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Constanze Stutz (eds.)

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Beginning

The Compulsion to Repeat as long as the Fundamentals Remain Unchanged – An Introduction

Antonia Kupfer/Constanze Stutz

1 Introduction

Although it is potentially possible, humankind has still not succeeded in securing the basis of life for all people. A major reason is the dominant global capitalist economy, based on the use and exploitation of nature. This disturbed metabolism between economy and nature has caused many deaths already and poses an immediately life-threatening dimension for even privileged ones now. Devastating weather and climate catastrophes and an increase in infertile and inhospitable parts of the Earth are forcing ever more people to migrate. Since the economic crisis of 2008/2009, the growth and potentials of expansion of the post-Fordist production phase have come to an end. In turn, the "economic-ecological pincer crisis" (Dörre, 2019: 28, translated by C.S.), with its corresponding rampant social inequality, is becoming increasingly apparent, and is exacerbating the already widely diagnosed crisis of social reproduction (Aulenbacher, 2010; Winker, 2015). Large parts of the working population are being confronted with strong reductions in wage and reproductive work and are suffering from exhaustion. After three years of the Covid-19 pandemic, existential problems have intensified for many, with millions of people far from living a good life.

This state of affairs is not accepted by everyone. It is precisely these prevailing conditions of social reproduction (Bhattacharya & Vogel, 2017) that are being increasingly challenged by a resurgence of social movements across the globe (Arruzza, 2018). In recent years, an intensification of struggles around work and demands for the reorganization of care relations can be observed, along with international labour strikes and unrest in feminized employment sectors (Artus et al., 2020). In Germany, for example, a consolidation of labour struggles in this sector can be seen, beginning with the strike of nurses and physicians and other care workers of the Berlin Charité hospital in 2015 (Dück, 2022). At the same time, transnational networks have been collectively organizing a powerful international feminist strike movement (Gago, 2021). These feminist strikes are united by an expanded concept of work and labour[1],

1 With work, we refer to paid activities, accomplished by employees, the self-employed, civil servants or

which includes domestic and care work, as well as voluntary free labour (Federici, 1975).

At the same time, the social devaluation of feminized sectors of paid work and the more difficult conditions of reproduction for an ever-larger proportion of wage workers are not the only fields of struggle over social reproduction. Social struggles are taking place over energy, climate and transportation policies, with the goal of achieving affordable energy and transport (as in Kazakhstan in January 2022) while slowing climate change and preserving the planet (Backhouse & Tittor, 2019). With bitter disputes at borders, the question of how to deal with refugees and migrants is one of the most pressing issues that many countries are facing (Cassee & Goppel, 2012; Hess et al., 2017; Maffeis, 2019; Buckel et al., 2021). Calls by the tenants' rights movement for the expropriation and socialization of private housing corporations have also grown in recent years (Vollmer, 2019).

As different as these social movements and struggles may be, they are united on one fundamental level: they are all about securing livelihoods and better foundations for social and ecological reproduction.

2 Concepts: Change, Crisis and Livelihoods

The contradiction between the possibility of a more egalitarian society and continuing social inequality appears to be growing (see also Kupfer & Stutz, 2022). If the necessary knowledge seems to be there, the question remains of why nothing – or not enough – is happening to secure the livelihoods of all people. In the presence of dynamics of multiple crises, armed conflicts and wars and the catastrophe of climate change, precise conceptual work is necessary. The increased need for scientific debates about social dynamics comes at a time when the conditions (especially time and money) for learning and teaching in educational institutions and science are being systematically dismantled.

Constanze Stutz thinks that the notion of "authoritarian liberalism" (*libéralisme autoritaire*) coined by Grégorie Chamayou (2020 [2018]) grasps well the current phenomenon of defending the status quo through arguments of constraint. Following Chamayou, the struggle to secure livelihoods is taking

illegalized people, that generally have a positive (since creative and constructive) meaning for the working subject. With labour, we refer to unpaid activities in production and/or services, as well as to work that emphasizes the exploitative dimension of the work relation, especially the exploitation of the worker or employee, self-employed person or civil servant by the employer and/or the person or organization paying the workforce. Emphasizing the exploitative dimension does not neglect or exclude the fact that labour can also be perceived as fulfilling, rewarding, creative or otherwise positive – by both the working subject as well as the client or employer or other benefiting person or group. We have tried to use these two notions as precisely as possible, and if we refer to both dimensions, we use a slash between them (work/labour). For a deeper explanation of the distinction between work and labour, see Kupfer 2024.

place within a framework of social restructuring. Neoliberal modes of power are based on “a fundamental functional and strategic link between reducing the scope of state intervention and strengthening state authority within a limited area” (ibid.: 347, translated by C.S.) in which “subaltern pressures on policymaking are curtailed” (ibid.: 346, translated by C.S.).

Antonia Kupfer prefers the notion of “fascist tendencies” to describe current dynamics in policy, politics and society, with an emphasis on continuity and an aggravation of conventional power relations. The term fascism is highly contested and contains many potential dangers, of which failing to grasp empirical complexities and banalization are two. In using the term (and others), Kupfer is intentionally taking a position, with the aim of finding as precise a description and analysis of current social developments as possible. To this aim, Kupfer views it as productive to follow Klaus Fritzsche (1977), in terms of detecting fascist potential in current societies and insisting on a macro-sociological perspective of society as a whole. Fritzsche, who conceptualizes fascism concisely as both an “expression of crisis and [an] approach to a problem” (ibid.: 455, translated by A.K.) comprehends six theses, from which Kupfer emphasizes the following as being crucial today: namely, the emergence of fascism as a petit bourgeois protest movement with emotionally diffuse attitudes against institutions of the system in power, which rises under the protection of growing groups of capital (ibid.: 456).

Guido Speckmann and Gerd Wiegel (2021 [2012]) list five minimum conditions for a meaningful use of the term fascism, summarizing that “All previous fascisms arose in situations of political and social crisis in the respective countries and offered themselves as a special form of bourgeois rule to secure the existence of the capitalist mode of production with the direct exercise of violence” (ibid.: 60, translated by deepl.com). For Kupfer, the notion of fascist tendencies captures more precisely the violence of current domination strategies, in which life is suppressed, exploited, violated and ended for the benefit of a small privileged group; something that Chamayou’s term “authoritarian” fails to adequately depict.

Regarding the specificity of the present moment, Stutz argues that the concept of fascism covers more than it can illuminate. Even if the current worldwide situation shows similarities, fascism, from a historical perspective, is something very different, as unlike fascist constellations, the present mode of rule is borne by the postulate of a sovereign, independent will detached from the demos.

There are probably several reasons for this fruitful difference of opinion, such as our different ages, experiences and professional positions, as well as our different political perspectives and normative values. Both of us nevertheless agree on the importance of applying a classical Marxist analysis of society to the analysis of currently contested issues such as care and ecology. By this we argue that an understanding of social phenomena requires a feminist-historical-materialistic analysis of their social contexts in order to reveal

unequal distributions of power and thus violence, exploitation and suppression. Thus, we believe that an analysis of the coming-into-being of structures needs to be part of the analysis of what is currently being contested and claimed by various contemporary social movements aimed at securing livelihoods and better foundations for social and ecological reproduction. In terms of research methods, the analysis of coming-into-being includes a reconstruction of subjective perspectives, following Gabriele Rosenthal (2008), such as those collected through interviews. Such a reconstruction includes a description of the development of the perspective by referring to the social context in which it developed.

While we differ in our emphasis, we agree on a question that we consider key: How do we conceptualize crisis in the current situation in which everything seems to be in crisis? In order to integrate both the forces that persist, as well as those that are compelled to change by the crisis, a focus on how social movements politicize crisis and the subjective perceptions of crisis are of great importance. Since we consider the interrelation of structures and agencies as constitutive for societies and social phenomena, we also ask: How do subjects interpret their experiences and perceptions of crisis? How do seemingly objective crises, like the crisis of reproduction, influence the habits of individuals? Do these individuals also enter into crisis, or do they rather adapt to and pacify the experiences of crisis? What role do social struggles and movements play in this?

In order not to objectify social crisis processes, it is necessary to take a differentiated look at one of the main crisis-driving modes of capitalist production: the structural indifference of the capitalist mode of production towards its socio-ecological preconditions (for the feminist social theoretical perspective in German, see: von Werlhof, 1978; Mies, 1980; Bennholdt-Thomsen, 1994; Beer, 1990; later picked up by Wissen, 2020; Kupfer, 2023). This mode has intensified in recent decades. Since the global economic crisis of 2008/2009, it has become increasingly clear that the modes of production, life and being (Gramsci, 1996) of neoliberally-governed financial market capitalism can no longer be permanently stabilized. Rather, they are visibly condensing into an "economic-ecological pincer crisis" (Dörre, 2019: 28) that heralds the end of the phase of globalized post-Fordist capitalism, without a new regime of accumulation – with its corresponding gendered ways of life, regulating institutions and property relations – having already taken hold. What emerges clearly is that "historical capitalism [is] characterized not only by a cyclical process of creative destruction, but also by a long-term tendency to destroy existing livelihoods more rapidly than to create new ones" (Silver, 2018: 203, translated by C.S.).

One dimension of the current accumulation and aggravation of the crisis is that it is widely perceived as new. Yet it is important to remember that authors writing from the 1970s to the 1990s (see above for the German authors articulating a feminist social theoretical critique of capitalist modes of production) were

themselves part of a long tradition of critiquing capitalism as an economic system and way of life that destroys livelihoods. This perception of novelty ties back to the socio-political developments of the last 30 years. After the fall of the Soviet Union in 1989, and with the loss of an alternative, capitalism presented itself as the only possible political-economic system. Mark Fisher (2009) refers to this as “capitalist realism”. Contemporary feminist theorists have taken up the thread of the structural indifference of the capitalist mode of production towards its socio-ecological preconditions once again and are following the tradition of eco-feminist and materialist theory on their own terms. They conceptualize the contradictory organization of the sphere of devalued care work in the present-day crisis as a comprehensive crisis of social reproduction (Aulenbacher, 2010; Bhattacharya & Vogel, 2017). While politically we may easily agree with them, we need to take a closer look on a conceptual level. How are crisis tendencies handled in different social spheres and sectors? Is it possible to include an analysis of the dynamics of devaluation and investment and include at the same time subjective interpretations (Dück, 2022)?

If we conceptualized “social crisis” as a principally open situation without a predicable (preliminary) outcome – because by social crisis we refer to phenomena that are characterized as being contested – we can add depth to the (contested) analysis of transformations. In concrete terms, a focus on the contested enables us to integrate persisting forces and find practices of solidarity. As is true for all social analysis, the investigation of social changes requires us to take into account social contexts, which in turn are always composed of (contested) social structures and practices. For the current analysis of social and ecological reproduction, we consider Dück’s (2022) emphasis on subjective interpretations especially insightful for the understanding of the current social crisis. Nevertheless, while we do include subjective interpretations in our analysis, we do not echo them without having first analysed them (Kupfer, 2015; Kupfer 2024) – indeed, we recognize this as an important emancipatory research strategy in itself. Thus, we follow Gabriele Rosenthal (2008) in dealing with interviewees’ narratives in a reconstructive way.

Finally, we observe a significant shift towards criminalizing and repressing activists in social movements in recent years; this took an especially pointed turn in Germany in spring 2023. This criminalization could be interpreted as a way of securing the capitalist mode of production by the direct exercise of violence, as Speckmann and Wiegel have ascribed to attempts to solve crises that they describe as fascist. In fact, while the impending problems of climate change become ever more evident, dominant policies and politics steadfastly adhere to a paradigm of wealth through growth, instead of considering degrowth as a way to secure livelihoods.

In Germany, for instance, the nature of contestation seems to have reached another level in terms of the intensity and violence with which the federal states are reforming police legislation to enhance the repressive possibilities regarding

activists engaged (often using tactics of civil disobedience) against capitalism, sexism, racism, fascism and neo-Nazism, as well as for increased protection of the environment and ecology. In May 2023, activists of the environmental protest group Letzte Generation (Last Generation), whose most widespread form of protest has involved gluing themselves onto streets in order to block car traffic and demand enhancements to public transportation instead, were accused of being a criminal organization (Bayrisches Landeskriminalamt, 2023). The United Nations and Amnesty International have criticized this criminalization and have accused the police of allowing a severe encroachment of fundamental rights (United Nations, 2023; Gschoßmann, 2023). Even though the attorney general's office in Munich has admitted to some mistakes (Engert, 2023), this repression is part of a shift in discourse towards an intensification of authoritarian security policy by mostly right-wing politicians. Repression against environmental activists is not limited to Germany. In France, the large environmental movement Les Soulèvements de la Terre was banned in June 2023 (République Francaise, 2023; Les Soulèvements de la Terre, 2023), while in other countries, such as Indonesia, activists are being arrested (Amnesty International, 2023).

Till now we have talked about livelihoods being contested. But what do we mean by livelihood? The notion of livelihood – the basis of existence or source of life – comprises three important assumptions. First, we refer to entities – material, physical, biological – outside of human beings, with their own systems and processes. Photosynthesis is thus one example of a livelihood. Second, humans are social, cultural and natural beings, and as such are dependent on livelihoods. Third, livelihoods are finite if ecological systems are destroyed. So far, livelihoods are something that exists apart and independent from human beings. Thus, by livelihoods we refer to the material conditions of human existence. The notion of livelihood is related to the notion of nature, which is a material reality that is not the result of human will. However, over the course of human civilization, humans have increasingly influenced nature, which makes it impossible to see nature as "the other" to society. At the same time, societies were always shaped by natural conditions such as seasons. The notion of nature also changes historically and in relation to societies' ability to influence and control it.

Eco-feminism, a scientific trend that started in the 1970s and which is focused on revealing the connection between the exploitation of nature and of women, continues to be important to this day. Indeed, "ecofeminism opened the door to the recognition of women's knowledge and wisdom. It invites us to think about the elements that lie behind identity constructions and how this relationship is differentiated around elements such as environment, ethnic affiliation, age, religion and class" (Larrea et al., 2006: 27, translated by deepl.com) According to Sissy Larrea and her five co-authors from Ecuador, social eco-feminism is characterized by an integrative approach and knowledge, which is different to the cultural eco-feminism of Vandana Shiva and Maria Mies and the ecological political economy of Dianne Rocheleau, Barbara Thomas-Slayter

and Esther Wangari (1996). Mark Münzel (1987) fundamentally questions, from an epistemological perspective, ethno-ecological research findings by non-indigenous or non-aboriginal people. We consider his critique useful, as it guides researchers to systematically reflect on their methods and interpretations. Nevertheless, we do not consider this shortcoming to be a reason to abolish this approach altogether, in light of the assumingly few publications by indigenous and aboriginal people during the late 1980s. Due to lack of time, we admit to this shortcoming in our own work here by not taking work by indigenous and aboriginal people into account, but have rather followed publications we could access more easily.

In sum, it seems adequate to assume interdependencies between nature and society, and thus to state that the two are in a dialectical relationship (see Görg, 1999: 11). Through a dialectical perspective, nature and society are two different areas characterized by their mutual relatedness (Brand & Reusswig, 2007: 656). According to Clark and York (2005), Marx conceptualized human history as part of – though not subsumed by – natural history:

> that is, society is embedded in nature and dependent on it, although there are distinct social and natural processes (…). A dialectical relationship exists between society and nature, as they continually transform each other in their coevolutionary development (…). The direction of this relationship is not predetermined, the future remains open (ibid.: 327).

They add that "[t]he dialectical materialist perspective recognizes that the world is one of constant change but not one where anything goes. Constraints and possibilities remain in the structural conditions of the world" (ibid.: 332).

The dialectical perspective is also crucial for the emancipation of people. Following Görg (1999), Horkheimer and Adorno claim in their book "Dialectic of Enlightenment" (1972 [1947])

> that man, in spite of all construction of an object world 'for himself', recognizes nature as an alien (external as well as internal) condition of his existence, that he recognizes that in spite of, or rather because of, all projections of his impulses and purposes onto nature, he nevertheless also remains attached to it in a certain respect. As long as he does not recognize these conditions also as an element that is nevertheless also an *independent reality* in spite of all meaning it has for man in the first place, his own development, his emancipation from social domination as well as his relation to his own as well as to the external nature remains deformed. The nature-dominating thinking and acting can thus not exhaust the specifically human possibilities for reflection and self-realization and at the same time undermines the conditions of its own existence (Görg, 1999: 126–127, italics in original).

Consequently, livelihood struggles are directed towards the preservation of external and internal nature, comprising, for example, the conservation of woods and animals, as well as the promotion of breaks and other improvements to working conditions in paid work in order to maintain the workforce. With this, livelihood struggles are struggles over social relations to nature.

Livelihood struggles are directed against an exploitative and extractive relation to nature. They stretch from abstract visions of the good life (such as Buen Vivir) to the concrete struggles of blocking coal diggers. For a couple of years now, societies of the Global North are also being confronted with the destruction of nature and climate change in a way that poses an existential threat. For example, draught is increasingly leading to water shortages, which as a consequence has also excluded rivers as a means of transportation (this happened to the river Rhine in the summer of 2022). However, most destruction still takes place in the Global South, which means that the main perpetrators are not suffering the consequences of their actions. Despite this realization, powerful Western states like the US and member states of the EU are predominantly pursuing a policy and politics of greenwashing and technofixes as part of the "Inflation Reduction Act" and Green New Deal (Kupfer, 2023).

From the abundance of livelihood struggles to choose from, we have chosen to focus on those carried out by the social movement for climate justice. We have selected the climate justice movement because it is pushing a fundamental claim for system change to address an inherently multidimensional crisis. With this, it goes beyond local initiatives relating to specific issues, such as imposing a speed limit for a single residential road. This does not mean that the climate justice movement does not engage in protest against the local destruction of nature – it does – but its agenda is much broader and local issues are incorporated into wider narratives about the current systems of capitalism, sexism, racism and ableism. Thus, the movement is fighting against various attacks on livelihoods simultaneously. Additionally, the climate justice movement is a transnational movement, which is well suited to our volume that aims to achieve a global perspective.

In addition to looking at the social movement for climate justice, we will also focus on states' reactions to the current multidimensional crisis, where we observe broadly two ways of dealing with it. The first, already mentioned, is being carried out by the EU and the US, and could be subsumed under the notion of Green New Deal (though since the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, this project has been partially postponed). The second is being carried out by individual states (such as Poland and Hungary) that are intentionally dismantling democratic institutions. However, in terms of states' policies and politics, and the already existing and increasing repression of activists, it is becoming more difficult to distinguish between authoritarian and democratic states, which is itself a dimension of the current crisis we have pointed to above.

3 The Climate Justice Movement

The climate justice movement has its roots in the claims for environmental justice raised by the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit in Washington DC in 1991 (Tokar, 2013). The preamble to the official summit declaration stated that

> WE THE PEOPLE OF COLOR, gathered together at this multinational People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit, to begin to build a national and international movement of all peoples of color to fight the destruction and taking of our lands and communities, do hereby re-establish our spiritual interdependence to the sacredness of our Mother Earth; to respect and celebrate each of our cultures, languages and beliefs about the natural world and our roles in healing ourselves; to ensure environmental justice; to promote economic alternatives which would contribute to the development of 500 years of colonization and oppression resulting in the poisoning of our communities and land and the genocide of our peoples (National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit, 1991, without page).

As stated in the above quote, maintaining livelihoods was at the core of their demands; livelihoods that had been destroyed by mainly white people from the Global North imposing an economy of destruction worldwide. One of the principles of environmental justice therefore declares "the right of victims of environmental injustice to receive full compensation and reparations for damages as well as quality health care" (ibid.).

In these claims of the National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit, what would become the core of the later climate justice movement was already visible: namely, the realization that those who are most affected by environmental destruction and climate change have done the least to contribute to it. From a historical perspective, one can see that the use of fossil energy and industrial development are closely intertwined (Mautz, 2017). Through the extensive use of fossil energy in the 19th century, for instance, the UK was able to rapidly industrialize and thus extend industrial capitalist relations throughout much of society. Industrial capitalist relations were strongly classed, meaning that majorities of populations were excluded from participating in decision-making processes. Demands for a post-fossil era are linked to ideas of decentralization and the democratization of economic and social structures; policies for renewable energies, for example, have often been accompanied by claims for a wider participation of citizens.

In preparation for the United Nations World Summit on Sustainable Development in Bali in 2002, NGOs from the Global South and North prepared the Bali Principles of Climate Justice (2002) and the Durban Declaration of

Carbon Trading (2004) (Görg & Bedall, 2013), which pushed further the analysis of the origins of climate injustices and the claims to restore climate justice. For example, in the Bali Principles transnational corporations are opposed on principal, while in the Durban Declaration carbon trading is rejected as a false solution that will magnify social inequalities in many ways (International Climate Justice Network, 2002; Climate Justice Now!, 2004).

While the claim for climate justice was initially pronounced by people of colour (see above), later during the late 1990s and early 2000s, white people in Europe joined the movement as an extension of their anti-globalization activities focused on the WTO and G8 (Tokar, 2013). After the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen in 2009, a widespread disillusionment among climate justice activists took place due to governments' failure to pick up their claims (Sander, 2016). As a consequence, a change in strategy took place and the climate justice movement turned towards activities focused on local perpetrators of climate change, such as mining and energy companies. In the Rhine region in Germany, for instance, coal mining in Erkelenz was blocked by an alliance called "Ende Gelände" for one day in 2015. This strategy of fighting local corporations responsible for extracting and profiting from fossil energies continues to this day.

The brief history of the climate justice movement has its roots in the initiatives of people of colour, as those most affected by a century-long societal relation to nature that has led to the destruction of their livelihoods, though it has extended to a movement of mainly white people claiming the necessity for a change of fundamental societal structures. In the following, we will focus on the content of what is being contested, and how this can reveal differences in the positions of the involved actors.

4 An Analysis of Social Movements

How do social movements and civil society actors politicize the persistent and intertwined multidimensional crisis of the present? As argued above, for an understanding of social struggles, we consider it useful to place special focus on the contested conditions of the social and ecological reproduction of social relations and living conditions. The climate justice movement understands environmental and climate problems as being embedded in societal problems. Characteristic of this view is the analysis of environmental and climate problems as being due to the abovementioned societal relation to nature, which entails the destruction of livelihoods by governments. A core element of this societal relation to nature is to draw a distinction between human beings and nature, thereby detaching humans from nature, the latter of which can then be conceptualized as a "pure resource" to be exploited. According to this perspective, problems start when resources end, or when the extraction of resources becomes very expensive, or

when environmental destruction and climate change pose a threat to human life through emissions, draughts, floods, fire, etc.

As an example of such a problem analysis, Görg and Bedall (2013) refer to the dominant policy following the Kyoto Protocol in 1997. At that time, the problem definition was focused on the outputs of the energy system – emissions – and neglected the inputs – namely, the production of energy. According to Görg and Bedall, the dominant perspective thus also neglected issues of social justice, such as the unequal distribution of environmental destruction and climate change outcomes taking place mainly in the Global South. In contrast, proponents of climate justice depart from the claim for a different societal relation to nature, one that acknowledges humans as part of nature and thus argues for the need to maintain the necessary material conditions for a healthy human existence (as was expressed, for example, in the Declaration of the People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit in 1991). As outlined above, such a problem analysis leads, among others, to claims and actions to leave fossil fuels such as coal, oil and gas in the ground.

Along with differences in problem analysis, there are also differences in the suggestions for middle- and long-term solutions. For a couple of years now, there have been two “projects of hegemony”, as Hendrik Sander (2016) puts it. In the EU, and since the election of Joe Biden in 2020 also in the US, a “green” project of massive investment into economic growth using tax money is underway. In this approach, governments are sticking with the capitalist model of constant growth and are thus proposing technical solutions for environmental destruction and climate change. The other hegemonic project underway Sander refers to as “grey”, as it sticks with extracting fossil fuels for the production of energy and supports nuclear power stations as another pillar. The US under Trump and Brazil under Bolsonaro were examples of this latter approach. Currently, despite Biden’s Democratic Party administration in the US and Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva’s Partido dos Trabalhadores in Brazil, with their environmentally friendly election programs, both countries still practice the extraction of fossil fuels and have no plans to phase this out.

In this way, the more pronounced division in the approach of states in response to the current multidimensional crisis – between the Green New Deal, on the one hand, and the dismantling of democratic institutions on the other (as described above) – has become increasingly blurred (Boddenberg, 2023; Burchardt, 2023). There are also countries like Australia, India (Marzai, 2023) and China that are practicing a more “grey” strategy, in spite of attempts to rebrand their activities as “green” (such as so-called “green extractivism” or “post-extractivism” in Australia). On the opposite side, the claim for degrowth is being raised, departing from the realization that the growth paradigm is linked to capitalism, which is the economic order that suppresses humans and nature and thus needs to be overcome. There are different streams within the degrowth movement (Schmelzer & Vetter, 2019), but they consent to agree that degrowth implies a deep societal change that would reduce the destruction of nature.

A major actor in struggles for environmental and climate policies are NGOs, though their role is often ambivalent. On the one hand, many are making urgent demands to change policies to decelerate climate change. On the other hand, they may compromise with governments regarding some measures, for example by agreeing to implement markets for emission rights. With this, they are also contributing to the (re)production of the hegemonic consensus on burning fossils for energy usage (Görg & Bedall, 2013). Consequently, the attitude towards NGOs, and the question of whether – and if so, how – to ally with them in pushing forward improvements, is highly contested within the climate justice movement and is carried out in various ways. In sum, the issue at stake, the very core of what is being contested, relates to fundamental beliefs on how to live.

5 Overview of the Contributions in this Volume on Social and Ecological Reproduction as a Contested Field

Following the above introduction, the articles that follow will provide a closer socio-analytical look at what is being contested, and will offer answers to the question of how states, social movements and civil society actors are dealing with this multidimensional crisis. The collected contributions explore these movements in the contested social spheres of care and supply, usage and (dis)location. In doing so, they draw attention to the ways in which social and state structures adapt to crises and social struggles, and the ways in which social movements search for altered forms of protest (Bello et al., 2019). Struggles over the organization of social and ecological reproduction are not new, though they have intensified and taken on new formations since the crisis cycle of 2008/2009. We are currently in an open social situation, in which the different interests of different actors are opposed to each other without a definite strategy of proceeding. Among other things, the increasingly authoritarian security policy responses to protests and the criminalization of climate justice activists raise fundamental questions: How and in which context is violence (and non-violence) defined and legitimated? How could resources – from food to solidarity – and humans' livelihood needs be secured in increasingly hostile and repressive political environments?

Arguedas Ramíres's article reminds us that the unnecessary persistence of hunger globally demands another justification than simply neoliberal individualism. Arguedas Ramirez conducted a comprehensive research project on hunger and justice in Costa Rica between 2017 and 2019. She argues that in order to fully understand the problem of global hunger, it is essential to listen to those who are living in food insecurity. After this, Christine Löw demonstrates, using the example of India, how a fossil regime imposes its ideas on people's – especially women's – lives. According to the Modi administration, cooking with wood is one of the major causes of deforestation. As a solution, a state

program has been created to support cooking with liquefied petroleum gas. It is, furthermore, targeted specifically at women, who are identified as being primarily responsible for cooking in the household. Not only is the logic of fossil energy thus maintained, but the way in which the state's program ties women into financialized obligations – by necessitating a bank account, through the acceptance of credits and loans, and by adding the burden of buying expensive gas refills (instead of simply collecting firewood) – addresses users as neoliberal market subjects, and thereby keeps them in a subordinate and exploited social position. Furthermore, by neglecting existing differences among social groups according to income, the state's program ends up imposing even higher costs on poorer people. Löw reveals how the Indian government has thus implemented a policy of continuing extractivism (Franik, 2009), which deteriorates the bases of life of the poorest in a twofold way: by continuing ecological destruction and by forcing people to consume energy at high costs.

If we are right and the issue at stake, the very core of what is being contested, relates to fundamental beliefs regarding how to live, we can confidently assume that ecological reproduction is not the only field in which these social struggles play out. The fact that so many people must endure increasingly precarious working conditions under contemporary financialized capitalism is increasingly being politicized by feminist movements and activists in feminized employment sectors, such as nursing, care and services. There is also an increasing feminization of strikes (see Artus in this edition). Despite the overall increase in activity, we ask what is preventing greater linkages between the different actors engaged in struggles over the conditions of social reproduction and care relations in feminized sectors of employment.

Furthermore, the social devaluation of feminized sectors of employment is not the only field of struggle for social reproduction: in addition to broad tenant protests (Vollmer, 2019; Latocha in this edition) and socio-ecological movements, transnational networks have been organizing powerful international feminist strikes since at least 2018 (Gago, 2021). Uprisings and protests against femicide and violence against women mobilized thousands of demonstrators in the course of the Ni una Menos movement in South America, for instance, and increasingly also in the Global North, such as in London in 2021. This updating and reformulation of strikes as a protest form by feminist networks and actors can be theorized, following Julia Dück, using a social-theoretical-informed notion of social reproduction as a contested social relation (Dück & Hajek, 2023).

Forms of resistance have their own temporality and are bound to historically specific constellations of repression and rebellion. Kijan Mohammadi shows this in her analyses of social movements in Iran. Mohammadi argues that given the accumulation of protests in recent years and the network structure of this protest movement, and even though the movement is being suppressed by the state, it has achieved a momentum that means it will likely continue and in fact has the potential to become an even larger movement consisting of diverse groups of

people, both women and men. This is also due in part to the absence of reforms in response to the protestors' demands by the government or of a revision of the constitution. In addition to protesting the obligatory hijab, for instance, the movement may also expand to protest economic problems, inflation, political problems and judicial inequities.

Ingrid Artus picks up the issue of fights in her contribution and recalls the historical forgetting of women's participation in strikes. In particular, she looks at the social and domineering conditions of this forgetting. Women were involved in almost all of the major strike movements of the historical labour movement. That their involvement has been forgotten makes visible how processes of forming collective identities have been tied to divisions in the working class. This history of gendered divisions is still evident today in the difficulties of mobilization related to unions. Artus argues for the need for a progressive grasp of such differences. Strikes, after all, allow for a collective experience outside of daily routines; a breaking of routines that makes other possibilities of togetherness conceivable again.

To conclude this volume, we bring our reflections into conversation with the philosopher, critical theorist and feminist Nancy Fraser. In our discussion about her new book "Cannibal Capitalism", we revisit the structuring questions of the anthology and try to find answers in conversation. This volume intends to encourage and empower readers in their daily struggles for a better world, which is possible. We hope you enjoy reading.

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Eating

Hunger and Justice: The Voices of Women from a Neighbourhood in San José, Costa Rica

Gabriela Arguedas Ramírez

1 Introduction

Food insecurity can be overcome, according to free trade advocates, by letting the market act of its own accord. The problem, they argue, lies in tariff barriers and other regulatory obstacles. Empirical evidence, however, shows otherwise. Free trade has not solved the problem of hunger in impoverished countries, despite free trade agreements with the US, China and the European Union.

In Mexico, for instance, things have actually worsened (Santos Baca, 2014). The problem is not related to productivity. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) estimates that “6% of global food losses occur in Latin America and the Caribbean and the region lost each year and/or wasted about 15% of their food available, even though 47 million people still suffer hunger” (Benítez, 2018: without page).

Moreover, in the richest countries, where there is an overproduction of food sold at low prices, millions of people live in food insecurity. Regardless of the caricature often made of hunger as strictly situated in the Global South, millions of people live with hunger every day in the US and Europe (FAO, 2020). Individualism is at the root of this problem. According to this ideological position, the cause of the problem is not political or economic, but personal. It is the individual who is at fault. Several studies have demonstrated, however, that hunger is a very complex social problem that cannot be solved merely by lowering food prices and cannot be reduced to the realm of mere individual choices.

Other factors, ranging from the global political context to gender, race, nationality and age discrimination are determinant. Lowering the cost of living is the paradigm that governs public policies in most of the world, and has established itself as the dominant way of responding to the problem of hunger. From the theoretical framework of neoliberal economics – which contradicts Amartya Sen’s (1981) proposal of food as entitlement – the only responsibility of the state is to ensure that the market provides food cheap enough for the poor to buy. The only standard is to secure that someone earning a minimum wage can afford the minimum number of calories to function in their daily lives.

But the cheapest food is actually producing hidden hunger, obesity and malnutrition, because it is hyper-industrialized, very low in nutritional value and

high in calories. It is not the food required to be a strong and healthy individual. This is what I have conceptualized elsewhere as "dead food" (Arguedas-Ramírez, 2019: 151). The global food system not only has *not* solved the global problem of hunger and malnutrition, but even worse, is contributing to the destruction of biodiversity, the homogenization of diet and culture, the production of dead land and dead water (Sassen, 2014), and the generation of chronic diseases.

In order to fully understand this problem, it is essential to listen to those who are living in food insecurity. The FAO launched a global research project called "Voices of the Hungry"[1] to gather qualitative data to complement the quantitative indicators developed for estimating food security across countries. In Costa Rica, the lived experience of hunger has not been studied. Research focus lies on agricultural production, especially linked to exports. Despite the fact that at least 5% of the population lives in some degree of food insecurity (FAO, 2020), this problem has not received attention. This research aims to learn about food insecurity through the voices of women in the community of Tirrases, in San José, Costa Rica.

2 Hunger in context

James Vernon's (2007) account of hunger includes important clues to explain its persistence, and the scientific and academic interest it arouses, while the social taboo seems to remain almost unchanged. According to Vernon, in Europe and the US during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, hunger provoked neither interest nor empathy. On the contrary, the common opinion was that hunger was both an outcome and an incentive: a result of laziness and an incentive to seek work and be productive. Later, the notion of hunger as part of a divine plan or as a sign of an individual's moral failure was gradually displaced (though not eradicated) by the idea of hunger as the result of failed economic systems.

Even though the FAO frames hunger as a social problem, it barely criticizes the market's failure to eradicate hunger (Jarosz, 2011). The political response to hunger after the 1950s was the Green Revolution. Yet despite the huge amount of resources, ideas, scientific projects and political interventions the Green Revolution entailed, it did not eradicate hunger (Jakobsen, 2011; Schultz, 2015; Watts & Fitzpatrick, 2018; Holland, 2018). What it did achieve was to disrupt family, agricultural and community relationships. Beyond transforming food production, it fostered new forms of political and economic control (Cullather, 2010). While the Green Revolution did prevent famines, it also created other serious and long-term problems. As a hegemonic food production system, it created an era of overproduction of food that has destroyed ecosystems and contributed to climate change, without effectively eradicating hunger in the

1 http://www.fao.org/in-action/voices-of-the-hungry/en/

world (Gómez et al., 2013). Moreover, climate change is a driver of hunger worldwide, as the FAO has been warning since 2018.

While the Green Revolution was consolidating its hegemonic position, the notion of food as a human right was shifting away from a charitable approach to hunger towards a political approach centred on justice. This process was motivated not only by the social suffering of hunger, but also by its far-reaching global consequences. Although the concept of human rights has limitations, Schanbacher (2019) considers it useful for drawing international attention to neglected communities. The human rights movement and the notion of food as a human right are deeply connected to social movements that demand justice, such as the *campesino* and indigenous movements, labour rights movements and environmentalists (Edelman, 2014; Spitz, 1984; Courtis, 2007). Linked to food as a human right, the FAO and other organizations developed the concept of food security, which I use in this article due to its official currency, though criticisms should be taken into account. Jarosz (2011), for instance, argues that the shift from the notion of hunger to the notion of food security responds to a sanitization of the issue and has been functional to the neoliberal logic. Here, I use food insecurity, broadly understood, as a synonym of hunger.

3 Methodology

I conducted a research project on hunger and justice in Costa Rica between 2017–2019. The study was based on a qualitative approach that included field visits, in depth interviews, workshops and participant observations in the community of Tirrases, in San José, Costa Rica.

The CEN-CINAI program[2] was my entry point to the public institutionalization in charge of securing the human right to food in highly vulnerable communities. Through the local CEN-CINAI centre, I met women in the Tirrases community who were living in food insecurity. Other entry points to the community were *La Cometa* community centre, which is supported by the Municipality of Curridabat, and a public educational program for women coordinated by INAMU (*Instituto Nacional de las Mujeres*; National Institute for Women).

Tirrases is an impoverished urban area of San José. Sixty years ago it was a rural area dedicated to coffee plantations, but nowadays there are very few sources of employment and a high crime rate. Tirrases borders with a sanitary landfill site that for many years was one of the biggest open-air dumps in the metropolitan area. It is the poorest district of Curridabat, and one of the poorest in Costa Rica. Nearby Tirrases, however, are some of the richest districts in the country.

2 *Centros de Educación y Nutrición y de Centros Infantiles de Atención Integral* (CEN-CINAI; Education and Nutrition Centres and Children's Centres for Integral Care) are public care centres for infants and children. They also provide food assistance to pregnant women living in poverty.

As a result of housing policies in the 1980s, population density increased quickly in Tirrases. So did the demand for employment. But housing projects were not linked to more comprehensive development strategies. Almost half of the adult population is unemployed or sub-employed. Those who have a job endure long commutes and low wages. The situation is even more challenging for women, who have an unemployment rate double that of men.

4 The Production and Perpetuation of Hunger

Food is a basic need of every living being. We can endure hunger only to a certain degree. But the experience of hunger is more than a body demanding nutrients and energy. Culture determines what food we eat, when and in what way. The hegemonic economic system has created ways of producing and consuming food, and also a certain way of framing hunger.

Even though hunger is usually thought of as a consequence of a food shortage, it is fundamentally linked to political decisions. For instance, hunger was used as a disciplinary mechanism to control enslaved people in the plantations of the southern states in the US. Restricting or facilitating access to food is a long-standing domination tactic that persists to this day. Through control over access to forests, where people collect roots, fruits, seeds, fungi and even insects, and through that same control over agricultural lands, crop seeds, the agricultural knowledge required to farm, harvest, preserve and cook food and to care for farm animals, and without access to hunting land for family consumption, an entire community or even an entire country can be controlled and disciplined. In this way, a dominant political and economic class can impose itself over the rest (Shiva, 2006; Trentmann & Just, 2006; Human Appeal UK, 2017).

What, then, is this contemporary hunger that exists in the impoverished neighbourhoods of almost any city in the world, in both the Global North and South? Where does this hunger come from, since we live in a world of overproduction and superabundance of food? My argument is that this form of hunger is not only the expected result of the global hegemonic system of food production, processing and marketing, with its concomitant homogenization of diet, but is also the result of "necropolitics" as understood by Achille Mbembe (2003). This is to say that, as part of the global production of highly industrialized food, many forms of ecological and human exploitation and oppression are being reproduced and normalized.

Hunger is a social problem. Although it may seem obvious, it is necessary to insist on this point, because there is a strong tendency to make hunger an absolutely private experience, in the sense that it becomes silenced through feelings of shame and isolation. It weighs an overwhelming burden of humiliation and guilt on individuals and families living in food insecurity. The narrative that emerges from the neoliberal way of framing hunger could be summed up like

this: if someone is starving, in a world of cheap and superabundant food, it is because they have failed as individuals (Gathwaite, 2016).

In the case of food insecure children, this judgment of individual failure is amplified, because the most socially important task that has historically been assigned to women across cultures is to care for children. Thus, it is usually the mother who is held accountable for her children's hunger, regardless of the socioeconomic context in which she is living. In traditionally misogynistic societies, women face a double burden of hunger. But women are still commonly excluded from land ownership and decision-making in the agricultural system at all levels, even though they actively participate in farming, harvesting and preparing food. The obligation to feed and care for children and the sick is not paired with women's access to the necessary resources to fulfil this function (Patel R., 2012; Allen & Sachs, 2007).

The neoliberal narrative against the welfare state has also induced a growing popular rejection of social policies. In Costa Rica, although there are no studies on the social perceptions of welfare policies, a proxy indicator can be inferred from the growing electoral support for right-wing political parties that reject distributive justice policies in favour of market-based solutions for social problems. The physical, moral, psychological and social consequences of hunger are exacerbated by the shame, anxiety, frustration and anger associated with being socially blamed for living in food insecurity. Thus, food insecurity could be constructed as an indicator of a country's physical and mental health (Chilton & Booth, 2007; Maynard, Andrade, Packull-MacCormick, & Perlman, 2018).

In Costa Rica, the structural causes of hunger continue to be normalized and thus go unproblematized. The apparent impossibility of eradicating hunger in a world of abundance is an outcome of the economic system that depends on the commodification of even the most fundamental goods for human survival. The consequences have been overwhelming: the destruction of cultures and ecosystems and the exacerbation of climate change. The hegemonic food system produces cheap, highly processed and nutrition-poor food to keep the cost of living for cheap labour as low as possible. It is a live-devaluating cycle.

Josué de Castro (1962) considered this continuous tacit negation of the structural causes that make hunger a persistent problem one of the greatest taboos of our time. Escobar (1995), for his part, describes how hunger went from being a taboo to becoming an object of scientific inquiry and then a narrative of power:

> The language of hunger and the hunger of language join forces not only to maintain a certain social order but to exert a kind of symbolic violence that sanitizes the discussion of the hungry and the malnourished. It is thus that we come to consume hunger in the West; in the process our sensitivity and pain becomes numbed by the distancing effect that the language of academics and experts achieved (p. 104).

I consider the voices of hungry people to be crucial, but not as the FAO has framed them in its Voices of the Hungry project, as sources of detailed information about food insecurity. What the FAO was looking for, by paying attention to these voices, was to complement indicators of food and nutrition insecurity and to better understand the relationship between over-nutrition[3] and under-nutrition. But the importance of listening to people who live in food insecurity goes beyond that. The problem of hunger, having been encapsulated within a technocratic logic, has been depoliticized. Hunger signals a failure in the moral bond between individuals in a community. A well-organized society should acknowledge that we are interdependent, not only among individuals but with the ecosystem as well. Such a society would not tolerate some of its members suffering from hunger while there are sufficient resources in the community. Toleration of the suffering caused by hunger indicates a moral numbness that dehumanizes those who suffer and weakens the ethical principles on which the basis of the political pact of any society stands. Qualitative studies in general can help to prevent such numbness by bringing to the forefront what lies behind the quantitative indicators of food insecurity.

Food insecurity is rooted in structural injustices determined by gender, ethnicity/race, class and age. The relevant concept of feminist food justice by Sachs and Campillo (2014) integrates food security and food sovereignty, through a feminist lens, emphasizing the vital yet undervalued participation of women in food production and food preparation and care work at the family and community levels. These tasks, traditionally assigned to women and frequently ignored in the upper levels of government, must be at the centre of any effort to eradicate hunger.

Chinkin and Wright (1993) conclude that “the thread which seems to bind women’s stories to the general international legal structures and institutions that purport to guarantee a right to food and a right to be free from hunger for every person is the right to self-determination” (p. 263). For these authors, the freedom and the right to life are futile if there is no food, shelter and clean water.

Anaemia in women of reproductive age is the most prevalent multiple micronutrient deficiency associated with household food insecurity (Ghose et al., 2016). Gender socialization is a determinant in food insecurity. Thus, women know very well about food needs and obstacles precisely because they carry the burden of responsibility for feeding their families, without having the necessary relevant opportunities and rights, and they embody the effects of this contradiction.

There is robust empirical evidence linking gender discrimination and oppression within the family and inequalities in food availability. Women often allot food to others before themselves and they eat less fruit, vegetables and protein. Therefore, food insecurity experiences should be considered in public

3 I consider this concept to be inadequate, because it is not an excess of nutrition that produces obesity in poor people, but the lack of nutritious food.

policy in a gender-specific way (Johnson, Sharkey, & Lackey, 2018). In Costa Rica, data validates the connection between gender and hunger, and the effects of malnutrition, hidden hunger and other forms of food insecurity in pregnant women (INAMU & IMAS, 2016). Hunger in pregnant women not only has devastating effects on their metabolisms and mental health, but also affects foetal development. It changes the foetus' genomes, transforming its metabolism in utero through epigenetic modifications. As a result, hunger becomes an intergenerational form of injustice (Scorza, Duarte, Hipwell, & Posner, 2019) (Reuben et al., 2020). Children who are hungry are at a higher risk of school failure and mental illness in adulthood (Weinreb et al., 2002). Living in hunger pushes people to the limits. To put food on the table, many young kids get involved in criminal activities such as drug trafficking or robbery, as I found out in Tirrases.

5 Discussion

5.1 Listen to the Voices of Hunger

Feminist food justice gives moral and epistemic value to the experience of hunger. The voices of people who are constantly dealing with hunger and suffer their loved one's hunger must be heard, recognized and validated in order to achieve food justice.

As Page-Reeves (2015) has argued, we need to think about food insecurity in a different way, paying special attention to those who are "off the edge of the table" (p. 4) in order to understand how power structures shape access to food, as well as meanings and relationships through food. Based on Scheper-Hughes and Lock (1987), I propose the notion of the hungry body as the product of social, economic and cultural relations determined by political negotiations that often take place outside the borders of the country where that body exists and survives. The hungry body is an intersectional materiality, in the sense that it experiences and deals with hunger in a different way according to sex/gender, ethnicity/race, immigration status, age, level of education, etc. According to these social and material links, subjectivity is transformed by the experience of hunger. This lack is the product of dispossession, which in turn speaks of the accumulation and modes of production in contemporary neoliberalism.

Chilton and Booth (2007) looked at the effects of hunger on Afro-descendant women who visited community food banks in a highly vulnerable area of Philadelphia, USA. They identified the category of "hunger of the mind", which describes the stress and anxiety produced by poverty, violence and trauma. Those harms are part of a larger pattern in the lived experience of food insecurity. The women interviewed identified stressors such as welfare requirements, disrespectful or unhelpful social workers, the daily difficulties of being poor,

having young children or teenagers, grief over the loss of a loved one, having friends and neighbours with equally stressful lives, and safety concerns related to living in violent neighbourhoods.

A Colombian study on hunger and pregnant teenagers by López-Cano and Restrepo-Mesa (2014) shows similar results to Scheper-Hughes (1989) and Chilton and Booth (2007). The authors of the study conclude that "food insecurity limits not only the possibilities of feeding but the possibilities of dreaming: living in an environment with deficiencies made pregnant women perceive the future in a painful and uncertain way" (López-Cano & Restrepo-Mesa, 2014: 84). They found that poor pregnant teenagers could only afford to eat very small portions of food that did not meet the minimum nutritional requirements for their age and pregnancy condition. Some participants in the study, for instance, reported that some days all they would eat was a small amount of rice and a single egg, and sweetened water with bread for dinner.

5.2 Voices of Hunger in an urban Costa Rican Community

Tirrases de Curridabat is an impoverished urban community in San José, Costa Rica. Some of the families are lower-middle class, but a growing number of families there are living in poverty. Many live in informal settlements and have either migrated from other parts of Costa Rica or from Nicaragua. Most people in the community work on a temporary informal basis as construction workers, domestic workers, security guards, cooks, street vendors, etc. There are no farming areas or community gardens in Tirrases. Most women lack formal employment and depend on their partners, charity offered by neo-Pentecostal churches[4], and on what they can earn by doing casual/informal jobs.

Despite pressures from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for Latin America, Costa Rica still has remnants of a welfare state, which provides essential services in poor communities such as Tirrases. There is a primary care healthcare center, two elementary schools, a high school and a CEN-CINAI centre providing food and care for dozens of boys and girls from birth up to the age of five. Through CEN-CINAI, *La Cometa*, and education programs for women offered by the Institute for Social Assistance (IMAS) and the National Institute for Women (INAMU), I got in touch with women in the community and participated with them in various educational and communal activities. Through interviews and group discussions, I became familiar with their experiences regarding hunger and food insecurity. Based on the interviews and participant observations, I identified the following categories of women's personal experience of food insecurity and hunger.

4 The presence and influence of neo-Pentecostal churches have increased amongst poor communities in Tirrases and elsewhere, as they offer material and emotional support in addition to spiritual community.

5.2.1 Hunger as Struggle

Hunger is a constant challenge that women in Tirrases must solve, with or without money. As discussed in previous sections, in highly conservative societies, feeding the family is commonly understood as a woman's duty. In Tirrases, all women must help with this task. For girls and teenagers, participating in food-related activities is part of their preparation for motherhood, which is taken to be the normal destiny of all women.

Most of the women I interviewed see motherhood and care work, which includes food provision and preparation, as fundamental socio-political tasks. As Laura put it: "I do my best and sacrifice things every day because I am raising good men and women for this country". Cecilia described her life as follows: "All day I'm thinking about what I should do to feed them, so that they go to school with clean clothes, so that they study and not fail their classes. I want them to have a better future".

Most of the women I met during fieldwork living with a partner mentioned that the men they live with are reluctant to give money to buy food for the family. They give little and demand that the women find a way to cover as many expenses as possible with it, not just food. As Teresa explained:

> I used to work, so I was very independent. I am the kind of person who asks once and if I see that he is not going to give me anything, I see how to get it. I'm not into that whole 'Give me, give me, give me' stuff. I ask once. He knows what I need, what the *güilas* [children] need. And if no, then no. I do not ask twice.

Dignity is a value for these women, and part of their daily struggle consists of feeding their families without harming their dignity or that of their children.

Patricia's case illustrates the domestic tensions in the relationships between women and male providers: "I buy a chicken a fortnight. The chicken is for him. We never eat chicken. And he complains because he says we spend a lot on food. I sometimes hold back my hunger so that the food will last". Gender inequality adds to the ethos of sacrificial motherhood that is dominant in the Christian tradition. As a result, in households where there is not enough for everyone to eat, women feel obliged to make sacrifices so that their children and husbands can have more food.

Amanda, a Nicaraguan domestic worker, gets up every day at 4am to get her children's meals ready. She is the sole breadwinner in the family. She says that she trained her three children to eat whatever she puts on the table with pleasure, "even if it is only bean broth with rice. But sometimes they want more, and there is no more. They tell me the food was good, they want a little more, but I can't give them more". She has to pay a neighbour every day to watch her children while she goes to work. The wage she receives is not enough, however, to pay for the rent for

the tiny house where she lives, the bills, food expenses, and to keep the children in school. Families like Amanda's require support from the state or from charities to help them make ends meet. Without social solidarity, these families are on the brink of homelessness, children might drop out of school to help their mothers in informal jobs, or they might even get involved in drug dealing.

5.2.2 Hunger as normalized Harm

Constant food insecurity affects the physical and emotional health of women and their children. Almost all the women I met during fieldwork have some type of metabolic-related disease: diabetes, hypertension, obesity[5]. They also struggle with anxiety and sadness. Francisca told me that "the only thing that keeps me alive are my children. If I died, they would be helpless. But sometimes despair is so great I want to die". Teresa said that very often "either they eat or I eat. I wait for them to eat first. That is why my self-esteem is so low. And now it turns out that I have fibromyalgia".

Healthcare providers' response to these emotional and physical indicators of stress is to prescribe psychotropic drugs, which does not contribute to solving the structural causes of the problem and can very easily generate more problems, like creating dependence on the drugs (Cubero-Alpízar et al., 2020). Healthcare providers are not trained to identify the structural causes of hunger and its consequences. Hence, the intricate effects of hunger on the physical and mental health of these women are neither recognized nor effectively addressed. As Margarita explained:

> I'm trapped, stuck, because I kind of have more expenses, more needs, then I can't afford any of it. In fact, today in my house there is nothing to eat, you know what I mean? But I keep trying to figure things out, one does not stop thinking about it. My son needs a full stomach so he can concentrate and study. If he's hungry he won't be able to study.

The feeling of being trapped is pervasive among the women I interviewed. Some of them cried during our conversations. They had never discussed these situations with anyone, or perhaps only with their mothers or sisters. Solidarity between family members and neighbours is one of the key survival strategies in the community. Solidarity is often tacit, however, and much goes without saying. Although the fact that there is no need to give many explanations indicates that everyone in the community understands what is happening, an adverse effect of this silence is the lack of a safe space to unload the vast emotional weight they carry.

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5 Obesity in these cases is not the result of over-eating, but of chronic malnutrition for almost all their lives due to a diet that is insufficient in nutrients and, very often, high in empty calories.

These findings are similar to those of Chilton and Booth (2007), Gathwaite (2016) and Maynard et al. (2018). Hunger is the result of structural injustice that produces material and symbolic harms, aggravating other forms of exclusion and discrimination. It is a form of "necropolitics" (Mbembe, 2003) that could be resisted and confronted through a food production and distribution system guided by feminist food justice principles.

5.2.3 Hunger as Humiliation

For many women, the constant struggle to feed their families, and being forced to resort to social assistance provided by the state or relying on the charity of churches, is humiliating. They feel as if they have failed and are being judged by the rest of society. Teresa told me: "I don't want them to give me anything. It is not true that we are lazy here and that we want to live off handouts. I just want to have a chance to earn a living". Teresa has an enormous talent for crafts. She knits and sews beautiful clothes. But she must sell them at excessively low prices to try to compete with stores that sell cheap low-quality imported products. Laura explained her plight as follows:

> We have to tolerate and endure, humble ourselves, because we have to go and ask for help. I had to go to IMAS for help and it came almost eight years after I asked for it so that my children could continue in school. I have four children. All of them are studying and there are days when I wake up worried because I don't have anything to give them for breakfast. I admit that sometimes my children have had to go to school on an empty stomach and it worries me… the school gave very good breakfasts, but not now. Now they are limited. In the cafeteria now they only give them a supplement.

In the above quote, Laura refers to a recent change in the public schools' meals policy. Until 2019, public schools in Costa Rica provided a full breakfast or lunch (depending on the class time) to all students. Due to a change in public health policy, supposedly to prevent obesity in childhood, they now only offer a food supplement and not a complete meal. The problem is that the new policy does not address the needs of the most food insecure communities. Additionally, the plan does not take into consideration the relationship between food injustice, obesity and the epigenetic effects of hunger on metabolic disorders.

Once I brought something for breakfast to one of the meetings with a group of women in Tirrases. Rosa, a young woman who works at a popular roast chicken restaurant chain, thanked me. When we spoke in private, she told me with tears in her eyes that she had not had breakfast that day because she had nothing to eat at home. Rosa lives with her children and her mother, who is ill. Her mother has

no pension, even though she worked as a domestic worker for the same family for twenty years. They never paid her social security and she did not know how to claim her labour rights. Rosa's mother is a Nicaraguan migrant with legal residence in Costa Rica, but she was afraid to report her former employers. Now Rosa has to support her mother and her children with her very low salary and sometimes she cannot afford to eat herself. She only eats at the restaurant, but her lunch time is after 3pm and sometimes she has to go without any food until then. Rosa also suffers from anaemia, the consequence of a benign tumour in her uterus. She needs a hysterectomy, but she fears losing her job if she were to take a month of sick leave.

One can see the chain of humiliation and abuse of these women, whose vulnerability and defencelessness are exacerbated by their food insecurity. In other words, hunger is both a cause and an effect of the violations and degradations of their rights. Migration status, racism and xenophobia exacerbate their vulnerabilities and limit their access to social services.

One of the harshest situations that the women I spoke with shared with me is sexual exploitation. Marcela described the case of one of her neighbours, who had had no alternative but to accept an offer to work as a sex worker. The situation was degrading for this woman, but she had no alternative. Marcela received the same offer, but she had declined. However, in the course of our conversation she stopped for a moment and said "I haven't done it yet. The day could come when I have to".

Additionally, many teenagers become pregnant as a result of improper relationships with older men that are approved by their families. Usually an agreement is reached between an older man with money who is interested in the teenage girl and, in exchange for the family's tolerance of this relationship, he 'helps' them with their expenses. Clearly, this is a case of sexual exploitation of minors, and such relations are typified in Costa Rica as a felony, though it is not uncommon for these girls to believe they are in a romantic relationship. The man usually leaves once he finds out the girl is pregnant. As a result, there is one more girl who does not finish school, one more child to feed and no source of income.

Social patterns of gender oppression, discrimination and exploitation put women and girls at greater risk of food insecurity. Even worst, teenage girls often have a second and even a third child before reaching adulthood. They endure hunger while pregnant, which means they have an increased risk of problems associated with pregnancy, labour and post-partum, and their children also suffer the effects of undernourishment. This is what intergenerational structural injustice looks like.

5.2.4 Hunger as a disciplinary Mechanism

Through the interviews and observations, I identified two main forms of disciplinary practices: one in domestic life and the other at the institutional level (Bellows, Lemke, Jenderedjian, & Scherbaum, 2015; Bellows & Núñez Burbano de Lara, 2016).

In the domestic context, male providers can use hunger as part of the power mechanisms to force their partner to submit to their authority. This is the case with María, who has four children, does not have a job and is financially dependent on her husband. María went to a clinic because she had discomfort in her genitals. They diagnosed her with a sexually transmitted infection. Since María's only sexual partner was her husband, it was clear that the infection came from him. Treating the infection required both sexual partners to take medication for a week and abstain from sexual intercourse during those days. When she told this to her husband, he became angry and refused to take the medicine. He demanded that María have sex with him, or else he would not give her money to buy food. María tried to solve the problem by asking a neighbour for help. Her neighbour agreed to feed María's children for two days. However, when María's husband found out about this he was furious and forbade the children to go there. Cases like this are frequent and domestic violence easily escalates.

At the state level, institutional culture enables the discrimination and revictimization of vulnerable people who need assistance. Tacit standards prevail about how a truly poor and needy person (particularly a woman) should look or act. These are performative markers interpreted by service providers as indicators of 'truth'. In Laura's words, "you have to look bad for the social worker to believe you. They check you up. If you put on a lot of makeup, do your hair, do your nails, they scold you and ask you why you walk around looking like this, with what money did you buy those things". I asked Laura how she felt when the IMAS social worker came to her home to evaluate her request for financial support for her school-aged children. She replied that "for me this whole process was degrading. I felt bad, because I felt like I was begging. We are a family of six and my husband just had a stroke two months ago. Right now, he can't work".

Several studies describe how social perceptions about the poor influence social policies (Appelbaum, 2001). As Cooley, Brown-Iannuzzi & Boudreau describe for the US: "When people imagine welfare recipients, research indicates that they often imagine lazy, Black Americans who are perpetually dependent on government assistance" (2019: 1). A similar situation happens in Costa Rica. The neoliberal turn is coherent with such revictimizing narratives and facilitates the use of welfare policies as control instruments for disciplining individuals.

6 Conclusions

In a society where gender roles and power relationships perpetuate the sexual division of labour, food insecure women deal with high levels of emotional, physical and moral distress. Above, I have described the situation of women who are mothers; however, it is necessary to emphasize that the elderly and disabled people are also at high risk of food insecurity. Public school cafeterias in impoverished communities such as Tirrases sometimes receive grandparents who have nothing to eat at home, although this is not contemplated in the official policy.

Constant lack causes a social trauma that is ignored by the rest of society. Hunger has mental and physical health consequences in children, including an increased risk of chronic disease later in life. In Tirrases, struggling to provide and allocate food in the family demands a lot of women's attention and energy, leaving them exhausted and vexed; even more so because they know there is plenty of food, resources and comforts all around them in privileged neighbourhoods where some of them work as domestic workers.

The hungry body is not only hungry for food, but also for dignity and justice. In the course of my fieldwork, God and inequality emerged in almost all my conversations and meetings, often in expressions of indignation over the lack of empathy, solidarity and justice the women experienced. "How is it possible that people who have plenty of things are not more generous with those who have less?" Rosa once asked me. Phrases like this were constantly repeated. "I've seen that they throw away food that's still good. And here we are starving", said Mariela, a Nicaraguan domestic worker, whose employers fired her after she returned from maternity leave, leaving her unemployed with a newborn and four school-aged children.

"But God sees everything", Mariela told me. The mention of God always comes after a story about the outrage they feel over the continual mistreatment they have to put up with. Phrases such as "I hold onto God", "God willing", "With God's help" and "God will judge them" were frequently repeated. Religion is one of the few emotional and moral havens for women in the community. Religious narratives appeal to a promise of justice that will come in the future. They believe that those who have humiliated and harmed them will have to answer to God. It seems to me that this moral need for a coming moment of equality and reparation is as fundamental to them as a plate of hot food on the table.

It is a striking finding that the women I met feel more certain in justice being administered by a divinity in the future than in the justice (distributive and formal) that a well-organized society should provide to all. It reveals how hunger breaks people's confidence in how a society is organized. Hunger proves that a political community that expects its members to respect each other, to abide by the law and to trust its institutions is failing to fulfil its most fundamental principles if it cannot secure the most basic needs for people to live a dignified life.

In the perspective of Sen's (1981) theory of human rights as entitlements, the difference between the notion of the human right to food and food as an entitlement lies at the core of the global market economy, which is based on private property. The entitlement of an individual is determined by their original endowment. A person will end up facing food insecurity if their basic entitlements do not comprise a group of goods that includes enough nutritious food for them and their dependents. A person will also become hungry if a change in their resources (such as loss of land, loss of the ability to work due to illness, or a change in their ability to exchange or acquire goods) makes it impossible for them to continue acquiring enough food.

Sen indicates that hunger and famines can be analysed in terms of failures in the relationships between entitlements. For this reason, food insecurity and famines can occur even when there is an abundance of food in a particular region and time. Hence, measuring per capita food production in order to determine if there is food security is usually misleading. The main objective of Sen's analysis based on entitlements is not only to problematize the limited focus on food availability, but also to provide a general framework to understand hunger. Many factors – from drought, inflationary pressures, massive job losses, political crises – can create obstacles for people to get the food they need, but what underlies hunger are the determinants of each individual's set of entitlements. That is, the structural problem is one of justice. A well-organized society can respond to an emergency – a climate or economic crisis – in such a way that people do not have to suffer hunger. In other words, what Sen describes as failures in the relationships between entitlements are the result of forms of structural injustice that could be fixed if there was the political will to do so, based on a broad societal and ethical commitment to protect basic human rights.

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Cooking

Against the Responsibilization of Marginalized Women for Clean Energy in India: Intersectional Gender Relations, Power and Social-Ecological Transformation in a Neoliberal Hindu-Nationalist State

Christine Löw

1 India's Neoliberal Hindutva Project and the Empowerment of Women below the Poverty Line in Times of Climate Disaster

India is currently facing unprecedented heat waves, droughts, hailstorms and floods, leading to hundreds of deaths and ruined stocks of rice and other staple food crops – contemporary effects of global climate disaster. The heightened pollution of rivers, soil and air, deforestation and biodiversity loss are further contributors to extreme weather. This situation has resulted in income poverty, the destruction of livelihoods, insufficient nutrition, increasing hunger and health risks for intersectionally marginalized groups, especially rural women*, Adivasi, Dalits[1], farmers, LGBTIQ and Muslim communities (Down to Earth, 2023). Acknowledging that India is highly vulnerable to climate change, the National Action Plan for Climate Change (NAPCC, 2008) integrates sustainable development and growth with energy efficiency, a transition towards renewables and improved energy access to 660 million people from hitherto excluded groups.

In May 2016, the Indian government launched the social welfare scheme *Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana* (PMUY) to distribute 50 million LPG connections to women of households living below the poverty line[2]. In September,

1 When referring to governmental documents, the terms 'Scheduled Caste' (SC) and 'Scheduled Tribe' (ST) are used because they have been introduced in the Indian constitution as juridical categories for affirmative action/quotas, welfare and social policy schemes. In other contexts, I use the self-chosen name Dalit (untouchable) and Adivasi (indigenous/first settler/native).

2 With the objective of independent India 1948 to eradicate poverty, empirical data about 'the poor' have been gathered to create poverty measure instruments (based on income or expenditure only). In the early 1970s to target services to the most needy, the government developed a measure by which families or households (not individuals) were categorized as living 'below the poverty line'. From 2002, India identified rural households as 'below the poverty line' (BPL) according to a thirteen-item census questionnaire, covering topics such as food, housing, work, land ownership, assets, education, health, status of children and so on. If rural families are qualified to receive a BPL-card, they are eligible for government support such as subsidized food, electricity and schemes to construct housing and encourage self-employment activities. According to the Tendulkar Expert group, a person who lives on a monthly expenditure of INR 1,000 or less in cities and INR 816 or less in villages, at 2011-'12 prices is poor. This one-dimensional threshold is used to determine poverty status in India in the context of the World Bank's income of below 1,90 USD/per day as indicator of extreme poverty in discussions about Sustainable Development Goals (SDG).

2019 the target of 80 million new LPG connections has been achieved. The aim is to provide clean cooking gas to women in rural and deprived households, which were otherwise using traditional cooking fuels such as firewood, coal, cow-dung cakes etc. The scheme has an explicitly gendered frame, aiming "to safeguard the health of women and children by providing them with a clean cooking fuel – LPG, so that they do not have to compromise their health in smoky kitchens or wander in unsafe areas collecting firewood" (MoPNG, n.d.). To promote women's empowerment, LPG connections are registered and issued to women heads of household who complete the relevant application and meet the eligibility criteria.

At the same time, the government is expanding its coal strategy, which has led to intensive controversies over energy, climate change, welfare policies and social justice. Indigenous and environmental movements have protested against the interests of the national elites, the Indian state and transnational companies – with Adivasi women spearheading the struggles. Thus, energy issues are crucially interconnected with climate disasters, sustainable development, intersectional social injustices and gender relations at three levels. First, to deliver inclusive growth and development, the government aims to provide one third of the population that currently uses firewood and dung cake as fuel with clean cooking energy. Second, to reduce deforestation and combat climate change, almost 700 million people should be provided with clean cooking energy. Third, distributing cooking stoves to women living below the poverty line aims to increase women's wellbeing, health and empowerment.

2 Feminist Critiques of Neoliberal and Neo-Nationalist[3] Strategies to 'Rescue' poor Women through Clean Energy

Whereas at a first glance, PMUY appears to be a gendered social policy program that will particularly benefit rural women who are multidimensionally poor considering i.e. housing, food, health, income, assets, education, land ownership, I suggest analyzing the scheme within broader feminist critiques of welfare policies that strengthen neoliberal governance (Wilson et al., 2018). Referring to Amrita Chhachhi's feminist re-workings of Michel Foucault's model of neoliberal governmentality in the Indian context (2020), I will examine whether the structure and implementation of PMUY does in fact benefit poor women – as has been promoted by the government. This theoretical frame stresses that

3 I use Hindu-nationalist and neo-nationalist as synonyms by stressing the current project of establishing and normalizing right wings nationalist ideas, practices, laws, and institutions about Hindutva, neoliberal economics, exclusionary constructs of history, origin and nation/national identity intersecting with particular ideological constructions of gender relations, women, family & community, heterosexuality including a clearly anti-muslim orientation and oppression of critical voices and emancipatory movements within India against this political project (Chhachhi, 2020).

neoliberalism is not only an economic doctrine but also includes a new political rationality of gendered citizens and the state. Thus, poor women have been placed at the forefront of the Hindu right's economic, political and social agendas and are constructed as bodies to be protected and rescued.

The state's activities play a significant role in producing women as gendered neoliberal subjects who are simultaneously *entrepreneurial* and *altruistic*. This is enabled through a selective incorporation of feminist ideas such as empowerment, vulnerability and agency within the neoliberal discourses of countries, global institutions and their corporate partners (Chhachhi, 2020: 53). Chhachhi argues that present-day India must be understood as combining the two political projects of neoliberalism and Hindutva. The latter represents a modern political ideology which constructs a nation state that fuses a pure singular (Hindu) identity with being Indian, by establishing an exclusivist majoritarian nation (ibid.). The entanglement of market-oriented economic, social and environmental policies with the flexible and dynamic project of Hindutva affects intersectional gender relations and reinforces or changes patriarchal structures for *differently positioned women* in India along patriarchy, casteism, internal colonialism against indigenous groups, class inequalities. To examine and challenge the instrumental use of marginalized women for the new financialized Hindu family, community and nation, intersectional feminist accounts must include the present struggles of feminist Adivasi and Dalit women against dispossession, the destruction of livelihoods and the neo-nationalist turn in politics.

Starting from this background, in part 3 I examine whether PMUY addresses intersectional gendered inequalities concerning energy along the lines of access, affordability, availability, transparency and gendered power relations. I argue that the scheme – in stark contrast to its goals – often deepens intersectional gendered inequalities by turning poor women into market citizens and enables the Modi government to position itself as the 'saviour' of subaltern women; in contrast to the interests of middle/upper class women and the political centre that is characterized as serving only the needs of elite women. In part 4, I examine the current protests and struggles of indigenous and environmental groups against the expansion of coal mines, which are led by women, and which challenge gendered neoliberal and Hindu-nationalist narratives. Finally, I argue that issues of energy access, use and governance must be understood in a broader context of sustainable development, climate mitigation, social-economic and intersectional gendered inequalities. Thus, models for transversal feminist energy justice need to actively conjoin with collective activism and knowledge from the struggles of women/feminists movements, LGBTIQ groups, indigenous peoples, farmers and environmental organizations for a just world.

3 The Indian Clean Cooking Initiative PMUY

In the following sections I will examine the results of the implementation of PMUY in terms of access, affordability, availability, gendered participation and transparency for women living below the poverty line. Focus will be placed on the contrast between the expressed goals of the scheme and the material effects, in the context of unequal gender relations intersecting with power structures along casteism, internal colonialism/oppression of indigenous people and capitalist class relations.

3.1 Access and the PMUY Beneficiaries: truly Intersectionally Gendered or Essentializing Women?

The PMUY handbook identifies any woman over 18 years from a household below the poverty line who does not have access to an LPG connection as eligible, with preference for Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs)[4] and weaker sections of society, according to the latest Socio Economic and Caste Census (SECC) from 2011. The SECC 2011 data demonstrate correlations between poverty, casteism and indigeneity: while SCs and STs together comprise 28% of the total population, they form 43% of the total population living below the poverty line. Within social groups, 29% of SCs and 45% of STs are living below the poverty line, compared to only 12% for the General Caste. Abhishek Jain, Saurabh Tripathi, Sunil Mani, Sasmita Patnaik, Tauseef Shahidi and Karthik Ganesan (2018: 56ff.) show that financial poverty is also directly linked to energy poverty: as of 2012, households below the poverty line spent about 13% of their monthly expenditure on their energy needs, including fuel and light, compared to 9% for households above the poverty line. Socio-economic data from the National Sample Survey (NSS) 2011–2012[5] reveal how the penetration of modern fuels like LPG varies by caste and indigenous belonging. LPG as a primary cooking fuel in rural India was used by 23.3% of households in the category ‘Others’, as compared to 5.3% of ST households and 8.9% of SC households. Through PMUY, the overall proportion of SC households using LPG has increased from 12% in 2015 to 55% in 2018; for ST households, LPG use has increased from 8% to 38% in the same period (ibid.). Thus, the scheme has been inclusive in terms of caste, indigeneity and economic status, by expanding its purview to include marginalized groups.

At the same time, PMUY is not entirely gender-transformative, because it promotes women as the primary cooks within households (MoPNG, 2023). Furthermore, it maintains a separating logic of marginalized sections of the

4 See footnote 1.
5 https://catalog.ihsn.org/index.php/catalog/3283

population, namely STs and SCs versus women. Nowhere in the scheme is the notion of intersecting inequalities along gender, caste and class mentioned. Thus, the lack of landownership among female STs and SCs – a prerequisite for home delivery of LPG cookers within PMUY – cannot be seen as resulting from the current practices of dispossession, displacement and exploitation of land, forests and water due to the neoliberal macroeconomic politics of the Indian government (Löw, 2021). As Sasmita Patnaik and Shaily Jha (2020) emphasize, PMUY is mixed in its outcomes and delivers gender equality only partially by isolating gender from the impact of caste and class, and the interactions among them. Thus, it is not possible to see that in rural India, casteism intertwined with gendered capitalism makes women from ST and SC groups more constrained than others in meeting their energy demands.

3.2 Affordability and the Logic of the Market

Aiming to provide material access to clean energy for poor ST and SC women, PMUY is expected to account for affordability. Despite the credit-linked subsidy of INR 1,600 (USD 23) provided by PMUY to assist women to secure a new LPG connection, the remaining upfront cost of INR 1,600 must be borne by the beneficiaries. This amount can be availed as a loan from the oil marketing companies (OMCs) and adjusted against the monthly subsidy amount receivable by the beneficiaries for each refill. Surveys show that the median monthly expenditure on cooking fuel of PMUY SC households is INR 165 (USD 2.4) and INR 41 (USD 0.6) for ST households, in comparison to INR 240 (USD 3.4) for general households (Jain et al., 2018: 43f.). Particularly for ST and SC women with low incomes, the refill prices are too expensive. As of 1 August 2022, 9.2 million customers did not take any refills in 2021-22, while 10.8 million took only one refill (Bhagirath, 2022). In India, the poverty line stands at about INR 32 (USD 0.45) per person per day for rural areas, with monthly household incomes between INR 1,000–5,000 (USD 14–70) among the poorest (SECC, 2011). A refill cost of INR 853 (USD 10.27) in July 2022 remains unaffordable for many, as other family needs take precedence (ibid.).

The high cost of LPG combined with the easy availability of biomass hinders increased uptake of LPG (Rao et al., 2020). Moreover, almost 74% of PMUY beneficiaries opted to take out a loan from the OMCs to cover half of the LPG connection cost under PMUY. Cylinders must be refilled seven to eight times at the market rate to reach the minimum threshold for the loan to be written off. The subsidy per cylinder amounts to around one-fourth of its cost (subject to change with the market price of LPG). This implies that the poorest households have to pay the highest prices to use LPG. Households with intersecting vulnerabilities of caste, indigeneity, gender and poor economic status are often unable to afford to pay for LPG refills (ibid.).

PMUY thus targets poor SC and ST women with a monetized clean cooking program that expects them to pay the highest price for the refills. In opposition to the language of the scheme that talks about the financial inclusion of marginalized women, PMUY establishes a process of energy transition that tends to deepen intersectional gendered injustices. This is further exacerbated by the direct transfer of subsidies (via the Direct Benefit Transfer for the LPG scheme), wherein the subsidy amount is transferred to the beneficiaries' bank account, resulting in a steep upfront cost (paying the market price of an LPG refill). Patnaik and Jha (2020: 11) stress that PMUY does recognize inequality across social groups and gender in access to clean cooking energy. However, less attention is paid to the affordability of fuel, which is another important aspect, particularly for SC and ST women and female-headed households. In their policy recommendations, both authors suggest gender-transformative implementations that would include recognition of casteism and anti-indigenous bias as structural social inequalities at all levels. Similarly, design, implementation, and policies through the lens of gender and social inclusion frameworks should provide greater and specific forms of financial-social support for SC and ST women and female-headed households with the goal of granting them the same quality of energy as other women (ibid.).

3.3 Availability: Home Delivery and Walking Distance

The availability of LPG and refills is characterized by a lack of adequate delivery infrastructure in rural areas. Patnaik and Jha (2020: 8) found that households had to travel a median distance of 6.4 km (from 4 to 8 km) one-way to procure LPG. The home delivery rate of cylinders remains low for both PMUY and non-PMUY households across social categories at the intersections of caste and gender. The rate of expansion in the distribution of LPG has not kept pace with the increased number of new connections provided under the PMUY scheme. However, unless home delivery is implemented in practice, many women will depend on male family members for mobility and transportation of the cylinders. This challenge is further exacerbated for newly-married or younger women, who are also the primary cooks in most households. Home delivery varies not only by state but also significantly by social group; ST households have the worst rate of home deliveries. This is influenced by the proportion of the population of a particular social group and the rate of home delivery of LPG in the state (Jain et al., 2018: 45). For instance, low home delivery rates in Jharkhand and a high proportion of STs in the state population influence the overall rate of home delivery for STs. These results demonstrate that PMUY-guidelines for LPG distributors do not consider the structural roots of differentiated energy access and thus cannot integrate different needs and policies to enable energy justice for subaltern women. Moreover, being an LPG distributor requires access to land;

thus, despite the existence of reservations for Dalits and Adivasis, few Dalit and Adivasi women would have the necessary land to apply for distributorships.

3.4 Transparency in Financial and Digital Inclusion

Problematic is also the enforced link between the application form and providing a detailed address, a Jan Dhan bank account (an account linked to the Modi government's financial inclusion program that aims to expand affordable access to financial services such as bank accounts, remittances, credit, insurance and pensions) and the Aadhar number (a unique government-issued identity number based on biometric and demographic data) of all members of the household. Under PMUY, consumers need to link their bank accounts to their Aadhar number in order to receive the subsidies on LPG refills. The Direct Benefits Transfer for LPG scheme, under the aegis of the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, also requires consumers to have an Aadhar number in order to access the LPG subsidy. As Priya Chacko (2020) notes, PMUY encourages financial inclusion by requiring recipients, particularly rural Dalit and Adivasi women, to have a bank account and an Aadhaar number. The claim here is that PMUY activates access to credit, insurance, savings accounts and electronic payments via financial institutions for women who have been typically excluded from these endowments.

In addition, PMUY, which its extensive funding by the BJP government, has been marketed using images of mothers, daughters and Prime Minister Modi. It has been promoted and praised by Modi on YouTube and Twitter, two modes of communication that establish a direct connection with an audience. Crucial for Chacko is the construction of "shared resentments of poor women in different communities, an antagonistic frontier against elites who previously supposedly denied the poor access to cooking gas, and shared aspirations for a better future driven by entrepreneurship" (2020: 9). In her reading, the populist discourse of PMUY builds on protecting poor women from unsafe cooking, explicitly mentioning "marginalized, Dalits, Tribal communities" – in stark contrast to the middle class and established women in urban India who were the focus of centrist politics before the BJP came to power in 2014. In this understanding, PMUY represents an empowerment agenda of marketized social policies, which turn marginalized women into virtuous market citizens who embody neoliberal rationalities and Hindu-nationalist social values.

3.5 Gendered decision power, voice and autonomy in energy

In the context of cooking energy, PMUY assumes that women bear a disproportionate burden when it comes to both collecting biomass for fuel and cooking. While the obligation on women to collect biomass for fuel might be reduced in the case of LPG, the supply of LPG is transferred onto formal and monetized distribution networks with a financial cost. This cost places an additional responsibility on women to negotiate for the recurring expense of the fuel. Despite the subsidy linked to PMUY being credited to the female beneficiary's bank account, the decision-making with respect to the purchase of LPG refills remains dominated by the economic situation of the household overall, including other (male) household members.

Until 2018, two thirds of decisions to order LPG refills were made by men (Jain et al. 2018: 72.). Among households that had LPG, only 23% reported that the women of the household (whether the head of the household, spouse, daughter or daughter-in-law) made the decision as to when to order a refill. In 67% of the households surveyed, it was men (head of the household, spouse, son or grandson) who decided when to order a refill. In only 10% of households did both the head of the household and spouse decide together on when to order a refill. Women's participation in decision-making was highest in West Bengal (59%), lowest in Madhya Pradesh (16%). In addition, only 17% of the LPG-using households confirmed that women placed orders for cylinders, i.e. booked a cylinder in person or through a call/SMS (ibid.).

Furthermore, women depended on male members of the household not only to apply for the refill but also to transport the refilled cylinder from LPG dealers. The inability of women to transport the heavy LPG cylinders (which weigh around 14 kg) to and from a dealer's location themselves added to the average delay in the purchase of refills. The most common reasons for dissatisfaction among both PMUY and non-PMUY households were that LPG is expensive to use and that distributors are too far away (sometimes 8 km walking distance) (Jain et al., 2018: 76f.).

4 Contested Discussions within Diverse Intersectional Feminist Movements and Research

As the research on implementation of the Indian PMUY scheme on energy access for rural poor women in part 3 has shown, affordability is the biggest barrier to LPG adoption. LPG is economically not reasonable for many ST and SC woman because of the high prices for refills and the inadequacy of subsidies. In 2021, a study about clean cooking energy access in India stated that 80% of female interviewees are unable to afford LPG (either due to the cost of the connection or recurring expenses on fuel) as the primary reason for not having an LPG

connection in states like Jharkhand, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal, and Odisha (Mani et al., 2021). In 2023, with prices going up to INR 1,000 (USD 12) feminist NGOs complained that it is "disturbing to see the obstacles that women in poor households face due to the exorbitantly priced LPG refills across India" (The Wire 2023).

Based on the empirical findings, it can be stated that due to the financialized logic of the scheme, which combines funding with a loan, PMUY entails a calculated risk for poor women to run into debt. Thus, PMUY entails a calculated risk for poor women to run into debt due to its financialized logic combining funding with a loan. It is questionable whether these forms of feminized financial responsibility allow PMUY beneficiaries more hours for family and education and guarantee them more dignity. Moreover, the issue of access to LPG refills reveals that the design of PMUY places additional burdens on many women living below the poverty line, with long walking distances to distributors and increased dependence on male relatives due to the weight of the cylinders (Cabiyo, Isha & Levine, 2021). Beyond that, the examination of female decision-making power in the household has demonstrated that patriarchal structures in decisions about refills between spouses, for instance, will not simply change by establishing women as the targets of clean energy programs. Without gender-transformative politics, policies and institutions, SC and ST women remain obliged to negotiate hierarchical power relations on an individual basis. Thus, I argue that from a critical feminist view PMUY should not be analysed as an isolated welfare measure for poor marginalized women but must be understood in the context of India's new project of neoliberal gendered Hindutva.

Referring to Chhachhi's analysis about linking the Indian hegemonic projects of neoliberal Hindutva and the reinforcement/reconstruction of patriarchal gender relations, the clean cooking scheme can be interpreted as another example of female financial emancipation that does nothing to change the deeply misogynistic and capitalist logics of financial markets. PMUY, with its "rhetoric of 'empowerment' of poor women […] sets up conditions for indebtedness, increasing burdens on women given their continuing responsibility for domestic labour and digital financialization" (Chhachhi, 2020: 73). In consequence, the 'rural poor women' who should be saved from "health problems, drudgery and time intensive work" (MoPNG, n.d.) might in fact become the object of intensified control and surveillance by the state.

Parallelly, PMUY can be described as a form of public engagement that is emptied of demands for political power, socio-economic justice and democratic participation. While PMUY seems to entail a recognition of intersectional inequalities along gender, caste and class in India, the design and implementation of the scheme separates non-hegemonic sections of the population from democratic deliberations and decisions. It is important to understand that in contemporary India, neoliberal governance directs the language of democracy *against* the demos (Chhachhi, 2020: 72). Although PMUY emphasizes devolution

of authority, the government relies on discourses about top-down authority from a male leader who knows best how to empower non-elite women and save them from unhealthy cooking practices and miserable life conditions. In contrast to democratic ideas of feminist self-empowerment and women's/female power over their own lives, resources and decisions, PMUY can be better understood as a populist strategy of patriarchal, marketized Hindutva ideas and practices. Following Chhachhi, it embodies crucial aspects of the government's 'Make in India' campaign, which has been running since the BJP came to power in 2014, and which involves a shift away from redistribution through a welfare state towards financialization with a deepening of the paternalist contract through the "father as protector" (ibid.: 67).

Opposing the narrative of saving disadvantaged women through welfare schemes such as PMUY, in the last decade women-led movements of Adivasis, Dalit-Bahujan, Muslims, farmers, pastoralists and fishers have sprung up to protest the Indian developmental strategy for hydro- and solar power plants, coal mines, deforestation and land grabs for climate carbon projects (Ramdas, 2009). Coalitions between environmental, peasant and indigenous groups, intersectional feminist and LGBTIQ+ organizations have stressed that insufficient access to energy must be understood in relation to issues of povertization, gender injustices, dispossession from natural resources, displacement of rural collectives, and the BJP government's national, neofascist, neoliberal development and growth strategy (Patnaik, 2022). While it is often argued that the use of biomass cooking stoves is a major cause of forest loss, critical evidence suggests that commercial forestry, the clearing of land for industrial agriculture, urbanization and infrastructural projects, and other large-scale changes in land cover (through dams, hydro and solar power plants, mines) have far greater impacts than fuel wood harvesting (Global Forest Coalition, 2023). In addition, illegal logging and corruption within forest departments, neoliberal economic policies promoting unsustainable consumption, and climate change resulting in increased loss of 'natural' forest all mean that Dalit and Adivasi women have no choice but to collect woody biomass for sale and household use (Khandelwal et al., 2016: 4).

With the emergence of BJP's strategy for a green economy, forest-dependent women in India have begun to combat 'false climate solutions' that destroy both natural resources and their sustainable livelihoods (Ramdas & FSA, 2016). To mitigate climate change, India has adopted so-called 'nature-based solutions' (NBS), with a focus on protecting and restoring forests to ensure that billions of tons of carbon are captured in trees in the coming years. NBS programs such as Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+) are highly land-intensive and use the financialization of carbon, nature and the commons as a primary mode of combating climate change (World Rainforest Movement, 2022). REDD+ has been challenged by rural communities, and specifically women, because it views forests as sinks for CO2, which leads to their enclosure and the prevention of people from using forest resources for

their own livelihoods and survival (Löw, 2021). Evidence also demonstrates that REDD+ dispossess indigenous and rural people from their guaranteed land rights and threatens the autonomous ways of living of forest dwellers (Nandi & Garg, 2017; Löw 2020).

Situating India's narrative of energy transition in the context of climate mitigation, growth, and gender justice, social networks, NGOs and concerned scientists have revealed the government's strategy as a paradox of 'talk renewables, walk coal' (Roy/Schaffartzik, 2021). The government continues to rationalize its fossil fuel-intensive development trajectory under the pretext of poverty alleviation and 'democratization of the carbon space'. Several reforms in mining regulations, including relaxations in forest clearance processes, have been introduced to boost coal mining in the country (Agarwal & Dash, 2022). Coal – the single largest source of greenhouse gas emissions in India – has been hailed as a driver of industrial development, despite mounting evidence of its economic uncertainty. Furthermore, India's expansion of coal also extends into the conflicted development of renewable energy, in which land dispossession, exclusion and the deepening of intersectional gendered injustices are reproduced (Chhotray, 2022). Thus, many researchers describe the socio-ecological and political effects of hydro-, wind-, solar power plants as a replication of the power structures of the extractive coal industries that are associated with expropriating the livelihoods of rural and Adivasi communities, ignoring land and forest rights, destroying the ecosystems including biodiversity, worsening climate and environmental injustices (Del Bene et al., 2018). In addition, the government-led narrative that expansion of coal and renewables are needed to overcome energy poverty of rural groups – and in particular women – is questioned through research about Adivasis who live next to one of the most prestigious national wind power plants in the Western Ghats of Maharashtra and don't have access to electricity while the renewable energy project threatens their livelihoods and the rich biodiversity of the region (Lakhanpal, 2019).

Most of the country's coal mining projects are in Chhattisgarh, Odisha and Jharkhand, states with resource-rich territories (iron ore, bauxite, coal, limestone, diamond) as well as high Adivasi populations. Many indigenous activists and organizations have started to resist state-led and transnational coal mining. Strong mobilizations are taking place against the Adani coalmine project in Hasdeo Arad region in Chhattisgarh —the largest remaining intact forest area in India. The Ministry of Coal has mapped more than a billion metric tons of coal reserves in the area, spread over 1,878 square kilometres, of which 1,502 square kilometres is forest land (Bhutani, 2020). In particular, Adivasi women, together with their communities, have protested against the negative effects of coal mines (Hussain, 2021). They have pointed out how their land rights have been violated, rivers, air and soil poisoned, and their health, food status and wellbeing constrained (John, 2022; Khadse & Srinivasan, 2020). Feminist scholars have also analysed how mining projects strengthen violence against women, from

sexualized violence and trafficking into brothels to unjust compensation for land, repression of female activism and moral policing of women's mobility and labour (Survival, 2022). At the same time, women have been at the forefront of protests in the mining belt in Odisha, fighting against the state's violation of the Forest Rights Act (FRA) (Lund & Panda, 2015). The FRA allows Adivasis the right to claim legal ownership over the forests they have lived in and conserved for centuries. Contemporary feminist research suggests that development-by-dispossession in India combines environmental and gendered injustices (Dubey & Saxe, 2023).

It is therefore crucially important to analyse discourses on energy, gender relations and entangled social inequalities in India at a political and economic level. Current feminist discussions on critiques of PMUY reveal the amalgam of neoliberal Hindu-nationalist ideas in the construction, practices, norms, subjectivities and material realities of poor women. Many of these analyses miss, however, the strong opposition of indigenous, environmental and peasant groups, often led by women, against their dispossession from land, forests and food in the expansion of coal industries. By analysing the gendered socio-economic, legal, political and symbolic-cultural context in which these authoritarian, male, populist projects have emerged, it will be possible to elucidate not just how gender politics shape these projects, but why they play this crucial role.

5 Conclusion and Outlook

In sum, my analysis has shown that the PMUY scheme establishes a neoliberal political discourse on obligations and rights through its focus on the fuel wood collection of low-income rural women. While at a superficial glance PMUY might seem to empower marginalized women through granting them access to LPG cooking stoves, a critical feminist perspective reveals its particular neoliberal rationality of responsibilizing these women. Starting from an essentialist gendered notion that only women are responsible for cooking, PMUY maintains this dominant logic of reproducing gendered roles, norms and duties. While a transformative model of gender inequality would ask how men and male persons could take on more responsibilities for food preparation, PMUY cements the gendered asymmetry of work, rights and obligations.

Referring to feminist critiques of neoliberal and Hindu-nationalist India, it also became clear how the idea of *homo economicus* is gender-specifically used for Adivasi and Dalit women and expanded onto the BJP's notion of marketized (not political) citizenship in the current public sphere, laws and democratic institutions. Thus, while claiming to empower marginalized women, these policy agendas in fact act to disempower the women they target, and furthermore contain inherent contradictions that have the potential to undermine the BJP's authoritarian populist project. The contentious and contradictory logic has been

illustrated, when contrasting the PMUY's narrative of empowering ST- and SC-women from detrimental energy, health and life conditions with current state activities to oppose, demonize, and fight against poor rural women when they organize in struggles of Adivasi- and Dalit-, environmental and peasant networks against deforestation, coal mines and renewable energy projects. Furthermore, I suggested to integrate insights from collective activism and knowledge generated within the various Adivasi and Dalit groups of women resisting the dominant Hindu-nationalist neoliberal development path with its gender specific interpellations. These socio-ecological, political and economic movements explicitly challenge the BJP government's rhetoric of helping and securing non-elite women by speaking out and documenting how forest departments, the police, transnational companies and national elites violate their rights to natural resources, health, energy, education, sexual self-determination, a good life, etc. In sum, their basic democratic and citizenship rights.

Finally, in framing energy and gender in a transnational perspective, PMUY and other clean cooking initiatives for poor women in the Global South raise unanswered epistemological questions such as why do global energy saving programs target poor women in the Global South who produce very little CO2 emissions and why are struggles of Dalit and Adivasi to maintain and expand collective property rights over natural resources not recognized as thoroughly feminist demands for livelihoods, justice, and a good life. It is crucial for critical feminist analysis to question the neocolonial-patriarchal attention of many scholars and development organizations in the Global North on changing the behaviour of poor women in rural India. Opposing this focus, new debates about gender, climate coloniality and climate debt (Sultana, 2022) have shed light on high energy consumption by nation states, transnational companies, households and wealthy men/males in the Global North (and more recently also the Global South) (Listo 2018). Intersectional and post-/decolonial feminist approaches can be extremely helpful in demonstrating that the structural causes of energy poverty and vulnerabilities to the impacts of climate change are the result of socio-economic, legal and political domination based on neocolonial capitalism and green extractivism, casteism, racisms and sexisms (Chakrabarty 2023; Bergold-Caldwell et al., 2022).

Linking debates about socio-ecological transformations with feminist approaches to energy studies that analyse historic and contemporary power structures of oppression will facilitate innovative critical research. Moreover, as Clare Cannon and Eric Chu (2021) suggest, transversal feminist energy studies must foster radical visions of alternative societal futures through collective activism and grassroots mobilization. The theorizing of social justice across energy-related topics, issues and concerns must grapple with recent global movements, including Black Lives Matter, #MeToo, NiUnaMenos, Fridays for Future, Extinction Rebellion, Dalit, Adivasi and Forest feminism, and Indigenous, anti-capitalist and anticolonial struggles (Lennon 2017; Bell, Daggett & Labuski

2020; Sovacool et al., 2023). Only by connecting knowledge about linkages between climate change and inequalities rooted in historical and contemporary dominant power structures – such as anti-Black racism, trans- and homophobia, misogyny and patriarchy, casteism, extractive capitalism, the neocolonial global economy, neo-nationalism and fascisms – will it be possible for feminist energy approaches to integrate questions of social justice in an encompassing sense.

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Inhabiting

Liquid Homes, Concrete Struggles. Understanding the Commodification of Housing through the Lens of Social Reproduction

Tabea Latocha

1 Introduction

The use value of housing – as fundamental to sustaining the health of communities, caring relationships in neighbourhoods and social reproduction in cities – has moved to the centre of urban struggles over the past years. The demand for a right to adequate and safe housing has shifted from the margins to the centre of public discourse (Bowlby & Jupp, 2020; Ortiz, 2020). At the same time, recent crises have set the stage for accelerated wealth accumulation and redistribution upwards, as corporate control of residential property has expanded and the profits of real estate investment funds have skyrocketed (e.g. Unger, 2022). As both housing activists and critical scholars rightly stress, this dynamic has expanded and exposed the already-existing spatial, social and economic inequalities that materialize when dwelling is commodified, including "the disproportionate and systematic exposure of working-class communities […] to unemployment, unsafe jobs, eviction, homelessness, displacement, and wealth loss" (Graziani et al., 2020: 4; Gabor & Kohl, 2022).

The precariousness of housing-as-home is closely connected to the neoliberal enclosure of housing-as-asset (Jupp et al., 2019; Soederberg, 2018), and is symptomatic of the current conjuncture of financialized capitalism. Trading dwellings as liquid financial assets in order to generate shareholder value and optimize returns through "accumulation by dispossession" (Harvey, 2017) is depriving communities of their life-sustaining systems called 'home'. Scholars Peter Marcuse and David Madden (2016) get straight to the point when stating that the "Housing crisis is not a result of the system breaking down but of the system working as it is intended" (p. 11), leading to "the subordination of the social use of housing to its economic value" (p. 13).

In this article, I seek to develop a heuristic to understand the commodification, and later financialization, of housing through the lens of (struggles for) social reproduction. To do so, I firstly suggest a way of theorizing the marketization of housing from a feminist infrastructural perspective by conceptualizing housing as an essential societal infrastructure of care (Latocha, 2021; section 2). To grasp and explore housing from this perspective makes visible the interplay of macro- and micro-structural politics that produce precarization through

housing. Secondly, I apply this conceptual framework to the case of housing financialization in Germany (section 3). I trace the roots of the commodification and later financialization of housing in the German institutional context, with a particular focus on the social rental segment of the market. Using the example of Europe's largest financialized landlord, Vonovia, I shed light on the dialectic of use value and exchange value of housing in current struggles over the governance of social rental housing subject to financialization and affected by the following pressures of gentrification.

To conclude, I argue that feminist perspectives on financialization can show that the process of housing commodification does not merely operate as a distant structural logic at the macro level of political-economic systems, but rather relies on active governance processes at the meso and micro levels of the politics of dwelling and social reproduction in cities (section 4). By connecting the abstract dynamics of global property markets (macro level) to the concrete local practices of financialized rental housing provision in cities (meso level), and to how these processes shape rent relations, tenants' everyday experiences of home and their struggles to stay put (micro level), feminist perspectives on housing are timely and needed, as they can help to give voice to tenants' struggles and open up space for contestation of the 'urban finance fix'.

2 Theorizing Housing Financialization through a Feminist Lens: Housing as an Infrastructure of Care

> Commodification is the name for the general process by which the economic value of a thing comes to dominate its other uses. […] The commodification of housing means that a structure's function as real estate takes precedence over its usefulness as a place to live. When this happens, housing's role as investment outweighs all other claims upon it, whether they are based upon right, need, tradition, legal precedent, cultural habit, or the ethical and affective significance of the home (Madden & Marcuse, 2016: 14).

Since the early 2000s, and in particular in the aftermath of the global financial crisis 2007/8, housing scholars have used the concept of financialization to make sense of the rise of finance in housing markets, and its implications for the production of dwelling space, urban governance, and local/global as well as public/private relations in cities (Aalbers, 2017; Aalbers et al., 2021; Beswick & Penny, 2018; Gabor & Kohl, 2022; Holm & Bernt, 2021). According to the definition put forward by Manuel Aalbers (2023), financialization refers to "the increasing dominance of financial actors, markets, practices, measurements and narratives, at various scales, resulting in a structural transformation of economies,

firms (including financial institutions), states and households" (p. 3). In the field of housing, financialization refers to "the production, letting, trading, financing, maintenance, and management of housing according to the logic of financial product creation" (Unger, 2016: 177) by institutional investors and other private shareholders in transnational markets. Housing financialization is linked to the more general process of commodification, meaning the "subordination of the social use of housing to its economic value" (Madden & Marcuse, 2016: 17).

In the context of the neoliberalization of social and housing policies in Western welfare states in the past decades, the predominance of the exchange value of housing over its social use has produced geographies of gentrification, exclusion and displacement as part of a system that transfers economic risks and social costs downward to low-income communities deemed "disposable" (Ferreri, 2020), while redistributing wealth upwards to global corporate landlords and private investors (Graziani et al., 2020; Godechot, 2020; Heindl, 2022). With the increasing precariousness of both housing and social reproduction, radical and activist scholars have called for more situated, ethnographic accounts of home un/making, the "slow violence" (Pain, 2019) of housing insecurity, and the emotional experiences and embodied struggles of vulnerable urban communities dealing with displacement (Ferreri, 2020; Gibbons et al., 2020; Harris et al., 2019; Jupp et al., 2019; Lees & White, 2020). They stress the importance of recognizing the everyday experiences of subjects as radically political, following bell hooks' argument that "understanding marginality as position and place of resistance is crucial for oppressed, exploited, colonized people" (hooks, 1989: 21).

Taking this idea further with regards to the racial capitalism-financialization nexus in the US context, Fields and Raymond (2021) find that "producing life-giving geographies of housing requires bringing collective resistance for emancipatory social change into the analytic frame" (p. 1625). Hence, they advocate that critical research must attend to efforts aimed at contesting the financialization of housing. Critical scholars call for more grounded activist research that explores the lived experiences and "micropolitics of dwelling" (Lancione, 2020), as well as the scope for de-financialization (Wijburg, 2020). Acknowledging these important calls, more research is needed to analyse how the financialization of rental housing plays out on the ground, how this process reshapes tenants' social, emotional and embodied experiences of home, and what forms of individual and collective struggles emerge to fight precariousness and alienation. I argue that a critical feminist lens on housing can do exactly that, as it brings together the different aspects and dimensions of social reproduction and helps to deconstruct neoliberal logics of the status quo, opening up space for contestation and the imagination of alternative futures (Heindl, 2022).

To investigate housing commodification through a feminist lens, I have developed a theoretical framework that combines the insights of critical political economy approaches to housing financialization with feminist approaches to housing and home as well as feminist ethics of care (see Latocha, 2021, 2022). In

doing so, a major objective is to show that commodification and financialization are not seemingly natural processes, operating as a rigid structural logic at the macro level of political-economic systems, but rather necessitate an ongoing and active process of governance at the meso and micro levels of social reproduction, hence opening space both for co-option and for contestation of the 'urban finance fix'.

Feminist approaches to housing focus on the relational geographies (e.g. Easthope et al., 2020) and the material, embodied and emotional qualities of housing as constituting elements of the use value of dwelling space (e.g. Hobart & Kneese, 2020; Longhurst, 2012). Housing is regarded as a fundamental individual need and at the same time a social good that forms the basis for social stability, social integration and the participation of subjects in society, economy and politics. The home is thus an anchor point for the circulation of everyday life and the place from which we look out into the world and enter relationships with others and society as a whole. In capitalist societies, the home is also the (social) space that ensures that the commodity of labour power is maintained and reproduced (Federici, 2012). For the economy to function, there must always be enough physically and mentally fit workers to keep the system running. To be able to work, people must eat, sleep, rest, take care of themselves, maintain relationships etc. A home is indispensable for much of this (Madden, 2020).

Feminist scholars emphasize that home, as the locus and means of social reproduction, is a space charged with social meanings, emotions and affects (Bowlby, 2012), which in turn shapes the subjectivities, everyday experiences and identities of its tenants and/or owners (Mee, 2009). In times of alienation, the home can therefore also be a place of insecurity and oppression (hooks, 1989; Kadıoğlu & Kellecioğlu, 2023; Madden & Marcuse, 2016). Michele Lancione (2020) recalls that the subjective experience of dwelling is shaped by the interplay of micro-politics 'on the ground' and the macro-structural context of the political economy of housing: "[Dwelling] is a matter of embodied experiences and endurances, which are related to histories engraved on our skins and bodies, yet also rooted in structural conditions" (p. 278). Put this way, housing-as-home is the product of the historically- and locally-specific interplay of micro- and macro-structural processes of social reproduction in capitalist societies. Importantly, struggles over housing can also be the starting point for collectivization, emancipatory politics and social transformation (Fields, 2017b; Heindl, 2022; Künstler & Schipper, 2021; Uhlmann, 2023).

Feminist ethics of care have gained considerable attention in recent years in disciplines such as critical geography and urban studies (Bond, 2019: 17; Williams, 2017; Wiesel et al., 2020). The central criticism of such approaches is the individualization of risk, the economization of social reproduction and the resulting commodification of care in neoliberalized welfare regimes (Folbre, 2014: 3; Fraser, 2016a, 2016b). Care is defined as "a species activity that includes

everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our world so that we can live in it as well as possible. That world includes our bodies, ourselves, and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web" (Fisher & Tronto, 1990: 40). Society is understood as a "structured whole" (Haller, 2018: 70, Trans. T. Latocha), and economy is defined as the "result of the generalization of subjects' lifestyles" (Beier et al., 2018: 9, Trans. T. Latocha).

Based on the Marxian terminology of the political economy, it is assumed that the state plays a central role in mediating between structure (macro-social relations) and agency (behaviour of subjects) through the re-production of the value-form-dominated capitalist economy (Dück & Hajek, 2019; Marx, 1962 [1876]: 59). This is particularly visible in the field of housing (e.g. Kutz, 2018). From a critical feminist perspective, housing can be conceptualized as a central place of social reproduction, and thus housing policy in the context of the regulation of societal reproduction (Kuschinski, 2019: 125). Social reproduction is determined as the

> processes involved in maintaining and reproducing people, specifically the labor population, and their labor power on a daily and generational basis […]. It involves the provision of food, clothing, shelter, basic safety, and health care, along with the development and transmission of knowledge, social values, and cultural practices and the construction of individual and collective identities (Bezanson & Luxton, 2006: 3).

In this broad definition of the term, social reproduction includes reproductive work at the micro level of households (in the home), and the reproduction of social structures at the macro level (through the regulation of the housing system). 'The home' as we know it today is spatially – and in its social imagination as the private sphere as opposed to the public – a profoundly gendered and classist construction (Kuschinski, 2019: 126). As early as the 1970s, feminists proclaimed that the private sphere of the home is political: representatives of the so-called 'wages for housework' debate (see Molyneux, 1979; Federici, 2012; Della Costa, 2019) denounced the patriarchal power structures and bourgeois gender roles and relations woven into the architectural and social spaces of 'the private home' and housing policy more generally (Hayden, 2018 [1981]; Trogal, 2017). Through the normalization of the bourgeois idea of home as the "ideal type of modern living" (Häußermann & Siebel, 1996: 13, Trans. T. Latocha), housing in its commodity form has become hegemonic, with the purpose of disciplining the working class (Niethammer, 1988). This includes the separation and hierarchization of productive labour, work, over unpaid reproductive labour, housework, as well as the idea of housing as a place of security and intimacy for the nuclear heteronormative family (Federici, 2012). The levels of social structure, subject(ivities) and everyday life are thus interwoven in the sphere of housing through its social function as the place of reproduction.

Bringing housing (struggles), social reproduction and care into one analytical frame is the goal of the theorization of housing as an essential infrastructure of care. This heuristic aims to connect the abstract-distant processes of the political economy of housing financialization (macro level) to how these processes materialize in the concrete local practices of rental housing provision and management in cities (meso level), and to how they shape rent relations, tenants' everyday experiences of home and their struggles to stay put (micro level).

The approach of 'housing as infrastructure' has gained considerable interest from critical housing scholars in recent years (Kadıoğlu & Kellecioğlu, 2023; Power & Mee, 2020; Ortiz, 2020). The conceptual framework links approaches of socio-technical infrastructure research (see Amin, 2014; Graham & Marvin, 2001; Larkin, 2013) with the political economy literature on housing (see Aalbers, 2016; Bernt, 2022; Holm, 2011; Madden & Marcuse, 2016; Soederberg, 2018). Acknowledging these important contributions to recent debates in interdisciplinary housing research, I bring into dialogue the heuristic of housing as infrastructure with feminist theorizations of social reproduction and care (see Bowlby, 2012; Hobart & Kneese, 2020; Madden, 2020; Uhlmann, 2023). Against the backdrop of the commodification of welfare and the neoliberalization of housing policy, I suggest a critical feminist research agenda that places the caring (or neglecting) quality of housing at the centre of inquiry (Power & Mee, 2020: 490).

From a political economy point of view, financialization is often presented as an abstract, disembodied process operating at a distance from cities, housing and daily life. In contrast, the approach I outline here aims to overcome the notion of 'distance', making more visible the relations and processes by which finance is reshaping housing governance, tenants' subjectivities and experiences of home 'on the ground' within the urban context (Lai, 2017), and thereby maintaining a relational view of both the micro-politics of dwelling and regulatory shifts in housing governance (Easthope et al., 2020; Gibbons et al., 2020). The interconnectedness of processes of precarization of households at the level of everyday practices, emotions and relationships, as well as at the political economy level, can be grasped through an analysis of the following three dimensions: 1) the neoliberalization of housing policy; 2) financialization and management strategies; and 3) the lived experiences and struggles of tenants (see section 3).

In summary, the conceptual framework of housing as an infrastructure of care serves as an "empirical tool" (Brenner et al., 2011: 228) to analyse, firstly, how the neoliberal ethics of care inscribed in social policy and the regulation of housing produce unequal access to housing as a place of reproduction and care (macro-structural level), and secondly, how housing systems structure the care practices of households and produce particular modes of subjectivation (micro-structural level). To analytically grasp and explore housing from this perspective can make visible the interplay of macro- and micro-structural politics that produce precarization through housing. The great potential of this approach, I argue, lies in

the fact that the otherwise often separately-considered processes of marketization at the structural and subject levels can be viewed in an integrated way. This approach thus brings together micro- and macro-level processes of changing housing governance in the context of neoliberal welfare state transformation. Accordingly, I will apply the conceptual framework to the example of social rental housing in the context of welfare state transformation in Germany.

3 Social Rental Housing in the Context of Welfare State Transformation in Germany: The 'New Frontier' of Financialization

> [i]nfrastructures enables [sic] 'caring spaces and caring selves' as well as giving rise, at times, to neglect (Power & Mee, 2020: 490).

Applying the feminist infrastructural framework to the case of financialized housing in Germany, I bring into dialogue literature on macro-economic and policy shifts in the regulation of housing, the financialized management strategies and logics of housing provision, with their disciplining effects on tenants, at the meso level, and the voices of tenants, their emotions, fears and lived experiences with dwelling in financialized homes, at the micro level. Using the example of the financialized provider Vonovia, I analyse the following dimensions: 1) the neoliberalization of housing policy; 2) financialization and management strategies; and 3) the lived experiences and struggles of tenants.

3.1 The Neoliberalization of Housing Policy

In order to understand how processes of financialization have unfolded in the particular market and regulatory context of Germany's social rental housing sector, I situate housing commodification within the wider context of welfare state transformation (Doling, 1994; Jessop, 1999; Schönig, 2020), showing why there is a particular relationship between this process and urban space in the current conjuncture of globalized neoliberal capitalism, and how moments of crisis reveal tension in this relationship. I will now briefly revisit debates in critical urban studies and geography that illustrate how changes in the German welfare regime and in the regulation of housing have enabled "creating liquidity out of spatial fixity" (Gotham, 2009) from real estate values, stressing the active role of the state in driving forward processes of re-commodification.

As part of a wider transformation of welfare states since the 1980s in large parts of Europe, many countries have witnessed a decline in the provision of social rental housing (Czischke, 2009: 121). Overall, there has been a trend towards marketization, liberalization and more market-oriented and

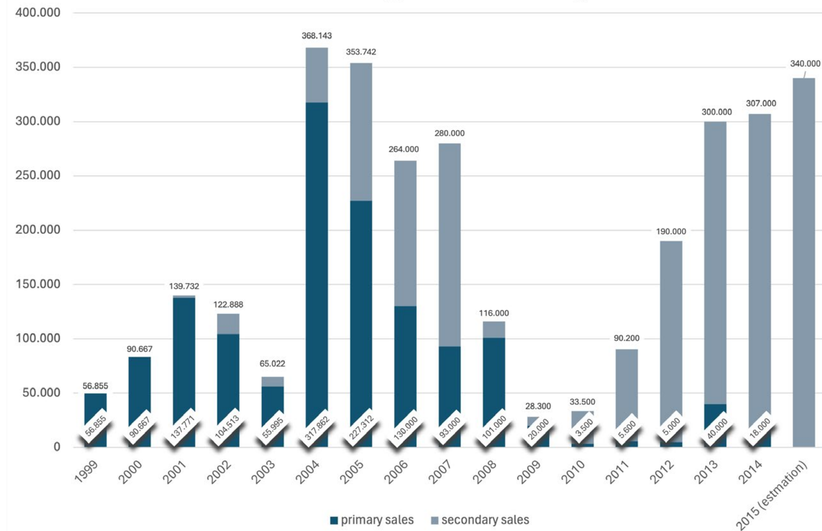
competitive modes of housing governance (Schönig et al., 2017: 34). In this context, supply-side subsidies for social housing provision have been gradually replaced or complemented by demand-side subsidies in several countries (e.g. housing benefits or vouchers), leading to the shrinkage of the social and public segments of the housing market (Donner, 2000; Scanlon et al., 2014). Within this neoliberalizing context, the German social housing model is a particular case. Once an important pillar of the post-war welfare state, the sector has changed drastically in size, social significance and architectural form over the past 40 years (Egner, 2014; Schönig et al., 2017; Schönig, 2020).

De jure social housing, in the form of state-subsidized housing programs, is organized against the backdrop of Germany's 'Social Market Economy' (Harlander, 2008). The prevailing logic of this model is that the market can adequately balance housing need with provision, and hence that social housing should only temporarily help to tackle individual and/or wider societal crises, e.g. in times of large-scale migration (Egner et al., 2004; Häußermann & Siebel, 1996). Based on this understanding, German social housing has a temporary nature: social homes have limited periods of social obligations, and thus when the subsidies are repaid by the providers, the dwellings can enter the market (Donner, 2000: 200). These state subsidies (mostly in the form of interest subsidies or public interest-subsidized mortgage loans) target all provider groups in Germany, leading to the overlap of the social housing sector with both private and public rental, as well as owner-occupied housing.

As social housing programs have been drastically reduced since the 1990s, and the limited periods of social obligation expire for the existing stock, every year more and more social homes are lost. While in 1968, the social rental sector in Germany made up 18.6% (3.7 million dwellings) of the housing stock and grew to a total of 4 million in 1987 (15.3% of the total housing stock) (Kofner, 2017: 64), it dropped to only 1.12 million price-reduced units in 2020 (Deutscher Bundestag, 13.05.2022). Once a sector for all social strata, today social housing only serves as a residual market segment for those unable to provide themselves with a home on the private market (Schönig, 2020). Numbers have significantly dropped since the complete abolition of public interest housing (*Wohnungsgemeinnützigkeit*) in 1990 and the large housing portfolio transactions that followed (see figure 1). This change in policy introduced by the liberal-conservative coalition under Helmut Kohl enabled formerly non-profit providers such as cooperatives or public housing organizations to privatize (parts of) their stock and restructure their companies according to commercial business strategies and towards delivering more entrepreneurial objectives (Egner et al., 2004: 26; Aalbers & Holm, 2008). With the abolition of *Wohnungsgemeinnützigkeit*, municipally-owned housing organizations were likewise no longer obligated by law to operate as non-profit public interest organizations. In many cases, indebted municipalities have used the privatization of their social housing stock as a vehicle to re-balance their budgets (Holm, 2008, 2011).

In the years following the end of *Wohnungsgemeinnützigkeit*, federal subsidies were successively cut, then national social housing policy was terminated with the federal states reform in 2006, and thus the governance of housing, including the management of public housing companies, has diversified (Schönig, 2020). Within the rental sector, public providers today hold a share of only 11.3%, "with the municipal housing companies alone accounting for 9.8 per cent of this sector" (Kofner, 2017: 63). Together with the implementation of neoliberal urban policies and measures of fiscal discipline at different institutional levels of the state, the abolition of public interest housing has induced large-scale transactions in the de-commodified housing sector (Schipper & Schönig, 2016). In the late 1990s and early 2000s, large shares of the social rental housing stock were sold to private equity funds (Aalbers & Holm, 2008; Gabor & Kohl, 2020).

Figure 1: Large housing portfolio transactions (> 800 units) in Germany, 1990–2014



Source: Author's based on Unger, 2016: 178 with data from BBSR-Datenbank Wohnungstransaktionen.

As indicated by Unger (2016), these funds generally operate with high leverage and deploy short-term strategies (three to five years) of 'pure speculation' – like 'buying low and selling high' – to create exchange values from their investments in the built environment (see also Fields & Uffer, 2016; Wijburg & Aalbers, 2017). Wijburg, Aalbers and Heeg (2018) call this 'first wave' of financialization in the German social rental market, which lasted from the late 1990s until 2007, 'financialization 1.0', with disinvestment and lack of maintenance being the characteristic features of tenant-provider relations (see Müller, 2012). With the advent of the 2007/8

global financial crisis, however, accessing external finance, which is “crucial for the business models of private equity real and hedge funds” (Wijburg et al., 2018: 1099), became increasingly difficult, leading to most institutional investors selling off their portfolios (Aalbers, 2016). Following the global financial crisis, many private equity funds which held stock in Germany were converted directly into real estate investment trusts (REITs), and their housing units were directly sold to the newly-established listed real estate companies.

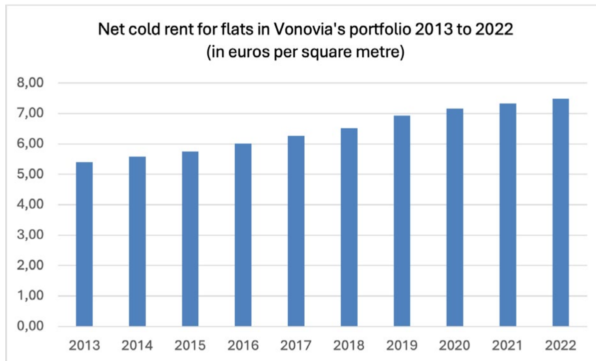
3.2 Financialization and Management Strategies

Critical gentrification scholars find that these listed real estate companies adopt long-term investment strategies to create a stable cash flow for their shareholders; for instance, by enhancing the net value of the social rental portfolio through stimulating gentrification, modernizing their housing stock, ‘gaming’ rent regulations and collaborating with local authorities to coordinate neighbourhood redevelopment (Fields & Uffer, 2016; Wijburg et al., 2018). This ‘second wave’ of releasing rental housing into the privatized mainstream of capital accumulation is described as ‘financialization 2.0’, and is characterized by a focus on long-term rather than short-term real estate management and value extraction. “More precisely, it entails a stage of capital accumulation in which rental housing units are no longer treated as purely speculative goods but rather as long-term investment objects for investment funds” (Wijburg et al., 2018: 1100).

From once having served as good-quality, below-market housing, social rental units in Germany have thus become the ‘new frontier’ of financialization (Belotti & Arbaci, 2020). Today, social rental units serve the needs of institutional investors rather than of the low-income tenants that they were originally built for. In general, institutional investors take full advantage of all legally-permissible rent increases, thereby using renovations and the re-issuing of contracts as central mechanisms to constantly increase rents and hence maximize returns (Bernt et al., 2017; Schipper, 2021). In this context, the social and ecological aspects of housing are played against each another, such as when energetic modernizations of (former social, now private rental) housing estates are used as a vehicle to increase rents (Arendt et al., 2023).

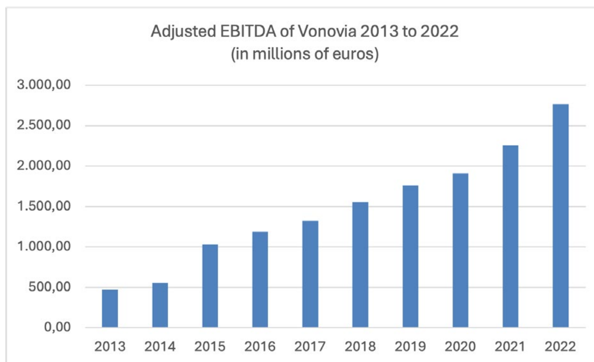
This business model can be exemplified using the figures of Vonovia, Germany’s largest landlord (see figures 2 and 3). Vonovia’s business model is to make profit from the rental management and servicing of flats in Germany and Europe. In this, Vonovia can be considered representative for all listed real estate companies in Germany (Wijburg et al., 2018: 1104), in terms of being committed to its institutional shareholders as it seeks to generate high returns from long-term portfolio management (Unger, 2016). Due to its recent merger with the second ‘mega-player’ in the German market, Deutsche Wohnen, Vonovia now manages around 550,000 flats, making it Europe’s largest listed

Figure 2: Net cold rent Vonovia (2013-2023)



Source: Author's based on: https://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/519254/umfrage/nettokaltmiete-fuer-wohnungen-aus-dem-bestand-der-vonovia/ (accessed 18.03.24).

Figure 3: Profit from operating activities of Vonovia (2013-2023)



Source: Author's based on https://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/519253/umfrage/ergebnis-der-operativen-geschaeftstaetigkeit-der-wohnungsgesellschaft-vonovia/ (accessed 18.03.24).

real estate company (Unger, 2022). On the German market, Vonovia holds today "a quasi-monopoly position", alongside LEG Immobilien and Foncière des Régions (Immeo Wohnen) (Wijburg et al., 2018: 1103), with its rise being closely connected to the privatization and commodification of large shares of the de-commodified and social rental housing sector from the 1990s onwards.

On the one hand, Vonovia has been identified as the leading market innovator in terms of its business model (insourcing services, introducing sustainability and green standards), its expansion strategy (expansion qua acquisition in Sweden, France, Austria and Netherlands), and its corporate policy. It has heavily

influenced housing politics and governments[1], as well as local neighbourhood development schemes in many cities and regions all over Germany (Unger, 2021). On the other hand, Vonovia is known amongst tenants and activists for 'playing' rent regulations and pushing neighbourhood renewal to maximize shareholder value by exerting pressure on low-income tenants to execute so-called "renovictions" (Betz et al., 2019; Metzger, 2020). Even during the pandemic recession, Vonovia was able to increase returns for its shareholders and continue rent maximization (see figures 2 and 3).

Until 2015, the company Vonovia was known as Deutsche Annington. Deutsche Annington was founded in 2001 as a subsidiary of Terra Firma, a British private equity fund, when the company acquired 64,000 housing units from the German Federal Railway that had been privatized in 1994. The company started expanding its portfolio in Germany, acquiring large housing companies in Berlin, Leipzig and Dresden, as well as the portfolios of energy companies such as E.On and RWE in the Ruhr area. In 2013, Deutsche Annington was transformed into an independent company and listed on the Frankfurt Stock Exchange (Initial Public Offering, IPO). After a merger with Gagfah in 2015, which added an additional 144,000 housing units to its portfolio, the company was renamed Vonovia and on 21 September 2015 it became the first German real estate company to be listed on the DAX (Metzger, 2020).

Importantly, the IPO facilitated a significant change in Vonovia's shareholder structure, underlining the gradually increasing international dimension of listed real estate in Germany in the "post-crash decade" (Atkinson, 2020: 5). Most of Vonovia's shares are held in free float by a consortium of asset managers and banks. "Not only can global asset managers such as Blackrock influence the local business strategies of Vonovia through shareholder votes; a large share of the profits of Vonovia, i.e. the rents of tenants in Germany, flow out of the country and are absorbed into international capital circuits" (Wijburg et al., 2018: 1107).[2] The company currently has a stock market value of around 18 billion euros,[3] promising its shareholders higher dividends every year.[4] The pressure on Vonovia to increase rents is thus great, as rental income directly determines shareholder value. In other words: constantly rising rents are a prerequisite for paying out ever higher dividends – i.e. profit sharing – to shareholders. Hence, the company will use any means at its disposal to secure a stable cash flow from rental income.

1 For example, the commitment to the "*Zukunfts- und Sozialpakt Wohnen*" with the federal state of Berlin, which includes the sale of 20,000 housing units to the public sector, in case of the realization of a merger of Deutsche Wohnen and Vonovia (dgap.de 01.08.2021).

2 The US investment company Blackrock, which is known for its speculative financial transactions, holds around 10% of Vonovia shares.

3 23.03.2022: https://www.finanzen.net/aktien/vonovia-aktie

4 In March 2022, this number was at 48 billion euros, displaying the instability of the business model in the context of the multiple crises of the last months (see Unger, 2023).

In particular, energetic modernizations are used as a legal leeway to upgrade neighbourhoods and drive rents up permanently (see Arendt et al., 2023; Schipper, 2021). In contrast to maintenance costs, which are paid by landlords, in Germany 8% of modernization costs can be passed on to tenants (11% until January 2019). The installation of balconies or lifts, for example, which are regarded as raising the standard of apartments, justify not only short-term rent increases, but permanent increases in the monthly payments that residents must bear. Scholars find that Vonovia strategically exploits this “modernization gap” (Bernt, 2022): necessary repairs and maintenance of ageing housing stock (to be paid by the landlord) have often not been carried out at all for decades (see picture 2), or are done as cheaply as possible; while in some cases repair work is falsely declared as modernization (to be paid for partly by tenants) (Wijburg et al., 2018).

The subordination of the long-term care and sustainable maintenance of housing stock to lucrative short-term modernizations and upgrades of the apartments’ standards has a harmful effect both for tenants and for housing’s function as critical infrastructure (Kadıoğlu & Kellecioğlu, 2023). Importantly, this “financialization of maintenance” (ibid.: 16) has been enabled by the regulatory shifts in German and European housing policy, though it also results from the lack of democratic oversight over landlords’ housing governance and maintenance conduct. In 2021 and 2022, around 70% of the annual profit of Vonovia was distributed directly to shareholders as a so-called ‘pay-out’.[5] In 2022, 37 cents per euro of rent – more than one third of the rental income – was not reinvested into housing management and maintenance but paid out to shareholders as dividends. In other words, it was redistributed from the tenants’ pockets to the investors. The Berlin collective Cuadro Frezca recently commented satirically on this business model of generating profit from rental returns with their mural action #dasfehlendedrittel (the missing third) painted on the façade of a Vonovia apartment building in Hanover (see picture 1).[6] In their everyday lives, however, Vonovia’s tenants are not at all in the mood to laugh.

5 23.03.2023: https://aktienfinder.net/dividenden-profil/Vonovia-Dividende, https://www.digrin.com/stocks/detail/VNA.DE/payout_ratio

6 23.03.2023: https://dasfehlendedrittel.tumblr.com/

Picture 1: #dasfehlendedrittel

Source: https://dasfehlendedrittel.tumblr.com/ (accessed 19.12.21)

Picture 2: Poorly maintained housing stock managed by Vonovia in Frankfurt am Main.

Source: Tabea Latocha

3.3 Tenants' Lived Experiences and Struggles

In the process of maximizing profits from the management of rental housing, tenants are, in the words of Desirée Fields, the "unwilling subjects of financialisation" (2017a), who finance the profits with their monthly payments. Housing becomes particularly precarious when, due to the forced immobility of residents (who lack financial resources to move elsewhere), inadequate housing conditions – such as poor quality, overcrowding or insufficient accessibility – become permanent and severely restrict the (self-)care of residents (Müller, 2012). When tenants' life support systems get out of balance, housing conditions can have a harmful effect on everyday life and societal participation, as well as the physical and mental health of households (Breckner, 1995; Fields, 2017b; Gerull, 2011).

Tenants in a Vonovia-owned working-class estate in Frankfurt am Main, for example,[7] find themselves stuck in poor-quality apartments with delayed maintenance work (if any) and are confronted with insufficient services and communication from their landlord. Vonovia manages around 12,000 homes – approximately 3% of the local housing stock in Frankfurt – with many of these constituting former public or non-profit housing units that were transferred

7 The empirical material on which the following observations are made comes from interviews and activist ethnography carried out as part of my DFG-funded PhD project at Goethe Universität Frankfurt *Housing, Home, Displacement. An investigation of how tenants experience and grapple with the changing governance of their homes in a neoliberalizing urban context.*

from public to private to financialized ownership in the 1990s and 2000s. Until today, mainly working-class families with low- or medium-income levels live in these apartments (Schipper, 2021). Tenants in the neighbourhood report broken heating, damp walls, mould, crumbling plaster on the balconies and high vacancy rates over many months in their estate. This "material and repetitive disruption of the infrastructural flows that make a home function for its inhabitants" (Kadıoğlu & Kellecioğlu, 2023: 17) severely constrains everyday life and curtails the social-reproductive activities of families. Tenants report difficulties coordinating childcare, home/office and housework with the time-consuming efforts of getting in touch with Vonovia services (outsourced to call centres), and managing the emotional and physical strain of waiting for – more often than not – unreliable maintenance and repair work to be done while living under deteriorating conditions. And all of this is despite the fact that their monthly rental obligations have steadily been increased to the legally-possible upper limit, the local rent index,[8] with the effect that many households pay more than 30% of their net income for housing costs[9] and must thus cut expenses in other areas of life.

The financialized management of Vonovia thus produces anxiety, stress and illness for tenants (Madden & Marcuse, 2016: 61), leaving them with feelings of exhaustion and frustration. The authors of the Vonovia Mapping Project 2021, who analysed the tricks of the financialized company in an action research project in another working-class neighbourhood in Frankfurt am Main, make the following sobering observation:

> The precarious housing situation of tenants are not singular cases: rising rents with poor maintenance and barely accessible customer service are systemically anchored in the business model of financialized housing companies. Rent increases, non-transparent service charges, heating failure or mould are commonplace for many tenants today.[10]

Under these circumstances, especially marginalized tenants feel limited in their agency to individually and/or collectively confront their landlord in order to claim their rights (see Künstler & Schipper, 2021), despite many of them feeling that a grave injustice is being done to them (Rinn, 2021).

In November 2022, Vonovia announced the energetic modernization of some parts of the working-class estate in Frankfurt. In a 38-page letter sent

8 The '*Mietspiegel*' (rent index) displays the legally permissible amount of maximum rent increase for a neighbourhood that landlords are allowed to demand. It is calculated by taking into consideration the average rents of lettings that have been newly rented out within the past six years (until 2020, it only included new lettings of the past four years; however, due to considerable criticism of this regulation – which did not take into consideration the rental prices of the existing stock – there was a legal amendment made with effect from 1 January 2020).

9 Thirty percent of net income is generally regarded as the limit for affordability of housing costs.

10 22.03.2023 https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/00bc61b41c9c456082fa00780bfa598f (Trans. T. Latocha)

individually to each tenant party concerned, renters were informed about the extensive plans of their landlord. There was no option for participation or consultation. The long-term construction work and the threatening prospect of heavy rent increases of up to three euros per square metre after completion[11] have brought about everyday hardship and existential fear ever since. The constant threat of displacement severely affects tenants' quality of life, evoking feelings of dis-belonging, and disrupting community ties and emplacement. In many cases, the need to secure financial stability in order not to be displaced becomes the main driver of households' everyday decisions, bringing about high mental and emotional strain, ontological insecurity and thus residential alienation. Only a few individual households have taken legal action against Vonovia, seeking advice from a lawyer or tenant association, in order to struggle for justice; the majority of the working-class tenants simply do not have the capacities and/or financial resources to do so.

The replacement of local landlords by distant institutional investors such as Vonovia presents major difficulties for tenants in terms of holding providers socially, legally and politically accountable at the local level, and poses particular challenges to contesting and politicizing tenants' harassment and gentrification induced by financialized management. Instead of the home providing ontological security and the foundation for a meaningful life, social reproduction primarily centres on persevering through hardship and meeting rental obligations. Tenants are the ones unwillingly financing the profits of shareholders (Fields, 2017a), and are forced to make room for more solvent households when monthly rents exceed the level they can bear to pay for a home.

In the case of Vonovia, the promise of constantly-growing dividend payments from the financialized governance of rental housing is paid for with the precarization and displacement of tenants. In the words of Laura Briggs, these conflicts are "where neoliberalism lives in our daily lives" (Briggs, quoted in Madden, 2020). The everyday lived experiences of the housing crisis and related struggles for secure social reproduction in cities are being scandalized and politicized by researchers and activists (Fields, 2017b; Gibbons et al., 2020) and tenant movements worldwide, most prominently in Germany by the *Deutsche Wohnen & Co Enteignen* (Expropriate Deutsche Wohnen & Co) campaign in Berlin[12], as well as through journalist contributions and testimonies of tenants' everyday struggles and hardships (see pictures 3 and 4).

What can these tenants' lived experiences and the embodied politics of struggle teach us about (financialized) capitalism?

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11 Example: For a 70 square metre apartment with a total rent of €715 (including all ancillary costs), the monthly rent price would increase by €200 to a total of €915 after completion of the modernization.

12 https://dwenteignen.de/

Picture 3: Longing for de-commodification: graffiti on an electricity box in a Vonovia-owned estate in Frankfurt am Main.

Source: Tabea Latocha

Picture 4: Demonstration against financialization on Housing Action Day 2022, Frankfurt am Main.

Source: Tabea Latocha

Taking the lived experiences of tenants as the central entry point for a better understanding of the processes of commodification and financialization, it becomes clear that a principal element of housing commodification has been a re-configuration of housing as a ‘liquid’ financial asset rather than a social good and space of care for urban communities. Against the backdrop of the neoliberal transformation of welfare states and the accompanying individualization of life risks, the ideology of “market before state” functions as a “powerful imaginary shaping the organisation of care” (Power & Mee, 2020: 496). Neoliberal care ethics find expression in the abstraction of housing as a commodity on the market, which hides the social nature and co-constitution of space and social relations, as well as the possibilities for an other-than-market-based housing system (Belina, 2013: 76). The disciplining moment of neoliberal housing policy is thus obscured (ibid.).

The neoliberal coding of home space and property, and the market mechanisms regulating access to housing determine the “social possibilities, life and identity designs” of subjects (Strüver, 2018: 43, Trans. T. Latocha). The melting down of social securities stipulated in the tenancy law, the punitive management practices of institutional landlords (Unger, 2022), and the constant threat of displacement for low-income households in urban housing markets bring about subjects’ alienation, with the effect that public voicing of dissent or collective struggles for the right to housing only very rarely prevail. Uncovering the “negative externalities of financialization at the local level”, we can conclude with Desirée Fields that “housing made precarious contradicts the very ontology of home” (2017b: 592).

Applying the conceptual framework of housing as an infrastructure of care allows us to connect the political economy of housing, financialization and the management strategies of institutional landlords with the embodied experiences and struggles of tenants. Asking with Emma Power and Kathleen Mee (2020) "[h]ow housing systems organize the possibilities of care giving and receiving at a household and social scale" (p. 489), the case of Vonovia and other institutional landlords in Germany shows that financialized homes disrupt everyday life and bring alienation. Instead of housing enabling "caring spaces and caring selves" (ibid.: 490), financialized homes give rise to neglect. The subordination of the social use of housing to its function as an asset is coupled with the precarization and harassment of tenants as well as material neglect. While aware of the unjust treatment and unwilling to be subjugated to these financial logics, renters feel threatened and paralyzed by landlords' strategies, and thus only rarely voice dissent publicly or even collectivize their struggles. To grasp and explore these processes from the perspective of housing as an infrastructure of care allows us to make visible the interplay of macro- and micro-structural politics of commodification and to concretize its socio-material effects, in order to counter and politicize financialization as it has become ingrained in the sphere of social and societal reproduction.

4 To Conclude

> The political economy of housing today produces anxiety, stress, and illness (Madden & Marcuse, 2016: 61).

Housing-as-home is a fundamental material and social prerequisite for social reproduction and the unfolding of everyday life, but also for social cohesion in cities. If this life support system, as David Harvey calls it, is out of balance, this has negative consequences for all aspects of existence – at the individual as well as the structural level (1975 [1973]: 159). This article has argued that housing financialization is a contradictory process, with serious socio-material consequences for renters, as the quality and affordability of housing are increasingly subordinated to shareholder values and the maximization of returns. Social reproduction becomes contested as conflicts arise from the contradictory nature of hyper-commodified homes as both places to dwell and objects of value extraction.

I have suggested using a feminist infrastructural lens on housing financialization as a heuristic for an integrated and critically-informed analysis of housing at both the micro level of social reproduction and the macro level of governance. This lens brings together experiences of residential alienation, the materiality of housing, and the structural transformation of the neoliberal reorganization of housing, as well as urban and social policy, in the context

of punitive welfare reforms. Risk management in post-Fordist capitalism (Soederberg, 2018) has thereby played a major role in the conversion of social rental housing into an asset class, as the need to cut public expenditure was a major priority for the transforming welfare state (Schönig, 2020). Financialized rental housing governance has increased housing insecurity for individual tenants, and has caused the loss of affordable dwelling units – either due to increased rents or the physical deterioration of flats – challenging lower-income communities collectively (Ferreri, 2020; Lees & White, 2020).

Using the example of the financialization of social rental housing in Germany, I have argued that the systematic transfer of risks onto low-income rental tenants has been a central means by which financialization has continued and advanced following the 2007/8 global financial crisis (and during the ongoing pandemic recession) and, through various socio-material effects at the local level, come to re-structure the social reproduction of households. Applying a relational view of the political economy and the situated experiences of tenants, I have shed light on the dialectic of home and housing in current struggles over the governance of social rental housing subject to financialization and affected by the following gentrification pressure. The individualization of care, mediated through neoliberal housing policies and the financialized management of neighbourhoods, tends to exacerbate already-existing social disparities, as financial logics permeate everyday life and care practices (Hillmann et al., 2019: 142). In theorizing housing financialization through a feminist infrastructural lens, it becomes possible to explore the nexus of commodification, materiality and precarious dwelling. A dialectical reading of lived experiences and the political economy of housing financialization, conceptualized as two interconnected levels of social reproduction, enables us to "[to] raise questions about how care (and neglect) flows through housing systems" (Power & Mee, 2020: 491) and may contribute to producing knowledges "articulated towards housing struggles" (Gibbons et al., 2020: 4).

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Surviving

Social Movement and Body Integrity

Kijan Mohammadi

1 Introduction

Bodily integrity refers to the inviolability of the physical body and emphasizes the importance of personal autonomy, self-ownership and the self-determination of human beings over their own bodies. Although bodily integrity is a subject of discussion in various fields, including medicine (regarding topics such as organ donation, amputation and circumcision), law (for instance, concerning human trafficking) and feminism (covering topics such as pregnancy and abortion, among others), this article highlights the importance of bodily integrity within social movements, with a focus on the recent Women's Movement in Iran. Iranian society and lifestyles have, over the past few decades, transitioned from traditional and religious to modern. The more recent social movements have thus been influenced not only by domestic and historical factors, but also by discourses from the Western world. Increased access to social networks, satellite media and higher levels of education are some of the causes of this change. The impact of these changes has been more pronounced in recent years, particularly among the middle class and women. Research indicates a connection between the use of foreign and Western satellite networks and the adoption of modern values. Furthermore, Iranian women have become more aware and empowered through higher education, increased participation in society and employment, and their demand for full citizenship rights.

Considering that the structure of the state in Iran concentrates a large degree of power and control in the government, it is also the meeting place of demands and developments. In most of Iran's social movements over the last three decades, there are fewer peaceful cases and more power conflicts. Following the 2009 Green Movement, the 2017 Worker's Movement and the 2019 economic protests, protest movements opposing the state's power have gradually increased, reaching their current highest level in September 2022. In late summer 2022, after the death of Mahsa (Jina) Amini, a 22-year-old girl from a Kurdish family in Saqqez, while in the custody of the morality police (*Gasht Ershad*), a wave of protests swept across Iran. The high-profile presence of young and adolescent women and girls during the protests was undeniable, and this shifted the media's view on Iran's youth and adolescents. During the protests in the period 1981–1990, the main players were people over 20 years old looking for reform in Iran, while in the decade 2001–2010, teenagers (including those in their early teens)

entered the arena of protests, and their bold presence caught the attention of the media at the time. They were called the Internet Generation or Generation Z, because they were demanding the right to choose their preferred lifestyle, not live a pressured or obligatory one.

In 2022, the exertion of control by the government and the morality police over women's bodies in the public sphere – as tragically illustrated by the death of Mahsa (Jina) Amini – ignited the fire of previously hidden protests in Iranian society. Iranian women have resisted power for years in their covert or cross-sectional campaigns, with titles such as "secret freedom", "I love bicycles", "our cameras are our guns" and "white Wednesdays". In the aftermath of Amini's tragic death, Iranian women have begun to reveal their hidden demands with the chant "Women, Life, Freedom". The protests, which are referred to as the Women's Movement, began with women and girls burning their headscarves in public. Indeed, the headscarf has become the paradigmatic symbol of the movement, and the police's mandate to control women's bodies and official clothing has become the focus of a challenge to the regime, where protest actors are seeking the right and freedom to determine for themselves how to cover and control their own bodies. In this movement, on the one hand you have ideals about the role of women and their place in the social structure, with the hijab as a means to control this, and on the other you have protesters arguing for freedom of choice. The protests, led largely by women, spread widely throughout the country, particularly through the involvement of students in schools and universities. Furthermore, as universities became key sites of resistance, this led to the focus of the protests expanding to cover more demands than simply justice for Amini. This is expressed in the slogan "Women, Life, Freedom".

In this article, in which I employ a documentary descriptive approach, I aim to answer the following questions: What exactly happened in the social movements in Iran from 1999 to the present? Who were the participants and protesters, and what were their demands? And by focusing on the Women's Movement that started in September 2022 and which continues to this day, I aim to discuss the issue of physical and bodily integrity in two external and internal dimensions.

2 Historical Background to Iran's Social Movements Over the Last Three Decades

The Student Movement began on 8 July 1999 with a protest by a group of students at Tehran University, following the closure of the Salaam newspaper, which was affiliated with the Reformist Party. The rally was accompanied by slogans demanding freedom of speech and publication, and it ended slowly and peacefully in the late hours of the night. However, on the morning of 9 July, a group of plainclothes forces, along with some uniformed police officers, stormed the Tehran University dormitory, assaulting and arresting a number of students. This led to a wave of protests and sparked further clashes following the arrival

to the movement of non-student groups (Shargh Daily, 2001).[1] One student lost an eye from a gunshot wound, some people's hands and feet were broken, and many students were arrested (Barzegar, 2004). Although the number of dead and wounded was never officially announced, human rights activists say that nine people were killed in Tehran during the five days of protests, a young student was killed during the clashes, and many more were psychologically traumatized. Two students, Fereshteh Alizadeh (a student activist at Alzahra University) and Saeed Zeinali, were arrested and disappeared, and after more than 20 years they have still not been found (Ghazi, 2023).

The Green Movement emerged on 15 June 2009, just three days after the presidential election results were announced amid allegations of fraud. Contrary to the expectations of voters and supporters of Mir Hossein Mousavi and Karroubi, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was declared the winner of Iran's tenth presidential election. This outcome triggered widespread protests, with approximately three million protesters taking to the streets of Tehran. The demonstrators mainly consisted of middle-class individuals and students. The prominent slogan of the protests was "Where is my vote?" The Green Movement, as it came to be known, witnessed a death toll of 72 individuals, with some media sources reporting a higher number of 112. Among those who lost their lives was Neda Agha-Soltan, a woman who was directly shot and killed by the authorities in Tehran (Pezhvakeiran, 2009),[2] and who has since become a symbol of Iranian freedom during protests.

The Worker Movement in 2017, also known as the Livelihood Movement, began on 28 December 2017 in Mashhad, with 10,000 protesters chanting "No price increases". It then spread to more than 160 cities across Iran, during which strikes occurred (Iranpedia, 2018a).[3] Some of the most important strikes involved workers of Ney-Shekar Haft Tappeh, an Iranian company that has been the focus of much controversy over the past few decades due to mismanagement (Payandeh, 2018). In the year 2017–2018 and following the eruption of these protests, at least 5,762 popular protests took place, and unofficial statistics report that 8,000 people were arrested and 40 people died (Iranpedia, 2018b). Statistics regarding the number of detainees are not entirely clear, though an official Iranian newspaper announced a number of 3,700 individuals (Iran Newspaper, 2018).[4]

The Aban 98 Movement began in November 2019 as a protest against the sudden three-fold increase in gasoline prices, which sparked significant unrest

1 Shargh Daily is an Iranian newspaper published in Persian. It covers various topics, including politics, economics, culture and social issues.

2 Pezhvakeiran.com is a private news website that covers political and social news for Iran and the world and focuses on human rights violations.

3 Iranpedia is an online encyclopaedia that provides information about a wide range of topics related to Iran and its history, culture, geography and other aspects of the country.

4 Iran Newspaper is a Persian-language Iranian news website that covers national and international news, politics, economy and culture.

in Iran. Iran's specialized human rights magazine, titled "We Have a Share of Justice", published an article discussing these events. Media reports indicate that the death toll exceeded 300, and that over 7,000 individuals were detained during the demonstrations (IranIntl, 2019).[5] However, there are discrepancies between official and unofficial figures. Some informal reports even suggest a death toll as high as 1,500, with reports of bodies being found in dams, lakes and rivers across various regions of Iran, including Kurdistan and the Karun River in Ahvaz (BBC News Persian, 2019[6]; Rahmani, 2019). In one notable incident that emerged a few days after the protests occurred in the city of Mahshahr, security forces fired upon protesters after the protesters had shot at the officers. Eyewitness accounts state that nearly 20 people were killed, while according to narratives such as those reported by the New York Times, the death toll in Mahshahr and its surrounding settlements ranged from 40 to 100 individuals (Mehrabi, 2020).

These statistics revealing the scale of state repression do not only indicate the government's lack of faith in the right to freedom of assembly, but also structural legal problems. An interview article with Reza Hajihoseini, the prominent human rights defender and permanent and honorary president of the FIDH (International Federation for Human Rights), in Our Rights Magazine of November 2019 directly addressed the structural problems of the government regarding Iranian citizens' right to protest. In the article, the following questions were posed: Where does the authorities' insistence on respecting citizens' rights to protest come from? Is the direct shooting and targeting of the heads of young protesters a sign of recognition of the right to protest? In response to these questions posed by Our Rights Magazine, Hajihoseini stated: "The constitution states that marching is free, but all rights and freedoms are conditioned by Islamic standards and should not oppose the principles of Sharia" (Hajihoseini, 2019: 7). He also highlighted several structural legal problems in the country, leading to the situation that even though the government recognizes the right of citizens to protest, protestors, including children, are nevertheless killed during demonstrations in Iran, some of whom have been clearly targeted directly.

3 The Mahsa (Jina) Amini Movement or Women's Movement

The Mahsa (Jina) Amini Movement or Women's Movement is the latest popular protest movement in Iran, and particularly involves women. It began on 16 September 2022 following the tragic death of 22-year-old Mahsa (Jina) Amini from a fatal head wound while in the custody of the morality police. The protest

5 Iran International includes a satellite television network, radio channels and a London-based Farsi news website focusing on broadcasting news and political and social programs related to Iran.

6 BBC News Persian is the Persian-language version of the BBC website dedicated to news and analysis on Iran. It covers a wide range of topics including politics, society, culture and sport.

initially started in Iranian Kurdistan in the city of Saqqez during Amini's funeral, with the aim to disregard the mandatory hijab – Amini was detained by the morality police for supposedly failing to comply with this mandate. Under the slogan "Women, Life, Freedom", the protest quickly spread to other cities. This protest movement is about much more than just the compulsory hijab, however; it is targeting the government's attempts to control women's bodies and minds.

The hijab itself has become a tool for exercising political power, as the government seeks to regulate various aspects of people's social lives. Some religious leaders and proponents of the hijab argue that if women stopped wearing headscarves, it would lead to the gradual elimination of the hijab, and women would dress less modestly. In particular, they want to oppose what they see as negative Western influences. Religious leaders believe that the hijab provides security for women and society. However, the women involved in the protest movement are arguing for personal freedom and the right to choose how to dress, to have control over their own bodies and lifestyles, and to be granted full citizenship rights.

As stated above, the Women's Movement in Iran is not solely concerned with the morality police or the compulsory hijab; it challenges a repressive system that restricts women's freedom and equality. Women and teenage girls have taken their protest against state control over their lives and freedom to the streets, schools and neighbourhoods. They started by burning their headscarves, and thus the headscarf became a prominent symbol of the movement, and women and girls the key protest actors. Teenage girls in schools took off their official hijabs and staged mass protests, chanting freedom slogans after school closures and in the streets. They resisted pressure from the authorities and announced their protests in various ways, such as by removing their headscarves, cutting their hair, walking without headscarves, burning headscarves in public squares, and chanting powerful slogans emphasizing the importance of life and freedom.

When the protests gained momentum and expanded beyond the issue of the hijab, various groups of social activists, as well as athletes, artists and lawyers, also joined the movement. Slogans echoed through the streets and main thoroughfares of many cities. Virtual groups were formed on social media platforms, rapidly uniting individuals and disseminating calls for action. The Twitter messages related to Amini's death received over 40 million re-tweets in the first week alone (Deutsche Welle, 2022).[7] A notable song titled "For" by Shervin Hajipour, which was inspired by these protest messages on Twitter, garnered over 44 million views on Instagram within 24 hours and became the symbolic anthem of the movement.[8]

7 Deutsche Welle is a German international broadcaster that provides news and analysis in various languages, including Persian. DW Persian covers global news and offers a diverse range of content on politics, culture, science and more.

8 Shervin Hajipour was arrested immediately after the song was played and her Instagram page was closed.

The media has played a significant role in facilitating communication and amplifying the protests, with videos and photos of street demonstrations spreading widely, and the sound of protest reaching the ears of the world. Furthermore, the influential hacker group known as Anonymous got involved in the protests. They targeted the website of the Central Bank of Iran, several government websites, CCTV cameras in Tehran, and other portals and websites, rendering the government's online presence temporarily inaccessible. Due to the protesters' access to social media and their ability to disseminate news abroad, the Iranian government-imposed internet restrictions, and certain platforms such as Telegram, Instagram, WhatsApp, Play Store and Twitter were filtered in the country. This media censorship continues to this day. Yet despite all of the limitations and government pressure, the movement has not been silenced.

Following the spread of the protests nationally, a new student movement evolved in support. At the beginning of the 2022 academic year, the incoming students were accompanied by these nationwide protests and with the central slogan of "Women, Life, Freedom". Student protests first appeared at the two most important universities in Iran – Tehran and Sharif universities – then at several other universities in Tehran, including Amir Kabir, Beheshti, Alzahra, Shariati, Allameh, Khajeh Nasir, Azad University of Science and Research, Azad University of North Tehran, Azad University of Arts, University of Science and Technology, among others. The voice of student protests then continued to expand to other universities in other Iranian cities. During this time, universities became loci of resistance and struggle. They even faced security confrontations in some cases, including an attack by security forces along with a number of plainclothes forces on the evening of Sunday 2 October 2022, with the siege of Sharif University of Technology in Tehran and attacks on students. Mayhem and shooting caused injuries and a number of students were detained and transferred to unknown locations. From 17 September to 15 December 2022, student protests took place at 144 Iranian universities, and 637 students were arrested (Wikipedia, 2022).

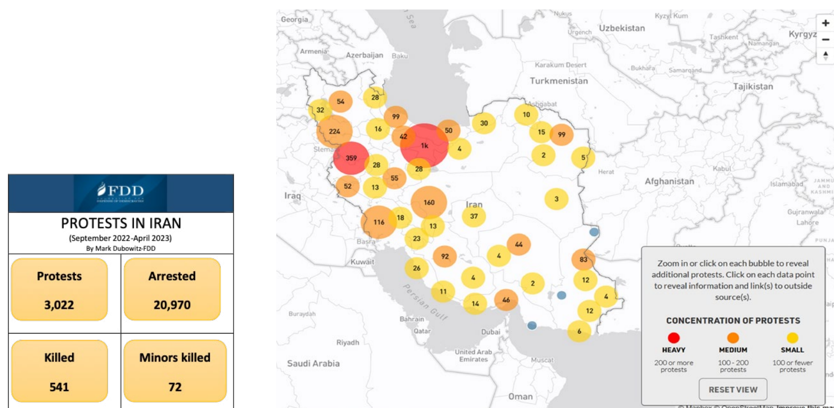
One feature that distinguishes the "Women, Life, Freedom" protests from previous protests has been the participation of guilds and workers. Teachers and lawyers are among those who have shown their support for the nationwide protests by rallying in the streets or halting their work. Here, it can be said that these protests went beyond one stratum or group of society, and through a kinetic process of expansion took on the collective identity of different groups.

Iran Human Rights (IHR) has stated that on 3 February 2023, eyewitness reports described how security forces targeted protesters directly, especially young women. This included deliberately shooting them in the head and face, leading in several cases to blindness. Such inhumane and extrajudicial acts by Iran's security agencies, aimed at suppressing these popular protests, have been

systematic (Akhbar-Rooz, 2023).[9] Ophthalmologists in three hospitals in Tehran (Farabi, Rasoul Akram and Labafinejad) have admitted more than 500 patients with eye injuries during the course of the protests, and doctors in Kurdistan province have also reported at least 80 admissions for head and face injuries (Kayhan London, 2023).[10]

According to the latest statistics from the Foundation for Defence of Democracies (FDD, 2023),[11] from September 2022 to April 2023, 3,022 protests were carried out across Iran, with 2,097 protesters arrested and 541 killed, of which 72 were children. The map below shows the distribution of protests across Iran.

Map 1: Distribution of protests across Iran from September 2022 to April 2023



(Source: FDD VISUAL, Design by Daniel Ackerman, Development by Pavak Patel)[12]

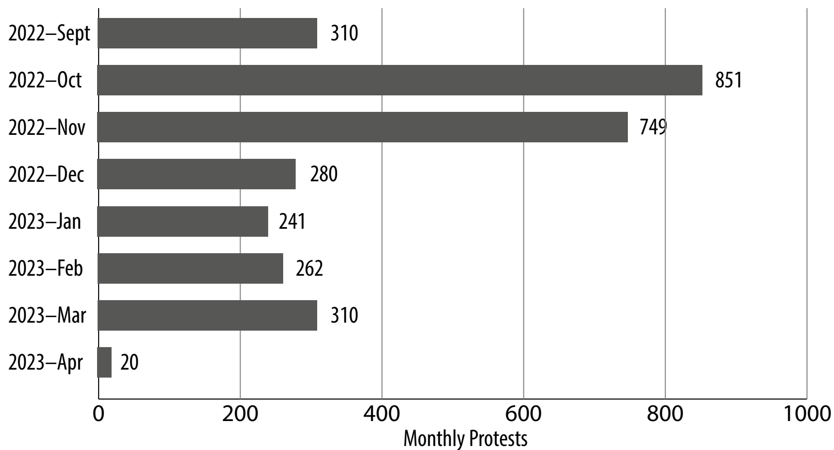
As the map shows, protests and popular movements were scattered throughout Iran, though they were most intense in the country's capital Tehran. Different ethnic groups in Iran, including Turks in the north-west, Kurds and Lur in the west, and Baluch in the south-east, have also had a strong presence. Thus, it can be said that although the protest began in a Kurdish city in western Iran, it quickly became a trans-ethnic movement across the whole of the country. Due to the scale of the protests and the inefficiency and brutality of the government in its response, the rift between the government and the people has intensified,

9 Akhbar-Rooz is a Persian-language Iranian news website that covers national and international news, politics and social issues.
10 Kayhan London is a dual Persian- and English-language news website that provides news, analysis and opinion pieces on Iran and the Middle East. It covers various topics, including politics, human rights and culture.
11 The Foundation for Defence of Democracies (FDD) is a non-partisan policy institute based in the United States.
12 FDD's real-time data on the number of protests is compiled through open-source reporting. A source link is available for each protest. The data on the estimated number of arrests, injuries and deaths is compiled through the latest reports by the Human Rights Activists News Agency (HRANA).

which has in turn made the state-ethnic relationship weaker and inter-ethnic relationships stronger. At first, some opposition groups and separatist parties for ethnic minorities that are based outside Iran, renewed calls for secession from Iran; this issue is also sometimes raised by Kurds in neighbouring countries, for example by proposing that citizens in the western parts of Iran, who are mostly Sunni or Kurdish, join Iraqi Kurdistan. In fact, however, even though the different ethnic groups in Iran do want freedom and self-determination, and even though there is government discrimination, they do not want to separate from the nationality and land of Iran. Furthermore, when Mahsa (Jina) Amini was killed, many non-Kurdish ethnic groups such as the Lor, Baloch and Azari expressed their solidarity with Kurds.[13]

The following chart shows the number of protests from the beginning of the movement in September 2022 to April 2023, whereby a clear decline over time can be seen. This reduction is a consequence of the large government's repression. However, the protests and the movement have not stopped and are still continuing.

Figure 1: Distribution of Iranian protests by month (September 2022 – April 2023).



(Source: FDD VISUAL, Design by Daniel Ackerman, Development by Pavak Patel)

13 Examples of slogans from other ethnic groups expressing solidarity with Kurds:
- From Zahedan [Baluch people] to Tehran [capital], my life for Iran.
- From Kurdistan to Tehran, I sacrifice my life for Iran.
- From Kurdistan to Tehran, injustice against women.
- Kurdish, Baluch, and Azeri: freedom and equality.

4 Nonviolence in Modern Movements and Bodily Integrity

Bolstered by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights following the end of the Second World War, nonviolence became a powerful strategy of independence and freedom struggles around the world. Mahatma Gandhi, for instance, successfully led a liberation struggle for Indian independence, with an emphasis on resistance through nonviolence and civil disobedience. Many other movement leaders have also put this method of struggle at the forefront of their work, including Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in the US, Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu in South Africa, Dom Hélder Pessoa Câmara in Brazil and Rigoberta Menchú Tum in Guatemala, among others.

In 1962, Nelson Mandela, after recounting several instances where peaceful protests had been met with violence by government forces, stated, “Naked force and violence is the weapon openly used by the South African Government to beat down the struggles of the African people and to suppress their aspirations” (Mandela, 1965: 113). Indeed, it was not uncommon for nonviolent protests around the world, from the middle of the twentieth century onwards, to face violent reactions from the state or controlling elites; though in several instances, these nonviolent movements were nevertheless successful. Especially in today’s fluid and networked societies, the principle of the physical and psychological integrity of protesters should be considered closely. As Hill (2016) defines it, “personal integrity abuse refers to any violent government action that violates rules that have been developed in political theory and international law concerning acceptable uses of physical force by governments. These rules have become the basis for the most commonly used indicators of personal integrity abuse, the Political Terror Scale” (Hill, 2016: 824). In the field of human rights, violation of the bodily integrity of another is regarded as an unethical infringement that is intrusive and possibly criminal.

Bodies may indeed be experienced as autonomous, but when this is so, this is because of their social and discursive acknowledgment as autonomous. “Indeed, to the extent that both integrity and autonomy play interchangeable roles in contemporary legislation, the passive and spatial nature of women’s bodies is highlighted” (Miller, 2007: 114). Because women’s sense of self, autonomy and safety is affected by the society in which they live, as well as the explicit and implicit opinions of others, in some cases some women might restrict their own body and spatial movements. To have physical integrity is to have full power over one’s body and the right to make decisions about it. When individuals engage in social domains without apprehension or coercion, it can be asserted that they possess independence (Miller, 2007). In other words, autonomy is a step before independence. There are numerous examples in which women’s and girls’ liberty and body integrity are violated in Iran, including child marriage, forced marriage in some traditional families, the rule that a married woman needs her husband’s written permission to travel outside of the country, and rules and restrictions

regarding what women can wear in public. All of these exert significant pressure on individuals.

Questions related to topics such as reproductive autonomy, rape and abortion, among others, have been analysed with the help of this concept of bodily integrity. Often, the notion of bodily integrity is utilized without reflection, but when it is examined closely, it is clear that the concept can be employed in divergent ways:

> According to Kant, a violation of the body's integrity is morally wrong on three counts (McKenny, 1999): (1) The integrity of the human body is a constituent of the dignity of the person, so that to violate the integrity of the body is to violate the dignity of the person. (2) The (biological) integrity of the human body is a necessary condition of the fulfilment of human moral and other purposes, which may depend upon the integration of some body parts into the whole. (3) Respect for the integrity of the body is a condition for proper moral sensibility (Dekkers, Cor & Wils, 2005: 186).

In the psychological dimension, Patosalmi, referring to Cornell, writes:

> Psychological theorizing of bodily integrity strengthens Cornell's understanding of the personality as a project: something that cannot be finished and is always in flux, which is created in interaction with others as the person identifies with others who are a part of her or his life. An idea of bodily integrity as imaginary and needing others for its recognition is an important consideration for Cornell in regard to legal theory. She believes that the state and the legal system should be understood as Symbolic Others that confirm and constitute who is established as a person. This means that it is not just the family, primary caretakers, or other people close to the person who construct imaginings about bodily integrity, but also the state and the legal system, which regulate bodily existence (Patosalmi, 2009: 131).

And in legal settings, policies and laws play the main role, as Cabezas and Schweiger (2016) state:

> The need to preserve the bodily integrity of girls could also have a double function in policy-making. First, it could be used as a theoretical tool to detect unnoticed instances of injustice, and ascertain whether the best interests of girls are being respected in a given policy or law. Second, it could contribute, as a filter, to scrutinizing the moral validity of political proposals, checking whether a given proposal would respect the three areas of a girl's bodily integrity in both the short-term and long-term, not only from a financial and physical standpoint but also in relation to her psychological development and agency (Cabezas & Schweiger, 2016: 47).

Patosalmi also states that “bodily integrity is a feature of basic human capabilities” (Patosalmi, 2009: 125). This integrity includes different dimensions such as “freedom of movement, respect for bodily boundaries, and opportunities for sexual satisfaction and reproductive choice” (Nussbaum cited by Patosalmi, 2009: 125). And as was previously mentioned regarding the impact of laws and policies on bodily integrity, for the level of government intervention in the lives of citizens, the theory of civil libertarians can be considered:

> In the domain of libertarian philosophy, the primary concern of civil libertarians is the relationship between government and individuals. In theory, civil libertarians seek to restrict this relationship to an absolute minimum, in which the state can function and provide basic services and securities without excessively interfering in the lives of its citizens (Wikipedia, 2023).

So, the body is not only a physical body; rather, it is the product of society and is an arena through which to show the numerous contracts and orders that generate social structures. With the control that society exerts on the bodies of individuals, particularly women, and by designing the body, the process of gender socialization and dominance is enacted. This is a form of dominance that can be reproduced by pre-existing ideologies. Controlling women’s bodies is a form of state domination in the public sphere. In this regard, the morality police in Iran consider it their duty to control anomalies – including in terms of what women wear. This practice makes women feel that through the social compulsion that interferes in what they are allowed to wear and insists on them covering up, their control over their own bodies is taken away. Sparked by the death of Mahsa (Jina) Amini following her arrest for a supposed infraction of the mandate to cover herself properly, women and girls in Iran began a protest movement of civil disobedience to reclaim autonomy over their bodies and lives. The protestors in the “Women, Life, Freedom” movement are demanding choice – as noted in the capability approach, which states that “Humans beings should be able to choose what they want to achieve in their lives” (Cabezas & Schweiger, 2016: 40) – as well as respect for their bodies and lifestyle choices. Kant sees respect for the integrity of the body as a fundamental condition for creating an appropriate moral conscience, and it therefore must be maintained. Furthermore, according to the liberal philosophy of civil liberties, the government should exert minimal interference in the lives of citizens.

Bodily integrity in this article thus refers to two dimensions: the first dimension relates to totalitarian control exercised over women’s physical bodies and which curtails the rights of different strata, ethnicities and groups to pursue quality of life; the second dimension relates to the physical immunity of protesters in past movements as well as the current movement in Iran. What is being discussed in Iran’s recent Women’s Movement regarding the issue of

physical integrity is the right of women to make their own lifestyle choices, to have control over their own bodies, and to have civil and bodily freedom.

5 Conclusion

Over the past three decades, the Iranian people have been striving for freedom and democracy at great human cost. In recent years, there has been an increase in uprisings and political movements, uniting different layers and classes of Iranian civil society. The death of Mahsa (Jina) Amini in the custody of the morality police sparked protests that spread throughout the country, starting as a women-centred anti-hijab movement and evolving into a broader demand for political system change. The protests gained international attention and support, with the universal slogan of “Women, Life, Freedom” resonating across borders and inspiring marches worldwide. The movement has three main aspects: internal, external and international. The internal aspect refers to the domestic protests resulting from the accumulation of social issues, economic hardships and the demands of Iranians over the past three decades. The external aspect includes Iranians residing abroad who, through unity and solidarity, have organized widespread civil rallies and declared their own civil protests, expressing their support for the current movement. The international aspect involves pressures and sanctions imposed by Western powers on the current Iranian regime.

It is noteworthy that the current movement lacks revolutionary status and is situated midway between reform and revolution. The government has the power to influence its trajectory through its actions and decisions, either leading to reform and reduced protests or further suppression and increased injustice, potentially fuelling a revolution. The government is in fact resisting the movement and its demands for reform, while the movement itself continues its path in a scattered and intermittent manner due to a lack of clear leadership. Foreign media and celebrities (including athletes, artists and famous actors) are playing a significant role. Additionally, the movement can be considered a grassroots one, something that has become more possible in the digital age, with access to social networks being its most important tool. The movement exhibits incremental progress and occasional setbacks, but it remains resilient.

On the other hand, the issue of the compulsory hijab in Iran has a political dimension and serves as a tool for government power. It is also an issue with massive social repercussions, given that there are 43 million women in Iranian and currently 26 institutions responsible for enforcing hijab regulations. Controlling women’s bodies can violate their physical integrity; this control also plays a role in shaping the lifestyles of Iranians and challenges their citizenship rights by imposing and restricting their freedom to choose how they live their lives. The ruling power presents itself as a protector of women’s security, and has created numerous complexities in the debate over whether to allow the

hijab to be optional. Supporters of the Islamic hijab contend that women can participate in society and public spaces without fear of moral abuse or judgment, because the hijab conveys peace and security to them. If the government fails to implement reforms, however, Iranian society will move towards polarization. In such a circumstance, a crisis in the legitimacy of the regime could occur. This could be accompanied by inflation and judicial injustices. Popular protests would likely escalate, and yet more groups would join the movement, and thus an even larger movement could emerge.

Considering that there is no structural framework for peaceful protests to take place, and that the government perceives all protesters as disruptors and a threat to social order, greater violence will likely be exerted against protesters in the future. It therefore seems that the way out of the current situation is through structural reforms, and one of the main things that needs to be amended is the constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Above all, there should be protections for freedom of expression through democratization of the press and mass media, the removal of filters and access to international social network platforms such as Instagram, the right to engage in civil and peaceful gatherings, freedom of choice for women in terms of how to dress, and last but not least the removal of social discrimination.

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Fighting

Women* in Movement: Female (Care) Strikes Between Unions and Feminism

Ingrid Artus

In the heart of a global capitalist economy based on social inequality and a rigid exploitation of nature, we are currently witnessing a worldwide wave of feminist movement. Or to use the metaphor of Karen Offen (2000), there is a new "volcanic eruption" of feminist struggles directed against patriarchal violence and gender-specific inequality. These topics are old. What is new, however, is the propagated means of struggle: the women*'s strike, *grève feministe* or *sciopero delle donne*, which has proved to be capable of mass mobilization, as was impressively demonstrated, for example, in Argentina in 2016, in the US in 2017, in Spain in March 2018, in Switzerland in June 2019 and 2023, and in Iceland in October 2023 – as well as in a lot of union-led feminized strike activities focused mainly on the care sectors. The following text is about these new female (care) strikes, which, I propose, can be seen as hubs of utopia. They evoke visions of a better and fairer society based on solidarity and liberated from sexual oppression. These visions are, furthermore, not only an abstract and distant goal, but are (at least partially) also actualized and 'lived' in the course of concrete strike practices.

In this text, I do not only explore the potentials of women*'s strikes, but also the difficulties in cooperation between unions and the international feminist movement. The article is structured in five parts. To begin, I will briefly describe lines of tradition concerning the relationship between women*, unions and the labour movement. Following this, I offer some remarks on the fundamental concept and topic of 'strike', before addressing the specificity of women*'s strikes, or more generally, the relationship between strike and gender. This is followed by a fourth section outlining the difficulties and potentials of collaboration between unions and the feminist movement. The conclusion emphasizes again that women*'s strikes can be seen as hubs of utopia for a better world. Overall, my aim for this text is to offer a contribution to bringing research on utopia out of its academic niche existence. I posit that the classic concept of utopia as an unreal 'non-place' can be contrasted or even replaced by a concept that understands utopias as an integral part of critical-progressive social movements (cf. Daniel & Klapeer, 2019; Daniel, 2023).

1 Women*, Unions and the Labour Movement: Lines of Tradition and Current Facts

The labour movement and the women's movement can be seen as the two most influential social movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Nonetheless, the relations between these social movements are complicated (Günther, 2019; Artus et al., 2020; Streichhahn & Jacob, 2020). In the early days of unionization in the nineteenth century, the male-dominated unions often fought against female waged work, which was seen as 'dirty competition' to men*'s work and posing a danger of 'wage depression'. Women* were not even accepted as union members and were also legally forbidden to organize politically (Lossef-Tillmans, 1978). It would be decades before the socialist workers' movement, and especially the proletarian women's movement, changed these kinds of arguments. This was due to figures such as August Bebel and Clara Zetkin, the founder of International Women's Day on 8 March.

Gradually, the socialist labour movement and the trade unions committed themselves to the goal of gender equality. Since that time, unions have fought for many emancipatory achievements, not only but also for women*. But at the same time, they remain institutions of hegemonic masculinity (Podann, 2012) – or 'androcentric institutions' – which means that the ordinary or normal union member is still thought of as a man*. Although women* are increasingly part of the waged labour force, they continue to be underrepresented in trade unions – in terms of their organizational presence, union leadership positions, and the degree to which trade union policies reflect the interests of women* (Elomäki et al., 2022).[1] Gender-specific unionization varies greatly depending on which industry is unionized (Artus & Holland, 2022).

German trade unions have gone through difficult times in the past 30 years. Their membership has almost halved from its peak at over 11 million after the integration of East German members in 1991 to 5.64 million in 2022 (DGB, 2023). Against this background, and in view of the increasing number of women* in employment, German trade unions are nowadays increasingly targeting female workers with the aim of increasing their membership. Hence the proportion of women* in the German Trade Union Confederation (DGB) has risen slightly from 32% in 2005 to 34% in 2022 (DGB, 2023). Women* have become more visible within the labour movement. There is also a certain trend to consider gender-political issues in collective bargaining in a more decisive way and to promote women* in union leadership positions. Recently, the two biggest

1 A comparison of ten countries in Western Europe by Rebecca Gumbrell-McCormick and Richard Hyman (2013: 54) showed that Germany occupied the inglorious top position in terms of difference in the degree of unionization among men* and women*. While in Sweden, Denmark, the UK and Ireland women* were even more union-organized than men*, the degree of female organization in Germany was only about half as high as that of men*.

German trade union organizations, the DGB and the branch union of the metal and electrical industry (IG Metall) are headed by women*.

In parallel, a significant rise in feminized (and often migrant) labour disputes and female strike activities can be observed. The centres of female worker unrest are the service and care work branches. Before analysing these feminized strike activities in more detail, however, I will first ask a question, banal at first glance, but ultimately not so simple: What is a strike?

2 On the Subject of Strike

If you ask someone what a strike actually is, you will get very different answers depending on whom you ask. A German trade unionist will answer that a strike is a legal and important power resource to enforce a collective agreement. This 'narrow' concept of strike is mainly due to the quite restricted legal right to strike in Germany (Dribbusch, 2007, 2023). Strikes are legal only as temporary collective cessations of work in order to enforce collective contracts between unions and employers. Hence, only trade unions can legally call for a strike. Individuals or other groups of activists cannot – at least not in the context of waged employment and without the risk of negative sanctions.

Political strikes – meaning strikes that are basically addressed to the state and involve political demands – are prohibited in Germany, at least according to current legal opinions. And even unions can only legally call for a strike if there have been intensive negotiations beforehand. It has to be assured that a strike is the last resort in a collective bargaining dispute. If, finally, a union calls for a strike in a collective bargaining dispute, then it pays its union members strike benefits, which are around 60% of their wages. Strikes are thus expensive for unions, and this is an important reason why German unionists are rather cautious about calling strikes. Nevertheless, the trade union-affiliated Economic and Social Research Institute (WSI) registered 225 union-led strikes in 2022, involving several thousand work stoppages and around 930,000 employees. In international comparison, the degree of industrial action in Germany is in the lower midfield. Around seventeen per cent of all employees in Germany have taken part in a strike in the 'narrow sense' at some point during their working life (Dribbusch, Luth & Schulten, 2022).

Looking at what is called a strike in history, or in other countries or political contexts, there are many more kinds of actions that can be called strikes. In France, for example, there is an individual right to strike, which means in principle three wage earners in the workplace can simply decide together to go on strike for some demand, without any union at all. In Italy, Greece, Spain and France, general strikes for political demands are also part of the normal repertoire of political action (Hamann, Johnston & Kelly, 2013), even if there are always social disputes about the legitimacy and even legality of political

strikes (this is currently the case in the UK, in view of the extensive strikes in the national healthcare sector). In Germany, too, there are many actions called strikes that have little or nothing to do with unions. There are climate strikes or education strikes at universities and schools. Feminists have called for sex strikes or childbirth strikes. And currently there is an international women*'s strike movement, which takes place mainly in the form of mass mobilizations on feminist struggle days such as 8 March. So there are many forms of strike, which would fall under the concept of strike in the broader sense. And while these are hardly common among the (German) trade unions, they are becoming increasingly common in German as well as international social movements.

According to this broad definition, a strike thus means that as many people as possible join together to break their cooperation with the existing rules. The striking people normally have one thing in common: they are in a relatively powerless position vis-à-vis someone or some institution that is more powerful than they are. A strike is therefore when these relatively weak people get together, organize themselves and decide that at a certain point or even over a longer period of time they will no longer cooperate within the existing power relations and routines. In other words, it is the – often demonstrative – withdrawal of cooperation by the weaker in relation to the stronger through the means of collective organizing, with the aim of changing asymmetrical power relations.

This is strike action in a broad sense. And strikes, precisely because they pit the weaker against the stronger, are usually dangerous. They are moments of crisis. They are crisis-like because they break with routines that have hitherto been taken for granted. They are crisis-like because the activists do not know exactly what will happen if they question what has been taken for granted up to now, if they stop cooperating. Nor do they know exactly how the more powerful will react if they withdraw their willingness to cooperate. Hence strikes are potentially dangerous moments in which people must rely on one another.

A successful strike requires trust in the reliability to collectively organize. It also requires the belief that together the world can be changed. Strikes are moments of danger, moments of crisis; but they are also moments in which a utopia appears. They are moments in which it becomes clear that together we are strong, we can change the world. Together with others, I can take my fate into my own hands. Strikes are moments of self-empowerment in which people experience that they can move things. People who participate in strikes often never forget this experience for the rest of their lives.

Strikes are constructive moments in the formation of political awareness, and they are moments in which collective identities are formed. A 'we' is constituted in collective action. This we – the collective identity that strives together for a more or less utopian goal – is both a prerequisite for joint action, and at the same time a consequence of it. Therefore, strikes as a means of struggle are, on the one hand, exigent and presuppositional; they need preparation and/or a long tradition of collective action. On the other hand, they often have considerable

effects for the future, in terms of fostering feelings of solidarity and collective identity. This is true for both successful and failed strike movements. Even when strikes ultimately fail to achieve the goals set, they are often viewed positively or even glorified in retrospect as powerful attempts to fight back. As the motto goes: those who fight can lose; those who don't fight have already lost.

If we now take a closer look at women*'s strikes or feminized strikes, these are special in the sense that the 'we' that fights and wants to realize a utopia is (more or less) defined by a (however constructed) gender identity. As strikes that are carried out by a majority of women* and that pursue primarily female interests, they always have – explicitly or not – consequences not only for capitalism but also for patriarchy. Something similar can be said for migrant or Black strike movements. It does not matter whether these strikes are 'only' or primarily for more wages or shorter working hours, and at first glance seem to have little to do with patriarchal or racist conditions of exploitation. The meaning, the dynamics, the media perception and also the strike results in these cases are always shaped by the conditions of sexist or racist oppression. These facts are explained in more detail below.

3 Strike and Gender

In the history of the labour movement, strikes have been clearly considered masculine. This can be seen, for example, in the famous painting of Robert Koehler called *Der Streik* (The Strike), which was exhibited at the Spring Exhibition of the National Academy of Design in New York in 1886 and became immediately famous. It depicts a strike as the labour movement classically imagined it at that time. The striking factory workers are all male. A few women* can also be seen in the picture, though they are clearly not part of the strike action. They seem to be begging their husbands to be careful, or they are looking into the riotous crowd with worry, surrounded by their children.

In the imaginary of the older labour movement, 'the' striker is clearly a man. Of course, this is an androcentric view of history. Many studies prove that there have always been plenty of women*'s strikes as well (Perrot, 1998; DeVault, 2004, 2006; Notz, 2020a; Dribbusch, 2020). As just one of many examples, the strike of the Crimmitschau textile workers in Germany can be cited here. In 1903 and 1904, these textile workers went on strike for months calling for a ten-hour day. They lost the fight, partly because they were ultimately abandoned by the predominantly male trade unions at the time. Nonetheless, the Crimmitschau textile workers fought one of the toughest labour battles of their time and were, so to speak, at the fighting edge of the workers' movement.

Although there have always been tough labour struggles in feminized industries, such as the Crimmitschau textile workers' strike, historical studies also prove that women*'s strikes were less common overall than male-dominated

strikes. They have also usually been more defensive (Perrot 1998; DeVault, 2004, 2006). Strikes are gendered phenomena. It matters which gender is involved. This is true because of the gender-based division of labour, within and beyond formal employment. In the area of waged work, the fields of activity classically differ between men* and women* to this day. There is a segmentation of the labour market with feminized and masculinized professions. Women*'s strikes therefore take place in different places and branches than those of men*. As a result of the differing occupational fields, but also due to women*'s typical double burden of employment and family/unpaid care work, the strikes of women* and men* often have different content and goals. For women*'s strikes, reconciliation between family and employment, between paid and unpaid work, often plays a role, as do shorter (waged) working hours. Qualitative working conditions are also more likely to be the subject of debate, rather than wage levels alone. The forms and cultures of conflict also differ. Striking (male) miners like to burn car tires and striking (male) airline captains perform in uniforms. While male-dominated strike cultures often cultivate martial and military symbolism, it is not uncommon for female strikers to appear with flowers, balloons, music and dancing. Children are also often part of the action.

Gender is thus a fundamental feature of social movements, and gender-specific symbols and characteristics have very different values in patriarchal societies. They can also be valorised or devalued depending on the level of gender equality. As Einwohner et al. (2000) put it, "When we say that a movement is gendered, we mean that some aspect of the movement constructs differences between women and men and/or elicits a certain set of social meanings because of its association, actual or assumed, with femininities or masculinities" (p. 682). This is true not only for social movements in general, but also for strikes.

A typical feature of women*'s strikes is, furthermore, that women*'s power resources were and are often more limited than those of men. This is because women* are still more often employed in less qualified or precarious jobs. They suffer from a double and triple burden as worker, housewife, mother – and eventually also political activist. Their resources for collective organizing were/are fewer. They were/are less accustomed to speaking up and standing up for their interests, and combative ways of representing their interests are often still considered 'unfeminine' – if not illegitimate – for women*. So women* were and are in many ways limited in their ability to act, individually and collectively. Female action is also perceived differently in society and the media. Men* are not only more likely to demand their workers' rights in a militant manner, but they are also more accepted in doing so. While women* were and still are often assigned primarily to the family sphere, they are also expected to perform unpaid work or at least to be modest in their demands for remuneration.

Summa summarum, the social evaluation and symbolic expression of women*'s strikes is different from that of men*'s strikes. It is more unusual, more extraordinary, more surprising when women* revolt. At first glance, they

may seem less dangerous and more harmless. At the same time, however, their uprisings break more fundamentally with social attributions and expectations. It is precisely this aspect that is so important for the individual experience of women* who participate in strikes, for the subjective meaning of striking. As noted above, strikes are moments in which individuals experience that they can collectively change their fate, that they are strong. This might possibly be an even more dramatic experience for women* than for men*.

Struggles in the field of waged labour are never only about capitalist exploitation. Labour struggles are always gender struggles, too (Artus et al., 2020), and they should furthermore be seen with an intersectional perspective (Crenshaw, 1989). There are always many relevant axes of discrimination, such as class relations, racism, sexism and ableism. At this point, however, it is important to note foremost that patriarchal oppression and the struggle against patriarchy always play an eminent role in women*'s strikes, (nearly) regardless of whether this goal is explicitly stated or not. Furthermore, looking at women*'s strikes in an intersectional way means acknowledging that women*'s struggles within the mainly male-dominated labour movement were and are ideologically in a difficult position. They have been, and continue to be, integrated into androcentric union organizations which declare(d) the class conflict to be the main contradiction. Thus women*'s strikes – explicitly framed as such or not – were/are often perceived as divisive.

When women* define their 'special' interests – equal pay, equal career opportunities or protection against sexual harassment – this could be interpreted as a danger to class unity. The so-called "proletarian antifeminism" (Thönnessen, 1969) saw feminism as a kind of suspect collaboration with the capitalist enemy. Thus, historically there has been a wide gap, especially in Germany, between the bourgeois and the proletarian women*'s movements (Notz, 2020b), and a long tradition of division between proletarian trade unionism and bourgeois feminism.

Ironically, the particular strength of the labour movement led to a particularly pronounced split in the women*'s movement. 'Sisters' were mostly not united, but split off in different 'class camps'. Women*'s strikes can therefore be seen as a kind of "blind spot" (Kurz-Scherf, 2020) standing in the shadow of the two major social movements that shaped the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in Europe: they stood in the shadow of the labour movement, because the representation of women*'s interests was often perceived as divisive; and they stood in the shadow of the (predominantly bourgeois) feminist movement, because its main objectives were often not defined within the area of capitalist exploitation (but, for example, on a political level as women*'s suffrage). Even today, coalitions between female trade unionists and feminist groups remain complicated, rare and often precarious (Wolf, 2021). This is why the contemporary women*'s strike movement – positioned as it is between unions and the feminist movement – is a very interesting intersectional phenomenon.

4 Female (Care) Strikes and an International Women*'s Strike Movement: Between Collective Bargaining and the Fight Against Patriarchy

We are currently witnessing a kind of 'third wave' of the women*'s movement. Where do these new women*'s strike movements come from? It is important to note that these women*'s strikes are not expressions of defence but are rather offensive phenomena. Women* are taking to the streets and breaking from their cooperation with patriarchy because they have grown stronger than before, because they think they are able to successfully push through new demands. The movement(s) is/are based on emancipatory processes and an increase of female power resources worldwide. This includes female advances in the field of waged labour, with the overall increase in women*'s employment. Today, women* are the family breadwinners more often than ever before. Girls too have made enormous progress in terms of qualifications and education. Family constellations are also changing. This strengthens female self-confidence and means that women* (can) increasingly demand equal rights, integrity, self-determination, better living conditions, dignity. "We matter" is the motto. We matter as women*, or simply as humans.

The current women*'s strike movement is fed by two main sources. One is the increasing number of collective bargaining strikes taking place in many feminized service sectors. We are, for instance, witnessing a tertiarization of strikes in Germany; and given the predominantly female workforce in many service industries of the tertiary sector, such as retail, cleaning and care work, tertiarization also means a feminization of strikes. On the other hand, there is the international women*'s strike movement, which in the beginning was primarily directed against violence against women*. With the slogan *"ni una menos"* ("not one [woman] less"), it originated around 2015 in Latin America and was mainly directed against mass femicide. Accompanied and supported by the #MeToo movement, particularly in the US, it grew larger and took up a variety of issues against sexism and gender discrimination, as well as intersectional topics (Arruzza, Bhattacharya & Fraser, 2019). Since the overwhelming women*'s strike on 8 March 2018 in Spain, which mobilized hundreds of thousands of participants, the call for an international women*'s strike has become part of the standard repertoire of annual feminist mobilizations (Lorey, 2018; Kiechle, 2019; AG Feministischer Streik Kassel, 2023).

Let us first have a brief look at the feminized strike actions in the German service sector. A kind of 'flagship' of the movement are the manifold and quite successful strike actions within the German hospital sector. The struggles have taken place at the core of the actual crisis of social reproduction (Jürgens, 2010), also referred to as "crises of care" (Artus et al., 2017), and are sometimes

connected with demands for a "care revolution" (Winker, 2015).[2] The 'care crisis' is the consequence of new gender arrangements on the one hand, and of economization, privatization and the dismantling of the welfare state on the other. It results in dramatic understaffing in paid and unpaid care work, massive overwork and bad working conditions, often with a threat to patient well-being.

Given this background, the hospital sector is the area where ver.di, the United Services Union, is probably currently doing the most intense work of organizing, and where it recruits most new members. Beginning in 2011, successful strikes in the Charité clinics in Berlin paved the way. This was followed by a broad organizing campaign in Saarland, very successful struggles in Bavaria and in the university hospitals of North Rhine-Westphalia, as well as in Frankfurt (Hesse) (Artus, 2019; Quetting, 2022). A large number of strikes are taking place, above all focused on reducing workload and recruiting more employees.

New strike strategies had to be developed because the situation in the care sector is different from that in industries. You cannot simply switch off the machines and leave the factory floor, because patients still have to be cared for, also during a strike. There is, furthermore, less profit in hospitals than in the automobile industry, and the effects of the strike often do not directly affect those who are economically responsible. Power resources in care struggles are thus more difficult than in classic factory work. This is why direct democracy in strike organization, as well as alliances with social movements, play a major role, and why strike action in care sectors necessarily has to become more 'political' than in production industries. Care sectors such as hospitals, day care centres and retirement homes are often underfunded. Therefore, a lot of questions have to be asked: Where does the value creation flow to? Where do the profits go? Apparently not to the care of children, patients and elderly people. Why is this? What values are important to us? What are the primary needs of society? What do we want to finance? Do we need more cars or good care? Such questions are about very fundamental social values and also about the distribution of social resources. So collective action, especially in the care sectors, necessarily addresses the level of state regulation, if not the economic (capitalist) system as a whole.

All of these observations also apply to the second focal point of female strike activities: the education and child care sector. In Germany in 2015, tens of thousands of day care centre employees took part in strikes over several weeks for better working conditions and higher wages (Artus & Pflüger, 2017). In 2022, there followed another round of collective action in the struggle to upgrade

2 The care crisis came to a head during the 2020/21 coronavirus pandemic, where women* were doubly affected. The closure of facilities, especially in feminized employment sectors (schools, kindergartens, restaurants, shops and cultural institutions) affected women* much more than men*, and in two ways: as employees and as carers. As a result, women* in particular faced a reduction in paid working hours and thus income due to the pandemic. The division of labour within the family also experienced a surge in re-traditionalization (Kohlrausch & Zucco, 2020).

'typical' female care work. In that year, ver.di deliberately chose 8 March as a strike day for its current round of collective bargaining, an explicit attempt to bring together trade union and feminist struggles (Behle & Wiedemann, 2022). These new care strikes are struggles for recognition. They are about the value of female labour, in symbolic and material terms. And they are about the value of 'care' in a very general sense.

But it is not only in caring professions in which women* are increasingly striking. It is also happening in many areas of precarious service work, such as retail, cleaning work, the hotel and catering industry and flight attendance. The Amazon strike, which has now been going on for over ten years, is also relevant in this respect (Apicella, 2021). Although Amazon staff is not predominately female (it is roughly fifty-fifty men* and women*), there are many women* involved in the strike. The proportion of migrants is high in the area of precarious service work, and the struggles of migrant women* are often even broader in nature. They are fundamental emancipation struggles directed against capitalist, sexist and racist discrimination.

This new wave of female labour unrest thus affects a variety of different sectors and takes place in various contexts. They are mostly union-organized strikes in the narrow sense of the term (as discussed above). They certainly all have consequences for gender relations, but the striking women* rarely characterize their strikes explicitly as 'women*'s' strikes, and even more rarely as 'feminist' strikes. This is different from the women*'s strike movement at the international level, which is not a strike in the narrow sense but in the broader sense. The movement originated in Argentina, Uruguay and Chile with huge demonstrations, where women*, fed up with patriarchy, one day refused to cooperate and took to the streets.

This idea of a one-day women*'s strike is not entirely new, but has a longer tradition, above all in the Global North. Such strikes took place, for example, in the US in the 1970s, in Iceland in 1975 and also in Germany in 1994. But after the 1990s it became quiet around the idea of a one-day women*'s strike for a long time. And it is remarkable that its rebirth occurred in the Global South in 2016. Since then, every year women* around the world have taken to the streets – often on 8 March – and gone on strike: for equal rights, self-determination over their own bodies, against violence against women*, and for a world without exploitation and oppression. The women*'s revolt is not limited to paid work, but affects all areas of life: waged labour, housework, farming, family, sexuality. Unpaid (care) work and the unequal gender-based division of labour is often placed at the centre of theory and activism. The feminist strike movement also sees itself as an intersectional movement. The goal is not only to fight against sexism, but also against capitalism and racism, and to fight for a society in which the focus is not on profit maximization and competition, but on care, the satisfaction of needs and solidarity with one another. This is a very fundamental change.

There are, therefore, important differences between the two currents of women*'s strikes. It is also difficult to judge whether we are dealing here with *one* feminist strike movement or rather with various protest movements – admittedly close to one another in terms of content, but nevertheless dealing with very different concepts, cultures and organizational frameworks. An interesting attempt to combine these two currents of the women*'s strike movement was made, for instance, when the service union ver.di decided to set the first strike day of a collective bargaining round in the sector of child day care and social services on 8 March 2022. This meant that 8 March would be a Friday day off in a very real sense: i.e. a legal strike day (in the narrower sense), at least in social services and childcare centres.

This action offered significant support for the feminist mobilizations for 8 March, both symbolically and practically. In return, women* from feminist groups participated in the preparation of the collective bargaining round. They went to day care centres and distributed flyers, some of which were ver.di material and some of which bore their own messages. In this instance, trade union bargaining policy was framed by feminist slogans. This was for many an "aha experience" – for educators in the day care centres as well as for feminist activists. Many day care workers were surprised to learn what 8 March had to do with their working conditions. Conversely, the feminist activists learned a lot about union concepts of striking. This was an interesting action, both symbolically and in terms of labour struggle policy. It was an attempt to strengthen the bargaining power of workers through alliances with feminist movements, an attempt to strengthen the development of a strong feminist strike movement through an alliance with the unions, and an attempt to create a kind of collective identity that includes both trade unionists and feminist activists.

This was, nevertheless, only a first timid approach to collaboration by two movements that have many differences. The terms of 'strike' still diverge. When a trade unionist talks about a collective bargaining strike and a feminist talks about a women*'s strike, they mean very different things. It is also important whether we speak of a women*'s strike, a feminist strike, or even a FLINTA* strike.[3] Do we naturally assume the existence of men and women, or are there many genders, or no gender at all? Traditional egalitarian feminists (which are numerous within unions) are often suspicious of the (mostly younger) queer feminists – and vice versa. Who is the acting subject in a feminist strike? What is the collective identity? Are (cis) men* allowed to join the strike? And if so, what is a fitting role for them? Who are the core groups, and who are the allies? The traditions of action are also very different: rather hierarchical and bureaucratic, but also well organized, on the union side; more creative and spontaneous, but also sometimes a bit chaotic, on the feminist side. The approach to law, legality

3 FLINTA* stands for female, lesbian, intersex, non-binary, transgender, and agender* and is an attempt to find a term for a group of people who are not cis men.

and police also differs. The contents and goals of social movement and strikes are not the same either. Are higher wages and equal employment rights the main issue? Or is it about addressing the gender-specific division of labour in the society as a whole? Do we want two more vacation days, or to change the world? A lot of communication will be necessary for a fruitful combining of the different women*'s strike movements. The unions will have to learn (more) feminism, and the feminists will have to learn (more) unionism.

5 Summary: Female Care Strikes as Hubs of Utopia?

There is currently – not only in Germany – a new women*'s strike movement that is being fed by two sources: the first are intensified female trade union struggles, the second is an international women*'s strike movement fighting against patriarchy. These two strike currents have different cultures and objectives. They are not easily compatible, but they have (at least) one thing in common: they can be seen as hubs of utopia. Strikes in general are moments of crisis, moments of breaking with the routines of oppression, moments of collective action and directly lived mutual solidarity. They are moments of self-empowerment which show that together we can change the world.

Women*'s strikes are special in the sense that – explicitly or not – they always challenge patriarchy and have consequences for established gender relations. They influence social discourses and gender images. They are both an expression and a source of self-confidence. When women* strike collectively, these are unforgettable experiences of solidarity. In this respect, they are direct forms of collective emancipation.

Women*'s strikes are also special because they often focus on care professions – in hospitals, kindergartens, schools etc. – which are particularly affected by new forms of capitalist exploitation and the dismantling of the welfare state. In many care professions, working conditions have deteriorated to an extent that they no longer allow employees to realize their own professional ethos. What is at stake here is surely the recognition of female work, but also the standards of care in our societies.

Female (care) strikes ask very fundamental questions, such as: Can I still do 'good' care work at all under the current economic conditions? Why are social institutions so underfunded? Why are hospitals and retirement homes privatized and expected to yield profits? Why can a rich society like Germany not achieve good hospitals, and good care for children and elderly people? Which sectors and which persons profit from the produced values? And sectors and persons do not?

At this point, feminized union struggles, especially in the care sectors, immediately become political, and go far beyond their own sector. If they want to be successful, they have to ask very fundamental questions, and thus they have to become utopian. This is why women*'s strikes – in trade unions and in

society – are an efficient and important means not only of fighting patriarchy and achieving gender equality, but in general for working for a better world. Care struggles can be a link pin between trade union collective action and feminist movements, but also between struggles against patriarchy and struggles against capitalism, maybe even at an international level. This is not easy, and transnationally the construction of collective identity is even more challenging. The road towards a solidary and humane society is still long. But there is no way around it.

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Sparking

Capitalism is Devouring Livelihoods – A Call for Counter Hegemony[1]

Interview with Nancy Fraser

Antonia Kupfer: Tonight we are delighted to have the opportunity to learn directly about your just-published book, "Cannibal Capitalism", published by Verso. Your book starts with an argument, "Why we need to expand our conception of capitalism." I wanted to ask you to explain this further and why you see this argument as relevant, especially now, given that there is already a decade-long eco-feminist tradition in movements in the Global South and also North that has revealed capitalism's dependence on nature and unpaid care work.

Nancy Fraser: Let me just start first with "why now?" I do think we're in a situation of real urgency. I would describe the situation as a very acute multidimensional crisis, in which we have an ecological crisis entwined with a crisis of care or social reproduction. A political crisis. A crisis of democracy, if you like. A crisis of work and livelihood and, in general, the economy not working for the mass of human beings on the planet. To my mind, this is a rare kind of crisis. It's what historians have called a general crisis, meaning it's not sectoral. It's not that one sector of the society is in crisis, but it's the whole social order, the whole order of civilization, if you like. And those kinds of crises come along only rarely. I would say that in the 500 years or so of capitalism's history, we've had at most three or four such crises. The 1930s would be the most recent one. I suppose that the ecological dimension gives us a sense that this crisis might even be more – more consequential, more threatening – than even the crisis of the 1930s, which was already a big deal, because of the threat to the planet and to life on it, including but not only human life.

My first thought is where do we see social forces in society that are at least potentially capable of rising to the occasion and taking responsibility for getting us out of this mess? I don't think the elites and the established political parties, or the corporate powers, are or can be counted on for that. On the contrary, in most cases they are forces that make things worse. I'm looking around to see who and where and how we might generate a response to this and I would say that there's a great deal of social agitation and mobilization, which is either already plainly progressive and emancipatory or at least potentially so. But this mobilization, activation, engagement is very dispersed and very fragmented. It doesn't accumulate. It doesn't rise to the level of, using Gramsci's language, a counter hegemonic bloc. A social force that could present itself as a right, espousing an

1 This chapter is a transcript of an interview, which has been edited lightly for clarity.

alternative form of social life and credibly presenting itself as actually having the vision and the breadth, the heft power, to implement such a vision.

I would say that right now, the scale of the crisis is dramatically larger than the scale of the forces that could resolve it in an emancipatory dimension. And it seems to me that what we want or what I feel a need for is a perspective that is able to trace all the various dimensions of this multiple crisis to one and the same social system. I believe that it is not accidental that ecology happens to be going bad at the same time that democracy is collapsing, at the same time that social reproduction is threatened. I don't think this is just some multiplicity of bad things happening in a more or less accidental way. I think that it's systemic and I think it's about the unravelling of the form of capitalist society that has been entrenched on a global scale for the last 40 years – namely neoliberal capitalism – that was supposed to resolve the crisis of the earlier form of social democratic capitalism. And we can argue about how well it did or didn't resolve that. I don't think it did very well. But in any case, it is now about unravelling the neoliberal regime of capitalism.

I have a sort of a political intuition that it would be useful to have a perspective that in a sense demonstrated why various social movements – each of which has maybe its own paramount issue, which differs from the paramount issue of other movements – why they all are grounded systemically in one and the same social system, and why all of them need to cooperate to transform that system. That's the political intuition. The theoretical intuition is that our received critical theories of capitalism, while very insightful in one aspect or another, are not yet adequate to give us that kind of perspective of how the multiplicity of crisis strands are entangled and exacerbating one another.

My thought is that the received views of capitalism are too economistic. They understand capitalism as an economic system that is premised on commodity production in for-profit enterprises, based on free wage labour market exchange, competitive firms, and so on and so forth. Now, that's not wrong. It's just that there's a lot more going on. The kinds of issues we need to understand, I think, is what is the relation between that economic aspect of the society, which is real and powerful, and what is the relation between it and nature? What is the relation between production and social reproduction? What is the relation between the market and the state or other forms of public power? What is the relation between commodities and public goods?

For a long time, I've been trying to argue that the capitalist economy depends on non-economic background conditions. You don't have wage labour if you don't have first people doing reproductive work or care work to maintain, nurture, birth and socialize and care for the labour force and replenish it. Second, you don't have commodity production without energy, without so-called raw materials, without all the natural inputs, and without the general environmental conditions that we all rely on. And the economy relies on breathable air, potable water, relatively stable sea levels, climate, etc. That's all a necessary background

condition. Third, there are also public powers and public goods. You don't have a capitalist economy without legal systems that guarantee property rights. Without police armies, repressive forces that maintain order and put down dissent. Without regulatory capacities that restrain capital "for its own good". Kind of like Ulysses tied me to the mast so I don't jump over and dash myself against the rocks. So public power and public goods, all those things – infrastructure and so on – all the things that the market and private-profit-oriented production cannot supply: that's a third necessary condition.

And there's a fourth one as well, which I think of as the underside of exploited wage labour. Exploited wage labour is supposed to be done by free workers who are citizens, who have rights, who have access to the courts, who can call on states to protect them and maintain their rights, and who are paid. Not gloriously by any means, but for their living costs, the cost of their reproduction. That's Marx's idea of exploitation: the capitalist gets the surplus, the worker gets paid for the hours that are necessary to produce the worker's own means of living. My idea, and it's not unique to me, is that that all rests on another form of labour that is less pleasant, and that capitalism doesn't want to acknowledge, and that we try to look away from: that is unfree or semi-free or dependent labour of those who do not have actionable rights, are not able to call on state protection to vindicate their rights. A classic example would be migrants. The most extreme case would be migrants without papers. But even migrants with papers have only a kind of conditional right to be a resident on the territory and to work on the territory. And they are easily deportable in a way that native-born citizen workers are not. Their rights are compromised.

Then, of course, there are also racialized minorities, with the United States being an obvious case, in which especially African Americans, but other people of colour as well, indigenous peoples, have a very hard time really claiming the status of being a free citizen worker and therefore are not able to command a wage that covers their full living costs. They are paid less than the cost of living, less than the necessary labour hours in the Marxian view. They are expropriated, as opposed to exploited. That's the terminology I use. The profitability of exploited labour depends on the availability of expropriated or expropriate labour, and that's a division – exploited, expropriated – that corresponds roughly but unmistakably to what W.E.B. Du Bois called "the global colour line".

In a nutshell, I'm trying to make visible what underpins the supposedly phenomenal productivity and wealth-generating capacity of the capitalist economy. What underpins it is a huge amount of unpaid costs, forms of social wealth that capital helps itself to and takes no responsibility for replenishing or reproducing: nature, care, expropriated labour – especially of people of colour – and public goods or public powers, state capacities. Capital depends on all these things. It, you could say, free rides on them. It helps itself to them and it disavows any obligation to replenish what it takes or to repair what it damages. To me, that's a formula for disaster.

The title of my book is “Cannibal Capitalism”. What I’ve just described is a dynamic, a tendency for the capitalist economy to cannibalize its own underpinnings, which are, of course, also the underpinnings and substance of our lives. We are, in a sense, the main course in capital’s binge eating, so to speak. This is an expanded view of what capitalism is. It puts the emphasis on the cannibalizing relation between the foreground economy and the background non-economic conditions of our lives. And I think it gives us a way to see why the ecological aspect of our crisis and the social reproductive aspect of our crisis and the political aspect and the racial injustice aspect, the imperial aspect, why all of those are grounded in one and the same social system. And my hope is that that’s a perspective that could help inform our understanding and make more vivid, more appealing, more necessary the sense of the need to scale up emancipatory engagement to really try to think in Gramscian terms about building a counter hegemony.

Constanze Stutz: I would like to go on a bit further on the contradictions of social reproduction. In your book, you argue that no society, capitalist or otherwise, that systematically cannibalizes social reproduction can endure for very long. And yet right now, in capitalist societies, there is a key contradiction regarding social reproduction. On the one hand, social reproduction is a necessary condition for sustained capital accumulation. On the other hand, capitalism’s striving towards unlimited accumulation leads to it cannibalizing, as you argue, the very social reproduction activities on which it relies. Under financialized capitalism, this embedded social contradiction results in a major crisis of social reproduction and care, as we are seeing right now.

In your book, you emphasize, in the era of financialized capitalism and this crisis of care and social reproduction, a new centrality of debt, through which capital now cannibalizes labour, disciplines states, transfers wealth from periphery to core, and sucks value from households, families, communities and nature. I would like you to explain a bit more why right now, under financialized capitalism, debt has become so central. I’ve noticed that feminist movements, especially in the Global South – like in Argentina, with Verónica Gago and others – are currently strongly politicizing debt, using debt as a basis for building an overarching political struggle, one that connects worker movements and also feminist ones. So my question would be if you see possibilities here for a new form of socialist feminism, especially one that can maybe succeed in breaking up the mainstream feminist movement’s love affair with marketization, as you’ve argued before, especially in democratic capitalistic states of the Global North? And how it may be possible to bring about a common struggle of solidarity between feminists of the Global North and the Global South.

Nancy Fraser: Part of what I’m trying to do in the book is outline the contradictions or crisis tendencies that I think are built into capitalism in general, into any form of capitalism; but also to try to show how those contradictions or crisis

tendencies play out in the present form of capitalism, which I call neoliberal or financialized capitalism. And you're right that, for me, the question of debt is central at several levels, as I'll explain. But let me just say something about how I see the social reproductive contradiction inherent in all capitalism, manifesting now in financialized capitalism. I think it's a sort of confluence of a lot of things. One thing – and I would love to hear from you about Germany in particular, because Germany is one of these few European countries that has had, at least in the past, a relatively low rate of female labour force participation compared to France or the UK or the US. And I suppose it's because the industrial labour unions have been very strong and have been able to command something close to a family wage, which could support the whole family on one worker's salary. So it was, in a sense, economically feasible for women to not be in the paid workforce. And then, of course, it was, let's say, culturally and ideologically articulated that this was what a proper family should look like, what a proper woman should be doing, and so on and so forth.

So now the thing, the reason I bring this up, the German case – and I'm not sure whether that's still the case or whether it's weakened a lot or just a little – but I would say that the one big feature of the transition from social democratic to neoliberal capitalism has been, in many places, a massive entry of women into paid work. And that means that the people who always had and still do have the responsibility for domestic household maintenance – care work and so on – that those people are going to have much more of their time commandeered by capital. So that there's already a stress on social reproduction even there. Then you add to that the insistence of financial capital in this phase on austerity. No deficit spending. That's a big difference from social democratic capitalism. The demands of investors – and in the case of the Global South, of the international financial organizations, the IMF, the World Bank and so on – the demand that states cut social spending, that they, if not fully eliminate, at least significantly reduce the amount of support that they are providing for families and communities. One thing social democratic capitalism did was try to sort of buttress up, using public power, to support social reproduction. So that capital wouldn't just destroy it, eat through it, eat up families and care and communities in the way that it had done in the previous era.

Now that's being reversed, and I think this is like a one-two-punch. You have the diminution of public support for social reproduction. You have the diminution of time, energy and capacities for private social reproduction, with the rise of the so-called dual-earner family. One salary won't cut it anymore. And of course, that, by the way, is related to the assault on unions. Again, I think Germany – maybe you haven't felt this to the same degree – but we've certainly seen a dramatic decline in union power and union membership in the US. And the same is true in many other places as well. So basically, with the offshoring of manufacturing to lower wage regions, you have the rise of the low wage service economy supplanting the higher paid and unionized manufacturing work, so that

all of this fits together. One salary won't do it. Women must give their time to capital, take it away from the gendered care work responsibilities that they had earlier. I mean, they still have them, but they can't perform them. And the state cuts back support. So right there, it is like a pincer movement of two different forms of pressure on social reproduction.

Now, the wage question means that even with two earners in a household – and of course, not all households have two adults – but even when you do, the wages are so low with the so-called "gig economy". And that's where work is very precarious. Many McJobs, as we call them, don't carry benefits. Capital contrives to employ you for just one hour less than would be full time. You don't get health care or anything like that because we don't have universal health care, as you know. Anyway, I realize that the US might be an extreme case here, but it's an extreme in the so-called wealthy countries. But, you know, it's a bit of a bellwether. I think you can find variations on these dynamics everywhere. And so, basically, we see a huge rise in consumer debt. Wages for present work are not sufficient to support households. People are forced to live off future wages through consumer debt, and that takes the form of maxing out credit cards, of automobile loans and buying on layaway, as we call it, where you pay month by month. Maybe you know something about the student debt crisis in the United States, because we – our university system – depends heavily on tuition, which has been skyrocketing. And so young people enter life owing hundreds of thousands of dollars. And this will stunt their life course for decades and decades, if not forever. So that's the debt at that level.

Oh, and of course, we must also talk back to the question of expropriation. I mean, this is a form of expropriation. But for populations of colour there's a special intensity, because they subsist based on extremely predatory forms of debt. Payday loans with astronomical interest rates. It's almost like borrowing from the Mafia or various kinds of loan sharking like that. Or, you know about the famous subprime sector of the mortgage market, which nearly crashed the world financial system in 2007/2008. So anyway, there's all this kind of, let's call it consumer debt or the debt of the working class.

But then – and I know I'm taking the long way around, but I'm finally getting to the Global South part – then there's so-called sovereign debt, which is the debt of states. And of course we find this all over the place, but it's especially problematic for the Global South. Here you have a situation where post-colonial states, who had been subject to centuries of expropriated extractive relations to the colonizing world powers, they become independent, but in a way that leaves that legacy. Leaves wrecked economies essentially as they were. That doesn't at all address the historic siphoning of wealth over centuries. So there, in that situation, there's a period, again, that coincides with what we would call in the Global North the social democratic era. For those in the Global South, it was the developmental state era, in the immediate post-war period, in the aftermath of independence for many countries.

So that was a period in which they tried to "develop". This is a word, of course, we must put in quotes a little bit, because of the ecological dimension, but I'm leaving that out right now. They tried to "develop" using something called import substitution industrialization, meaning that they were essentially going to protect their economies from market forces that would continue this wealth siphoning. And some strides were made in that era in some places, at least in places that elected governments, that had some genuine interest in improving the situation of peasants and workers. But neoliberalism undid that too, right? Namely the so-called Washington consensus structural adjustment. This was another sort of post-colonial form of imperialism that essentially said: No, you cannot protect yourselves in these ways. You must liberalize your economy, meaning open it up to the big sharks swimming out there. You can't spend the same amount of money on education and health care and so on. You have to put your debt obligations front and centre. Everything has to go to debt service, to interest payments. And then you get this round after round of restructuring of debt, which doesn't at all reduce the amount of debt owed, it just lengthens the time frame and allows interest upon interest upon interest to compound into the stratosphere.

Debt is very important at that level. It is a major mechanism of extractivism and of expropriation at many levels. And we've seen what happens when anyone dares to think about non-payment. We saw what happened to the Greeks. We saw what happened to the Argentines. And you know, even the sort of question of Brazil; although now we have Lula back, we'll see what happens. And in any case, I do think that all this debt, at the level of how it affects ordinary people, is an assault on social reproduction. It's basically a way of siphoning wealth from the global working class, North and South, to the financial interests.

What are the chances for a new form of socialist feminism? To finally come to the heart of your question. I think we are seeing a resurgence of interest in forms of feminism, whether they would themselves use the word socialist or not, that have an affinity with what we used to call socialist feminism. I think we are seeing a lot of anti-capitalist feminism, a lot of feminism that wants to sort of position itself as a voice that speaks not for a sectorial interest of women only but also for the broader populations who are suffering from austerity, debt and expropriation. And this is, in a sense, an example of this kind of more integrative thinking that, as I started out by saying, I think we need in this kind of crisis. If you want to scale up emancipatory engagement, you need a more integrative way of thinking.

We learned a lot, I would say, in the past decades from zeroing in on gender or race or ecology. But it's time to put all these things together somehow, to figure out how to put them together. And by taking all those insights that were developed in a relatively siloed way and now developing them in a more integrated way, I guess I sort of think that a lot of the leadership in a new form of socialist feminism will probably come from the Global South. I think that in

many cases, the forms of militancy that you see developing, especially in Latin America or in southern Europe, that these have this expansive character. And this was why we wrote "Feminism for the 99%", because we were already seeing that something like this is happening, especially in Brazil, in Argentina, in Spain, in Italy. And, you know, we tried to sort of take something that was already happening and give it a name and make it more visible and make the case for it. I don't care if people want to use that phrase 99%. I just care that it's happening, whatever we call it.

And on the other hand, I said that the leadership will come from the Global South. I also feel as an American that we are, maybe along with China, we are what the Iranians used to call the Great Satan in the world. I mean, we are a force. I'm talking about our government's policies and so on. We are a force for such badness in the world overall that I feel that if we could, in the belly of the beast, manage to make the case for this kind of integrative socialist feminism – but let's also add eco-socialist, anti-racist, democratic anti-capitalism. The problem is you have too many words, but you know what I mean – if we could develop any kind of strong alliance within the United States that could connect with forces in the Global South and in Europe and in South Asia, and East Asia, and Africa, then, you know, this would be something extremely powerful. So although I do think the vision in a way is coming from the Global South, I think it's extremely important that we in the Global North, who are living in places that control an unconscionable percentage of the world's resources, that spew out an unconscionable percentage of greenhouse gas emissions, that we have a real responsibility here. We can't just leave it to them to do this.

Antonia Kupfer: I'd like to turn now to the emphasis of your book, "The Practices of Change". And you already talked about the topic of what could be done to build up alliances in the US to connect to strong feminist movements in the Global South, for example. And turning now to the topic of ecology again. So you start from the assumption that capitalism harbours a deep-seated ecological contradiction, and you explain the processes of extraction and the ways of making social reproduction, also ecological reproduction, impossible. In your book, you claim that eco-politics must transcend the merely environmental by becoming anti-systemic. And I'd like you to explain a bit more what you mean by systemic and anti-systemic. I'd be very interested in the actors. Because given the situation we are in right now, I'm rather pessimistic, I have to say. There are actors, but I see them very much suppressed. I see social movements that are claiming system changes, based on an analysis similar to yours, which are being suppressed and are not really being heard by the masses, or at least they have not joined in so far. In Germany, feminist and ecological movements are rather lacking working class participation. Where do you figure the chances are for a wide alliance?

Nancy Fraser: What I say in the book, first of all, is that capitalism is the principal socio-historical driver of climate change, of greenhouse gas emissions. Which is not to say that we haven't had ecological disasters in non-capitalist societies. But my view is that overcoming capitalism is necessary, but not a sufficient condition, for having a habitable planet. I believe that capitalism, because it's defined in part by this cannibalizing dynamic vis-à-vis nature, cannot solve this problem. Not everyone would agree with me. And part of me says, okay, maybe we don't have to exactly agree in advance, but let's all agree that we need rapidly, in a short span of years, to decarbonize the world economy. We can see later, if we were to succeed in doing that, if what we would have would still be called capitalism or not. I suspect it wouldn't. But I'm not going to go to the mat on that now.

What I would go to the mat on is the whole array of proposals and actors who are largely grouped together under the term "green capitalism". Who think that you can use markets to cure the evils that markets have brought us. Who think that carbon trading and speculation and environmental derivatives and these really scary techno fixes that involve shooting carbon into outer space or whatever – the Elon Musk kinds of insanity. These things are nonstarters. What is left? Who are the actors who are not buying into that or who, if they are not clear about it, could at least be convinced that they need to pull back from that and do something else?

I would say that the main actors today could be grouped into different currents, so-called Green New Deal activists. Even though that's a US name, I think you have analogues of it elsewhere. And the thing that's interesting about the Green New Deal – and I don't want to idealize it, because the actual programs and legislative packages that they've introduced are quite timid, I would say – but the important insight is that you cannot pose the problem of saving the planet from ecological disaster as a zero-sum game, which means people have to lose their jobs, their livelihoods. You must address the people's legitimate concerns about livelihood security. And so this current of eco-politics is one that insists that good jobs, jobs that pay well and are socially valuable and so on, can be created; that going back to dealing with climate change is not the end of "development", meaning the end of jobs.

So that already speaks to your point about the question of the working class. But let me just introduce a parenthetical comment about the working class. Part of the problem is that we're perhaps defining what the working class is too narrowly. I came close to saying this earlier in Constance's question about feminists who want to relate to workers. Women are workers. Care work is work. Abortion is a labour issue. If you understand that social reproduction – and biological reproduction, for that matter, it's not for nothing that we talk about women going into labour when they have babies. Part of what I want to do is expand our idea of what the working class is and say that maybe what we are really trying to do is create a new sense of what the working class is and let

people see themselves as being differently situated right within the same class, in some way or another. Which is not about homogenizing the working class. The working class is internally differentiated. But this whole question of social reproduction can be seen as a question of labour. And it is a question of labour.

I was very inspired – this is a little bit of a digression, but I think it's worth saying – I was inspired by W.E.B. Du Bois' great work "Black Reconstruction", which is a history of the US Civil War and Reconstruction, which argued that in the 19th century the United States had two labour movements: the trade union movement and anti-slavery. Anti-slavery is a labour movement. It's obvious the two movements didn't see each other as fellow movements of the working class, just two different segments of it. They didn't recognize one another; they didn't join forces. Du Bois said, if they had recognized one another and joined forces, the whole history of the country, and possibly of the larger capitalist world, would have been different. And I thought, yeah, but Du Bois missed something, because there's also a third labour movement, and that is those who do the labour of care and social reproduction. There's a sense in which I think we could see feminism as a kind of unrecognized labour movement, one that isn't even recognized by feminists themselves as a labour movement.

I'm sort of thinking about this question of the working class and what it would mean to have various labour movements that recognized one another. This is very important for the ecological problematic. Green New Deal is one. Another is the environmental justice wing of the eco-political universe. Those who are very concerned about the inequity and disparate quality of where the burdens are going and who have a very good solid analysis of how waste is distributed in capitalism. Not only how money is distributed, but how waste is distributed. And this corresponds to that global colour line, both internally within countries and globally. And then there's the de-growth current, which attracts many young people for its radicalism, for its critique of the whole civilizational ethos, what counts as a good life, and the turn to Buen Vivir and other conceptions of a good life that come out of indigenous or other marginalized communities.

These are three very powerful currents, each of which has tremendous insights, each of which also has some blind spots, but maybe the insights of one correct the blind spots of the other. And I would like to see some kind of alliance among them. To create a sort of ideological climate in which everyone is forced to choose. Which side are you on? Green capitalism or environmentalism for the 99%, something like that. That's what I mean by anti-systemic and anti-capitalist.

But the other thing that I said is that we should also try to develop an ecological orientation that is trans-environmental, meaning that it understands that the ecological dimension of the crisis is one dimension. It's a very scary and acute dimension, but it's not the only one. And that people who are fighting primarily on that front must be very careful to make connections with those who are fighting on other fronts which in their lives seem more pressing. I may feel that the destruction of the planet is the thing that is most urgent, most existential

for me. But I am not going to tell people whose sons are being killed by police in the streets that they should stop worrying about that and worry about climate change. In other words, people's lives in the crisis are affected differently, and that must be respected. And what we want in the end is trans-environmentalism, one that, as I say, connects the environmental contradictions of capitalism and the ecological crisis of capitalism to the crisis of racial oppression, to the crisis of social reproduction, to the crisis of democracy, and so on and so forth. Everybody will come to this for their own reasons. It's not about saying which are the primary contradictions and which are the secondary and all that old stuff, which hierarchizes this. It's really about an integrative vision of what this system is and how it works to differentiate our experiences, even though I would argue we are all – not literally all, but all but a small portion of the world's population – are part of a global working class.

Constanze Stutz: For the last question from us, can we go back to your decision to frame this as socialism and bring it into the frame of socialism? You write in your book that just as capitalism, socialism is back, and I would agree that the task of rethinking socialism in the 21st century is a really big task. You argue in your book that you are not going for a liquidation, but a re-envisioning of the institutional boundaries that a socialist society would inherit from capitalist society. So can you please describe the possible ways you see for this re-envisioning? Especially here in Germany, where we had two different states for 40 years: we had a capitalist one and a socialist one. And there are quite different concepts, notions, experiences and histories of socialism in the post-socialist states and capitalist states in different parts of the world. What constellations do you see in the present to organize all these different approaches and experiences for a really global transnational socialist movement?

Nancy Fraser: There are two questions here. Is socialism the word we want? We want a word or a phrase or some way to talk about an alternative. We can't ask people to sort of march into the line of fire without having some idea of not just what we're against, but what we're for. We've been through a kind of way of thinking on the left that's been stressing resistance and opposition. But I do think that a counter hegemonic bloc has got to have, however fully developed it is, it's got to have some idea of what we're for. Historically, the word socialism, right, has functioned as the principal name for an alternative to capitalism. Anarchists might disagree. Maybe there are other names around the edges, but I would say that, overall, that's been the main idea. And I do appreciate that people who have lived through really existing socialism are going to have – maybe they'll be very divided among themselves – but some are going to say that's the last thing we need, and others will say, gee, I sort of missed parts of that.

I understand that this word isn't going to work for everybody. I don't want to kind of insist that everyone call themselves a socialist. I envision a counter

hegemonic bloc that could be sort of agnostic about what the social system that we want is called and what it is going to be like in its details. To me, it's more important that we agree on some basic principles or aspects of the systemic change without worrying about the label. And what I mean by that, as I just said, non-destructive civilization, decarbonization of the economic system. And then I would say the most general principle that we want is we want a system that doesn't cannibalize, and I call it "pay as you go". If we design systems of production and of politics and so on, and we use up natural wealth or human social wealth in the form of care work or public goods, we take responsibility as we go. We don't just let these unpaid bills pile up until the next generations suddenly find themselves in a huge mess. To me, that's the fundamental idea.

And I do think that that's an expanded view. I personally do think of myself as a socialist, so I don't have any problem for myself. But what I'm saying is I'm not demanding everybody else call themselves one. That's my idea of what I think of as an expanded view of socialism. In other words, it's not sufficient to understand socialism as the transformation of the economic system, just as it's not sufficient to understand capitalism as an economic system. We have to do more. And it's already a lot more than merely socialized ownership of the means of production. We have to also reinvent – and this is what you said – the relation between whatever form of production we develop and reproduction, both ecological and social. I believe that probably we do want to have some markets. That's maybe a contested idea. There are some leftists who are purists and who think that all markets are capitalist. I don't. I'm with Polanyi on this. I think there are many kinds of markets and they're useful in certain circumstances. I think that we want to change the relationship between markets as economic institutions, distributive institutions, so to speak, and public powers, commodities and public goods. That's to me an expanded view of socialism: not transforming the economic system only, but also transforming the relation of the economic system to the so-called background conditions of possibility. I don't have any kind of a blueprint or institutional proposal that's specific. I have a few principles, and I have an argument for why this is a useful way to think about reinventing socialism. It does have to be reinvented.

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Contested Social and Ecological Reproduction

Although it is potentially possible, humankind has not succeeded in securing the basis of life for all people. A major reason is the dominant global capitalist economy, based on the exploitation and use of nature – but this state of affairs is not accepted by everyone. To analyse what is being contested, authors take a closer socio-analytical look at how states, social movements and civil society actors deal with the multidimensional crisis.

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