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Down the Neoliberal Path: The Rise of Free Choice Feminism

Abstract: The *free choice* ideology dictates that any time a woman makes a choice it is an act of feminism. The idea that personal choice presupposes the faraway horizons of freedom and its guarantee, as well as the undoubted potentials of women's empowerment, makes up the central position of the critique in this essay. Our text is divided into two parts. In the first part of the paper we are going to outline the basic assumptions of neoliberalism, in order to use them as foundations for the argument about its feminist affirmation. We will illustrate the relationship between neoliberalism and feminism by using the example of women's entrepreneurship, which is usually interpreted as a strategy of undeniable emancipation. In the second part of the essay, as a concrete response to 'neoliberal feminism', we are going to point to the progressive potential of social reproduction theory and socialist-feminist practice to be further developed out of it. Given the intention of this text is not to exhibit a detailed historical-comparative analysis of feminism, we are merely going to use concrete examples to illustrate the link between feminism and neoliberalism, and to map the shift from early second-wave feminism to identity politics and the cultural turn that swallows up the critique of political economy.

Keywords: neoliberalism, capitalism, *free choice* ideology, women's entrepreneurship, feminism, social reproduction theory

"She moves fastest who moves alone": The tandem of neoliberalism and feminism

There are no *pure theories* or *pure ideas*; they are not borne out of thin air without a spatial or temporal foundation. Neither can political thought and political theory be *neutral*, as they, too, are conceived at a particular point in time and within a specific framework of social relations. Theoretical work is largely ideological, and therefore inevitably advocating some position or *truth*, or defending some particular class interest. Finally, a theoretical project can only achieve full meaning when it manages to derive autonomous self-criticism able to explain – or at least attempting to explain – its own genesis and transformations throughout history. Feminist theory, along with its development, history and political positions it uses to affirm certain class interests

or ideologies at a concrete point in time, are not to be spared this self-critical duty, either. When Perry Anderson warns about the problems of Western Marxist theories in his *Considerations on Western Marxism*, his argument is that they are ignoring their initial politicization and articulating cultural analysis without a socio-economic or class context.¹ This same line of critique could be used to analyze some strands of feminist theory and practice in the period from the 1970s onwards.

If we are interested in the social meaning of feminist emancipatory potential, and if we are to deal with feminism as a collectively-oriented movement and political theory, then it becomes clear that feminism is not and cannot be a collection of different, scattered, individual positions. Feminism as a socio-political struggle faces a contradiction if it becomes a matter of individual agency, i.e. personal interest to be utilized as fit, for the sake of one's private goals or preferences. That does not deem personal experiences of oppression epistemologically unimportant, or the personal not political – on the contrary. After all, we need only to remember that choice is the embodiment of the political demand for abortion. The problem we are tackling here is the scope of individualism: if we stick with the descriptive approach to individual experiences and the motto “Choose to do whatever you like – it's empowering!”, then we lose from sight the systemic sources of oppression and the power of articulating socially-responsible collective practices as the vehicle for emancipatory potential. After all, we need to remember that in the capitalist mode of production one person's *freedom* often comes at the expense of another's.

In the following section we are going to try to illustrate the special relationship between neoliberalism and feminism and concentrate on the claim that women's entrepreneurship strategy represents an undeniable aspect of emancipation. This discussion will be framed by an approach along the lines of the opposition individual–class, that strongly marked the second wave of feminism in Western Europe and North America.² In consequence, it also led to a divergence in feminist approaches to the problem of women's oppression and the views pertaining to how to end it.³ Roughly speaking, on one side there was the formation of the gender-identitarian methodological position embraced by the radical feminist tradition. On the other side there was the liberal-feminist one, also to be interpreted through the identitarian lens stripped of any class perspective. And on the third end, the socialist-feminist position,⁴ which, along with the gender-identitarian framework, also includes a class analysis of women's oppression within the framework of historical materialism and

¹ Perry Anderson, *Considerations on Western Marxism* (London: Verso, 1987).

² Cf. Hester Eisenstein, *Feminism Seduced: How Global Elites Use Women's Labor and Ideas to Exploit the World* (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2010); Nancy Fraser, *Fortunes of Feminism: from State-Managed Capitalism to Neoliberal Crisis* (London: Verso, 2013).

³ Cf. Zillah Eisenstein, *The Radical Future of Liberal Feminism* (New York: Longman, 1981); Olive Banks, *Faces of Feminism: a Study of Feminism as a Social Movement* (New York: St. Martin's, 1981).

⁴ In this text, the term *socialist feminism* will be used to refer to three historical phenomena: (1) socialist feminism of the late 19th and early 20th centuries (a legacy of the second international in many respects); (2) the 'first wave' of the theory of social reproduction of the 1970s, which covers the field of Marxist-feminist work in the context of the domestic labour debate; (3) finally, the 'second wave' of the social reproduction theory which begins in the 1980s with the work of Lise Vogel and her "unitary theory".

gender historicisation.⁵ One might therefore agree with Nancy Fraser when she claims that “the history of second-wave feminism appears as a drama in three acts”:

In Act One, feminists [insisted] that *the personal is political*, this movement exposed capitalism’s deep androcentrism and sought to transform society root and branch. Later [...] second-wave feminism was drawn into the orbit of identity politics. In Act Two, its transformative impulses were channeled into a new political imaginary that foregrounded *difference*. Turning *from redistribution to recognition*, the movement shifted its attention to cultural politics [...] In an Act Three [...] the movement would retrieve its insurrectionary spirit, while deepening its signature insights: its structural critique of capitalism’s androcentrism, its systemic analysis of male domination, and its gender-sensitive revisions of democracy and justice.⁶

Given the intention of this text is not to exhibit a detailed historical-comparative analysis of feminism, we are merely going to use concrete examples to illustrate the link between feminism and neoliberalism, and to map the shift from early second-wave feminism to identity politics and the cultural turn that swallows up the critique of political economy. In the words of Nancy Fraser: “Was it mere coincidence that second-wave feminism and neoliberalism prospered in tandem?”⁷

Bearing in mind the most useful conclusions by Nancy Fraser and Hester Eisenstein about the relationship of neoliberalism and cultural-identitarian feminism and the congruences of their development can significantly ease our understanding of the historical subsidence of the collectivist potentials of feminism and the affirmation of its individualistic ideology. Furthermore, we need to ask, what is it that presupposes the neoliberal social paradigm; is it possible to use the special relationship of feminism and individualism to understand the neoliberal appropriation of the feminist struggle? How does one interpret the regressive tendencies of neoliberalism, and how do they relate to feminism?⁸ Let us begin our discussion by defining what we understand by the term *neoliberalism*.

⁵ Cf. Karen Offen, “Defining Feminism: A Comparative Historical Approach,” *Signs* 14 (1988): 119–57.

⁶ Nancy Fraser, *Fortunes of Feminism: From State-Managed Capitalism to Neoliberal Crisis* (London: Verso, 2013), 1.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 218.

⁸ In order to avoid superficial distinctions of neoliberalism and neoconservatism and the premature identification of one school of neoliberal thought with the whole, one needs to recognize the numerous and transnational linkages and dimensions of neoliberalism. Although neoliberalism and neoconservatism are often hard to tell apart, the distinction in this text is to be understood as defined by Philip Mirowski. Cf. “The Thirteen Commandments of Neoliberalism,” in Philip Mirowski, *Never Let a Serious Crisis Go to Waste: How Neoliberalism Survived the Financial Meltdown* (London: Verso, 2013).

What is neoliberalism?

In his book *Capitalism and Freedom*,⁹ Milton Friedman devoutly argued that both building democracy and ensuring freedom were undeniably tied to capitalism. In fact, he went as far in his conservatism as to claim that competitive capitalism was a necessary condition for the establishment of democracy and freedom. His theory emphasizes how, in the relation of freedom and equality, the former always takes precedence and conditions the latter. In short, Friedman concludes that individual freedom – always starting from the economic sphere in order to enable the political one – and the right to personal choice are the assurance of progress of the individual as the foundation of society. He says: “He moves fastest who moves alone”,¹⁰ or, in the words of Friedrich Hayek, “individual freedom [...] is most appropriate to regard as a moral principle of political action. Like all moral principles, it demands that it be accepted as a value in itself.”¹¹

The neoliberal ideology freely relies on Friedman’s or Hayek’s seemingly considerate proposals, telling us how grand it is to be emancipated from the state and its authority and insist on a freedom of *personal choice*. But to say that neoliberals entirely reject the role of the state in the processes of their own foundation would be completely untrue. What is really at play is pronounced interventionism. With the help of a strong state, neoliberals are trying to establish a form of market that is the best according to their *expert* assessment. These are special *powers*, “magical realism, and other neoliberal delusions.”¹² The market possesses particular mechanisms of self-regulation which, in cooperation with unobstructed *entrepreneurial energy*, hold the solution to all problems faced by civilization: “Any problem, economic or otherwise, has a market solution.”¹³ This is facilitated by the idea of a *free society* in which democracy must be limited and implemented “in a sanitary fashion” as a method of promoting *freedom*:

Democracy has a task which I call ‘hygienic’ for it assures that political processes are conducted in a sanitary fashion. It is not an end in itself. It is a rule of procedure whose aim is to promote freedom. But in no way can it be seen in the same rank as freedom. Freedom requires democracy, but I would prefer temporarily to sacrifice, I repeat temporarily, democracy, before having to do without freedom, even if temporarily.¹⁴

⁹ Milton Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002 [1962]).

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 73.

¹¹ Friedrich A. von Hayek, *The Constitution of Liberty*, ed. Ronald Hamowy (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011 [1960]), 129.

¹² Corey Robin, “Magical Realism, and other neoliberal delusions,” *Dailykos*, <http://www.dailykos.com/story/2016/4/17/1516494/-Corey-Robin-Magical-Realism-and-other-neoliberal-delusions>, accessed May 11, 2016.

¹³ Philip Mirowski, “Defining Neoliberalism,” in *The Road from Mont Pèlerin: The making of the neoliberal thought collective*, ed. Philip Mirowski and Dieter Plehwe (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 439.

¹⁴ Friedrich Hayek cited in: Mirowski, “Defining Neoliberalism,” 446.

Neoliberals, who have gained in influence since the mid-seventies, deny the foundations of the modern welfare state.¹⁵ By encouraging individualism to the greatest possible extent, neoliberalism ignores social issues because they, according to its view, have a negative effect on individual sovereignty and freedom. This neoliberal concept does not stop at the *visible* level of undoing social rights, but focuses even more deeply on individuals and their enterprise, thereby reproducing the antagonism of labour and capital as the base of the socio-economic structure of capitalist society. What is the reasoning behind this claim, what are we referring to when we talk about *entrepreneurial individualism*, to paraphrase C. B. Macpherson?

The framework of the neoliberal project is not as much about limiting the state as remaking the state, as emphasized by Philip Mirowski: “A primary ambition of the neoliberal project is to redefine the shape and functions of the state, not to destroy it.”¹⁶ Quite contrary to the myth pushed as much by neoliberals as by left-wing authors, Paul Heideman, while directly referring to Mirowski, points out that throughout history, neoliberals have more than just used the state for popularizing and affirming the market: “Neoliberals, by contrast, grasp this point with both hands – and therefore seek to reshape all of the institutions of society, including and especially the state, to promote markets. Neoliberal ascendancy has meant not the retreat of the state so much as its remaking.”¹⁷

This neoliberal principle of *remodelling*, or, as David Harvey calls it, “creative destruction”,¹⁸ has always insisted on *open discussion* and the readiness for new theoretical concepts to be included in, or excluded from, the basic framework.¹⁹ One of the key examples of this principle is a different understanding of the individual in the cases of classical liberalism and neoliberalism. While liberalism insists on the concept of a coherent individual self as its foundation, neoliberalism sees the individual as endless possibilities of activating the entrepreneurial spirit, as variable bundles of human capital, and counts with the interests of the individual always changing, mediated by the market and its values. That is the foundation of entrepreneurial individualism: a position in which the individual self is always tuned so as to be ready for personal metamorphoses, improvement and innovation reveals a particular strength of the method used to affirm the, as Mirowski calls it, “everyday neoliberalism”. This subtle

¹⁵ I have written more on this in: “Minimalna država i neoliberalne strategije kapitalizma,” in *Kriza, odgovori, Levica* ed. Miloš Jadžić, Dušan Maljković and Ana Veselinović (Beograd: Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, 2012), 159–79.

¹⁶ Philip Mirowski, “Defining Neoliberalism,” 436.

¹⁷ Paul Heideman, “Bulletproof Neoliberalism,” *Jacobin*, <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2014/06/bulletproof-neoliberalism/>, accessed May 13, 2016.

¹⁸ David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

¹⁹ Despite its *open* and pliable character, neoliberalism is to be regarded as a concrete political doctrine with a clear goal and a firm institutional core. For instance, Mirowski’s argumentation starts with the fact that behind the *great* neoliberal project stands the largest international think-tank of the conservative counter-revolution – the Mont Pèlerin Society (MPS), founded in 1947 in Switzerland. Cf. *The Road from Mont Pèlerin: the making of the neoliberal thought collective*.

and constant remodelling of the *everyday* and the individual actualised within significantly hinders the fight against neoliberalism, and in some ways explains the reasons for the Left's recent failures to do so.²⁰

Despite Mirowski's analysis being riddled with flaws, such as ignoring the labour market as a real terrain in which the neoliberal project is implemented, and hence leaves the argumentation of the Left's criticism "incomplete and almost empty",²¹ it is still important to consider his left-wing objection to the theory of the Left, namely that in all of its research on neoliberalism it has still failed to point to the extremely close relationship between neoliberalism and the state, just as it has mostly failed to notice how this relationship is formed at the very core of social institutions. Following this line of criticism, let us try and articulate certain socio-political phenomena which are largely absent from the focus of feminist theory, which in turn was bound to have played a significant role in forming the existing alliance of neoliberalism and feminism. What is the key problem of the *free choice* ideology?

"Free choice itself is a feminist act"

The *free choice* ideology dictates that any time a woman makes a choice it is an act of feminism. The idea that personal choice presupposes the faraway horizons of freedom and its guarantee, as well as the undoubted potential of women's empowerment, makes up the central position of this ideology. What it advocates is the *right* to self-fulfillment according to one's own needs and value system, which is self-evidently interpreted as a breakthrough into the space of freedom, pluralism, and diversity – a clear example of neoliberal ideology. Aiming to revive a more radical feminist analysis, the editors of the recently published collection *Freedom Fallacy: The Limits of Liberal Feminism* justifiably harshly state in the introduction:

This version of populist feminism embodies notions of empowerment, choice, and the individual above all else. [...] Individualism lies at the heart of liberal feminism, championing the benefits of *choice* and the possibility that freedom is within reach, or occasionally, that it already exists should women choose to claim it. [...] More *choice*, or even a greater ability to choose, does not necessarily mean greater freedom.²²

Going back to the aforementioned discussion on neoliberalism and its foundations in the philosophy of individualism which is always open to new possibilities and modifications, it becomes clearer how free-choice feminism neatly fits into the

²⁰ Cf. Mirowski, *Never Let a Serious Crisis Go to Waste*.

²¹ Cf. Heideman, "Bulletproof Neoliberalism".

²² Miranda Kiraly and Meagan Tyler, *Freedom Fallacy. The Limits of Liberal Feminism* (Ballan: Connor Court Publishing, 2015), x–xii.

procedures of everyday neoliberalism. What interests us here is to see how individual autonomy and empowerment have been eagerly taken on by conservatives. Free-choice ideology does not rest on the political philosophy of choice which explores the ways in which structural inequality limits freedom; its framework is based on individual approach to the right to choose, self-evidently taken to be empowering, no matter what the choice actually is. What do we have in mind while contextualizing the *instrumentalization* of feminism based in the free-choice ideology of women's entrepreneurship?

First of all we should bear in mind that this type of neoliberal feminism tries really hard to present itself as a critique of conservatism. That is where the power of the openness and incompleteness of the neoliberal project lies. It spreads unhindered from the right side of the political spectrum into the left, feigning ideological neutrality, although ideology is present here in all its might. Within the *lean in* ideology, women's entrepreneurship is usually presented as a project of women's empowerment, a subversion of gender stereotypes, a liberal answer to gendered division of labor.²³ As stated by Adrienne Roberts:

Over the past decade, a growing coalition of capitalist states, regional and international development institutions, non-governmental organizations, transnational corporations and others has converged on the need to promote gender equality. This coalition finds its ideological basis in the business case for gender equality, which highlights the benefits to be accrued by women, communities, national economies and private businesses by investing in women and girls. Investing in women and girls is not only important in its own right, it is also 'smart economics'.²⁴

Women's entrepreneurship is meant to encompass more than 'the business case for gender equality', it is always presented as a legal and political opportunity, a moral and civilisational accomplishment that makes up the very centrality of modern liberal democracy, a project of liberty, equality and justice, a logical extension of the classical liberal project. However, Marxist-feminist scholars in a number of disciplines, including international relations, international political economy, feminist economics and development studies have been warning of how the neoliberal project of women's entrepreneurship represents but one form of reproduction of the capitalist mode of production.²⁵

²³ Cf. Sheryl Sandberg, *Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead* (New York: Knopf, 2013).

²⁴ Adrienne Roberts, "The Political Economy of 'Transnational Business Feminism'. Problematising the Corporate-Led Gender Equality Agenda," *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 17, 2 (2015): 209.

²⁵ Adrienne Roberts, "Financial Crisis, Financial Firms... and Financial Feminism? The Rise of 'Transnational Business feminism' and the Necessity of Marxist-Feminist IPE," *Socialist Studies/Études socialistes* 8, 2 (2012): 85-108; Geeta Chowdhry, "Engendering Development? Women in Development (WID) in International Development Regimes," in *Feminism/Postmodernism/Development*, ed. M. Marchand, and J. Parpart (London: Routledge, 1995), 26-41; Geeta Chowdhry and Sheila Nair ed., *Power, Postcolonialism and International Relations* (London: Routledge, 2002); Suzanne Bergeron, "The Post-Washington Consensus and Economic

Apart from that, women's entrepreneurship imbues women with a particular neoliberal form of rationality, producing a very specific management, i.e. governmentality philosophy in which women, in the best manner of rational economics and their individual choices, *work on themselves* and rise in the economic hierarchy.

Due to its insisting primarily on the identity level of the problem, this ahistorical discourse of *women's business* and the practices that follow from it rather solidly manages to ignore the fact that it is precisely women's entrepreneurship that perpetuates the existing position of women in society, as well as its class relations. Just like *men's entrepreneurship*, this neoliberal innovation, too, has the task of convincing the working class that, if they only try enough, and then try some more, then all the doors will be open and success guaranteed. Yet, in the capitalist mode of production neither the entrepreneurial *ethics* nor its *spirit* follows from rationally-tuned will and well-invested effort, as neoliberal ideology would have us believe. In capitalism, an entrepreneur derives his or her stability primarily from their present and past socio-material backgrounds. Starting capital does not come out of nowhere, and we do not all have the same starting position. Therefore, there is no fundamental difference between women's and men's entrepreneurship, they are both here in order to reproduce the exploitation of the working class. Women's entrepreneurship helps to legitimize and reproduce the same neoliberal macroeconomic framework that conditions gender inequality and systems of oppression typical of the capitalist mode of production. Let it be noted, when women entrepreneurs and women in the corporate sector fight for their positions, they do not do it as an expression of a collectivist feminist struggle, but of individual will and private interest.

If women's entrepreneurship is analyzed as a metaphysical right to free choice, outside of the context of political economy and using gender as an ahistorical and depoliticized category, we are doomed to a position from which it becomes impossible to perceive the project as representative of an increasingly powerful and pervasive strategy that helps to legitimize capitalism and the broader neoliberal macroeconomic framework that has created and sustained gender-based inequality and oppression.²⁶ Furthermore, if we view women's entrepreneurship outside of the economic field, ignoring its class consequences, presented as an opportunity for greater levels of gender equality that will help usher in a more equitable, socially just and sustainable capitalism that benefits women and capitalists alike, then we are ignoring the dangerous fact that this type of neoliberal feminism plays an important role in the reproduction of capital accumulation and is complicit in the legitimization of the capitalist relations of domination and exploitation.

What are possible feminist strategies in the fight against this sort of free-choice ideology? Let the summary of this text try to challenge forms of neoliberal feminism,

Representations of Women in Development at the World Bank," *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 5, 3 (2003): 397-419; Marianne A. Ferber and Julie A. Nelson, *Feminist Economics Today: Beyond Economic Man*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003); Katharine N. Rankin, "Governing Development: Neoliberalism, Microcredit, and Rational Economic Woman," *Economy and Society* 30, 1 (2001): 18-37.

²⁶ Roberts, "Financial Crisis, Financial Firms... and Financial Feminism?," 92-93.

offering a framework that structurally underpins the politico-economic project of women's entrepreneurship.

Social reproduction theory's challenge to neoliberal feminism

Socialist feminists have been developing theory and politics throughout history by directing their struggle against capitalism and class-reductivist bourgeois initiatives, methodologically founding their analyses in historical materialism.²⁷ As summed up by Susan Ferguson and David McNally: "Socialist feminists were largely united by a commitment to understanding women's oppression as grounded in socio-material relations intrinsic to capitalism, rather than as simple products of attitudes, ideologies, and behaviors. To this end, they turned to theoretical approaches associated with Marx's materialist conception of history".²⁸ One of the key methodological and theoretical differences between Marxism and *bourgeois* social theories is the devotion to the research process which explores the production and reproduction of human practice within the socio-material reality framework. It is along these lines that social reproduction theory (SRT) develops a Marxist analytical framework pointing to the relation between labour and labour force within the capitalist mode of production.

However, that does not deem this historical-materialist task completed. As pointed out by Ellen Meiksins Wood, "The original intention of historical materialism was to provide a theoretical foundation for interpreting the world in order to change it [...] The purpose was to provide a mode of analysis especially well equipped to explore the terrain on which political action must take place."²⁹ Can SRT, apart from its materialist interpretative power, also be used as a framework for articulating progressive political struggle against neoliberalism and its appropriation of feminism? What is the basis of SRT?

Starting at Marxist analysis of the problem of reproduction, SRT further develops the argument that the labor power of the worker is produced outside of capital's circuit of commodity production. In order for society to survive it needs to reproduce. Reproduction may either allude to the process of the regeneration of the conditions of production which enable society to survive, or to the regeneration of humankind.

²⁷ Readers interested in the rich and detailed approaches to socialist/Marxist feminism should consult: Lise Vogel, *Marxism and the Oppression of Women. Toward a Unitary Theory* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2013, [1983]); Cinzia Arruzza, *Dangerous Liaisons: The Marriages and Divorces of Marxism and Feminism* (Pontypool: Merlin Press, 2013); Susan Ferguson and David McNally, "Capital, Labour-Power, and Gender-Relations: Introduction to the *Historical Materialism* Edition of *Marxism and the Oppression of Women*," in Lise Vogel, *Marxism and the Oppression of Women: Toward a Unitary Theory* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2013), xvi-xxi.

²⁸ Ferguson and McNally, "Capital, Labour-Power, and Gender-Relations: Introduction to the *Historical Materialism* Edition of *Marxism and the Oppression of Women*," xviii.

²⁹ Ellen Meiksins Wood, *Democracy against Capitalism. Renewing Historical Materialism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 19.

To simplify, using the example of classic industrial labor, it would mean that reproduction is used to secure work operation, its regularity, to invest in the machines, factories, and raw materials. When machines break down they need to be repaired, replaced, or new ones purchased. Moreover, the labour force which delivers the production and reproduces the relations of society must be secured. Analogous with the machines, when laborers grow old or die they are *replaced*, while those of working age need to eat, rest, and renew their strength in order to be fully ready for work.

In the capitalist mode of production, the capitalist secures through the market the means needed for the operation of a factory and worker's wages. Wage labor enables the working class to secure/consume items and services necessary for life – like food, clothes, covering household expenses – however, those needs are met in the household, not on the market. Moreover, in order to eat, one needs to take into account preparation of food, if one buys clothes, they need to be washed and maintained, and also body care needs to be provided to elderly members of the family or children. Unlike labor in the 'productive' sphere of society, the domestic labor belongs to the 'reproductive' sphere.³⁰ And to conclude, both capitalists and laborers consume, one way or another, food prepared at home, their clothes must be washed, or they depend on some other reproductive labor. Therefore, their life and work in the productive sphere is mediated through a range of activities belonging to the domestic sphere.

The particularity of neoliberalism resides in its seizing of the entirety of the social fabric, both the productive and reproductive spheres. The difference between productive and reproductive labor presents the basis for understanding capitalism as a whole, and particularly in analysis of specific traits of capitalism from the 1970s. An emphasis is on the duality of the problem, depending on whether we refer to "productive labor in general" or "productive labor for capital"³¹.

From the early 1970s onwards, social welfare was increased through the inclusion of households into market circulation. A whole variety of economic activities were concentrated around domestic work, care and similar services previously offered in a non-capitalist manner. The neoliberalisation of the market through the introduction of part-time labor contracts, the flexibility of the workforce and deregulation of labor and welfare legislation are all phenomena related to the 1970s crisis and stagflation, when the neoliberal regime was being formalized, in part, through women's labor and the commodification of domestic work.

The processes of the reproduction of labor power within the neoliberal framework pose an important ground for various struggles. If we broadly consider the ways in which neoliberalism activates its political and socio-economic strategies, we encounter two parallel lines within which its method is implemented. On the one hand,

³⁰ I have written in more detail on this subject in: "From theory of accumulation to social reproduction theory: A case for Luxemburgian feminism," accepted for publication in *Historical Materialism*. While here presenting a further elaboration of SRT, I will be using some parts of the argumentation that I have developed in this other article.

³¹ Savran Sungur and Ahmet E. Tonak, "Productive and Unproductive Labour: An Attempt at Clarification and Classification," *Capital and Class* 23, 2 (1999): 113–52; Sergio Cámara Izquierdo, "A value-oriented distinction between productive and unproductive labour," *Capital and Class* 30, 3 (2006): 37–63.

it affects the productive sphere (whether it is about systemic de-industrialization, or the dismantling of unionism and the attainments of the labor movement), while, on the other, it powerfully erodes the social dimensions of the state pertaining to the systems of working class reproduction – access to food, housing, social services. This method includes austerity measures.³²

That is precisely why, in order for the potentials of anti-capitalist organizing to be fully realized, their strategies need to involve the struggles concerning everyday social reproduction, therefore the reproduction of the working class as well. The questions of sustainable domestic microeconomics, the fight for the commons and public goods (water, food, electricity, housing) and the socialization of care work must be an integral part of the current struggles focused on improved working conditions and higher wages. That is where the revolutionary force of SRT lies: simultaneously linking the political and social levels of resistance, outgrowing its particularity and possessing the power to unite the working class because it is directed precisely on the sphere of everyday life struggles affecting every individual. One has to agree with Tithi Bhattacharya: “[I]t is in these spheres of life-struggles that we can often sense the full rage, combativity and hence potential of the working class as a whole. Men, women and children, pushed to their limit by capital, take to the streets to test the limits of capital.”³³

For this very reason, as an answer to free-choice and its metaphysical groundwork, it was important to stress that individualism as the assumption underlying the free-choice ideology plays a prominent role in the conservative revolution and feminism’s drift to the neoliberal right, also embodied by women’s entrepreneurship. In order not to leave this discussion at the level of mere critique, Social Reproduction Theory was introduced to be used as an important analytical tool in the fight against the conservative appropriations of feminism, and as a reminder of the emancipatory potentials of this approach. They can be summed up thus: an anti-capitalist strategy of struggle can only be successful and complete if it encompasses, in the organizational sense, both those struggles pertaining directly to formal economy, and those *outside* of it. The class struggle must simultaneously take place both in the domestic and work spheres. Wherever our feminist struggles primarily focus on issues like sexual orientation, racism, or sexism, workers’ struggles for higher wages or better working conditions should also be included. And wherever our resistance is aimed primarily at labor and wages, the fight for reproductive justice and the emancipation of subordinated social groups must be developed within those agendas. That is where the specific and inexhaustible power of socialist feminism lies: its focus on changing the entirety of social relations and connecting different progressive alliances into a common anti-neoliberal, or to be more concrete, anti-capitalist struggle.

³² More on this subject in: Ankica Čakardić, “Women’s Struggles and Political Economy: From Yugoslav Self-management to Neoliberal Austerity,” in *Welcome to the Desert of Post-socialism. Radical Politics after Yugoslavia*, ed. Srećko Horvat and Igor Štiks (London: Verso, 2015).

³³ Tithi Bhattacharya, “The IMF Makes a Class Warriors of Us All,” *Public Seminar*, <http://www.publicseminar.org/2016/04/the-imf-makes-class-warriors-of-us-all/#.WNbTulcX77g>, accessed April 22, 2016.

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