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**Zur Frage unbezahlter Arbeit: Dimensionen
von Gender in Politik und Ökonomie**

**On the Issue of Unpaid Labour: Dimensions of
Gender in Economy and Politics**

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Abstract

What is unpaid labour, how can it be understood as a gendered activity, and how and why has it been excluded from the (political) economy? This paper seeks to answer this question; first by laying out different political theories and frameworks to understand how unpaid labour relates to other forms of labour, using the methodology of feminist and Marxist analyses, which will provide a basis for understanding its societal and (therefore) monetary (de)valuation. It will look at different political movements which, in different ways, laid bare the value of unpaid labour, analyse their methods, and compare their demands, influences, and backgrounds. The paper will discuss how unpaid labour is often seen as invisible labour, highlighting the existence of a systemic data gap, especially in regards to research. Lastly it will showcase one of the first empirical studies which uses gender as an analytical device and compare its findings with the same study redone in present day. Concluding, perspectives on the future and methods of counteracting this systemic problem will be presented.

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Introduction

What is unpaid labour? How does one determine the value of different forms of work? What does certain work being done primarily by a certain class or gender mean, and by whom and since when have these questions been critically analysed?

Usually, people would not consider washing their dishes, cleaning their windows, taking out the garbage, or reading bedtime stories to their young ones to be a form of labour. However, all of these activities do not only play a vitally important role in sustaining and maintaining the world in a way to ensure it is liveable, but are equally activities which enable people, in the sense of providing the sustenance and force required, and thereby make it possible for them, in the first place, to engage in “real” labour. In this sense, *unproductive labour*, or *reproductive labour* is just as necessary, a prerequisite, to having the capacity of engaging in what most would consider *actual work*.

This leads to a rather intuitive question, which the question this paper will try to answer; why is this form of labour not considered valuable? This has to be asked on both an economic level, in the sense that it is *unpaid labour*, as also a (macro)political one, in why the responsibility/burden of being responsible for such labour is indisputably more likely to be a female one, and how these two facets are interlinked.

In order to do this, this paper will firstly look at how different political and economic theories intersect and interact with unpaid labour, and how the term of economy itself is shaped by it. Secondly it will analyse different historical political movements, past and present. The focus will lie on how they used, and made visible the burden of unpaid labour, as also what their goals, methods of operation, and important theoretical influences were. Thirdly, this paper will look at how unpaid labour has been systematically invisibilised and excluded from what one considers to be part of the (productive) economy. It will further analyse the contents of one of the earliest studies to use gender as an analytical method regarding female industrial workers and illuminate the lack of systematic change in regards to unpaid labour over the past 90 years.

1 What Is Unpaid Labour? About Terminology and Definitions

In order to better understand the term of unpaid labour and the political and economic implications it carries, one can look at the different ways it, and its surrounding concepts, have been defined. All of these definitions will flesh out how the term of unpaid labour will be understood in this paper, as referring partially to reproductive labour and caring labour, within the terminologies provided by theorists and economists who base their understanding of unpaid labour as a specific form of labour since industrialisation, specifically connected to the problems of modern capitalism.

1.1 Care Ethics

The first, and probably most broadly applicable of these terms is care and care ethics, often understood as a form of feminist ethics. A definition of care, given by the US-American political theorist Joan Tronto in 2015, describes care generally,

"In the most general sense, care is a species activity that includes everything we do to maintain, continue, and repair our world so that we may live in it as well as possible. That world includes our bodies, our selves, and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life sustaining web"¹

which has much to do with what unpaid labour is generally concerned with, it works as a caring mechanism to sustain the world around it, and no society, or modern production and economic system of any sort, can survive without it. Care always stands in relation to something, and is defined as much by what is seen as societally important (for example policy relating to healthcare, school systems, or infrastructure).² Something discussed in care ethics is also how, while performing

¹ Joan C Tronto, *Who Cares? How to Reshape a Democratic Politics*, (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2015), 3.

² Joan C Tronto, *Who Cares?*, 3-4.

caring labour can very much be personally fulfilling and valued, the problem lies in its systemic and gendered devaluation.³ It also talks about how being forced into occupying a caring role and doing caring labour is the result of persisting antiquated social and economic hierarchies relating to idealised family structures.⁴ Care also works as a term to display the totality of this sustaining mechanism, being much broader than how unpaid labour will be discussed here, however the term is vital in how it is used to analyse the nature of how unpaid labour is seen societally, and in regards to connecting systems, with caring principles also being a basis for actions generally.⁵ The way gender plays an important role is that care work has, in the Western context, been predominantly defined as a woman's labour of love, "They say it is love. We say it is unwaged work."⁶, describing how women having to exercise unpaid labour has been set as a natural state in current (and past) economic structures.

1.2 Reproductive Labour

However, unpaid labour is also more directly intertwined with its condition, historically, and materially, which leads to a second definition. The stateless political economist Karl Marx states that labour power, as in the capacity of production, only exists in the living body of the worker.⁷ This living body however is not a self-sufficient entity, it has to be cared for, it has to be infinitely reproduced until its death for it to be able to have the labour power to produce:

"If the owner of labour-power works today, tomorrow he must again be able to repeat the same process in the same conditions as regards health and strength. His means of subsistence must therefore be sufficient to maintain him in his normal state as a working individual."⁸

³Ibid, 19.

⁴Julie Kohler, "The End of Family Values" in *The Politics of Care, from COVID-19 to Black Lives Matter*, (Cambridge: Boston Review and Verso Books).

⁵Emma Dowling, "Caring in Times of a Global Pandemic. Introduction", in *Historical Social Research* 46, (2021): 8-10.

⁶Silvia Federici, *Wages Against Housework*, (Bristol: Power of Women Collective and Falling Wall Press 1975) 1.

⁷Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. 1, trans. Ben Fowkes (New York: Penguin Books, 1976) [1867], 272.

⁸Karl Marx, *Capital*, 275.

These means of subsistence are mostly sustained through what one would call reproductive labour, be it paid, or unpaid. The differentiation of reproductive to productive labour is, quite literally, given in that productive labour *produces* commodities of determined value, while reproductive labour does not. Reproductive labour is essentially the precondition for someone to be able to sustain themselves and their surroundings to partake in productive work. Marx's understanding that labour power itself is valued with a different historical and moral lens than the commodities it produces can be applied equally as well to unpaid labour.⁹ From this perspective one can better understand the stigma of unpaid labour having to be of female work, the connection between work's lack of value, and *real* production, and the gender of the person doing the work generally being historically regarded as a political and economic status quo, which need not even be considered. This stigma is (ironically) even reinforced by Marx's analysis, since the focus lies only on productive labour creating value, without actually explaining where the labour power for this is reproduced, creating the real world effect of a lack of concern regarding the conditions surrounding reproductive labour.¹⁰ However, this does not discount how one can work with and build on the term of reproductive labour, and more essentially create analytical tools in regards to the economic and systemic real world conditions regarding household labour, since reproductive labour always implies the economic conditions which go with it.

1.3 Social Reproduction Theory

This leads to the concept of social reproduction theory, and how it is used by feminist Marxists to define and understand reproductive labour. Social reproduction theory adds on to the Marxist definition by "developing a class analysis that shows how the production of goods and services and the production of life are part of one integrated process".¹¹ "Under the capitalist mode of production, social reproduction, whether waged or unwaged, refers to the totality of those activities required to create,

⁹Ibid, 275.

¹⁰Rainer Bauböck, *Wertlose Arbeit, Zur Kritik der häuslichen Ausbeutung*, (Vienna: Verlag für Gesellschaftskritik, 1991) 11.

¹¹Meg Luxton, *Feminist Political Economy in Canada* in *Social Reproduction: Feminist Political Economy Challenges Neo-Liberalism*, eds. Meg Luxton and Kate Bezanson, (Montreal & Kingston, London and Ithaca: McGill-Queen University Press, 2006), 36.

maintain, and restore the commodity labour.”¹² This means linking the “production of life”, reproduction, to productive labour. One can do this by analysing what the global working class consists of today, in regards to gender, ethnicity and disability, as well as considering the social relationships which exist between places of production, varied workplaces, and places of reproduction, for example households, educational facilities or hospitals.¹³ This is helpful in understanding how gender works within unpaid labour since it deals with understanding the current and historic intersection and development of unpaid labour in relation to paid waged labour within capitalist systems. In example, it can be used to analyse the development of the system of subsistence economy, where both genders physically had to participate, to the idea of a sole male worker as the breadwinner becoming entrenched in society.¹⁴ It can, subsequently, also be used to look at the developing problems connected to the modern “two-earner family”, with the burden of social reproduction falling almost exclusively on the female part, within financialized capitalism in the present day.¹⁵ Social reproduction theory also has to do with the formation of a “feminist class struggle”, using the Marxian term of class, as class itself cannot exist on its own, but only in relation, in struggle, to other classes,¹⁶ to try to create a new gender, sexuality and race inclusive class consciousness.¹⁷

1.4 Etymology

Taking a step back one has to examine how the term of economy itself is shaped by unpaid household labour. Economy is etymologically derived from the ancient Greek word *oikonomia*, meaning household management, which is in turn formed by two

¹²Tithi Bhattacharya, *Introduction: Mapping Social Reproduction Theory in Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentering Oppression*, ed. Tithi Bhattacharya, (London: Pluto Press, 2017), 39.

¹³Tithi Bhattacharya, *Introduction in Social Reproduction Theory* ed. Tithi Bhattacharya, (London: Pluto Press, 2017), 3.

¹⁴Salar Mohandesi and Emma Teitelman, *Without Reserves in Social Reproduction Theory*, 42-44.

¹⁵Nancy Fraser, *Crisis of Care in Social Reproduction Theory*, 32-35.

¹⁶Daniel Bensaïd, *Marx for Our Times: Adventures and Misadventures of a Critique* (London: Verso, 2002), 111.

¹⁷Cinzia Arruzza, “From Social Reproduction Feminism to the Women’s Strike” in *Social Reproduction Theory, Remapping Class, Recentering Oppression*, 192-196.

ancient Greek words, one *nomos*, meaning custom or law,¹⁸ and one *oikos*, meaning household.¹⁹ This is interesting in that it shows how connected the idea of household actually is to what one would consider productive economic activity, but also in how the Greek's themselves very deliberately considered this productive activity as separate, or excluded from politics and philosophy.²⁰ The Greek's definition shows many parallels to the value judgments toward unpaid labour today and in contemporary history. They defined where one can be and act as a political entity based on a discriminatory system of space divided by gender and property. The only place where politics were possible was in the Agora, because that was the only space where people could be equal, since it was limited to free men. A counterpart to this was the *oikos*, the private household, where there could be no political expression, since there were no equals, only the head of the household ruling over the women, children and slaves.²¹ As Jewish US-American Hannah Arendt put it, being unfree was the precondition to the structure of family existing, signifying this, the term "Familia" itself was often translated to mean just servitude, showing the implicit political and economic relations concerning household activities.²² Especially the restrictive and normative political definition of housework has been something strongly influencing western understanding of unpaid labour, as also the ethics regarding leading a frugal, self-sufficient and orderly household being connected to the mental and spiritual well-being of the person in question.²³

1.5 Frameworks

All of these different definitions and frameworks are not only important since they imply certain ideological frameworks, but also since they showcase how problems related to unpaid labour are complex, culturally situated, and thereby can be

¹⁸ *Νόμος*, Wiktionary, accessed October 25 2021, <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/%CE%BD%CF%8C%CE%BC%CE%BF%CF%82>.

¹⁹ *Οἶκος*, Wiktionary, accessed October 25, 2021, <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/%CE%BF%E1%BC%B6%CE%BA%CE%BF%CF%82>.

²⁰ Dotan Leshem, "Retrospectives: What Did the Ancient Greeks Mean by Oikonomia?", *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 30, no. 3 (Winter 2016): 233, accessed October 25, 2021, <https://pubs.aeaweb.org/doi/pdfplus/10.1257/jep.30.1.225>.

²¹ Hannah Arendt, *Was ist Politik? Fragmente aus dem Nachlass*, ed. Ursula Ludz (Munich: Piper Taschenbuch 2020) [1993], 100.

²² Arendt, *Was ist Politik?*, 100.

²³ Dotan Leshem, *Retrospectives*, 232

interpreted in many different ways with different tools and perspectives on how to reform or fix them. Especially care ethics and social reproduction theory are often used in conjunction, especially by feminist theorists and activists.

An important distinction has to be made here that this paper will discuss gender dimensions of unpaid labour in the sense of reproductive labour, not the gender implications of forms of productive labour which are unpaid, such as for example slave labour. It is also not primarily concerned solely with reproductive labour, as this includes its paid form, but mainly with unpaid reproductive labour, and the problems associated with it in modern industrial capitalism. These issues range from overwork, from it being taken for granted that one has to do this labour in addition to having a job, the fact that mainly people of the female gender are considered responsible for it, that there is little to no data on the effects of this type of labour even though it is of both economic and political significance, to unpaid labour being systematically economically devalued through the state of it being unpaid, as also not considered in economic measurements, because it is, and has historically, been seen as unimportant by those setting and controlling the political and economical margins.

2 Political Movements, Their Effects and Influences

2.1 Wages for Housework, an International Feminist Movement

One of the backbones of the political and socio-economic struggle for recognition of unpaid labour and care work is and has been the formation of political movements and strikes/protests. One of the earliest of these movements, which incorporated the need for financial independence as well as demanded recognition for unpaid household labour, was an international feminist movement during second-wave feminism known as Wages for Housework in English, where the different chapters formed the International Feminist Collective (IFC), which formally existed from 1972-1977.²⁴ As the name might suggest, the movement was interested in securing a government paid wage for household labour, notably regardless of gender, and even though it was influential, is mostly forgotten today. The reason for this is largely that the feminist movement as a whole rejected the idea of tying a wage to housework, seeing it as a regressive strategy, instead focusing on making sure women gain equal access to the workforce, with the main goal in social reproduction being “task sharing” within the family construct.²⁵ The goal of making women part of the workforce has by and large succeeded in the western world, task sharing not so much, with, for example women in Canada, having to spend an additional 50 hours per week doing unpaid labour in addition to having a job, or alternatively exploiting the labour power of other women by paying them to do this, with usually poor pay, for them.²⁶

Important to note is the reason that this movement has also disappeared from the public consciousness is that no research was done on it, causing it to go largely forgotten for around 35 years, with the Wikipedia article about it being created only in 2012, and the first comprehensive history *Wages for Housework, A History of an International Feminist Movement 1972-7*, which much of this chapter is informed by, being published by the Canadian political scientist Louise Toupin in French only in 2014. This is even though its contributors and important activists, for example Selma

²⁴Louise Toupin, *Wages for Housework. A History of an International Feminist Movement, 1972-77*, (London: Pluto Press, 2018) [2014], 83-85.

²⁵Louise Toupin, *Wages for Housework*, 3-4.

²⁶Ibid, 5.

James and Silvia Federici, still agitate for similar causes, James having been part of the organisation of the more recent Global Women's Strikes.

The movement itself was politically revolutionary in the sense that it was one of the first internationally organised movements which looked at housewives as part of left wing (and Marxist) struggles and tried to organise them so they could achieve political change. While it was an international movement, its mobilisations and activities were mostly limited to Western states, like Canada, England, the US, West Germany and Switzerland. It tried to use a system sustaining segment of society to collectively exert influence and achieve political goals through means of, for example, petitions, marches and strikes. The traditional left-wing view that unions were responsible for securing these rights was questioned by the movement, especially US-American Selma James, one of the most influential members. She questioned unions' capacity to represent unwaged women workers, since unions' function was limited to representing working women, and thereby did not account for the "struggle of the wageless".²⁷

"Housework had to be transformed into a natural attribute rather than be recognized as a social contract because from the beginning of capital's scheme for women this work was destined to be unwaged."²⁸ Is a passage from a Silvia Federici *Wages for Housework* pamphlet published 1975, which highlights the Wages for Housework critique toward political and economic conditions under capitalism. It explains how unpaid labour was politically devalued and made out to be the woman's natural state, standing in contrast to waged labour. The unwaged quality consequently stigmatising unpaid labour as something which was distinctly not work, and therefore also delegitimizing struggle against this "labour of love", since, from this perspective, one is not labouring, or producing, and therefore does not have grounds to change current economic conditions.²⁹

²⁷Ibid, 87.

²⁸Silvia Federici, *Wages Against Housework*, (Bristol: Power of Women Collective and Falling Wall Press, 1975) 2.

²⁹Silvia Federici, *Wages Against Housework*, 2-6.

Difficult in this process was trying to both effectively reach women, since these were not working in a centrally organised unit like a factory, but also of disparate socio-economic statuses, from older generations of mostly housewives dependent on their partners, to younger generations that were more economically independent.³⁰ Crucial to this approach was trying to build a mass movement with information campaigns to reach women, but also not getting lost in the specific aspects of Wages for Housework, and instead focusing on acknowledgement for this form of labour as a whole, so that basis for change on a more specific level already exists. This approach was also designed in a way to not exclude women from different segments of society and with differing goals and preconditions, from black, indigenous, lesbians, rural/urban, waged/unwaged, to sex workers, which is indicative of what one might today call an intersectional approach.³¹ Crucial to all this was creating awareness and informing people of this movement in the first place, this awareness creation ranged from gaining exposure through traditional media outlets like radio and television, to print publications such as pamphlets and flyers, as also periodicals. Other important organising mechanisms were public meetings, women's centres and street events, which were all important in organising on a local level and developing tactics.³² The movement was influential in the sense that it was part of the broader feminist awareness campaigns at the time, but also since its outlook and goals were radically different than many other feminist political movements, which were more focused on labour participation and equality through "equal opportunities" than the problems related to unpaid labour.³³ These problems have persisted, even with the measures taken by the global North to make "family-job reconciliation" possible,³⁴ and have actually resulted in a "care drain", where "migration leads to a transfer of a migrant's care capital from South to North"³⁵, meaning that in order to make up for the lack of caring labour and resources provided in the Global North, this labour is increasingly

³⁰Louise Toupin, *Wages for Housework*, 3-4.

³¹Ibid, 211-212.

³²Ibid, 103-106.

³³Ibid, 3-4.

³⁴Ibid, 216.

³⁵Ibid, 217.

getting cheaply outsourced from the Global South, which consequently creates a new form of class and power dynamics between women.³⁶

2.2 Icelandic Women's Strike

During this same period, the year of 1975 was designated International Women's Year by the UN, which created organisations which would later become part of the UN Women, as also sparked debate and call to action on the national level in certain countries. The most effective and far reaching of these responses was the Icelandic Women's Strike which occurred on the 24th of October 1975. The Icelandic women's strike was a political grassroots movement which engaged women on a national level, with around 90% of women in Iceland taking a "day off", it being referred to as such since organisers feared repercussions by employers for officially going on strike. The strike was largely protesting against the enormous Icelandic wage gap at the time, with women earning on average 40% less than men, as also the employment practises which discriminated against Icelandic women who were mostly solely responsible for unpaid care work within families.³⁷ The action showed how dependent the economy and status quo were on women's unpaid and underpaid labour, with many essential services, such as newspapers, schools, fish factories, nurseries and theatres essentially shutting down for the day since the workers were primarily female, not to mention laying bare the burdens of childcare, even if only for a day.³⁸ It was not only important for women to be able to discuss, establish goals and organise themselves, but also had political consequences, with Iceland's parliament passing a law mandating equal pay the following year in 1976, and the movement pushing for the a female president in Iceland who won in 1980, making her the world's first democratically elected female president. This is also due to Iceland's population being very small, which makes it easier to mobilise nearly the entirety of the population, as also influence things on a

³⁶Ibid, 218-219.

³⁷Max Rennebohm, "Icelandic women strike for economic and social equality", 1975, Global Nonviolent Action Database, accessed December 28, 2021 <https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/content/icelandic-women-strike-economic-and-social-equality-1975>.

³⁸*The day the women went on strike*, The Guardian, accessed December 28, 2021 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2005/oct/18/gender.uk>.

national level, also due to Iceland being a demographically relatively homogenous country, facilitating connectedness between striking people.

2.3 NiUnaMenos, Movements in the Hispanic Sphere

Another, more recent political movement, were the *NiUnaMenos*³⁹ (Not one less) strikes occurring first in Argentina in 2015 and later in various Latin American countries. These were motivated by the recurring problems related not only to recurring sexual violence and access to abortion, but also the socio-economic disparities which were at the root of these problems.⁴⁰ The focus was also not to just stop working in waged labour, but also to include people doing unpaid and informal economies, in order to show how systems of exploitation and violence are interconnected with conditions of paid and unpaid labour and facilitate violence and femicide.⁴¹

Social scientist Verónica Gago argues that the strike works to connect women internationally, by turning violence against women into a political matter.⁴² She defines three aspects of this politicisation, firstly that by attaining the status of a political subject by way of strike, one is not turned into a victim and thereby forced into dependency towards the state, secondly, that woman's strikes are wilful acts of mass sabotage, and by act of this sabotage make visible how different segments of society are dependent on many different heterogeneous forms of female labour, and thirdly, make possible a re-contextualisation the organisational dynamics of a strike to better depict the different groups which are involved.⁴³ She argues that woman's strikes are so effective and work as more than just a tool to demand better working conditions, but also drive social change, especially if they're organised

³⁹*NiUnaMenos* (Not one less, as in not one woman less, since una indicates the feminine gender) is itself a reference to the slogan "Ni una mujer menos, ni una muerta más" (Not one woman less, not one more death) by the Mexican poet Susana Chávez, who was herself murdered at age 36.

⁴⁰Isabell Lorey, "Vorwort" in *8M - Der große feministische Streik*, trans. Michael Grieder and Gerald Raunig, (Vienna et al.: transversal texts, 2018), 9-11.

⁴¹Isabell Lorey, "Vorwort" in *8M - Der große feministische Streik*, 11-13.

⁴²Verónica Gago, "#NosotrosParamos, Notizen zu einer politischen Theorie des feministischen Streiks" in *8M - Der große feministische Streik*, 30.

⁴³Verónica Gago, #NosotrosParamos, 30.

spontaneously,⁴⁴ because they visibilise not only gendered problems related to waged labour, but much more show how arbitrary the line between what is defined as not-work (unpaid labour) and waged labour.⁴⁵

Partially inspired by the strikes in Latin America and making use of growing attention and support for the feminist cause, the International Women's Strikes, taking place on International Women's Day on March 8th,⁴⁶ were particularly large in 2017 and 2018. The strikes themselves were motivated by the recurring problems related not only to the disparities in paid wage labour and recurring sexual violence⁴⁷, but also unequal distributions of caring labour. Around 6 million people participated in the Strike all around Spain, making it the largest European strike to have ever taken place, showcasing the massive desire and push for systemic change.⁴⁸

Italian activist Cinzia Arruza, one of the organisers of the International Women's Strike of 2017, meanwhile argues that the support for the strike also comes from a rejection of recent liberal feminism, which has resulted in increases of economic and social inequality between women of the working and upper classes, with the wage gap between men and women only really decreasing for upper class women, in favour of a more class based inclusive feminism.⁴⁹ She further argues that politics based on identity, for example gender, race, and sexuality, are themselves part of class struggle if one considers that

“In lived reality, class, race and gender inequality are not experienced as a separate and compartmentalized phenomena that intersect in an external way: their separation is

⁴⁴ Arguing in the tradition of Polish Marxist Rosa Luxemburg's theory in *The Mass Strike, the Political Party and the Trade Unions* (1906), which, broadly speaking, postulates that spontaneous mass strike by the workers, in contrast to (government approved) planned strikes, are one of the most effective methods/tools for achieving social change.

⁴⁵ Verónica Gago, #Nosotrospamos, 33-35.

⁴⁶ March 8th is International Women's Day, first being celebrated in Russia on this date on the same day in the Julian calendar, women striking on this day famously also causing the strike for “bread and peace” in 1917, which resulted in the abdication of the Czar, and in consequence to women gaining the right to vote

⁴⁷ Isabell Lorey, “Vorwort” in *8M - Der große feministische Streik*, 10-11.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 18.

⁴⁹ Cinzia Arruza, “From Social Reproduction Feminism to the Women's Strike” in *Social Reproduction Theory, Remapping Class, Recentring Oppression*, 192-194.

merely the outcome of an analytical thought process, which should not be mistaken as a reflection of experience”⁵⁰

which is key in counteracting oppression based on identity, since the driving force and political power behind all different oppressed groups can be articulated in class struggle, and not separated, as has been happening in liberal feminism, which weakens both the overall cause as also reduces its scope.⁵¹ All this culminates in the formation of a decidedly transnational class consciousness with values which result in feminism through class struggle, a feminist class struggle, which acts of course differently in different contexts, but shares tendencies towards “anti-liberal, internationalist, anti-racist, obviously feminist and tendentially anti-capitalist”⁵² processes.

What ties all these strikes and movements together, is how they use striking as a method of not only protesting against sexual violence and inequality in regards to waged labour, but also consciously refuse fulfilling the day to day societal obligations in regards to unpaid labour. This refusal, especially in the Icelandic strikes case, has a profound effect on making visible an often marginalised and invisibilised form of labour, and showcasing how system sustaining it truly is.

⁵⁰Cinzia Arruzza, “Social Reproduction Feminism to the Women’s Strike” in *Social Reproduction Theory*, 195.

⁵¹Ibid, 195-196.

⁵²Cinzia Arruzzo, “From Women’s Strikes to a New Class Movement: The Third Feminist Wave”, Viewpoint Magazine, accessed February 12th, 2022, <https://viewpointmag.com/2018/12/03/from-womens-strikes-to-a-new-class-movement-the-third-feminist-wave/>.

3 The Data Problem: Measuring Unpaid Labour

3.1 Unpaid labour and the Data Gap

Unpaid labour is referred to as invisible labour. In scholarly and in political terms, an issue that remains invisible can neither be studied nor changed. While those who perform unpaid domestic labour know very well how much time they need to invest in order to get it done every day, this type of labour has historically been excluded and therefore made invisible in political and economic realities. In order to effectuate change and work towards gender equality and justice with regard to the issue of unpaid labour, we need to understand better how it actually works, and how the productive economy relies on it.⁵³

According to Perez, the problem of gendered injustice results from lacking data. Caroline Criado Perez uses the term “gender data gap”⁵⁴ to address gendered inequalities as they are linked to invisibility. The value of unpaid labour presents “one big data gap”.⁵⁵ Empirical study and analysis of unpaid labour would generate such data. If such data were available, it would provide information on the conditions of highly gendered inequality and injustice. Data leads to knowledge. Knowledge, but also its lack, provides the basis for economic and political concepts, as they shape human realities. What these concepts include and what they exclude, is what preconditions entire systems toward being designed as just, or as unjust. The lack of data on unpaid labour has a historical reason. Its exclusion from what is being measured did not just happen, it was decided.

Following Criado, one of the most important examples of how unpaid labour was excluded from mainstream economic thought, is the historical development of the GDP, the gross domestic product, one of the central building blocks of economics. The

⁵³Social reproduction theory is an important field of Marxist-feminist thought, and activism, that investigates the invisibility and oppression connected to unpaid reproductive labour. See for example: Tithi Bhattacharya, “Introduction: Mapping Social Reproduction Theory,” in *Social Reproduction Theory. Remapping Class, Recentering Oppression*, ed. Tithi Bhattacharya (London: Pluto Press, 2017), 1-20.

⁵⁴Criado Perez, *Invisible Women: Exposing Data Bias in a World Designed for Men* (London: Vintage, 2020) [2019] 1.

⁵⁵Criado Perez, *Invisible Women*, 1.

GDP itself is one of the first formal methods of statistical economic measurement, which emerged as the basis of what constitutes the economy after the Great Depression in 1934, and adapted in the Second World War to ascertain how much was produced solely by the war economy, constituted by the output of government and businesses.⁵⁶ What makes the GDP exclusionary, and shows how little the economic and political establishment cared about data related to unpaid labour, is that while it was discussed to include the value of unpaid housework in its calculations, this was considered “too big a task in terms of collecting the data”.⁵⁷ It was simply not deemed worth the effort to have data on a form of labour which, even though it was recognized as vital to economic production. The persistent data gap on unpaid labour was caused by arguments that it would be too time intensive to start surveying, which is telling in regards to how mainstream economic institutions and nations have viewed unpaid reproductive labour, and speaks towards how little data was, and still mostly is, available in this field of empirical study.⁵⁸

3.2 Käthe Leichter’s Study

This is especially relevant since during the rise of industrialisation and later the further emancipation of women into the workforce, the topic of unpaid labour is still most often left as the responsibility of women. Which, regardless of work, have to effectively invest the equivalent of a jobs worth of time into unpaid labour for the household, "this means that for many women the workweek averages from sixty to ninety hours, like at the peak of the Industrial Revolution, starting at six in the morning and ending at nine in the evening."⁵⁹ It becomes abundantly clear that this unjust gendered division of labour is systemic as it is shaped by economic and political conditions. At present, this structural problem continues to impact women's lives and the way they often do not have full control over their time. This has to do with the social convention of women having to perform the brunt of unpaid labour. One of the

⁵⁶Ibid. 240.

⁵⁷(See:) Diane Coyle, *GDP: A Brief but Affectionate History*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014).

⁵⁸Criado Perez, *Invisible Women*, 241.

⁵⁹Silvia Federici, *Beyond the Periphery of the Skin Rethinking, Remaking, and Reclaiming the Body in Contemporary Capitalism* (Oakland, CA: PM Press, Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia, 2020) 37.

first studies to ever examine this as a structural problem that impacts on the lives of individual women, who are both female labourers under industrial conditions, and “house wives” in domestic environments, was carried out by Jewish-Austrian social scientist and unionist Käthe Leichter in the early 1930s. The research outcomes were published in 1932 under the title *So leben wir... 1320 Industriearbeiterinnen berichten über ihr Leben*.⁶⁰ Leichter was one of the first women to study political sciences in Vienna and Heidelberg, back then a mixture of law, political science, and economy, which primed her to conduct research involving both analysis of the economic and political injustices, by focusing on what would today be considered a gender specific perspective. Her approach was two pronged: Firstly she did not presume male and female members of the industrial proletariat to have the same domestic obligations and responsibilities. Secondly she conducted a large scale empirical study involving interviews with over a thousand women on their time-use for both paid labour at the factory and unpaid labour at home, pioneering what today is called a time-use survey.⁶¹

In methodological terms, this study was revolutionary. It was one of the first of its kind in the German-speaking context, as it examined women's lives as they were being incorporated into the industrialised workforce of the proletariat, with the clear political aim of improving women's conditions.⁶² In order to effectively communicate the insights of her research to working class women, and thereby make it easier to mobilise political support, Leichter made use of Otto Neurath's pictographs, a visual language which uses simple symbols, to communicate statistical data in such a way that it can be intuitively understood.⁶³ The study looked at these conditions in the sense that they did not solely survey the women's working conditions at their jobs, but also how much additional time they were expected to invest into unpaid labour at

⁶⁰Translates to “This is how we live... 1320 female industrial workers report about their lives”.

⁶¹Käthe Leichter, *So leben wir ... 1320 Industriearbeiterinnen berichten über ihr Leben; Eine Erhebung* (Vienna: Arbeit und Wirtschaft 1932).

⁶²AK Wien, Abteilung Frauen und Familie, MA 23 - Wirtschaft, Arbeit und Statistik, Stadt Wien MA 57 - Frauenservice Stadt Wien, eds. Claudia Sorger and Nadja Bergmann, *So leben wir heute ... Wiener Industriearbeiterinnen berichten über ihr Leben* (Vienna: AK Wien, Abteilung Frauen und Familie, MA 23 - Wirtschaft, Arbeit und Statistik, Stadt Wien MA 57 - Frauenservice Stadt Wien, 2018) 16.

⁶³Otto Neurath, *International Picture Language; the First Rules of Isotype*. (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trubner & co., 1936).

home, almost all of them essentially having to work double shifts in a full time job.⁶⁴ The study does this by using the method of time-use studies, which ask the participant to document the amount of time they have to spend on work or household activities, as well as using interviews to give insight into both the personal effect on the workers, and also to see the opinions they themselves have. These time use studies document a workday of 16,5 hours of combined paid and unpaid labour, with most women (81,3%) getting up between 5-6 and going to sleep primarily between 21-23 o'clock (89,4%). The mornings were spent by 72,7% of workers already having to do household labour in the morning, and 60,8% reporting having to do all unpaid labour when they get back from the factory, usually between 16-18 o'clock.

This study plays a role in Käthe Leichter's work as a unionist, specifically because she founded the women's department in the Austrian Chamber of Labour, and because her research was empirical and independent, it played a large part in informing her about which practical problems to tackle in regard to workers gender inequality. The Austrian Chamber of Labour itself is a product of parliamentary and unionist successes in the 1920s, dismantled during the Nazi Regime and reintroduced afterwards during occupation.⁶⁵ It functions as a state-wide worker's interest group, and is responsible for many of the laws regarding minimum wage and worker's rights.⁶⁶ It was also the Viennese Chamber of Labour which decided to redo Käthe Leichter's study in 2018, using the same methods of time-use surveys and interviews, titled *So Leben wir heute ... Wiener Industriearbeiterinnen berichten über ihr Leben*.⁶⁷

3.3 Stagnant conditions

This study reveals that in regard to household labour, not much has substantially changed. The main difference is that back then it used to be even more work and time

⁶⁴Käthe Leichter, *So leben wir...*, 78.

⁶⁵*Seit 1945: Nachkriegszeit bis in die Gegenwart*, Arbeiterkammer, accessed February 11th, 2022. https://www.arbeiterkammer.at/ueberuns/akundoebggeschichte/Von_der_Nachkriegszeit_in_die_Gegenwart.html

⁶⁶Doris Hecht-Aichholzer, *Die Arbeiterkammer - 60 Jahre Mitgestalterin der Zweiten Republik*, accessed September 18th, 2021. http://archiv.arbeitswirtschaft.at/servlet/ContentServer?pagename=X03/Page/Index&n=X03_1.a_2005_07_08.a&cid=1182957331443.

⁶⁷Translates to "This is how we live today... 1320 female industrial workers report about their lives"

intensive than it is today, owed mostly to technological advancements and access to gas, electric light, and water.⁶⁸ However, the fundamental question of who is responsible for this type of labour has stagnated, or at best minimally changed, as 78% of the women questioned in the modern survey responded that they are predominantly responsible for domestic unpaid labour. This is actually more than in the 1932 study, where 60,8% of total women stated they are solely responsible.⁶⁹ This even seems to have been accepted as a mostly unquestioned fact of life by a majority of the interviewed and surveyed women even in the present day, with only 10% saying that they would want more support from their partner or other family members, and 61% not responding to the question at all.⁷⁰ Another surprising aspect is that work in addition to unpaid labour actually takes up a nigh identical amount of time in these workers' day to day lives today, in spite of technological advancements and access to resources and tools in housework. 56% of women wake up before 5 in comparison to the 7.1% in 1932, while there has only been an increase in 23,4% who get to go to bed before 21 o'clock. Something interesting to note is that the current survey does not include specific questions to what time is used for during free time, including evenings, Saturdays and Sundays, something which was overwhelmingly used for housework with 78,7%, 75,4%, and 44% respectively, and instead focuses only on media use and internet access, which is somewhat telling to how perceived priorities have shifted.

This shows that while changes have happened surrounding unpaid labour, they mostly occurred on the techno-material level, and even there these have not significantly impacted the amount of time which has to be invested into unpaid labour. The last paragraph of the housework part of Leichter's study even addresses the unsustainable nature of such a exhausting work and home life, stating that younger generations especially feel the strain and see the effects of these conditions in older generations, and Leichter states that hope comes from this rebellious spirit; "that the heavy burden of having a job combined with housework cannot be the perpetual destiny of the

⁶⁸AK Wien et al, *So leben wir... heute*, 106.

⁶⁹Käthe Leichter, *So leben wir...*, 81.

⁷⁰AK Wien et al, *So leben wir... heute*, 107.

working woman".⁷¹ The gendered dimension has indeed remained largely unchanged and continues to result in structural systemic injustice and heavy burdens.

⁷¹Käthe Leichter, *So leben wir...*, 87. Die jüngeren ledigen Arbeiterinnen, die die Mutter[sic] an der Überlastung früh altern gesehen haben, die selbst fühlen, daß ihnen droht ins Joch gespannt zu werden, sie lehnen sich am ehesten gegen die Belastung auf, sie glauben, daß es doch anders sein könnte. Von dieser schon fühlbaren Auflehnung geht auch die alleinige Hoffnung aus, daß die schwere Belastung mit Beruf und Haushaltsarbeit nicht dauernd das Schicksal der arbeitenden Frau sein kann.

4 Conclusion

The political and economic dimensions of unpaid labour, especially in regards to gender, are undoubtedly ignored and underrepresented in the current (political) economy. This is in spite of the fact that this form of labour is undoubtedly system sustaining, and most all economic and social activity relies heavily on its formally invisibilised and monetarily marginalised presence.

This VWA aims at having made visible this presence in three different ways:

Firstly, in the dimension of political and economic theory, showcasing the value of robust analytical and ethical frameworks, and in effect revealing the multi-faceted value of unpaid labour to society, while laying out how and why it has been systematically undervalued within industrial capitalism.

Secondly, by illustrating political movements dealing with reforming, or at least making visible, the issues connected to the highly gendered societal state of unpaid labour, where the goals, methods and inspiration often correlates with the frameworks already shown.

Thirdly by exposing how current economic theory and statistical economic measurement makes unpaid labour invisible and laying out a method of analysing unpaid labour with statistical methodology, showing and comparing a study from past and present, which reveals how conditions and systematic change in regards to unpaid labour have effectively stagnated.

There are many possible ways to try improving our current political and economic status quo in a way which does not delegate unpaid labour to being a burden half of the population will have to essentially carry alone. These range from reforms regarding Universal Basic Income, which would be very in line and offer similar effects to what the Wages for Housework movement would do. Another would be cutting labour time for everyone equally, since productivity and automation are at a stage where that is realistically possible, and actually remunerating jobs equally independent of gender, which would revolutionise and make possible for both genders to partake in unpaid labour. More generally, drastic economic and social

changes have to take place in order to make labouring itself a more just system, since efforts focusing solely on ensuring equal opportunities between genders and classes have failed; one has to try and shape a system which places actual human needs before those of entrenched social values and capital.

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