

FORUM

Women and children together and apart Finding the time for social reproduction theory

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Abstract: In what ways, and to what effects, are proliferating temporalities of appropriation in financialized capitalism transforming or transformed by those of social reproductive labor? More specifically, how are woman-child relations affected when social reproduction becomes a site of immediate, not just indirect, capital accumulation through relations of debt? To answer these questions, we take up species-being as the labor *relation* that anchors socially necessary labor and links women and children by attending to three temporal modalities of accumulation via social reproductive labor: scholarization, (re)familization, and debt servicing. We argue that differentiated tempos in the appropriation of surplus value, operating to “fix” contradictions between capital’s short- and long-term interests, are critical sources of tension between women and children in the meeting of needs. Producing and mapping divergent rhythms of appropriation on to different groups may both link diverse women and children, and put their interests at odds.

Keywords: appropriation, debt, familization, financialization, scholarization, socially necessary labor, species-being, temporality

In our recent collaboration for the collection *Feminism and the Politics of Childhood: Friends or Foes?* (Rosen and Twamley 2018), we returned to the unfinished political and intellectual question of social reproductive labor (Rosen and Newberry 2018). A central aim of our joint work is to keep those positioned as women *and* those positioned as children within the frame.¹ We seek to understand children’s active participation in the labor of social reproduction while bringing forward again insights from Marxist

feminist scholars about the gendered and racialized character of this labor and its appropriation. We recognize that women and children’s everyday lives are often entangled through this labor and its expectation, even as we are wary of assuming any necessary links between them. The temporality of appropriation and its role in producing differentiation in changing regimes of accumulation has been central to our arguments to date, and here we continue this unfinished discussion with others to develop further



the discordant temporal implications of socially necessary labor under financialized capitalism. In the following, we both elaborate our central argument and develop it by considering how women and children are differentiated through the quickened tempo of debt servicing for the achievement of social reproduction.

Back to social reproductive theory again

Capital's fundamental contradiction between its drive for immediate profit and the need to regenerate labor power has been convincingly argued (Vogel 1983). On the one hand lies capital's imperative for a ready supply of labor—achieved in part through daily activities of meeting embodied needs, forming subjects and generating subjectivities, as well as generational replacement. In an “age of migration” (Castles et al. 2014), this reproduction of labor power for capital is most certainly combined with new forms of labor secured through regimes of migration and deportability (De Genova 2002). On the other hand, everyday practices of social reproduction diminish those people available for immediate surplus value extraction through wage labor. There is, however, no capitalism “as such” (Fraser 2017) as an abstracted set of relations to which culturally and historically specific forms are viewed as aberrations. It is more helpful to think about shifting regimes of accumulation where emerging forms of capital and stratified diversities are central to global capitalist projects (Tsing 2009). As a result, while there is a general tendency for capital to attempt to increase profits by decreasing the amount of socially necessary labor covered by wages, there is significant spatial-temporal variation and instability in how capital seeks to “fix” the crisis tendency which lies at the heart of social reproduction.

In elaborating these points, the renewed interest in social reproduction theory has provided a timely reminder of unresolved questions about the gendered effects of the unwaged and under-waged socially necessary labor central to capitalist accumulation (Bezanson and Lux-

ton 2006; Bhattacharya 2017; Mitchell et al. 2004; Vogel 2000). This scholarship explores the ways that gendered responsibilities are being “re-traditionalized” through new forms of governance (Molyneux 2006) with women's reproductive labor stabilizing and absorbing precarious livelihoods (Newberry 2014). The racialized and spatial dimensions of social reproduction have received important attention (Mitchell et al. 2004), for instance, in highlighting the displacement of the “care crisis” from minority to majority worlds through the decreasing value attributed to bodies further down the line in “global care chains” in a racialized international division of labor (Parrenas 2012). However, little social reproductive theorizing, as such, has included children as more than objects of “investment” and the labor of others; they are treated primarily as of theoretical interest for their adult futures. For example, generational replacement in domestic labor debates is highlighted as operating through a logic of cost-benefit through which “the [privileged] child as commodity is niche-marketed to secure success in the insecure future” (Katz 2008: 10) while the working-class child is the site of impossible demands and pressure.

In contrast, studies of childhood as a socio-cultural phenomenon have elaborated notions of social reproductive labor by attending to children's care work, as well as their contributions to domestic labor and family-based economies (e.g., Abebe 2007; Katz 2004). Together this scholarship highlights that *assumptions* of children as the objects of social reproductive labor are just that—a discursive and material reframing of activities as learning, apprenticeship, and waitthood separated from the political economy of adulthood. Such moves reflect what Leena Alanen (2011) refers to as “generationed” social orders, in which adulthood and childhood are socially produced, interrelated but in dichotomous and asymmetric ways. However, questions as to why women and children are overdetermined in relation to social reproductive labor, along with which women and which children, often slip from view. Here then we ask:

How can we keep the gendered, racialized, and generationed aspects of social reproductive labor in focus?

A second focus of our work has been on the question of temporality. Despite increasing attention to space and the geopolitical, the temporal dimensions of social reproductive labor have been comparatively neglected. Where time does appear, it is primarily about developmental time (from child to adult) or generational replacement. Child and youth scholars have resisted the accepted temporalities of childhood, including the common assumption that childhood is inherently a temporal category implying an untroubled unfolding of futurity. Yet, an increasing body of work highlights the importance of attending to temporalities and their relation to accumulation as crucial to understanding inequities embedded within capitalism's historically and spatially specific manifestations (Bear 2014; McDowell 1986). In an age of financialized capitalism taken to be characterized by crisis and precarity, temporal rhythms are proliferating such that disjuncture, overlaps, and antagonisms are brought to the fore in what Laura Bear (2014) refers to as a "thickening" of time-space. Eric Cazdyn (2012), for instance, identifies "the chronic" as a contemporary temporal mode in which crisis and breakdown have become a new normal. While our own explicit focus on the contradiction that lies at the heart of capitalist social reproduction means that the idea of a "fix" is not a new one, Cazdyn (see also Ley 2018) makes the important point that the labor of repair and maintenance are necessary fixes that produce the "meantime," a new form of temporizing to deal with perpetual crisis that can colonize the future. Similarly, Sarah Sharma (2014: 15) attends to temporal differentiation by considering how different bodies are synchronized, through labor, specifically "people whose labor is explicitly oriented toward negotiating time and the time of others."

In drawing on these insights about time, we ask: In what ways, and to what effects, are proliferating temporalities of appropriation in financialized capitalism transforming or transformed

by those of social reproductive labor? More specifically, how are woman-child relations affected when social reproduction becomes a site of immediate, not just indirect, capital accumulation through relations of debt (Federici 2014)?

Finding the time for socially necessary labor

In what follows, we attend to three temporal modalities of accumulation via social reproductive labor: increasing scholarization (institutionalization of childhood in formal educational settings), (re)familization (the shifting of tasks that may have previously been considered the responsibility of the state to the family), and the ways these "are drawn into another temporal rhythm of debt" (Bear 2014: 19). We argue these modalities produce plural, and often conflicting, temporal rhythms in ways that may both link diverse women and children, and put their interests at odds. For this work, we take up species-being, a sketch of a concept by Marx that emphasizes how we are made *as humans* through our labor (Rosen and Newberry 2018). Species-being recognizes the labor *relation* that anchors socially necessary labor and links women and children, among others, without overdetermining that relation. We recognize here the intimate interdependence of those positioned as women and children through this process. Because species-being is fundamentally wrapped up with others, Marx saw it as the basis for human freedom, creativity, and love (Fromm 1961; Roelvink 2013). We add that it is also the basis for care and concern (Sayer 2011) and a recognition of mutual need.

The labor of species-being can also differentiate and stratify both needs and the social reproductive labor necessary to meet them. Our collaboration has focused on early childhood education and care (ECEC), because of our research and activist experiences with programs in Canada, the United Kingdom, and Indonesia. In Canada, Rachel Rosen was seeing mothers, as well as childcare and domestic workers,

trapped and scrutinized by the state because of the expectations that were placed on them in contexts of impoverishment and retrenchment, while in Indonesia, Jan Newberry was seeing old programs for community development used to harness women's labor to deliver new World Bank-funded ECEC programs. Our work together "realized" a tension in these programs between the social reproductive labor required of children in these early education settings and that required predominantly of women, often in ways that obscured the other's exploitation and oppression, or held the other primarily accountable for this subjugation (Rosen and Newberry 2018). We proposed that species-being has been largely rewritten under capitalism, given the centrality of labor power to capital's accumulation strategies. This was a reminder that the accomplishment of socially necessary labor, in terms of *how* needs are met, is an open question and a site of political struggle.

As we have argued, "It is the tempo of the appropriation of surplus value, and the various attempts to 'fix' the contradictions between capital's short and long term interests, that is central to the differentiation of needs and to the outlawing of some. It is also a critical source of the tension between women and children in the meeting of these needs" (Rosen and Newberry 2018: 129). Drawing on Linda McDowell's (1986) distinction between those who provide subsistence via their wages and those who engage in unwaged reproductive labor, we point to the differentiation produced through the timing of appropriation, what we call a "temporal lag." This temporal differentiation suggests species-being is being rewritten under capitalism in ways that may synchronize the labor of women and children at one moment, while differentiating them through the slowing and speeding of their various labors. McDowell's original insight, that a gendered division of labor and patriarchal state policies create relationships of dependency that help account for the subordinate status of women, is expanded to identify children's generational subordination. As we go on to specify in relation to a temporal matrix fueled by debt

servicing, (re)familization, and scholarization under financialized capitalism, this temporal lag is pluralized under changing regimes of accumulation producing forms of differentiation across time and space and between and among women and the young.

It is by now commonplace to understand the past five decades as an era of financialization, a reference to the increasing dominance of finance capital and the ways social life and social relations are being remade in the process (Haiven 2014). These changes can be understood as a response to the endemic crisis in capitalist accumulation that came to a head in the 1970s (Federici 2014). Financialized capitalism is marked by a neoliberal ideology of marketization and the propagation of a debt economy² where the bundling and reselling of debt, and its temporalities of risk speculation, is now central to accumulation (Adkins 2017). States—in line with the dictates of global institutions such as the IMF/World Bank—are both retrenching social support and protection and "re-familializing" such responsibilities, with women held discursively and materially culpable for their achievement (Borda Carulla 2018; Gillies 2014; Llobet and Milanich 2018). Simultaneously, the conditions for their marketization are created. In combination with increased labor precarity, this has meant that the species-being labor of making lives, and "mak[ing] life worth living" (Narotzky and Besnier 2014: 5), is increasingly secured through technologies of debt: loans, credit, and payment holidays.

Women are viewed as the idealized subjects of debt by financiers: steady and dependable, with social networks providing co-optable models for policing repayment (Federici 2014). Sohini Kar's (2013) work, for example, identifies the differentiation produced between proxy creditors and borrowers in low-income communities in India through microfinance loans and the financial labor required of women. For these idealized gendered and indebted subjects, the tempo of appropriation is both sped up and punctuated by a steady repayment schedule. The relationship between responsabilization and debt

deepens the unacknowledged links between their unwaged species-being labor and care of their communities (Newberry 2017).

Debt is not simply about survival, however, but about hopes for what's yet to come (Graeber 2014). These hopes are often symbolized by the figure of the child and materially invested in dreams for children's better futures. For children, debt is a lifelong companion taken to signify familial and household relations of obligation. These obligations sometimes demand immediate repayment, exemplified by separated child migrants who send remittances from wage labor or "pocket money" from social services to their transnational family members (Rosen et al. 2019). At other times, it represents a promise to repay where the future is laid hostage to the lengthy temporal lag that lies ahead of the moment of value appropriation. Hegemonic visions of childhood as a time of innocence and an extra-economic state, bolstered by globally travelling policies and interventions, mean that children contend with not only the pressing demands of promises to repay but also normative assumptions that render their childhoods "lost" or "deviant." It is not hard to see how these conflicting temporalities can produce antagonisms between women and children; with the former carrying the immediate burden of debt repayment and the latter shouldered with an often-overwhelming sense of long-term obligation (Horton 2017; Vergara del Solar et al. 2018) and a debt seemingly not of their own making.

Nowhere are the dreams of better futures more prominent than in the process of scholarrization, whereby childhood has become synonymous with the school or early childhood setting. The global focus on "human capital development" in long-term schooling can be understood, argues Glenn Rikowski (2003), as a form of "quality enhancement" of labor power, a central strategy for increasing relative surplus value in financialized capitalism. This can range from the labor to develop particular skills and knowledge, for instance, the literacy and numeracy skills central to many (post)industrial jobs whether in the service industry or in export

processing zones, and the labor involved in constituting the types of social being that are pivotal to financialized capitalism's continuity: flexible and entrepreneurial selves and stratified social relations.

This focus on investment in the future with its shadow of debt obscures the reproductive labor undertaken by children in educational institutions. It is illustrative of the slowing down of socially necessary labor even as the provisioning for educational enhancements such as the promotion of early childhood development programs under the auspices of IMF/World Bank loan conditionalities and school attendance promoted through Education for All, can speed the appropriation of women's labor in these contexts (Rosen and Newberry 2018). Children's labor is increasingly less available—normatively and materially—for the tasks of family reproduction, which they may have previously shared with women, given gendered divisions of labor. Not only has this meant an increase in domestic responsibilities for women, but it is accompanied by state conditionalities for support based on the assumption that *women* are crucial to children's optimization as human capital. Mothers are expected to take time away from their immediate reproductive and waged labor to ensure their children are in school and given the best conditions for school learning, a process of "concerted cultivation" (Lareau 2003). Women more generally are expected to contribute to early childhood and schooling, whether through volunteering time and energy (Molyneux 2006; Newberry 2014) or absorbing the costs of such provision through re-familialization (Borda Carulla 2018; Rosen et al. 2017). Maxine Molyneux notes that for Mexico, despite the emphasis on the "individuation of the social" in neoliberal policies, women are "bound ever more securely to the family" (2006: 439).

As we have argued in relation to a "temporal lag":

The household-based reproductive tasks that in many cases aligned the needs of women and children become outlawed

but in different ways: women must volunteer labor to offer local ECEC programs [and schooling] and children must attend. In the case of women, the surplus value of this volunteered labor is appropriated immediately while that of children is deferred through the longer-term enhancement of their labor power. (Rosen and Newberry 2018: 128)

These conflicting temporalities within processes of scholarization and familialization are most assuredly idiomatic of capital's interest in variously reducing the cost of socially necessary labor covered by wages. What is equally clear is that debt regimes can transform "forms of sociality into objects of quantification and management" (Watanabe 2015; see also Elyachar 2010). It may well be that the conflicts and resentments between women and children produced by these contemporary trends are of benefit to capital as a diversion, given that social reproductive labor is not only central to capital's accumulatory dynamism but also a space in which "opposition to practices of subordination and injustice may be fomented" (Rosen 2017: 378; see also Federici 2012).

Likewise, the proliferating tempos of financialized capitalism are symptomatic of tensions and stratifications between children: those subject to the immediate exploitation through wage labor and debt repayment and those who experience a more extended temporal lag through schooling and household labor. Children, particularly when very young, are often banned from working for wages and as a result end up working in unregulated sectors or not at all (Nieuwenhuys 2009). When they do work for wages, children are often treated as a cheaper workforce, paid lower wages for the same work as adults under the guise of euphemisms such as "training wages." Schooling, of course, can be understood itself as an institution linked to the production of disciplined and stratified bodies for capital. These features both ensure a cheaper source of labor for capital but also account for inequities among children, not only between women and children.

Given these very real antagonisms that can emerge through diversification and stratification of the sites, methods and timing of reproductive labor, and its varied economic and social value, a pressing question is how such conflicting temporalities can be maintained, often without significant contestation. It is self-evident that even when needs are outlawed, they still need to be met. But the ways these are met are not self-evidently through women's voluntary or low-paid work in marketized sites, or through their re-traditionalized (Molyneux 2006) labor in domestic contexts. Nor are needs self-evidently met through the "extractive logic" of colonialism that renders subaltern children as wage laborers (Balagopalan 2018) and debtors, or through children's (invisibilized) labor of quality enhancement in schooling contexts. Perhaps these questions are most clear when indexed to debt, which turns human relations, morality, and social obligations into "impersonal arithmetic"—cold, quantifiable, and transferrable over time (Graeber 2014: 14)—for it is here that explanations about women and children's reproductive labor that derive from the power of the "cult of domesticity" (Fraser 2017) and the reframing of labor power's reproduction as a long-term labor of love and self-improvement become most contradictory.

Bear (2014: 2) has argued that time has become a "central site for social conflict and a symptom of the inequalities within capitalism," stressing the intensity of labor directed to synchronize these temporalities, while Sharma (2014) notes the privilege afforded to those who can go slow because of the quickened tempo of others' labor. In keeping with these points about labor in and on time (Bear 2014), we suggest temporal conflicts are mediated by producing and mapping divergent rhythms of appropriation on to different groups, including women and children. Such stratifying of bodies through temporality is not new. Johannes Fabian's (1991) seminal text argues against anthropology's production of colonial subjects as "Other" through a denial of "coevalness," while Elizabeth Gagen (2007: 17) elaborates on the interpenetration of

notions of primordial time in relation to colonial subjects and child development theories targeting “all children—American, European and Non-Western,” which effectively render both as “primitive.”

Here, we have made the case that in financialized capitalism the quickened tempo of debt servicing for the achievement of social reproduction is mapped on to the idealized adult female subject, while the lengthened temporal lag is linked to the idealized child subject in school. More broadly, there is a desynchronizing of the tempo of linked labor that is species-being through a process that both slows and quickens, a process keyed to new regimes of debt, scholarization, and familialization under financialized capitalism. As a result, conflicting temporalities in everyday life appear as conflict between groups rather than symptoms of capital’s complex and contingent regimes of accumulation, and the structure of (settler) colonialism and the dispossession and extraction on which it is built and sustained.

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Notes

1. We use “women” and “children” advisedly throughout the article, recognizing that these are historically and socially constituted subject positions. At the same time as rejecting essentialist understandings, we do not dispute ontological presence, which exceeds any linguistic or social constructions, and, as the article is at pains to demonstrate, we are keenly aware of the material impacts of being positioned as woman or child.
2. While debt, as Graeber (2014) ironically points out in the title of his seminal work *Debt: The First 5,000 Years*, has a long history, contemporary debt is differentiated by its ubiquity, centrality to accumulation, and the way it remakes interpersonal obligations in monetized terms with distant and impersonal others (e.g., banks and securities traders).

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