

‘MARX IN UTERO’
A WORKERS’ INQUIRY OF THE IN/VISIBLE LABOURS OF REPRODUCTION
IN THE SURROGACY INDUSTRY

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Abstract

What can the work of Marx tell us about surrogacy, and vice versa, what can the work of surrogacy tell us about Marx? My research on commercial surrogacy in Georgia offers an interesting case study to re-assess the relevance of Marxist research frameworks, as it uncomfortably disrupts capitalist dualisms of production vs reproduction, family vs market, gift vs commodity and waged vs unwaged work. Today, Georgian surrogates are paid for putting their reproductive biologies and gestational bodies to work in the (re)production of babies, family happiness and surplus value in the surrogacy industry. Yet, neither in classic political economy accounts nor in its Marxist counterpart, are they seen as ‘real’ workers. On the contrary, surrogates and their ‘labour of love’ are made invisible and relegated to the hidden abodes of reproduction. In this chapter I use the work of Marx, and his disobedient feminist ‘granddaughters’ to analyse and politically translate the invisibility of reproductive work in the global surrogacy industry.

Marx and the (Re)Production of Material Life

‘The first premise of all human existence and, therefore, of all history, [is that humans] must be in a position to live in order to be able to make history. But life involves before everything else eating and drinking, a habitation, clothing and many other things. The first historical act is thus the production of the means to satisfy these needs, the production of material life itself.’ (Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, 1987 [1845])

I conduct research on the political economy of assisted reproductive technologies (ARTs), at the crossroads of ongoing histories of (settler)colonialism and (bio)capitalism. Over the past years, I have been focusing on mapping the booming transnational surrogacy chain between Israel/Palestine and Georgia. I follow the reproductive trail of infertile Israeli couples and their

fertility brokers who are increasingly traveling to Georgia where they hope to recruit affordable surrogates who can make their dreams of genetic parenthood come true.

I hear the reader thinking; why on earth would Marx be relevant for studying contemporary processes of baby- and family-making? How can the work of the bearded old man from Trier who spent most of his intellectual/political life thinking, reading and writing about the horrors of industrial capitalism inform our analysis of surrogacy and assisted reproduction? Marx himself, unlike his comrade in crime Friedrich Engels, has not written that much on the biological reproduction of life and the gendered role of the (nuclear) family under capitalism (Hartsock, 1983; Hartman, 1986; Federici, 2018)¹. Particularly in his magnum opus *Capital*, he remained conspicuously silent on the workings of gender and reproduction in the circuit of commodity production. If Marx were to live now, it is unlikely that he would know his way around the fertility clinic or the surrogacy agency. As a father of eight children (seven children with his wife Jenny Von Westphalen and one with their lifelong housekeeper and friend Helene Demuth²), it is even more unlikely that he would have needed to. Yet, in my qualitative research on transnational surrogacy, Marx has proven to be a fertile source of inspiration, especially through the work of his disobedient granddaughters, i.e. Marxist and autonomist feminists such as Silvia Federici, Maria Mies, Angela Davis, Ariel Salleh and Kathi Weeks who have examined the value of women's reproductive work under capitalism. For them, as for me, Marx's work has been an indispensable yet insufficient tool for understanding and overcoming gendered forms of exploitation under capitalism.

¹ In her recent book Heather Brown (2013) posited that Marx has developed important insights on gender, feminism and the family (most crucially through his dialectic method) scattered throughout his work, although it 'occasionally evinced signs of Victorian morality'.

² Although most sources confirm that Marx was indeed the father of Helen Demuth's illegitimate baby, it remains a contentious issue. It is certain, though, that soon after his birth the boy, who was named Frederick after Friedrich Engels, was placed with a working foster family in London (Wheen, 2001). I thank Noëmi Willemen for pointing out this detail, which seems relevant in a book chapter on the invisible labours of reproduction.

To his praise, Marx's historical materialist approach has assisted me in understanding reproduction not merely as a cultural *or* biological matter, but as a *material relation* that *dialectically* takes shape in and through its 'intra-actions' (not interactions) with capital, nature/biology and labour (Barad, 2007; Brown, 2013; Moore, 2015; Battistoni, 2017; Lewis, 2019). As the opening quote from *The German Ideology* (1987) illustrates, Marx's understanding of 'material life' was not rooted in the binarization of biology vs. society or nature vs. nurture, as is often presumed. Instead, he viewed these apparent dualisms as *dialectical* moments of the whole, which are always historically situated and mediated through *labour*, a key insight for (some) Marxists. Marx went on to explain in *Capital, Volume One* (2013:120):

'Labour is, in the first place, a process in which both man [sic] and Nature participate, and in which man, through his own actions, mediates, regulates and controls the metabolism between himself and nature. He opposes himself to Nature as one of her own forces, setting in motion arms and legs, head and hands, the natural forces of his body, in order to appropriate Nature's productions in a form adapted to his own wants'.

Unfortunately, Marx's understanding of labour under capitalism has always been a rather productivist one, referring to the waged work of the industrial worker who produced commodities for the market and not to the unwaged work of the housewife's who reproduced life in the household. As Maria Mies (2014:46), poignantly remarked in her ecofeminist critique of capitalist patriarchy:

‘The instruments of wage labour are the hands and the head but never the womb or the breasts of a woman. Thus, not only are men and women differently defined in their interaction with nature, but the human body itself is divided into truly human parts (head and hand) and natural or purely animal parts (genitalia, womb)’.

Surrogacy is an interesting case study to re-assess the relevance of Marxist research frameworks in explaining how the world works, as it uncomfortably disrupts capitalist categorizations of production and reproduction, family and market, waged and unwaged work. Today, Georgian surrogates are paid for putting their reproductive biologies and gestational bodies to work in the (re)production of babies, family happiness and surplus value in the surrogacy industry. Yet, neither in classic political economy accounts nor in its Marxist counterpart, are they seen as ‘real’ workers. On the contrary, their work is made invisible, and relegated to the hidden abodes of reproduction. Before further unpacking how I started from Marx to look beyond Marx in analysing and politically translating the invisible labours of reproduction in the global surrogacy industry, let me first position my work within the existing scholarship on surrogacy.

State of the ART: Towards a Workers’ Inquiry of Surrogacy

Gestational surrogacy is a reproductive practice in which a woman gestates an embryo and delivers a baby for intended parent(s) with infertility issues. First, the embryos are created in the lab through in vitro fertilisation, a technology that fertilises the oocytes from an intended mother or egg cell donor with the sperm from an intended father or sperm donor. The embryo(s) are then transferred to the uterus of the surrogate, who is hormonally prepared to gestate the foetus and eventually birth the baby (Vora, 2019).

Over the past two decades gestational surrogacy has transformed from a rather small-scale intimate practice into a booming transnational industry in which women started commodifying their reproductive bodies, biologies and capacities by working as surrogates and egg cell providers. According to recent studies, the global fertility market is estimated to reach between USD 36 - 40 billion in revenue by 2026, with commercial surrogacy being one of its most lucrative services (Frost and Sullivan, 2019; Kowitt, 2020). In several states in the United States, Canada, Israel and India it has developed into a flourishing ‘baby business’ involving various actors and stakeholders such as surrogacy agencies, fertility clinics, genetic counsellors, law firms specialised in family and migration law, shipping and logistics companies, hospitality services (hotels, restaurants, tourist industry) and, of course, a global army of reproductive workers including egg vendors and surrogate carriers but also nurses, nannies and drivers (Vertommen and Barbagallo, under review)³.

As an increasingly popular and evocative fertility procedure, surrogacy has drawn plenty of scholarly attention across disciplines over the past decades. This has resulted in an ever-growing and fascinating body of work, in which Marx, however, remains largely absent. Much of the early anthropological research focused on how surrogacy is organised in specific national and cultural settings. It also addressed how surrogacy enabled the emergence of new family and kinship structures and novel parental identities and subjectivities, such as gay dads and surro-moms (Ragone, 1994; Teman, 2010). Other research approached surrogacy from a bio-ethical or legal stance, discussing whether surrogacy is a morally acceptable reproductive practice, and whether it should be regulated through a gift regime (altruistic surrogacy) or through a market regime (commercial surrogacy) (Shalev, 1991; Shenfield et. al.).

³ In the United States, the fertility power par excellence, the market for in/fertility services and technologies is expected to grow from approximately \$6 billion in 2019 to \$8 billion in 2023. In China revenues could double to over \$7billion by 2023 (Frost & Sullivan, Economist).

What was still missing, though, was a broader political economy analysis of how surrogacy was integrated into a capitalist ‘bio-economy’, structured around the global flow of reproductive tissues, technologies, workers, mediators, investors and consumers. Recently, feminist and STS scholars began studying the incorporation of reproductive processes, bodies, data and practices in capitalist projects of commodification and rent-making (Franklin and Lock, 2003; Rajan, 2006; Helmreich, 2008; Birch and Tyfield, 2013; Cooper and Waldby, 2014; Pavone and Goven, 2017; Van de Wiel, 2018). While some scholars emphasized the competitive advantage of techno-scientific innovations (from test tubes to automated bio-bags) as sources of valorisation and others foregrounded the growing importance of rent and assets (via intellectual property monopolies), I call on Marx to shift our attention again to the *regimes of labour* that are at the heart of processes of valorisation in the fertility industry. In advancing a worker’s inquiry of surrogacy, I have prioritised different kinds of questions on who does what kind of work in the fertility industry. How are these divisions of labour gendered, racialised and classed? Which activities and services are considered as work? And how are these paid and valued ⁴.

A worker’s inquiry is a method that was developed by Marx and later picked up by Marxists such as CLR and Selma James, Raya Dunayevskaya, Grace Lee Boggs, Claude Lefort and Mario Tronti to assess the labour conditions of the working class⁵. The idea behind a workers’ inquiry is that workers are not passive subjects to be researched, but the most pivotal and best

⁴ I got inspired to rethink surrogacy/mothering through the methodological lens of a workers’ inquiry and, vice versa, to rethink workers’ inquiries through the lens of surrogacy/mothering during a talk with Camille Barbagallo, Jamie Woodcock and Eoin O’Cearnaigh on contemporary workers’ inquiries at May Day Rooms in September 2017.

⁵ For a comprehensive account of the theoretical and methodological genealogies of workers’ inquiries, see Haider and Mohandesi, Viewpoint Magazine, 27 September 2013. <https://www.viewpointmag.com/2013/09/27/workers-inquiry-a-genealogy/> (last entry 8 February 2020). For a contemporary take on precarious workers’ inquiries, see the *Notes from Below* collective and journal <https://notesfrombelow.org/> (last entry 8 February 2020).

situated actors in describing and thus transforming their own conditions (Marx, 1880; James, 1972; Woodcock, 2017). As Marx (1880, quoted in Haider and Mohandesi) stated: “*It is the workers in town and country alone [who] can describe with full knowledge the misfortunes from which they suffer.*” Following in the footsteps of feminist scholars like Sharmila Rudrappa (2015), Amrita Pande (2014), Kalindi Vora (2015), Michal Nahman (2013) and Sophie Lewis (2019), my research uses the experiences and perspectives of surrogates on their paid and unpaid reproductive work, as a lens to understand broader capitalist processes.

The Hidden Abodes of (Re)Production

‘You must never regard cleanliness and order as something secondary, for health and cheerfulness depend upon them. Insist strictly that your rooms are scrubbed frequently and fix a definite time for it – and you, my dear Karl, have a weekly scrub with sponge and soap.’ (Letter from Henriette Pressburg to her son Karl Marx, 1836)

For many Marxists labour is the pivotal entry point into a materialist analysis of the capitalist world-economy (Weeks, 2011). It is seen as the ‘father of all wealth’, and the ‘secret of profit-making’ (Marx, 2013). When Marx wrote *Capital* in 1867, it was meant as a critique of bourgeois political economy that viewed market-based exchange between buyers and sellers of commodities as the central motor of capitalist value-creation. In his quest to explain how capitalism actually operated, Marx followed an inspiring method that has also been useful in my own research. He always started from things that were *visible*, such as commodities – or in my case, a healthy surrogacy babies - and then moved to the ‘hidden’ social relations that had to be revealed or made visible through scientific research.

In a much-cited passage in *Capital, Volume One* on the buying and selling of that ‘peculiar’ commodity labour power, Marx (2013:118-119) described how on the marketplace, ‘the very

Eden of innate rights’, the owner of money and the owner of labour power appear as equals who exchange money for labour power. Yet, in order to reveal how and where capitalist valorisation takes place, Marx invites us to leave the site of the analysis from market-based exchange to wage-based production. He wrote:

‘Let us therefore, in company with the owner of money and the owner of labourpower, leave this noisy sphere, where everything takes place on the surface and in full view of everyone, and follow them into the hidden abode of production, on whose threshold there hangs the notice “No admittance except on business”. Here we shall see, not only how capital produces, but how capital is produced. The secret of profit-making must at last be laid bare’.

According to Kathi Weeks (2011:6), what Marx accomplished by altering the focus of the study and descending into the hidden abode of production, is to publicize the realm of waged work, and to expose it as the ‘lifeblood’ of capitalist production rather than a ‘peripheral byproduct or natural precursor’. Once we arrive in the realm of production, Marx (2013:119) noted a ‘change in physiognomy of our dramatis personae’. They didn’t appear as equals anymore.

‘He, who before was the money-owner, now strides in front as capitalist; the possessor of labour-power follows as his labourer. The one with an air of importance, smirking, intent on business; the other, timid and holding back, like one who is bringing his own hide to market and has nothing to expect but — a hiding.’

Since the 1970s Marxist and autonomist feminists have been critiquing classic Marxian frameworks for not paying enough attention to all the nurturing, caring, emotional, reproductive labour that is required for producing that special commodity labour power (Dallacosta and James, 1972; Federici, 1975; Davis, 1981; Vogel, 1983; Fraser, 2014; Bhattacharya, 2017, Mezzadri, 2019; Ferguson, 2019). They argued that the vital work of keeping the worker alive and reproducing the next generation of workers is mostly performed in unwaged capacity by women at home or in the community. These feminists have pushed the analysis of capitalist modes of production from the factory to the kitchens and the bedrooms, revealing a whole realm of gendered exploitation and oppression that remained invisible in Marx(ism): domestic work, mothering, sex and reproduction (Barbagallo and Federici, 2012; Curcio, 2020).

In her plea for a feminist historical materialism, Nancy Hartsock (1983) took on board Marx' suggestion to follow the worker from the marketplace to the workplace, but she pushed his argument further. She proposed to follow the worker into the even more hidden abode of reproduction, the homeplace, where according to Hartsock (1983: 234) another change occurs in the *dramatis personae*.

‘He, who before followed behind as the worker, timid and holding back, with nothing to expect but a hiding, now strides in front, while a third person, not specifically present in Marx's account of the transactions between capitalist and worker (both of whom are male) follows timidly behind, carrying groceries, baby, and diapers’.

Yet, for Marx, what women did when they were birthing, changing diapers, cleaning, cooking and having sex was not so much work, but part of nature, and therefore taken for granted.

Acknowledging that labour was not the only source of wealth creation under capitalism, Marx (2013:23) cited William Petty in *Capital* to clarify its gendered differentiations when writing that ‘labour is the father [of wealth] and the earth its mother’. Social reproduction was at best considered as a component of primitive accumulation, but never as a source of surplus value in and of itself.

Today, much of the domestic housework that was once performed by slaves as forced labour or by housewives as ‘a labour of love’ is now incontestably paid labour. Increasingly, reproductive labour has been commodified into ‘an immediate point of accumulation’ that can be bought and sold on the labour market (Federici, 2012). However, as the case of surrogacy clearly demonstrates, the social conditions under which reproductive work is performed on the market remain as pernicious as ever. It is precarious, undervalued, invisible, often criminalised work, that is still not viewed as ‘real work’. During my fieldwork research on surrogacy in Georgia, I used Marx to go beyond Marx, in exploring the invisible labours of reproduction.

The Invisible Wombs of the Market: Housewifization of Georgian Surrogates ⁶

A recent report by UN Women (2018) investigated the causes of Georgian women’s ‘economic inactivity’ and their high levels of informal employment. According to the UN statistics only 50 percent of the Georgian women participate in the labour force, and half of them are employed in the informal sector. The study clarified that Georgian women face a gender pay gap of more than 40 percent on the formal labour market and spend on average 45 hours per week on unpaid care work at home (compared to only 15 hours for men) with no affordable

⁶ The arguments developed in this section have been further developed in an article I have written with Camille Barbagallo on ‘Invisible wombs of the market: the dialectics of waged and unwaged reproductive labour in the global surrogacy industry’, currently under revision.

childcare services available. The report concluded that these obstacles should be removed *in order to* economically activate Georgian women on the labour market.

One of these supposedly ‘economically inactive’ women, was Elena, a single mother from Tbilisi who was eight months far in her surrogacy pregnancy when we first met. Like thousands of other women, Elena was trying to make a living in Georgia’s fractured economy by carrying a baby for a foreign couple. Elena explained that she would have to work three years as a laboratory assistant to earn the same amount - 15,000 USD - as she does now while ‘doing nothing, except for being pregnant’ (interview Vertommen, Tbilisi, 21/06/2018)⁷. ‘Being’ a surrogate also allowed Elena to stay at home with her two-year-old son, as she could not afford to pay for childcare when she worked outside of the house.

Surrogacy is legal in Georgia, but it is not considered as work. Elena signed a surrogacy contract with the commissioning parents to officialise the agreement. Yet, this was not a labour contract that was regulated by the Georgian labour code. Although Elena was paid for her gestational services, she was not given a salary or a wage, but rather a fee or financial compensation. If something were to happen to her during the procedure, this would not count as a work accident, but as an ordinary health issue. Furthermore, when interviewing her surrogacy agent, it was remarkable how the language of donation and altruism was used to promote fertility services, even though surrogacy has undeniably transformed into a commercial industry. Elena was not recruited as a gestational worker, but as a gift-giving angel (see extract below, from an interview held in Tbilisi, 12 May 2018):

⁷ In 2018, the average annual income for women was 1.830 USD (GEL 4.517) compared to 3.110 USD for men, suggesting a pay gap of 41 percent (UN Women, 2018).

Agent: The whole procedure costs 30.000 dollar, 36.000 with egg donation. The agency fee is 4.500 dollars, the whole process from the start until the end, the surrogate gets 15.000 dollars, during the pregnancy she gets 400 dollar per month and then 11.400 after delivery, the egg donor gets 1000 dollar.

Me: Is the money for the surrogate considered as a salary?

Agent: No, it's seen as a compensation.

Me: So, it's not seen as a job?

Agent: No, it's like a financial help from the parents in return of their gift.

When asking Elena whether she considered surrogacy to be her work, she resolutely answered 'no' (interview Tbilisi, 21 June 2018). Despite all the physical and emotional labour involved in gestating the foetus and the time she spent on medical appointments and skype conversations with the intended parents over the past year, she refused to describe surrogacy as her work. She clarified:

'Pregnancy is an automatic thing; it's just happening on its own. I am just being a mother and a housewife, and I am doing this because I desperately need the money'.

Nargiza, another surrogate who was in the sixth month of surrogacy pregnancy when I interviewed her, got visibly annoyed when I asked her whether she considered surrogacy as her work (interview Tbilisi, 2 June 2018). She replied:

Nargiza: 'Have you ever been pregnant?'

Me: 'Not really'

Nargiza: ‘That’s why you are asking this question. We can return to this discussion after you have had a baby (laughing). You need to go through pregnancy to understand it. Pregnancy is just a state that you are in. It’s not a good or a bad job. it’s not a job. I chose to be a surrogate because I need to be a good mother. The wellbeing of my daughter means everything for me’.

‘Being’ a good mother was not only an important reason for Elena and Nargiza to become surrogates, but it was also a crucial requirement. Elena’s surrogacy agent explained that only women who have already birthed their own children were accepted to become surrogates as this diminishes the chances of a scenario in which the surrogate would want to keep the surrogacy baby after birth (interview Tbilisi, 12/05/2018). It also provides proof of the optimal functioning of their reproductive biologies and gestational bodies. While the work of motherhood is the condition of surrogacy’s possibility in Georgia, the fertility sector merely treats it as an unpaid internship⁸. Similarly, while the Georgian surrogacy industry is highly dependent on the closely intertwined and mutually formative work of motherhood, pregnancy and surrogacy, for Elena and Nargiza both the unwaged reproductive work of mothering and the paid reproductive work of gestating were viewed as a natural state of being, rather than a performative state of labouring.

To make sense of this dialectal relation between the unseen work of motherhood and surrogacy, Marx’s insights have been useful but not sufficient. For this, I turned to the work of scholars like Jason Moore (2015), Kalindi Vora (2015), Sophie Lewis (2019) and Maria Mies (2014) who have provided sharp analyses of the historical value of unpaid work of women, slaves, colonized peoples and nature under capitalism. In her research on Indian women’s involvement in lace making, Mies (1982:110) introduced the concept of “housewifization” to explain that despite

⁸ Thanks to Camille Barbagallo for this insightful comment.

their full incorporation into a capitalist export-oriented production system as wage labourers, ‘the lace makers’ integration was premised on their self-understanding as housewives’. In her later work Mies (2014:116) clarified that ‘women are the optimal labour force because they are universally defined as housewives, not as workers’. Similarly, I argue that profitability in the fertility industry largely depends on the housewifization of Georgian surrogates. From this perspective, the work of surrogacy is highly exploitative, badly paid and suffers from poor labour conditions, precisely because the work of pregnancy and motherhood is not recognised and valued as work at all. As Moore (2015:54) succinctly puts it: ‘Value does not work, unless most work is not valued’.

This housewifization of surrogates is even further enhanced by the fact that they perform their gestational labour alone ‘at home’. Surrogacy is taboo in Georgian society, and surrogates are often judged for presumably ‘selling their own children’. Contrary to Indian surrogates who were grouped together by the fertility agencies in so called surrogacy hotels to avoid stigmatisation in their home communities, Georgian surrogates remain isolated, divided and invisible in the homeplace. Not even their own homeplace, but a new home, where they feel safe from moral judgements.

Every time I met Elena, for instance, it was in the new flat she moved into during the seventh month of her pregnancy, to avoid gossip from her neighbours. Even when I interviewed her during the day, the curtains of the apartment would be closed, and she wore baggy clothes in order to hide her bump. Nargiza quit her job as a barista once she became a surrogate, because she did not want her colleagues to know about it. She continued to wear a wedding ring when leaving the house, although she had been divorced for many years. ‘To avoid nasty comments by strangers’, she said (interview, Tbilisi, 23/05/2018).

Seizing the Means of Reproduction: between Theory and Praxis

‘Wages for housework is only the beginning, but its message is clear: from now on they have to pay us because as females we do not guarantee anything any longer. We want to call work what is work so that eventually we might rediscover what is love and create what will be our sexuality which we have never known. We are housemaids, prostitutes, nurses, shrinks (...). From now on we want money for each moment of it, so we can refuse some of it and eventually all of it’ (Silvia Federici, *Wages Against Housework*, 1975).

There are methodological, ethical and political challenges in conducting a workers’ inquiry of a job that is not considered as ‘real’ work’, in a workplace that is not perceived as a ‘real’ site of labour, with participants who do not identify as ‘real’ workers. As with Selma James’s (1972) workers’ inquiry of housewives, this also became apparent during my fieldwork with surrogates in Georgia when discussing the ‘appropriateness’ of a labour perspective on surrogacy/motherhood. This struggle between appearance and reality, falsehood and authenticity is precisely one of the main theoretical arguments I develop, i.e. that the work of reproduction is naturalised, made invisible and therefore devalued, not only by the bosses, but also by ‘the mother workers’.

On the one hand, this invisibility is tactically deployed by Georgian surrogates to remain under the radar; to avoid being seen and shamed by nosey neighbours, to circumvent taxation by the state and to protect themselves against the surveillance of pushy commissioning parents or

surrogacy agents. On the other hand, this invisibility is enforced on them, and one of the structural reasons why surrogates, like prostitutes, mothers and other reproductive workers, do not easily identify and organise as workers. There are no unions or cooperatives of surrogates where Georgian surrogates are seizing their means of reproduction. This *refusal* of workers' consciousness and identity has in turn deepened processes and practices of exploitation in the fertility industry. Georgian surrogates remain absent on birth certificate of the baby. They are not allowed to decide about the number of embryos that are transferred to their wombs, how to give birth, whether to breastfeed or to perform an embryo reduction or abortion. This is decided by the commissioning parents and the fertility agents and doctors. They also miss out on collective negotiating power over their wages, health and life insurance, etc. Marx (2013) once wrote that 'it is not a piece of luck to be a productive labourer, but rather a misfortune'. True, but it surely does help to be identified and to identify as one. Therefore, more workers' inquiries of/by paid and unpaid reproductive workers (sex workers, mothers, fathers, egg cell providers, housewives, altruistic surrogates, commercial surrogates, nurses, teachers, midwives, cleaners, etc.) could help us, on the one hand, re-think crucial Marxist terms such as value, class (composition), the working day, the work floor and, on the other hand, re-imagine crucial Marxist organising tactics such as the strike, the union, the party, etc.

It is through Marxist and autonomist feminist perspectives on capitalist valorisation, that I have come to understand both surrogacy and motherhood as work. This body of work helped me to examine the dialectical relation between paid and unpaid reproductive labour that is required in the (re)production of babies and profit. This is contrary to what UN Women, the Georgian state, the fertility industry and surrogates themselves claim. For them surrogacy does not count as work, and, as Jason Moore (2015) rightfully remarked, this is precisely how capitalists get rich, by not paying their bills and devaluing most work.

The most important lesson that I take from Marx is that we need to understand how capitalism works in order to overcome it, and that we need to develop the necessary conceptual tools to understand the world in order to change it. This is a double process of ‘creative destruction’. Firstly, it means that we must be fierce and radical in our critiques of capitalist society and bourgeois knowledge production. But critical deconstruction is only the first step of this process of creative destruction, and often the easiest one for academics who are taught to build ivory towered careers by critiquing the work of others. What is too often forgotten, though, is the second step, i.e. the need to be generous and generative in what we offer in return. The intellectual ammunition we co-create should ultimately make sense in the lives of the people we study. Marx himself has dedicated his life to critiquing bourgeois political economy by uncovering waged-based production as the driving force of capitalism. This analysis has enabled people who are selling their labour power to make sense of their role and power as workers, and to ultimately change the conditions under which they are building their lives and making history.

Despite disagreeing with Marx on notions of what constitutes ‘productive work’, Marxist and autonomist feminists have done much of that inspiring work of ‘creative destruction’. They have uncovered how capitalism appropriates processes and practices of reproduction by externalising and naturalising it. This feminist insistence on the denaturalisation of reproduction has been uncomfortable for many people, including working-class housewives and mothers. For many women it was and is still shocking to frame love as unwaged work, or to ask money for every smile they are asked to give, as the opening paragraph of the *Wages for Housework* manifesto suggests them to do. Yet, this provocation has been generative for introducing reproductive labour as an organising principle. This has enabled me, for instance,

to see the (dis)continuities between the work struggles of Georgian surrogates, outsourced cleaners at my university and disenfranchised sex workers and mothers in London who are the driving force behind the Women's Strike Assembly in London. There are no doubt limits to a labour perspective on surrogacy and other reproductive practices and processes, as Susan Himmelweit (1995) Kalindi Vora (2012) and Kathi Weeks (2011) have poignantly argued, albeit from different angles. Yet, the reproductive labour perspective has made it possible to forge comradely practices of solidarity between groups of people who have been excluded in malestream political economy accounts from being seen and from seeing themselves as political subjects.

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