

THE ORGANISATION OF SOCIAL REPRODUCTION IN A POSTCAPITALIST PARTICIPATORY ECONOMY

SERIES: TOWARDS (A BETTER) POSTCAPITALISM
A HANDY HOW-TO GUIDE

by Savvina Chowdhury

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The Organisation of Social Reproduction in a Postcapitalist Participatory Economy

Savvina Chowdhury

SERIES

Towards (a Better) Postcapitalism: A Handy How-To Guide

méta Working Papers' series "Towards (a Better) Postcapitalism: A Handy How-To Guide" publishes solicited policy papers on aspects of how would a non-dystopian postcapitalism look like. The series focuses on three 'pillars':

Production | Allocation | Decision Making

i.e., how could/would postcapitalist *production* be like (and who would own the means of production), what shape would the *allocation* of goods take (and which alternatives to the market economy may be explored), and what would be the main tenets of postcapitalist *decision making* and *democracy*.

In this paper, **Savvina Chowdhury** addresses the first pillar, i.e. production.

Savvina Chowdhury, PhD, teaches feminist political economy at the Evergreen State College, in Olympia, Washington. She is currently working with youth at a juvenile detention centre and is interested in popular education. Savvina also works with *Economics for Everyone*, a community-based group that holds free, monthly popular education workshops in downtown Olympia, inviting dialogue and discussion on the historical and contemporary crises of capitalism.

The feminism we have in mind recognizes that it must respond to a crisis of epochal proportions: plummeting living standards and looming ecological disaster; rampaging wars and intensified dispossession; mass migrations met with barb wires; emboldened racism and xenophobia; and reversal of hard-won rights – both social and political. We aspire to meet these challenges.

—Arruzza, Bhattacharya and Fraser, *Feminism for the 99%: A Manifesto*, 2019, 13.

Introduction

How does feminist theory inform our planning for a model of an alternative to capitalism called a ‘Participatory Economy’? First developed in 1991 by Michael Albert and Robin Hahnel,¹ Participatory Economics (Parecon for short) envisions a post-capitalist future guided by the values of economic democracy, justice, solidarity, diversity,

¹Michael Albert and Robin Hahnel in *The Political Economy of Participatory Economics*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991; Michael Albert, *No Bosses: A New Economy for a Better World*, Hampshire: Zero Books, 2022; Peter Bohmer, Savvina Chowdhury and Robin Hahnel, ‘Reproductive Labour in a Participatory Socialist Society’, *Review of Radical Political Economics*, 52,1, 2020; Robin Hahnel, *Democratic Economic Planning*, New York: Routledge, 2021; Anders Sandstrom: *Anarchist Accounting: Accounting Principles for a Democratic Economy*, New York: Routledge, 2021.

and environmental sustainability. This paper assumes that the reader is familiar with Parecon, and asks how might insights from feminist social reproduction theory add to this model? Social Reproduction theory starts from the premise that while the capitalist economy produces commodities, it also produces and *reproduces* people and social relations on a daily and generational basis.² Socially reproductive work is organized around meeting human needs, raising youth, caring for elders, cultivating norms and values, and includes the customs and practices that tend to neighbourly relations and bind our communities together. This work can be broadly categorized as (i) the domestic labour involved in maintaining households, (ii) the caring or affective labour of tending to the bodily and emotional needs of human beings over their lifetimes, and (iii) the work involved in socializing children, ‘building communities, and sustaining the shared meanings, affective dispositions and horizons of value that underpin social cooperation.’³ Though increasingly commodified under neoliberalism, social reproduction continues to be *feminized*, done mostly by women,

²Marxist Feminists first developed the concept of reproductive labour drawing on Karl Marx to describe the fact that labour-power has to be produced and reproduced on a daily and generational basis. For more contemporary applications see for instance, Kate Bezanson and Meg Luxton, *Social Reproduction: Feminist Political Economy Challenges Neoliberalism*, McGill University Press, 2006; Tithi Bhattacharya, *Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class Re-centering Oppression*, London: Pluto Press, 2018; Cinzia Arruzza, Tithi Bhattacharya and Nancy Fraser *Feminist for the 99%: A Manifesto*, London: Verso, 2019.

³ Nancy Fraser, ‘Contradictions of Capital and Care’, *New Left Review*, July/August, 2016, 23.

and much of it on an unpaid or underpaid basis.⁴ Highlighting the persistent feminization and under-compensation of this work reveals how the subordination of women, queer and gender marginalized people under capitalism is intertwined with the subordination of social reproduction, with society-wide ramifications. Feminists argue that the disassociation of socially reproductive work from economic activity has served to empower those who benefit from the nexus of patriarchy + capitalism + neoliberal state. Moreover, by extending the logic of the market to all areas of life, the neoliberal social order has been undermining our socially reproductive capacities, eroding the health, wellbeing and cohesiveness of our communities. As a point of focus, social reproduction theory asks: do our communities, neighbourhoods, families, children and elders have what they need to flourish and thrive? In the future that we wish to build, feminists call for reorienting our economic agenda to meet basic needs for everyone (food, clothing, shelter, clean water, health care, education, dignified work, etc.), such that our communities' well-being is not subordinated to corporate profitability.

Drawing on feminist political economy, this paper takes the position that a reorganization of social reproduction is an integral part of the struggle to create a better society. How do we ensure that long-standing hierarchies, organized around racial and gendered lines, do not reconstitute themselves in the process of planning for a better, post-capitalist future? The trajectory of the paper is as follows: Section

⁴ For instance, in the US, 76% of public-school teachers, and 89% of elementary school teachers are women. Women make up more than 85% of workers in nursing and home health aides; but only 1/3 of physicians and surgeons. <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2019/08/your-health-care-in-womens-hands.html>

I develops a set of principles⁵ to guide our thinking about how might we reorganize the work involved in caring for ourselves and our communities in a post-capitalist Participatory Economy; Section II discusses operationalizing these principles through balanced job complexes that balance for socially reproductive work.

I. PRINCIPLES GUIDING THE ORGANIZATION OF SOCIAL REPRODUCTION IN A POST-CAPITALIST PARTICIPATORY ECONOMY

Restructuring social relations away from a hierarchical society is a fundamental goal of Albert and Hahnel's model of a post-capitalist Participatory Economy. The model proposes to restructure society through its institutional makeup: (i) social ownership of the productive commons; (ii) democratic decision-making circles that create collectively managed workplaces and neighbourhoods; (iii) an iterative participatory planning process to allocate resources, scaled up through federations; (iv) remuneration based on peer assessments of how hard one works, how long one works, and the onerousness of one's socially valuable labour; and finally, (v) balanced job complexes where people engage in a balance of empowering and disempowering work.

⁵ The principles developed here builds on Nancy Fraser's framework for thinking about social reproduction and gender justice in 'After the Family Wage: A Postindustrial Thought Experiment' in *Fortunes of Feminism: From State-Managed capitalism to Neoliberal Crisis*, New York: Verso, 2013.

The basic decision-making building blocks of a Participatory Economy are workers councils and neighbourhood councils, and their federations. People live and work in self-managed neighbourhoods and workplaces, collectively deciding how to organize their communities and allocate their resources, taking opportunity costs, social costs and environmental harms into consideration on the one hand, and workers' remuneration on the other. Workers are paid based on how long they work, how hard they work and the onerousness of their socially valuable labour. Proponents of Participatory Economics qualify their definition of economic democracy or self-management by adding that decision-making processes in neighbourhood and workers' councils would allow people to have power, or input in proportion to the degree one is affected by different options. Any given community member may participate in a number of councils in their place of work, as well as in their neighbourhood. But before women, caregivers and marginalized communities can participate in making decisions, they have to be able to show up to council meetings.

(i) *Social Reproduction, the Leisure-Time Equality Principle
and Economic Democracy*

Women and caregivers' societal position of doing the greater part of unpaid socially reproductive labour puts them in a subordinate position economy-wide - an additional dimension to consider in the discussion on who is empowered/disempowered to make decisions in councils and federations. As long as care-giving and household responsibilities fall disproportionately on women, they will have less time and less income to participate on an equal footing in a

Participatory Economy. Witness what happened as the Covid-19 global pandemic unfolded: many caregivers were forced to leave their paid jobs to care for children, elders and people who got sick. Amid disruptions in schooling and childcare during so many mothers in the United States quit their jobs that economists called the recent recession a ‘She-cession’⁶ and raised concerns about how caregivers and mothers of young children continue to pay a ‘care-penalty’ in terms of forgone income.⁷

Women and caregivers are also likely to be ‘time-poor’ vis-à-vis everyone else. ‘Women in our communities’ noted one policy report during the pandemic, ‘have never been busier taking care of loved ones, provisioning supplies, and finding ways to offset the enormous economic and social burdens of this time’.⁸ The unpaid ‘second shift’ means women have less time for civic engagement, political office and

⁶ Carlo Pizinelli and Ippei Shibata, January 19, 2022. ‘Why Jobs are Plentiful While Workers are Scarce,’ <https://blogs.imf.org/2022/01/19/why-jobs-are-plentiful-while-workers-are-scarce/>. Pizineelli and Shibata argue that, ‘The prolonged school closures and scarcity of childcare services put an extra burden on mothers of young children, pushing many to leave the labour force—the so-called “She-cession”. The authors note that in the UK, where childcare centres stayed open, employment levels for women were less affected than for US women.

⁷ Stefania Fabrizio, Diego B. Gomes, Marina M. Tavares, 2021. ‘COVID-19 She-Cession: The Employment Penalty of Taking Care of Young Children’, IMF Working Paper WP/21/58.

⁸ Hawai’i’s State Commission on the Status of Women, April 14, 2020, ‘Building Bridges, Not Walking on Backs: A Feminist Economic Recovery Plan for COVID-19’ <https://humanservices.hawaii.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/4.13.20-Final-Cover-D2-Feminist-Economic-Recovery-D1.pdf>

leisure.⁹ The Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development's uses time-use surveys to measure women's 'time-poverty' worldwide and finds that, 'In every country, men have more leisure time each day while women spend more time doing unpaid housework'.¹⁰ Not only is leisure time in and of itself a desirable goal in our post capitalist future, but from the perspective of gender justice, economic democracy and self-management, time-poverty can hinder women and caregivers from fully participating in society's democratic processes, and their perspectives and priorities tend to be under-represented in policy-making circles.

One solution proposed by proponents of Parecon to address the costs associated with unpaid socially reproductive work is 'standard payment for household members who provide in-home childcare and eldercare'.¹¹ In other words, members of a Participatory Economy may decide that households with children or elders who need care would be allocated allowances to account for hours of caring labour by family members. But while allowances might mitigate the gender pay gap in a Participatory Economy, how do we prevent this work from falling disproportionately on women and how do we prevent time-poverty? Section II will address this in more detail, but incorporating the **leisure-time equality principle** to inform our notion of economic justice involves redistributing socially reproductive work so that that no one group of workers (women, immigrants) bears a disproportionate

⁹ Arlie Hoschild, *The Second Shift: Working Families and the Revolution at Home*, Penguin Books, 2012.

¹⁰ <https://www.oecd.org/gender/balancing-paid-work-unpaid-work-and-leisure.htm>

¹¹ Hahnel, *Democratic Economic Planning*, New York: Routledge, 2021, 205.

responsibility, and that people of all genders are at liberty to participate in civic activities. By promoting the widespread engagement of all genders within the political process, the leisure-time equality principle deepens Parecon's values of economic democracy, collective self-management and economic justice:

Just as there can be no true democracy if some groups of people are ill equipped to participate because they do unempowering work all day, so there can be no true democracy if some groups of people are sleep-deprived or overwhelmed by private care-giving responsibilities.¹²

(ii) Social Reproduction and the Anti-Marginalization Principle

A second insight from feminist social reproduction theory is that androcentric bias¹³ against feminized labour has marginalized and invisibilized the work involved in caring for and regenerating our families and communities. As a result, the perspectives and priorities of caregivers are under-represented in policy-making, undermining our socially reproductive institutions. Decades of austerity policies implemented by neoliberal states have led to resources being diverted away from child care and after-school activities, away from public housing,

¹² Cynthia Peters, 'The Art (and Serendipity) of Kinship: Ideas about Family, Sexuality, and Caregiving a Better World' in Chris Spanos, *Real Utopia: Participatory Society for the 21st Century*, Oakland: AKPress, 2008, 44.

¹³ Androcentrism is defined as 'the practice, conscious or otherwise, of placing a masculine point of view at the centre of one's world view, culture, and history, thereby culturally marginalizing femininity', <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Androcentrism>

public education and libraries, gutting mental health clinics, and dismantling public health systems to our collective peril.¹⁴ Coming on the heels of decades of this compromised public health context, the Covid-19 global pandemic resulted in a death rate in the US that has exceeded that of other high-income countries, with mortality rates disproportionately concentrated among poor, black, indigenous, and working-class people of colour.¹⁵

The **anti-marginalization principle** calls for bringing social services to the forefront of our investment decisions to counter the persistent dominance of androcentric values in a patriarchal society. Workplaces that are masculinized (such as assembly lines, corporate cubicles and boardrooms) and geared to support corporate wealth accumulation, or the apparatus of the carceral surveillance state (such as the military, police and prisons), have been deemed to be more investment-worthy than feminized spheres such as social housing, socialized medicine, and public education. This suboptimal allocation of resources has led to increased burdens for women and caregivers, all the while enriching those who benefit from this patriarchal neoliberal order. As one over-worked nurse put it during the pandemic: ‘If you’re

¹⁴ For example, municipal cost-cutting measures in public infrastructure has manifested in a number of egregious cases in US cities such as Baltimore, Newark, and Flint, where municipal water sources, contaminated with lead, has affected the health of predominantly poor communities of colour, including causing blood poisoning among children in Flint, MI. <https://wdet.org/2016/02/10/Highsmith-Flint-Crisis-a-Long-Time-Coming-and-Could-Have-Been-Prevented/> and <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/15/us/detroit-schools-water-lead-contamination.html>

¹⁵ <https://www.epi.org/blog/the-unequal-toll-of-covid-19-on-workers/>

not voting for Medicare for all at this point, do not f*cking talk to me! I will lose my mind on you. Don't tell me thank you and then, you know, support a system where the rich get richer and the poor die'.¹⁶

The anti-marginalization principle calls for rectifying this androcentric bias in public policy.

Proponents of Participatory Economics argue that a vibrant public education system, universal healthcare, day-care, eldercare, socialized housing are all institutions that would centre the work that is needed to meet our basic human needs.¹⁷ In a Participatory Economy, with its values, norms and institutions, as well as equal representation of women and caregivers on decision councils, the iterative planning process would presumably lead to the creation and prioritization of a robust public sector that would support high-quality, decommodified, Universal Basic Services.¹⁸ Furthermore, we might expect that a larger share of a neighbourhood's total consumption will be organized in collective settings, initiated and managed by workers' councils. For instance, neighbourhoods may decide to build social housing with communal kitchens and dining halls that collectivize domestic labour, and child and eldercare collectives to supplement publicly provided care. There may be innovative forms of shared consumption in the

¹⁶ Hanna Wallis, April 28, 2020. 'Nurses Say They Don't Want to Be Called Heroes During the Coronavirus Pandemic', <https://www.teenvogue.com/story/nurses-dont-want-to-be-called-heroes>

¹⁷ Hahnel, *Democratic Economic Planning*, New York: Routledge, 2021; Sanders and Strom, *Anarchist Accounting: Accounting Principles for a Democratic Economy*, New York: Routledge, 2021;

¹⁸ <https://en.unesco.org/inclusivepolicylab/analytics/move-debate-universal-basic-income-universal-basic-services>

form of 'libraries' of durable consumer goods such as electric cars, lawn mowers and bicycles, as well as other forms of consumption designed to minimize carbon emissions.¹⁹

(ii) *Social Reproduction, the Anti-Exploitation Principle and Solidarity*

In keeping with Parecon's principles of economic justice and solidarity, **the anti-exploitation principle** involves developing an anti-racist and anti-androcentric framework for organizing domestic, caring and socialization work so that it is not offloaded onto immigrants, women of colour and marginalized groups. Historically in the US, maids, nannies and eldercare work were jobs held by African American, working class and immigrant women, who worked for well-off households.²⁰ The gradual dismantling of the welfare state and corporate restructuring associated with the neoliberal period has re-inscribed a racial dynamic that has long been present in the organization of social reproduction in advanced capitalist societies. Corporate restructuring during the neoliberal era drew more and more women into the paid workforce at a time when cutbacks in government expenditures squeezed state support for social welfare programs. Women who found themselves contending with the stresses involved in balancing paid work with unpaid work at home turned to market-

¹⁹ Peter Bohmer, *Personal Communication*, January 12th, 2022

²⁰ For instance, in 1870 in the US, half of all women in the paid workforce were domestic workers; 90% of all Black women worked as domestic workers (Salar Mohandesi and Emma Teitelman, 'Without Reserves', *Social Reproduction Theory*, T. Bhattacharya (ed.) 2017).

driven solutions, shifting the burden of caring for their families on to immigrant maids, day-care and eldercare workers. Whether working formally or informally on a precarious or undocumented basis, today, many caregivers and maids are from countries in the Global South.

This new globalized reorganization of social reproduction has been a boon to governments in both the Global North and South: immigrant women in effect, subsidize androcentric neoliberal states by doing this work for low pay, privatizing social reproduction, and absolving governments from having to fund social services. Working for long periods away from their own families, living frugally, immigrants send back much-needed foreign currency as remittances to support their own families. For ‘girl-boss feminists’ this raises question: to what extent have the successes of professional women during the neoliberal period relied on the low-paid, precarious care-work done by poor and immigrant women?

To an extent then, the globalization of childcare and housework brings the ambitious and independent women of the world together: the career-oriented upper-middle class woman of an affluent nation and the striving woman from a crumbling Third World or post-communist economy. Only it does not bring them together in the way that second-wave feminists in affluent countries once liked to imagine – as sisters and allies struggling to achieve common goals. Instead, they come together as mistress and maid, employer and employee, across a great divide of privilege and opportunity.²¹

²¹ Barbara Ehrenreich and Arlie Hochschild, *Global Woman: Nannies, Maids and Sex Workers in the New Economy*, New York: Henry Holt & Company, 2003, 11

The anti-exploitation principle highlights the way that the neoliberal order has reconfigured socially reproductive work so that it remains feminized, and is (once again) racialized, reinforcing race, class and gender inequities. Meanwhile, childcare²² and eldercare care workers continue to be among the lowest paid,²³ and are also subject to precarity in informal settings, as immigrants have little recourse to citizen-worker rights. From a feminist perspective, the neoliberal patriarchal state is like a ‘dead-beat’ dad, offloading care-giving responsibilities on to poor and immigrant women. Instead of taxpayer financed public institutions, poor and immigrant women are hired to do this work in informal or formal settings, where employers pay them low wages to provide care on a for-profit basis.²⁴ Meanwhile, the feminist goal of socializing care work and domestic labour is undermined by market-based solutions as neoliberal states are able to avoid paying for social welfare policies.

The anti-exploitation principle reinforces the need for a vibrant public sector that organizes socially reproductive work on a de-commodified basis. It also draws attention to the need for worker collectives with autonomy over how schools, day-care centres and

²² Elise Gould, ‘Child care workers aren’t paid enough to make ends meet’, Economics Policy Institute, Issue Brief #405, <https://www.epi.org/publication/child-care-workers-arent-paid-enough-to-make-ends-meet/#epi-toc-2..>

²³ Workers in assisted living facilities in the US earn minimum wages, though the industry is itself lucrative and growing, *Business Insider*, <https://www.businessinsider.com/senior-care-market-trends>.

²⁴ Veselka, V. and Clayton Cotterll. 2021. ‘I’m a Longtime Union Organizer. But I Had Never Seen Anything Like This’ <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/14/opinion/unions-oregon-assisted-living.html>

retirement homes are collectively managed. But how will Parecon prevent these jobs being feminized and racialized? How do we prevent the occupational segregation that characterizes contemporary capitalist labour markets where care-giving professions remain feminized and racialized? In order to bring about the structural transformations necessary to address the racial and gender inequities in hetero-patriarchal capitalist society, a Participatory Economy will have to **de-link socially reproductive labour from femininity**, Parecon proposes to do this through balanced job complexes (this will be addressed in section II).

(iv) Social Reproduction and the Eco-Sufficiency Principle

The eco-sufficiency principle challenges us to work toward meeting basic needs for everyone while simultaneously working toward minimizing our impact on our ecosystems, on other species as well as humans. Intertwined with the biological and social aspects of sustaining our communities, is the health of our surrounding ecosystems. The list of environmental ‘sacrifice zones’ that litter the US landscape grows longer as we learn more and more about the ways that consumerism is affecting the health of ecosystems,²⁵ affecting the quality of our potable water, arable land, healthy food systems and watersheds.

²⁵ Seminal literature on environmental justice, such as *Dumping in Dixie* by Robert Bullard (1990) shows how the effects of a degraded environment have disproportionately impacted the health of communities of colour in the US. A recent example of this is Louisiana’s ‘cancer alley’, where the toxins produced as byproducts of plastics manufacture have been connected to rising rates of cancer in this predominantly black community (<https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/03/1086172>).

The same extractivist mentality that continues to invest in burning fossil fuels at expense of the wellbeing of other species and degradation of the environment has also wreaked havoc on our own bodies, such that alarming levels of industrial toxins are now found in human breast milk, and microplastics have been detected in our bloodstream.²⁶

Under capitalism, the separation of production from life-sustaining work has led to an over-production of commodities for individual consumption over collective ways of meeting our needs. Proponents of Parecon argue that contrary to neoclassical economists' adherence to markets as efficient resource allocative mechanisms, markets are actually inefficient in assessing environmental costs because they externalize much of the costs of production. Contrary to prevailing orthodox views, they contend, externalities are not exceptions, but are in fact pervasive.²⁷ Moreover, as we are now witnessing, these externalized costs are a matter of climate justice, as global warming is adversely affecting the lands and livelihoods of poor and marginalized people around the world. From an ecofeminist perspective, the bias against collective consumption in favour of private consumption also ignores the fact that the good life associated with capitalist consumerism is enjoyed at 'the expense of others: of nature, of other peoples,

²⁶ Anne Leonard, *The Story of Stuff: The Impact of Overconsumption on the Planet, Our Communities And Our Health And How We Can Make It Better*, New York: Free Press, 2010.

²⁷ Hahnel, *Democratic Economic Planning*, New York: Routledge, 2021, 34; Sandstrom, *Anarchist Accounting: Accounting Principles for a Democratic Economy*, New York: Routledge, 2021, 20.

of women and children', and is only possible for a small global minority.²⁸

Parecon's counter to markets, participatory planning, includes Iterative Facilitation Boards which calculate *indicative prices* for goods and services. Indicative prices are calculated by summing up the social costs of production, opportunity cost and estimates of damages caused by the release of pollutants in the production process. Through an iterative process, councils and federations come to a decision by comparing their self-activity proposals for desired goods to their costs as estimated by indicative prices. Incorporating the eco-sufficiency principle would involve estimating environmental costs from the perspective of global climate justice as we transition towards decarbonizing our economies. Feminists point out that prioritizing social reproduction would reorient resource allocation towards expanding the existing low-carbon sectors of our economy and as well as beginning the process of rebuilding our frayed social networks and community cohesion:

Shifting to an economy in balance with the earth's limits also means expanding the sectors of our economy that are already low carbon: caregiving, teaching, social work, the arts and public-interest media...All this work, much of it performed by women, is the glue that builds humane, resilient communities – and we will need our communities to be as strong as possible in the face of the rocky future we have already locked in.²⁹

²⁸ Maria Mies, *The Subsistence Perspective*, London: Zed Books, 1986.

²⁹ *The Leap Manifesto: A Call for a Canada Based on Caring for the Earth and One Another*
<https://leapmanifesto.org/en/the-leap-manifesto/>

In a Participatory Economy, socially reproductive work might be framed as a key sector of a de-carbonized society that sustains our communities, attends to ecosystems, as well as making amends through environmental reparations.

II. BALANCED JOB COMPLEXES AND RECONCEPTUALIZED SOCIAL RELATIONS

A key mechanism proposed by Albert and Hahnel for democratizing society, for dismantling hierarchies in the workplace and for promoting worker empowerment are balanced job complexes. Re-organizing work so that people rotate into and out of tasks, both within each workplace and across the economy as a whole, they argue, would allow people to participate in decision-making processes that affect all of us in society:

Balanced job complexes mean no one would just do or just cleans up after surgeons. No one would only teach, or only sweep. No one would only dig resources from a mine, or only schedule the mine's operations. Balanced job complexes would mean all workers do a mix of tasks such that each job's overall empowerment effect is like that of all other jobs.³⁰

In addition to balancing workplaces for empowering and disempowering work, feminists argue that another axis of rotation is care-giving: in a Participatory Economy job balancing committees would organize work schedules so that people have roughly equal exposure

³⁰ Michael Albert, *No Bosses: A New Economy for A Better World*, Alresford, UK: Zero Books, 2022.

to empowering, rote, and care work.³¹ Balancing for care-work means everyone participates in some capacity in caring for family or community members, mentor youth, or spend time volunteering doing community work:

This is not to say that everyone has to help raise everyone's children, but they do have to participate in creating a safe, nurturing, educational space for the next generation to grow into. They have to be part of the web that makes sure that other people's needs are getting met. Thus, they have to be tuned into and aware of the mechanics of caring. This will lead to better decision-making in the same way that if you experience rote and empowering work you make better decisions about how to organize work because you are more invested in fairness, etc.³²

The reality is many people already balance their work-life patterns around activities such as caring for an elder, coaching a neighbourhood soccer team, and volunteering at a food bank or domestic violence shelter. Feminists argue that the 'key to achieving gender justice is to make women's life patterns the norm for everyone'.³³ Norway provides one successful example of a country that has attempted to do this at some level. Policy changes in the 1990s in Norway moved the country closer to achieving gender parity through a lengthy paid

³¹ Cynthia Peters, 'The Art (and Serendipity) of Kinship: Ideas about Family, Sexuality, and Caregiving in a Better World', in *Real Utopia: Participatory Society for the 21st Century*, Chris Spanos (ed.). Oakland: AK Press, 2008, 44.

³² Ibid, 45.

³³ Nancy Fraser, 'After the Family Wage: A Postindustrial Thought Experiment' in *Fortunes of Feminism: From State-Managed capitalism to Neoliberal Crisis*, New York: Verso, 2013.

family leave policy, including a statutory leave period for fathers, generous wage replacement during parental leave period, increased state investment in ensuring the availability of high-quality childcare at lower prices, as well as cash benefits to compensate informal childcare.³⁴

Incorporating a feminist vision into Parecon's balanced job complexes would incorporate socially reproductive work into everyone's daily schedules, normalizing caring for others as part of everyone's work-life pattern, and cultivating the ethics of care as a desirable societal norm. If the feminized ghetto of caring for reproductive labour is to be torn down, and society as a whole learns to value the work involved in caring for others, people of all genders, but especially men, have to consciously change more diapers, make meals, accompany grandfathers to doctor's appointments and care for people with disabilities. Feminized professions involving teaching, nursing and childcare etc. train workers to be sensitized towards meeting the needs of others and socialize them to cultivate an ethics of care. Years and years of practice in doing this work helps to cultivate an ability to be other-oriented (as an antidote to behaviour motivated by self-interest).

³⁴ Marit Rønsen and Ragni Hege Kitterød, 2015. 'Gender-Equalizing Family Policies and Mothers' Entry into Paid Work: Recent Evidence from Norway'. *Feminist Economics* 21,1. p 59–89. Norwegian policies appear to have mitigated the gender gap in time poverty and leisure time: according to time-use surveys (based on nationally representative samples of between 4,000 and 20,000 people) the OECD finds that 'Women in Norway spend more time relaxing in front of the TV or entertaining friends than anyone else (6 hours and 6 minutes a day), followed by Belgium (5 hours and 46 minutes).' <https://www.oecd.org/gender/balancing-paid-work-unpaid-work-and-leisure.htm>

Mobilizing all genders to participate in caregiving can help to foster values of empathy, care, humility and cultivate an ethic of solidarity - key to building a more just and equitable society.

Caring for people can be both empowering and disempowering. The affective aspects of care work means that caring for someone who is ill or elderly can be meaningful, but also emotionally taxing, rote and mind-numbing, physically exhausting, and induce burnout and secondary trauma – and so the responsibility of caring labour should be evenly distributed. Breaking down gendered notions of caring means that we must socialize our boys and men to know that they too can be caring, nurturing, empathetic and solicitous of the well-being of others in society, and chip away at the ‘toxic’ notions of masculinity hegemonic under hetero-patriarchy and capitalism, that teaches men to assert their masculine identity by being violent,³⁵ by dominating others, by being driven by self-interested. Children growing up in a post-capitalist Participatory Economy, where people of all genders cared for homes and families ‘would perceive nurturing as gender neutral, even if it is partly informed by biology (as in the case of breast-feeding) and people would come to experience caregiving “as a non-gendered activity’ .³⁶ Hence teaching the values of caring labour may help us transform our ideas of gender, and help us to move past hegemonic notions of masculinity that have normalized misogyny,

³⁵ In *The Will to change: Men, Masculinity and Love* (New York: Washington Square Press, 2004) the late bell hooks pointed out that patriarchal masculinity is psychologically destructive to *men* as well as women. Hegemonic notions of masculinity, she argues, socializes men to normalize misogyny and gender-based violence.

³⁶ Cynthia Peters, 2008, 44.

militarism, violence against women. In the process, we might fundamentally transform the way we relate to one another.

In other words, if the work that we do on a daily basis can have a transformative effect on us as individuals, then the tasks that involve orienting ourselves to the wellbeing of others, might play an integral role in instilling notions of solidarity and cultivate an awareness of ‘self-in-community’. Hence, balanced job complexes balanced for care might yield numerous societal benefits, including: overcoming the ghettoization of care work as ‘women’s work’ or as work that is relegated to poor brown and black immigrant women; redressing an inequitable distribution of income and wealth; redressing an inequitable distribution of leisure-time for caregivers; and breaking down hetero-patriarchal gender norms so that we have more freedom of gender and sexual expression: ‘By reorganizing work and reducing the degree to which caregiving work is done privately in the home, society must do away with rigid gender roles and definitions of sexuality so that people are free to seek identity and intimacy in whatever way(s) they see fit’.³⁷

In the process of reconceptualizing how we relate to one another, we might also reconfigure our relationship to the environment. How might repairing our environment overlap with a feminist recovery plan for a post-pandemic society? Like the Works Progress Administration (WPA) of the New Deal era, we have existing models that show us how labour can be mobilized and trained as part of a state-led institutional strategy to create jobs and put people to work on restoring our infrastructure of roads and bridges, mobilize artists to paint

³⁷ Ibid.

murals a Federal Arts Project, and similarly, we can mobilize people to work in the care-giving sectors for a Federal Feminist Recovery Plan. We can draw lessons from how the WPA put people to back to work, to think about how to institutionally support work on repairing and restoring our social fabric. Just as the Green New Deal might create jobs to put everyone to work cleaning up our rivers, oceans, and detoxifying our soils and repairing eco-systems etc., it might also pay people, thereby encouraging everyone, especially those who are gendered as men, to participate in care work as part of a new Federal jobs program, to support families, mentor children, and care for elderly community members.

Conclusion

Feminists say that while women scurry around taking care of people, their homes, families and neighbourhoods, decisions get made on their behalf, about their rights, and about their bodies. Women are also among the lowest paid workers, have less free time, and are more vulnerable to structural as well as interpersonal violence. Looking at society through the lens of social reproduction reveals the fundamental inequities and unsustainability at the core of capitalism societies. As families, neighbourhoods, social cohesion and ecosystems come under duress, the politics of social reproduction offers a lens through which to address the gender, racial and environmental justice in thinking about a post-capitalist future. Coming on the heels of decades of neoliberal policies, the global Covid-19 pandemic has forcefully brought the crisis of social reproduction to the forefront of public consciousness. Women, immigrants and the working-poor have

borne the greater burden of absorbing the shocks of neoliberal austerity regimes, and now a rolling global pandemic, by working longer and harder at the risk of exposing themselves and their families to disease and death. Feminists seek to bring the crisis of social reproduction to the foreground, expanding the terrain of working-class struggle from the factory, office and farm to schools, homes and neighbourhoods.

Drawing on feminist social reproduction theory, this paper offers four principles to deepen along gendered and racial lines Parecon's values of economic democracy, justice, solidarity, efficiency, diversity and sustainability. Balanced job complexes, where people rotate into various kinds of socially reproductive work, ensures that everyone participates in taking care of community needs (the anti-marginalization principle), without offloading this work on to others (the anti-exploitation principle), and the rewards and responsibilities of this work is more evenly distributed among members of a society (the leisure-time principle). If people of all genders rotate into some form of socially reproductive work, then we move towards dismantling the gender hierarchy, strengthening democratic practices and de-linking social reproduction from femininity. Thus, the reorganization of social reproduction itself, through balanced job complexes, would militate against caring for our communities from being marginalized, feminized and ghettoized, moving us towards dismantling hierarchical power relations.

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