

2. Uncaring Conditions

Care Work under Capitalism

“Neoliberalism is uncaring by design,” the London-based Care Collective asserts.¹ It is thus of central importance to uncover and address the uncaring, exploitative, highly gendered conditions that care under capitalism is subjected to, how these conditions came into being, and how they shape our contemporary life as caregivers, care-receivers, and creatives. Also important to consider is how these oppressive mechanisms extend into the realm of artistic and curatorial processes, and how the gendered norms it upholds dictate whose work becomes visible and whose doesn’t.² The following, albeit brief, analysis of historical and contemporary conditions around care work under capitalism showcase the need to collectivise and radically rethink the position of care in our respective societies – locating care at the centre of transformative struggles.³ This discussion forms the basis for the subsequent chapters’ critical engagement with a field of practice at the intersection of care, art-making, and curating – and the necessary articulations for an “otherwise.”⁴

1 Care Collective, *The Care Manifesto* (London: Verso, 2020), e-book.

2 See chapter 3 – “Contested Terrains: Gender, Care, Art, and Curating.”

3 See particularly section 3.1 – “Against All Odds: Mothers in the Arts” and the following sections.

4 See chapter 5 – “Caring Infrastructures: Roadmap for an Otherwise”

2.1 Economy of Invisible Hands

Feminism involves so much more than gender equality. And it involves so much more than gender. Feminism must involve a consciousness of capitalism.
*Angela Davis, "Feminism & Abolition"*⁵

The Covid-19 pandemic lent itself as a magnifying glass that brought forth central contradictions of the political and capitalist economic system, as a broad social formation, in relation to care work. When schools and childcare centres closed down as part of the lockdown measures and parents were still expected to continue their waged labour, societies worldwide experienced a central contradiction within the capitalist system, which has been voiced by Marxist feminists since the 1970s:

Unwaged social reproductive activity is necessary to the existence of waged work, the accumulation of surplus value, and the functioning of capitalism as such. None of those things could exist in the absence of housework, child-raising, schooling, and affective care, and a host of other activities that serve to reproduce new generations of workers. [...] Social reproduction is an indispensable background condition for the possibility of economic production in capitalist society.⁶

The official economy therefore depends on social reproduction whose value it disguises and disavows.⁷ Against this backdrop, it seems indispensable that we critically question the invisible hand of the market, which the economist Adam Smith articulated in 1776 as the basic premise of capitalism and which continues to serve as a central premise for representatives of (neo)liberal thought.⁸ Theologians Ina Praetorius and Regula Grünenfelder, the initiators of *Wirtschaft ist Care* (Economy Is Care), contest Smith's assumption:

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- 5 Angela Davis, "Feminism & Abolition: Theories & Practices for the 21st Century" (lecture, University of Chicago, May 2013).
 - 6 Nancy Fraser, "Crisis of Care? On the Social-Reproductive Contradictions of Contemporary Capitalism," in *Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentring Oppression*, ed. Tithi Bhattacharya (London: Pluto, 2017), 23.
 - 7 Cinzia Arruzza, Tithi Bhattacharya, and Nancy Fraser, *This Is a Manifesto for the 99* (London: Verso, 2019), 22, 25.
 - 8 Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations* (New York: Bantam Classics, 2003). Widely regarded as the founding father of capitalism, Smith's legacy as a promoter of free trade and the privatisation of public infrastructures is celebrated widely in neoliberal thought. For further analysis of Smith's life, ideas, and legacy, see Ryan Patrick Hanley, ed., *Adam Smith: His Life, Thought, and Legacy* (Princeton, IL: Princeton University Press, 2016).

It supposedly provides everyone automatically with whatever they need as long as no limits are imposed on doing business. In reality this hand consists of many, above all women's, hands. The putatively free market economy is, in reality, dependent upon nature and certain people, above all women, to provide for everything, without the so-called financial incentives.⁹

In this light, Smith's suggested "invisible hand of the market" rather appears to be billions of invisibilised women's hands, whose labour sustains not only the paid economy but society as a whole.¹⁰ The example of the German economy – to establish a socioeconomic context for my curatorial practice – showcases the significantly higher volume of unpaid (domestic and care) work in comparison to the paid labour sector. A large-scale time-use study for Germany in 2013 showed that people in Germany spend about 35 percent more time on unpaid work and related commuting time (89 billion hours) than they spend on paid work, including commuting time (66 billion hours).¹¹ To calculate the economic value of this unpaid domestic labour, the study of the German Federal Statistical Office set a net wage of 9.25 euros per hour for the labour performed at home.¹² This fictive net wage allows the study to conclude that, in 2013, "the gross value added of household production [unpaid domestic labour] with 987 billion euros is significantly higher than the gross value added in the manufacturing sector [paid labour] (769 billion euros)."¹³ The often invisibilised sphere of social reproduction is thus 40 percent – and, depending on the model of monetary evaluation for this unpaid labour, up to even 127 percent – larger than the so-called productive sphere, which is measured and accounted for in a given nation's gross domestic product (GDP).¹⁴

Time-use studies in Germany further confirm that not only is the unpaid domestic labour sector larger than the paid sector of the overall economy but also that this

9 Ina Praetorius, and Regula Grünenfelder, "Wirtschaft ist Care," Schweizerische Frauen*synode, 2020.

10 Ibid.

11 The cited time-use study shows figures from 2013. A similar large-scale time-use study was undertaken in 2022; however, not all the figures and analyses have been released yet. As such, I cite the latest available numbers, creating a combination of the 2013 and the 2022 time-use studies. For the above-cited figures, see Norbert Schwarz, "Der Wert der unbezahlten Arbeit: Das Satellitensystem Haushaltsproduktion," (The Value of Unpaid Labor: The Satellite System Household Production), in Statistisches Bundesamt Deutschland, ed., "Wie die Zeit vergeht. Analysen zur Zeitverwendung in Deutschland. Beiträge zur Ergebniskonferenz der Zeitverwendungserhebung 2012/2013" [How Time Passes. Analyses of Time Use in Germany. Contributions to the Results Conference of the Time Use Survey 2012/2013] (Wiesbaden: Statistisches Bundesamt Deutschland, 2017), 249.

12 Ibid., 250.

13 Ibid., 255. My translation.

14 Ibid.

unpaid domestic labour is predominantly performed by women. A subsequent time-use study of the German Federal Statistical Office, from 2022, suggests that women in German households perform 29 hours and 52 minutes of unpaid care work per week, while men perform 20 hours and 42 minutes, creating a “gender care gap” of 44 percent.¹⁵ This gendered gap in caring responsibilities is mirrored in the figures for full- and part-time employment of parents. According to the study, only 8 percent of fathers in a relationship work part-time, whereas 71.5 percent of mothers with a partner work part-time.¹⁶ The study also showed that women spend a total of 46 hours per week performing *paid* and *unpaid* labour, thereby working 1.5 hours weekly more than men – indicating an increase in the gendered gap of 30 minutes per week from the previous study in 2013.¹⁷ The vast amount of unpaid caring labour, their part-time employment and employment in low-paid sectors, a lack of leadership positions, widespread prejudice against mothers in the workforce, and the overall gender pay gap could all be mentioned as factors¹⁸ that contribute to the re-

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- 15 Statistisches Bundesamt, “Durchschnittliche Zeitverwendung für Erwerbsarbeit und unbezahlte Arbeit von Personen ab 18 Jahren nach Geschlecht” [Average Time Spent on Paid and Unpaid Work by People Aged 18 and Over by Gender], accessed March 2024, <https://www.destatis.de/DE/Themen/Gesellschaft-Umwelt/Einkommen-Konsum-Lebensbedingungen/Zeitverwendung/Tabellen/erwerbsarbeit-unbezahlte-arbeit-geschlecht-zve.html>. In the previous time-use study from 2013, the “gender care gap” was 52.4 percent. For further information, see Nina Klünder and Uta Meier-Gräwe, “Gleichstellung und innerfamiliäre Arbeitsteilung. Mahlzeitenmuster und Beköstigungsarbeit in Familien im Zeitvergleich” [Gender Equality and Intra-Family Division of Labour: Meal Patterns and Feeding Work in Families Compared Over Time], in Statistisches Bundesamt Deutschland, “Wie die Zeit vergeht,” 70. Despite the fact that the time spent daily on unpaid work increased by seven minutes for fathers from 2001–02 to 2012–13 and reduced for mothers by six minutes in the same period, mothers still perform 2 hours and 38 minutes more unpaid work per day than fathers. These figures come from an Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development report from 2019 that laments Germany’s position as the last-ranked industrialised nation on the list, seemingly a country with stubbornly prevailing so-called traditional family values. “For this reason, it is not possible to speak of an egalitarian division of labor between fathers and mothers on the basis of the time-use data. A clearly female connotation of unpaid work still prevails,” as the study’s authors, conclude (71).
- 16 Statistisches Bundesamt, “Qualität der Arbeit: Eltern, die Teilzeit arbeiten” [Quality of Work: Parents Who Work Part-Time], accessed March 2024, <https://www.destatis.de/DE/Themen/Arbeit/Arbeitsmarkt/Qualitaet-Arbeit/Dimension-3/eltern-teilzeitarbeit.html>.
- 17 Statistisches Bundesamt, “Korrektur: Gender Care Gap 2022: Frauen leisten 44,3 % (alt: 43,8 %) mehr unbezahlte Arbeit als Männer” [Correction: Gender Care Gap 2022: Women Perform 44.3 % (old: 43.8 %) More Unpaid Work than Men], press release no. 73, March 2024, https://www.destatis.de/DE/Presse/Pressemitteilungen/2024/02/PD24_073_63991.html.
- 18 For a comprehensive overview of hindering factors and the current status of gender equity, see Statistisches Bundesamt, “Gleichstellungsindikatoren” [Gender Equality Indicators], accessed March 2024, https://www.destatis.de/DE/Themen/Querschnitt/Gleichstellungsindikatoren/_inhalt.html#647256.

ality that women earn only half the income men do across their lifespans, and that the earnings of women-as-mothers are even lower: between 40 and 70 percent less than childfree women over the course of their lives.¹⁹ Specifically, the expected income of a mother with one child is reduced by 40 percent and that of a mother with three or more children is reduced by 70 percent (known as the “motherhood lifetime penalty”).²⁰ An international study on the phenomenon of the so-called child penalty, which takes a comparative approach, draws the following conclusion:

[T]he existence of large child penalties is a pervasive phenomenon. In each country, the earnings of men and women evolve similarly before parenthood – after adjusting for lifecycle and time trends – but diverge sharply after parenthood. Women experience a large, immediate and persistent drop in earnings after the birth of their first child, while men are essentially unaffected. Ten years after child birth, women have not recovered.²¹

The study shows regional differences, in which Scandinavian countries experience long-run penalties of 21–27 percent; English-speaking countries feature penalties of 31–44 percent; and German-speaking countries experience penalties as high as 51–61 percent.²² The reality of mothers in the paid workforce is in stark contrast to those of employed fathers: a UK-based study by the Trades Union Congress analysed that men's salaries rise up to 21 percent when they become fathers.²³

Meanwhile in Germany, 52 percent of young men, between 18 and 35 years of age, still consider housework and child-raising to be the task of women.²⁴ Once partnerships break up, in 91 percent of cases the mother becomes the primary caregiver of the child(ren) – thereby forming part of the 2.6 million other single parents fac-

19 Bertelsmann Stiftung, “Women in the German Labor Market: The Cost of Being a Mother,” July 2021, <https://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/de/publikationen/publikation/did/women-in-the-german-labor-market-en>.

20 Bertelsmann Stiftung, “Frauen auf dem deutschen Arbeitsmarkt: Aufholen, ohne einzuholen,” March 18, 2019, <https://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/de/themen/aktuelle-meldungen/2019/maerz/frauen-auf-dem-deutschen-arbeitsmarkt-aufholen-ohne-einzuholen>.

21 Henrik Kleven, Camille Landais, Johanna Posch, Andreas Steinhauer, and Josef Zweimüller, “Child Penalties across Countries: Evidence and Explanations,” National Bureau of Economic Research, working paper no. 25524, February 2019, 3, <http://www.nber.org/papers/w25524>.

22 Ibid.

23 For the full report see “Fathers Working Full-Time Earn 21% More Than Men without Children, Says TUC,” Trades Union Congress, April 25, 2016, <https://www.tuc.org.uk/news/fathers-working-full-time-earn-21-more-men-without-children-says-tuc>.

24 Plan International, “Spannungsfeld Männlichkeit,” 2023, https://www.plan.de/fileadmin/w/ebseite/04_Aktuelles/Umfragen_und_Berichte/Spannungsfeld_Maennlichkeit/Plan_3_Page_r_Maennlichkeit-A4-2023-NEU-V1.pdf.

ing a poverty risk of 68 percent compared to non-single parents.²⁵ Upon retirement, women in Germany on average receive 42 percent less pension than men.²⁶

A global study carried out by Oxfam for the year 2020 showcases that the uneven conditions around care work in German are very much a worldwide phenomenon. For their global report, Oxfam estimates that collectively women and girls – especially those living in poverty and from marginalised groups – are performing 12.5 billion hours of unwaged care labour every day. Their unpaid labour would have produced 10.8 trillion USD in value if that work had been paid with minimum wages.²⁷ This value is three times the size of the world's tech industry, the report states. Oxfam contextualises the calculation by asserting that the figure signifies an underestimate:

[T]he true figure is far higher. Yet most of the financial benefits accrue to the richest, the majority of whom are men. This unjust system exploits and marginalizes the poorest women and girls, while increasing the wealth and power of a rich elite.²⁸

This essential labour of care, however, does not appear in any GDP calculation worldwide, even though no economy is sustainable without it. Taking these figures into consideration, care as a feminised “labour of love” becomes a pivotal point that defines, and limits, the socioeconomic possibilities, well-being, and independence of women, and of mothers in particular. The feminist scholars Gisela Bock and Barbara Duden, in their influential essay “Arbeit aus Liebe – Liebe als Arbeit” (Labour of Love – Labour as Love) from 1977,²⁹ specifically address the position of women's unpaid labour under capitalism. Following Marxist-feminist lines of thought, they assert

25 Anette Stein and Antje Funcke, “Viele Familien ärmer als bislang gedacht,” Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2018, <https://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/de/themen/aktuelle-meldungen/2018/februar/viele-familien-aermer-als-bislang-gedacht>.

26 This figure is for a woman's retirement pay if only her own income is used as a basis. If her retirement pay takes into account her spouse's income, then the gender pay gap is 29.9 percent. Statistisches Bundesamt, “Gender Pension Gap: Alterseinkünfte von Frauen 2021 fast ein Drittel niedriger als die von Männern,” Pressemitteilung Nr. N 015, March 7, 2023. https://www.destatis.de/DE/Presse/Pressemitteilungen/2023/03/PD23_N015_12_63.html.

27 Emma Seery, ed., “Time to Care: Unpaid and Underpaid Care Work and the global inequality crisis,” Oxfam International, January 2020, <https://oxfamilibrary.openrepository.com/bitstream/handle/10546/620928/bp-time-to-care-inequality-200120-summ-en.pdf>.

28 Ibid.

29 Toupin's book *Wages for Housework* includes a summary of the essay in English on pages 187–88. Bock and Duden were also key figures in the German iteration of the Wages for Housework movement (Lohn für Hausarbeit).

that “women are not only the ‘heart of the family’ but the heart of capital.”³⁰ Marxist scholar and philosopher Nancy Fraser makes a similar argument:

Non-waged social-reproductive activity is necessary to the existence of waged work, the accumulation of surplus value and the functioning of capitalism as such. [...] Social reproduction is an indispensable background condition for the possibility of economic production in a capitalist society.³¹

Bock and Duden furthermore point out that, under the model of the family wage, the state or businesspeople received two labourers for the price of one: in the so-called traditional setup of the nuclear family, the husband commonly worked outside the house for a wage, enabled by the unpaid housework of his wife. In such a scenario, his wage not only financially covers her unpaid housework but systemically hides it. Particularly in a new world order, where money had become a primary medium of power, the family wage structurally subordinated those who did not earn cash wages to those who did.³² Bock and Duden conclude: “The invisibility of domestic work is a function of its unpaid nature.”³³

The critical scholarly work and the existing empirical data render legible that the long path towards gender justice cannot be embarked upon without seriously addressing the conditions of social-reproductive labour, and the ways in which societies and their respective economies organise private and public care work. Departing from this understanding of the intricate relationship between unpaid care work and gender inequality, the feminist Wages for Housework movement demanded already in the 1970s that this labour be recognised and no longer rendered structurally invisible – thereby addressing the deep-seated structural contradictions between the capitalist system and the ways in which it organises care work. The philosopher and activist Silvia Federici, one of the central figures of the movement, argues fiercely that the demand for wages for domestic work is a subversive strategy – a stepping stone to destroying capital: applying a wage to housework allows it to be recognised as work, and consequently to be refused; otherwise, protesting women are “seen as nagging bitches, not workers in struggle.”³⁴ To regard unpaid domes-

30 Gisela Bock, and Barbara Duden, “Arbeit aus Liebe – Liebe als Arbeit. Zur Entstehung der Hausarbeit im Kapitalismus” [Labour of Love – Love as Labour. The Emergence of Domestic Labour under Capitalism], *Frauen und Wissenschaft. Beiträge zur Berliner Sommeruniversität 1976* (1977): 178.

31 Nancy Fraser, “Contradictions of Capital and Care,” *New Left Review*, no. 100 (2016), 102.

32 Ibid., 102.

33 Bock, and Duden, “Arbeit aus Liebe,” 120.

34 Silvia Federici, *Wages against Housework* (New York: Power of Women Collective and Falling Wall Press, 1975), 3.

tic work as work thus becomes women's leverage to change their position in society, countering not only capitalism but also patriarchy.³⁵ Federici states:

It is the demand by which our nature ends and our struggle begins because just to want wages for housework means to refuse that work as the expression of our nature, and therefore to refuse precisely the female role that capital has invented for us.³⁶

By raising the issue of unpaid labour, the movement challenged the place of women in social organisation, the gendered division of labour, and women's place within the gendered economy. Federici argues that understanding the movement as a "revolutionary perspective" is crucial not only from a feminist viewpoint but for the entire working class.³⁷

However, Wages for Housework received critique from the women's movement at large, as demanding wages for domestic labour "was seen as a step backward in the demand for women's equality rather than one of its essential conditions, as was claimed by the current's instigators and activists," the political scientist Louise Toupin reflects. According to Toupin, negotiating or redistributing housework was regarded as a private issue between partners. Back then, as today, a focus on

35 Germany, in 2013, experimented for roughly one year with offering a monthly allowance (of around 150 euro a month) for parents who cared for their children at home or organised their care work privately. This sparked a huge controversy within Germany. Opponents called it "*Herdprämie*," which roughly translates to "oven bonus," criticising that it would cement outdated gendered norms, keeping women behind the "oven" and outside the job market. Advocates regarded it as a support and necessary recognition of parents' care labour. For an overview of the debate, see Georg Meck, "Debatte ums Betreuungsgeld: Herdprämie," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, accessed July 13, 2023, <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/wirtschaft/wirtschaftspolitik/debatte-ums-betreuungsgeld-herdpraemie-11725961.html>. It is only now, roughly ten years later, that feminist voices have again begun to speak up for governmental financial support for caregivers, as a way to soothe the gap between the carer at home and the person who receives a wage outside the home. Teresa Bücker, central feminist voice within the German media landscape, argues: "A truly feminist equality policy would therefore not only have to ensure that women are financially independent through gainful employment but also design a cash benefit for the period after the birth of a child until care begins that can better protect against dependency and violence. Having enough money of one's own is important to counteract a shift of power in the couple's relationship, which unfortunately often happens with children when one of the partners reduces their working hours or can contribute only little to the family income during parental leave." Teresa Bücker, "Ist es radikal, das Elterngeld für Reiche zu streichen?," *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 2023, <https://sz-magazin.sueddeutsche.de/freie-radikale/teresa-buecker-elterngeld-kuerzung-kindergrundsicherung-92907>. My translation.

36 Federici, Wages against Housework, 3.

37 Ibid.

promoting “family-job-reconciliation” was preferred.³⁸ The Wages for Housework movement was often misunderstood through being taken too literally, portrayed as “a bureaucratic reign of resentful accountancy” – this, despite Federici’s pamphlet “Wages *against* Housework” (my emphasis) explicitly stating the subversive character of the demand – and thereby overlooking the momentum of utopia.³⁹ The political theorist and writer Sophie Lewis, whose work on the abolition of the nuclear family is indebted to the Wages for Housework movement, clarifies that “it’s not us choosing to be economistic about gestation, it’s capitalism. If we must cope to a kind of countereconomism regarding ‘what they call love,’ it is a needful demystification strategy.”⁴⁰ She urges her reader to continue to understand the movement as a provocation that aimed to recognise housework as real work – and, moreover, exploited work – and thus developed one of the most important concerns of early second-wave feminism. In this regard, Wages for Housework needs to be considered formative for future generations of feminist activists, theorists, and artists.

2.1.1 Historical Shifts: The Origins of the Sexual Division of Labour

To grasp the historical longevity of the many unequal processes and oppressive norms – present in all scales and realms of society, including the art field – it is imperative to consider the historical shifts that shaped the contemporary societies of Central Europe and North America, as they were the seedbeds of capitalism.⁴¹ Marxist-feminist scholarship has contributed substantially to the unveiling of capitalism’s gendered and racialised history and its ongoing creation of mechanisms of

38 Louise Toupin, *Wages for Housework: A History of an International Feminist Movement, 1972–77* (London: Pluto, 2018), 3.

39 Sophie Lewis, *Full Surrogacy Now: Feminism against Family* (London: Verso, 2021).

40 Ibid.

41 My focus lies on the transition from feudalism to capitalism in medieval Europe, after which I shift to examining the nineteenth century and the emergence of the Victorian ideology of gendered separate spheres between the public and the private, considering how these ideals not only oppressed women but also colonised peoples. The search for the origins of contemporary forms of oppression then moves into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, particularly homing in on the idealisation of the nuclear family and the invisible state infrastructures that continue to uphold the reproduction of this heteronormative ideal of family. This brief analysis of social reproduction in the Western sphere over the past several centuries forms the basis for the subsequent chapters of this research undertaking – highlighting the urgency of care not only as a central theme of my curatorial work but also as a theoretical framework for critically analysing curatorial labour and its entanglements with emotional, affective, and exploitative mechanisms in a gendered economy. See also Nanne Buurman, “From Prison Guard to Healer: Curatorial Authorships in the Context of Gendered Economies,” *OnCurating*, no. 51 (September 2021).

oppression.⁴² (As other forms of economic systems have organised care work differently, they require a different set of analyses.)⁴³ This strand of feminist scholarly work has traced a genealogy of how the racialised, classed, and gendered capitalist system came into being and what role care work, or social reproduction, has played in the different capitalist regimes of the past centuries. The key function of this feminist historicisation is that it *denaturalises* women's domestic work as a natural vocation.⁴⁴ Sociologist Maria Mies's and activist and philosopher Silvia Federici's Marxist-feminist analysis of women's social role goes back to the transition from feudalism to capitalism, where they locate the emergence of patterns of oppression that remain inherent to the capitalist economic system today. A key mechanism of capitalism that they both identify is its premise of exploiting resources – such as land, nature, and sociopolitically inferiorised labour according to class, race, and gender – for the goal of accumulating capital.⁴⁵

The early modern witch hunt, the peasantry's expulsion from its commonly worked lands, and the introduction of waged labour can be seen as central patriarchal-capitalist strategies that forced a radical reorganisation of social life, gender hierarchies, and divisions of labour.⁴⁶ Prior to capitalist expansion, access to land

42 Tithi Bhattacharya edited a volume on social reproduction theory (SRT) that brings together essays that “build from Marx” and are concerned with “remapping class, recentring oppression.” In her introduction, Bhattacharya describes SRT as an approach that displays an analytical irreverence to “visible facts’ and privileges ‘process’ instead. It is an approach that is not content to accept what seems like a visible, finished entity – in this case, our worker at the gates of her workplace – but interrogates the complex network of social processes and human relations that produce the conditions of existence for that entity. [...] the fundamental insight of SRT is, simply put, that human labor is at the heart of creating or reproducing society as a whole.” Tithi Bhattacharya, introduction to *Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentring Oppression* (London: Pluto, 2017), 2.

43 For further references on care work under socialism and communist regimes, I recommend: Sabine Hering, *Social Care under State Socialism (1945–1989): Ambitions, Ambiguities, and Mismanagement* (Leverkusen: Verlag Barbara Budrich, 2009); Susan Grant, *Soviet Nightingales: Care under Communism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2022). For a comparative approach through visual history, see the exhibition “Zwischen Fließband und Küche. Fotografien von (Care-)Arbeit in DDR und BRD 1960 bis 1990” [Between Assembly Line and Kitchen: Photographs of (Care) Work in the GDR and FRG 1960 to 1990], Berlin Museum für Fotografie, November 2022, <https://kgi.ruhr-uni-bochum.de/portfolio-item/zwischen-fließband-und-kueche-fotografien-von-care-arbeit-in-ddr-und-brd-1960-bis-1990/>.

44 Toupin, *Wages for Housework*, 187.

45 Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation* (New York: Autonomedia, 2014); Maria Mies, *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale: Women in the International Division of Labour* (London: Zed Books, 1986).

46 Introducing criticism directed at Karl Marx's theories, Federici laments that his work does not include the “profound transformations that capitalism introduced in the reproduction of labor-power and the social position of women.” She continues: “Nor does Marx's analysis

and the commons – such as peasants' access to meadows and woods to keep cattle, gather timber, and harvest various foods – was the basis for a different social order, albeit one that still had stark social stratifications. Federici describes the expropriation of communal lands – through tenant evictions, rent increases, and increased state taxes that led tenants into debt – as a central historical moment in the transition from feudalism to capitalism during the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries.⁴⁷

The commons were the material foundation upon which peasant solidarity and sociality could thrive. [...] The social function of the commons was especially important for women, who, having less title to land and less social power, were more dependent on them for their subsistence, autonomy, and sociality.⁴⁸

Federici argues that the new organisation of work turned women – particularly working-class women, as bourgeois women were “privatised” by men and the do-

of primitive accumulation mention the “Great Witch-Hunt” of the 16th and 17th centuries, although this state-sponsored terror campaign was central to the defeat of the European peasantry, facilitating its expulsion from the lands it once held in common” (Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*, 63). The early modern witch hunt was thus a mechanism to control and subordinate (peasant and artisan) women, “who in their economic and sexual independence constituted a threat for the emerging bourgeois order,” as Mies argues. For reference see Maria Mies, *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale*, 81. Within feminist literature, art, and curating, the figure of the witch has become a symbol of empowerment and anti-capitalist resistance. For example, the exhibition “WITCHES” at TAXISPALAIS Kunsthalle Tirol, Innsbruck, Austria, 2021, curated by Nina Tabassomi, recently brought together artistic positions that reflect and expand on the figure of the witch within a contemporary context, see <https://www.taxispalais.art/en/programm/ausstellungen/hexen/>. Gender and art scholar Kristen J. Sollée, in her book *Witches, Sluts, Feminists: Conjuring the Sex Positive* (Los Angeles: ThreeL Media, 2017), analyses the archetypes of “witch” and “slut” and how they have been used to police female sexuality and punish women. In the context of Sollée’s book, as well as other feminist positions, these terms have been reclaimed as positive affirmations. Sigrid Schade’s *Schadenzauber und die Magie des Körpers: Hexenbilder der frühen Neuzeit*, from 1983, provides a feminist art historical account of witches in the early modern age.

47 Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*, 68–69. These developments were forced upon communities either through war or religious reform, and they undermined their capacity for subsistence. In the sixteenth century, English lords and rich farmers eliminated communal lands to expand their holdings, which Federici calls “enclosures.” For further reading see Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*, 71. Simultaneous to the global expansion of colonialism, land privatisation began in Europe in the fifteenth century. As part of this international phenomenon, European merchants expropriated much of the land of the Canary Islands to turn them into sugar plantations in the sixteenth century. By the seventeenth century, the Spanish had expropriated one-third of the Indigenous lands of the Americas. Also on the African continent, the “slave-raiding” wrought excessive land loss. See *ibid*, 68.

48 Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*, 71.

mestic sphere – into communal goods, which rendered their activities as non-work: “as a natural resource, available to all, no less than the air we breathe or the water we drink.”⁴⁹

The loss of communal land can be considered a shared pivot point for a variety of shifts in how societies related to labour. All workers became much more dependent on the wage, while their landless condition provided their employers with more leverage to cut their pay and lengthen the working day:

Not surprisingly, with land expropriation came a change in the workers’ attitude towards the wage. While in the Middle Ages wages could be viewed as an instrument of freedom (in contrast to the compulsion of the labor services), as soon as access to land came to an end, wages began to be viewed as instruments of enslavement.⁵⁰

Women’s lives were especially negatively impacted by the land closures, as the economisation of life had made it much more difficult for women to self-support, confining them more and more to the sphere of reproduction – at a point in time when this labour began to be devalued completely.⁵¹ Federici writes:

With the demise of the subsistence economy that had prevailed in pre-capitalist Europe, the unity of production and reproduction which has been typical of all societies based on production-for-use came to an end, as these activities became the carriers of different social relations and were sexually differentiated. In the new monetary regime, only production-for-market was defined as a value-creating activity, whereas the reproduction of the worker began to be considered as valueless from an economic viewpoint and even ceased to be considered as work.⁵²

Hence, following Federici, the sexual division of labour – in which women traditionally perform unpaid care work and men perform waged labour outside the house – was born in Europe as part of the transition from feudalism to capitalist relations. Like today, reproductive labour earned a wage, though at lower rates, only when it was performed outside the home for a higher-classed social group.⁵³ Through this sexual division of labour, the social and economic function of the reproduction of labour power in private homes and its essential function in the accumulation of cap-

49 Ibid.

50 Ibid., 72.

51 Ibid., 74.

52 Ibid., 74–75.

53 Ibid., 75.

ital became invisible – and, still today, continues to be mystified as “women’s labour,” as women’s natural vocation as care providers.⁵⁴

These beliefs, which continue to shape contemporary family politics, were intensified by Christianity in the Victorian era (1780 onwards, with its peak in 1850) through the so-called doctrine of separate spheres, which regarded women as responsible for the home and child-rearing.⁵⁵ Women were thus seen as the moral and spiritual centres of their families, as they were considered “naturally maternal” beings who would embrace their motherly role.⁵⁶ Historian Susie L. Steinbach points to the historical assumption in Great Britain that women were typically “not economic creatures,” as they were expected to work without wages. In this light, women’s efforts were conceptualised not as “work” but rather as housekeeping:

Men spent their adult lives working hard. Women spent their lives bearing, raising, and educating children and running households. In practice, this meant that most women worked hard too. However, their work was unpaid and was not recognized as work or as economic activity at all; instead, it was classed as domestic activity.⁵⁷

Further, upon marriage, women were not able to legally own property nor enter into contracts (under the legal doctrine of *coverture*),⁵⁸ making them dependent on men

54 Susie L. Steinbach, *Understanding the Victorians* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 168.

55 Ibid. The doctrine of the separate spheres from the early Victorian period became central to the moral, social, political, and economic ordering of British society, then in other European countries, and later on in the United States.

56 Ibid., 166. To quote Steinbach in full: “The doctrine of separate spheres stated that men and women inhabited different roles in society. Men were essentially public creatures; women were private creatures. Men went out to do battle in the worlds of business and politics; their identities centered on being workers or professionals, husbands and fathers who were good providers. Women remained at home, in the domestic sphere, where they ran their households, raised their children, and cared for their husbands. Men were fundamentally independent; women were dependent. Men were by nature sexually predatory; women were sexually passionless. Men were socially and politically dominant; women were morally superior” (168).

57 Ibid., 172.

58 Coverture, also known as coverture laws or the doctrine of coverture, was a legal doctrine in English common law that defined the legal status of married women. Under coverture, when a woman married, her legal identity was essentially merged with that of her husband. Upon marriage, she became a *feme covert* (Latin for “covered woman”), which meant that her legal existence was “covered” or subsumed by her husband’s legal identity. Under coverture, a woman generally couldn’t own property in her own name. Any property she brought into the marriage or acquired afterward typically became her husband’s property. Coverture was gradually abolished in the United Kingdom over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries through a series of legislative reforms. For further reference, see the work of the

seamlessly throughout their lives – first as daughters and then as wives.⁵⁹ Federici and Nicole Cox, who was a key fellow activist in the Wages for Housework movement, argue that the nuclear family, as an invention of “capital for capital,”⁶⁰ serves to institutionalise women’s wageless labour and their dependency on men, but it also consequentially serves as a means to discipline men:

For our wagelessness, our dependence in the home, has functioned to keep the men tied to their jobs, by ensuring that whenever they wanted to refuse their work they would be faced with the wife and children who depended on their wage.⁶¹

We hence arrive at a situation where capitalist relations define social roles as heavily binary-gendered ones. The sexual division of labour therefore not only points women to their supposed social place as (unpaid) caregivers but also ascribes men their supposed place as breadwinners in the paid labour sector – dangerously positioning “masculinity” and “caring” at seemingly opposing ends.⁶²

2.1.2 Care Work and Ideologies of Devaluation

To further contextualise the relationship between gender, race, and class within the sphere of social reproduction, let us return, for a moment, to the nascent period of “housewifisation.”⁶³ This period was a product of the Victorian ideology of separate spheres, which was saturated with and mystified by new, domestic ideals of femininity and which the (White) middle class mostly adhered to.⁶⁴

Normative concepts of beauty and grace, as well as projections of female hysteria, manifested in the art of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as art historian Sigrid Schade demonstrates.⁶⁵ These heavily gendered norms became powerful

historians Tim Stretton and Krista J. Kesselring, *Married Women and the Law: Coverture in England and the Common Law World* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2013) and gender scholar Marilyn Yalom, *A History of the Wife* (London: Rivers Oram Press, Pandora List, 2001).

59 Steinbach, *Understanding the Victorians*, 167.

60 Nicole Cox and Silvia Federici, *Counter-Planning from the Kitchen* (New York: New York Wages for Housework Committee and Falling Wall Press, 1975), 7.

61 Mies, *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale*, 74.

62 For further reference, see Karla Elliott, “Caring Masculinities: Theorizing an Emerging Concept,” *Men and Masculinities* 19, no. 3 (2015): 240–59.

63 Mies, *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale*, 74.

64 Fraser, “Contradictions of Capital and Care,” 102.

65 Isa Härtel and Sigrid Schade, “Body and Representation,” *Schriftenreihe der Internationalen Frauenuniversität* 6 (2002): 75.; Ines Lindner, Sigrid Schade, and Sille Wenk, *Blick-Wechsel. Konstruktionen von Männlichkeit und Weiblichkeit in Kunst und Kunstgeschichte* (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag, 1989).

enough to even influence some of the social elites and, later on, parts of the working class, who, from 1840 onwards, aimed for the ideal of a wage-earning husband and a “non-working” wife, portrayed as the “angel in the house” – however, this goal remained largely unattainable for the lower classes.⁶⁶

We thus need to consider the intricate entanglements of class, gender, and race in relation to social reproduction, as they served as oppressive mechanisms within the newly established capitalist system. Along these lines of thought, Sophie Lewis historically positions motherhood in the US as an “institution of married white womanhood.”⁶⁷ Enslaved Black women were not publicly recognised as women, let alone mothers or Americans.⁶⁸ “No other group in America has had their identity socialised out of existence as have black women,” states the Black feminist theorist bell hooks.⁶⁹ Thus Black women were unable to make claims of kinship or “property to the fruits of their gestational labors.”⁷⁰ Unmarried (White) proletarians were also dispossessed of their babies through eugenic and patriarchal laws.⁷¹ In the nineteenth century, White elites on both sides of the Atlantic cultivated an ethics of “productive maternity” while perceiving the “excess production of babies among subaltern classes” as threatening.⁷² The Black feminist scholar bell hooks regards the devaluation of Black womanhood as an extended product of sexual exploitation of Black women during slavery – an image that had not altered over hundreds of years.⁷³

66 Steinbach, *Understanding the Victorians*, 168.

67 Lewis, introduction to *Full Surrogacy Now*.

68 Ibid.

69 bell hooks, *Ain't I a Woman* (London: Pluto, 1982), 7; in bell hooks, “Homeplace (A Site of Resistance),” in *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* (Boston: South End, 1990), the author argues that the domestic sphere, despite its patriarchal order, served as a site of refuge for Black people in a world of White supremacy.

70 Lewis, introduction to *Full Surrogacy Now*.

71 Ibid.

72 Ibid.

73 hooks, *Ain't I a Woman*, 53. hooks further writes: “During the years of Black Reconstruction, 1867–77, black women struggled to change negative images of black womanhood perpetuated by whites. Trying to dispel the myth that all black women were sexually loose, they emulated the conduct and mannerisms of white women” (55). Caught in this contradiction, Black women in the US today continue to carry the painful history of being devalued and dehumanised as a way for white men to justify upholding sexist and racist divisions of labour. For example, from the perspective of an upper- and middle-class white women, lower-class white women and women of colour were portrayed as “fallen sisters” in the media, as hooks already argued in the 1980s. Alongside this, white women were seen as physically and intellectually inferior to men and thus unable to perform the same tasks as men. To rationalise white women's mental and physical inferiority to men in tandem with Black women's ability to carry out “male” tasks, that is, “the black female's ability to survive without the direct aid of a male and her ability to perform tasks that were defined as ‘male’ work, white males

To challenge these oppressive, dehumanising modes of representation of Black people by White people, I turn our focus to the African American feminist artist Betye Saar, who was active in the Black Arts Movement from the 1970s onward. While her work initially focused on the Black male body as a way to counter White feminism, she then turned to give particular attention to the Black female body, as a way to reclaim it from the oppressive visuals of the Jim Crow era. Saar is known for her artistic approach of assemblage, where she brings together derogatory found objects that reproduce negative stereotypes of Black people in the US and uses them in an emancipatory way. "I was recycling the imagery, in a way, from negative to positive, using the negative power against itself," the artist reflected on her work, nearly four decades later.⁷⁴

Her iconic 1972 piece *The Liberation of Aunt Jemima* came into being four years after the death of Martin Luther King Jr.⁷⁵ In it, she subverts the racist image of a found "mammy" figurine, a caricature of a Black slave, and turns her into a Black hero:

She had a broom in one hand and, on the other side, I gave her a rifle. In front of her, I placed a little postcard, of a mammy with a mulatto child, which is another way black women were exploited during slavery. I used the derogatory image to empower the black woman by making her a revolutionary, like she was rebelling against her past enslavement.⁷⁶

Such mammy figurines first emerged in the eighteenth century, when grotesquely stereotyped images of Black women were used to sell kitchen products and other commercialised items (such as broom containers and pencil holders) that "served" their owners. In an almost perverse manner, these items were usually "placeholders," or "empty containers," for the everyday use of their White owners.⁷⁷ These objects can be closely linked to hook's statement that Black women were seen not as women

argued that black slave women were not 'real' women but were masculinized sub-human creatures" (71).

74 Betye Saar, "Influences: Betye Saar. The US Artist Reflects on the Art and Events that Have Shaped a Career Spanning Almost Seven Decades," *Frieze*, September 2016, <https://www.frieze.com/article/influences-betye-saar>.

75 Due to copyright restrictions, I was unable to include the artwork *The Liberation of Aunt Jemima* by Betye Saar in this book. If you should wish to view the discussed artwork, please see Betye Saar, "Influences: Betye Saar. The US Artist Reflects on the Art and Events that Have Shaped a Career Spanning Almost Seven Decades," *Frieze*, September 2016, <https://www.frieze.com/article/influences-betye-saar>.

76 Ibid.

77 Alexxa Gotthardt, "How Betye Saar Transformed Aunt Jemima into a Symbol of Black Power," *Artsy*, October 26, 2017, <https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-betye-saar-transformed-aunt-jemima-symbol-black-power>.

but as subhuman creatures – in this case, commercialised objectifications of racist stereotypes.

In 2007, the human rights activist Angela Davis – at the opening of the exhibition *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution* at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles – stated that the Black women's movement started with Saar's *The Liberation of Aunt Jemima*.⁷⁸ This direct link between Aunt Jemima, the mammy figure used to advertise pancake mix and syrup, and the Black women's movement is not a coincidence, given the powerful interruption and subversion of racist stereotypes wrought by Saar's artistic work – which, in this case, rejected and renegotiated embedded ideologies of Black women as devalued “subhuman creatures” at a representational level.⁷⁹ Saar's work thereby contributed to rejecting the perpetuation of Black women's devalued subjectivity and labour within the capitalist economy.

In direct response to both White feminists' insistence that race and sex were two separate issues and Black activists' assertion that racism and not sexism was the main source of oppression, hooks voiced her conviction that “the struggle to end racism and the struggle to end sexism were naturally intertwined – to make them separate was to deny the basic truth of our existence, that race and sex are both immutable facets of human identity.”⁸⁰ Seven years later, in 1989, the lawyer Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term “intersectionality” to reflect the interlocking effects of oppression.⁸¹

These ideologies of devaluation in regard to race, gender, and class – which intersect powerfully in Saar's artistic work – find their roots in the emergence of the patriarchal-capitalist mode of production that came out of the social reordering of Europe, the US, and the colonies that Europe “conquered.” Maria Mies makes the convincing argument that colonisation must be regarded as the flipside to housewifisation:⁸²

It is my thesis that these two processes of colonization and housewifization are closely and causally interlinked. Without the ongoing exploitation of external colonies – formerly as direct colonies, today within the new international division of labour – the establishment of the “internal colony,” that is, a nuclear

78 Saar, “Influences.”

79 bell hooks describes how “white males argued that black slave women were not ‘real’ women but were masculinized sub-human creatures.” See *Ain't I a Woman*, 71.

80 hooks, *Ain't I a Woman*, 12, 13.

81 Kimberlé Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics,” *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, vol. 1989, iss. 1, article 8 (1989).

82 Fraser, “Crisis of Care?,” 27.

family and a woman maintained by a male “breadwinner,” would not have been possible.⁸³

Interestingly, these repressive ideologies – as ways of devaluing certain forms of labour, and hence enabling an “economy of invisible hands” – had become quite influential, despite them being “just that – ideology, not lived reality,”⁸⁴ as Steinbach concludes. Fraser agrees that the theory behind social reproduction only partially aligned with everyday lives, as these caring activities were not exclusively bound to the private sphere but rather expanded into the public realm, including neighbourhoods, civil society, and public institutions – while some of this labour had already been outsourced or commodified.⁸⁵ At the same time, ideological underpinnings do have to be considered as crucial entities that come together in a powerful manner.

These same ideological forces also influence the mechanisms of value production within the arts. Also, in this context, anyone who deviates from the long-standing ideal of the White, male artist-as-genius – such as Black artists, women artists, artists with caring responsibilities – encounter structural obstacles that continue to mark their success as an “exception” to the norm, as the art theorist Isabelle Graw articulates in her lecture “Value on Shaky Grounds.”⁸⁶ The monetary value of an artwork, as the measurement of success within capitalism, is closely connected to the biography of the author:

Once an artwork sparks “fictional expectations” the desire for it will intensify. So, whether the artwork will be enriched with value or whether it won’t be considered valuable depends on the recipients’ projections about its future worth and credibility. Now these fictional expectations are of course not equally distributed.⁸⁷

Graw builds her argument in the analogy between the arts and sports, both areas with immense gendered gaps when it comes to financial reward and the attention economy. She argues that the (higher) payment of men is rooted in their “future expectations,” whereas women first have to *prove* their abilities and then are questioned as to whether they will be able to repeat their success in the future. Black artist and women artists, according to Graw, have been exposed to this lack of trust for centuries.⁸⁸

83 Mies, *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale*, 110.

84 Steinbach, *Understanding the Victorians*, 168.

85 Nancy Fraser, “Capitalism’s Crisis of Care,” *Dissent*, 2016, <https://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/nancy-fraser-interview-capitalism-crisis-of-care>.

86 Isabelle Graw, “Value on Shaky Grounds,” unpublished manuscript, 2021.

87 Ibid.

88 Ibid. and Linda Nochlin, *Women, Art, and Power and Other Essays* (New York: Routledge, 2018).

Thus, fictive speculations about an artwork's author affect the value generation of the artwork itself. The artist functions as a guarantor of the value-form, to speak in the Marxist terminology of Graw. In the case of racialised artists and women artists, Graw speaks of value discrimination that echoes deeply rooted systemic racism and sexism.⁸⁹ The art theorist and critic concludes:

As for the artworld we also shouldn't forget that this is a social universe that relies on unjustly distributed values, on a certain degree of value discrimination if you wish. One could even go so far to say that structurally speaking every market successful position here is reached at the expense of all those positions that remain invisible.⁹⁰

Arguably, artists with caring responsibilities could be seen as a specific kind of artist who likewise suffers from value discrimination due to lack of trust – as a result of the rather grim “fictional expectations” associated with them. This association between care as an inherently “unproductive” trait becomes apparent within the art system, as it does within society and the economy at large, and seems to be rooted in the racialised and gendered history of capitalism and its prevailing ideologies that shape the mechanism of value distribution. It is thus imperative to take a closer look, in the upcoming third chapter, at how the oppressive mechanisms around care work intersect with the artistic field, particularly when the labour of artistic production and social reproduction overlaps.

2.1.3 Invisible Infrastructures: The Nuclear Family

Homing in on the uneven histories of care work under capitalism, along with the origins of its oppressive ideologies and mechanisms of devaluation, creates the need to take a closer look at the contemporary scenario. Albeit briefly, I want to address the ways in which seemingly outdated gendered ideals of the Victorian age continue to be reproduced in today's version of the nuclear family and how these oppressive norms constitute an invisible infrastructure geared towards upholding the status quo.

The model of the nuclear family secures this status quo through upholding heteronormative ideas of gender and sexuality. Queer sociologist Alan Sears argues that heteronormativity serves to naturalise and externalise forms of sexuality that are culturally and historically specific, “framing particular household forms and divisions of labour as products of human nature and as necessary foundations for a

89 Graw, “Value on Shaky Grounds.”

90 Ibid.

healthy human society across time.”⁹¹ Thus heterosexuality, which arose as a concept in the late nineteenth century,⁹² formed *one* element of heteronormativity as a means to regulate sexual activities and to articulate and strengthen gendered norms that would justify “free” labour within the capitalist system.⁹³

This history is why conservative political forces today have a strong and explicit interest in, literally, *conserving* the nuclear family. It offers a way to maintain a specific social order that entails racialised and gendered power relations and ensures the reproduction of the next generation of like-minded workers. As Sophie Lewis states:

Drug users, abortion seekers, sexually active single women, black mothers, femmes who defend themselves against men, sex workers, and undocumented migrants are the most frequently incarcerated violators of this parenting norm. They have not been shielded by the fact that the Family today is now no longer necessarily heterosexual, with states increasingly making concessions to the “homonormative” household through policy on gay marriage.⁹⁴

The queering of families to include same-sex partnerships and parenthood, single parents, solo moms who choose to reproduce via sperm donors, and “chosen families” and more-than-human kinships can all be seen as alternatives towards building strong support networks, outside of biological connections.⁹⁵

In this light, the work *K-9_topology: Hybrid Family* (2016) by the visual artist Maja Smrekar, in collaboration with the photographer Manuel Vason, can be seen as a provocation towards the established order of the heteronormative, human-centred nuclear family (Image 2). In this durational performance, the artist lived in seclusion with her dogs for three months, entering a process of what she calls becoming (m)Other: “I stimulated my pituitary glands with systematic breastpumping to release the hormone prolactin and followed a diet rich in galactogogues to promote lactation.”⁹⁶ The process allowed her to successfully breastfeed her two puppies. Entering an intimate relationship of more-than-human kinship, the performance

91 Alan Sears, “Body Politics: The Social Reproduction of Sexualities,” in *Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentering Oppression*, ed. Tithi Bhattacharya (London: Pluto, 2017), 172.

92 Gayle S. Rubin, *Deviations* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 89.

93 Sears, “Body Politics,” 173.

94 Lewis, *Full Surrogacy Now*.

95 For an exhibition on queer families, see *Das Queere Familienzimmer*, Kunstraum Elsa, Bielefeld, 2023, which was curated by the photography artist Katharina Bosse. The institution's webpage for the exhibition is available at <https://elsa-art.de/2023/08/30/das-queere-familienzimmer/>.

96 Maja Smrekar and Manuel Vason, “K-9_topology: Hybrid Family,” 2016, accessed on February 22, 2024, <https://www.majasmrekar.org/k-9topology-hybrid-family>.

challenges the ideals of the nuclear family and expands and complexifies notions such as “family,” “care,” and “kinship.” In an effort to rethink the social and ideological instrumentalisation of a woman’s body and breastfeeding, Smrekar aimed to bridge the distinctions of private and political life and to regain a sense of power over the lives, bodies, and modes of cohabitation ascribed to these so-called separate realms. “The myth of humanity, based on its uniqueness, has always excluded some that don’t correspond to the ideal, for example animals with regard to parenthood and gender,” states the artist.⁹⁷



Image 2: Maja Smrekar and Manuel Vason, K-9_topology: Hybrid Family, durational performance, Freies Museum Berlin, 2016. Photo: Manuel Vason.

Artistic, activist attempts, such as Smrekar’s work, that challenge the nuclear family or that present queer and alternative families are often framed as “deviations” from, and even as “attacks” on, not only the nuclear family as such but social norms altogether. These social norms alongside the traditional ideal of the nuclear family are portrayed as indispensable to the political and economic order of Western capitalist societies. In such societies, the ideologies of gendered spheres and sexual politics seem to still prevail today, leading to the continued aspiration to the nuclear

97 Ibid.

family, an ideal enabled and reinforced through invisible juridical infrastructures that contain and punish deviations from this social norm.

An example of such an invisible mechanism that upkeeps the nuclear family is the German tax particularity known as *Ehegattensplitting* (spousal splitting). This practice financially rewards asymmetrical income structures in a married household, in most cases at the expense of women, who continue to perform most of the unpaid care work at home and who enter part-time positions more frequently and who, due to the gender pay gap, tend to earn less than their spouses. This tax model “makes it economically unattractive to break away from the norms of the 1950s, to which the tax system still corresponds with regard to marriage taxation. Thus, the single-earner-and-housewife-marriage is preserved – contrary to the clearly modernized social ideas.”⁹⁸

It comes as no surprise that this tax model originated in nineteenth-century Prussia,⁹⁹ where taxes were levied according to a household's form. Despite efforts to abolish joint taxation of married couples in the 1920s, the Nationalist Socialist regime restricted these efforts again in 1934 by introducing joint taxation and higher tax progression – certainly with the aim of keeping women out of the labour force, in accordance with Nazi family ideology.¹⁰⁰ After the war, the new German government retained this tax model – even though the Federal Constitutional Court ruled, in 1957, that joint assessment in the form practised up until then violated the constitutional protection of marriage, because spouses should not suffer any systematic disadvantages as a result of their marriage.¹⁰¹ However, *Ehegattensplitting* remains active still today, despite feminist efforts to restructure the taxation system in a more egalitarian way. The contemporary tax model in Germany thus continues to cement women's dependency on men's income, which has far-reaching economic consequences, particularly in the case of divorce, and is furthermore connected to elderly women's poverty (as pensions are distributed according to the income earned over one's lifespan).¹⁰² Defenders of *Ehegattensplitting* argue that it supports families

98 Gunda-Werner-Institut, “Weder fair noch sachgerecht: Das Ehegattensplitting steht contra Gleichstellung, Teilhabe und soziale Gerechtigkeit,” Heinrich Böll Stiftung, 2010, <https://www.gwi-boell.de/de/2010/02/12/weder-fair-noch-sachgerecht-das-ehgegattensplitting-steh-t-contra-gleichstellung-teilhabe>.

99 Prussia (Preußen) was a German state located on most of the North European Plain, as well as some southern regions. It formed the German Empire when it united the German states in 1871.

100 Gunda-Werner-Institut, “Geschichte des Ehegattensplitting: Von der Nicht-Diskriminierung von Paaren zur Diskriminierung von Individuen,” Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung, 2010, <https://www.gwi-boell.de/de/2010/02/12/geschichte-des-ehgegattensplitting-von-der-nicht-diskriminierung-von-paaren-zur>.

101 Ibid.

102 Gunda-Werner-Institut, “Weder fair noch sachgerecht.”

– yet the numbers show that 43 percent of the married couples who benefit from the tax alleviations are childless; meanwhile, unmarried couples with children do not benefit from the tax model.¹⁰³ This points to a double standard within the German legislation, where beneficial tax treatment is granted only to married couples while under social legislation unmarried partners are regarded as belonging to “marriage-like communal households” (for example, if an individual applies for social benefits, their unmarried partner is equally liable financially for them as if they were legally married).¹⁰⁴

A similar double standard arises in the tax legislation for single parents. For one-parent families, which deviate from the norm of the nuclear family, a special tax benefit model was created. However, it remains in effect only as long as the single parent does not live in a household with another adult, regardless of whether this relationship is romantic, married, familial, or social. As a consequence, if a single parent chooses to live with friends or family as a support structure, they lose the tax benefit – even though the living arrangement might have only social and not financial merits.¹⁰⁵

These invisible infrastructures, which are geared towards the heteronormative nuclear family, apply not only to taxes. They also materialise in relation to reproductive rights, whereby often male-dominated governments continue to control women's bodies, their health, and their reproductive choices. Such rights are limited by heteronormative morals that shape, for example, regulations regarding in vitro fertilisation (IVF) treatments. The German health care system covers part of the costs of IVF for married heterosexual couples, but not for single women or same-sex couples, making it significantly more difficult for them to reproduce in cases of impacted fertility.¹⁰⁶

This (state) control takes the form of invisible infrastructures that consist of laws, regulations, subsidies, tax benefits, and tax losses that shape and uphold the nuclear family. This ideal's moral and sexual codes, and the attendant mechanisms of control of women's bodies and social norms, continue to lie at the centre of many Western nation-states and their former colonies. Deviations from this norm, in the form of communal, queer, and other non-traditional forms of care are economically

103 Gunda-Werner-Institut, “Geschichte des Ehegattensplitting.”

104 Gunda-Werner-Institut, “Weder fair noch sachgerecht.”

105 Ibid.

106 In contrast to the German model, the state of Israel offers nearly full funding for IVF treatments to any Israeli woman, irrespective of her marital status or sexual orientation, until she has two children with her current partner. Consequently, Israeli women are the world's most intensive consumers of IVF, forming part of the government's “pro-natalists” mission. See Daphna Birenbaum-Carmeli and Martha Dirnfeld, “In Vitro Fertilisation Policy in Israel and Women's Perspectives: The More the Better,” *Reproductive Health Matters* 16, no. 31 (2008): 182–91.

and sociopolitically punished, and, in some cases of activism and civic solidarity, even criminalised.¹⁰⁷ It thus comes as no surprise that the slogan “the personal is political”¹⁰⁸ has become so crucial for feminist movements, demanding that society recognise the so-called private sphere as a realm of broader political concern.¹⁰⁹ Such a widespread recognition would challenge the history and status quo of gendered norms, affecting, among other things, the sexual division of labour, women’s economic (in)dependence, reproductive rights, and protections against domestic violence.¹¹⁰

2.2 Care as a Prism and Call for Action

The past sections outlined the historical and contemporary conditions of Western norms particularly around care and gender, stretching from medieval times up to the contemporary politics of the twenty-first century. From these uncaring conditions, I would like to develop a line of argument that offers a sense of (collective) agency within this tense and conflicting terrain.

107 The research collective Pirate Care has addressed the relationship between care and violence as well as solidarity and criminalisation in their artistic-curatorial-activist practices and writings. See, for example, Valeria Graziano, Marcell Mars, and Tomislav Medak (Pirate Care), “Care and Its Discontents,” New Alphabet School (blog), Haus der Kulturen der Welt, 2020, <https://newalphabetschool.hkw.de/care-and-its-discontents/>.

108 “The personal is political” has been a core phrase of the feminist movement since the 1960s. Its original authorship is unclear, as several feminists decline having coined the phrase and rather attribute it to the collective social movements.

109 Federici and Cox elaborate on the importance of politicising the domestic sphere as a source for broader societal transformation: “Since the left has accepted the wage as the dividing line between work and non-work, production and parasitism, potential power and absolute powerlessness, the enormous amount of wageless work women perform for capital within the home has totally escaped their analysis and strategy. Thus, from Lenin through Gramsci to Benston and Mitchell, the entire leftist tradition has agreed on the ‘marginality’ of housework to the reproduction of capital and, consequently, the marginality of the housewife to revolutionary struggle. According to the left, as housewives women are not suffering from capital, but are suffering precisely from the absence of it. Our problem, it seems, is that capital has failed to reach into and organize our kitchens and bedrooms, with the two-fold consequence that a) we presumably live at a feudal or at any rate precapitalist stage; b) whatever we do in these kitchens and bedrooms is at best irrelevant to any real social change. For obviously, if our kitchens are outside of capital, our struggle to destroy them will never succeed in causing capital to fall.” See Cox and Federici, *Counter-Planning from the Kitchen*, 2.

110 Emma Dowling, *The Care Crisis: What Caused It and How Can We End It?* (London: Verso, 2020).

The introduced empirical data and scholarly work suggest that the contemporary conditions of private care work, with its structural injustices, must be regarded as a historically grown system that cannot be thought of outside of larger political and economic conditions and social norms. Primarily women of all classes and races have been the ones impacted by narratives that feminise domestic labour and care work, limiting their participation in the paid labour sector and public, cultural life in a more broader sense. Viewed through this lens, care is not a loving gesture between kin but a historically grown system – an invisible infrastructure – that regulates and dictates how care is organised socially and politically, ultimately predefining who cares for whom. The examples of the *Ehegattensplitting* tax and IVF support illuminate the legacy of, and the importance of continued struggle against, binary, heteronormative, patriarchal norms and regulations around care politics, reaching towards a framework that makes room for plural gendered realities and forms of kinship.

What the introduced gendered economy of care, with all its contradictions, further showcases is the causal relationships between the previously introduced gender care gap, the gender pay gap, and the gender pension gap.¹¹¹ The issues at stake need to be set into an *infrastructural* relation to one another; in this constellation, gendered private care work for children and ailing parents or partners, is not only a temporal occupation outside the paid workforce but also the pivotal point in a caregiver's life that economically, socially, and politically affects their upcoming decades, reaching into their pension years.

I therefore want to raise awareness for the understanding of matters of private care work, or domestic work, as a central node or a lens with which to analyse broader socioeconomic mechanisms, and social inequalities in particular. Following a similar line of thinking, the Wages for Housework movement regarded unpaid housework as a *prism* “through which the multiple facets of women's lack of power over their lives in society as a whole could be seen, understood, and reassembled.”¹¹² I want to expand the movement's position by considering not only unpaid housework but feminist care politics in a wider sense as a prism through which to analyse often opaque matters of gender, class, disability, and racial justice. Considering larger infrastructural relationships, where care is regarded as a lens for intersectional cri-

111 “This means that women's retirement incomes were on average almost one-third lower than those of men. The reasons for this disparity are manifold: for example, women acquire lower pension entitlements on average over the course of their working lives, partly because they work in lower-paid industries than men. Women also work part-time more often, take more frequent and longer leaves of absence for care work, and are less likely to be in management positions.” Statistisches Bundesamt Deutschland, “Gender Pension Gap.” My translation.

112 Toupin, *Wages for Housework*, 3.

tique, is common in a range of feminist positions. As the feminist scholars Cinzia Arruzza, Tithi Bhattacharya, and Nancy Fraser argue in their “Manifesto for the 99”:

For in capitalist society, the organization of social reproduction rests on gender: it relies on gender roles and entrenches gender oppression. Social reproduction is therefore a feminist issue. But it is shot through at every point by the fault lines of class, race, sexuality, and nation. A feminism aimed at resolving the current crisis must understand social reproduction through a lens that also comprehends, and connects, all those axes of domination.¹¹³

Ultimately, as long as reproductive labour is feminised, one has to address the wider realm of social reproduction in order to move in the direction of gender justice.¹¹⁴ Hence, any new policies or changes in regard to how social reproduction is organised in a given society have far-reaching effects on other sociopolitical and economic sectors. I want to illustrate this with an example: Over the span of the twenty-first century, women have increasingly been recruited into the paid workforce via the narrative of emancipation, whereas many critics hold that this ideal of the “two-earner family” in reality demands women to perform a “double shift” – with a first shift of paid labour and a second unpaid shift at home.¹¹⁵ As Fraser argues:

As well as diminishing public provision and recruiting women into waged work, financialized capitalism has reduced real wages, thus raising the number of hours of paid work per household needed to support a family and prompting a desperate scramble to transfer care work to others.¹¹⁶

113 Cinzia Arruzza, Tithi Bhattacharya, and Nancy Fraser, *This Is a Manifesto for the 99* (London: Verso, 2019), 22. An understanding of the scope and mechanisms of social reproduction is, however, limited by the current methods that focus on the official economy, and hence the GDP. The sociologist and psychologist Norbert Schwarz argues, in his 2017 study “The Value of Unpaid Labor: The Satellite System Household Production,” that “the regular representation of household production is of great importance in various indicator systems for measuring welfare. This is intended to move the focus beyond standard economic reporting to a comprehensive view of material welfare” (quoted in Statistisches Bundesamt Deutschland, “Wie die Zeit vergeht,” 246.).

114 “Gender justice” is a term brought forth by Nancy Fraser. She proposes to understand gender justice as a “complex idea, not a simple one,” thereby establishing seven key principles that would allow welfare states to reconceptualise the position of women in society. These seven normative principles include, for example, the Anti-Poverty Principle, the Anti-Exploitation Principle, Income Equality, and Leisure-Time Equality. Due to the complexity of Fraser’s concept, refer to her in-depth definition of gender justice directly in Nancy Fraser, *Fortunes of Feminism: From State-Managed Capitalism to Neoliberal Crisis* (London: Verso), 115–123.

115 Arlie Hochschild and Anne Machung, *The Second Shift* (London: Penguin, 2012).

116 Fraser, “Crisis of Care?,” 34.

Fraser, like many other social reproduction scholars, notes that industrialised nations under contemporary financialised capitalism experience a “care gap,” which manifests as a heightened demand for cheap care labour from the Global South. As their societies age, industrialised nations are finding that their health care sectors lack professional care workers¹¹⁷ and that more and more women are entering the waged workforce (and thus no longer perform many of the care activities historically ascribed to them). In short, they are in desperate need of care providers. In 2019, Germany estimated that 4.1 million (mainly elderly) people were in need of care; ten years earlier, there were only 2.3 million people.¹¹⁸

With this example, it becomes evident that one change within the complex system of social reproduction – i.e., White, middle-class women increasingly entering the paid workforce in the Global North – has far-reaching consequences on, in this case, women of colour around the globe. The ensuing creation of global care chains – whereby predominantly migrant women are urged to leave their own families behind to provide underpaid around-the-clock care for the youngest and most elderly populations of richer nations – make it clear that care is not only a matter of gender but also intricately interlocked with concerns of race and class.¹¹⁹ Around the globe, the labour conditions for migrant care workers are utterly precarious. Oftentimes, they have no social security and have informally immigrated or hold very restrictive and temporary work and visa titles.¹²⁰ The already marginalised origin communities that such care workers migrate from experience a so-called care drain: a depletion of care resources locally. The private and public care sectors of the Global North thus benefit from the economic “underdevelopment” of the workers’ origin countries, using it as leverage to maintain care as an undervalued, invisibilised activity.

Many feminists, including care ethics and Marxist-feminist scholars, argue that care needs to be valued – and remunerated – for its essential social function and that it cannot be regarded as a private issue without public concern. However, it is important to understand that care, within the logic of capitalism, cannot easily be “valued more” as it is *devalued structurally* in order to remain cost efficient. The economist Susan Himmelweit explains the constraints to fair pay for domestic labour within the

117 Ursula Apitzsch, Marianne Schmidbaur, “Care, Migration und Geschlechtergerechtigkeit,” Bundeszentrale für Politische Bildung, September 7, 2011, <http://www.bpb.de/apuz/33149/care-migration-und-geschlechtergerechtigkeit>.

118 Statistisches Bundesamt Deutschland, “4,1 Millionen Pflegebedürftige zum Jahresende 2019,” 2020, https://www.destatis.de/DE/Presse/Pressemitteilungen/2020/12/PD20_507_224.html; Apitzsch, Schmidbaur, and Bildung, “Care, Migration und Geschlechtergerechtigkeit.”

119 The concept was prominently positioned in the discourse by Arlie Hochschild in “Global Care Chains and Emotional Surplus Value,” in *Justice, Politics, and the Family*, ed. Daniel Engster and Tamara Metz (New York: Routledge, 2015).

120 Apitzsch, Schmidbaur, and Bildung, “Care, Migration und Geschlechtergerechtigkeit.”

capitalist economy: “Where there is no productivity differential, employment will not be perceived as worthwhile unless wages are higher than the average paid to carers.”¹²¹ This phenomenon is reflected in the dynamic which occurs when a parent or other caretaker relative is paid less at their job outside the home than they would have to pay to a substitute caregiver.

We thus have to recognise first and foremost that care within capitalist economies fulfils its socioeconomic role as a devalued service, and thus demands for greater visibility or value need to be connected to larger structural transformations – otherwise, these demands run the danger of remaining symbolic gestures of recognition that do not alter the structural violences embedded within systems of care. As such, care politics must be an expansive politics in order to address the urgency around care with political adequacy, as the sociologists Ursula Apitzsch and Marianne Schmidbaur argue:

So far, it has not been possible to bring together the various strands of discussion around policies around women, family, social, health, tax, labor market, migration and foreign policy. To date, care work has not been seen as a central, coherent sociopolitical field and has not been dealt with accordingly. However, this is precisely what is needed in order to effectively meet the challenges of the future.¹²²

Fraser raises a similar critique when she writes that the economy is only looked at as an economic system in its narrow sense, not taking into account the sphere of social reproduction – which sustains all other economic activities. She asserts that the strains on care that manifest themselves under the current regime of financialised capitalism have deep systemic roots within the structure of our social order. Yet the present crisis of social reproduction is an indication that something is “rotten” not only within the current form of financialised capitalism but in capitalist society in general.¹²³ She urges us to understand that the “crisis of care” is thus not a crisis that is immanent to the sphere of social reproduction but renders itself legible at the intersection, at the *boundary*, with the productive sphere – and that these “boundary struggles” change with each regime of capitalism.¹²⁴ Fraser claims:

[E]very form of capitalist society harbours a deep-seated social-reproductive “crisis tendency” or contradiction: on the one hand, social reproduction is a condi-

121 Susan Himmelweit, “Can We Afford (Not) To Care: Prospects and Policy,” in *New Working Paper Series (London School of Economics, Gender Institute)* (London: London School of Economics, 2005), 16.

122 Apitzsch, Schmidbaur, and Bildung, “Care, Migration und Geschlechtergerechtigkeit.”

123 Nancy Fraser, “Contradictions of Capital and Care,” *New Left Review*, no. 100 (2016), 100.

124 Ibid.

tion of possibility for sustained capital accumulation; on the other, capitalism's orientation to unlimited accumulation tends to destabilize the very processes of social reproduction on which it relies. This social-reproductive contradiction of capitalism lies at the root of the so-called crisis of care.¹²⁵

The philosopher calls for a massive reorganisation of the relationship between production and reproduction to overcome this care crisis, particularly financialised capitalism's "rapacious subjugation of reproduction to production."¹²⁶ If her assumptions are right, then adjustments to social policy will not suffice to overcome the ongoing care crisis.¹²⁷ Without specifying what the solutions would entail, Fraser argues for the need to reinvent and reimagine the ways in which social reproduction and production relate to one another, as the gendered separation between these two spheres continues to be a primary basis for women's subordination in capitalist societies.

Taking up this effort of collectivising as a way to seek care justice and a renegotiation of the relations of re/production within the German-speaking realm, initiatives such as *Wirtschaft ist Care*, *Care Revolution*, *Care.Macht.Mehr* (*Care.Power.More*), and *Equal Care Day* have been demanding and building a care-centred economy that foregrounds reproduction over production.¹²⁸ They contribute to ongoing discourses and practices by providing "new models for care relationships and a care economy that centres not on maximising profits but on fulfilling the needs of human beings, and that does not distribute care work and care resources according to racist, sexist or classist structures."¹²⁹ Spearheaded primarily by women and queer people, these grassroots initiative have become central players in the various feminist marches, conferences, publications, and political conversations taking place across Germany and Switzerland.

As Fraser argues, "for feminism, there can be no more central issue than this."¹³⁰ This reorganisation, this challenging, of the current economic system must therefore be seen as a central feminist concern, in which "care" is not only what is at stake

125 Ibid.

126 Ibid., 117.

127 Ibid.

128 For further information, see *Care Revolution Network*, accessed July 7, 2023, <https://care-revolution.org/>; *Care.Macht.Mehr*, accessed July 7, 2023, <https://care-macht-mehr.com/>; *Equal Care Day Initiative*, accessed July 7, 2023, <https://equalcareday.de/>. Also see the publications Gabriele Winker, *Care Revolution. Schritte in eine solidarische Gesellschaft* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2017); Ina Praetorius, "Wirtschaft ist Care: oder die Wiederentdeckung des Selbstverständlichen," *Schriften zu Wirtschaft und Soziales. Band 16* (2015).

129 *Care Revolution Network*, accessed July 7, 2023, <https://care-revolution.org/>.

130 Nancy Fraser, "Capitalism's Crisis of Care," *Dissent*, 2016, <https://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/nancy-fraser-interview-capitalism-crisis-of-care>.

but also what provides a lens to analyse the current conditions of social injustices and what serves as a call to action for an otherwise.

Within the framework of this research project, the sense of (collective) agency for an otherwise, derived from the prevailing uncaring conditions around care, need to be transferred to the discourses in the artistic and curatorial field. Therefore, the following chapters of this book are dedicated to an analysis of the domestic, care work, and the gendered dynamics within the art field and within curating. The theories and practices explored in the next chapter lay the groundwork for a practice-based engagement with the potentials and limitations around curatorial care in the rest of the study.