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Dossier

The Role of Women in Workers' Struggles and Social Protests: Historical and Contemporary Explorations

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Workers of the World is the journal of the International Association Strikes and Social Conflicts, born in Lisbon on March 2011. The Association now has the participation of more than three dozen academic institutions from Europe, Africa, North and South America.

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Letter from the editor

This edition of **Workers of the World** is entirely dedicated to *The Role of Women in Workers' Struggles and Social Protests: Historical and Contemporary Explorations*. In it, Geert Van Goethem writes on the importance of the women's movement in Aden's (Yemen) national liberation struggle in the mid-twentieth century; Marianna Haug reflects on the legal framework of domestic labour from the theory of social reproduction; Giovanny Simon Machado analyses social rights from the Soviet propaganda present in Brazil between 1950 and 1964; Anna Paraskevopoulou discusses the contribution of women tobacco workers to the Greek labour movement during the interwar years; Vassilis T. Georgakis examine women's collective action during the period 1915-1916 on the issue of the cost of living and food shortages.

Paula Varela's article inaugurates a new section of translated articles in the journal, originally published in other languages and which we publish in English. In it, the author proposes a reflection on social reproduction struggles under neoliberalism from the point of view of Social Reproduction Theory.

On the eve of the *6th International Association on Strikes and Social Conflicts Conference* to be held in Cape Town, South Africa, 5th-7th February, with the generic theme *Strike Activity in the 21st Century: Implications of the Recent Global Upsurge,* the **Workers of the World** journal is proud to integrate a network

of reflection on the subject of the conflicts grounded on the class struggle, of the strikes as a meaningful expression of the workers' struggle. We're certain that the 6th Conference will be a success that will bring together academics and social activists in the essential debates that make ASSC a milestone in the emancipatory thought and practices.

With a renovated graphic layout, a new website and a reinforced editorial team, the **Workers of the World** already has online the calls for papers for the two editions foreseen in 2024. We invite all our readers to submit text proposals on the subject of *Strikes, Social Conflicts, and Class Struggle in Wartime* and *Strike Activity in the 21st Century: Implications of the Recent Global Upsurge*

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Food Scarcity and Women's Collective Action during the First World War: The Case of Greece, 1915-1916

ABSTRACT

The period 1912-1922 was a turning point in the history of the Greek state. The three consecutive wars it participated in (Balkan Wars 1912-1913, First World War 1917-1918, Greek-Turkish War 1919-1922), the National Schism which divided Greek society, the disastrous end of the Asia Minor campaign (known as the Catastrophe) and the exodus of 1.5 million Christians from Anatolia, completely changed the character of Greek society compared to the 19th century. As the country entered the Interwar period, new motifs emerged: statism, the intensification of the conflict between labour and capital, and the entrance of women into the public sphere. In this article we will examine women's collective action during the period 1915-1916 on the issue of the cost of living and food shortages, and the way in which they contributed to the shaping of the Greek Interwar period.

KEYWORDS

Greece,
First World War
Food riots
Popular movements

The aim of this article is to examine a largely ignored aspect of Greece's involvement in the First World War, namely the forms of collective action undertaken by women over the issue of high prices and food scarcity. Greece's participation in the war is inextricably linked to the events of the "National Schism" [Ethnikos Dichasmos], which constitutes the background to the social tensions of the period. The schism stemmed from the conflict between Prime Minister Eleftherios Venizelos and the Liberal Party, and King Constantine and a loose coalition of conservative parties. The dispute was over Greece's participation in the First World War, even though it brought to the surface underlying controversies over various political and social issues. Venizelos favoured participation in the war on the side of the Entente, while Constantine advocated for neutrality, a stance dictated by his sympathies for the Central Powers and especially Germany. At the peak of the schism, from September 1916 to May 1917, the Greek state was divided into two opposing entities: the Entente-backed Provisional Government of Thessaloniki under Venizelos, and the State of Athens, headed by various puppet governments of Constantine. This conflict, a low-intensity civil war, introduced unprecedented levels of political violence into Greek society and constituted a vertical rift that defined Greek politics for the entire interwar period.

The course of social unrest and protests, including food riots, was dictated by the events of the schism. The demonstrations organized by women, which evolved into food riots in some cases, and which are the subject of this article, occurred during the period of the mobilization of the Greek army from September 1915 to June 1916. The demobilisation and the subsequent intensification of the schism in the summer of 1916 led to a reduction in women's collective action, as men organized themselves into the royalist paramilitary reservists' associations [syndesmoi epistraton] and the country was sliding towards the brink of civil war; in the winter of 1916/17, women would again appear in collective action, this time in mixed crowds. In this article I will argue that these forms of collective action, despite seeming to have premodern characteristics, were attuned to the social landscape of their time, echoing the demands for state intervention and protection. I will also argue that those protests were part of a wider social development, and more specifically, the emergence of the organised labour movement.

WAR, NATIONALISM AND STATE

Since its independence, the Greek state and domestic elites had showed a clear preference for *laissez-faire* and sought a low level of state involvement in the economy. In the late 19th century, however, this policy changed. The ongoing crisis in the agricultural sector, the concentration and centralisation of capital, and the spread of wage labour created social frictions that could not be ignored. The paternalistic legislation of the first government of Eleftherios Venizelos and the Liberal Party (1910-1912) moved precisely towards the direction of preventing the social tensions that the prevalence of capitalism inevitably generated.[1] The need to expand the state's sphere of action became even more obvious as Greece got involved in three consecutive wars, the Balkan Wars (1912-1913), the First World War (1917-1918) and the Greco-Turkish War (1919-1922). Under those circumstances, a new special social group appeared, the veterans and their families.

Before the Balkan Wars, the care of conscripts and their families was the subject of private initiatives and charitable organisations, such as the Union of Greek Women which was active during the Greco-Turkish War of 1897.[2] That short conflict, which was confined to Thessaly, bore no resemblance to the Balkan Wars: the needs of mass mobilisation and modern warfare far exceeded the capabilities of civilians' charitable initiatives. Thus, when the government of Eleftherios Venizelos decided to mobilise the Greek army in September 1915, with the intention of participating in the war on the side of the Entente, the state set up a special fund to provide allowances for the families of the conscripts.[3] Very soon, however, it became evident that the state was unable to fulfil its promises: two months after the mobilization, the process of registering the beneficiaries had not yet been completed.[4] Even when the procedure was completed, the allowances were paid with a significant delay – so much so that months after demobilization, which occurred in June 1916, the families of the reservists were still complaining about the matter, demanding the payment of benefits from December 1915.[5]

Soon after the mobilisation, the women of the reservists appeared in the public sphere, protesting about their abandonment by the authorities. This pattern appears throughout Europe, with soldiers' wives dominating food riots and demonstrations, the case of the *soldatki* (soldiers' wives) in Tsarist Russia being the most prominent example.[6] In the Greek case, women's collective action remained usually spontaneous and unorganised and consisted mainly of rallies outside government buildings. Their main demand was for the payment of benefits and the intervention of the authorities to prevent the withholding of products and profiteering. The demonstrations began as early as October: in Athens, dozens of women gathered daily outside the Parliament and the Ministry of the Interior demanding the payment of their allowances.[7] Gradually, the women organised their action. On February 12, around 150 women "from all parts of Athens, by prior arrangement" gathered with their children and surrounded the house of the minister of finance, Stefanos Dragoumis, protesting against the delay in the payment of their allowances. They then headed to the parliament, where they were dispersed by the intervention of the police.[8] Protests of this kind began to grow, and the number of women involved increased: on March 2, three hundred women along with their children, surrounded the Ministry of the Interior, protesting once again about the issue of the benefits. One of them managed to escape from the policemen and tried to enter the office of Minister Dimitris Gounaris, only to be blocked by officials. The sight of the crying woman exiting the building accompanied by police officers caused an outburst from the demonstrators who shouted, among other things, "Kill us! Before we starve to death".[9]

1 Hadjiiossif, Christos. "Isagogi" [Introduction]. In: Istoria tis Elladas tou 20ou aiona. Oi aparches 1900-1922 [History of 20th century Greece. The origins 1900-1922]. Athens: Vivliorama, 1999, pp. 9-39.

2 Avdela, Efi and Psarra, Angelika. "Engendering "Greekness": Women's Emancipation and Irredentist Politics in Nineteenth-Century Greece". Mediterranean Historical Review. 20(1), pp. 67-79, 2005.

3 Makris, Alexis "Domestic dimensions of a transnational problem: social welfare for veterans in Greece (1912–1940)". War and Society 42(2), pp. 3-4, 2023.

4 Patris 14 November 1915.

5 The information comes from the internal correspondence between the reservists' associations in the region of Epirus. Zosimaia Public Central Historical Library (ZDKIB), archive of Konstantinos A. Metrzios, file 1/B, document 102: "Letter to K. Mertzios from the Reservists' Association of Metsovo", 8 February 1917.

6 Badcock, Sarah. "Women, Protest, and Revolution: Soldiers' Wives in Russia During 1917". International Review of Social History 49, pp. 47-70, 2004; Engel, Barbara Alpen. "Not by Bread Alone: Subsistence Riots in Russia during World War I". The Journal of Modern History 69(4), pp. 696-721, 1997.

7 Nea Imera 15 October 1915.

8 Patris 13 February 1916.

9 Patris 3 March 1916.

The presence of women in the public arena did not go unnoticed by the commentators of the time, but it did not emerge in a vacuum. This development originated in the 19th century, with nationalism and irredentism as a vehicle. Greece's need to mobilise every available resource for the fulfilment of its irredentist program inevitably opened up the debate on the part that women could play. In this context, the role of the family and motherhood was elevated, moving from the private sphere to subordinate itself to the public sphere. The family was no longer just the "refuge" of the middle-class man, but also the vital cell of the nation, and wife-mothers were responsible for the upbringing of ardent patriots and, especially, Greek soldiers. Through nationalism, Greek women acquired a "socially recognised function", and the service of men on the army required the proper recognition and support by the state.[10]

The service of men in the army appears throughout Europe as the main grievance of women protesters, while dealing with the authorities. Berlin women blamed the state for sending their men to fight without being able to at least provide them with "decent food".[11] The Russian *soldatki* constantly reminded the authorities that every benefit they claimed from the state had been paid for with the blood of their husbands and relatives who were fighting at the front.[12] In Greece, women did not cease to remind the authorities that conscription had put them in a desperate financial situation, and that it was the duty of the state to take care of them. At a demonstration outside the palace, women complained that they had been brutally treated by the police, those same women who had send "their men on the border".[13] In Ioannina, the capital of the region of Epirus – an area which faced shortages throughout the war – in one of the many rallies that occurred outside the prefecture, women claimed that "the army took our husbands and sons and left us starving".[14]

This rhetoric ensured at least for the demonstrators the favourable treatment of the press and some journalists, regardless of their political affiliation. A columnist in Ioannina, commenting on the daily demonstrations, noted that the authorities failed to fulfil their only duty to these women, which was to give them "a little bread as a reward for their sons and protectors who fulfilled their duty to the motherland, obeying her voice and going to the borders in defense of her sacred soil".[15]

In Athens, a liberal newspaper criticized the police, ironically calling "brave" those who used violence against desperate women whose husbands held "their swords outstretched against the Bulgarians".[16] But even the pro-government press, which had a more cautious attitude towards any popular mobilisation, emphasised that the care of the soldiers' families was a matter of "social and national necessity".[17] Nationalism had contributed to the creation of a favorable climate for a subject which, until then, had been completely absent from the public sphere and Greek politics. The "mothers of the nation" were no longer an abstract concept but a tangible social subset with its own claims and demands. The Greek state, committed to the national cause, was obliged to take this particular group very seriously.

At the same time, the women's collective action and demands were part of a broader shift in Greek society in support of state intervention. The period between 1914 and 1925 marked a significant deterioration of the Greek economy, with shortages, inflation and a steep decline of incomes for the popular and working classes. The enormous cost of living was the focal point of the mobilisations at that period and the dominant demand was that of state intervention in the economy. Price ceilings were imposed for a series of basic goods, such as food and fuel, while rent controls were imposed in an attempt to address the housing crisis that had been raging in Athens since the beginning of the 20th century, a measure that was maintained until the mid-1920s.[18] The demands of the conscripts' wives were fully attuned to the climate of the period: the evictions of soldiers' families had provoked public outcry and certainly played a role in the imposition of the rent control,[19] while the conscripts' wives of Kozani, a city in western Macedonia, called in a resolution for confiscating stashed food stocks to then be sold at reasonable prices.[20] In this sense, women's mobilizations were fully integrated into the social context of the time. However, in some cases women went further, taking matters into their own hands in the marketplace.

THE POLITICAL SCOPE OF FOOD RIOTS

Women's protests in some cases directly referred to food riots, a form of collective action that dominated Europe from the 16th to the 19th century. The social transformation that followed the emergence of political economy and capitalism rendered food riots obsolete by the 19th century, but the First World War brought about their re-appearance. In a number of countries, including the United States, Britain, Germany and Russia, food riots involved mostly women, reflecting the changes that the gender division of labour had resulted in.[21]
In Greece, apart from the issue of allowances, women's demands also addressed the issue of food prices and shortages. The market place had become a place for women to socialise, as had the food distribution points for the poorest families, and this is where we have the most important riots of the period. In the popular districts of the capital, the target was merchants who refused to comply with the price ceilings imposed by the state. In one case, the women, furious at a peddler who refused to sell his goods at the fixed price, called the authorities and vindictively bought all his merchandise in public view.[22] On 27 January, in a village of mountainous Central Greece, the conscripts' wives attended the Sunday service [a Greek Orthodox service]; afterwards, they took their children and crossed the market, protesting about the prices of food and their abandonment by the authorities. They headed towards the courthouse, surrounding the building, asking for bread. When the mayor of the commune appeared on the scene,

10 Varika, Eleni, I exegersi ton kyrion. I genesi mias feministikis syneidisis stin Ellada, 1833-1907 [The Ladies' Revolt. The Birth of a Feminist Consciousness in Greece]. Athens: Katarti, 1997, pp. 126-133, 139.
11 Bonzon Thierry and Davis Belinda, "Feeding the Cities", in Capital cities at war: Paris, London, Berlin 1914 – 1919. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, p. 338.
12 Badcock. op. cit. pp. 62, 66; Engel. op. cit. pp.712-713.
13 Astir 18 March1916.
14 Tahydromos ton Ioanninon 8 May 1916.
15 Ibid.
16 Patris, 18 March 1916.
17 Nea Imera, 15 October 1915.
18 Potamianos, Nikos. Oi nykokyraioi. Magazatores kai viotechnes stin Athina 1880-1925 [Shopkeepers and Master Artisans in Athens 1880-1925]. Herakleion: Crete University Press, 2015, pp. 464-493.
19 Nea Imera 13 and 14 September 1915.
20 Patris 9 February 1916.
21 For the case of United States, see: Frieburger, William. "War prosperity and hunger: The New York Food Riots of 1917". Labour History 25(2), pp. 217-239, 1984; Frank, Dana. "Housewives, Socialists, and the Politics of Food: The 1917 New York Cost-of-Living Protests". Feminist Studies 11(2), pp. 255-285, 1985. For the case of Britain, see: Coles, Antony James. "The Moral Economy of the Crowd: Some Twentieth-Century Food Riots". The Journal of British Studies 18(1), pp. 157-176, 1978; Hunt, Karen. "The Politics of Food and Women's Neighborhood Activism in First World War Britain". International Labor and Working-Class History 77, pp. 8-26, 2010. For the case of Germany see: Davis, Belinda. Home Fires Burning: Food, Politics and Everyday Life in World War I Berlin. Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2000.
22 Patris 8 November 1915.

the women threatened to stone him. It took the intervention of the police to disperse them.[23] Much more serious riots broke out in Athens on March 17. On that day about two thousand women queued up for a free food distribution organized by the French Catholic School, in a central part of the city. But as it became apparent that there was not enough food for all of them, about two hundred women, together with their children, marched to the Parliament where they clashed with the police. They then headed for the palace where they were intercepted by the palace guard and dispersed.[24] In Ioannina, on May 31, women attacked the market, seizing sacks of flour, while at the same time a group of villagers attacked wagons on the outskirts of the city, forcing the merchants to sell their products on the spot at a *fair* price.[25] Actions like these intensified after November 1916 and the blockade of the Greek ports by the Entente, but in this case the crowds that participated were mixed and did not exclusively consisting of women.

Food riots have been characterized as a premodern form of collective action, apolitical in character and with a narrow horizon.[26] However, we believe that this view is rather simplistic, in the sense that political character is identified with a certain political grouping or programme. For his part, Charles Tilly considers a food riot to be a political event and indeed "an important one", even in the premodern context, where he sees the conflict between the builders of the nation-state and a skeptical and reluctant peasantry.[27] British historian E.P. Thompson, in his famous article on moral economy, sees the food riots as an action oriented towards the defense of society, and as an attempt to protect a paternalistic model that ensured a minimum level of subsistence for the popular strata.[28] The case for a new moral economy, shaped during the First World War, has been made by some historians, and we tend to agree with them;[29] regardless, and concerning the political implications of food riots, we believe that neither Tilly nor Thompson confined the political character of food riots into the realm of modern political groups and parties.

In recent historiography, women's collective action during the war has attracted the interest of researchers, who have highlighted the political impact of food riots, especially in the cases of Tsarist Russia and Germany, where these protests were the prelude to revolutionary processes. Barbara Alpen Engel turned her attention to the "subsistence riots" that took place beyond the two urban centers of Moscow and St. Petersburg, and demonstrated the role that women played in the delegitimisation of the Tsarist regime. When outraged *soldatki* ransacked a merchant's shop in the Don region, among other things they took down and trampled a portrait of the Tsar, an unprecedented but clearly political act.[30] Sarah Badcock, following Engel, delved deeper into the case of the *soldatki*, in the period between the revolutions of February and October. Badcock considers the *soldatki's* collective action political, highlighting the inability of moderate political forces to both satisfy popular demands and keep Russia in the war, thus indirectly enabling the Bolsheviks' rise to power.[31] In the case of Germany, Belinda Davis challenged the dichotomy between high politics and everyday life, and showed that the discontent of the civilian population, especially women, was a key factor in undermining the "Wilhelmine regime, even before the war was clearly lost".[32]

As far as the Greek case is concerned, we have already mentioned the demand for state intervention, which cannot be considered apolitical. However, even if the conscripts' wives did not have any affiliation with specific parties or organisations, the climate of the period was such that their mere presence in the public sphere created a debate about their motives. By September 1915, and after the resignation of Eleftherios Venizelos, power was in the hands of King Constantine and a coalition of royalist parties (usually referred to as Anti-Venizelists in Greek historiography). The legitimacy of the government was fragile, however, as the Liberal Party abstained from the December 1915 elections. Protests over high prices and food scarcity were thus seen as a direct attack on the government; a royalist member of the parliament complained that behind the crowds of women protesting against the government were agitators, apparently meaning supporters of the Liberal Party, and called for the imposition of martial law.[33] The demonstrations which occurred on 17 March irritated of the pro-government press, which refrained from commenting on the failures of the state that led thousands of families to this desperate situation. One newspaper defended the police and the arrests of female protesters outside the parliament, while another criticized the French School for the sloppiness with which it set up the food distribution.[34] In the long run, however, the royalists managed to capitalise on the whole situation, attributing the sufferings of the "common people" to Eleftherios Venizelos who proposed mobilising the army and the interventions of the Entente which prevented the effective provisioning of the country.[35]

Food riots had another political aspect, and that had to do with the transition of motherhood from the private to the public sphere. The presence of children in this kind of demonstration was a common sight: in the food riots that occurred in New York City in February 1917, women from the popular districts marched with their babies in their arms, shouting "We want food for our children".[36] In Greece, children were constantly present in women's protests. In the 17 March riots, women were shouting, among other things, "Bread for our children". At a rally held in Patras, the largest city of Peloponnese, the conscripts' wives were at the head, with many of them holding babies in their arms, followed by a silent crowd bearing black flags.[37] In Russia, on the contrary, the image of women with babies in their arms begging for bread was more

23 Patris 29 January 1916.

24 Patris 18 March 1916.

25 Tachydromos ton Ioanninon 1 June 1916.

26 Taylor, Lynn. "Food Riots Revisited". *Journal of Social History* 30(2), pp. 483-496, 1996.

27 Tilly, Charles. "Food Supply and Public Order in Modern Europe". In: *The Formation of National States in Western Europe*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975, pp. 386, 392-398.

28 Thompson, E.P. "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century". *Past and Present* 50, pp. 76-136, 1971.

29 Bianchi, Roberto. "Voies de la protestation en Italie: les transformations de la révolte entre XIXe et XXe siècle". *European Review of History - Revue européenne d'histoire* 20(6), pp. 1047-1071, 2013; Potamianos, Nikos. "Isagogi. Ekdoches tis Ithikis Oikonomias" [Introduction. Versions of Moral Economy]. In: *Ekdoches tis Ithikis Oikonomias. Istorikes kai theoritikes meletes* [Versions of Moral Economy. Historical and Theoretical Approaches]. Rethymno: Institute for Mediterranean Studies of the Foundation of Research and Technology – Hellas, 2021, pp. 9-64.

30 Engel. op. cit. pp.716-717.

31 Badcock. op. cit. pp. 69-70.

32 Bonzon and Davis. op. cit. p. 334.

33 *Patris* 18 March 1916.

34 *Nea Imera* 18 March 1916; *Akropolis* 18 March 1916.

35 The issue is quite complex and requires a deeper analysis of the National Schism, which is beyond the scope of this article. What should be noted is that, gradually, the pro-war policy of Eleftherios Venizelos grew increasingly unpopular, compared to the neutrality favoured by the Germanophile Constantine, and this signalled a general alienation of the popular and working classes from the Liberal Party.

36 Frieburger. op. cit. pp. 221-223.

37 Kalpodimou, Kalliopi and Kondis, Georgios. "O antiktipos tou Ethnikou Dichasmou (1915-1917) stin perifereia. I periptosi tis Argolidas" [The impact of National Schism (1915-1917) in the countryside. The case of Argolida]. In: *1915-2015. Ekato chronia apo ton Ethniko Dichasmo. I politikes, politeiakes, koinonikes diastaseis ton gegonoton kai i metagenesteres epidraseis* [A hundred years since the National Schism. The political, political and social dimensions of the events and their subsequent impact]. Argos: Municipality of Argos, 2018, p. 180.

reminiscent of the 1905 revolution than of 1917, which is perhaps why some scholars tend to treat the invocation of motherhood as part of the premodern, and rather rural, repertoire of collective action.[38] In the Greek case, the invocation of motherhood is not necessarily identified with the rural space and the paternalism of the *Ancien Régime*. The special status that motherhood had occupied in Greek society, thanks to nationalism, legitimised the presence of women in the public sphere. The increasing presence of women in political activities is recorded from the end of the 19th century, but the period of war was a crucial one.[39] The National Schism was a real turning point in this respect, and the women's mobilisations of 1915 to 1916 were an important link in the chain of events that helped women to broaden their political horizon.[40]

The demands of women, however, coincided with the demands of the emerging labour movement, which at that time was initiating the creation of its most important institutions: the Socialist Workers' Party of Greece, which later evolved into the Communist Party of Greece and the General Confederation of Workers of Greece.

FEMALE AND CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS

One question that arises about the women's collective action during the First World War is how they relate to the intensification of the class struggle, that reached its peak in Russia, and the dying empires of Central Europe. We have already mentioned the role of women's collective action in Germany and Russia, which delegitimised their respective authorities, making the continuation of the war impossible and led both countries into turmoil. In the Greek case, the events of 1915 to 1917 didn't escalate to the point of challenging the state's authority, though they played a crucial role in the formation of the labour movement.

This subject goes far beyond the purposes of this article. What can be said is that the experiences of the successive wars during the decade 1912 to 1922 were catalytic for the establishment of the most important institutions of the working class. The first steps had been taken at the beginning of the 20th century with the establishment of the labour centres in Athens and Piraeus, as well as in Volos and Larissa, the most important cities of Thessaly. The shortages and high prices and the consequent surge in the cost of living forced the various local labour centres to intensify their contact and develop coordinated action with the Athens Labour Centre assuming a central role. With the outbreak of the war, the labour centres submitted various petitions to the government and the King, describing the dire living conditions of the working strata and calling for the imposition of price ceilings on various goods by the state.[41] The army mobilisation raised the issue of providing for the families of conscripted colleagues. In addition to the petitions, actions were taken for the direct financial support of these families, with the trade union of commercial employees of Athens collecting contributions from its members for this purpose.[42]

With the aggravation of the subsistence crisis after November 1916, workers escalated their mobilisations, engaging in ongoing strikes; the working-class repertoire was clearly modern, although there were some instances of food riots. This does not mean that women's collective action was not coordinated with the working-class movement. The most important contribution on the issue comes from Temma Kaplan, who developed the concept of "female consciousness". Studying mobilisations that took place in Barcelona in the 1910s, both before and during the war, Kaplan argues that there were forms of women's collective action that reproduced the gendered division of labour without, however, necessarily indicating that they were less revolutionary than forms of action adopted by the labour movement.[43] Kaplan interprets female collective action as an expression of female consciousness, a certain type of perception of social reality according to which women are responsible for the well-being of the family, the basic component of society, and therefore become responsible for the preservation of life.[44] Women motivated by this perception were even willing to clash with the authorities if they felt that the authorities were making it harder for them to carry out their duties towards their families and society.

But Kaplan also points out something else: communication at the neighborhood and community level, which were the main space for the development of women's consciousness, did not mean that these women were not also bearers of a class, and a working-class consciousness, in particular. Clearly, the market and the queues in the soup kitchens were a place where women "come into contact and communicate with other people who have similar interests" as Greek historian Leda Papastefanaki puts it.[45] The events of 17 March 1916 are a case in point, when the hours of waiting in queues for rations turned into a militant demonstration. Thus, we can clarify the conditions under which conscripts' wives were able to move from simple protest to collective action. However, this aspect of women's mobilisation cannot provide us with the full picture of the transformations that were taking place within Greek society at the time, and Kaplan herself does not confine women's presence to collective actions that reproduced the gendered division of labour in the public sphere. Women also participated in protests that took place after the demobilisation of the Greek army, this time in their capacity as workers or working-class women in general.

It is a fact that women's wage labour was limited at the beginning of the 20th century in Greece and the war period (1912-1922) did not change that, at least to the same extent as in Europe, where the First World War marked the massive entry of women into the secondary and tertiary sectors of economy.[46] There was, however, a demand for women's labour in certain sectors, such as seasonal agricultural work

38 Engel. op. cit. p. 712.

39 Potamianos, Nikos. "Morfes symmetochis ton gynaikon stin politiki zoi tou ellinikou kratous, teli 19ou – arches 20ou aiona" [Forms of female participation in Greek state's political life, late 19th – early 20th century]. *Ta Istorika 77*, 2023 (To be published).

40 Samiou, Dimitra. *Ta politika dikeomata ton Ellinidon, 1864-1952. Idiotita tou politi ke katholiki psifoforia* [The civil rights of Greek women, 1864-1952. Citizenship and catholic vote]. Athens: P. N. Sakkoulas, 2013, p. 105.

41 Livieratos, Dimitris. *Megales ores tis ergatikis taxis* [Significant Moments of the Working-Class]. Athens: Koukkida, 2006, pp. 92-95.

42 *Patris* 14 December 1915 and 17 March 1916.

43 Kaplan, Temma. "Female Consciousness and Collective Action: The Case of Barcelona, 1910-1918". *Journal of Women in Culture and Society*. 7(3), pp. 545-566, 1982

44 Ibid. pp. 545-551.

45 Papastefanaki, Leda. *Ergasia, technologia kai fylo stin elliniki viomichania. I klostoyfantoyrgia tou Peiraia, 1870-1940* [*Labor, technology and gender in Greek industry. The textile industry of Piraeus, 1870-1940*]. Heraklion: Crete University Press, 2009, pp. 375-376.

46 Avdela, Efi. "Stoichia gia tin ergasia ton gynaikon ston Mesopolemo: Opseis kai theseis" [Evidence on women's work in the interwar period: Aspects and Views]. In: *Venizelismos kai Astikos Eksychronismos* [Venizelism and Social Modernization]. Heraklion: Crete University Press, 1988, p. 197.

(especially in Thessaly), textiles and tobacco processing, and even printing.[47] During the naval blockade there was massive recruitment of women in other types of labour: in Piraeus, the municipality was carrying out road construction projects where 1250 women were employed along with 450 men who, of course, were doing the specialized concrete paving work.[48] The workforce employed in these projects was obtained from lists provided by the Panhellenic Association of Guilds.[49] The opportunity given to these women to work reflects the situation in Piraeus, where women seem to have had a presence in the city's labour movement and generally in the public sphere.[50] Such public works were undertaken all over the country, with the aim of offering work for the poorer classes, but we have no information on the composition of the workforce beyond the case of Piraeus.

The naval blockade imposed by the Entente in retaliation for the November Events caused the spread of food riots.[51] The crowds involved this time were mixed, and the initiative of the action was taken by men and mainly by workers; this does not mean that there was no women's action. On 25 January 1917, violent riots broke out in the centre of Athens and spread throughout the city. The riots began outside a bakery in the area of Omonia, in the heart of Athens, but then spread to the popular districts of Neapoli and Vathi, where a crowd of women looted a bakery and seized more than two and a half tons of bread.[52] A few days later, on 8 February, new riots occurred, this time in Piraeus. The riots broke out when ten thousand people, men and women, queued for a food distribution at the city's municipal theatre. When the authorities decided to cancel the distribution, worried about possible riots, two hundred workers moved in a violent manner towards the railway station, looting shops along the way. At the same time five hundred women seized hundreds of sacks of flour from a nearby government warehouse.[53] Working-class women appeared in orderly fashion in the public space, with rallies, as was the case in Volos in April 1917, when hundreds of women from the working-class districts demonstrated in a central point of the city, protesting against shortages, and were dispersed after clashes with the police, which made four arrests.[54]

The two types of collective action – the demonstrations of the conscripts' wives and the food riots in which working-class women participated together with men – can be viewed separately. However, we believe that the common element of women's class origins is present in both cases, and that the demands of the soldiers' wives, even if they were articulated in a way that reproduced the gendered division of labour in the public sphere, were at least as radical as the demands of the labour movement at that particular moment, since they were fully attuned. Therefore, we can only place the women's food mobilisations in a continuum of political mobilisation and radicalisation of the working strata, since the core of their demands was the protection of society from the grip of the free market, through state intervention.

CONCLUSION

In June 1917, Eleftherios Venizelos, backed by Entente troops, once again assumed the government of Greece, and the country soon entered the First World War. Over the next three years the Liberals would rule almost dictatorially, creating a stifling atmosphere for social discontent to manifest itself. This discontent was finally expressed in the elections of November 1920, when Venizelos suffered a shocking defeat, and ousted King Constantine returned after a controversial referendum. However, the inability of either the Liberals or the Anti-Venizelists to bring the conflict in Asia Minor to a successful conclusion, and to deal with the ongoing economic crisis the country was experiencing, paved the way for the consolidation of a purely class-based pole, with the founding of the Socialist Workers' Party of Greece in 1918. The crushing defeat of the Greek army in 1922 and the exodus of 1.5 million Christians from Anatolia marked the beginning of the Greek Interwar. The liberalism of laissez-faire and uninterrupted parliamentarianism, conditions that characterized 19th century Greece, gave way to constant aberrations and military interventions, and the rise of statism.

At the same time, however, a new social dynamic appeared in Greek political affairs: the rapidly emerging labor movement, as well as the feminist movement which, through its various constituents, had a militant stance. In our opinion, the women's collective action of the period 1915 to 1916 can be included in a continuum of social ferment that had both of the above developments at its end. The presence of women in the public sphere was an indication in itself of a social transformation observed since the beginning of the 20th century, when women, especially of the popular classes, became more comfortable participating in public life. The dense political time of the Schism intensified this process; in 1920 women were participating en masse in Liberal and anti-Venizelist political rallies. Even the very nature of women's collective action during the period under consideration served as a promotional factor. The politicisation of motherhood had its roots in nineteenth-century irredentism, but it intensified during a decade of continuous warfare. The result was the further undermining of the dichotomy between the public and private spheres, and the confinement of women to the latter. Women's collective action also had a class aspect. The women's demonstrations themselves were indicative of the crystallisation of a class polarized society, with the working class emerging as a separate subject. Simultaneously, women's demands for protection of the lower strata by the state and for intervention in the marketplace were coordinated with the demands of the labour movement.

In conclusion, if the National Schism gave birth to the Greek Interwar, we ought to recognize that the women's collective action of the short period 1915to 1916 was also a link in this chain of social transformation experienced by Greek society. Therefore, the discussion of premodern or apolitical action is probably taking us in the wrong direction and we should acknowledge the fact that a given repertoire of mobilization does not prejudge the direction that a social struggle will follow ■

47 Kliafa, Maroula. "To episitistiko problima sti Thessalia kata ton A' Pagkosmio Polemo" [Subsistence crisis in Thessaly during the First World War]. In: *I Thesssalia toy 1917* [Thessaly in 1917]. Koropi: Niki Publications, 2019, p. 129.

48 *Nea Imera* 18 February 1917.

49 *Nea Imera*, 14 February 1917; Concerning the Panhellenic Association of Guilds, see, Potamianos. *Oi nykokyraioi. Magazatores kai viotechnes stin Athina 1880-1925*. p. 408-413.

50 Papastefanaki. op. cit. p. 382.

51 On 18 November 1916 (according to the Gregorian calendar, 1 December), with Greece divided between the Provisional Government of Thessaloniki and the State of Athens, the Entente, following a prior agreement, landed troops at Piraeus to receive quantities of arms and ammunition, effectively disarming the Greek army. The Entente force was ambushed by Greek regular and paramilitary forces and the operation resulted in fierce fighting between French and Greek troops, which led to the retreat of the former and the naval bombardment of Athens. The royalists then launched a pogrom against the Liberals with hundreds of arrests.

52 *Nea Imera* 26 January 1917.

53 *Nea Imera* 9 February 1917.

54 *Tachydromos tou Volou* 10 April 1917.

Marianna Haug

Reproductive work and legal form: The necessary relationship between law and gender oppression in capitalism

And if you didn't understand what feminist means
I warm my belly on the stove, I cool it in the basin
I take care of the boss's son, my daughter is alone
The hand is on the job, the mind is on the daughter

(Ancient Poetry, by Ellen Oléria)

ABSTRACT

This text starts from the contributions of the Marxist critique of law and Social Reproduction Theory to understand why the domestic work done by the family is not waged, since no one receives a salary for cleaning their own house, cooking their own food, or taking care of their own children, which does not enter the logic of the employment contract and abstract work. The law separate what is considered family law from what is labour law as a strategy to guarantee the daily and generational reproduction of the workforce in exploitative conditions. Thus, ultimately, the legal form is directly related to the institution of gender inequalities in capitalism, in view of the historical process of making women responsible for domestic work, inside and outside the family structure.

KEYWORDS

Marxist critique of law
Legal form
Reproductive work
Gender
Domestic work

INTRODUCTION

When I read about Social Reproduction Theory, I got excited again about the feminist movement, which I was slightly removed from in relation to direct tasks of militancy, even though the theme permeated all other possible spheres of action. However, the lack of a material, epistemologically coherent explanation, or a methodological one, which concretely related gender and racial oppression to the reproduction of material life – being, therefore, supported by dialectical historical materialism – meant that I hadn't delved into the field of gender studies before. It seemed like a field in which all new debates turned to postmodern and anti-Marxist or downright liberal elaborations, until the issue of the reproduction of labour power became popular in the movement.

Although Vogel (2022) [1983] had already raised this debate long ago, her book, Marxism and the Oppression of Women: Towards a Unitary Theory, was left cornered for many years, only being translated into Portuguese and published in Brazil in 2022. However, by giving centrality to the work, dealing with themes that generate identification for permeating the life and routine of all working-class women through materialist explanations and taking methodological responsibility, this debate is being renewed in Brazil, which is a fertile ground for new Marxist-feminist elaborations.

In this sense, I was interested in researching Social Reproduction Theory in connection with the Marxist critique of law, to understand the legal form as fundamental for the commonplace functioning of expropriation of surplus value, in addition to the fact that legal ideology is a necessary mediation for sociability in the capitalist mode of production.

Edelman (2016) [1978], advancing what Pachukanis inaugurated as the Marxist critique of law, pointed to the importance of law in the mystification of the production relationship, placing employer and worker as equivalent parts of the same contract and legally hiding the surplus labour in this process. With that, he showed the relationship between the legal form and the field of production and productive work, removing criticism that Pachukanis had a circulationist thesis that is not related to the way goods are produced under capitalism.

Since Edelman made this move to analyse the law within the logic of the employment contract in the face of productive work, I was interested in researching how the law relates to the exploitation of reproductive work, which especially affects working-class women, and whose work is indispensable for continued capital accumulation. I elaborated some questions in order to answer the way in which the law is necessary to continue oppression by gender and race with regard to the responsibility of black, Latino, LGBTQIAP+, and Global South women workers, for the daily and future reproduction of the workforce.

THE LEGAL FORM AS THE SOCIAL FORM OF CAPITAL AND THE MARXIST CRITIQUE OF LAW

To understand the relationship between law and gender oppression in capitalism, we need to analyse, first hand, the law in the form we know it today, given that it is usually presented as a necessary and consensual social contract for ensuring order and peaceful coexistence among people.

However, starting from dialectical historical materialism, we verify that the legal form is a social and historical form responsible for the organization of relations of equivalence, in order to enable the exchange of goods, the sale of the workforce as a commodity, generalised exchange and, ultimately, the appreciation of value. If capital is not a metaphysical phenomenon but a material mode of production with specific historical determinations, this does not exist abstracted from its forms (Rubin, 1987: 27), so the legal form is part of this composition.

In this sense, it is possible to understand the legal form as specific to the capitalist mode of production, and that it does not exist without what we call law today and that, in turn, law as we know it only exists and is only possible in these historical conditions in which the commodity form is the ultimate determination of social relations. Only under capitalism is labour sold under contractual logic as equivalent to wages measured over time. While the salary is considered compatible with the working day on a contractual level, this hides the extraction of surplus value during the productive process.

Thus the legal form is essential for obscuring the expropriated surplus value while presenting the boss and the worker as equivalent parts of the same contract, dissolving class relations and presenting only the "subjects of rights", the "citizens", who are equal before the law. This legal equality is essential to allow the exchange of goods, since the subjects involved in the exchange need to be legally equal for the mercantile exchange to be fully generalised.

This understanding of the legal form in its historical context – founded on the pillars of legal ideology and the subject of rights, in the materiality of relations – is fundamental for us to analyse the importance of the law for capitalism. Pachukanis (2017 [1924]) inaugurated the Marxist critique of law by writing The General Theory of Law and Marxism, pointing out how, being the indispensable legal form for capitalism, "The disappearance of the categories of bourgeois law under these conditions will mean the disappearance of law in general, that is, the gradual extinction of the legal element in human relations" (Pachukanis, 2017 [1924]: 83).

Pachukanis was a Soviet jurist during discussions after the Russian Revolution about what to do about the law in the transition to the end of private property. At the time, he argued against theorists of legal socialism and labour law, who defended the use of law as the main tool for the transition to socialism. Pachukanis, however, argued that the law is not only not the best tool for that – as the legal form is an essentially bourgeois form that allows the exchange of goods – but also that overcoming capitalism would necessarily lead to overcoming the law as we know it too.

To understand the legal form from this perspective, he started from dialectical historical materialism, studying the subject of rights in the same way that Marx studied the commodity, to break with legal positivism and with the neo-Kantian heritage brought by Kelsen to the branch. Likewise, jusnaturalism and legal idealism, influenced by Hegel, are also unable to explain what the legal form is and its relationship to the mode of production, since they understand it autonomously, as a harmonious and closed whole that hovers over other social relations.

By historicising the legal form, it is possible to understand how it is specific to this mode of production and is precisely what allows the sale of labour power and the expropriation of surplus value in a mystified way. Based on Pachukanis' analyses, another author who advanced studies of the Marxist critique of law was Edelman (2016 [1978]), who diagnosed the process that he called "legalisation of the working class" to propose that shifting the class struggle to the legal terrain is not just seeing another place where the results of the class struggle can be manifested, since the legal form only reproduces its own individualising and patrimonialist logic, which produces a different result from that process. Law is an arena of struggle in which the bourgeoisie controls the language, the rules of the game and the possibilities of results, and from which it already derives full advantage. Thus, based on the law, we will not have de facto justice for the working class.

Edelman is not proposing that we never articulate legal strategies as a form of resistance, but pointing to the importance of understanding this agenda strategically with a perspective of dissolving this social form, so that we do not shift our main struggles to the legal arena that surrounds us, imprisons us, and yields limiting results.

In a similar fashion, 60 years earlier, Remy Janneau (Martins, 2022) realised, from practical studies on US trade union movements, that the working class cannot be "legalised" when it intends to act as a class. The legal form does not allow this, since it individualises and categorises its agendas, by shifting them on to a terrain in which victories are partial, pulverized and do not allow for class and mass organisations. With this, we see a convergence in the works of Pachukanis, Edelman and Janneau in pointing to the historicity of the legal form and its intimate relationship with the commodity form.

From these contributions, this article intends to understand how the legal form articulates with gender oppression to allow the reproduction of the workforce in conditions of exploitation and, consequently, the valorisation of value and the accumulation of capital.

SOCIAL REPRODUCTION THEORY AND EXPLANATIONS OF GENDER OPPRESSION

Feminist movements have long sought to explain the origin and functioning of women's oppression, through various political and epistemological proposals. Cinzia Arruzza (2019), in her book Dangerous Liaisons: Marriages and Divorces Between Marxism and Feminism, organises these expressions into three key analyses: (i) double or triple systems theories, (ii) independent capitalism theories, and (iii) Social Reproduction Theory.

The first encompasses currents that understand capitalism and patriarchy as autonomous systems, each with their own functioning. This is exemplified by Heidi Hartmann (1979), who argues that gender oppression is independent of capitalism, even though both systems are historically interconnected. Updating this thesis, Sylvia Walby (1990) proposed the theory of triple systems, in which capitalism, patriarchy and racism are organised as three autonomous systems. This starts from an understanding that class relations are defined purely in economic terms, based on classical political economy, which does base itself on the reproduction of material life and social relations. Still, authors such as Christine Delphy (1977), in this same sort of analysis, even argued that men and women belong to antagonistic classes, as if patriarchy was a mode of production.

Regarding the theory of independent capitalism (ii), authors such as Ellen Wood (1995) argued that capitalism has only an opportunistic relationship with gender and racial oppression, but that it is not something intrinsic to its functioning, even proposing that there are women in this mode of production who benefit from a high level of emancipation unknown to them in other historical moments, and that capitalism could exist without these oppressions. However, there is no capitalism "purified" of gender and race oppression: they are a necessary part of its functioning. Arruzza (2015, 37) comments:

> *In short, capitalism has an essentially opportunistic relationship with gender inequality: it uses what it finds beneficial from existing gender relations, and destroys what becomes an obstacle. This vision is articulated in several versions. Some claim that under capitalism women benefited from a level of emancipation unknown in other types of society, and this would demonstrate capitalism as not being a structural obstacle to women's liberation. Others maintain that we must carefully distinguish logical and historical levels: logically, capitalism does not specifically need gender inequality, and can get rid of it. But historically, things are not that simple.*

This key to interpreting independent capitalism understands the mode of production through a reading of "purity", which is anti-historical and closer to Weberian ideal types than to Marxism. Engels, in his Letter to Conrad Schmidt (2000 [1895]), discusses how feudalism in its "purity" practically never existed, not in Normandy, Norway, England or southern Italy, in this logic of natural and closed concepts. Therefore, relying on a non-historical hypothesis of a capitalism that could exist without the production of gender and racial distinctions may fall into idealistic speculation on the mode of production. There is historically no capitalism without gender and racial oppression, and abstracting this historical issue to a supposed logical interpretation of the mode of production would move us away from the method of understanding the concrete social relations that capitalism demands to exist materially.

Capitalism, to be born and exist, historically needed to be gendered and racialised, depending on these conditions to reproduce. Indeed, gender polarity – the idea that there are two genders that are complementary opposites – is a recent colonial invention. In the 19th century, an argument used by the European bourgeoisie to justify the colonisation of African territories was the idea that societies where there was not a great contrast between male and female were not civilised and needed interven-

tion (Schuller, 2017). Thus, the imposition of the genderfication processes was closely related to the discourse of "scientific" racism and the materiality of imperialism and the expansion of capital.

In pre-capitalist societies there were not necessarily gendered processes as we know them today. The traditional Yoruba family in Nigeria is described as non-gendered: "It is non-gendered because kin roles and categories are not differentiated by gender. So significantly, power centres within the family are diffuse and not gender specified" ((Oyěwùmí,, 2004: 6).

In the same sense, we can mention the Iroquois who have an egalitarian hunter-gatherer system without distinction into gender roles, as well as the Khasi of India or "the Minangkabau of Sumatra, the Ngada of Flores Island or the Na (also called Mosuo) of China, this people who, undoubtedly unique in the world, do not socially recognise marriage or paternity" (Darmangeat, 2017: 23).

Likewise, racism also needs to be historicised and understood in its intrinsic relationship with the determinations of the commodity form, since it is something relatively recent, as Breitman (1954, 45) exposes:

> *M. F. Ashley Montagu, discussing the "modern concept of 'race,'" says: "Neither in the ancient world nor in the world extending to the latter part of the eighteenth century was there any corresponding notion [of racism]. A study of humankind's cultures and literatures, both ancient and recent, shows us that the notion of races naturally or biologically different from one another, both mentally and physically, is an idea that did not emerge until the late eighteenth century, or thereabouts, of the French Revolution." (Man's Most Dangerous Myth: The Fallacy of Race.) [...] Whichever century is chosen, the point is: racial prejudice against the Negro arose to justify and preserve the system of slave labor that operated according to the interests of capitalism in pre-industrial stages, and remained slightly modified by industrial capitalism after slavery became an obstacle to the further development of capitalism and was abolished. Few things in the world are more marked with the characteristics of capitalism. [...] Prejudice against the Negro grew out of the needs of capitalism, it is a product of capitalism, it belongs to capitalism, and it will die when capitalism dies.*

In this context, the exploitation of reproductive work does not affect all women in the same way, since the capitalist mode of production is sustained by inequalities and responsibility for domestic work falls largely on working class women, especially black, indigenous, poor women and women from countries in the Global South, so that racial discrimination is closely related to capitalism, being essential to expand the possibilities of exploitation of the workforce (Gorender, 2000: 69), including reproductive work. In this sense, the model of "femininity" that would be constructed and imposed on their bodies was also racialised:

> *The social role of racialised gender has dimensions in its history that are quite different from the characteristics of docility and fragility attributed to white women. For example, for black women in Brazil, insertion into the job market differs from the direct translation of female emancipation. If, during the enslaved period, activities aimed at black women imposed great physical effort, such as building houses, harvesting crops on plantations, and carrying heavy loads, nowadays this is updated in the occupation of precarious jobs, materialised in informal work, outsourcing and domestic employment. Incarceration seeks to shape incarcerated women into the racialised profile of femininity, whose stigma deepens the obstacles to achieving better exercise, stability, reduced working hours, labour benefits, pushing them towards even more intense economic marginalisation, and [becoming] more controllable. (Silva, 2018: 772)*

In the Brazilian context, most of the domestic work is carried out by black women, according to data from DIEESE (2013: 6-12), and between 2004 and 2011, the proportion in domestic services categorised "No country" grew from 56.9% to 61.0%, but among non-black women this rate was minor, at 4.1%. Thus many of these women are over-responsible for domestic work, carrying it out within their own family while providing services to other families. By carrying out the service in other families' homes, there is a "liberation" of middle-class women to work in the productive sphere, in addition to women who already work double and triple shifts inside and outside the home.
It is therefore important to understand how the social forms through which we identify gender and race are historical and related to the mode of production, which is necessary to point to the specificities of these oppressions in the capitalist mode of production instead of understanding them as trans-historical.

This also concerns the LGBTQIAP+ agenda, considering that it is "exclusively under capitalism people were categorised in terms of sexual identities based on specialisation of desire" (Sears, 2016: 141), so that the super specialisation of work linked to the structure of the modern subject consolidates this logic of identities related to sexuality, which would not make sense as a categorisation in other modes of production.

In this sense, regarding the legal form, it is relevant to point out how the constitution of subjects of rights in the capitalist mode of production is also related to the constitution of identities and sexualities as such, since:

> *capitalism is unique among class societies in that members of the working class own their own bodies, creating the basis for the conceptualisation and practice of sexuality grounded in embodied autonomy. Yet that freedom is immediately paired with dispossession, "freedom" from control of the key productive resources expropriated by members of the capitalist class. People develop sexual identities and practices in the context of hierarchies of dispossession that alienate them from effective control over their bodies and lives. (Sears, 2016: 151)*

Therefore, by subsuming identities through fetishisation and through the individualisation that is accompanied by the subject of rights, neoliberal capitalism "seeks to transform queer and LGBT subcultures into merchandise; this does not change the fact that these cultures and the policies that they derive from them or that inform them always have a destabilising function for capitalism" (Rebucini, 2019, 121). In this sense, the legal form and the subject of rights interpellate the subjects as such, to enable recurring material practices that allow concrete behaviours concerning gender and sexuality formats.

Still, the organisation of affective and patrimonial relationships

is also specific and historically located, since, although "monogamy" as a form of social and affective relationship can be found in other pre-capitalist societies such as the South Slavs, it is a novelty in this mode of production in terms of being a matrimonial, contractual and exclusive cohabitation model (Álvares, 2019: 134). Engels (1984 [1884]) pointed to the issue of monogamy as a private property mapping strategy to locate direct descendants and heirs, arguing that the origins of the family, private property and the state were intimately interconnected.

I thus point to the need to historically locate the relations of oppression in their specificities to understand how they are linked to the capitalist mode of production and, therefore, to the overdetermination of the commodity form. If we are precisely analysing a mode of production in its complexity and dynamics, we are not dealing with a collection of random and individual events or with the unique performance of a specific capitalist, but with broad relations of production based on the exploitation of an entire class by another and based on the metamorphosis of commodities into money and the production of surplus value in the production process.

In view of this, capital cannot depend on eventual trips of workers to their jobs but depends on regularity in the extraction of surplus value and in the sale of labour power. To ensure that a worker who showed up at work today returns the next day, capital demands specific socio-biological needs, such as being fed, having slept, wearing clean clothes, being in a minimum psychological condition to work and so on. This involves an invisible job of preparing your food, making your bed, washing your clothes, absorbing what distressed you throughout the day, and so on. This work, made invisible, is called reproductive work in Social Reproduction Theory – everything that guarantees the daily and generational replacement of the workforce in conditions of exploitation. As this work is historically constituted as the responsibility of women, especially black, Latino, and LGBTQIAP+ women and women from the Global South, there is a direct relationship between gender oppression and the exploitation of reproductive work done by this prominent portion of the working class.

That is why it is important to approach this debate from the centrality of work, especially reproductive work, linked to processes of gendering and racialisation that are historical. Thus, the Social Reproduction Theory provides us with bases to understand the origin of women's oppression, as well as the need for capital to produce this specific system of oppression and exploitation. Based on authors such as Lisa Vogel (2022 [1983]), we began to understand the relationship between reproductive work at home and the production of goods outside, proposing a unitary theory of this analysis.

The division between reproductive work inside the home and productive work outside the home, based on gender roles, is something quite recent in history. This division comes from capitalism's requirement to have a portion of the working class that serves to ensure that the workforce is placed into better conditions of exploitation at a time when relative surplus value was becoming predominant, and it would be in the interests of capital that the working class survived longer, to guarantee new possibilities for exploitation.

There was a process of creation of so-called housewives, from "popular education to teach factory workers the skills needed for housework" (Federici, 2021: 157), while a model of maternal sacredness was being shaped and women were punished for "maternal negligence", in addition to the progressive degradation of the image of so-called prostitutes. At that moment, the organisation of the family was remodelled to meet the private reproduction needs of the workforce on this scale.

With this, gender roles that articulated with racist stereotypes were strategically constructed in the Global North and South to allow the exploitation of the reproductive work of working-class women and, with it, the daily and generational replacement of the workforce. To this end, the legal form and the family form will be articulated – given the overdetermination of the commodity form – as social relations proper to this historical moment.

THE LEGAL FORM AND ITS RELATION TO THE EXPLOITATION OF REPRODUCTIVE WORK

Among feminists who start from Social Reproduction Theory to understand the oppression of women in capitalism, there are divergences regarding how this process is thought to take place. Silvia Federici (2019 [1972]) joins the Wages for Housework movement, as well as Selma James and Mariarosa Dalla Costa, to argue that the demand for a salary for reproductive work is a fundamental strategy, since the great difference between this work and other work is that it is free work, which would explain the origin of women's oppression.

However, based on the Marxist critique of law, we know that all jobs, including those that are salaried, have a free part, since the salary is not the equivalent of the time worked, considering that there is a mystified expropriation of surplus value in the productive process which does not appear in the contractual work relationship, where the service is codified as fully paid. Therefore the difference is not in the full payment for the work, but in the fact that it is not mediated by the logic of the employment contract.

Even though the Wages for Housework manifesto states that the problem lies in the lack of a contract and not exactly in the absence of remuneration, focusing on how the legal arena operates in a specific way can help us understand the need for family formation, alongside contractual operation. Even though neoliberalism updated the traditional nuclear family model, allowing the formation of same-sex families, the growth of single-parent families and a decrease in marriages alongside an increase in stable unions, the contractual logic of the obligation to reproduce the strength for work remains intact.

Angela Davis (2016 [1981]), however, argues that since the beginning of capitalism black women have been paid for domestic work and this did not solve the problem of the precariousness of reproductive work and gender oppression:

> *The experiences of another group of women reveal the problematic nature of the "remuneration for domestic tasks" strategy. Cleaners, maids, housekeepers – these are the wom-*

> *en who know better than anyone what it means to be paid for housework. [...] Remuneration cannot compensate for their situation analogous to slavery. [...]*
> *In the United States, women from ethnic minorities – especially black women – have been paid for housework for countless decades. In 1910, when more than half of all black women worked outside the home, a third of them were employed as paid domestic workers. In 1920 more than half were domestic servants, and by 1930 the proportion had grown to three in five.*

However, it seems that these authors are dealing with different areas of reproductive work. By saying that domestic work is free, Silvia Federici is analysing the reproductive work carried out within the family, whereas Angela Davis, when dealing with paid domestic work, is necessarily observing work outside the family. Therefore the same reproductive work of washing the dishes, taking care of children or the elderly, cooking, getting pregnant and giving birth to a baby, and so on may or may not be salaried work, mediated or not by the employment contract.

Thus it is not the nature of the work that determines whether it will be paid for, but who does it and for whom. When a person washes her own dishes, a mother takes care of her own children or cleans her own house, she will not be paid for that, but if she hires a person from outside the family to do it, that person will be paid, otherwise it would be legally considered work analogous to slavery. The question is: why, when this work is done by the family, is it not necessarily mediated by the employment contract?

To answer this, we need to return to Marx (1996 [1867]: 202-103), who proposes the contract as a distinctive feature of capitalism in relation to other modes of production. If in feudalism the peasant knew exactly the portion of his or her production that was intended for himself or herself and the portion that would be forwarded to the feudal lord, while in colonial slavery, all work appeared as unpaid work, in capitalism, , the work seems to be paid in full because of the mystification of the employment contract, and therefore, workers seem to work for themselves as a free expression of will:

> *But, in reality, it makes no difference to a person working three days a week for himself, on his own land, and another three days for free on the master's land, as working daily in the factory, or in the workshop, six hours for himself and six hours for others. your boss; even if in this case the paid and the unpaid part of the work appear inseparably confused, and the character of the whole transaction is completely disguised by the interference of a contract and the payment received. at the end of the week. In the first case, unpaid work is visibly taken away by force; in the second, it seems willingly given. Here's the only difference (Marx, 1996: 102-103, my emphasis).*

Thus, the turn that capitalism brings from the legal form is precisely to make it the case that "in a strictly legal logic, the work itself is not fruitful" (Edelman, 2016 [1978]: 31), hiding the surplus value in the equation of salary with work. Thereby it seems that workers work to support themselves, and not to increase a boss's profits. In this sense, reproductive work cannot appear as work that favours capital, but as work that favours the worker herself, otherwise expropriation in the production process becomes evident. Thus, the family legal organisation will be fundamental to structure this issue.

In colonial slavery in Brazil, when an enslaved person became pregnant, the pregnancy was treated as reproductive work that favoured the slave owner, as he was increasing his possessions with more slave labour (Machado, 2018: 355-356), based on the logic of the partum sequitur ventrem [birth follows the womb], that the child inherits the condition of the mother. In this sense, there was no talk of "motherhood" for enslaved women, or "maternal feelings" or "family structure" in this period, since pregnancy was not seen as work for themselves, but for the slave owner.

In capitalism, all the work from pregnancy to child care cannot appear as work that generates fruits for capital, so it is reorganised to appear as "maternal duty", "affection" and the "own will of the family", in order to show this work as work for themselves, not to show that the reproduction of the workforce serves capital and that there is, therefore, more work in this context. There was thus a whole violent and racist historical process of constitution the logic of "maternal sacredness", imposing on women that they should fulfil this role of social reproduction under penalty of being medicated and violated in the logic of legal and hygienist medicine of the 19th century.
Also – as the salary is not, in reality, remuneration for the work done, but remuneration for the reproduction of the workforce, so that the working class has access to goods that will enable them to go back to work the next day – if there was any remuneration for the internal reproductive work of the family that, in theory, is working for itself, this would mean a duplication in remuneration for reproduction of the workforce, which would also unbalance the logic of equivalence that sustains the whole exchange of goods in the production mode.

Therefore, the law had to deal differently with the work done inside and outside the family, composing the family as a unit of production and consumption that works to maintain itself and in which its internal works are not mediated by the employment contract, using affection as a marker of what would and what would not be understood as "work".

For this reason, family law will have a substantially different operating logic from Brazilian labour law. First, if labour law starts from the idea of the primacy of reality, so that concrete facts are prioritised to the detriment of what is written in the contract, in family law, judicial or notarial declarations are required for recognition of family relationships such as maternity, paternity, marriage or filiation, in addition to publicising these relationships. Second, if labour law provides that work in exchange for housing and food is a relationship analogous to slavery, family law understands that a woman can perform domestic work in her home "in exchange" for housing and food "naturally". Third, if labour law is based on a logic of subordination and onerousness, family law is based on the idea of "pursuit of happiness", based on the constitution of the eudemonistic family (Torres and Haug, 2022) and the principle of affectivity. Finally, if labour law proposes monthly remuneration as equivalent to the time worked, family law provides for property and succession links, uncharacterised by any salary nature.

Thus the differentiation of family relations from labour relations

that the law brings, in addition to the specificity of the way in which it organises these family relations, is a necessary distinction from the very functioning of capitalism to mischaracterise labour relations based on affective ties. This does not mean that affection does not actually exist in contemporary families, but that this trait is used to misunderstand the internal reproductive work the family as properly a job.

It is worth highlighting that the contractual logic placed on the family form will not only appear in cases where there is a formal celebration of marriage, since, recalling Marx (1996 [1867]: 209), "this legal relationship, whose form is the contract, whether legally developed or not, ... is a relationship of will, in which the economic relationship is reflected". Even when not legally developed in the literal nature of a marriage event, the contract form is socially imprinted. The marriage contract does not exist just to impose a family model, especially because it does not do so perfectly, as single-parent families today in Brazil are not exceptional (and this is not an accident along the way, but something imposed, by way of production, also as a work overload for working women), but the contract is central to hiding gender inequalities and to the exploitation of unpaid reproductive work that is mischaracterised as work within the family itself.

Furthermore, unlike the employment contract, the marriage contract is one of exclusivity in opposition to all others, imposing that a person can only have that specific type of relationship (of affection and property ties) with their spouse and, if they have relationships with other people outside of marriage, this does not generate legal effects. This exclusivity reflects the very logic of the property of alienating assets in opposition to others. This does not mean that there is no actual affection and love between the parties in marital relations, just that this issue appears as a distinctive demarcation of work within from work outside the family, in addition to marking whether the same work will be paid or not by the logic of the employment contract – work which was not configured in this way before the capitalist mode of production.

CONCLUSION

I started from the contributions of both the Marxist critique of law and the Social Reproduction Theory to understand how the law today is responsible for organising the form of exploitation of reproductive work and, therefore, the oppression of women, especially black, Latino and LGBTQIAP+ women, of the working class under capitalism.

By proposing the family as a legally organised unit based on bonds of obligations, duties and rights, in addition to mapping successors and equity distribution, the law proposes that these bonds would be different from other social relationships because they are linked to the issue of affectivity, using affection as a distinctive marker to mischaracterise the internal work of the family as work.

Thus, intrafamily reproductive work is not mediated by the logic of the work contract and will not be considered equivalent to a salary, not appearing as abstract work that is equalised and can be exchanged for other work in the form of the commodity, appearing as concrete work for oneself. It is important for this work to appear to be for itself and to leave the logic of the abstraction of work so that it seems that the worker is reproducing his or her life for the sake of self-interest and manifesting his or her own will, without reproductive work being seen as something that guarantees the accumulation of capital.

As a result, the reorganisation of the family by capital went through a historic and violent process of designing maternal sacredness, family love and the eudemonistic family that "seeks married life as a path to happiness", to make women of the social class responsible for the reproduction of her own work force and that of her family members, without being remunerated under a work contract for that purpose.

Even when these tasks are transferred to someone outside the family and these jobs are contracted, it is still primarily women who perform them, and in a very precarious way, as is the case with domestic servants or women hired by large cleaning service companies.

By standardising, in legal terms, the category of family, it is proposed that all families are equal before the law, even though working families and bourgeois families fulfil different functions for capital. While working-class families are held accountable as private centres that guarantee the daily and generational replenishment of the workforce in exploitative conditions, bourgeois families fulfil the function of guaranteeing the maintenance of capital possessions among their descendants, without this capital being dissolved in the state, maintaining private property within the same families over generations.

From this, the legal organisation of the family understanding the family as a specific social form of this mode of production is also a mechanism for the reproduction of class relations and social classes across generations. The legal form, therefore, essential for the mystification of class relations in capitalism, is linked to the family form as a strategy to guarantee the daily and generational reproduction of the workforce, which is structured according to gender roles and racist stereotypes that are constitutive of this mode of production.

Only acting as a class makes it possible to curb the meanings of legalisation and the subordination of the working class to the ideological apparatuses of the state (Althusser, 1996 [1971]) such as the law. In the same way, class solidarity and attention to making women responsible for reproductive work allows for action that goes beyond liberal feminism and, at the same time, goes beyond family morality, which is even what prevents strikes at work. In the intrafamilial reproductive system, a wife failing to cook food for her husband is treated as a matter of negligence and not as a political action.

Mischaracterising work within the family as a job hinders the organisation of strikes in this area and the solidarity of strikes by so-called "housewives" with other, productive sectors. Therefore, analysing domestic work and productive work outside the home in a unitary way, as different stages of the same process that involves the exploitation of one class by the other, is fundamental to understanding that the true struggle of women for emancipation is necessarily a struggle against capital ■

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Geert Van Goethem

On the wings of a bird: The anti-colonial struggle in Aden from the perspective of the Arab women's movement, 1955-1967

ABSTRACT

Although the former British crown colony of Aden, as part of Yemen, is today involved in one of the most hopeless armed conflicts, during decolonisation and the Cold War it was one of the most coveted and disputed areas between East and West. Aden was both geopolitically and economically a central link in the British empire. Yet, in less than a decade, a national liberation struggle succeeded in driving out the British. This liberation struggle was also, to a significant extent, a class conflict in which a strong local trade union movement confronted the colonial authorities. That story is well known. Less well known, and even ignored, is the importance of the local women's movement in this struggle. In this contribution, I want to examine the role of the Aden women's movement within the context of Aden's social and national liberation struggles and, in particular, look at how they developed their activism, what their repertoire was and what resources they managed to mobilize. The gender perspective broadens our view of this anti-colonial movement and brings into the spotlight actors who have received little attention until now.

KEYWORDS

Yemen
Decolonisation
Racism/colonialism
Trade unions/internationalism Islamic
Feminism/women's activism

In the mid-1950s, the bipolar world of the Cold War took on an added dimension with the development of a non-alliance movement, of which Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser was one of the leading personalities. Driven by Nasser, a strong upsurge of Arab nationalism emerged in the Middle East, which, along with political and military actions against Israel and support for anti-colonial movements in the region, put the Western camp on the defensive.[1]

Within this Western camp, the UK had major interests in this region. Although the British empire was also crumbling here, it remained committed to a few strategic positions.[2] One of these was Aden, a small area, not much bigger than a town, on the southernmost tip of the Arabian Peninsula.

Between 1955 and 1967, Aden was in the throes of a national liberation struggle which was also a social struggle, and a strong local trade union movement was at its forefront. This anti-colonial struggle is known and has received quite a bit of attention, among labour historians as well. Much less known, and mostly totally ignored, is the importance of the women's movement. This is difficult to understand because the sources[3] are there for the taking, so to speak.

In this contribution I will situate the Aden women's movement in the context of the broader anti-colonial and social struggles, and ask how they were able to act autonomously, notwithstanding the economic, cultural and religious constraints that prevailed in this place and time.

It is possible to develop multiple perspectives here, but I limit myself to class and gender. I look at gender as an independent counter-power that women activists were able to mobilise, hence broadening the national liberation struggle in a way that would not have been possible from a purely class perspective. Gender, then, was an empowering factor in a particularly unfavourable context, both politically and culturally. Aden's women's movement had to develop agency for itself, taking into account multiple boundaries and handicaps. Public expressions of feminism were not obvious. Many women were illiterate; few had economic independence, and paid employment was hardly available. Yet these women found space for their activism. It is therefore interesting to look at how they developed their activism, what their repertoire was and what resources they managed to mobilise.

The focus on the women's movement also allows us to look more closely at the often ignored importance of local ideology and the broader cultural factors that underlay the discontent with the colonial system. Religion was an important element in this, but also language; the inferior position of Arabic in administration and education was a source of shared frustration. The feminism of Aden's women's movement can thus be situated both within Islam[4] – equal rights for men and women – and nationalism. The multi-dimensional activism we see developing here thus transcends the classical narrative of the anti-colonial liberation struggle.

I start this contribution with a brief description of colonial Aden, after which I discuss the development of a militant trade union movement that was fully engaged in the national liberation struggle. Next, I turn my attention to the local women's movement, its emergence and development, their participation in the broader anti-colonial struggle and their own specific input. And finally, I take a closer look at the guiding force behind this movement, the woman whom the British hated so much that they wanted to banish her from the colony, Radhia Ihsan.

THE BARREN ROCKS OF ADEN

Aden is located on the southernmost point of the Arabian Peninsula. You could describe it as a Gibraltar on the Red Sea: strategically, but also economically, of exceptional importance not because of raw materials, but because of its port, which, in the mid-1950s, grew into one of the world's most important petroleum ports in just a few years. That rapid expansion had come after Iran nationalised its British-controlled oil industry in 1952. This forced the Anglo-Iranian Oil company, which changed its name to British Petroleum (BP) in 1954, to pack up, and it chose Aden as its new regional centre.

This seemed a logical choice. Aden had been a British crown colony since 1936. The administration as a whole was in British hands, headed by a governor who received his instructions directly from London. It was surrounded by a number of sultanates and imamates, led by traditional dynasties. These had the status of British protectorates and thus enjoyed a degree of self-government. Aden – the city and its wider surroundings – together with those protectorates formed an area known to this day as South Yemen. North Yemen, the other part of present-day Yemen, with Sana'a as its capital, had already seceded from the Ottoman Empire in 1918 and was independent. So Aden was small, controllable, fairly isolated and had a port that provided access to the world's oceans. But there was a problem. Aden was also quite sparsely populated, in any case, totally insufficiently for the development and operation of a port and a large-scale industrial complex. The solution was immigration. Massive labour imports from the north and the protectorates, as well as from India, Italy, Lebanon and Somalia, were supplemented by several thousand expatriates from Britain. In a few years, the population doubled.[5]

The British government's[6] policy was to maintain control of Aden, although towards the end of the 1950s there was a form of limited self-government. In response to what was seen as a growing threat from Arab nationalism, London also decided to constitutionally embed Aden in a federation with the protectorates. This put political relations in the colony on edge, upon which the British pursued a repressive and authoritarian policy that cracked down on organisations and individuals who opposed the colonial regime. The lack of institutional

1 Stephen Blackwell. Pursuing Nasser: The Macmillan government and the management of British policy towards the Middle East Cold War, 1957–63. Cold War History (4)3, 2004, pp. 85-104,
2 Toby Matthiesen, Red Arabia. anti-colonialism, the Cold War, and the long sixties in the Gulf States. In: The Routledge Handbook of the Global Sixties. London: Routledge, 2018, pp. 94-103.
3 Indian Office Records (British Library, London), Foreign Office and Colonial Office Records, National Archives, Kew.
4 Margot Badran & Miriam Cooke (eds.). Opening the Gates: An Anthology of Arab Feminist Writing. Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2004.
5 Aden had about 58 000 inhabitants in 1946 and by 1955, the population had risen to 138 000.
6 Between 1955 and 1964, there was a Conservative government, which was succeeded by a Labour cabinet led by Harold Wilson in October 1964.

perspective and the harsh colonial rule, as well as the economic exploitation of a rapidly growing working mass, increased social tensions that spontaneously manifested themselves in the formation of trade unions, which would take the lead in the social and national struggle from 1956 onwards.

TRADE UNIONS IN THE FRONT LINE

Even in recent publications on the liberation struggle in Aden, one can read that, given "the British determination to cling on, a strong countervailing force was required to secure their removal: this force was Arab nationalism".[7] When one sees things from this perspective, like this author, one almost automatically concludes that the trade unions exploited the social struggle for the sake of their nationalist objectives. This was exactly the position of the British colonial authorities as well. The question is whether this does not short-change other countervailing forces, such as class, gender and even religion.

It is undeniable that the lack of perspective in a speech by the undersecretary of state for the colonies, on a visit in 1956, was one of the triggers for a first major strike wave, that started on 3 March and lasted almost six months. In all, no fewer than 72 strikes would break out during that period involving a total of some 35 000 workers. The governor, and with him the colonial administration, were surprised by the presence on the ground of a number of unions that immediately took charge of the struggle. The rapid industrial expansion, accompanied by massive labour immigration, gave rise to the spontaneous establishment of trade unions.[8] Those unions were strong in a number of key companies in the petroleum sector and at the port, and at the time had a limited but militant membership of about 4000. During the years that followed, workers in just about all sectors would unite and a number of business unions merged into industry unions. The number of union members rose to more than 20 000. The pattern of development of this trade union movement thus showed strong similarities with that of other industrialised areas, culminating in the creation of a national umbrella, the Aden Trades Union Congress (ATUC). The leader of the ATUC was Abdullah Al-Asnag[9], who quickly became one of the most charismatic figures of the local resistance to the British. Both in name and structure, the Aden trade union movement was similar to the British one, with whom good relations were also initially maintained.

But the colonial administration saw these unions as vehicles for Arab nationalism and suspected that they were funded from Moscow or Cairo. Indeed, it cannot be denied that there was a certain simultaneity of social actions in Aden with developments in the Middle East such as the Suez crisis, that there was a very strong sympathy for Nasser, and that the Egyptian regime's propaganda channel, Radio Cairo, was busily listened to and commented on in the city's working-class neighbourhoods. The British saw this too, of course, and concluded that the social struggles in Aden were fuelled by Egypt because it could not afford a second military front besides Israel. Therefore, according to an analysis of the British colonial administration in Aden, Nasser resorted to what was described as subversion: "Incitement of local nationalists, through radio, press and agents, to the point where they clash with local authority and their movement can be represented as a 'struggle' that calls for outside support."[10]

From this tunnel vision, any action by the trade union movement that was not limited to the purely industrial was branded as subversion. The response of the colonial administration was primarily repressive, but in addition, a strategy was developed to take the political sting out of the social struggle while keeping the Aden trade unions in the Western camp. For both, cooperation was sought from both British and international trade union organisations. In his secret note after the 1956 strikes, Governor Hickinbotham stated that local union leaders were "inexperienced and immature", and "what unions need above all now is skilled advice, guidance and training".[11] The British TUC was asked to send a consultant to Aden, which they actually did, while the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), the international umbrella of non-communist unions, also sent a mission to Aden. Also, the International Federation of Petroleum and Chemical Workers (IFPCW), an American-led and funded international trade secretariat that was fully engaged in the anti-communist crusade of the US trade union movement, sent delegates and money. Aden thus became a front in the global struggle between East and West, and the world of labour was one of the most contested front lines in that struggle.

AN INDUSTRIAL AGENDA?

On the ground, however, this was not the first concern of union members and leadership. The situation of workers in Aden was precarious for several reasons. There were not only the low wages and dangerous working conditions that regularly caused deaths on the shop floor. There was also, especially for the mass of low-skilled migrants from the protectorates and the north, hardly any housing. These mostly single men slept in open-air hotels – a mattress between some half-walls – and were effectively disenfranchised. Dismissal was possible at any time, as was deportation. Indeed, to the British administration, these were aliens with only a limited residence permit that could be revoked at any time, for instance after participating in a demonstration or a strike.

In 1960, after another noisy year of strikes, when the British administration analysed the reasons for those strikes, a very recognisable top five emerged. The number one reason for strikes was wrongful dismissal, which triggered 19 strikes, followed by improvement of working conditions (14 strikes), severance pay (11), reduction of working hours (8) and solidarity with other strikes (7).[12] None reflected an immediate nationalist or political agenda.

There had also been several strikes at BP in 1959 and the administration suspected that these did have a nationalist underpinning. This suspicion was fuelled by the fact that the BP

7 Spencer Mawby. British policy in Aden and the Protectorates, 1966-1967. Last outpost of a Middle East Empire. London and New York: Routledge, 2005, p.3.
8 John Chalcraft. Migration and popular protest in the Arabian Peninsula and the Gulf in the 1950s and 1960s. International Labor and Working-Class History 79 (Spring), 2011, pp.28-47.
9 Abdullah al-Majid Al-Asnag, (Sana'a 1934 - London 2014). His name is often written as Al-Asnaj in British sources. I choose to use the spelling of his name as on documents signed by him.
10 Memo: Policies of Saudi Arabia, Yemen and Egypt towards Aden colony and protectorate. National Archives (FO371/120528), August 1956.
11 Secret memo, governor Aden to Secretary of State for the Colonies. (British Library IOR/R/20/B/2397), 15 March, 1957.
12 Memo, Review of the industrial relations situation in Aden colony during 1959/1960. (British Library, IOR/R/20/B/2877).

union leadership not only accepted advice from the Americans and the ICFTU, but also sought help in Egypt, confirming the British belief that they were dealing here with Cairo-driven "subversion" against British interests.

In January 1960, a new conflict broke out at the BP refinery that would last ten weeks. At stake was the demand for a pay rise, which was granted, but the union also demanded free electricity and water for BP workers. The latter demand was rejected by BP management. This demand immediately shows how difficult it is to distinguish between the purely industrial and anti-colonial aspects of this social struggle.

The accounts of the police infiltrators who followed the strike closely and were present at the union meetings teach us what was going on the ground. The leader of the union at the BP refinery was Albulla Ali Ubaid, born in Aden in 1930, and employed as a clerk in the planning department of the BP refinery.[13] The British themselves described him as "the most genuine trade unionist in Aden", which did not prevent them from arresting and jailing him after a strike. During the BP strikes of 1959 and 1960, his speech was nevertheless quite nationalistic. He told his members that "the company was exploiting their country and they must prepare for a long strike".[14] He also explained the demand for free electricity and water: "British employees paid nothing for electricity and each one gets 10 000 gallons of free water for their gardens and for washing their dogs." Water and the way the British handled such a scarce and vital supply were symbolic not only of colonial exploitation but also of the colonialist's disdain for the local population. National and social struggles were intertwined and one provided fuel for the other.

"The volatile nature of the Arab"

Racial segregation and discrimination against the local population were mainstays of British colonial rule. The inhabitants of Aden had to conform to a form of racial-ethnic ranking, with British expatriates claiming the most privileges in all areas. This was true in housing, healthcare and education, as well as in terms of status and access exclusively for British to social and cultural amenities. Natives of India, often employed in the colonial administration, followed in the second row, followed by those born in Aden. Adenese individuals and families, if they conformed to the British regime, could enjoy economic benefits and qualify for certain administrative positions. At the very bottom came the mass of immigrants from Arab areas, who provided the cheap labour needed by the industry and were virtually without rights.

This racial outlook also coloured the way the British colonists viewed the phenomenon of trade unions. They saw these unions as tools in the hands of a foreign regime, particularly Egypt, and not as advocacy agencies that stood up for their members. It was the colonial administration's contention that unions pursued a political goal "under the guise of industrial relations". In doing so, they exploited the nationalism of "an emotional and excitable Arab population".[15] For Governor Luce, too, the local trade union movement was "emotional and rather irrational"[16], and political extremists exploited the tensions there. This, combined with "the naturally volatile nature of the Arab", could lead to deterioration in labour relations at any time.[17]

According to British diplomat Kennedy Trevaskis, the union was the surrogate of the tribe for an Arab, and unions for workers who had emigrated from Arab territory performed the same function as the "tribe" they had left, with the union leader fulfilling the role of tribal leader, to be followed unconditionally "not as industrial leaders but as guardians of their social and political security". These organisations were therefore, in his eyes, not real trade unions.[18]

From this superior position, colonial policy aimed to "guide" the Arab population to what they saw as more developed forms of industrial relations, such as prevailed in the motherland where unions, in their view, behaved more responsibly.

For unions, this implied learning how a mature and responsibly operating trade union movement worked in the UK. Both the administration in Whitehall and the colonial authorities therefore sought rapprochement with the British TUC, which indeed sent a delegate to the colony for several months. His intention was to assist the unions whenever there was a labour dispute and advise them in negotiations. On the spot, however, he found little confidence among the leadership of the trade union movement in Aden and concluded that "as a stabiliser I have been of more use to the Government than to the Trade Unions".[19]

The British attempts to keep the ATUC in the Western camp made little impact, insofar as the ATUC also accepted invitations from the communist World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU) and established contacts with a number of national trade union confederations from behind the iron curtain. At the same time, the ATUC also became an active partner of the International Confederation of Arab Trade Unions (ICATU), headquartered in Egypt. These non-Western contacts were viewed with suspicion by the British colonial authorities, who reinforced the belief that the ATUC was a political vehicle driven by foreign opponents.

On the strike front, after a short relatively quiet period, a new trade union offensive had begun in 1959 with 84 strikes, some of which caused major economic damage at the port and British Petroleum. The colonial authorities then took advice from a British expert on industrial relations, who was of the opinion that, given the "immature behaviour" of the unions, strikes should be banned unless a mediation process had been gone through beforehand. This resulted in an ordinance (a local law) that indeed made mediation compulsory.[20] The British administration thus tried to force the unions to

13 File Abdullah Ali Ubaid. British Library (IOR/R/20/B/2877).
14 Report H. Conway, Security Liaison officer, Aden. 7/03/1959. British Library (IOR/R/20/B/2885).
15 Memo, Political aspects of the trade union movement in Aden Colony. British Library (IOR/R/20/B2877) 1956.
16 Letter from Sir William Luce to Sir Vincent Tewson, 14/11/1958. Modern Records Centre, TUC archive, (Mss.292/956.8/5).
17 Ibid.
18 Kennedy Trevaskis. Shades of Amber, A South Arabian episode. London: Hutchinson, 1968., p.155
19 Report of TUC deputy Dalgleish, 28/07/1958. (MRC, TUC archive Mss 292/956.8/5/).
20 Debate in British parliament: Aden (Industrial Relations). UK Parliament Hansard, 22 May 1962. https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/1962-05-22/debates/4086f1ed-69aa-437b-9177-

cooperate with the employers and the local authorities, thereby forcing them into an impossible position. The leader of the British TUC, George Woodcock, realised this and warned Duncan Sandys, the secretary of state for the colonies, that "an ordinance of that kind was bound to drive the unions into politics".[21] But the British government held firm. The intention, according to the governor, was to "monitor and guide" the unions towards what he called "healthy industrial relations". In doing so, he wanted to put an end to what he described as the "irresponsible use of the strike weapon".[22]

As expected, the Adenese unions reacted to the curtailment of their rights and launched a series of one-hour warning strikes, which culminated in a general strike on 15 August, 1960. The night before, a large meeting was held, attended by 5000 people. The British authorities explicitly noted the presence of 200 women at this meeting.

Despite the ordinance, things remained unsettled in the colony during 1961. In a December 1961 strike at the BP refinery, the leader of the union and ten members of its board were arrested and later sentenced, to four months in jail for the leader and six weeks for the others. This led to worldwide protests from both Western-minded and communist union internationals, who raised the issue with the International Labour Organization (ILO).[23] This was a clear escalation in which the British administration deployed "exemplary punishment" as a key element in a military strategy.[24] This punishment included, in addition to imprisonment, corporal punishment and deportation. That the British hand was not exactly soft is proven by the fact that the intelligence service in Aden "resorted to interrogation techniques later suffered by Irish republicans".[25]

The social struggle thus landed in a political phase. The impossibility of organising strikes and the repression toward union leaders led the ATUC to effectively establish a political wing, the Peoples' Socialist Party (PSP), in July 1962.[26] In doing so, the British leadership had achieved what they said they wanted to avoid. The social and political struggles became one and indivisible.

SUFFRAGETTES AND NATIONALISTS

British colonial Aden could be described as a kind of police state, with a highly developed apparatus of repression, restrictive legislation that curtailed basic rights such as free speech, a partisan judiciary and an administration not mandated by the people. Within this, an intelligence service was also active, keeping a close eye on opponents and monitoring developments on the ground through infiltration and snitching.

It is the reports of these services that explicitly mention the presence of a sizeable group of activist women who not only participated in, but in some areas even led, the anti-colonial struggle.

Women's participation in the labour market in Aden was low. In 1955, only ten per cent of adult women worked outside the home.[27] These were women engaged in paid employment under a contractual relationship. In addition, many women were active in the non-formal circuit, as paid or unpaid household help, as employees of small businesses, and in the fairly extensive prostitution network.

Women who performed paid work ended up in a number of sectors, such as administration, care and education, but there was also an underclass of very poorly paid female workers, usually maintenance workers, in the industrial sectors. British sources describe them as "sweepsters". But besides a limited supply of paid labour, there were other factors that made women's participation in the labour market more difficult.

Aden was not only a racially segregated society, but strong gender segregation also prevailed. Purdah[28], which significantly limited women's participation in public and economic life, applied in a number of communities. And there were further obstacles that hindered women's access to the labour market. These had to do with the substandard quality of education for women and the large number of illiterates. For them, only poorly paid and underemployed jobs were available.[29] These additional forms of discrimination that were partly situated within a cultural-religious framework led to an active local women's movement facing a situation that limited their agency on top of colonial realities.

Despite these constraints, a number of women's associations were active in Aden. As early as 1943 there was a women's club, which recruited mainly from the more "emancipated" families with migrant backgrounds and British expatriates.[30] From the early 1950s, a number of women from Aden also started participating themselves, which quite soon created a conflict as these women did not accept the patronage and paternalism of British women. They wished to be able to set their own agenda and respond to the needs of the local population. As a result, in 1956 – after a disagreement over a fund-raising campaign in support of the Arab victims of Port Said[31] – there was a split. The immediate effect of this split was that the more progressive or nationalist women's organisation began to take a more activist stance and also began to manifest itself in the public arena. Led by local women, the club campaigned for women's right to education, and organised debates in which male intellectuals also participated. There were also actions directed against "the veil and headscarf

bf0c94483e22/Aden(IndustrialRelations)

21 Memo, meeting of TUC General Council with Duncan Sandys. 22/10/1962 (MRC, TUC archive Mss 292B/956.8/3).

22 Dispatch from Governor W.H. Luce and Iain Macleod, Secretary of State for the Colonies, 22/04/1960 (BL, IOR/R/20/B/2877).

23 Borivoj Romic, Confederation of Trade Unions of Yugoslavia, to ILO, 6/01/1962 (BL, IOR/R/20/B/2886)

24 Spencer Mawby, op. cit. p.353.

25 Jonathan Bloch and Patrick Fitzgerald. British Intelligence and Covert Action. London: Junction Books, 1984, p.132

26 Spencer Mawby, op. cit. p.79.

27 Susanne Dahlgren. Contesting Realities. The Public Sphere and Morality in Southern Yemen. Syracuse NY: Syracuse University Press, 2010, p.50

28 The term comes from the Persian word parda, meaning curtain. Initially, it referred to the hangings that separated the female quarters in a house from the male quarters. Its meaning includes various ways of separating the female from the male space and ensuring that women do not come into contact with "inappropriate" men. It can also refer to veiled clothing.

29 Susanne Dahlgren, op.cit. p.79

30 Susanne Dahlgren, op. cit. p 114.

31 During a failed invasion of Port Said in November 1956 by a coalition of British and French troops, attempting to liberate the Suez Canal, hundreds of Egyptian soldiers and civilians died.

(hijab)".[32] In 1959, they organised a public demonstration against the hijab in which six women – four unveiled – marched through the streets of Aden, followed by thirty others in cars. A press release was also issued denouncing the "headscarf and hijab as an obstacle to participation in social and political life".[33] Such public action by women was unprecedented and therefore caused a stir.

But the women's organisation also played an active role in growing Arab nationalism and opposition to British colonialism. The British government's support for Israel and increasing Israeli aggression towards the Palestinians was additional grist for the mill of a rapidly developing Arab nationalism in which this women's movement began to participate fully and actively. The women launched a boycott of French and British products and became active in support campaigns for Egypt. When the British governor's wife visited their club, the women dressed in black as a protest against colonial rule. This increasing Arab self-awareness was also reflected in the club's name change when it renamed itself the Arab Women's Society in August 1961, with the motto "one nation, one responsibility".[34]

But this nationalist activism was not shared by all women. Women from families favourable to the British – as a rule women from the more prominent families – continued to be active in their own Aden Association for Women, which would not participate in anti-colonial resistance. By its own admission this club had 470 members, mostly Arab women. There was a board of eleven women, two of whom were of European origin and one of Indian origin. However, they continued to work "to raise the social and cultural standard of women in Aden"[35] and received support from the colonial administration. The secret service assessed them positively (unlike the Arab Women's Society, which was described as "purely political and nationalistic"[36]): "There is nothing of an adverse nature know against this association", although it was added that, with Mahia Nagib, the editor of the monthly women's magazine *Fatat-Shamsan*, they did have a "militant suffragette" on board.[37] This became apparent when Mahia Nagib explicitly called for women's voting rights in connection with local legislative council elections. According to her, women should be allowed to be elected and also hold executive positions in this body because "The Adeni women was in no way less competent than the man".[38] But exactly here was a fundamental difference of opinion with the Arab Women's Society, because for the latter, the legislative council was an instrument in the hands of the British occupier. Together with the trade union movement, the more militant women's organisation therefore called for a boycott of these elections and actively participated in strikes, demonstrations and protests to support this boycott. Still, the image remains of a very active and empowered, though divided, Aden women's movement that fought on more than one front and managed to mobilise a significant group of women.

A foolish woman

Arab Women's Society's anti-British actions brought them into the sights of British intelligence, which began to monitor their doings. In doing so, they particularly targeted the organisation's chairwoman, Radhia Ihsanullah.

Radhia Ihsanullah Umar was of Indian origin, born in 1933 in Jedda and immigrated to Aden with her family at the age of five. Her father had been born in Punjab in 1884 and owned the Ihsan hotel in Crater, the central district of Aden. So the family clearly belonged to the upper middle class, and Radhia received a good education. She would later teach Islamic law[39] but it is not clear what was her initial formation.

Ihsanullah first appeared on the British radar in 1956 when she collected for the "Martyrs of Port Said". In the years that followed, Radhia Ihsanullah fully committed herself to the anti-colonial struggle. According to the British, she was "always in [the] forefront praising Arab nationalism and denouncing any anti-Arab British acts", making her "Aden's most prominent female nationalist".[40] The head of the British police in Aden described her as "a well-known leading agitator, especially among students in Aden, and her influence among her followers is surprisingly strong".[41] Her activities were not limited to the women's movement; she also became a prominent member of the trade union and worked as a journalist for the trade union magazine *Al Amil* (*The Worker*). The members of the union for miscellaneous industries elected her assistant treasurer, and she also became a member of the executive committee of both the ATUC and the party, the PSP. This made her the only woman on these boards and the only woman to hold such prominent positions.

But while they had to acknowledge that she was influential, the British could not appreciate her commitment at all and just about everything she did or said was looked at from a negative point of view. The British stated that she "regrets not being pure Arab, but through her activities [she] hopes to win popularity with Arabs". This was the case, for instance, when she changed her name from Ihsanullah to Ihsan. According to the intelligence chief, she did this "to make it appear that she is Arab, not Indo-Arab, which she actually is".[42] Another explanation is also possible. Indeed, Ihsan refers to one of the three basic tenets of Islam: "virtue through constant attention to and awareness of God", so it could well be that by changing her name she was aiming to reinforce her Muslim identity.

Her actions were also negatively framed. When the Arab Women's Club clashed with the British woman in charge of the socio-cultural centre, who prohibited certain activities, it was

32 Amel Nejib al-Ashtal. A long, quiet, and steady struggle: the women's movement in Yemen. In: Mapping Arab Women's Movements. A Century of Transformations from Within. Cairo and New York:The American University in Cairo Press, 2012, p.203.

33 Amel Nejib al-Ashtal, op. cit. p.203.

34 Amel Nejib al-Ashtal, op. cit. p.204.

35 Report by K.G.F. Irwing, head special branch, 19/12/1962 (BL, IOR/R/20/B/2813).

36 Memo of the Director of Security, 12/01/1963 (BL, IOR/R/20/B/2813).

37 Report by Irwing, op. cit.

38 The Recorder,7 January, 1962.

39 Shafika Al-Gumaee. Women and Politics in Yemen. Unpublished dissertation, San Diego University, 2012, p.33.

40 H. Conway. Memo 15/08/1960 (BL, IOR/R/20/B/2877).

41 File Radhia Ihsanullah 'Umar (BL, IOR/R/20/D/289).

42 H. Conway 1960, op. cit.

described as a "cattish attack" by "an unbalanced woman of Indian origin who has lately been trying to set herself up as a leader of Arab nationalism among the women of Aden". "A foolish woman", the education department chief wrote; "she should not be taken at all seriously".[43]

Fighting for the future.

That picture was not confirmed in the reports of informants who noted Radhia Ihsan's words at her numerous public appearances. The language was obviously harsh and militant, but also laced with poetry and references to Arabic literature. The central line, in many of her speeches, was that of unity; the common struggle of men and women for the liberation of their country. The image she used here was that of a bird, which also needs two wings to fly.

At a mass meeting on 13 August 1960, attended by at least 3500 people, Radhia Ihsan addressed striking workers and led a group of 150 women. She denounced the low standard of living of working-class women – "They toil for handfuls of food and a frock to wear" – and blamed the government and companies for not wanting to raise the living standards of the workers. Therefore, she said, "Go on with your strike. March on, blessed by God. We are supporting you, in every house you will find refuge and care.... We wish to co-operate with you and liberate this land".[44]

A few years later, in May 1963, at another mass union demonstration, she quoted Egyptian poet and politician Mahmoud Sami el-Baroudi, a great name in Arabic literature as well as one of the iconic fighters of British colonialism. Clearly, Radhia Ihsan saw the social and national struggle as a whole, and in doing so, she was on the same track as the trade unions, as articulated by Nassir Sallami of the education union: "Behind the capitalists stands the colonialists who do not want to improve our standard of life. Therefore it is colonialism that we must fight first".[45]

But this anti-colonial struggle was not limited to the economic sphere as far as the Aden women's movement was concerned; for them it went much wider. "We are fighting for the future of a new generation", declared Radhia Ihsan at a February 1962 meeting of the Arab Women's Club attended by 120 women, at which the substandard quality of education was denounced.[46] Radhia Ihsan and her fellow supporters therefore fully supported the student strikes that added a new dimension to the anti-colonial struggle from early 1962.

The protests had started in the girls' college, part of the British-led public education system. The girls protested against their poor education and inferior diploma and were supported in this by the women's movement. The protest movement spread to other schools, including the college for boys, and during demonstrations in the streets of Aden, clashes with the police occurred. The student protests had a serious impact on public life in the city, and the authorities were forced to close the schools. In addition to the students themselves, parents were also involved, of course, and it was impossible for the authorities to ban such strikes with legislation. The only other options were repression and the closure of the schools, which did not silence the protest but rather escalated it.

The school strikes also put a finger on the wound of the colonial system – not only the fact that both the curriculum and leadership were in British hands locally, but also the inequality between the different ethnic groups were denounced. Gender inequality was another thorn in the side. A pamphlet distributed by the Arab Women's Society stressed that education was a matter for every citizen of Aden because it was about "the future of coming generations on whom rests the task of building the homeland", therefore demanding that "all Girls schools to be run of the same syllabus as the Boys schools".[47] The discriminatory treatment of the local Arab population and certainly the inferior position of Arabic as a language reinforced the anti-British sentiments with which these school strikes too became a part of the national liberation struggle, just as Radhia Ihsan and her followers had wanted.

Radhia Ihsan's house became the command centre from where the actions were coordinated by a mixed committee of girl and boy students. This too was unseen. The student protest continued for about eight months and, with the women's movement as a link, would realise a broadening of social and political resistance.

The school protests also give us insight into the means of action used by the women's movement. Besides strikes and demonstrations, there was much focus on forms of peaceful resistance that could reach a wide audience. To this end, symbolic actions were sometimes carried out, such as putting up black flags or wearing black clothes and black armbands. But one of the most widely used means of action were handwritten pamphlets containing both appeals for support and denunciations of the colonial regime. And in addition, there was the trade union magazine *Al Amil*, which also had a wide circulation. In a sharp May 1962 article in the midst of the school crisis, Radhia Ihsan complained that "the Englishmen always thinks he is right in our country...there always stood in our way (female) foreigners from the State ruling our country and from the Commonwealth who are always obedient to their white masters". Again, the colonial administration's comment was that her tone was "aggressive, unbalanced and hysterical", and they closed with the cynical comment: "I wonder if a holiday in South Africa will do her any good".[48]

UNWANTED

In just a few years, Radhia Ishan had emerged as a central pivot of the national liberation struggle in Aden. She was active as a journalist and a trade union militant, she led the actions of women and students and, in addition, as chairwoman of the Arab Women's Club, she had a broad group of activist supporters. Her influence extended beyond the colony and

43 J. Hartley, director of education to acting chief secretary. 13/03/1960 (BL, IOR/20/B/2813).
44 H. Conway, 1960 op. cit.
45 Police report of general meeting. ATUC, 31/10/1960 (BL, IOR/R/20/B/2867).
46 Confidential report of R Waggit, Special Branch. 5/02/1962 (BL, IOR/R/20/B/2813).
47 Translated from the Arabic pamphlet of the Arab Women's Society. (BL, IOR/R/20/B/3125), 1962.
48 Comment on a translated article. 15/5/1960 (BL, IOR/R/20/B/28132).

she was a well-known figure in the Arab world, adding an international dimension to the national struggle through regular contacts and trips abroad. A brief glance at her diary confirms this. In March 1960 she participated in the Afro-Asian Women's conference in Cairo; in June 1961 she undertook a tour of several Arab countries to recruit financial support for the Women's Club; in September 1961 she participated in a second congress of Afro-Asian Women in Port Said, after which she travelled on to Cairo. From 1962 she was regularly in Sa'naa and Taiz, and in 1963 she went to Moscow for a meeting of the International Women's Federation.

The local authorities were particularly annoyed with her and wanted to get rid of her, so the plan arose to expel her from the colony. The British governor of Aden justified this intention as follows: "She is rabidly anti-British and pro-Egyptian, and loses no opportunity of fomenting disturbances. Her continued residence in Aden is, in my opinion, most undesirable."[49]

Since Radhia Ihsan was not born in Aden, according to the British, she could be denied entry to the colony after a trip abroad. In March 1963, this plan was presented to Duncan Sandys, the British minister for the colonies, and permission was sought, which came promptly: "no objection to the proposed action".[50] A first opportunity arose when Radhia Ihsan attended a United Nations sub-Committee meeting in Sana'a in May 1963. But the plan ultimately fell through because she was already back in Aden while the UN was still in Yemen, and the British did not want to risk that. A second opportunity followed just a month later when she travelled to Moscow. But the issue had apparently got some people in London thinking anyway, because she did not actually have a valid passport for any country, and if she was no longer allowed to enter Aden, then, as a British citizen, she could not be prevented from coming to London. And that was not seen as an option because it was feared she would turn to the British parliament with all the political domestic consequences for the then-Conservative government. And so the proposal was put away for the time, pending a better opportunity.[51]

Radhia Ihsan, no doubt ignorant of the British plans, had not given up her peaceful resistance and, with the Arab Women's Club, opted for a method of action that was difficult for the British to counter: the sit-in, a method of action that had also been used during the student protests. The first major sit-in began on 27 December 1963 at the Asqalani Mosque, and lasted for 24 days. This sit-in mobilised the local Muslim community and led to widespread solidarity with the protesting women. And because the mosque was the venue, the local authorities could not intervene. When, after some concessions from the administration, the action was lifted and it immediately became clear that these promises were not to be kept, a new protest followed in February 1964. This time, the women chose the administrative headquarters of the board as their target. There, of course, the police were able to intervene and after two days, they put an end to the action. Non-violent resistance was nipped in the bud again and again.

TERROR

Although the unions continued to oppose the curtailment of their rights, from mid-1962, a significant new element was added that created a literally explosive situation. According to Governor William Luce, the British wanted to secure their economic and strategic position in the area "for the foreseeable future"' by merging the colony with the surrounding protectorates. This led to negotiations in London that resulted in the creation of the federation of South Yemen. For Aden's anti-British activists, this was unacceptable, not only because it perpetuated British rule, but also because it would make Aden part of an area in which traditional dynastic rulers would still have a lot of influence, while they preferred secular rule as in North Yemen, where the Imam had been expelled.[52] The British also refused to consult the people of Aden on this merger, reinforcing the feeling that everything was decided from above in London. The Aden trade union, which now also had a full-fledged political arm in the PSP, rebelled against this and launched a fierce protest campaign. On 24 September 1962, the PSP/ATUC and the Arab Women's Club organised a large protest demonstration against the merger talks in London. The demonstrators gathered at the Ihsan hotel and then marched in seven processions, one led by women, through the city streets.[53] It was a banned demonstration that ended in a confrontation with the police. The British authorities took advantage of this to declare martial law and imprison the leaders of the anti-British protests. Among them was Radhia Ihsan, who was sentenced to ten weeks' imprisonment, six of which she would serve. After her release, she wrote a razor-sharp article for the Yemeni newspaper *Fatat-ul-Jezirah,* testifying about the shocking prison conditions.[54]

Martial law on top of existing regulations virtually deprived local activists of any possibility of peaceful resistance. Fierce protests against this course of action were immediately staged from Western trade union circles as well as from Egyptian and communist quarters. The protest against the British even reached the United Nations General Assembly, which adopted a resolution on 11 December 1963 demanding the immediate release of the arrested "nationalist leaders and trade unionists" and a halt to all deportations.[55]

But the arrest of the leadership of the movement and the promulgation of martial law also paved the way for the most radical nationalist elements. On 10 December 1963, a bomb attack was carried out against Kennedy Trevaskis, the British High Commissioner of the federation. It left one dead and dozens injured, including Trevaskis. The British responded immediately and harshly, arresting 52 people while more than

49 Telegram from Sir. C. Johnston to Secretary of State for the Colonies. 1/03/1963. National Archives, Foreign Office (FO 371/168620).
50 Ibid.
51 Telegram to Sir C. Johnston. 24/06/1963 (National Archives, FO 371/168620).
52 This led to an indirect conflict between Egypt and Saudi Arabia, which continued to support the ousted Imam, while Egypt supported the new regime.
53 Amel Nejib al-Ashtal. Op. cit. p.204.
54 File, Radhia Ihsanullah Umar (BL, IOR/R/20/D/289).
55 United Nations Digital Library. A/RES/1972, XVIII.

200 others were deported.[56] The entire top leadership of the unions and the PSP were arrested and deported to a prison outside Aden. Among them were Abdullah Al-Asnag and Radhia Ihsan. The authorities acknowledged that the arrests did not immediately mean they suspected those arrested of the attack, but rather that the authorities felt that the "PSP posed a security threat".[57] Once again, these arrests sparked a global outcry. To protest against her detention, Radhia Ihsan went on hunger strike. Women's and student organisations from Europe, the USA, Australia and socialist countries responded by sending protest telegrams to the UK government and the High Commissioner. Her family also protested and publicly expressed concern because of her health, whereupon her sister Zakia was also arrested.[58] After a dramatic call from her family that she was ill and her life was in danger, she was released, although the prison administration claimed that nothing was wrong.[59]

The phase of the gun

The conflict in Aden now really entered an armed phase, with attacks against British troops and local police forces. It was the start of a terror campaign not only against the British, but which also became an internal power struggle for control of a future administration. The violence also reached trade unions and civil society organisations. The National Liberation Fund (NLF), which led the armed struggle, managed to seize power in a number of trade union organisations and also targeted the leadership of the ATUC and the PSP.[60] The NLF, according to Trevaskis, resisted the domination of "non-tribal Adenis", including trade union leaders such as Al-Asnag, who indeed lost control and was forced to flee Aden when the threat increased. On 7 October 1965, Abd Al-Malik Ismail, the leader of the General Petroleum Workers' Union, used radical language on the Voice of the Arabs. According to him, it was now up to the armed struggle: "It is the stage of our destiny, it is the stage of the gun, the bazooka, blood and internment camps".[61]

His words were followed by deeds. In February 1966, Ali Hussein Qadhi, who acted as ATUC chief in Al-Asnag's absence, was murdered in his home. According to British intelligence, this assassination was intended to liquidate the "moderate" leadership of the ATUC, paving the way for the radical elements of the NLF.[62] This campaign of terror within the unions would take the lives of dozens of militants. The NLF also had strong contacts in the Eastern Bloc and took advice from East German officials.[63] In Marxist-Leninist tradition, it tried to make the most of the revolutionary potential of the trade unions. To do this, the "moderate" leaders first had to get out of the way, physically if necessary. By the end of 1966, this process was largely complete and the leadership of the trade union movement was in the hands of the radicals, who immediately severed all ties with the Western unions.[64]

So, with escalating violence, figures such as Al-Asnag and Radhia Ihsan suddenly became moderates. This was now also understood by the British, and talks were initiated with Al-Asnag for a transfer of power, but it was too late. In November 1967, the British had to flee Aden and power passed into the hands of the NLF, which would install an East German-style regime with the Peoples' Republic of Southern Yemen. The new regime in Aden was soon recognised by Egypt, Yemen and Syria, which marked the de facto end of western-minded civil society organisations, as opposition was not tolerated.[65]

Both Abdullah Al-Asnag and Radhia Ishan left Aden. Al-Asnag settled in northern Yemen, where he held key government positions and became foreign minister three times. However, after being involved in an uprising from the south, he was sidelined and had to leave Yemen. He would pass away in London in 2014. Radhia Ihsan left the colony and did not return to Aden until 1992, after the unification of North and South Yemen. She had been in voluntary exile for more than twenty years. On her return to Aden, she gave an interview in which she named one of the central fault lines that fuels the conflict to this day: "There are conservative forces who want to return Yemen to the times of the Imamate. These see a threat in the liberated, educated and self-confident women".[66] She again left Aden, however, and returned to Sana'a, where she died in 2020.

CONCLUSION

The struggle to free Aden from the colonial yoke proves that different forms of resistance and organisation can reinforce each other to become a revolutionary force. That nationalism ultimately prevailed does not diminish the contribution of other countervailing forces. Besides class, gender was prominently present, with a broad-based and deeply rooted women's movement. This women's movement managed to develop an agency that took into account what were described as "customs and traditions", despite constraints and obstacles. Moreover, it is noteworthy that the initial public protests against the cultural-religious rules that significantly hindered women's participation in public and economic life fell silent as soon as the women's movement began to participate fully in national resistance to colonialism. This does not mean that this women's movement deemed women's rights subordinate, but by focusing on education and more specifically education for girls, it found a militant agenda that was compatible with and even strengthened the social and national ones without controversy.

Although this women's movement was radical in word and to some extent in deed, it remained non-violent. Its repertoire was broad, broader than that of trade unions, and

56 Memo on Aden, TUC. 16/12/1963 (MRC, Mss 292/B/956.8/3).
57 Memorandum of conversation between TUC delegate and W.H. Formoy, Colonial Office. 2/01/1964 (MRC, Mss 292/B/956.8/3).
58 Memo by ICFTU delegate Ivar Noren. 20/01/1964 (MRC, Mss 292/B/956.8/3).
59 Handwritten comment on a telegram of Zakia Ihsanullah, 22/01/1963, File Radhia Ihsanullah, (BL, IOR/20/D/289).
60 After merging with several other liberation movements in early 1966, the PSP transformed into the Front for the Liberation of Occupied South Yemen (Flosy), which would join the armed struggle.
61 Police memo on radio broadcast by Abd Al-Malik Ismail. 7/10/1965 (BL, IOR/R/20/D/168)
62 Telegram from the High Commisioner to the Secretary of State of the Colonies., 24/02/1966 (BL, IOR/R/20/D/257)
63 Miriam M. Müller. A Spectre is Haunting Arabia: How the Germans Brought Their Communism to Yemen. Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2015, p.252-254.
64 BP Refinery Aden. Employee Relations Report. (National Archives, CO 1015/1240) 1967, p.3 (National Archives, CO 1015/1240)
65 Report of a meeting of the British and American Labour Attachés on Arab Labour Developments. Beirut, 28/01/1968 (National Archives, Colonial Office, CO 1015/1240).
66 Interview by Safa' Ali Ibrahim. After 20 Years, Radhia Ihsanullah Has Woken Up and Spoken. 14 Uktubr, 20/04/1992, cited by Susanne Dahlgren, op. cit. p.165.

managed to mobilise an important section of the population, especially students, their parents and women who were not in salaried employment. The women's struggle was therefore characterised by a broad social agenda, non-violence and social stratification. On top of this came an international connection, mainly with other women's movements and the surrounding Arab countries, and notably there were close contacts with international communism.

Was the terror avoidable that eventually succeeded in making the British pack their bags faster than they would have liked? Perhaps so. By gradually depriving the social movements in Aden of any form of resistance, through repression, legislation and administrative obstruction, the British ensured that moderate forces that initially didn't believe in violence lost the battle to the radical nationalists who preached terror as the only legitimate solution. When the British realised this, it was too late, and in the end, the vibrant civil society in Aden also became victims of a liberation that did not bring liberty.

Finally, this story is also an invitation to (re)look at anti-colonial historiography within the field of labour history from a gender perspective. It allows us to develop a multifocal view that does justice to social movements whose visibility in history is less obvious, though whose presence on the ground was therefore no less decisive ■

Giovanny Simon Machado

Weaponising social rights: Soviet propaganda for Brazilian women during the Cold War (1950-1964)

ABSTRACT

This paper aims to analyse how social rights appeared in Soviet propaganda for Brazil between 1950 and 1964. This is a case study that uses as its main source the Spanish-language version of the magazine Soviet Woman (La Mujer Soviética), written and published by the Soviet Women's Committee (SWC). For this analysis, a global history approach has been used to highlight the connections between the SWC and its Brazilian counterparts, especially the leadership of the Federation of Brazilian Women (FMB). The main result was that great importance was given to social rights and the role of the state in their provision. The evidence strengthens the main argument that Soviet propaganda sought to convey a polity paradigm. The reception of this propaganda in Brazil occurred simultaneously in syncretic and orthodox ways, the former combining the Soviet narrative of social rights with idealized, romantic and even Christian views, while the latter demonstrated orthodoxy and imitation of the typical Soviet vocabulary.

KEYWORDS

Soviet Union
Propaganda
Brazil
Social rights

INTRODUCTION

This study involves an analysis of both textual and visual components of Soviet propaganda disseminated in Brazil from 1950 to 1964.[1] In this analysis, I focused on the theme of social rights, how they were portrayed, what narrative means were employed, and how they were perceived by their target audience.

The main hypothesis suggests that the Soviet Union propagated democratic and progressive values, presenting an alternative societal model where the state provided for individual needs. During the Cold War, words such as democracy, freedom and progress were contested, with opposing blocs assigning different meanings to these terms. Examining this societal model in-depth could shed light on the nuanced interpretations of these concepts, revealing both shared and distinct worldviews. Freedom may extend beyond personal choices, democracy cannot be reduced to multi-party elections alone, and progress can encompass more than just economic aspects. This paper follows György Lukács' interpretation of democracy and freedom, specifically discussed in his 1968 essay, The Process of Democratization (Lukács, 2011: 83–206).

He argued that the more democracy is stripped of any tangible material substance, becoming increasingly formal and detached of human needs, the more susceptible it becomes to fetishisation by the manipulation machinery of the ruling classes; while freedom from necessity is achieved by "placing the objective choices of economic development at the disposal of the conscious designs and humanistic goals of the species" (Lukács, 2011: 114).

My aim is to analyse the content of Soviet propaganda, specifically focusing on the magazine *Soviet Woman* (*SW – Советская женщина, Sovetskaya zhenshchina*) and its Spanish translation, *La Mujer Soviética* (MS), as primary sources. Understanding the impact of these messages on recipients is crucial, making this study a case analysis of Soviet propaganda's progressive message (Peri, 2018: 622). The circulation of *Soviet Woman* abroad, particularly in Brazil, serves as an object of analysis. The magazine, produced by the Soviet Women's Committee (SWC) in Moscow and printed by *Pravda*, spans 152 issues from 1950 to December 1964. All editions examined are available at the Russian National Library in St. Petersburg. Correspondence between Brazilian and Soviet women, predominantly members of the Federation of Brazilian Women (FMB), provides insight into how the Brazilian public received Soviet propaganda. These letters, stored in the Soviet Women's Committee collection (P7289) at the Russian State Archive (GARF) in Moscow, reflect long-term pen-pal relationships formed through international conferences, political pilgrimages, cultural exchanges and similar encounters.

The first two sections of this article cover the context in which the Soviet propaganda under analysis was produced and distributed – the international peace movement and the Soviet Women's Committee and their activities in the post-war and Cold War period. The subsequent section delves into the depiction of social rights within the magazine, exploring how they evolved into a tool wielded by Soviet propagandists and advocates of democratic fronts. The analysis further examines how Soviet propaganda portrayed social rights as a form of technology. Additionally, it scrutinizes the hybrid reception among Brazilian women, occasionally mirroring the Soviet lexicon and, alternately, adapting it to align with their romantic and quasi-religious perspectives.

WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS AND THE PEACE MOVEMENT

Key parts of this research are the Soviet Women's Committee *(Комитетом советских женщин, Komitet sovetskikh zhenshchin)* and the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF). The WIDF was created for the purpose of uniting women from various countries in their struggle for peace and equality (Castledine, 2012: 46). As an international federation, the WIDF was composed of several nationally based sub-organizations that were affiliated with the world organization. These, of course, included the SWC and the FMB. Therefore the WIDF served as a medium and arena of contact between women's movements in different countries. The WIDF also maintained an international journal entitled *Women From Around the World*, which was first edited in Paris, but then moved to the German Democratic Republic because of the repression by the French government.

Along with the World Federation of Democratic Youth (WFDY), the WIFD and other international federations, which could be called international democratic front organizations, were created by socialist, communist, and social democratic parties in order to organize different social segments in the struggle for peace and progress (Orth 1964). In the period immediately after World War II, because of the growing tension, a great demand for peace arose to prevent the continuation of the conflict that was then taking shape between the USSR and the other victorious Allied powers. Thus agitation and campaigning for peace was visibly one of the most important themes of MS magazine, relying not only on political texts and resolutions but also on artistic forms and correspondence with people, institutions and movements that were repeatedly called "partisans of peace".

The geopolitical situation in which the Soviet Union found itself after the war is well known: a context of increasing mutual threats, showdowns, and reciprocal aggression between the two major Cold War superpowers. Increasing hostilities and nuclear blackmail marked the period when the US, directed by the Truman doctrine, invoked its policy of "containment", engaging in action wherever the USSR might be acting to seek influence (Kennan, 2012: 116). In domestic affairs, one of the effects of the anti-Soviet Truman doctrine was the persecution of the Communist Party of the United States along with non-communist movements that opposed American warmongering policy, which were accused of "subversive activities" and closed by the government[2] (Castledine, 2012: 48).

During the era of de-Stalinization known as the thaw period, a defensive discourse was introduced into the Soviet view on peace, which led to Khrushchev's policy of "peaceful coexistence". One of the supposed purposes of this new policy was to relieve the USSR of its military burden and to shift the compe-

1 This paper summarises master's research conducted at the Higher School of Economics - Saint Petersburg in the Applied and Interdisciplinary History program in the year 2020. For the complete discussion see "Paradise is just ahead: Social rights in Soviet propaganda to Brazil (1950-1964)" (Machado 2020).

2 It is worth mentioning the WIDF member, the Congress of American Women (CAW), which had been accused of being an instrument of Soviet policy and "a specialized arm of Soviet political warfare in the current 'peace' campaign to disarm and demobilize the United States and democratic nations in general, in order to render them defenceless in the face of the 'Communist drive for world conquest'" (Weigand, 2001: 63).

tition with the West to economics and quality of life rather than weaponry. Khrushchev intended to break with the isolation characteristic of the Stalin era and present the USSR as a friend and defender of peace, propagating the superiority of socialism in the field of material and human progress (Friedman, 2015: 28).

The peace movement emerged as an effective platform for disseminating the Soviet worldview, serving as an opportunity to showcase what they referred to as "the peaceful way of life of the Soviet people". In contrast to the May 9th celebrations featuring Katyushas, nuclear warheads, tanks, and soldiers with AK-47 rifles, the parades at world peace events in the socialist East presented a different spectacle. These demonstrations highlighted an alternative aspect of Soviet achievements, featuring students, pioneers, scientists, athletes and artists. The individuals showcased symbolized the outcome of a society organized to meet the needs of the people through state provisions.

Regarding the autonomy of women's organizations from the communist movement, despite a natural Soviet hegemony, the democratic young women's movements were not a monolithic bloc in the service of the Soviet state. According to Yana Knopova (2011), the relative autonomy of the women's movement could be seen through its active role in trying to change aspects of domestic policies in the Soviet Union, in the case of the SWC[3]. In this sense, this case study of the interaction between Soviet and Brazilian women within the Cold War political landscape can give us important indications about the multiple forms of Soviet political work with relative autonomy from the line of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and regular state diplomacy. Simultaneously, we can grasp something of the aspirations of subjects from the Global South at a time of great turmoil and social tensions.

GENERAL FEATURES OF THE MS MAGAZINE AND ITS EDITORS

When comparing *La Mujer Soviética* with its Russian counterpart, it becomes evident that they share nearly identical content. The differences lie primarily in the layout and arrangement of articles, which are adjusted to maintain the overall structure of the journal. While this analysis does not delve into the translation methodology, an initial observation suggests that early translations in the 1950s were often literal and somewhat mechanical, whereas translations in the 1960s seemed more tailored to the mind set of Spanish-speaking readers. Maria Ovsiannikova served as the editor-in-chief of both the magazine and its Spanish version. However, the journal had a specific editor for the Spanish version, Emma Volf,[4] who remained active throughout from 1950 to 1964.

The magazine had distinct roles, including art editor and technical editor, which sometimes involved one, two or even three different individuals. The personnel for these roles varied across editions and rotated among different translations of the journal. The editor's staff was located at Kusnetski Most, 22, in Moscow, which remained unchanged for both the Spanish and English editions throughout the entire period. However, it is worth noting that Nina Voronina, a professional translator and member of the SWC, mentioned a different building on Pushkinskaya Street in Moscow.[5] The first mention of Kusnetski Most appeared in the November-December 1952 issue, and again in 1955's February issue. From then on, this address became a permanent part of the technical sheet of every issue published. The correspondence from Brazilian women was primarily directed to Pushkinskaya Street, leading me to believe that this address served as the main point for both receiving and sending letters at the SWC office. In contrast, Kusnetski Most appeared to be the address specifically designated for the editors.

In some issues, *Soviet Woman* magazine dedicated a few pages to promoting international subscriptions, listing addresses of bookstores and businesses that collaborated with Moscow to distribute the magazine in various countries. The increasing number of accredited stores for subscriptions served as an indicator of the magazine's growing popularity worldwide. In 1951, six Latin American countries had local subscription centres, which decreased to five in 1952 and finally to only two in 1956. However, the number of countries offering subscriptions increased again in 1958, peaking in 1963 with a total of nine countries. By 1963, the list of suppliers mentioned in the Spanish version of the magazine focused exclusively on Latin American countries. These numbers reflected the political situation of each country and its relationship with the Soviet Union. There were five accredited suppliers in Brazil[6] in October 1963; after 1964, the year of the military coup, the suppliers decreased drastically until they disappeared.

The size of the magazine remained relatively stable, typically ranging from 40 to 60 pages per issue. However, there were notable fluctuations in three specific periods. From 1950 to 1953, the number of pages varied among 62, 64, and 66, except for a special issue dedicated to Stalin's death, which had 18 pages. Between 1954 and 1960, the magazine consistently had 50 pages, while in 1961, it ranged from 42 to 48 pages. Initially, the magazine was published bimonthly, with six issues a year, but from 1954, it became a monthly publication.

The print run of the magazine provides an interesting parameter for analysis. Although the number of prints does not guarantee distribution, it offers insights into the magazine's popularity, even without precise data on sales and distribution. During the Stalin period, the print run remained relatively consistent, ranging from 3250 to 5000 copies. Initially, the number of copies was fixed at 5000 until January 1952, after which it was reduced to 4500 in February, March and April. In May, it further decreased to 4100,

3 The SWC, an independent and public organization comprised of women from across the Soviet territory, played a pivotal role in advocating for women's rights. As protagonists of the post-war reconstruction, women's organisation became authorities in the matter of social rights. Besides the Soviet Woman, the SWC had other publications with broader circulation in the Soviet Union, including magazines such as Rabotnitsa [The Working Woman] and Krest'yanka [The Peasant Woman]. In her comparison of Rabotnitsa's circulation with that of Soviet Woman within the USSR from 1945 to 1950, Peri (2018: 623–24) notes that the former had a circulation of only 20 000 copies, while Rabotnitsa ranged from 75 000 to 200 000 annually. Soviet Woman had the distinctive feature of being a magazine for both a domestic and a foreign audience.

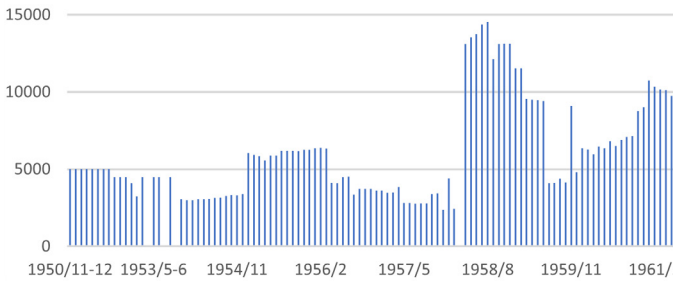
4 During the research for the aforementioned MA thesis and this paper, no relevant information was found about Emma Volf.

5 The SWC was located in a building on the corner of Pushkinskaya Street and Pushkinskaya Square (Voronina and Costamo, 2016).

6 In my interview with Anita Prestes (2019), a dedicated activist of the PCB during that era and the daughter of Luiz Carlos Prestes, the party's General-Secretary, I highlighted the subscription addresses in Brazil. She then informed me that, interestingly, two out of the five listed bookstores (Vitória and Intunliv) were under the direct control of Brazilian communists. Consequently, it became evident that the magazine had a more extensive readership beyond the circle of communist sympathizers.

and in June, it declined to 3250. From then until the end of 1953, the print run returned to 4500. Starting in January 1954, after a significant change in Soviet leadership, monthly variations in print occurred with strong fluctuations, as shown in Figure 1:

Figure 1: Print run of *La Mujer Soviética* magazine



Source: Graph created by the author from data compiled from all 152 issues of the magazine from 1950 to 1964. The x-axis represents years, and the y-axis represents the number of copies printed.

The circulation of the magazine may have been influenced by shifts in Soviet domestic and foreign geopolitics during the Cold War. Notably, fluctuations in the print run coincide with significant events such as the 20th congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1956 and the de-Stalinization process. The Sino-Soviet split, which disrupted the unity of the international communist movement, also had a profound impact on communist parties worldwide, including those in Latin America and Brazil. Conversely, the Cuban revolution's adoption of socialism as its official ideology, political system, and mode of production in 1961 had a positive influence. The Global South, as a whole, served as a pivotal battleground for the major superpowers during the Cold War, as well as for countries within the same camp.[7]

WEAPONIZATION[8] OF SOCIAL RIGHTS

In the textual analysis section, before going into the subject of the technology of social rights, it is worth pointing out a preliminary aspect regarding the use of social legislation as a form of political propaganda. This feature is not new and dates back to the Soviet revolutionary period, when the law itself had a "propagandistic" format (Borisova, 2012). This means that the law was not only designed to solve social conflicts through customs and tradition. Nor was the legal dimension a semi-autonomous social sphere ruled by the positivist law scientists, with formulas applied by legislators and judicial bureaucrats. Law was weaponized as means of mass mobilisation of the working class against the bourgeois class. Unlike the revolutionary period, the more prosaic post-war period made the law less of a weapon, since the domestic bourgeoisie had already been vanquished (Losurdo, 2004). However, it retained certain propagandistic aspects when employed in the external geopolitical context. So, what is seen as a protection won by the people who were already living under socialist regimes continued to function as a propagandistic form in foreign relations. This is what we seek to demonstrate with this article.

The law or the constitution itself were seen as both a form of protection and an achievement of the people living under socialism. The article El Sanatorio "La Madre y lo ninõ" [The Sanatorium "Mother and Child"], for example, reported on the operation of a sanatorium on the Kirov Islands, which was visited by Lenin in the past. This sanatorium guaranteed specialized treatment for postpartum women and their newborns. In this article, the right to maternity leave, guaranteed "by the Stalinian constitution to all pregnant women", was highlighted (Kirichenko, 1950: 24). Another example is in the text entitled Las Ideas de Lenin y Stalin" [The Ideas of Lenin and Stalin]:

> *We do not know the exploitation of men by men. We are unaware of the sinister shadow of forced unemployment, of insecurity in the future, of sad old age. Under the sun of the Stalinist constitution, the Soviet people, relying on the power of their socialist economy, work inspired and freely with their happiness*. (*La Mujer Soviética,* 1951 (04))

Here the Stalinist constitution of 1937 was seen as a source of security, stability in life, joy and happiness. The choice of the sun as a metaphorical mirror is noteworthy, given that the illumination of the sun is one of the most stable and "secure" natural phenomena present in human experience. Many other examples could be quoted: M. Kartashova, speaking about elections, wrote that their social achievements "have been endorsed by our Constitution, to which the people have lovingly given the name of Stalinist Constitution, Stalinist law for all the people" (Kartashova, 1951: 7); the Spanish communist, Dolores Ibarruri (1951: 47), hailing Soviet women for their struggles, argued that they shared with the women of the world "their experience of women living in the freest country on earth, protected by the Stalinian Constitution".

Numerous examples demonstrate the dedicated efforts of Soviet propagandists to promote social rights as a means of attracting their target audience to the sphere of influence of the socialist camp. They not only presented the rights of labour, women, education and public health as abstract ideals or mere party program points, but frequently referenced Soviet law and its constitution as tangible evidence of a viable alternative political paradigm.

While the Soviet Union did not invent the concept of state-guaranteed social rights with material support for its citizens, it served as a powerful stronghold for such rights. As Conrad (2016: 66) noted, the synchronicity of historical events holds significant importance in the global history approach, surpassing the mere study of origins. And, as argued by John Quigley, the

7 Clara Charf, a Brazilian communist cadre and spouse of the renowned Carlos Marighella, went so far as to write a letter to the SWC expressing her dissatisfaction, contending that they ought to receive increased material support from the Soviet Union due to an alleged "attack by the Chinese magazines". While this observation may not comprehensively elucidate the overall trend, it could suggest a competitive dynamic in the realm of printed propaganda between parties aligned with China and those aligned with the Soviet Union in various countries (Charf, 1963). It is also consistent with the work of Jeremy Friedman (2015).

8 By "weaponise", I specifically refer to the process of adapting or employing something as a weapon. This entails utilizing tools, concepts, information, and any other resources in a manner that strategically leverages them for a particular purpose. In the Soviet context, the weaponisation of social rights was not hypocritical; their accomplishments in the realm of social rights have long been acknowledged, even by individuals critical of the Soviet system. In employing this term, I aim to highlight how the Soviet Union strategically utilized social rights – both as ideas and tangible demonstrations – to enhance their influence, propagate their ideology, and potentially garner support and sympathy from other nations and peoples abroad.

Soviets challenged the West with social rights, and this objectively resulted in a new situation where capitalist states began to invest heavily in social policies (Quigley, 2007). During the Cold War, the debate over which mode of production best served the interests of its citizens was a significant global challenge, rivalling the arms race in importance. The Soviet narrative placed great emphasis on social rights and the role of the state in this realm, offering its own solutions to address this issue. Meanwhile, some countries, particularly in Western Europe, appeared to seek intermediate or alternative approaches to this question.

SOCIAL RIGHTS TECHNOLOGY

The USSR strategically used its technical and scientific achievements, exemplified by Yuri Gagarin's historic space flight, as a propaganda tool. Each issue of MS featured articles on science, showcasing advancements in power plant construction and innovative machinery and production methods. The Soviet Union openly aimed to increase productive forces, develop the economy, and surpass the United States in terms of production.

The technology of social rights was a material demonstration of a broad concept and a legal principle that, together, assigned particular significance to modernity and progress in the Soviet vision. What I call the technology of social rights was a narrative resource to express the existence and practical operation of an alternative social configuration opposed to Western individualism. This is how Soviet propaganda attempted to materialize the paradigm of how society and the state should provide for and protect the individual. Logically, any argument about the superiority of a system seeks to provide actual proof of its functioning. Such a characterization is significantly fair when we think that the USSR employed planning and intervention in the form of large-scale social reproduction. Specifically in this case, I present cases found in the textual analysis of the USSR propaganda presented and disseminated of a particular technology of guaranteeing social rights through devices and institutions. The singularity of these devices was presented as if they were created for this purpose and maintained by the state, promoters of a culture considered as high, universal and free, with a civilizing and emancipatory purpose.

Figure 2: Article "Así Somos en Siberia" in the pages of *La Mujer Soviética*

Source: *La Mujer Soviética* (11), 1964: 22-25. Digitized from the original copy held at the Russian National Library in Saint Petersburg.

The idea of social rights has a necessarily positive character – that is, they require action on the part of the state, different from natural rights that are considered essentialist and immutable parts of human nature and which need to be protected from the action of the state or third parties, and therefore have a negative character. Thus different societies have found diverse ways to realize a right that needs to be made positive. This sometimes requires the use of a variety of instruments, often understood as social policies. The technology of social rights can thus be summarized in the discourse that also advocated the combination of some elements, such as institutions, social devices, legal guarantees, and mechanisms that were blended to produce two things: socially emancipated and multipurpose individuals, and a new kind of civilization.

The article *Colaboración Creadora* (Creative Collaboration) by Tatiana Yachmeneva, explained how engineers and Stakhanovist workers collaborated to expand production and search for new productive methods as well as how workers could acquire specialized knowledge and prepare for entry into higher education, or even study at the factory library. She said: "Each Soviet factory is a university that provides the most diverse knowledge, which gives workers the possibility of catching up with people engaged in intellectual work" (Yachmeneva 1950: 12). The factory was presented as a space for the production of consumer goods necessary to meet social needs, but also for the self-production of a subject considered to be improved, or who had access to education, by these means. This technology, however, needed certain devices or tools. The library and the courses can be considered as tools for the realization of a right.

In Ekaterina Fomina's article, En Nuestra Fábrica, something similar was done. The article began by highlighting one factory's successes in achieving the goals of the five-year plan, praising the union's role in industrial organisation: "The factory's union organization, which with great concern for creating the best working, living and resting conditions for the workers, without forgetting their cultural development, has notably contributed to these achievements" (Fomina, 1951: 22). She then listed the various services that the workers had at their disposal in the factory. They studied in the high school next to the factory; numerous dwellings were built, being part of the urbanization project planned by the union; "Those who work well, rest well", because permits were granted to attend the sanatoriums, and there was also the rest house built by the union; the concern with health included a polyclinic with dentist, electrotherapy, hydrotherapy, gym, X-ray machines, and assistance from other medical centres with balneotherapy, diet therapy and physiotherapy; the library had fifty-six thousand volumes, with works by Lenin, Stalin, Gorki, Shakespeare, Pushkin, Tolstoy and Turguenev; the union's House of Culture promoted plays and exhibitions and hosted films, conferences and concerts (Fomina, 1951: 22–23).

The narrative revealed a microcosm surrounding the factory where all the material and spiritual needs of the workers were met. The subjects had everything they needed right there in the workplace. This social complex, built to improve the lives of workers, was materialized through those technologies and social rights devices that have appeared in this article, but also in many others.

This technology of social rights was also constituted in its uniqueness by the "source of power" drawn on. In many of the articles analysed, public funds and free access to services were highlighted as a distinctive aspect of the Soviet model compared to the rest of the world. This is demonstrated, for example, in a text named Los Primero Catorce Dias [The first fourteen days], on the care of newborn babies, in the February 1963 issue. After

a detailed explanation of what care a mother should have for her newborn, a final paragraph draws attention by stating: "As the magazine *Soviet Woman* is sent to many countries, it is not superfluous to remember that all medical care, doctor and nurse consultations in the polyclinic and at home are free" (Podkaminer, 1963: 39).

Marx understood the technological innovation of modern industry to be combining a source of power (animal, steam, combustion, electricity) with the mechanisation of tools already known and used by craftsmen into automated machinery (Marx, 2013: 445–59). None of the institutions listed in the MS magazine pieces were invented by the Soviets, but their particular arrangement, combined with universal and free access, converted this particular organisation into a new technology not known until then. This social rights technology was being advertised to the West and the Global South to increase Soviet influence in the world, and to compete in the quality-of-life arena for the superiority of their political paradigm over others. As John Quigley has argued, these policies were not created by the Bolsheviks, but their strength and influence occurred through their ability to put them into practice for the first time[9].

THE HYBRID RECEPTION OF SOVIET PROPAGANDA IN BRAZIL

In this final section, I briefly discuss how the reception of Soviet propaganda was registered in essays and correspondence between Brazilian and Soviet women.[10] The period spanning the 19 years from the conclusion of the *Estado Novo* to the military coup of 1964 in Brazil was characterized by political upheaval and a concerted effort to overcome economic underdevelopment through industrialization, albeit accompanied by social challenges. Various iterations of the developmentalist doctrine were implemented, yet, under pressure from the far right, the state consistently favoured major foreign capital. This had a direct impact on the lives of women, prompting them to organise to resist inflation, famine and other such issues. In this context, the Soviet Union emerged as an alternative model of societal organization and development for many individuals in the so-called Third World.

The Soviet-Brazilian correspondence analysed here can be divided into two categories: official communication between the SWC and FMB, and personal exchanges between individuals. Two notable pen pals were Lydia da Cunha from Brazil and Natasha Berezhnaya from the Soviet Union. Their personal correspondence began after meeting at women's movement events and continued for several years. However, the tone of the letters differed significantly. Brazilian letters displayed a personal touch, with inquiries about their pen pals' lives and expressions of longing. Soviet letters, on the other hand, focused on political and social aspects, expressing frustration over delays in receiving periodicals and news from Brazil. All letters were translated into Russian, and reports had to be sent to superiors, even for individual exchanges.

The difference in tone between the Brazilian and Soviet women's correspondence can be attributed to a functional asymmetry. Brazilian women juggled their militant activism with their personal lives, while Soviet women such as Natasha had a professional obligation as an interpreter and translator. Being under scrutiny, they maintained a strictly professional approach, avoiding personal discussions. This led to a more professional tone, whereas Brazilian women blended militancy with personal matters.

Figure 3: Note *El Brasil coronó a Valentina*[11]

Source: *La Mujer Soviética* (8) 1963: 09. Digitized from the original copy held at the Russian National Library in Saint Petersburg.

Social rights as the foundation of happiness was a frequent reference in the correspondence between Brazilian and Soviet women. This is a main feature present in the writings of the Brazilian women. One postcard sent by Elisa Branco to the SWC read, "For a world in which all children live as happily as Soviet children" (Branco, 1952). Life in the USSR was, in these terms, understood as a parameter of a happy life. When Nina Popova, a Soviet cadre in the women's movement, was awarded the *Stalin Peace Prize* in 1953, the FMB sent a letter saluting the achievement, because she was one of them, a woman. In that letter, they expressed an idealized and romanticized image of the USSR, saying that the country was the homeland of socialism, where

9 "Many of the ideas reflected in the Soviet legal innovations had been aired before the Bolsheviks came to power [...] The implementation of those ideas in concrete legislative form in Soviet Russia likely added to the potency of these ideas" (Quigley, 2007: 189).

10 For a more detailed discussion, see Machado (2020: 67–106).

11 In June 1963, the USSR sent Valentina Tereshkova into space, making her the first woman in space. Upon her return, she became a celebrated public figure, and in 1968, she assumed the presidency of the SWC and became a prominent member of the communist party. Following the USSR's dissolution, Tereshkova joined the ruling party, United Russia, and was elected to the State Duma in 2011 and subsequent elections.

women have their rights guaranteed, children are healthy and cheerful, and all people are happy, lovers of peace and progress (FMB, 1953a). Socialism again was understood not necessarily as state ownership of the means of production or dictatorship of the proletariat, but as a regime of social rights and guaranteed material conditions.

Brazilian women were effectively taking the social rights conquered in the USSR as weapons for their local combats. Branca Fialho and Arcelina Mochel, the main leaders of the FMB at the time, sent a letter to the SWC informing them that they were giving speeches all over the country explaining to Brazilian women about the life and rights of Soviet women (FMB, 1953b). To illustrate the leaflet, they also asked for photos of the recent visit of a delegation of Brazilian women to the USSR, probably after the Third World Congress of Women in 1953, held in Copenhagen.

As a parameter and example of a social rights regime, the Brazilian women expressed not only their admiration for the Soviet Union, but also their gratitude and love. Elisa Branco, wrote a short note, as one of the personalities awarded the Stalin Peace Prize. In that note she said:

> *I am a Brazilian mother, who loves her country and her children, and I want to express my deep love for the Soviet Union. We women express profound gratitude to the Soviet people for having liberated the women of their country and for having won the right to a free life also for our children during the battles in defence of their homeland.* (*La Mujer Soviética,* 1954: 3)

Another noticeable feature in the discourse of the Brazilian women was their political syncretism. Even though they formally agreed with Soviet politics, and were led and inspired by them, their discourse was not exactly the same. A short text by Aldenora de Sá Porto, published in September 1958, revealed this subtle difference. Her text, published on the first page of this specific issue of the magazine, was not addressed to those already admiring and following the USSR, but to those who for some reason cultivated a hostile stance. She criticised prejudices against the Soviet people and their women, such as lack of elegance or masculine appearance by overwork or being an atheist. She appealed to some kind of religious sentiment:

> *And a foreigner came to see her, to hear her! She contemplated the clear beauty of her blue eyes, the eloquence of her words, which are Love and Peace. May the hungry wolves devour themselves in their own sands, the truth will break through! To see her in the fullness of her work, it is not necessary to expel God from your religion, it is not necessary to violate the laws of your country. Let us do the same. Let us cease to inquire if in your heart there is a God empowering you with a soul. It is too petty to pray for peace only for your own. For this supreme desire for peace is already the presence of good fortune, of one who approaches the true meaning of "love one another".* (Porto 1958: 1)

She not only associated the Christian principle of "loving thy neighbour" with the positions uttered by the Soviet peace propaganda, but classified this as its "true meaning". The idyllic romanticism mixed with the Christian meanings of peace, love and truth show that some Brazilian women tended to a syncretic interpretation when they received the Soviet propaganda, adjusting it to their own setting and to their own thinking so that they idealized an almost Edenic Soviet Union, an almost biblical paradise built on earth.

While some of these Brazilian women incorporated the traditional Soviet lexicon, and communicated in a flattering way, taking positions that seemed orthodox and faithful to the communist party line, others absorbed and reinterpreted the viewpoint present in Soviet propaganda according to their own religious or romanticized beliefs. Both inclinations, syncretism and orthodoxy, were present in the Brazilian reception of Soviet propaganda. However, in this diversity of receptions, the point of convergence among all was the agreement on the importance of social rights and positive action by the state for the betterment of citizens' lives.

FINAL REMARKS

The Soviet Union projected a democratic and progressive set of values to the world, presenting a distinct polity paradigm that advocated for organizing society with the state catering to individual needs. This paradigm cannot be simply labelled as socialism, as it aimed to encompass even capitalist states, in contrast to the liberal paradigm.

It is widely observed that the USSR toned down the strictly revolutionary nature of its propaganda abroad, opting for broader communication in its content. Nevertheless, traces of revolutionary discourse persisted in Soviet messages to the Brazilian public, particularly following the Cuban revolution in 1959. The revolutionary overthrow of power, the seizure of means of production, and the establishment of a dictatorship of the proletariat were not the central themes of Soviet propaganda. Instead, the persistent and stable aspect was the dissemination of an ideology advocating for social rights and state guarantees.

The polity paradigm promoted by Soviet propaganda emphasized the positive role of the state in ensuring the collective well-being of the people. According to Lukacsian ideas, this propaganda engendered an ideology that advocated freedom from necessity (Lukács, 2011: 112–13), where true freedom is intertwined with the provision of material conditions for individuals to develop themselves fully.

In this study, I also introduced the concept of "social rights technology" as a narrative resource employed by Soviet propaganda. This technology used narrative and visual tools to deconstruct various material needs and the mechanisms through which they were fulfilled, presenting them as part of a new, state-driven complex. The narrative aimed to captivate readers by highlighting the diversity of applications, universal access, and state funding associated with social rights.

The fulfilment of material needs was prominently featured in both the language and visual elements of Soviet propaganda. Within the texts of MS, it was common to encounter extensive lists of devices and institutions that were created and implemented to satisfy these needs. These encompassed a wide range of facilities such as houses, hospitals, clinics, sanatoriums, day care centres, schools, universities, theatres, cinemas, cultural

palaces, libraries, galleries, parks, squares, canteens, subways, buses and more. The distinction between different dimensions of material needs was merely indicated by commas in the texts. Moreover, visually, reports within the magazine showcased these social rights apparatuses through a variety of small photos, presenting them in a manner reminiscent of a catalogue of consumer goods ■

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Anna Paraskevopoulou

Women Tobacco Workers in the Interwar period in Greece

ABSTRACT

This article discusses the contribution of women tobacco workers to the Greek labour movement during the interwar years, a period characterised by significant socio-economic changes. Challenges such as the influx of refugees from Asia Minor who constituted cheap labour in 1922, the introduction of modernised methods of processing tobacco, and the gradual decline in demand for high-quality tobacco affected industrial relations at the time. Consequently, the period was characterised by a strong response from the tobacco labour unions, with a dynamic presence of women who fought for better work conditions, equal pay, and rights at work. The article concludes that more research on individual biographies is needed to better understand how women's activism evolved during this period and its role in the development of the women's movement.

KEYWORDS

Tobacco workers
Gender relations
Women refugees
The Greek labour movement

INTRODUCTION

The tobacco industry in Greece dates back several centuries and its history is deeply intertwined with the economy, society and culture of the country. Tobacco was first introduced in the late 16th century under the rule of the Ottoman Empire. The Ottomans considered tobacco a lucrative source of revenue, and its production and distribution were promoted and carefully regulated. The northern region of Greece provided a favourable climate and soil conditions that facilitated the cultivation and growth of the best quality tobacco, called Oriental, unique in terms of its flavour and other characteristics. Tobacco cultivation and processing was the predominant economic activity of the area (Stergiopoulos, 2016). After the area was annexed to Greece at the start of the 20th century, towns such as Thessaloniki, Xanthi, Kavala, Drama, Serres, Volos and Agrinio continued to prosper from trading their high-quality product. Cigarette manufacturing in Greece also grew in the early 20th century as several Greek tobacco companies were established, leading to the production of both domestic and internationally popular cigarette brands.

The tobacco industry provided employment to thousands of people in all stages of work: growers and agricultural labour, skilled tobacco workers in warehouses, intermediaries (brokers), merchants and factory owners. The processing of the tobacco leaves took place in specially designed buildings called *kapnapothikes* (tobacco storerooms) and *kapnomagaza* (tobacco warehouses) which were built in the manufacturing towns. Here, skilled labour was employed, often consisting of people who were already involved in the agricultural stage of tobacco cultivation – its growth and the initial processing of tobacco leaves (Labrianidis, 1987).

It was in these working spaces that the tobacco workers' movement was born. The formation of La Federation Socialista (the Socialist Federation) – established in Thessaloniki in 1909 by workers of various ethnic groups and representing different sectors – signalled the beginning of an organised effort (Starr, 1945) for workers to demand rights at work and improve their work conditions. From then onwards, the influence of La Federation contributed to the development of a significant tobacco workers' movement, leading to the large-scale strikes that took place throughout the 1910s, 1920s and 1930s (Aggeli, 2007). The tobacco workers played a pivotal role in the history of industrial relations and the labour movement in Greece, and for this reason it is vital that the study of the economic history of tobacco production should record the tobacco workers' contribution. Nevertheless, it is crucial to recognise that mobilisation and activism among tobacco workers originated during the period of Ottoman Empire rule, as documented by Nacar's research (2014), and despite the geopolitical changes and rearrangements of borders, worker activism continued nearly uninterrupted. Notable here is the work of Papastefanaki and Kabadayi (2020), who have looked at labour social history in both Greece and Turkey.

Women played a vital role both in the tobacco industry as workers and in the tobacco labour movement as activists. It can be argued that their struggles for better working conditions, fair wages and improved rights within the industry were crucial to the broader labour and women's rights movements. Many involved, being members of the communist party, considered their resistance and contribution to the tobacco workers movement as a double effort to liberate themselves from their oppression as workers and their oppression as women (Mpakali, 2014). Directly and indirectly, the struggles of women tobacco workers in Greece contributed to better pay and work conditions, collective bargaining, health and safety and improved labour rights. At the same time, they challenged the stigma of paid work for women and the prevailing gender norms that kept women in "hidden" employment (Hatton, 2017), such as agricultural and domestic work, with no opportunity to organise and demand better working and living conditions for themselves. It is essential to recognise their effort to fight for gender equality and worker's rights as part of the continuous work of fighting gender discrimination.

The history of the tobacco labour movement in Greece is often divided into three broad historical phases (Labrianidis, 1987): before the First World War, the interwar years, and the period after the Second World War. These phases represent different socio-economic conditions nationally and internationally: the economic conditions – that is, the demand and supply of tobacco – and the efforts of the Greek state to modernise its economy. This paper focuses on the interwar years because it was during this period that the tobacco workers movement and the events that followed were most intense. After the end of the Greek-Turkish War (1919-1922), a large exchange of populations took place between Greece and Turkey as part of the Lausanne Treaty (1922), resulting in thousands of refugees arriving in Greece in need of a job and other necessities. The tobacco industry was one of the main employers for both men and women refugees. This large pool of mainly cheap labour, consisting of many women and children, resulted in the expansion of the sector (Christodoulaki, 2001), but also in the reduction of employment rights and wages and the general weakening of the workers' collective bargaining power (Dagkas, 2007). The new situation led to further worker organising and to a stronger tobacco workers' union movement as every tobacco warehouse had a union representative.

The interwar period is additionally interesting because the women's rights movement was growing on the international stage, and this was a time of intense activism and advocacy for gender equality and women's suffrage. Greece was no exception as women workers organised in labour unions and fought for equal rights. Nevertheless, to borrow Canning's term "mutual distancing" (Canning, 1992: 740), there is limited literature on women's contribution to the Greek labour movement and, consequently, a considerable number of historical publications concerning women's labour, daily experiences and political activism developed somewhat independently from the main body of historical social science (Canning, 1992). The purpose of this paper is to render women more visible in Greek labour history by examining their roles as workers and political activists – roles that often merged.

The paper contributes to this discussion by considering both class and gender as integral parts of women's political activism. Class remains a crucial analytical framework for labour historians. However, this framework must be broadened to enable the examination of how women and men transition between various positions on gender, race, ethnicity and other forms of difference (Davis, 2011; Frader, 1998). Therefore, feminist scholarship has proposed methods to revive the concept of class by highlighting how it encompasses more than just a structural position within the economy and society. Instead, class is viewed as a historical, political and cultural construct – a shaped social entity. Class interests are shaped not solely on economic and material grounds, but also on the foundation of verbal assertions and appeals to symbolic significance which carry inherently political implications, such as the struggle for better work conditions and the achievement of equal rights and social justice. Moreover, the gendered understanding of class, which stems from economic

relationships and structures, has a significant impact on shaping the state and commercial and political institutions as physical and mental spaces for the development of political activism.

Judith Butler's conceptualisation of precarity in connection with the "performative power of assembly" is also relevant here, as – albeit referring to the contemporary neoliberal system – she suggests that human vulnerability, deprivation and dispossession are frequently influenced by political and economic factors that are outside our control. In response, the author advocates for resistance against "induced precarity and its accelerations" (Butler, 2015: 16). One strategy to accomplish this is to bring attention to these issues as individuals come together to demonstrate in public areas (Butler, 2011) and the article, as we shall see in the following sections, explores how women tobacco workers used their own bodies to protest against bad conditions of work and pay. By doing so, their participation in public demonstrations represented resistance, indicating a significant shift in the perception of women who were traditionally expected to confine themselves to private spheres.

METHOD

Women tobacco workers were therefore at the forefront of early women's rights movements in Greece, engaging in various forms of activism, including syndicalism and participation in demonstrations and strikes (Liakos, 1993). Many experienced the harsh realities of the time, and some paid for these struggles with their lives. Using historical sociology, and based on a range of secondary sources, this paper creates a narrative of women tobacco workers' contribution to the labour movement in Greece, their solidarity and collective action, and their empowerment in Greece. The intersection of history and sociology allows the examination of social phenomena, recognising how social transformations take shape and influence social outcomes (Calhoun, 1998). In this case, historical sociology helps to better understand the role of agency of women tobacco workers within the overall economic transformations that were taking place at the time in Greece, paving the way for wider female participation in the labour market and organised labour movement.

More specifically, the paper focuses on the short stories of four women tobacco workers who fell victim to state violence and lost their lives in demonstrations and strike action. Currently, detailed information about the private and political lives of the four women tobacco workers is limited. The few facts that exist about their membership of political parties, their activism and their lives as workers, mothers, spouses or daughters were circulated in the media. Despite the restricted information available, it remains crucial to unify these four accounts and illustrate that women during the interwar period were not passive or restricted to private realms. They were not merely "hidden labour", but rather active participants who challenged the norms and customs of the era. They organised themselves into trade unions, voiced their political convictions, and made ultimate sacrifices for their principles.

Many more women workers during this period were injured by various acts of police violence; these four stories are just a sample of women workers' experiences. An intersectional approach has been considered in this paper, which refers to the recognition of how various forms of social identity and categorisations intersect and influence the experiences and struggles of workers within the labour movement. On this occasion, gender, class and refugee status were dimensions of identity that shaped women's activism in the tobacco labour movement, acknowledging that workers faced multiple layers of discrimination and oppression based on these intersecting identities.

The selection of the four stories was based on three main criteria. First, the stories represented a major event in the tobacco workers' labour history in the 1920s. Second, was the intersectional elements of their story. The third criterion was based on the period of these women's stories, being during the interwar period.

THE FOUR NARRATIVES

The story of Maria Housiadou (1924), Kavala

Kavala is one of the main port towns in north-east Greece. It has a rich history of tobacco production, which played a significant role in shaping the city's heritage and economy. It became known for its skilled tobacco workers and modernised processing facilities in which tobacco leaves were processed and then shipped from the port for domestic and international distribution. In 1922 there were tensions both in Kavala and the neighbouring Xanthi (an equally important centre of tobacco production), and workers went on strike demanding better wages, the reduction of the 12-hour work day, and a ban on the export of unprocessed tobacco leaves, which lowered the quality of the product and threaten workers with deskilling. The export of unprocessed tobacco leaves was prohibited by a law (2869) which was passed in 1919. However, as unprocessed tobacco lowered the cost of exports and therefore was deemed profitable by the merchants, a loophole was found in the interpretation of the law which led to continuous conflict between the unions and the merchants (Carmona-Zabala, 2018). The threat of lowering the quality of tobacco also meant the weakening of the tobacco labour movement, and this is another reason that workers were strongly opposed to it. In 1924, workers found that unprocessed tobacco was loaded onto vessels in the port and took decisive action by calling a general strike and demonstration in Kavala. The strike was supported by the communist party (Mpakali, 2014) and also demanded better pay, shorter working hours and better work conditions. Maria was a member of the communist party and a dynamic member of the tobacco workers' labour movement. On the day, she took part in the demonstrations. The police took action against the workers: shots were fired and Maria was killed. There is not much known about her life and work, but it certainly took a lot of courage for her to be such a dynamic and front-line member of the union. Her memory is honoured as one of the first female victims in the tobacco workers' struggle.

The story of Vasiliki Georgatzeli (1926)

A little more is known about Vasiliki's life, according to the doctoral research conducted by Aggeli (2007). Vasiliki was born in Asia Minor and came to Greece with her family as a refugee during the exchange of populations. She lived and worked in the town of Agrinio, another important town in the history of the tobacco industry. Vasiliki found work in a tobacco factory. Tobacco processing was hard work, unhealthy and for low wages. In 1926, the exchange rates changed and increased the profits of tobacco merchants. Tobacco workers went into strike to demand better wages and work conditions. Like Maria, Vasiliki was also

a dynamic member of the union, and during the strike she was part of a group guarding the demonstrations and actions. During the main demonstration, the police became heavy-handed with the strikers, using live bullets that killed four people. Amongst them was Vasiliki, who was shot in the chest. She was 29 years old, pregnant with a child and mother of two. Her sacrifice is memorable. Mpada's (2018) notable work on the memories of Agrinio's women tobacco workers provides the following quote:

> *...our union was strong. The bosses brought in tonga [a new machinery for processing tobacco] and for this reason they employed only women, our men were left without a job....Men used to earn 90 drachma and women 37, why shouldn't they employ us in tonga?...We went to many strikes over this and in 1926, when they killed Georgatzeli, a woman tobacco worker, pregnant....the police killed her...no shame, pregnant...[killed her together] with two more [strikers]...they did not even let us the funeral to take place in the St Demetrios church. (Mpada, 2018: 86)*

The local news reported that the funeral became a demonstration which many locals attended. Despite the loss of life, the strike was successful because many of the demands were met. Today, there is a plaque that commemorates the death of Georgantzeli and the other strikers.

The story of Anastasia Karanikola (1936)

The strike and demonstration of May 1936 is considered to be one of the important historical moments in Greek industrial relations. Large-scale strike action took place all over Greece, starting on 29 April. According to the *Rizospastis* newspaper (2006), 12 000 tobacco workers, following their union's decision, went on strike. Of these, 70% were women. The main reason was working conditions; however, the widespread unrest also shows that the action was part of a wider class struggle arising from the economic crisis and other socio-political changes. The mobilization of tobacco employees unified workers from other sectors who showed solidarity, leading to a united uprising against the ruling Metaxas regime and demanding its fall. The Metaxas government responded harshly, and the police used brutal tactics against the demonstrating, killing many. An image of a mother crying over the dead body of her son, Tasos Toutsis, is said to have inspired the famous Greek poet Giannis Ritsos to create his work Epitaphios. This is another aspect of women's experiences of the class struggles that took place in Greece during the interwar period.

Anastasia was shot dead in these demonstrations. As in the case of Maria, there is little information about the life and work of Anastasia; her death was commemorated with a hand-written note saying 'this is where Anastasia was murdered'. Anastasia was a member of the communist party and an active member of the tobacco workers' movement. Her death signifies the contribution and sacrifice women made towards the class struggles of the time.

The story of Katina Emmanouilidou (1933)

The story of Katina (her real name was Marianthi Pispiloglou) differs from those above as she did not die in a demonstration. Her life, however, is unconventional, and her contribution to the labour movement is of equal importance, as well as being documented in Greek media. Katina was born in 1907 in Asia Minor and came as a refugee to Greece in 1922. According to the *Ethnos* newspaper (1922), at the age of 15 she went to work as a servant in a household, but experienced attempted rape and left to find a job in a Piraeus (Attika) tobacco factory. In 1927, she participated in a tobacco workers' strike and became involved with the communist organisation of Bolsheviks and Leninists (KOLMEA) in Greece, becoming the representative of women. In 1930, commemorating women's contribution to the 1 May Labour Day demonstrations, she was arrested, beaten, and served a one-month sentence in prison. Her political action had an impact on other tobacco factories in Piraeus (Ethnos, 1922). After her imprisonment, she continued her activity but, in fear of being arrested, she left for Thessaloniki, where she was re-arrested during a demonstration and was sentenced to four months imprisonment. In 1932, speaking during another labour demonstration, she was re-arrested and again beaten by the police. According to the documentary Michani tou Chronou (n.d.), Katina had given birth three months previously. While in the police station, "people gathered and out of Christianity charity, demanded she be given the baby for breastfeeding" (Michani tou Chronou, n.d.). Katina was sentenced to three years in prison and two years on Gavdos, an isolated island. She escaped, however, and despite difficult interrogations, the other female prisoners showed solidarity and did not reveal any details. She lived in the houses of various comrades until she became ill and died in 1933.

Katina's life reveals various threads of women's lives during that period: being afraid of deviating from the norms and conventions; having a baby outside marriage; unionisation; arrest, and in her case, dramatic escape.

WOMEN IN THE FRONTLINE OF THE TOBACCO WORKERS' MOVEMENT IN GREECE

Scholars note that the history of the labour movement in Greece is an under-researched topic (Ghikas, 2004), and the same is true for the contribution of tobacco workers. The tobacco industry itself, as an important economic activity of Greece's, has attracted some interest, focused on the changing dynamics of the national and international economy. Over time, there were shifts in the tobacco industry and the roles of women within it. Changes in agricultural practices, industrialization and urbanization impacted the tobacco industry and the roles of women. Furthermore, mechanization and changing economic factors – especially after the economic depression in the 1930s – led to a decline in tobacco cultivation in some regions. As a result, the number of tobacco workers employed in the industry also decreased and eventually almost disappeared. Nevertheless, the tobacco workers' movement itself needs more in-depth analysis. In recent years, however, the topic has attracted further interest and doctoral research activity is also increasing, examining local areas or particular aspects of the tobacco workers movement. The four stories of the women activists above reveal several aspects of Greece's labour history but also the scarcity of biographical information. The story of the women tobacco workers still needs to be told. Although there is scattered information in national and local newspaper articles and TV documentaries, and interest from local historians and some academics, there are still gaps in this narrative. The contribution of women tobacco workers to the emancipation of women in Greece needs more systematic investigation by academic and non-academic researchers. The later struggles of women as partisans during the Second World War and afterwards, or as political prisoners exiled to the Greek islands in the 1950s and the 1960s, is not dis-

connected from their actions in these earlier phases of the labour movement. According to Gall and Fiorito (2012), mobilization is central to the changing of beliefs and attitudes, and therefore the study of the individual unions is essential to better understand the evolution of a movement. We can extend that argument and consider how attitudes and beliefs changed women's position in society and how the women's movement developed as a result of, or in parallel to, the women tobacco workers' actions.

McBride et al. (2015) questioned whether we, as researchers, are "sufficiently problematizing relationships within categories of difference" (McBride et al., 2015: 338). Focusing on the tobacco workers' movement, more research is needed to better understand how particular characteristics and experiences shaped women tobacco workers' decisions to become activists and to give their lives for their activism. In doing so, further research can also reveal the contribution of other women working in the tobacco sector, such as Muslim or Jewish women who equally contributed to the development of the tobacco labour movement. Such an approach will further strengthen the intersectional perspective of such study.

The four stories in the previous section highlight the women's tough working environments and their poverty, as many arrived as destitute refugees, widowed or orphaned. Circumstances led them to break existing conventions and seek paid employment for survival, even if initially this was frowned upon by other women (Aggeli, 2007). In fact, women's work in the tobacco industry was an essential source of income for many families – especially refugee families as their labour helped support household finances and contribute to the local economy. Researchers have identified the hostility that women tobacco workers often faced from their employers as well as from male comrades who perceived them as a threat to their union positions or to negotiations and other actions (Mpakali, 2014). Such barriers did not cause women to step back, and they continued their work and their activism. E.P. Thomson's concept of "moral economy" is relevant here because it refers to the economic and social experiences of the working classes, who hold moral assumptions and expectations about economic justice and the distribution of resources. These assumptions were rooted in traditional customs, communal norms and a sense of social obligation (Thompson, 1963).

Paid work itself helped women to emerge from their "traditional" hidden or invisible roles of domestic work to a more organised work environment. As Butler (2011) suggests, when women's bodies are seen together – here both at work and in political activism – they challenge the prevailing (patriarchal) idea that divides males and females, associating them with a binary notion of public and private that assigns the domain of politics to men and reproductive labour to women (Butler, 2011). Therefore a closer look at what turned women tobacco workers into activists in such difficult conditions is worth considering further in future research.

According to Tilly (1978), collective action relies on five components: "interest, organization, mobilization, opportunity, and collective action itself" (Tilly, 1978: 7). All four stories have these five components in common. The historical circumstances shaped these women's experiences and motivations for their dynamic presence in the labour movement. Their opportunity came when they took employment in the tobacco factories. Moreover, as the labour movement grew, women became integral actors in mobilising other members, taking collective action and generating interest from other women in the sector. For Tilly, effective structures are key for the organisation of workers. In the case of women tobacco workers, given their strong activism, effective structures were co-produced by women's contributions and sacrifices to the labour movement (Tilly, 1978). This last point may be disputed because it was still men at the top of the hierarchy, both at work and in the unions and the political parties and associations; however, women did also contribute to a certain degree to the decision-making process.

The study of the women tobacco workers' movement reveals that women – as they have always done in the history of women's movements – rarely focus only on women's equality issues. Instead, they combine struggles for equality with other causes. The four stories reveal this: women died for their ideals to improve their working environments, for the men who became unemployed because they were replaced by women (as cheaper labour), for their freedom from disadvantage and discrimination because they were refugees, for breaking society's norms and for fighting against social class oppressions. Their dedication to their union was based on their ideological commitment rather than other expectations (Snape et al., 2000). Their contribution to women's liberation is significant, but in their world, it was secondary, as their own gender and class identity was formed in the intertwined space of the private home and their tobacco factory work. All four stories talk about agency in women's decisions to become active members of political parties or political ideologies as well as women's causes.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

To the contemporary visitor to towns in North Greece, the architectural industrial heritage of the tobacco production is visible in the form derelict tobacco processing warehouses or as regenerated areas for cultural activities. What it is not visible, however, is the enormity of the tobacco workers activity – neither as individual workers nor as organised, powerful unions which shaped the historical events of their time and the future of the labour movement in Greece. What is even less perceived is the story of women's participation in the actions and struggles of the trade unions of the time.
The article has unfolded the historical events of the interwar period in Greece by focusing of the story of four women activists, examining the circumstances of their activism and their subsequent deaths as a direct result of their dedication to the tobacco labour movement. Scholars have contended that the overall societal backdrop, encompassing cultural norms, economic circumstances, and policy structures, significantly influenced the experiences of women employed in the tobacco industry during this period. However, it has also been posited that these women played a pivotal role in shaping these circumstances, actively contributing to the developments within the labour movement. Although the presence of women in labour history has often been neglected, women and gender historians have equally tended to overlook the specific working experiences of women within the workforce. This paper therefore concludes that some areas need further (predominately archival) research to better understand the circumstances of the role of women tobacco workers in the wider labour movement in Greece, and their contribution to the development of women's position in Greek society ■

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TRANSLATED ARTICLES SECTION

Paula Varela

Women Workers at the Heart of Social Reproduction Struggles: Theoretical Debates and Political Battles[1]

ABSTRACT

This article proposes a reflection on social reproduction struggles under neoliberalism from the point of view of Social Reproduction Theory. I divide the article into three parts. The first defines Social Reproduction Theory as a critical theory of capitalism that focuses on the contradictions inscribed in the reproduction of the labour power under capitalism. The second part addresses what we mean by social reproduction struggles, distinguishing three types of social reproduction struggles that allow us to highlight the strategic position occupied by women workers, who guarantee life. The third part proposes a reflection on social reproduction struggles as a space of articulation between the powerful women's movement (and other social movements) and the labour movement, where we could democratically debate our right (as a life-work class) to settle the conditions of our social reproduction.

KEYWORDS

Working class struggles
Women workers
New feminist wave
Social reproduction
Marxism

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The discussion on social reproduction under neoliberalism has been gaining attention in both academic and political circles. We owe much of this to the new feminist wave and its power to put a series of questions on the public agenda that have a long history in the women's movement, particularly in its left-wing, anti-capitalist and socialist expressions: What are the conditions under which (human) life is produced and reproduced in capitalist societies? What does social reproduction work entail and what "value" does it have under capitalism? What is the relationship between women's oppression and the social fact that we are the ones who carry out this work?

The increasing focus on the question of the reproduction of life is also due to capitalism itself, and the deep crisis of social reproduction that it has engendered, which is exploding today in many different ways. Undoubtedly, the Covid-19 pandemic has exposed this crisis without anaesthesia, by placing in front of our eyes what Susan Ferguson (2021) called "life-making" vs. "death-making". But even before the outbreak of the pandemic, we were already witnessing, on a global level, a diversity of social struggles emerging from this crisis of social reproduction: against job precarisation and the impoverishment of labour; against austerity plans; against institutional violence towards "lives that do not matter"; against the dispossession of natural resources of local communities; again state reactions to forced migrations. Much of the rise in social conflicts worldwide is marked by this crisis of social reproduction that is pushing different sectors of the life-work class (Antunes, 2005) to fight, whether in the terrain of strictly labour struggles, or in the broader terrain of social struggles.

This article proposes a reflection on social reproduction struggles under neoliberalism from the point of view of Social Reproduction Theory. To this end, I divide the article into three parts. The first provides a definition of Social Reproduction Theory as a critical theory of capitalism that focuses on the contradictions inscribed in the reproduction of the labour power (and the lives that bear it) under capitalism, as a process that is differentiated but cannot be dissociated from that of the production of value. In this sense, Social Reproduction Theory is here understood as a theory of the relation between the production and reproduction realms, and it is from the understanding of this interlinking that a radical critique of capitalism emerges. The second part offers a definition of what we mean by social reproduction struggles in order to delineate its contours and make them recognisable, without losing the diversity of forms it assumes. To this end, I distinguish three types of social reproduction struggles that allow us to identify protagonists, territories and potentialities, and to highlight the strategic position occupied by women workers, who guarantee life. The third part, to close, proposes a reflection on social reproduction struggles as a space of articulation between the powerful women's movement (and other social movements) and the labour movement, where we could democratically debate our right (as the life-work class) to settle the conditions of our social reproduction: –a strategic dispute that has women workers at its heart.

SOCIAL REPRODUCTION THEORY AS CRITICAL THEORY

The discussion on social reproduction in the field of feminism requires, from the very beginning, a clarification: we are not talking about the set of processes implicated in the reproduction of capitalist society as a whole, but to the set of processes involved in the reproduction of labour power and the life that bears it. This distinction is what Laslett and Brenner (1989) called the difference between "societal reproduction" and "social reproduction". In other words, when we speak of social reproduction we are referring to this "narrow" but, as we shall see, highly complex (and compelling) meaning.

One of the richest moments in the discussion of social reproduction was the second wave of feminism, and particularly what became known as the domestic labour debate within Marxist and socialist feminism. The debate on domestic labour, kicked off by Margaret Benston's early text, *The Political Economy of Women's Liberation*, published in 1969[1], involved great intellectuals and activists such as Mariarosa Dalla Costa, Selma James, Jean Gardiner, Christine Delphy and Wally Seccombe, among others.

Forty years after that discussion, and on the basis of an important series of works and publications, we can now distinguish three perspectives that have in common placing the concept of social reproduction at the centre of their analyses (both for understanding the oppression of women and for understanding capitalism as a whole), although they differ in their ways of conceiving it. The autonomist (or post-operaist) perspective, which includes authors such as Silvia Federici (2019) and Alessandra Mezzadri (2019), who have reformulated proposals such as "the commons"[2]. The feminist economics perspective, from authors such as Amaia Pérez Orozco (2014), Cristina Carrasco (2016) and Corina Rodríguez Enríquez (2015), focuses on the notions of "sustainability of life" or "crisis of care". And Social Reproduction Theory (SRT), from authors such as Tithi Bhattacharya (2017), Susan Ferguson (2020) and Cinzia Arruzza (Arruzza y Bhattacharya, 2020), poses the question about the current forms taken by the (contradictory) relationship between the sphere of production of value (and surplus value) and that of the reproduction of labour power and life at the centre of its theoretical and political concerns.

As part of the latter perspective – whose fundamental outlines were traced by Lise Vogel in her book *Marxism and Women's Oppression. Towards a Unitary Theory* (2013), originally published in 1983[3] – I would like to point out a series of elements that allow us to understand Social Reproduction Theory as a Marxist approach that is, at the same time, a feminist theory about the oppression of women in capitalist societies, a theory about the ways in which the working class is historically produced and reproduced, and a critical theory of capitalism that focuses on its irreducible tendency to impoverish (and even destroy) the possibilities of reproducing our lives, and therefore compels us to fight it unambiguously.

1 It is interesting to note that simultaneously, and apparently without mutual knowledge, in Latin America, Isabel Larguía and John Dumoulin (socialist militants who lived in Cuba after the revolution) published the text Por un Feminismo Científico (1969) (For a Scientific Feminism) in which they analyse the "invisible work" of women and its indispensable character for the production of value and surplus-value. In this work, they distinguish three types of invisible work: biological reproduction, education, and care of children, the elderly and the sick people – the reproduction of the labour power consumed daily. For a brief history of Larguía and Dumoulin, see the book by Mabel Bellucci and Emmanuel Theumer (2018).

2 See the dossier published in 2019 in Radical Philosophy 2.04, series 2, "Social Reproduction Theory. History, issues and present challenges". For a critique, see Varela (2020b).

3 In 2013, Historical Materialism reprinted it with an excellent introductory study by Susan Ferguson and David McNally (2013). The French and Brazilian editions were published in 2022 and the Spanish one will be published this year.

The first element has to do with how life is produced and reproduced in capitalist societies. This question makes it possible to highlight the first complexity: under capitalism, the reproduction of life is also (and unfortunately) the reproduction of labour power as a commodity. Those of us who do not have capital (or rent) are condemned to sell our labour power in order to live, and if we do not manage to sell it, we are forced to depend on someone else who does (or on the state and its reduced social policies). The very logic of capitalism (of expropriation and exploitation) imposes this condemnation on us. In this sense, the reproduction of life depends on two different but inseparable processes: a) the "invisible" work of making and reproducing life, carried out mainly by women, and b) what happens in the sphere of production of value and surplus value (the conditions in which labour power is sold, exploited and even expelled from the labour market), because that's where the means to guarantee our life comes from (in the form of wages or remuneration). To consider that the reproduction of life is or can be resolved exclusively in the sphere of social reproduction (dislocating it from the sphere of production) is to ignore the indispensable character of labour power as a commodity for the accumulation of capital and, therefore, for capitalism. Contrary to that illusion, neoliberalism (by expanding expropriation and exploitation mechanisms) has reinforced the indispensability of labour power for its own survival[4] , and has turned the screw even further: even if we sell our labour power, we cannot guarantee our social reproduction. The expansion of the phenomenon of low-waged workers – not only in the countries of the periphery (such as Argentina) but also in Europe and the US – is proof of this tendency (and it is a dimension of the current social reproduction crisis).

The second element has to do with the importance of identifying the various spheres in which social reproduction work is carried out (always mostly by women): the household and the community[5] (that "hidden abode of the hidden abode"), the public sphere (schools, hospitals, homes for the elderly, and so on), and the commodified sphere (the so-called education and health-care industries, increasingly relevant niches of capital accumulation). This means a broader view of this strongly feminised work which, although having the home and the family at its centre, exceeds this specific *locus* and imbricates the sphere of paid work, creating and reinforcing feminised sectors of the labour market, and taking on different institutional forms depending on the moment of capitalism in question and the socio-institutional framework in which it is immersed. In order to understand how the current crisis of social reproduction is unfolding, it is necessary to look at all these spheres and their articulations: household-community; public institutions; commodified services. As we will see below, this point of view makes it possible to analyse the strategic position of women workers in the institutions of social reproduction today.

The third element has to do with highlighting that social reproduction work is one of the ways in which capital guarantees the availability of labour power, but not the only one. The others are migration, violent dispossession (through expropriation of natural resources or through debt), political dispossession (through undocumentation policies), forms of forced labour (such as slavery, human trafficking and prisons). This is of great importance because it places the problem of the reproduction of life at the heart of a broader debate on the (extremely violent) mechanisms of domination with which capitalism resolves its need for labour power to exploit and expropriate. This directly connects the debate on social reproduction with discussions about racialisation, colonialism, migration, institutional violence and the like. All these dimensions become a necessary part of the debate on the reproduction of life because they are inescapably part of the specific and historical ways in which labour power is produced and reproduced under capitalism. They are *necessary* aspects, therefore, of the morphology of the life-work class, to use the Brazilian sociologist Ricardo Antunes' (2005) idea.

It is understanding all these interlinked processes involved in the reproduction of life that makes Social Reproduction Theory a feminist theory of women's oppression under capitalism, based on the analysis of the necessary yet devalued nature of social reproduction work and the consequences for power relations in capitalist societies, as well as a theory of the making of the working class based on analysing the historical processes through which labour power is produced and reproduced in a gendered, racialised, sexed, expropriated and disabled way, and a critical theory of capitalism that places at its very core the struggle to build our right to shape the conditions of our own social reproduction.

SOCIAL REPRODUCTION STRUGGLES: PROTAGONISTS, TERRITORIES AND POTENTIALITIES

From this theoretical approach, I will focus on analyses of a series of struggles with specific characteristics, which we call social reproduction struggles. The aim of the sort of typology I present here is threefold: to emphasise the social and political importance of these struggles in the context of the deep social reproduction crisis we are going through; to identify their contours and differences in order to think about their potentialities; and to establish their possible articulations with other social struggles so as to think about their inscription in the increased social unrest that has been taking place in recent years globally.

The first type of social reproduction struggle is what we call struggles of institutionalised social reproduction, which refers to those conflicts and strikes that take place in institutions (public or private) of social reproduction such as hospitals, schools and homes for the elderly. These kind of struggles (mainly led by women) have been gaining strength in recent years in the heat of three combined trends. On the one hand, the growth of workers in this services sector. As pointed out by various authors who analyse changes in the morphology of the working class (An-

4 As in every period of crisis, the "end of labour" discourse has come back into fashion, whether in its optimistic version (emphasising that capitalism has advanced so far in its technological development that human labour will be displaced by new technologies) or in its pessimistic version (pointing out that the current "capitalism of finance" and debt no longer requires the exploitation of the available population in order to accumulate capital and, therefore, we are heading towards an ineluctable scenario of mass unemployment). However, an empirical analysis of the situation of workers worldwide shows that, far from disappearing, the class that lives from labour is spreading, becoming more precarious and impoverished. See Gutiérrez Rossi and Varela (2023).

5 The socio-community sphere could be seen as a fourth space for the reproduction of life, which is becoming increasingly important, spurred on by social reproduction crisis and the "bursting" of households. From the perspective of feminist economics, these four spheres make up the so-called "care diamond". Here I prefer to place it as a form of the household sphere because of a twofold consideration: on the one hand, it is a mistake to conceive of the household as equivalent to the "nuclear family" (as black feminists argue, the notion of household/family has long adopted various modalities that include communal networks); on the other hand, it is necessary to pay great attention to socio-community reproduction work in slums or poor neighbourhoods (soup kitchens, community child care, educational support) due to the fact that the state is taking advantage of this work to turn it into a policy guaranteeing the reproduction of life at a very low cost.

tunes, 2018; Benanav, 2021; Silver, 2003; Smith, 2020; Moody, 2017), there is an increase in the services sector in global terms, with different dynamics by region and country. Within this heterogeneous sector, one of the branches that has grown most is institutionalised social reproduction, which has the general characteristics of the services sector and the particular characteristics of social reproduction work: it is a low-productivity and labour-intensive sector, and an extraordinarily feminised and low-wage sector, especially if we take into account the high qualifications required for much of this work (education, health and care). The other trend that is spurring struggles in this sector is austerity plans (through budget cuts, outsourcing, subcontracting and privatisation) in the case of public institutions, and job insecurity and precariousness of working conditions in the case of private institutions. These attacks have meant that, in the vast majority of social reproduction struggles of this type, labour demands for working conditions and salaries have been combined with demands around the quality of the service provided – in other words, demands about the conditions of social reproduction of the population who attend these institutions to reproduce their lives. Finally, a third trend that should be taken into account when analysing the rise in conflicts in the sector is the new feminist wave, which questions the devaluation of care work and vindicates it as work that is essential for the reproduction of life (but also for the reproduction of capital and capitalist society as a whole). While not asserting here that the struggles and strikes in this sector have a feminist identity *per se* (which would imply attributing to them a political orientation that does not necessarily emerge, although it is sometimes openly stated), it must be said that the new feminist wave (and its capacity to establish a public agenda) has helped to deepen the contradiction between the necessary status of this work ("essential", as it was called during the pandemic) and the "disposable" status of the workers who carry it out for both the state and private institutions. In short, the rising levels of conflict in social reproduction institutions should be understood in the context of an increase in the number of workers in the sector and the ongoing austerity plans and cuts that affect job security, working conditions and quality of the service, as well as a certain revaluation of this highly feminised work, based on the topics put on the agenda by feminism.

These struggles in social reproduction institutions present a peculiarity that derives from the specific position of these workers, which has a direct impact on their class power. As we know, the question of the sources of workers' power[6] is a classic one in labour sociology and also in Marxism. So is the distinction elaborated by E.O. Wright (2000) and enriched by Beverly Silver (2003) between "structural power" (derived from the position of workers in the economic system, which opens up the possibility of interrupting or restricting the accumulation of capital) and "associative power" (derived from the unity of workers and the building of workers' organisations, whether they are trade unions or political parties). The point I want to make here is the need to incorporate a third category into the analysis: the socio-reproductive position as a specific and differentiated source of power of the working-class. By socio-reproductive position I mean the location of wage workers[7] who perform tasks in the institutionalised system of social reproduction, whether public or private (health, education, care). This location implies a specific source of power that stems from *the possibility of directly affecting the reproduction of life*. In contrast to what happens with structural power, these workers do not hold a strategic position in the economic-productive system (as might be thought for sectors such as logistics or certain industries), but *they do hold a strategic position in ensuring the condition of possibility of this economic-productive system: the existence of labour power available to go to work*. That is the very core of the particularity of these workers' position and, consequently, of their source of class power: that work that produces and reproduces life, in doing so, produces and reproduces the most precious commodity for capital, *labour power*. Affecting the institutionalised production and reproduction of labour power usually has indirect impacts on the accumulation of capital, but direct impacts on working-class families and, through them, on the community as a whole. Moreover, it affects what is considered a right (despite it being under constant fire from neoliberal austerity plans) – the right to life in the form of the right to education, healthcare and assistance for those in vulnerable situations.

This is an extremely important peculiarity of these (mostly women) workers' position: the institutions in which this work is carried out combine, in time and space – due to the very nature of the work of producing and reproducing life – the needs of workers as wage earners with the needs of workers as part of the life-work class, that is, of the working class as a whole (not only its wage-earning fraction). The institutions of social reproduction are amphibious territories, and thus potential nodes of articulation of production and reproduction struggles. And this can be highly explosive, because it opens the possibility of a counter-tendency to corporative and sectorial labour struggles (the major strategy of trade unions nowadays) and of replacing these with the debate about how to organise class struggles that, by contrast, articulate demands in a transversal way. The "socio-reproductive power" held by the workers of social reproduction institutions offers, as part of its characteristics, the possibility of linking demands that today appear dichotomised (those of wage labour and those of social reproduction) not in an arbitrary way or based purely on principles of class solidarity (which are necessary) but in an organic way. It is the objective characteristics of these particular institutions of reproduction and of the work that is carried out there that opens up the possibility of such articulation. And this organic character is given because the working conditions of social reproduction workers are inextricably linked to the conditions in which the lives of the people who attend these services are reproduced. This inseparability, which is inherent to this concrete work, opens up the possibility of linking demands in a common struggle in the field of collective action by the working class.

It is clear that the achievement or not of this articulation is not settled in the field of the source of power but in the political strategies of trade unions and also feminist organisations, and in the possibility of understanding (theoretically but, above all,

6 Unlike other authors, I prefer to speak of "sources of power" and not of "resources of power" in order to emphasise that, given the relational character of working class power (always in antagonistic terms with capital), there are no such things as "resources" available (like a set of available options) but that these sources of power are transformed (or not) into working class resources depending on the strategies that the working class gives itself in its relation with capital.

7 As much of social reproduction work is carried out without wages at the household and community level, it is important to note that when I refer to the socio-reproductive position as a source of working class power, I am referring specifically to workers who perform such work in a paid capacity in institutions of social reproduction such as education, health and care. As we will see below, other forms of social reproduction work also involve a source of power that runs through other types of social reproduction struggles.

politically) that the right to settle the conditions of our own social reproduction is a demand that intersects different sectors of the working class, with its huge heterogeneity of race, sexual orientation, gender, migratory origin, community belonging and capacity. This right, which shoots to the heart of capitalism because it has an articulated impact on the sphere of production and social reproduction, refers not only to the material conditions of our reproduction, but also the subjective, affective and moral conditions.

Some of this socio-reproductive power became evident in diverse recent strikes such as the Teachers' Spring in the USA in 2018 or the teachers' strikes in Chicago in 2019, when the workers included demands for an end to racism in schools or for good food for neglected populations such as Blacks and Latinos as a relevant to their struggle. Similarly, in strikes of care homes' workers in the Basque Country in 2016/2017, strikers put on the table the impossibility of providing decent care due to the ratios, lack of inputs and lack of staff. In the health strike in Neuquén (Argentina) in 2021, they formed an inter-hospital assembly that brought together workers of the different hospitals in the region and coordinated pickets and street actions with the active support of the population, blocking the choke points of oil production in the region.

This socio-reproductive power – as the capacity to articulate the demands of production and social reproduction circuits – compensates for the weakness in structural power of these sectors of the working class, and endows them with a great firepower that it is imperative to examine theoretically and politically as a strategic position.

Struggles involving women workers in unpaid social reproduction work, particularly women's work in the household and in communities, are the second type of social reproduction struggle. These kinds of struggles have been highlighted, in particular, by the international women's strike that has been taking place since 2017, worldwide. It has re-signified the strike, thinking of it beyond the workplace (and the production circuit) and reconfiguring it as a cessation of activities, whether they are paid (and therefore recognised as work), or whether they are unpaid (and therefore naturalised as part of care or "love", to use the now historic phrase: "they call it love, we call it unwaged work").

As is well known, the international women's strike marked a turning point in the dynamics of the women's movement at an international level, and placed the issue of the work women do at the centre of the scene. This meant a recognition of women as subjects who work and produce, a valorisation through which the figure of the strike becomes deeply meaningful, and emblematic slogans – such as "if our bodies aren't worth it, produce without us" – emerged. This slogan links the two topics that run through the new wave of feminism at an international level: on one hand, the struggle against male violence and its materialisation of women's bodies as "bodies that do not matter" (a materialisation whose extreme is femicide, but which includes rape and systematic harassment and the denial of the right to decide on pregnancy); and on the other, the construction of women as a "contentious subject", and ultimately as a possible "dangerous subject". This construction of women as a threatening subject is based on women as subjects who produce – that is, *as workers*. It is because of this, and not for any other reason, that the threat to stop working and paralyze the world becomes performative.

This specific type of social reproduction struggle has three important particularities. It brings together, in the same collective action, an enormous diversity of women who, united by their capacity to work (to produce and reproduce), have different and often diverging experiences. This is because, at least in its postulation (although much more complex in its realisation[8]), it is a strike on the household terrain, but not *only* on that terrain. It is a strike in all the spaces where women work: hospitals, schools, care institutions, cleaning companies, hairdressers, shops, factories, transport, universities. But it is also a strike that expands the issues for which it is necessary to go out and fight, and thus puts on the table a broader and more complex conception of social reproduction. It is not only about economic demands (without which we would have an idealistic vision of how life is reproduced in our societies); it is also about affective, political, gender, moral, bodily and sexual dimensions. The right to abortion, to choose sexuality and gender, to the defence of life and the end of patriarchal and institutional violence, to leisure time, to pleasure, to the future, are central dimensions of our social reproduction (Jaffe, 2021) because the reproduction of life is not only a material process (biological and social) but a subjective one in which all aspects of "how we want to be governed" are at stake. Finally, this type of social reproduction struggle takes place in the streets, public squares and all the political spaces of cities, because this level of discussion on the reproduction of life has the capitalist state as its privileged interlocutor. Indeed, it is the capitalist state, the ultimate guardian of the violence that shapes our social reproduction under this system, that privileges profit. the international women' strike targets states (and their representatives) as the administrators of a social reproduction that does not satisfy us, that is in crisis, that violates us, that impoverishes us.

The third type of social reproduction struggle is those whose demands are directly related to the possibility of the reproduction of life, even if they are not headed by social reproduction workers. This type of struggle, the broadest of the three, includes struggles for housing, the increase in the prices of basic goods, public transport, and access to services such as water, electricity, sewage and gas, but also (and this is very important), against police and institutional violence on certain populations, insecurity in working class neighbourhoods, dispossession through debt, and expropriation of natural resources from local communities (water, clean air, land and forests). In other words, a heterogeneous set of demands that shape the specific conditions in which life is reproduced. This type of struggle has been led by social movements such as the students who started the revolts in Chile with the slogan "It's not 30 pesos, it's 30 years"; the Indignados in Spain; the Geração à Rasca in Portugal; Black Lives Matter, with its epicentre in the United States but which has spread to various countries around the world; and the current radicalised struggles in France against pension reform. These movements,

8 Of course, this shift "from victims to workers" who threaten to strike brings with it a series of new elements. One of the most important is the question of how the threat is made effective – that is, the performativity of the strike. One of the risks facing the international women' strike today is that of losing the performativity of the strike due to a restrictive view of women's work, as if it were reduced to the work we carry out in the private sphere of the household, without taking into account all the forms of paid work to which we are subjected. Such a narrow conception makes it impossible to show the socio-reproductive power of women workers in waged social reproduction, which would completely dislocate the "normal life" of the community and, through it, of capital.

which in some cases have been thought up in opposition to the so-called "classic" workers' protests, are complementary to (and sometimes, as is the case in France now, have even been articulated with) workplaces strikes, shaping a rise in conflict at the international level, which is directly related to the crisis of social reproduction as a dimension of the capitalist crisis unleashed in 2008. As Aaron Benanav points out:

> *After more than ten years since the 2008 crisis, political immobilism seems to be cracking. Social struggles have developed on a scale not seen for decades. There have been waves of strikes and social movements across five continents, from China to North Africa, from Argentina to Greece and from Indonesia to the United States. (Benanav, 2020: 155-156).*

A perspective that places social reproduction (and its crisis) at the forefront of the analysis allows us to link these heterogeneous struggles. It makes it possible to include not only the powerful women's movement but also other social movements that have broadened and radicalised the political horizons of a new militant generation, within a common struggle for our right to shape the conditions of our social reproduction.

WOMEN WORKERS AT THE HEART OF A RADICAL FIGHT AGAINST CAPITALISM

The three types of social reproduction struggles described above reveal three signs of our times that might be turned into tools and, if I may say so, weapons of combat. The first one is *the centrality of women workers not only in social reproduction work but also in the articulations between the production and the social reproduction realms*. It is in this amphibious territory, in this permeable boundary, that women find our specific position within the working class as a whole. We are at the plexus of the contradictory relationship between production and reproduction. And it is this place of bridges that offers us (though does not guarantee us) a leading role, and a leadership role, in the heterogeneous struggles of our class to resist the further degradation of the reproduction of life. Assuming such a role implies a fight within the new wave of feminism, but also within workers' organisations, whether they take the form of trade unions or social movements. If Cinzia Arruzza (2010) referred to feminist socialist militants as "those without a part", to point out a kind of foreignness in the feminist movement to defending a class position, and a foreignness also in the labour movement to defending a feminist position, the perspective of Social Reproduction Theory allows us, by contrast, to place ourselves (and our essential work) in the intertwining of gender oppression and class exploitation, to demand our full citizenship card as women workers, and to exercise our place of leadership.

The second sign of our times is *the tendency towards politicisation that is part of social reproduction struggles*. In a context in which the far right, in the form of right-wing populism, seems ready to fight to hegemonise the point of view of "the people" in the face of a "neoliberal progressivism" (Fraser, 2017) devoted to identity politics that reproduce partialities *ad infinitum*, the holistic view offered by the social reproduction approach is fundamental. We are not facing identity-based struggles that claim individual pro-choice rights. Nor are we dealing with sectorial workers' struggles that delude themselves with the illusion of guaranteeing their social reproduction while the reproduction of the rest is endangered. We are talking about the collective and universalising struggle for our right, as the life-work class, to be the ones who democratically settle the material and subjective conditions in which we want to reproduce our lives, – conditions that enable us to unfold our productive, amatory, ludic and caring capacities to their fullest expression.

The third sign of our times is *the radicalisation of some social reproduction struggles in the form of revolts and violent confrontations.* The depth of the capitalist crisis has not only triggered this series of struggles, it has also brought into focus the impotence of moderate politics proposals (the Pink Tide in Latin America or the electoral fronts with social-liberal parties in Europe or the USA), inviting a new generation to seek anti-systemic (or seemingly anti-systemic) ways out. This is the basis on which Bolsonaro in Brazil, Trump in the USA and Milei in Argentina are built. But this is also the basis for updating the possibility of an anti-capitalist horizon. This implies the democratic debate, among all the movements in struggle, about how we want to reproduce our lives, what level of confrontation it implies with the "rules of the game" marked by the reduction of our labour power to a commodity to be used and discarded, and what are the strategies to achieve it. This is the urgent debate: let's have it ■

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