

BECOMING A MOTHER ON THE PERIPHERY

FROM SOCIALISM TO A NEO-LIBERAL
'TRANSITIONAL' REGIME OF MOTHERHOOD
TOWARDS RADICAL CARE PRACTICES

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HERE I ONLY WANT TO STRESS THAT BY DENYING WOMEN CONTROL OVER THEIR BODIES THE STATE DEPRIVED THEM OF THE MOST FUNDAMENTAL CONDITION FOR PHYSICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL INTEGRITY AND DEGRADED MATERNITY TO THE STATUS OF FORCED LABOR, IN ADDITION TO CONFINING WOMEN TO REPRODUCTIVE WORK IN A WAY UNKNOWN IN PREVIOUS SOCIETIES.

Silvia Federici (*Caliban and the Witch*, 2004)

FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN WILL BEAR THE BRUNT OF PRIVATIZATION AND CUTS - LEAVING CARERS WITH MORE UNWAGED WORK THAN EVER.

Selma James (*Sex, Race and Class*, 2012)

TO UNDERMINE FOR GOOD THE SEXUAL DIVISION OF LABOR, WOMEN AND MEN MUST BEGIN WITH CHILDREN.

Selma James (*Sex, Race and Class*, 2012)

What does becoming a mother mean in the times of transition to neoliberal capitalism in countries on the periphery? How is the institution of motherhood constituted and whose interests does it serve? In what way were the problems of motherhood contemplated before and during "transition", what were the measures taken and what were the consequences of the prevalent attitudes within the local context? Finally, in what way is it possible to change the repressive institution of motherhood and what potential does childcare can have in the sphere of political organization?

The institution of motherhood in the local context was in the past twenty years shaped from the remains of the socialist state and as an instrument in the hands of the dominant ethno-nationalistic and pronatalism-traditionalist politics, while feminist critique was mainly reduced to identifying the lethal relationship between nationalism and motherhood, without linking this question to its connection with the new neoliberal-capitalist circumstances. Additionally, certain romanticized tendencies and ideologemes arose which attributed the fall birth rates in Serbia to a privately expressed resistance to the dominant ideology (Blagojević, 1997).

In some radical circles discussions are held on the possibility of completely abandoning the category of gender (Gonzalez, 2012). However, we believe that gender as a social construct cannot be discarded as long as it defines us. It is impossible to understand what motherhood is unless we understand its full involvement in the capitalist system. In order to change the repressive institution of motherhood, a systematic radical class critique of the governing regime needs to be undertaken, as well as continual work on the establishment of alternative relationships in the area of the reproduction of everyday life (Vilenica, 2013).

Motherhood is a social, political, economical and cultural construct and the liberation of women from the bondage of motherhood is an important political question that concerns us all. Every society based on the exploitation of labor produces its own institutions of motherhood and capitalism is no exception (Federici, 2013). Becoming a mother in the age of neoliberal capitalism signifies entering a field of action of neo-liberal social, economic and cultural norms which include the production of the regime of motherhood (Vilenica, 2013). This regime entails a form of social control and regulation in which care becomes the area where the interests of capital, the nation and their supra-infrastructures are achieved. Motherhood, as a set of childcare practices, has a central role in social reproduction. Here, reproduction is considered everything done in order to reproduce ourselves and our everyday lives. In capitalism our biological and social reproduction is organized as labor which is exploited and expropriated with the aim of reproducing a work force for capital, soldiers and taxpayers for the state (Federici, 2013). In capitalism, biological reproduction and childcare are structured through the institution of motherhood, first and foremost, as wageless labor (nowadays, in the process of universal commodification and fundamentally depreciated paid work), in the majority of cases executed by women. It is important to remember that capitalism is fundamentally dependent on a patriarchal society and the exploitation of the work of mothers (Burcar, 2013). In capitalism, the definition of maternity is continually naturalized and the work of mothers is made invisible. These processes enable the uninterrupted exploitation of this work, which is perceived as disconnected from the rest of the production process. In capitalism, the work of mothers is looked upon as an individual responsibility and is fundamentally an inseparable part of the accumulation of wealth, exercised through expropriation, which means that surplus values are not shared with those that produce it.

Modern neoliberal regimes of motherhood are gender, race and class determined, as is capitalism itself. They originate from complete privatization, the retreat of the state and increasing individualization of responsibility regarding the reproduction of everyday life and childcare, as well as the continual creation of a center and periphery. These are created through medical and social measures, various policies, the establishing of a distinction between paid and unpaid work, the commodification of care, consumerism, new technologies but also the creation of certain values within a society which determine what it means to be a “good” and “bad” mother. These regimes can be seen as a global phenomenon with local particularities.

In the context of Serbia and other Eastern European countries, i.e. countries at the periphery, the regimes of motherhood are established through the constant

reproduction of the state of political, economic and social “transition”, which began with a brutal primitive accumulation of capital, wars, the disintegration and retreat of the socialist method of state management. This neoliberal transitional regime of motherhood develops the same model of exploitation and expropriation as any other capitalist model of the institution of motherhood. It is not a matter of the distortion of capitalist model, as is commonly stated in debates on “good and bad capitalism”, but of their reproduction. This is a form of peripheral capitalism, in which the majority of the world population lives today and the type of institution of motherhood that is produced and maintained for the purposes of capitalist reproduction.

The neoliberal-transitional regime of motherhood was assembled from the remains of certain egalitarian practices. These practices were established from an initial revolutionary impulse to create new social relationships, which in its most radical forms involved altering gender relationships, the disintegration of the family unit and the establishing of a model of collective households and joint responsibility for childcare (Kollontaj, 1979).

Ideologically, legally and to an extent economically, socialist Yugoslavia supported the emancipation of women. With the constitution of the Federative People’s Republic of Yugoslavia (FPRY) from 1946 women were legally made equal to men in all areas of life. (Constitution, 1946) The Law on Marriage from the same year equated the responsibilities of both men and women with regard to childcare, and a by-law on paid maternity leave was enacted (Pantelić, 2011). Abortion was legalized in 1978 through the Law on Medical Procedures for the Exercising of the Right to Free Choice Regarding Childbearing, according to which the termination of pregnancy was possible before the tenth week from conception (Stojaković, 2012; Pantelić, 2011). It is important to point out that socialism – the revolutionary and scientific debate having ended – represented a practical and historical breakaway from the urban-capitalist form of reproduction. In socialism, the emancipation of women was perceived as a principal condition and gauge of universal social and human emancipation (Djordjević, 1975). The main model for the emancipation of women, and therefore society, besides the legal equalizing of men and women, was the practice of full permanent employment. It was believed that the entrance of women into the labor market was the direct route to egalitarianism. The possibility of permanent employment enabled women to take advantage of numerous rights, such as the right to social and medical insurance, paid pregnancy and maternity leave, as well as extended unpaid childcare leave of up to three years, with a guaranteed return to the same job position after the end of leave (Vilenica, 2013; Burcar, 2013).

The new society was founded on the practice of revolutionizing production as well as reproduction through the collectivization of private responsibilities, such as the preparation of food and childcare. As a solution to the conflict between the social roles of women and their double burden, socialism offered the communalization of housework and childcare (Djordjević, 1975; Tomšić, 1981; Vilenica, 2013). Communalized childcare was in part manifested through the establishing of nurseries and kindergartens, with the idea of making them universally available. In 1947, the government of the FPRY brought it the Directive for the Establishing of Nurseries within state-owned companies, authorities and institutions of national importance as well as within local Peoples' Councils. Consequently, in 1947 the Act on the Establishing of Children's Nurseries and Kindergartens was passed (Gudac-Dodić, 2005). Single, employed mothers had priority at enrollment in these institutions. However, a problem which was never solved was the insufficient capacity of these childcare establishments. Additionally, significant changes were made in socialism in the area of communalizing feeding, but the numbers were not encouraging as regards washing, cleaning and care of children with disabilities or developmental impairments (Tomšić, 1981). These policies were not enacted in order to help women-mothers but so as to pass the responsibility onto society, which was seen as a prerequisite for the dissolution of gender-based distribution of labor.

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An important role in the process of social emancipation was performed by the Antifascist Women's Front (AWF), an organization which was founded during WWII. The AWF functioned as a collection of autonomous organizations and boards which aimed to create conditions for the emancipation of women in the newly established socialist society by encouraging their involvement in social and productive labor, by working on the education of women through literacy courses and ideological and political education, as well as by providing everyday support (Stojaković, 2012; Stojaković, 2013; Pantelić, 2011). As part of its political and social endeavors and due to the chronic lack of nurseries and kindergartens, the AWF worked on their establishment. Women from this organization predominantly worked in the cities, while in rural areas, which were organized in collectives, the same process was slower (Stojaković, 2013). Besides finding premises for these institutions, the AWF organized courses for the education of nursery teachers and carers. One of the most numerous sections of the AWF was the Mother and Child section (Stojaković, 2013), which indicates that mothers carried most of the burdens of societal transformation. With regard to concrete problems, the AWF developed the practice of forming activity groups which provided help to new mothers and got engaged in childcare and housework (Stojaković, 2013).

However, this process did not run smoothly. The creation of a new socialist state and a new socialist man was accompanied by numerous problems. One of them was the problem of unemployment (Woodward, 1996), which meant that a large number of women could not find a paid job and were therefore not entitled to certain social rights, the reason for which they were obliged to remain within the confines of the nuclear family and household. Furthermore, the process of the communalization of housework, which as a model was created in order to free women from being overburdened with house chores, was not able to maintain its initial levels of enthusiasm due to economic difficulties. This led to the traditional nuclear-patriarchal family being integrated by the socialist state and its transformation into the center for social reproduction. Avoidance of the consideration of gender roles within a family led to the theoretical concept of "working woman" being replaced by the concept "working mother" (Drezgić, 2010), which clearly points to the legitimization of the double burden carried by the working woman, who is now both the producer of industrial goods and of offspring for society and the state. In this situation, working mothers were still in a far better position than those who had no paid job. The mother-worker was the focus of state care. The problems were evident but the search for a solution was not being abandoned. Models of social solidarity with working mothers which would entail the distribution of expenses incurred by biological reproduction were being considered (Kralj-Pejaković, 1979). Ways of incorporating them into the fiscal system and the system for contributions and medical insurance were being promoted and when the proclaimed measures were not fully implemented there was criticism. Certain officials of the Communist Party called attention to the problems that ensued when the state ceased to fully fund childcare institutions. Also criticized were the financial burdens placed on families, which were now required to partially contribute their own earnings to the funding of childcare institutions. What was emphasized was the necessity of organizing social public services which would take over housework but also the incorporating of mechanisms which would humanize the gender relationships within the educational system through the involvement of children in the process of communalization in the local community (Tomšić, 1981). All the same, the final result was that the repressive model of the patriarchal family and invisible housework was never placed on the agenda of official politics and was therefore never put into question (Vilenica, 2013).

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Mothers who were housewives were in a far worse position than working mothers. Yugoslav workers were the owners of production resources within the framework of self-management of public property. However, large numbers of housewives and unemployed mothers were left out of this wider picture. They were not given

the same opportunities for emancipation which was given to working mothers. This situation was legalized by the 1974 Constitution which established a new class system. Workers were the owners of production resources, unlike citizens, who were not. The latter group also included unemployed housewives. Housewives were considered socially useless citizens who did not have the same rights as the working class and in matters of social and medical welfare they were completely dependent on their husbands. (Djordjević, 1975) The only sector where they were equated with men and working women was the civil security sector. These measures were founded on the idea that the occupation of housewife was obsolete and possibly eradicated. However, in practice the situation was very different. The problem of high unemployment was partially solved by the opening of borders and sending the workforce to temporary employment abroad in the 1960s and 70s, as well as the return of many women to their traditional roles in the household. These practices of the socialist state did not go down without a reaction and criticism. Upon reading the proposed Constitution of 1973 a group of housewives from Pančevo decided to send a letter to the Constitution Commission with a request that housewives be recognized as workers. After analyzing the actual situation, these women insisted that a temporary solution be found for housewives, which this Constitution refused to equate with other members of society, thus marginalizing them until such a time as society as a whole moves to the second stage of development. They demonstrated that the occupation of housewife is not, nor will it ever be, obsolete, for as long as all citizens are not provided with a paid job and other benefits. This initiative spurred a wider public discussion and what is interesting is the fact that Party officials who worked on the emancipation of women did not support the initiative because they considered it deeply conservative. They believed that such a move would only strengthen patriarchal attitudes in the family by legitimizing the profession of housewife.

The history of the revolutionary origins and socialist growth of Yugoslavia is the history of continual rifts and contradictions between what was being proclaimed and the Yugoslav reality. The proclaimed emancipation of women had its basis in legal acts, in the realization of the idea of permanent employment, state funded social and health care and the communization of the reproduction of everyday life. However, due to economic difficulties and lack of interest in resolving the problem of free labor within the household, women's emancipation was left unfinished. This situation was aggravated, among other things, by the dissolution of the AWF by the Party establishment in 1953. The autonomous work of the AWF was perceived as problematic due to what was called "overly political work" (Čakardić, 2013). The woman question was to be solved by the abolition of

classes and the suppression of conservatism, not through the dealing with gender issues. Instead of the AWF the Association of Women's Societies of Yugoslavia was formed, which operated until 1961, when the Conference for Women's Social Activism was formed. This institution was active until 1965 (Božinović, 1996). This move was part of the process of the party-led bureaucratization of women's activism and its political normalization. During the 1970s in Yugoslavia a self-organized feminist movement came into being. It criticized the lack of adherence to the proclaimed principles of equality as well as the universal bureaucratization of the woman question. The movement reintroduced the concept of feminism to the public narrative, which in socialism was considered a bourgeois ideology. This conceptual situation created the possibility for second-wave feminists to position themselves as the founders of feminism in Yugoslavia. They did this with a sharp criticism of their predecessors who worked within the Party. Under the influences of second-wave feminism the strategies employed in the struggle for female emancipation changed. Childcare and social and worker rights of mothers were no longer the focus of new feminist thought and neither were other important achievements in the area of women's rights accomplished during socialism, all of which were taken for granted. The new movement shifted its focus from social and economic questions to the criticism of sexism in the private sphere, in the labor market and in academic circles, as well as to the criticism of the double burden of women and the perpetuation of traditional patriarchal roles (Bonfiglioli, 2011; Prlenda, 2011; Dugandžić-Živanović, 2011). Additionally, they worked on the creation of conditions in which minority and identity movements could be established. Although these questions were an important corrective for socialist society, ceasing to deal with the issues of political economy, to a certain extent made it possible for the instrumentalisation of the women's movement in the process of creating a "transitional" civil society in the 1990s and 2000s which followed the passage to capitalism.

The new "transitional" motherhood regime in Serbia and other countries formerly a part of Yugoslavia was established with the restoration of capitalism. This turnaround is a continuation of the crisis caused by bureaucratic-technocratic repression executed as part of the austerity measures which were adopted in the 1980s, under the auspices of the IMF. The crisis made evident the conflict between the ideology of social equality and the problems of everyday life, which were used as an excuse for the return to the conventional framework of capitalist modernization. The dominant ideology of capitalist restoration in the Yugoslav republics was that of a nation with the family as a key sub-ideologeme. The process of transformation from socialism to capitalism was accompanied by wars and permanent economic hardship, the impoverishment of the inhabitants, the shift from public and state to private ownership, de-industrialization, forced and voluntary emigration of a large number of people to First World countries, as well as an even more ruthless return to traditional gender roles under the strong influence of clerical and nationalist morals, which among other things has engendered pronounced homophobia and racism.

At the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, having children and the question of birthrates become the dominant themes in public debates as a formal basis for the production and reproduction of the nation. During these processes the idea of family planning was substituted with the idea of nationalistic population politics through the narrative of "deviant and desirable reproduction" (Drezgić, 2010) and the introduction of the practice of reproductive punishment. In Serbia these measures of population politics were implemented in the form of "counterfeit pro-natalism" and "counterfeit anti-natalism", characterized by harsh rhetoric in public narratives, indirect economic measures and interventions in the sphere of education (Drezgić, 2010). Through these measures, a woman of favorable ethnic origin was reduced to a birthing machine in the project of the creation of a nation and a new national state founded on capitalist social relationships. This biological reductionism and the establishing of a "natural" connection between mother, children, the fatherland and nationhood created a veil which obscured the fragile national construct and what should derive from it – a common national interest. What was considered a national interest was in fact the over-generalized interest of the techno-bureaucratic elites.

During the wars of the 1990s the reducing of women to status of mothers of the nation was also stimulated through patriotic mobilization. Child bearing was not only to save the nation from extinction but was also to serve a purpose in national security and defense of the country (Zajović, 2012). As part of this project maternity hospitals were literally depicted as recruitment centers. In Serbia, Serbian mothers were encouraged to give birth whereas the high birth

rates among the Albanians, Muslims and Roma was portrayed as deviant (Drezgić, 2010). This was perceived as biological warfare that threatened the national borders and the biological and cultural survival of the nation. The biological war was fought during the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia, where the mass rape of women on the opposing side was utilized as a war strategy. These measures had an important role in the politics of national and gender identity, in the creation of national and the destruction of social cohesion, its corruption and the creation of fellowship in crime.

The transformation from mother to mother-of-the-nation is closely linked to the advancement of the traditional patriarchal family as the basic unit of reproduction of the new nation and state. The family model was used as a key instrument with which to alleviate the hardships of the economic and social crisis that was induced by the channeling of massive funds to finance the war and the brutal primitive accumulation of capital which shifted the society into the framework of capitalist modernization. This period was characterized by a substantial increase in the numbers of extended families, most often comprised of blood-relatives, based on patrilineal but also on horizontal connections with lateral relatives, all of which clearly indicates the manner in which the crisis was being dealt with (Milić, 2004). Additionally, high unemployment rates, low wages and the degradation of the social system lead to the appearance of a large number of informal activities which helped sustain the family, but primarily strengthened the traditional gender-based family roles within a household (Zajović, 2012). During the 1990s most of the population lived in abject poverty, workers did not receive wages for months and even years. Female unpaid labor thus became the greatest economic resource and the instrument for buying social peace.

The strengthening of the patriarchy and patriarchal family and the elevation of the mother to the status of hero, the one who safeguards traditional moral values, who bears children that will in turn become the defenders of the country's national interests within the framework of transition to capitalism initiated the patriotic mobilization of mothers. One of the more extreme examples was when mothers who identified themselves with the Serbian nation organized a blockade to prevent humanitarian aid from reaching women and children of Bosnian Muslim descent in Sarajevo in 1994 (Koonz, 1997). In contrast to women who promoted "patriotism", a movement of women against war existed for a short while in Serbia. However, this movement did not manage to overcome the problems of fragmentation on national and ideological grounds and was quickly dissolved (Zajović, 2012). The movement of mothers was antimilitaristic. It campaigned against forced mobilization and for the return of soldiers from the front. In feminist circles motherhood as a potential for political organizing was

rejected in the search for alternative methods of operating, principally due to the universal instrumentalization and essentialization of the qualities of a mother. The result was that the wider social action for the emancipation of mothers ceased to exist in this period.

The reproduction of the state of perennial transition in Serbia continued into the 2000s, after the so-called democratic changes. The dominant discourse in dealing with the past is characterized by the concept of totalitarianism, which is meant to distinguish life in Yugoslavia and in the 1990s from life after the attainment of freedom and democracy. Radical privatization and the blossoming of the market economy, which also include the solving of economic and social problems through an aggressive market approach, have become the benchmark of democracy. This transition engineering is accompanied by a continual crisis and corruption of the state, under the tutelage and supervision of the EU. Foreign financial loans, along with the deregulation of the labor market and privatization, promise to bring a better life and productive growth. What springs forth as a result of these monetary policies is the growth of foreign debt, the laying waste to industry, unemployment and even greater poverty. The effects of the debtor economy can be seen in the pressures put to introduce austerity measures, whose first victim is the public sector, accused as it is of overspending budget funds.

The history of the “democratic-transitional” neoliberal regime of motherhood in Serbia is the history of the degradation of the socialist heritage of social and health welfare, workers’ rights, the state’s abandonment of public services, corruption in hospitals, the growth of the grey and black markets, unemployment, emigration to First World countries and employment in the field of care, regression to the traditional family model, ethno-nationalistic pro-natalism politics, homophobia and the exclusion of all non-heterosexual parents and guardians (as was also the case in socialism), and racism against all mothers and children of undesirable origin.

The child welfare system was dissolved at the beginning of the 2000s with the abolition of the Law on Child Welfare in 2002-2003. Some of the consequences of these measures were the closing down of nurseries, the decrease in family aid, cutbacks in social and preventative health care, as well as the absence of feeding in pre-school institutions. (Kamenov, 2003) Lower capacities in state-owned kindergartens lead to the increase in numbers of privately owned kindergartens, whose monthly fees often surpass the average Serbian salary (Gudac-Dodić, 2005). Because of a decrease in public funding, the fees in public

kindergartens are rising, an increasing number of guardians are forced to rely on intergenerational solidarity or the informal carers’ market, unattainable to many due to low income. Health care is also being restructured and will suffer a cutback in funding, with a reduction of the system of general health care. One of the more recent measures was the ending of the right of women to free gynecological check-ups (Batričević, 2013). The most recent Law on Healthcare for Children, Expectant and New Mothers stipulates that gynecologists are required to report to the State Healthcare Fund all terminated pregnancies, under threat of sanctions. (Danas, 3/12/2013) This leads to the curtailing of low-income women’s right to free healthcare, infringes on their privacy and introduces control of reproductive behavior by making it available only to those with enough money to pay for it. Austerity measures bring a reduction in the number of healthcare staff, which in turn has a consequence on the quality of care provided due to the increased workload of healthcare workers. Less money is given to healthcare centers and the conditions of maternity hospitals are completely inadequate, which leads to tragic outcomes, such as trauma to mothers and children as well as an increase in the number of deaths of mothers and children.

Women from low-income families often do not have access to healthcare, and if they do they are often not able to buy the necessary medication. As part of the process of degrading healthcare institutions, corruption amongst healthcare workers has developed as well as the outsourcing of certain services to the private sector, practiced by certain doctors who work both in the public and private sector. All this further complicates the situation, particularly for low-income mothers who cannot afford better care. Social welfare has been degraded to the utmost as child benefits paid out by the state are amongst the lowest in the region and maternity leave is paid in the full only in Belgrade and Novi Sad, while the rest of the country receives only 65 percent.

Mothers are frequently the victims of mistreatment by employers, who often do not pay them during pregnancy leave, maternity and childcare leave. This money has until now been paid to the account of the employers. Additionally, it has been shown that there are no mechanisms which would prove discrimination of mothers in the work place. It is a common occurrence that pregnant women are fired upon their pregnancy becoming known as well as women losing their jobs or being demoted when they return from maternity leave. An example of such practices is the case of a mother from Kikinda who got fired from the company “Toza Markovic” in 2012 during her maternity leave (Blic, 10/9/2013). The woman sued the employer. The court, however, did not find that discrimination had occurred as her pregnancy jeopardized the production process in the company. Most vulnerable are pregnant women who are temporarily employed,

who are at this time not protected by legislation. Currently, a new labor law is being prepared, under pressure from the EU and the IMF. This law should protect temporarily employed mothers by preventing them from being fired while on maternity leave (Propisi, 16/4/2013). The same law, however, extends the temporary employment from one to two or three years, and changes the conditions under which severance pay is made in favor of the employer, all of which makes dismissal easier. The new law also relativizes maternity leave as return to work after the legal three months is deemed a personal choice of the mother. The right of mothers to take breaks during the day to breastfeed if they return to work before a year is out encourages mothers to go back to work as soon as possible. What these measures achieve is the diminishing of responsibility of the state to pay women during pregnancy, maternity leave and childcare leave, while shifting the responsibility to the employer. This reduces the likelihood of women being employed during their reproductive years and increases the possibility of pressure being put on women with regard to her reproductive choices. Especially vulnerable are migrant workers, low-income mothers who leave their children to work as child minders in First World countries. These women are most often illegal workers and without any worker or social rights in the destination country. By assuming this invisible work in the private sphere, these women ensure the emancipation of women in western European countries.

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Manipulation of the concept of crisis also enables the state to use new methods to implement its policies which declare the family a model of economic regeneration. In this model, childcare is taken out of its socio-economic context and is represented as a matter of personal choice and not the unequal distribution of resources. To be more precise, good motherhood and parenthood is depicted as a measure for escaping poverty. This individualizes responsibility, whereas material inequality is obscured through discussions on choice and personal responsibility. These points are illustrated by the new measures introduced by the Ministry for Labor, Employment and Social Policies, with the recommendation of the UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon, who stated that in a time of crisis it is necessary to focus on the family as a resource (RZZSZ, 15/5/2013). The Serbian state secretary in the Ministry stated that having children should be encouraged, but that support should be given to responsible parenting because the aim is not to have more children that will become the receivers of state help. Also the ministry is working on encouraging generational and inter-generational cooperation and voluntary work as a social policy measure. The new project, in the process of implementation with the cooperation of UNICEF and the "Novak Djokovic" foundation, is working on introducing the institution of family counselor and family assistant for families at risk. Family counselors and assistants would

help families stay together, as single mothers and guardians present a particular threat to the state budget. They would also instruct families with financial difficulties in what way to best use their own resources in improving their social status. In the present situation, where all these resources have been exhausted from 1990 to today, this can only mean the even greater exploitation and exhaustion of an already exhausted population. All of this is the consequence of the state's abandonment of social protection and the austerity measures put in place in order to protect big business, where each individual is perceived either as a useful consumer or a potential parasite. In the cases where mothers, fathers or guardians are deemed incapable of solving their financial problems, the state has well developed mechanisms of punishment by removing children from such environments. Paradoxically, the social aid that guardians receive is many times less than the aid given to foster families who care for children taken from "inadequate" low-income parents. This demonstrates that the state recognizes the work of mothers and guardians only when it involves "other people's" children.

Under these circumstances, conservative ethno-nationalistic codification of the family unit, based on patriarchal values and heterosexuality is continued. This leads to an increase in domestic violence and discrimination of all non-conventional forms of parenting and guardianship. This situation is plainly evident in the case of Romany mothers, who carry the double stigma of belonging to a different race and being poor. Some Romany mothers do not have documents, which means that they cannot access health and social welfare. Those who are able to live under the constant threat of being evicted from social housing or are forced to set up their living quarters in slums on the outskirts of cities, which was offered as a solution to the housing problem caused by the demolition of slums in Belgrade and its surroundings. In public, the Romany mother is depicted as a bad, irresponsible mother, who spends the day begging, child in arms. No consideration is taken of the fact that these mothers often do not have any other way of surviving. Begging mothers are prosecuted, which means that poverty is dehumanized and criminalized and the creation of human waste – the unwanted ones – is legitimized. The situation is also unbearable for the LGBT population, especially LGBT parents and guardians who are universally tabooed and rejected.

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The motherhood regime continues to mobilize mothers as the guardians of traditional patriarchal values and heteronormativity. The use of the antifeminist role of mothers became particularly evident during Pride parades, which have been cancelled on several occasions because of the alleged inability of the state to guarantee the safety of the participants. The far-right organization SNP 1389 organized a protest of pregnant women by the name "The All-People's Support of Childbearing" as a counter-event at the time when the Pride was to be held in

Belgrade in 2013, with the aim of promoting “family values” and higher birth rates (Press, 26/9/2013).

It could be said that the neo-liberal “democratic-transitional” regime of motherhood has been put in a position of being regulated by the market and nationhood (Hakalović, Kovo, 2012; Vilenica, 2012). This link between national and market regulations in the sphere of motherhood is evident on every step, the most salient example being the campaign “The Fight for Babies” which demonstrated the ways in which the healthcare system is being prepared for privatization with the use of moral panic, induced by the idea of the “white plague”. The narrative of the “white plague” is founded on the idea that a low birth rate threatens national interests and the social structure as a whole. The fight against this “epidemic” was “resolutely” initiated by the B92 foundation, run by media magnate, Veran Matić. The aim was to collect funds to buy incubators for hospitals in Serbia. The campaign was organized in an almost militaristic style with the goal of saving the “little heroes” – prematurely born babies (Vilenica, 2013). The marketing campaign called “brave people” – small businesses, companies, citizens – to get involved and help Serbia. From the outset, the campaign received substantial state support. The year 2012 was declared the Year of Babies as a gesture of public support for the campaign and an active effort to improve birth rates. In 2013 the president of Serbia publicly awarded the Sretenje Medal of Honor of the Third Class to Veran Matić for his involvement in a campaign of national importance. The campaign demonstrated the mechanisms of outsourcing being developed by the state which promotes the idea that social benefactors are the ones who now provide what was previously a public good. The obvious effect of this is the delegitimation of the state and the legitimization of those who got rich during the transition (tycoons and the political elite), as well as the lack of mechanisms of regulation and control in the acquisition of profit and the further exploitation of the populace, which buys into stories of humanitarianism but which has already paid through the tax system. These gestures of the state and social benefactors yet again enforce the politics of national identity which aims to break up social cohesion, without creating an adequate form of social policy. It is important to note that this form of outsourcing was begun in the 1990s when certain functions of the state were placed in the hands of NGOs, in the space between state and market. The non-governmental sector has, for example, assumed the care for socially vulnerable categories of children and mothers as well as children who suffer family abuse. Forms of social entrepreneurship are being promoted in order to reduce what the state would spend on social welfare and to develop mechanisms in which people who are “difficult to employ” are exploited.

The motherhood regime is also marked by the uneasy consensus that the feminist struggle is over (Zaharijevic, 2009). Certain feminist demands are being integrated into the legal system and the feminist movement is entering the mainstream, where it adapts itself to the requirements of the benefactors who want structural adjustments to be made. In this way the feminist movement is becoming normalized and instrumentalized by neo-liberal politics. This produces nominal potential for equality without the possibility of making real changes to the lives of people. These relationships demonstrate that things are far from ideal and that it is necessary to question the established feminist agenda and re-formulate feminist postulates and define the new battlefronts.

The question of the institution of motherhood is a universal social question regarding the organization of social relationships. It is the question of our biological reproduction and the creation of all social practices essential for the existence of a population: from birth and care of children, emotional investment and education, to various household chores such as food preparation and cleaning. Capitalism is founded on the exploitation of unpaid reproductive labor and the constant refusal to accept responsibility for the expenses incurred by population reproduction. The present-day crisis is not just a crisis in the sphere of production but also in the area of social reproduction. The brunt of the load has fallen onto the shoulders of women who are expected to absorb most of the expenses of social reproduction. The state has divorced itself from the public sector and the economic capabilities of the household are being stretched to the limits. Furthermore, we are advised to turn to the market, which would make entrepreneurs out of all of us and have us believe that we are all somewhat of a capitalist.

All over the world, during crisis, women become the heart of resistance. The most vulnerable group of women are those who take care of children. Becoming a mother has always meant facing inequality, even when the social state was at its peak. In times of crisis, throughout the 20th century, social movements of mothers and political motherhood were the most common forms of involvement. One example is the massive grass roots movement of single mothers created in 2002 in Poland. The movement was a reaction to budget cuts that involved a decrease in education and healthcare support and the abolition of the Alimony Fund (Hryciuk and Korolcyuk, 2012). The Fund was created in 1974 and its role was to provide an stipend for single mothers who received no help from the children’s fathers. The Fund was closed in 2004, the same day Poland entered the EU, falling victim to cuts in public spending as required by the EU. These

neo-liberal measures, which placed the burden of social reproduction on women, spurred a massive reaction throughout Poland. In public, these women were accused of being a product of communism because they expected the state to solve their problems instead of dealing with them themselves.

Within the local context, certain ad hoc actions articulate political motherhood in the form of protests that demand the payment of social welfare and the improvement of the quality of social services. The women of Kragujevac joined in protest demanding the payment of unemployed mother's welfare, paid for by the local government (Alo, 5/11/2013). Parents and mothers of children with disabilities also protested seeking financial aid, shorter working hours for employed parents and extended sick leave for taking care of seriously ill children (B92, 14/2/2013).

In the countries of Western Europe all the rights won by the longstanding feminist battle regarding state responsibility for the payment of "social wages" are being jeopardized. Also under threat are communal kindergartens and children's centers, which are the points where various activities are organized by parents, feminists and care workers, with the aim of maintaining control over the communal interest, safe from the interest of business (Barbagallo & Beuret, 2012). On the other hand, one of the consequences of austerity measures is the outsourcing of care which is now mainly performed by immigrant workers, many of whom come from countries that appeared after the collapse of Yugoslavia. Global child minder chains show the deep inequality that capitalism generates with the continual creation of peripheral and semi-peripheral countries from which cheap labor is sourced (Hrzenjak, 2011). Women from the periphery emigrate to First World countries where they take on the unregulated and depreciated work of carers from women in the middle and upper classes thus enabling the latter's further emancipation. Such employment is often undertaken in circumstances which facilitate severe forms of exploitation and mistreatment and the violation of these women's workers rights. Around the world movements of workers employed in households and in care are being established and are becoming an important component of the feminist struggle against the depreciation of housework. Domestic workers are fighting for their rights, for the introduction of an eight-hour workday, the right to have a day off, and are helping newly arrived workers by providing them with information and support.

Besides the conflict created in the struggle to attain better public services, a higher quality of assistance, social wages and workers rights, all these movements create something new – "(motherhood as) a collective experience" (Hryciuk, 2011). This points to one of the most important questions nowadays – how to re-

establish severed social connections and how to prevent isolation. The question is how to go beyond the narrow economic concepts and the state, which proved itself to be a poor negotiator, and discover new territories where a new collective social organization and set of conditions will be established in which we ourselves shape our futures and our lives.

The question of political motherhood and guardianship is also a question of how we raise our children. Children are also exploited (Fraad, 1995). The dominant model of raising children is one where they are treated as material to be molded by authoritarian programs, where they will serve the state and capitalism without a right to be heard. Families are often the grounds for systematic repression and child exploitation. The question is how to think differently about the collective practice of the dissemination of child care through the repressive family and how to involve children in our struggle. In the recent protests in Turkey around Gezi Park we were able to witness several encouraging examples. At one point, Prime Minister Erdogan publicly called mothers to intervene and keep their children at home. The next day, the mothers themselves came out into the streets and created a chain in order to show their support. In the following days, a photograph of a mother preparing a chemical solution against tear gas for her daughters circled the internet.

Speaking locally, the political left leaves very little space for the consideration of questions of reproduction, motherhood and childcare. There is almost no solidarity with those who take care of children, which leads to the exclusion of mothers, parents, guardians and children from the political struggle. In May 2013, when we organized a two-day round table and offered organized childcare for the duration of the program it became evident that such practices do not exist in the local context. That was when the key questions came into being: how can we support the needs of children and their guardians in an environment in which access to resources is unequal and how do we create non-hierarchical support structures in our struggles. In the last few years this has become a burning question in many other places, so nowadays we have examples of initiatives for the radical care of children from which much can be learnt (Law and Martens, 2012). Childcare is also political work and not only the responsibility of legal or biological guardians.

The history of political motherhood and communal care is also the history of appropriation, which is something we should always keep in mind. This is most evident in the example of mothers in South America, who in the 1980 and 1990 resisted against the establishment of neo-liberal measures during so called structural adjustments. Through networks of mutual support, women in Chile,

for example, succeeded in creating communal kitchens, kindergartens and in many other countries women organised schools which became places where the problems of the local community were discussed (Zibechie, 2012). When so-called progressive, socialist oriented governments came into power, these networks were disbanded, in many countries, with the introduction of new forms of domination. What took place was the use of participatory social politics and the imposition of models of organization through non-governmental organizations, which neutralized the political potential of the existing autonomous practices (Zibechie, 2012). At this point it is necessary to ask ourselves what is the role of the organized (party) left if it establishes a more “just” society by destroying emancipating grass roots movements. The question is how we can avoid the situation where the *left* destroys the *left* in the period of transition from one political and economic system to another.

In the radical political sense, becoming a mother in this day and age means refusing to become what is expected of us. However, it is not only a refusal but a constant political struggle to change the established social relationships. Political motherhood is the symptom of certain circumstances existing in a society in crisis. It is necessary to fight for workers’ rights, for public services, for the improvement of the quality of these services but we must not stop there. It is more than evident that the state and big business are determined not to share with us anything. The introduction of capitalism through accumulation by seizure, nationalism, the strengthening of the patriarchal family has brought to a universal fragmentation of society. The perennial crisis which in this region has lasted for over 20 years has destroyed the social tissue and networks of social solidarity. For this reason one of the most important questions is how we can rebuild the fractured social tissue and regain the capacity to shape our future and our lives. The question of becoming a mother is a question which concerns all of us and our reproduction is a political question. This is a question of introducing new relationships and functions in social processes, the creation of new forms of reproduction of everyday life and the communalization of care, not only for children but for all of us, if we desire that this new hoped-for society be established on equal opportunities for all, beyond the established distribution of labor and discriminatory and repressive regimes.

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