarly contested white women’s criticisms of the family as a site of oppression. Showing how

the state pathologized, and often punished, forms of family and social life which did not conform to Western liberal models, they focused on the role of family life in cultural resistance and resistance to the state.

However, black women's labor and their bodies were also central to the successful functioning of the slave system as a whole, and of racial and class domination during and after slavery. Work from the late 1970s, 1980s, and early 1990s, in particular from Angela Davis, Toni Cade Bambara, and Patricia Hill Collins, exposed how the control of women's biological reproduction had been mobilized towards racist projects of population control and the outright annihilation of black populations (as well as Puerto-Rican and poor white populations, as in Davis' work). [11] Building upon these earlier works, more recent feminist scholarship returned to the question of reproduction and slavery. Jennifer Morgan has demonstrated the centrality of women slaves' physical and reproductive labor to the material and ideological formation of the New World slave system. Pamela Bridgewater argued that, as the Atlantic slave trade was closed in 1808, the South had to "produce" its own slaves, marking a shift towards discourses and practices around "breeding" and rewards for having children. [12] Walter Johnson has similarly highlighted slave owners' awareness that their social reproduction depended on "the biological reproduction of the people they owned." [13] These works have also traced the forms of resistance and alternative forms of intimacy, community, and collective knowledge black women conjured in conditions of oppression. Further work on the policing of women's bodies and reproduction has expanded this focus to other racial, ethnic, and immigrant groups, in particular Latina and Native-American women. [14]

Marxist-feminist interventions from the 1970s and 1980s had a mixed reception among immigrant women. In one respect, critiques of domestic work resonated with immigrant women, who had been shuttled in massive numbers to perform domestic and care work for the white middle classes in the metropoles. In the United Kingdom, Selma James articulated the Wages for Housework framework with the concerns of

immigrant women: for them it was about making visible not only their labor, but also the hidden cost of rebuilding their lives and the lives of loved ones anew in material, cultural, and historical contexts that did not belong to them, after “the uprooting of everything you’ve known.” It was about the strength needed while “fighting to stay” where they are often unwelcome, and about the persistence and resilience of keeping together a life in constant uncertainty and threat of deportation. [15] For women coming from the colonized countries, immigration was about “reappropriating their own wealth, stolen from them at home and accumulated in the industrial metropolis.” [16] It was the wealth stolen from their own and their ancestors’ labor, and it was as much theirs as it was anyone else’s. As the geographies of the new global division of labor developed – not just in the United Kingdom but across Europe and in the United States – feminists turned to examine the commodification of domestic and care work and to challenge the social hierarchies and meanings of “work.” Focusing on the global reconfiguration of the labor force, they showed how the commodification of domestic, care, affective, and service work reinscribed the devalued social meanings of these activities in hierarchical value-regimes of labor, which mobilized racial, gender, and ethnic differences, as well as immigration status, to subordinate, dehumanize, and devalue black, brown, and immigrant bodies and lives. [17]

“It is impossible to speak of the relation of women to capital anywhere without at the same time confronting the question of development versus underdevelopment,” James wrote. Her work and organizing held together intersections between women’s struggles, immigration, race, and Third-World liberation movements, while playing with emerging discourses around “development.” [18] These tendencies became the basis for international organizations such as the International Wages for Housework Campaign, which welcomed women from a dizzying range of cultural, material, and economic contexts, from Peru and Trinidad, to India, Uganda, the Philippines, and Mexico, to account for their shared political experience and social conditions, while forging an experience of

solidarity and togetherness. [19]

However, this sweeping internationalism came at a great cost: by conjuring an "international sisterhood," James consistently universalized women's oppression, insisting that across cultural and material contexts, "what does not vary is that whatever the standard, women are the poorer and the socially weaker sex." [20] These forms of organizing and writing saw a strong push-back from Third-World and post-colonial feminists. Alongside Hazel Carby and others, Chandra Talpade Mohanty's signature intervention from the early 1980s unpacked their Eurocentric, colonial, and evolutionary premises. Mohanty argued that Western Marxist and socialist feminists contributed to the production of the "Third World" as a monolithic construct across widely different cultural and socio-historical contexts and posited an imagined, singular notion of Third-World womanhood, which reinscribed colonial hegemony. Patriarchy became a universal structure that oppressed all women in the same way – a "stable ahistorical something that apparently oppresses most if not all the women in these countries." [21] Presuming in this way that the conditions of oppression were the same, they erased their historical and cultural contexts and constituted women as a homogenous group on the basis of their shared oppression. Mixed up with racist and colonial prejudice, they posited a subject powerless, dependent, and uneducated, a product of the "backward" socio-economic conditions of which she was part. In this sense, "reproduction" and "unpaid labor" also became universalizing frameworks as they erased the kinds of culturally specific values and social meanings these activities assumed in non-Western and non-capitalist contexts. [22] And infamously, by projecting norms of agency and emancipation specific to Western liberal capitalist societies onto non-western contexts, they judged "traditional" gender and sexual practices as "uncivilized," backward, oppressive, and patriarchal. Thus paradoxically, Carby pointed out, Western Marxist feminists assumed capitalist relations as the gateway to emancipation and progress and implicitly embraced capitalist development as the vehicle for reforms. [23]

Instead of positing “women” as a coherent group, preexisting and already constituted, postcolonial feminists insisted that feminist analyses should examine how “women” and “men” emerged as subjects through cultural practices in each particular context and examine the culturally specific logics of gender practices and gender subordination, as they configure the political and social meanings of “women,” “men,” and their social activities. [24] Uncovering these logics would register not only the historically and culturally specific modes of gender subordination embedded in contexts of social difference and socio-economic conditions, but also render visible women’s agency, power, and their cultures of resistance – rather than just their victimhood. Arguing for situated knowledges, for contextually and culturally specific analyses of gender relations, and for staying attentive to the cultural meanings of gendered social practices, they challenged Western Marxist and socialist feminists to situate their theorizing – to develop an awareness that their concepts and critical methodologies are products of their own socio-cultural contexts and geographies.

Social Reproduction and the State

For the most part, movements around social reproduction in the capitalist West turned to the welfare state to resolve the structural contradictions between the spheres of production and social reproduction, maintaining a rather ambiguous relationship to the state. Even as they critiqued the disciplinary and racializing practices of the state, the welfare rights movement continued to levy their social demands on the state. As Premilla Nadasen outlines in *Rethinking the Welfare Rights Movement*, this movement was organized around forcing the state to give adequate benefits, while also fighting against the “dehumanizing and surveillance-based components of welfare.” [25]

Similarly, autonomists, who argued for autonomy from capitalism, autonomy from men and patriarchy, and lastly, autonomy from the state, had a contradictory relation to the state, advocating for women’s economic independence through the “female welfare wage” and various

other demands on the state, such as the housework wage. Various "claimants and welfare movements" in the UK and North America, the "Family Allowance Campaign" in the UK, child benefits for single mothers, and other demands to redirect money from the general "family income" towards the specific needs of women, were all ways to advance women's struggle for independence and empowerment by fighting to "keep the money in women's hands, to increase it." [26] Against the socialization and collectivization of housework and childcare, Silvia Federici argued:

> It is one thing to set up a day care center the way we want it, and then demand that the state pay for it. It is quite another thing to deliver our children to the State and ask the State to control them not for five but for fifteen hours a day. It is one thing to organize communally the way we want to eat… and then ask the State to pay for it, and it is the opposite thing to ask the State to organize our meals. In one case we regain some control over our lives, in the other we extend the State's control over us. [27]

Thus, as they addressed their demands mainly to government, the autonomists were positioned ambiguously vis-à-vis the state, especially because by centering their organizing around demands on the state they inevitably endorsed it. Yet these contradictions posed no problem for them: the state was a giant apparatus of control and dispossession, and these demands aimed to reclaim some of the resources that working people were robbed of. The question, Selma James argued, "was not whether the State can afford to give [the demands], but whether we can afford to continue to give so much to the state." [28] But a radical critique of the state was not exactly on their political horizon.

In this sense, they shared some, perhaps unintended, commonalities with post-Stalinist socialist humanists in the East-European contexts, who also had no radical critique of the state but embraced its forms of social distribution. Insisting that ordinary humans were the creators of their own destiny and their own environment, they saw the institutions of the reproduction of social relations at large as the sites where social

mobility could be achieved. Social mobility, seen as a measure of freedom and social wealth, was the precondition for the personal and social self-realization of the post-Stalinist socialist person – "the holistically developed person" or the "all-round development of the individual" which Marx spoke about in his *1844 Manuscripts*. [29] Their views of social reproduction, wedded to state governance, became an expression of a seamless convergence between social emancipation and social normalization projects. Yet questions of autonomy, of communal control of land, resources, and labor in the socialist countries was configured in very complex and radically different ways – a topic which needs special consideration.

A forceful critique of the state came from another, often overlooked, tradition on social reproduction. Althusser also wrote about social reproduction in the 1970s, independently of Marxist-feminists and against socialist and Marxist humanists. Among all these traditions, he was the one to expose most forcefully the structural role of the state in capitalist relations. [30] Though his work does not attend to the articulations of race and gender under capitalism, Althusser, like feminists, came to the question of social reproduction as a way of challenging traditional productivist and orthodox Marxism. But for him, social reproduction was a more expansive category, which included a range of practices, such as – "the reproduction of the means of production, [and] also the reproduction of labor power – family, housing, children, schooling, health, problems faced by the couple, by young people, etc." [31] Besides the law, the courts, the police, and the prisons, he saw the school, the church, and the family as part of the myriad institutions and everyday practices involved in the reproduction of social relations. Further, similar to the work of Italian autonomists, he saw the factory not just as a place where workers produced commodities and their labor was exploited, but as another site involved in the disciplining of bodies, in the making of working class subjects, and in the reproduction of the working class itself.

Such a definition of social reproduction may seem too diffuse and

general to be of any use, but what made it specific and conceptually different was that by reproduction, Althusser meant the reproduction of capitalist relations, or “the relations of exploitation.” [32] What fell in the realm of “social reproduction,” therefore, were those practices that reproduce relations of inequality and exploitation, those elements that enable and legitimate the relations of domination and guarantee their continued existence. In this sense, Althusser’s project offered another ambitious re-reading of Marx, suggesting that the primary driving logic of capitalism was not just the extraction of resources and labor power from workers. Coexistent, although not always in concert, with the logic of accumulating surplus value and its economic rationality, was the need to reproduce the hierarchies and forms of subordination on which capitalism depended.

Further, Althusser took into account the role of the state seen as the reproduction of social and class subjugation, and to him we owe one of the most interesting Marxist critiques of state power. Marx had left the issue of state power in a relative void, leaving the question “What is a Marxist critique of the state?” an unresolved theoretical challenge. In his essay “Marx in his Limits” from 1978, Althusser wrote that in orthodox Marxist accounts, the state “issued” directly from the mode of production and figured as an expression of the economic and material organization of labor and production. [33] This rather simplistic view was taken to its logical extreme in the Stalinist “base-superstructure” doctrine, which saw the state as a derivative of material-economic relations, secondary to the so-called “base” or the organization of economic life. Instead, Althusser saw the state as that which guaranteed the reproduction of the relations of social inequality and exploitation through a continuum of legal, administrative, discursive, and violent or repressive means. In other words, the state was the necessary precondition for the reproduction of capitalist relations; it made sure that the material and normative premises of capitalist exploitation remain intact, that they are being reproduced in daily life. [34]

Foucault’s work on governmentality and the biopolitical regulation of

“life” continues this Althusserian project, yet his work, mostly written in the context of the welfare state, creates oppositions between repressive and productive forms of power, the sovereign right to kill versus the biopolitical approach of “letting live.” [35] Unlike Foucault, Althusser never lost sight of, or interest in, state violence and the logic of state repression, seeing them as continuous with the more productive “technologies” of governance under capitalism – a contribution which is useful to revisit in the present political context.

Implications for the Contemporary Moment

That we have turned back to the 1970s at this particular political moment is not a coincidence: such a turn has been prompted by the exigencies of our struggles. To that effect, Amanda Armstrong wrote, out of the student struggles against austerity and the privatization of public higher education, that “now and then seem to mirror one another” both in the structural conditions and the forms of struggle. [36] She showed how the crisis of profitability in some industries in the 1970s propelled intense rounds of layoffs, which in turn spurred “waves of organizing” such as wildcat strikes and various forms of rebellions and organized defiance. [37]

We would add that the two eras seem to mirror each other negatively as well. Hard-fought gains of waged and unwaged women’s struggles in the 1970s are being currently undone, forcing us to return, once again and rather urgently, to the question of social reproduction. In fact, in the neoliberal context, existing infrastructures of social reproduction, the legacies of welfare state capitalism and socialism, have become instruments of dispossession of the means of survival and extraction of resources from already marginalized communities, often through state-administrative means. Their function is, besides extracting resources, to demand compliance and obedience to the work and debt regime, and to ensure that material wealth and class power remain structurally unavailable to those affected. Mostly falling on communities of color, immigrants, and the poor, these measures reproduce the structural

conditions of their class through coercion and repression. As we show elsewhere, these trends have been particularly egregious in the post-industrial urban areas of the Midwest, as in the water shutoffs in Detroit, and the closures of public schools and mental health clinics in Chicago. Predominantly in African-American parts of the city, infrastructures of access to social services and social-reproductive needs have been turned into coercive instruments of dispossession and racialization. [38]

Further, the question of state repression at the site of social reproduction has emerged today more urgently than ever. The capitalist system and the state have amassed tremendous political instruments to prevent the proliferation of social forms alternative to wage-labor, market relations, and the private property regime, whether they are practiced as forms of survival of those on the margins of the system and by different cultural communities, or whether they are part of political visions of imagining social relations differently. As Armstrong argued, "by sustaining regimes of ownership, by enforcing fees for basic necessities, and by breaking up squats and communal encampments, police forces, the courts, and other state bureaucracies enclose the material conditions of life, making it virtually impossible to reproduce ourselves and each other free of waged work." [39] In other words, the state has criminalized a vast range of social, material, and economic forms of life involved in reshaping social and material relations beyond capitalism and the state, and has been persecuting basic forms of survival, of helping and caring for each other – to make sure that capitalist relations remain dominant. By persecuting activities such as panhandling and performing on the streets and in the subways, feeding others in public, and finding shelter outside the private property regime, and by barring direct access to health and gender-affirming technologies and knowledges, the state "close[s] off," through repression, "of what we could hold in common." [40]

These conditions have made us turn urgently to the question of autonomy, of developing collectively skills and resources necessary for

our everyday survival. They lead us to the forging of new autonomous forms of collective governance, networks of mutual care, survival, and well-being, and invite communities to take back the resources and knowledges necessary to care for each other and to continue to survive on a daily basis. Armstrong has called these “insurgent forms of social reproduction.” [41] In other words, today, unlike during the 1970s, struggles on the terrain of social reproduction, historically tethered to the state, are facing the challenges to reimagine themselves against or outside of its horizons. [42] In the process of building autonomy on the terrain of social reproduction, these struggles can humbly learn from the experience and the collective survival of those permanently barred from the reproductive infrastructures of the state through various legal exclusions. Undocumented and precariously-documented immigrants, as well as ex-felons, have been permanently excluded from access to housing, unemployment, food stamps, and other social resources available to citizens. They have accumulated skills, knowledge, and the resilience and strength to survive in spaces of exclusion and invisibility. In this sense, studying the histories and cultures of social reproduction and survival of immigrant communities, who have been historically excluded from or have had little recourse to state resources, is of greatest importance. Further, transgender and gender non-conforming people, often trapped in the administrative and legal limbos of the state and in the binary regimes of public services and the health care system, have developed means of navigating within and against these institutions’ violence and harassment. Their particular conditions have given rise to body autonomy and gender-hack movements dedicated to reclaiming our bodies from the administrative and regulatory regimes of the medical system and the state. As the political links and possibilities for solidarity between these positions are becoming clearer, critiques of the state and struggles for autonomy can hardly go very far without their experiences and insights. This kind of organizing requires a serious commitment to postcolonial critiques of Eurocentrism and First-World frameworks. This is not only because people of color and immigrants who come from non-First-World and non-Western contexts join our

struggles only to be subsumed by U.S. regimes of gender, class, and racial difference – a process which erases their social difference and the histories of oppression and resistance present in the multiple worlds they carry and negotiate. It is also because there is a great deal to learn from indigenous and non-Western cultures of social and communal life. We hope that thinking materialist feminism in these directions opens a wider range of avenues for movements in the present, and for building militant struggle on the terrain of social reproduction.

References

1 This essay was written in collaboration with Jon Cramer.

2 We deploy the term “Marxist-feminist” here to name a slightly more capacious category than just the tendency associated with Wages for Housework, to include authors from the 1970s who focused on the home as a site of productive activity. There are significant tensions and differences within these, however, as in the case of some socialist-feminist identified thinkers, who held a dual oppression model of women’s subordination where capitalism and patriarchy interacted to produce the oppression of women. Others, who identified with Marxist feminism, while not ignoring cultural or other dynamics of oppression, thought the capitalist social formation was at the root of most salient features of women’s subordination.

3 FLOC, “To make many lines, to form many bonds// Thoughts on Autonomous Organizing,” *Lies: A Journal of Materialist Feminism* 2 (August 2015): 60.

4 Only recently some of these links have been explored in the work of Dean Spade, Paul Preciado, Eric Stanley, among others. Dean Spade, *Normal Life: Administrative Violence, Critical Trans Politics, and the Limits of the Law* (Brooklyn, NY: South End Press, 2011); Eric A. Stanley and Nat Smith, eds. *Captive Genders: Trans Embodiment and the Prison Industrial Complex* (Edinburgh, Oakland, and Baltimore: AK Press, 2011); Beatriz [Paul] Preciado, *Testo Junkie: Sex, Drugs, and Biopolitics in the Pharmacopornographic Era* (New York: The Feminist Press, CUNY, 2013). We also consider the unfinished work of Chris Chitty to be a significant contribution in this direction. For important earlier interventions, see Judith Butler, “Merely Cultural,” *New Left Review,* I/227 (January-February 1998): 33-44 (with response by Nancy Fraser in the subsequent issue); and Gayle Rubin’s classic text, “The Traffic in Women: Notes on the ‘Political Economy’ of Sex” in *Toward an Anthropology of Women* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975), 157-210.

5 Recent scholarship has revealed the extent and range of black women’s organizing from the 1940s to the 1980s, from within multiple political formations and across a range of problematics, many of which included housing, education, and domestic labor, highlighting that the sphere of social reproduction for black women has long been a site of resistance, community, and power. See for instance, Premilla Nadasen, *Welfare Warriors: The Welfare Rights Movement in the United States* (New York and London: Routledge, 2005), *Rethinking the Welfare Rights Movement* (New York and London: Routledge, 2012), and *Household Workers Unite! The Untold Story of African American Women Who Built a Movement* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2015); Rhonda Y. Williams, *The Politics of Public Housing: Black Women’s Struggles against Urban Inequality* (Cambridge: Oxford University Press, 2005); Dayo Gore, *Radicalism at the Crossroads: African American Women Activists in the Cold War* (New York: NYU

Press, reprint edition, 2012); and Kimberly Springer, *Living for the Revolution: Black Feminist Organizations, 1968–1980* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005).

6 Claudia Jones, “To End the Neglect of the Problems of the Negro Woman” (New York: National Women’s Commission, C.P.U.S.A, 1949, originally published in *Political Affairs,* June 1949).

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13 Walter Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), 193.

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15 Selma James, "Strangers and Sisters: Women, Race, and Immigration," 174-89.

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17 A sample of the voluminous literature with a focus on domestic and service work: Barbara Ehrenreich, *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America* (New York: Henry Holt and Co, 2001); Barbara Ehrenreich and Arlie Hochschild, eds.,*Global Woman: Nannies, Maids, and Sex Workers in the New Economy,* (New York: Henry Holt and Co, 2002); Grace Chang *Disposable Domestics: Immigrant Women Workers in the Global Economy* (Brooklyn, NY: South End Press, 2000); Bridget Anderson *Doing the Dirty Work? The Global Politics of Domestic Labor* (London, Zed Books, 2000); and Rhacel Salazar Parreñas, *Servants of Globalization: Women, Migration and Domestic Work* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001).

18 Selma James, "Wageless of the World," *Sex, Race, and Class – The Perspective on Winning: Selection of Writings, 1952-2011* (Oakland: PM Press, 2012), 104. See also her work with the UN, "The UN Decade for Women: An Offer We Couldn't Refuse," *Sex, Race, and Class,* 191-204.

19 For discussion, see Nina Lopez, "A Winning Perspective," in *Sex, Race, and Class,* 8-9. We find that this developmental internationalism rose to dominance in the second half of the 1970s in a number of international conferences on women in Mexico City (1975); Wellesley (1976); Copenhagen (1980), and more, and was embraced by the United Nations in various projects on women and development in the Third World. For a critical response, see Nawal Saadawi, Fetie Mernissi, and Mallica Vajarathon, "A Critical Look at the Wellesley Conference," *Quest: A Feminist Quarterly* 4:2 (Winter 1978), 101-7.

20 James, "The Global Kitchen," in *Sex, Race, and Class,* 173.

21 Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Difference," first published in *boundary 2* 12/13 (1984): 333-58.

22 For some of the early interventions, see also Felicity Edholm, Olivia Harris, and Kate Young, "Conceptualizing Women," *Critique of Anthropology* 3 (1978): 101-30; Michelle Rosaldo: The Use and Abuse of Anthropology: Feminism and Cross-cultural Understanding *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 3, no. 5 (Spring 1980): 389-417; Pratiba Parmar and Valerie Amos, "Challenging

Imperial Feminism" *Feminist Review* 17 (Autumn 1984): 3-19; Kum-kum Bhanvani and Margaret Coulson, "Transforming Socialist Feminism: the Challenge of Racism," *Feminist Review* 23 (1986): 81-92. (See interventions in the two special issues of *Feminist Review,* "Many Voices, One Chant: Black Feminist Perspectives," no. 17 (Autumn 1984); "Socialist Feminism: Out of the Blue," no. 23 (Summer 1986). For discussion on the history of the debates, as well as some further interventions, see Heidi Seifa Mirza, "Introduction: Mapping a Genealogy of Black British Feminism," in *Black British Feminism* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 1-28; Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Ann Russo, and Lourdes Torres, eds., *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991); M. Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Introduction, *Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures* (New York and London: Routledge, 1997); Mohanty, "'Under Western Eyes' Revisited: Feminist Solidarity through Anticapitalist Struggles," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 28, no. 2 (2002): 499-535.

23 Carby, "White Woman Listen!," 47-48.

24 Mohanty, 344.

25 Premilla Nadasen, *Rethinking the Welfare Rights Movement* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 5. While welfare rolls in "the mid-1960s were 48 percent African American," Nadasen estimates that 85% of the welfare rights movements were African American (16).

26 Selma James, "The Family Allowance Campaign: Tactics and Strategy," *Sex, Race, and Class*, 86.

27 Silvia Federici, "Wages Against Housework," *Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction, and Feminist Struggle* (Oakland: PM Press, 2012), 21.

28 Selma James, "The Family Allowance Campaign," 88.

29 For example, the work of Petur-Emil Mitev, Maria Dinkova, and Svoboda Puteva, who were part of a progressive movement among sociologists and social theorists in post-Stalinist Bulgaria and the Soviet Union, studying questions of social mobility, education, leisure, and personal self-realization through humanist lens.

30 Althusser's book *On the Reproduction of Capitalism: Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,* written mostly between 1968-70, where he develops his theory of social reproduction and his critique of the base-superstructure relationship, was recently translated in English (New York and London: Verso, 2014).

31 Louis Althusser, “Marx in his Limits,” *Philosophy of the Encounter: Later Writings, 1978-1987* (London: Verso, 2006), 44.

32 Ibid.,99.

33 Ibid., 97-99.

34 Althusser, *On the Reproduction of Capitalism,* 53-93, and throughout; further developed in “Marx in his Limits.”

35 Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the College de France, 1977-78* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004); *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the College de France, 1978-1979* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004).

36 Amanda Armstrong, “http://www.reclamationsjournal.org/issue_debt_amanda_armstrong.htm”>Insolvent Futures/Bonds of Struggle,” *Reclamations Journal*, special issue on debt, August-September 2011.

37 Amanda Armstrong, “Infrastructures of Injury,” *Lies Journal* 2, August 2015, 130-135. Focusing on the airline industry, she shows how the crisis in the 1970s also intensified sexism and the patriarchal subordination of waged and unwaged women-workers, and led women to organize against both the management and the coopted and male-dominated unions.

38 See Jon Cramer, “Race, Class, and Infrastructures of Social Reproduction in the Urban Present,” in the current issue.

39 Amanda Armstrong, “http://www.reclamationsjournal.org/issue06_armstrong.htm”>Debt and the Student Strike: Antagonisms in the Sphere of Social Reproduction,” *Reclamations* 6, July 2012.

40 Ibid.

41 Ibid.

42 Certainly important political experiences for this reimaging would be the social programming developed and offered by groups like the Black Panthers and the Young Lords. See for example Darrel Enck-Wanzer, ed., *Young Lords: A Reader* (New York: New York University Press, 2010); Alondra Nelson, *Body and Soul: The Black Panther Party and the Fight Against Medical Discrimination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), and David Hilliard, ed., *The Black Panther Party: Service to the People Programs* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press and Huey P. Newton Foundation, 2008).

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