

The subversive potential of witchcraft: A reflection on Federici's Self-reproducing movements

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Abstract

This is a theoretical contribution that draws on the work of Silvia Federici, and particularly her book, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the body and primitive accumulation* to discuss crises, struggles over social reproduction, and feminist activist organizing. We refer to incidents of women's organizing namely the Parisian *pétroleuses* (the female supporters of the Paris Commune), the Kurdish Women's Movement in Rojava, the Urban Land committees in Venezuela, and the 21st century witch-hunting in Africa, and discuss colonial and patriarchal strategies of exploitation and feminist resistance across different space-times. We then suggest that the struggles over social reproduction are intertwined with resistances that enable women to participate in communities that re-embed them in the spheres of feminist activism. The article concludes that the crises, including the gendered effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, should be discussed in relation to our capacity to organize in ways that nurture values of cooperation, equality, solidarity, and care, and eliminate unjust access to rights driven by patriarchal and statist repressive modes of social organization.

KEYWORDS

Federici, feminism, social reproduction

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1 | INTRODUCTION

The gendered outcomes of the 2008 global financial crisis have been widely theorized (McBride and White-side, 2011; Vaiou, 2014; Worth, 2016), with some key contributions originating from the field of feminist economic geography (Meehan and Straus, 2015; Mendoza, 2011; Roberts, 2015). Prior research suggests that during times of crises, women, particularly in low-income countries, are more likely to be taken out of school, to reduce the quantity and quality of the food they eat and are more likely, in order to survive, to sell sex (Mohindra et al., 2011). Crucially, as a result of the stress on families and communities brought about by crises, incidents of violence against women are on the rise (True, 2012; UNAIDS, 2012). For example, although Brazil has made significant advances over the years by establishing a legal framework to curb domestic violence, it still fails to put that into practice: the authorities do not prosecute thousands of domestic violence cases each year.¹ The serious problems in Roraima (Northern Brazil) reflect nationwide failures to respond to domestic violence against women. In Greece, where the 2008 crisis hit hard, police reported an alarming increase in cases of domestic violence. In comparison with previous years, domestic violence was up 54% in 2011 and 47% in 2013 (General Secretariat for Gender Equality, 2013). A rise in the incidents of domestic violence against women has also been reported during lockdown and the Covid-19 pandemic (Mittal and Singh, 2020; Peterman et al., 2020; Wilcox et al., 2020).

Besides domestic violence, the reports unearthing sexual violence are also on the rise. As Angela Davies notes, “the pattern of institutionalized sexual abuse [against black women] became so powerful that it managed to survive the abolition of slavery” (Davies, 1981, p. 177). In India, 5 years after the gang rape and death of a young student in Delhi in December 2012, girls and women survivors of sexual violence and rape continue to face significant barriers in access to justice and support services. In May 2017, a 23-year-old woman was brutally assaulted, raped, and murdered in the Rohtak district (Human Rights Watch, 2017). In the same year, Chechnya run a brutal campaign against LGBTIQ people, with state officials torturing and humiliating individuals and encouraging what they call “honor killings” of LGBTIQ family members. Of course, a few months before that, we witnessed the election of Donald Trump, who despite his racist and sexist statements, “...you know I'm automatically attracted to beautiful—I just start kissing them. It's like a magnet. Just kiss. I don't even wait. And when you're a star, they let you do it. You can do anything. Grab them by the pussy,” became the President of the United States of America. Then, the “pussy grabbed back” (#PussyGrabsBack).

The day after Trump's inauguration, the Women's March would become one of the largest demonstrations in American history. A few months later, on March the 8, American women celebrated International Women's Day with a one-day strike in solidarity with women across the world, particularly the Ni Una Menos (“Not One Less”) grassroots movement against gender-based violence that started in Argentina, spread rapidly worldwide and now has branches in New York, Berlin, Italy, Brazil, Costa Rica, Ecuador, and elsewhere. These protests brought together millions of women across the world, along with the men who supported them, to protest gender oppression. 700,000 female farmworkers of *Alianza Nacional de Campesinas* expressed their solidarity with actresses (following the Harvey Weinstein case), and new investigations had begun to expose harassment and assault in the restaurant industry, in home care, and in other workplaces across the world. Such mobilizations demonstrate the importance of embodied resistance to regimes of oppression, harassment, and abuse (Fotaki & Daskalaki, 2020; Idahosa, 2020; Swan & Fox, 2010). Soon after the 2017 marches, which laid the groundwork for a broader critique of women's oppression in the workplace and at home, we saw worldwide solidarity mobilizations and organized movements that culminated in the #BuildMovementsNotWalls, #MeToo, originally started by Tarana Burke, and the most recent #TimesUp.

Recently, during Covid-19 lockdowns, initially in Spain, but later also in France, Argentina, Italy, Greece, and elsewhere, the Institute for Equality has launched a campaign called *Mascarilla-19* (*Mask-19*), stressing that escaping abuse is a valid reason to leave your home during lockdown. By going to the local pharmacy, women could use the code word “Mask-19” to let others know that they experience violence at home or sexual assault. This initiative aims to provide women a tool through which they will resist and reverse conditions of domination and cruelty

intensified during the pandemic: “by thinking about women’s agency to resist the position assigned to them, agency is back in the hands of women, and this is a refusal to give in to the ways patriarchy works on women” (Wilcox et al., 2020, p. 13).

In recent years, therefore, we have witnessed intensified gender inequalities within households and reduced opportunities for social empowerment. As inequality has grown and the social welfare is rapidly eradicated, women are forced to work longer hours for stagnant or declining wages, while at the same time taking on a larger burden of care. In their attempt to remain competitive within informal markets, women work longer both in the productive and reproductive spheres. Women as caretakers of the family in India, for example, are expected to eat only the leftover food. This often results in malnutrition for the mother and eventually the children (Nandal, 2011). Gender inequality in the workplace still prevails despite abolishing formal barriers to gender equality almost 40 years ago (Leonard, 2017). A 10-year slow but steady progress on improving gender parity came to a halt in 2017, with the global gender gap widening for the first time since 2006 (World Economic Forum, 2017). The greatest inequalities are being observed on economic participation and opportunity as well as political empowerment (World Economic Forum, 2017, p. vii).

At present, the pandemic Covid-19 is forcing the household to bear heavier adjustment costs, disproportionately affecting women on a global scale. A United Nations’ report on the first 100 days of the pandemic suggested that gender injustices that existed before the pandemic will be intensified. Crucially, recent studies show alarming effects of Covid-19, particularly for marginalized and precarious women (e.g., Perez and Gandolfi, 2020 in Peru; Safdar and Yasmin, 2020 on Muslim women in Pakistan; Abuhammad, 2020 in Jordan). As Parry and Gordon (2020, p. 5) reported that women’s vulnerability in South African labor markets means that “when compared to men, women report that they are twice as likely to be unable to afford necessities for more than a month after lost earnings, with black women three times as likely to report this fiscal vulnerability.”

This article suggests that Federici’s (2014a, 2014b) thesis about the appropriation of the reproductive life-giving creative work by turning people into disposable social buffers is useful for understanding the gendered effects of crises. In particular, the article discusses how the analysis of reproductive struggles can inform our study of the gendered aspects of crises and their impact on the organization of work and particularly our potential to forge self-reproducing movements and postcapitalist alternatives. Our starting point is that vital in the organization of contemporary women’s resistance movements is the issue of social reproduction. As Federici (2004) explains, the strategy of cheapening the costs of labor, which lies behind this and every major capitalist crisis, hides the exploitation of women and other minoritized populations’ productive and reproductive powers and abilities; this is at the heart of the capitalist development. Such exploitation limits women’s participation in the formal economy yet at the same time, presents opportunities for engagement with the public and political life. To these opportunities we will turn toward the end of our discussion, where we will emphasize the need to more closely entangle political activism with daily reproductive work, and stress the importance of the organization of self-reproducing movements with transformative potentialities.

The remainder article is structured as follows: We first present a review of Federici’s analysis of antifeudal struggles and the repression of women’s movements in the early capitalist era. Then, we discuss social reproduction and women’s struggle for wages for housework, referring to feminist autonomist Marxist approaches that challenge the separation of the private and public spheres and call for a struggle to refuse commodification of women’s bodily capacities and the rearticulation of social relationship through the recognition of women’s unpaid reproductive labor. The paper then takes us from Paris and the *pétroleuse* to Cooperative Kitchens and the Grand Domestic Revolution, from Rojava and the Kurdish Women’s Movement to Venezuelan shantytowns, and from the women’s wages for housework struggles in the 1960s and 1970s to the witch-hunting practices in contemporary Africa that seem to coincide with the women’s movement to demand a land reform and land rights (Ogembo, 2006). The final section, before the concluding remarks, considers women’s organizing in the unfolding crisis of neoliberal capitalism, and the possibilities for enacting alternative economic and social relations based on self-reproducing movements that put feminist solidarity and activism in the center of their organization.

2 | ANTIFEUDAL STRUGGLES AND WITCH-HUNTS

The work of Federici and others (Fortunati, 1995; Mies, 1986; Power, 2017; Weeks, 2011) offers a full theory of the embodied labor focusing on how women's exploitation played a central function in the process of capitalist accumulation by demonstrating how "the degradation of women [and their bodies] are necessary conditions for the existence of capitalism in all times" (Federici, 2004, p. 13) whereby the value of labor is proven and perhaps created by its refusal. Presenting a critique to Marxism, who placed an emphasis on the contradictions within the economic system of feudalism that led to its overthrow by capitalism, Federici stresses the role that repressive forces or institutions (such as the Church and the State) played in this transition. By repressing peasant rights, controlling women's bodies and their reproduction, privatizing the commons, and demonizing newly acquired territories and subjugated populations, capitalist regimes not only achieved their exploitation but also justified their racist repression. Subjugated populations were identified by their "irrational bodies" and disciplined by systems of legal and economic sexism and racialization; women were "nonproductive" domestic labor and productive motherhood, and only the European white men were defined as citizens with full legal rights (Ferguson, 2006).

Federici positions the first organized attempts to challenge the dominant sexual norms and establish egalitarian social order in the antifeudal struggle. The struggle against feudal power, she explains, marks the first grassroots women movement in European history that contributed to the construction of alternative modes of communal life (Federici, 2014a). Medieval women's struggles were not separate from class ones rather these "heretic" revolts had gender. As the feudal economy failed, self-sufficient communities began to form; in these communities, we can find disproportionately large number of women—what Federici calls "the first proletarian international." Women in the movements were not acting as wives, but in their own right: they "were less dependent on their male kin, less differentiated from them physically, socially, and psychologically, and were less subservient to men's needs than 'free' women were to be later in capitalist society" (Federici, 2014a, p. 15). Several authors have also proposed that there was a definite queer element to many of the sects, which were the main political alternative to feudal oppression, until the early 15th century when their acts of resistance became actual warfare (Boswell, 1980; Richards, 1991). "These 'heretical sects' attracted hundreds of thousands of people, and openly called for a classless society, often specifically rejecting gender hierarchies as well as hierarchies of wealth" (Kersplebedeb, 2005).

These "conscious forms of social transgression" (Federici, 2014a, p. 22) along with refusal of bonded labor put forward an alternative to feudalism and capitalist order that was to follow and demonstrated that another world is possible, a world, however, which was not realized. Instead of egalitarian social relations, based upon the sharing of wealth and the refusal of hierarchies and authoritarian rule, this movement, unfortunately, was followed by the new capitalist era. In the roots of this crisis of the feudal system and the transition to the new era, one could also find how state control was extended over every aspect of reproduction, along with the extermination of the "witches," provided the foundations of primitive accumulation (Federici, 2014a). The witch-hunts, Federici explains in her ground-breaking book *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation*, developed in the aftermath of the peasant revolts of the late 15th and early 16th century in favor of a more anarchic and cooperative system of communal production managed by peasants. Witch-hunts coincided with price hikes (between the end of the 16th century and the first half of the 17th) and socio-economic crisis (Kamen, 1971, p. 249) as well as intensification of protests and revolts (see, e.g., the "peasant wars" against land privatization, including the uprisings against the "enclosures" in England) mostly led by women (Federici, 2014a):

Controlling so-called "heresies" that supported more egalitarian roles for women in religion, limiting women's control over reproduction and independent sexuality by prohibiting abortions and targeting women as the sources of non-procreative, "lewd" sexuality, stigmatizing women leaders of peasant revolts and alternative health practices so as to divide the working classes and weaken their resistance to land privatization and capitalist exploitation, and re-framing the ideology of the family to



Image 1 Suspected witches being hanged in England. Published in 1655, by unknown. Published in *A New History of Witchcraft* by Brooks and Alexander (2007), page 69. Public Domain, <https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?curid=28048132>

normalize the ideal relation for women as in the non-paid work of childbearing and childrearing (Wagadu, 2006, p. 115).

Witches embodied what had to be destroyed: “the heretic, the healer, the disobedient wife, the woman who dared to live alone, poisoned the master’s food and inspired the slaves to revolt” (Federici, 2014a, p. 11). Through an “intense process of social degradation,” women were constructed “in the image of capital” (Federici, 2014a, p. 100). This process included changes in women’s social status, for example, not being able to walk alone on the streets or sit outside their homes, how traditionally women’s task ale-brewing work came to be seen as men’s work. When the privileged groups started living in constant fear of the repressed and their potential for insubordination, then the witch-hunt gained momentum (Image 1). In their attack against magic, women were their most likely targets:

Aiming at controlling nature, the capitalist organization of work must refuse the unpredictability implicit in the practice of magic, and the possibility of establishing a privileged relation with the natural elements, as well as the belief in the existence of powers available only to particular individuals, and thus not easily generalized and exploitable. Magic was also an obstacle to the rationalization of the work process, and a threat to the establishment of the principle of individual responsibility. Above all, magic seemed a form of refusal of work, of insubordination, and an instrument of grassroots resistance to power. The world had to be “disenchanted” in order to be dominated (Federici, 2014a, p. 174).

Federici explains how charges of witchcraft often served to punish the attack on property following on privatization of the land and agriculture. Often accusing healers who used traditional remedies transmitted from generation to generation, witch-hunters promoted scientific rationalism as a vehicle for progress. Merchant (1990)

coimplicates witch-hunting with the profound alienation that modern science has instituted between human beings and nature, the destruction of the environment, and connects capitalist exploitation of the natural world with the exploitation of women. As Mies (1986, p. 83) argues, “the torture chambers of the witch-hunters were the laboratories where the texture, the anatomy, the resistance of the human body – mainly the female body – was studied [...]; torture through mechanical devices [was] a tool for the subjugation of disorder...[and] fundamental to the scientific method as power.” The subversive potential of witchcraft had to be annihilated and for that rationalism was not sufficient. The legitimization of witch-hunts was a “transitional phenomenon” (Federici, 2014a, p. 203): an ideological bricolage of elements taken from the fantastic world of Medieval Christianity, rationalistic arguments, and modern bureaucratic court procedures:

Just as the Enclosures expropriated the peasantry from the communal land, so the witch-hunt expropriated women from their bodies, which were thus ‘liberated’ from any impediment preventing them to function as machines for the production of labor. For the threat of the stake erected more formidable barriers around women's bodies than were ever erected by the fencing off of the communes. (Federici, 2014a)

The witch-hunt was a typical instance of how in the history of capitalism, Federici interpreting Parinetto continues, “going back” was a means of stepping forward and establishing the conditions for capital accumulation. Once the subversive potential of witchcraft was destroyed and repressive regimes were fully in operation, magic was dedemonized and, in some instances, even allowed. In her 1880 book, *Cooperative Housekeeping: How Not To Do It, A Study in Sociology*, Melusina Fay Pierce describes the devalued position of women that followed: “Surely it is not to be denied that we [women] are all on a dead level of mental achievement and social consideration [...] and that we are growing less valuable and less valued, because less helpful, all the time” (cited in Baumgarthuber, 2015). In 1871 Paris, the enemies of the Commune, Federici recalls drawing on Edith Thomas, claimed that thousands of female Communards, proletarian women—the *pétroleuses*—were demonized by Parisian bourgeoisie as roaming the city trying to identify places “bon pour bruler” (“B.P.B,” “good for torching”). Like the witch, the *pétroleuse*, who was also depicted as an old woman with a wild, savage look who had to be exterminated. Hundreds of women were again executed (Image 2).

In its current phase, capitalism yet again deploys witch-hunts—the *othering* of some individuals and groups (see, e.g., recent migration from the Middle East and elsewhere)—to legitimize the use of repressive violence over populations. We are currently witnessing renewed attacks on reproductive rights and rights to bodily autonomy, the violation of livelihood rights in developing countries, and the state's daily assault on indigenous and black lives (see, e.g., #BlackLivesMatter) all confirming that capitalism, as a social-economic system, is unequivocally committed to racism and sexism. Thus, capitalism mystifies its built-in contradictions by depreciating the nature of those it exploits: women, colonial subjects, black bodies, or displaced immigrants (Federici, 2014a). “Open the Wombs,” women were ordered during a witch-finding campaign in a rural community of Eastern Zambia in 1989, after being accused of making people infertile (Paris, 2000). Meanwhile, their bodies were cut up with dozens of razor incisions in order to insert a “cleansing” medicine (Paris, 2000). In 2008, Federici, in “Witch-Hunting, Globalization, and Feminist Solidarity in Africa Today,” links the contemporary witch-hunts in Africa with the growth of women's movement to demand a land reform and land rights for women. Capitalists have welcomed World Bank's structural adjustment programs in Africa as an opportunity for land privatization and the development of land markets. Women who are normally the leading figures in resistance against these reforms are often accused as witches. Hence, contemporary forms of witch-hunting demonstrate that the return of this gendered persecution is no longer bound to a specific historic time. “It has taken a life of its own, so that the same mechanisms can be applied to different societies whenever there are people in them that have to be ostracized and dehumanized” (Federici, 2008a, 2008b, p. 16).



Image 2 Pétroleuses arrested in Versailles. Image by Robertson, A. Daryez - Vicomte de La Vausserie, *Histoire anecdotique et illustrée de la guerre de 1870-71 et du siège de Paris*, Paris, Josse, 1873, 2 t. en 1 vol., in-4, p. 193. Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=17054347>

3 | SOCIAL REPRODUCTION AND THE STRUGGLE FOR WAGES FOR HOUSEWORK

Primitive capitalist accumulation has not been substituted by a more rational, less violent stage of pure capitalist market exploitation (Federici, 2012, 2014a, 2014b). Capitalism was and continues to be premised on the different forms of sexual division of labor and on undervaluing of women's and others' labor specifically those concerned with reproduction, care, and sex work (Federici, 2004; see also Mies, 1986). As Lise Vogel suggests in *Marxism and the Oppression of Women*, a wide range of potential meanings has contributed to problems in defining the concept of reproduction, and, based on the work of Kate Young and others, proposes three levels of analysis: first, social reproduction, or the reproduction of the conditions of production; second, reproduction of the labor-force; and third, human or biological reproduction. Social reproduction does not only include procreation but of all the activities necessary for the reproduction of human life, such as housework, ensuring the health, productivity and socialization of the current workforce, caring for those (including the jobless) who cannot support themselves, subsistence agriculture, the production of culture as well as care for the environment. These different aspects are related, and exploring their relationship becomes key in the search for alternative futures.

According to Federici, women, who typically carry out social reproduction, become crucial for maintaining capitalist social order: "This is a strange commodity for it is not a thing. The ability to labour resides only in a human being, whose life is consumed in the process of producing" (James, 2012, p. 5). The traditional, never-ending, labor of women, which is carried out in the private sphere, is material, affective, physiological. Hence, a discussion of social reproduction could provide some answers to "the complex questions of sex and value, and the relationship between structure and history, in the twenty-first century" (Power, 2017, p. 228). Recognizing sex for women as work has also made it possible to think about the ways that capitalism has exploited women's sexuality. In the *Hearts of Darkness*, Omolade (1995) focuses on the exploitive sexual actions of white males on black women, that started with Europeans in Africa until after slavery: "Black women all too often filled the gap for both recreational and procreational sex" (Omolade, 1995, p. 367). By forcing black women to have sex, white men were establishing their property rights over women slaves:

To him she was a fragmented commodity whose feelings and choices were rarely considered; her head and her heart were separated from her back and her hands and divided from her womb and vagina. Her back and muscle were pressed into field labour...her hands were demanded to nurse and nurture... her vagina used for his sexual pleasure, was the gateway to the womb, which was his place of capital investment- the capital investment being the sex-act and the resulting child the accumulated surplus (Omolade, 1995; cited in Federici, 2014a).

Through the alienation of the proletarian subject from her body, capitalism has constructed the female of the gendered binary, men/women, as key in the atomization and privatization of social reproduction (S. C. Motta, 2012). Stressing the coimplication, therefore, of capitalism and patriarchy, autonomist Marxist feminist approaches criticize the separation of the public (masculinized) and private (feminized) spheres, arguing that such separation becomes a barrier to political action and devalues women's social power (S. C. Motta, 2012). In employing the term "historiography from below," autonomist feminists stress the importance of making visible women's unpaid labor at home and unveiling the historical experiences of the oppressed as a means to develop a critique of capitalist political economy and more importantly, build a basis of autonomous and self-reproducing women's movements (Federici, 2012, 2014b; James, 2012; S. C. Motta, 2012). Feminist struggles for recognizing unpaid work at home throughout the 1970s have shown that there is an integral connection between the devaluation of reproductive work and the devaluation of women's social position (Dalla Costa & James, 1975; Fortunati, 1995; James, 2012). This was the case until women's struggles (particularly the Wages for Housework movement in the 1960 and 1970s) turned to the organization of reproduction and class relations and disclosed the centrality of unpaid domestic labor in capitalist economy (Image 3).

As Federici explains, the struggle for wages for housework (WfH) is unambiguously a struggle against social roles. It is not an attempt to position women *within* the capitalist work system and enter capitalist relations, but a struggle to refuse the commodification of social reproductive tasks (see also Daskalaki et al., 2020). The struggle for WfH does not constitute a revolution; it is, however, a revolutionary strategy that undermines capitalist division of labor and consequently, changes the power relations within the working class in terms more favorable to women and class unity. Thus, the demand for a wage makes women's work visible, "which is the most indispensable condition to begin to struggle against it, both in its immediate aspect as housework and its more insidious character as femininity" (Federici, 2012, p. 19). The struggle is to recognize reproductive work for what it is, part of capitalist relations, and more importantly, it constitutes what Federici (2012, p. 19) describes as "a revolutionary demand" not because by itself it destroys capital, but because "it forces capital to restructure social relations." The mere conceptualization of reproductive labor as work for capital allows rethinking every aspect of everyday life, from reproducing the next generation, to forming (sexual) relationships in relation to capitalist exploitation and accumulation (Federici, 2010). The WfH movement therefore called for the existing power struggles to be taken outside of the home and within the wider context of social relations, and despite the fact that feminists of the movement did not explicitly employ the "the personal is political" (Hanisch, 1970),² WfH mobilizations articulated collective forms of feminist theorizing and political action.

However, the reproduction and unpaid labor should not be treated as universalizing frameworks that do not take into consideration culturally specific values and social meanings. There are divisions within the labor of social reproduction. As S. C. Motta (2012) explains, upper class women's is increasingly outsourced reproductive work and produces racialized (migrant) domestic labor (see also Choi, 2016). A web of inequalities, built into the body of the world proletariat, divides us against ourselves and each other. Thus, "women" are not a coherent group, pre-existing and already constituted, and as postcolonial feminists insist, "women" and "men" should be theorized through culturally specific logics of gender practices, which configure their political and social meanings and their social activities. Uncovering these logics

WE DEMAND **WAGES FOR HOUSEWORK**

To cut down on housework - to eat out, get machines to do some of the work, and refuse to be slaves to the house

To be able to decide working conditions and wages on the second job, and if we want it in the first place

To stand up to men when we work WITH them and when we work FOR them - if we had our own money we could

To decide what our sex lives should be like

To decide if, when and under what conditions to have children

To give our children what we want them to have

To demand and WIN paid holidays away from ALL work

To demand and WIN decent housing



JOIN OUR CAMPAIGN

All over the US and in several other countries of the world women are organizing speak outs, rallies, marches for **WAGES FOR HOUSEWORK**. We speak in different languages but we are all saying the same thing.

Image 3 Wages for Housework Committee

would render visible women's agency, power, and resistances as well as oppression (Mohanty, 2003). As Bhattacharya (2017, p. 19) states in a recent edited collection on *Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentring Oppression*, a social reproduction framework "exposes to critical scrutiny the superficiality of what we commonly understand to be 'economic' process and restores to the economic process its messy, sensuous, gendered, raced, and unruly component: living human beings capable of following orders as well as of flouting them."

4 | NEOLIBERAL CRISIS, PRECARIOUS LIVES, AND THE STRUGGLE FOR ALTERNATIVES

The liberalization of the markets and the introduction of global forms of competition, led to the growing labor market insecurity, unstable employment, and declining real wages; the substandard working conditions, the casualization of work, low-wage jobs, and precarious employment are fully normalized realities of the neoliberal capitalism. In turn, its recent crisis has forced women to return to unpaid work at home—an indication of what Federici would call women's subordination in capitalism (Federici, 2004, 2013). As neoliberal states withdraw the provision of social services, women in the feminized spaces of household and community disproportionately take up the role of caring and domesticity (Moser, 1987; Nagar et al., 2002). During the recent Covid-19 crisis, the “return” to unpaid labor was treated as “functional”: when care provided by grandparents or family networks is not available, women become disproportionally responsible (UN Women, 2020). An Australian study (Craig & Churchill, 2020) revealed that compared to the organizationally employed, women who worked from home multitasked more (doing paid work while supervising children at the same time), and did less paid work and more domestic work and care, which amounted to a higher workload overall. Another recent study showed that severely affected groups by the pandemic include women living in poverty, single mothers, and essential workers as well as those belonging to minority racial and ethnic groups. Crucially, women report feeling more anxious, depressed, overworked, or ill because of their increased unpaid care work (Bolis et al., 2020).

In the context of these developments, it is crucial to think of unpaid care work in terms of its emancipatory potential (Federici, 2018), especially when this is rendered public and common (Kouki and Chatzidakis, 2020). Feminist resistance strategies (see related work by Cullen & Murphy, 2020; Jones et al., 2019; Vachhani & Pullen, 2019) also include women “taking care of their families and communities, and concentrating on these reproductive forms of labour infuses their lives with meaning, as they refuse to participate in neoliberal capitalism's cheapening of their labour” (Daskalaki et al., 2020, p. 15). In this context, Federici raises therefore an important question: “How do you struggle over/against reproductive work?” She explains that “we have to first immediately confront the question of how we struggle on this terrain without destroying the people you care for” (Federici, 2010, p. 24). For her, this struggle describes the resistance in public educational institutions because they have been underfunded and privatized; the struggle of domestic workers; of the mothers of Fukushima; of the subsistence farmers across the world. It is not the same as struggling in the traditional factory setting, against work intensification, for example, in an assembly line; at the other end of our struggle now we have people not things. In our struggles over social reproduction, we need to make a separation between the creation of human beings and our reproduction of them as future workers, who have to be disciplined to follow capitalist modes of relating and organizing work and life:

[...] the issue is not so much the ‘refusal’ of reproductive work, but its reorganisation in a way that makes it creative work. This, however, can only happen once this work is not aimed at providing workers for the labour market, when it is not subsumed to the logic of capital accumulation, and we control the means of our reproduction. (Federici, 2013)

We need to explore ways through which women can organize to challenge and appropriate practices and performances of femininity that marginalize and exclude women from the frontiers of political life. Their activist participation in movements can enabled new ways of being in public and private spheres, and new patterns of relating with others. This in turn could enable new forms of community organization or “commoning” and solidarity to emerge. We stress therefore that, in the center of our analysis of movement organizing, we need to put the study of the ways we reproduce these movements. That is, in order to be able to create a self-reproducing movement, we ought to strive for “a certain social fabric and forms of co-operative reproduction that can give continuity and strength to our struggles, and a more solid base to our solidarity. We need to create forms of life in which political

activism is not separated from the task of our daily reproduction, so that relations of trust and commitment can develop that today remain on the horizon" (Federici, 2013). This, according to Federici (2010), can only be achieved if we are able to: (a) transcend the divisions among women and realize the possibility of alliances; (b) confront capital not only during protests, but confront it collectively at every moment of our lives; (c) overcome precarity that prevents collective and embodied forms of resistance that foster transformative solidarities. Women's power in the home has in the past established them as the pillar of resistance movements: for example, as Carby (1997, p. 46) recalls, "the black family has functioned as a prime source of resistance to oppression" and a "site of political and cultural resistance to racism."

Focusing on the gendered impacts of mining, research shows how women disproportionately pay a heavy price in terms of mental health issues, domestic violence, and threats by community beneficiaries of mining (Jenkins & Rondón, 2015). However, women are not passive recipients of neoliberal reforms and simply victims of the extraction crisis. Instead, women are becoming organizers in the struggle for health, water, community, and life; they build conditions within broader activist movements and join the protest against mining corporations' activities that harm their health, safety, and even survival (Jenkins, 2014; Jenkins & Rondón, 2015). The family and community become terrains of resistance, potentially transforming patriarchal capitalist gendered relationships and roles (Fotaki & Daskalaki, 2020; S. C. Motta, 2012). Federici also employs the struggles of indigenous people in Bolivia against water privatization or in Ecuador against the oil companies' destruction of indigenous land to discuss women's embodied forms of resistance and solidarity. Butler's (2017) elaboration on the limits of the body also gives some indication of the power of the body to resist the various forms of oppression, including our collective responsibility to overcome conditions of induced precarity. Empirical evidence from Greece, one of the worst affected countries by the GFC, proposed that women become active in the public domain, running solidarity initiatives and activities in their attempt to resist the consequences of the crisis (Daskalaki & Fotaki, 2017; Fotaki & Daskalaki, 2020). These initiatives, ranging from soup kitchens, social groceries, social pharmacies, and clinics as well as diverse economies and occupied public spaces and workers' collectives, research has showed (Vaiou, 2014, p. 536), constitute an attempt to formulate social bonds mostly through relationships of solidarity and collective action. Such instances of feminist solidarity "connect concrete bodies with global processes" (Vaiou, 2014, p. 536) and more crucially, constitute a distinctive context for the investigation of alternative conceptualizations of organizing working/nonworking (precarious) lives and ways of disrupting the gendered binary separating productive and reproductive work. As Daskalaki and Fotaki (2017) argued, the struggle of women's movements in Greece shows that "the act of exposing bodies in public space constitutes activist feminism as an embodied struggle and places sociality and affect in the centre of building feminist solidarities relations."

Accordingly, alternative forms of organizing and postcapitalist futures (Gibson-Graham, 1996; Parker et al., 2014) should be studied through the exploration of the discontinual process of assembling and reassembling diverse territories of organizing. "This social character of our persistence and our possible flourishing means that we have to take collective responsibility for overcoming conditions of induced precarity" (Butler, 2017). As recently argued (Daskalaki & Simosi, 2017) organizational alternatives can trigger points of rupture during which precarious forms of work are being refused in favor of collective organizational forms. These alternatives become part of a broader project of emancipation and, not only forge *communitas*, but also enact a process during which new intersubjectivities can be actively performed. They are in the making and, similarly to "concrete" utopias (Bloch, 1986) they are mobilized by autonomous social organizing (see also Dinerstein, 2015). Evidence of such utopias can be identified in earlier forms of cooperative household organization such as Cooperative Kitchens and the Grand Domestic Revolution (for a discussion, see Hayden, 1982) organized by women in American towns in the 1880s. For example, for Price (1850) restoring the value of women in society would come through economic cooperation that began naturally at home. More specifically, cooperative associations performed important domestic work together, and each member charged her husband accordingly. This did not only ease a woman's workload but also enabled her to accumulate her own resources. A membership fee was used toward furnishing the cooperative's headquarters with necessary equipment. *Carthage Cooperative Kitchen* was one of these cooperatives which, despite

being ultimately degenerated, demonstrated that there is an alternative way to organize social reproduction. The struggle to reclaim the wealth that women produce at home is still extremely important. Yet, according to Federici (2012), these struggles ought to go beyond the monetary level and include the reclaiming of many forms of wealth that are not connected with the wage system but are elements of reproduction (such as housing, land, and the right to free education). S. C. Motta (2012), for example, draws on history of resistance and domination as lived and practiced by the invisible female inhabitants of Venezuelan shantytowns. She describes the struggle of three women living in different historical eras ("*La Pobreza y Yo, 1958–1998*"). In the third story, Cristina, a woman who has been at the heart of the organization of the Urban Land Committees (CTUs) in her community in La Vega (Caracas), argues that

unless we begin to rebuild from below, to articulate our needs, desires and energy into a *poblador* (shanty-town) movement, none of these structures will ever be remade, our communities will always be dictated to, passive recipients of knowledge, resources, whatever. When we are conscious, organized, when we see our power and potential, through this process we begin to construct new structures, new relationships, a new distribution of power, a new democracy (Cristina, cited in S. C. Motta, 2012).

Accordingly, intertwined struggles against patriarchy and capitalism, S. C. Motta (2013) argues, result in the gradual development of a feminist revolutionary praxis that is reflected in the upsurge in Venezuelan feminist analysis and reflections in popular movements: "While creating dignity, agency, solidarity, and collective power women also carry the triple burden of paid, domestic, and political work" (S. C. Motta, 2013, p. 59).

In a different setting, in Rojava (Northern Syria), women are organizing not only against ISIS (and its gendered violent acts; Al-Ali, 2018) but also in favor for more democratic, horizontal, and egalitarian societies, challenging in practice authority of the patriarchal capitalist state. On January 12 and 13, 2018, the Kurdish Women's Movement held the first Jineology conference in Derik city of Democratic Federation of Northern Syria. Jineology describes the principle that without the freedom of women within society and without a real consciousness surrounding women, no society can call itself free (Diyar, 2014; Mohammadi, 2019; see also Dirik, 2021; Düzgün, 2016). An autonomous Women's Democratic Confederalist system has been built up through thousands of communes, councils, cooperatives, academies, and defense units in Kurdistan and beyond.³ Women participate in all activities taking place in a Commune including decision-making and implementation of the decisions. The Commune is an antipatriarchal organizational structure that acknowledges and identifies difference, and calls for the direct and radical participation of the vulnerable and previously repressed and excluded others. Such structures enable members from different social groups, genders, cultures, or religions to connect and work together toward the institution of spaces of difference: Affective spaces of resistance that recognize the multitude of identifications, and enable diverse encounters of collective imaginaries with the purpose of building democratic, autonomous, and ecological livelihoods. Autonomous women's communes demonstrate how members challenge in practice authority of the patriarchal, capitalist state. In their fight against nation-state and profit-orientated environmental destruction, women stress care for water, lands, forests, and historic and natural heritage: "Economic autonomy and communal economy based on solidarity through the establishment of cooperatives are crucial to society's self-defence as they guarantee self-sustenance through mutualism and shared responsibility" (Dirik, 2017).

5 | "FREEDOM AS NON-DOMINATION": TOWARD ECOLOGIES OF CARE

In the previous section and particularly through the example of the Kurdish Women's Movement, we emphasized that affective ecologies or ecologies of care have the potential to elicit nonpatriarchal, autonomous, and self-organized initiatives with socially transformative potentialities. Following this, it is crucial to examine the

conditions under which marginalized communities enact an organizing pattern with such potential: to make mutual adjustments for reordering relationships and establishing anticapitalist subversive organizing. The “subversive” here becomes a “potentially productive force, introducing oppositional knowledge, reconfiguring public and private spaces, and opening new possibilities for challenging old patterns of gender performance [...] subversive performances and resistances may initially occasion the empowerment of subaltern groups before diffusing outward into wider social settings” (Brickell, 2005, p. 39). Thus, feminist organizing, learning from the example of Via Campesina, the Landless Movement in Brazil, Kurdish Women's Movement, and the Zapatistas, should engage in the construction of fully egalitarian commons, which constitute the seeds of an alternative mode of re/production (Caffentzis & Federici, 2014; De Angelis, 2007; Zibechi, 2010; Zibechi, 2012).

We call for forms of feminist organizing that will engage marginalized, aching bodies in the project of unveiling “what male control of our corporeal reality has suffocated” (Federici, 2010, p. 18). In this context, embodied forms of resistance and “feminist solidarity” (Mohanty, 2003) should be explored not as separate processes, with one doing something to the other, but as ongoing entanglements of translocal actors that continuously (re)assemble in order to enact “affective flows and possibilities” (Pullen et al., 2017, p. 107). The women of Rojava “reconstruct [their] sense of community into one that can truly incorporate difference” (Kersten & Abbott, 2011, p. 333) and despite living in an area of continuous conflict, their key concern remains: “[H]ow do we live (and work) together in a world beset by difference? The responses are an ethics of difference, which foregrounds resistance to oppression and valorizes diversity, and an ethics of consensus, which foregrounds ideals of dialogue and democracy” (Rhodes & Wray-Bliss, 2012, p. 40). By insisting on changing the hierarchically instituted social relations that lead to the constitution of oppressive and privileged communities not only for Kurds but also for all peoples in the region, the Kurdish resistance can be understood through a broader critique of capitalist modernity: “the transformation of the modern forms of patriarchy and nation-state is dependent on the transformation of the conditions of capitalist exploitation and expansion that colonize cultures, ecologies, and women's bodies, and vice versa” (Kücük & Özselçuk, 2016, p. 187). In order to create consensus amid heterogeneity, the principle of “freedom as non-domination” (Moreland, 2017) must be endorsed, eradicating all hierarchical relationships and authoritarian erasure of differences. This will open up possibilities for people to reimagine their social and economic activities in terms of cooperation, equality, solidarity, and care. Such proposition is also in line with diverse economy perspectives and feminist critiques of political economy (e.g., Gibson-Graham, 1996; Daskalaki et al., 2019; for a recent account, see also Gibson-Graham & Dombroski, 2020), in which the subject is reconceptualized in terms of affectivity, interrelationality, eco-philosophical resources, and the wish to live a meaningful life.

Accordingly, we propose that the study of struggles over social reproduction particularly in postpandemic contexts, should unfold in relation to three interlinked research agendas: first, we encourage research on the articulations of state power (Brenner & Elden, 2009) and “capitalist formations of enclosure” (Sevilla-Buitrago, 2015) that will theoretically and empirically inform the organization of new socio-spatial arrangements that nurture the coexistence of differences. This is particularly significant at times when individuals and groups experience exclusions and fences/walls and normative forms of classification/categorization with unequal, unjust access to rights driven by patriarchal, and statist repressive modes of social organization. Second, particularly in light of the gendered impact of the Covid-19 pandemic (ILO, 2020; UN, 2020), we consider it crucial to further disentangle how local and translocal struggles challenge organizing practices that sustain inequalities. Finally, we consider crucial that future research projects focus on how alternative organizational forms become embedded in wider struggles for justice, autonomy, and democracy, and resist capitalist forces of subordination and appropriation through feminist emancipatory praxis.⁴

6 | CONCLUDING REMARKS

Capitalism can only be understood in its totality when it is approached from the point of view of the slaves, the colonized, as well as the viewpoint of industrial workers, the proletarian men and women, children as well as an

ecological viewpoint (Federici, 2016). An important feature of the contemporary women's movement has been the feminists' effort to theorize on the condition of women. They have entered into the field of philosophy in an attempt not only to give a philosophical foundation to their analysis and approach but also to explore philosophies of liberation, which they felt could give a vision to the struggle of women (Ghandy, 2018). Some feminist theorists have already argued for the resurgence of feminist organizing at the heart of a range of social movements against neoliberal capitalism (Eschle & Maignashca, 2010; Motta et al., 2011). In this article, we discussed how feminist movements may respond effectively to defend those disproportionately affected by neoliberal capitalism and austerity regimes and particularly, the role of women's organizing in the struggle for a postneoliberal, postpatriarchal world.

Offering a close reading of Silvia Federici's work, we discussed reproduction of human life and in turn, the reproduction of human labor power as vital to the persistence not only of inequalities, but more crucially, capitalism itself. Aligned with Federici's recent contributions, we argued that struggles over/against social reproduction and resistance are linked with our capacity to organize self-reproducing movements, and participate in the sphere of political activism (see also Motta's 2019 latest work on 'feminizing our revolutions'). Yet, the idea of a self-reproducing movements also needs to be accompanied by the creation of structures that have the power to reappropriate the Commons (Federici, 2013). Until social reproduction becomes a politics of the community, women's bodies will continue to be sites of exhaustion and pain, tools in the continuation of repression and exploitation (Motta, 2011). Such politics prioritizes the cocreation of affective spaces of solidarity and resistance that connect the personal with the political, and subvert and transgress the division of labor that depoliticizes and individualizes social reproduction.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data sharing not applicable to this article as no datasets were generated or analysed during the current study.

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ On March 14, 2018, Marielle Franco, a Brazilian feminist activist and fierce critic of police brutality is assassinated; Franco was recently elected in Rio, with nearly 47,000 votes—the fifth-highest number received by a city councilor. She fought for the rights of women, single mothers like herself, gay people, and favela residents (#MariellePresente).
- ² Essay written initially in 1969 in defense of Women's Liberation Movement groups who emerged from existing radical movements (e.g., the Civil Rights movement, the Anti-Vietnam War movement, and Old and New Left groups).
- ³ In the Declaration of Democratic Confederalism in Kurdistan, Öcalan (2011) supports that the issues facing (Middle Eastern) societies such as corruption and weak democracies can be resolved only through women's liberation.
- ⁴ See Motta's (2017) latest work on emancipatory pedagogical praxis.

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