

Family Values: Capitalism, Marxism and Women's Oppression

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The opening sentence of Leo Tolstoy's famous 1878 novel, *Anna Karenina*, declares what while "[a]ll happy families resemble one another, each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way".¹ In *Anna Karenina* the greatest factor in determining happiness is loving 'correctly'. For Tolstoy, appropriate love is, familial love, linked in the novel to nature, spirituality, and childhood, experienced within the traditional family structure and centred on the continuation of the family unit. While 'unhappy families' undoubtedly provided Tolstoy with the narrative grit required to sustain his 800 page novel, he shows little interest in the invisible substructures that sustain this 'happy family' he cherishes so dearly. For the feminist writer Ursula K. Le Guin (1929-2018), it was the reverse of Tolstoy's dictum that reveals a more profound truth about the family under capitalism. Those who speak of stable, 'happy families', Le Guin suggests, conveniently ignore the 'substructure of sacrifices, repressions, suppressions, choices made or forgone, chances taken or lost, balancing of greater and lesser evils' that create the foundation of familial happiness.² This is not wilful ignorance; it is rooted in structures that mean women often make more sacrifices, harder 'choices', in the interests of the wider unit. The happiness of men and children often comes at the expense of women, and as Sophie Lewis notes, the attendant unhappiness can feel unique, but only because its structural quality, like the structure of capitalism, is obscured from view.³

The Irish State

In Ireland, 'the Family' enjoys a particularly central and privileged position within the state. Its defining legal document, the 1937 Constitution is deeply conservative and gendered, promoting the institutions of marriage and the family and elevating to an ideal, the 'special' role of women within the private home. The 1937 Constitution was the culmination of a deeply conservative political project, revealing a state that was willing to show extreme deference to Catholic teaching, while ensuring that its formal and constitutional structures were always steadfastly liberal democratic. It would make concessions to Catholicism in terms of its willingness to incorporate aspects of Catholic social teaching – Articles 40 and 41 for example – but they would always be subject to the regulating articles on property and capital. In other words, the post-independent elite was committed to creating a state that was both Catholic *and* capitalist, with the capitalist part too often being overlooked.

The Free State emerged from the detritus of the War of Independence against Britain and a short, but vicious, post-colonial civil war. Almost immediately it adopted Catholicism as one of its principle regulating ideologies, to perform a number of functions: firstly the Catholic Church conferred legitimacy upon the fledgling post-colonial state,

and secured the delivery of ideologically driven education, health, and welfare systems. In this way, the post-colonial state could disassociate itself from revolutionary struggles that included significant socialist and feminist movements.⁴ Central to this task was a deliberative and systematic attempt by the new state to limit the citizenship rights of Irish women between 1922 and 1937. Examples include the 1927 Juries Act, which exempted women from jury service; the 1930s marriage bar for women teachers and civil servants; and the 1936 Conditions of Employment Act which sought to limit the number of women employed in any given industry. This stripping away of women's rights was legitimised in terms of the family and traditional gender roles: if women 'naturally' belonged in the home with their families, then their opportunities to a life outside the home could legitimately be limited. For the newly formed state, born out of counterrevolutionary struggle, the regulation and control of women, created a sense of social stability for a country in flux. Regulating women's bodies and their sexuality was about more than marginalising women, it was central to the hegemony of the newly empowered Catholic middle classes, who emerged as the bearers of conservative stability as Catholic morality was extended and reinforced.⁵ We now know that this vision of the stable traditional family so cherished by Catholic Ireland

rested upon a particularly brutal system of containment where women and their children were considered ‘little more than a commodity for trade amongst religious orders’ with the knowledge and complicity of the State.⁶

These ideas were given formal and legal expression in the 1937 Constitution; a deeply conservative and gendered document that promoted the institutions of marriage and the family and where the ‘special’ role of women within the private home was elevated as an ideal. The document was produced through an intimate collaboration between the Catholic Church and the political establishment and authored by Ireland’s founding patriarchs Eamon de Valera and Archbishop John Charles McQuaid. Ireland’s patriarchal history and cultural narrative were intimately woven into the document’s narrative where the role of the family and the trope of woman as (m)other were both central.

Reflecting core Catholic social teaching, Article 41 recognises ‘the Family’ as ‘the natural primary and fundamental unit’ in society and ‘guarantees’ to protect its ‘authority, as the necessary basis of social order’. The family imagined in these articles is highly gendered where the ‘special’ role of women within the private home is elevated as an ideal. By defining women’s role in the state as a private one, situated within the family, reinforced by legal prohibitions on

divorce, abortion and contraception, the implication was clear: in this newly independent nation state, women’s function would be to (re)produce the bodies of the next generation of the family, and by extension to (re)produce the body politic, the nation itself. Women activists at the time were quick to spot the dangers inherent in Article 41 although there were divisions between middle and working class activists about the nature of the concerns expressed. Louie Bennett of the Irish Women’s Workers’ Union argued the phrase ‘life within the home’ should be replaced by ‘work for the home’, arguing that doing so would limit the risk of women being restricted to unpaid work at home and provide better labour protections for those who worked for wages.⁷

The Women Graduates’ Association focused on questions of autonomy, arguing that decisions about who went out to work should be left to the family without any interference by the State. De Valera refused to budge, and the 1937 Constitution was passed with article 41 intact. Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington concluded that the Irish Constitution was based on a ‘Fascist model, in which women would be relegated to permanent inferiority’.⁸

The consequences of Article 41 for women went beyond questions of employment and marginalisation. The elevation of the family ideologically

54 within the Constitution meant that even on occasions where the state sought to develop and extend state social service provision they were met with opposition. The infamous ‘Mother and Child Scheme’ introduced by Minister for Health, Dr Noel Browne, in the early 1950s, is particularly noteworthy in this regard. Browne’s bill would have introduced a new health care scheme for women and children which would have included free medical care for all mothers and their children up to the age of 16, regardless of income. The Irish bishops objected on the basis that it represented state interference in the private domain of the family. Another key concern of the Catholic hierarchy, although never explicitly stated was their fear that doctors would provide sexual education under the guise of gynaecological advice to their female patients including advice on family planning. As the Bishop of Fears stated,

Education in regard to motherhood includes instruction in regard to sex relations, chastity, and marriage. The State has no competence to give instructions in such matters. We regard with the greatest apprehension the proposal to give to local medical officers the right to tell Catholic girls and women how they should behave in regard to this sphere of conduct at once so delicate and sacred.⁹

Faced with opposition from elements of the Catholic educated medical professions and the church hierarchy the Government backed down, the scheme was defeated, and Browne resigned. The defeat of the ‘Mother and Child Scheme’ demonstrated that the regulation of female sexuality was a key strategy in maintaining the Church’s control over reproduction and the integrity of the family in its traditional form.

Oppression in the modern family

Today’s families are very different from those that de Valera and McQuaid set out to control. The Catholic church no longer dominates, while in almost every industrialised country, the traditional male-breadwinner family model has been replaced with the two-income family model with both members working outside the home. This has not produced greater equality for women, however. Instead, it has created a whole new set of burdens. The modern woman is supposed to be some kind of superwoman who has a successful career, happy well cared for children and a sexually satisfied partner. For working class women this creates a double burden, in which they return from work at the end of the day only to face all of their family responsibilities. Unlike wealthy women who can afford to pay for someone to take primary responsibility for childcare and domestic

work, working class women are expected to work outside the home and care for their children. In order to understand why this is the case, we need to recognise the vital economic and ideological role that the family continues to play for modern capitalism. Economically, the family is the site where the next generation of workers are fed, clothed, socialised, educated, loved, and cared for, to ensure that they turn into the next generation of workers. At the same time, the family is also an important unit of consumption.

Fewer and fewer families in Ireland today resemble the typical family envisaged in 1937. Indeed, the way the majority experience ‘family’ life today would have been unimaginable to Eamon de Valera and Archbishop McQuaid. Women are more than a decade older when they have their first child; they have fewer children; they are often in a relationship but not necessarily married when they have a child; increasing numbers actively choose not to have children and a significant number of families have one lone parent, usually a woman. Furthermore, the constitutional definition of ‘the Family’ itself has been widened to include same-sex relationships. However, it would be a mistake to think that the contemporary capitalist state is any less invested in the value of the family than in the past. So while traditional ideas about the family no longer reflect the reality of society

today, the family has proved to be remarkably resilient surviving as a dominant social structure, despite the profound changes in how we live and work. This should be less surprising to us than it is, because as Sophie Lewis argues, family values are bourgeois economics writ small.¹⁰

Neoliberalism is not just an ideological project; its principle objective is to reorder economic relations and restore the balance between labour and capital, in favour of capitalism. One of the ways this is achieved, is through the destruction of social capital. Increasingly, more and more responsibility is placed onto individual families as basic social protections and the welfare state is slowly dismantled. Healthcare and education, once provided by the state, are being turned into commodities, privatised and the cost is passed onto individual families. These attacks have a disproportionate effect on women. The ideology of the family continues to be supported even in ways that are contradictory to the needs of capital itself. Women’s paid employment is vital to capitalism, so it is not in the interests of the ruling class to see women return to the home although they do want women to understand that their primary responsibility is for unpaid family care.

In her highly influential book *Family Values* (2017), Melinda Cooper argues that from the 1970s onwards,

neoliberalism has essentially reinvented the welfare state by rendering family instead of society responsible for the poor. Cooper challenges the idea that neoliberal capital privileges atomised individualism over family solidarity. Instead, she argues that the liberal ethos of personal responsibility was always supported by the wider imperative of family responsibility. In practice this works by extending the poor law tradition into its contemporary form; household debt.¹¹

Gender and class

The family has always been central to the Marxist understanding of gender oppression under capitalism. In their early writings, Marx and Engels trace the origin of the history of property relations to the patriarchal family, where ‘the wife and children are the slaves of the husband’. They continue; ‘This latent slavery in the family though still very crude is the first property but even at this early stage it corresponds perfectly to the definition of modern economists who call it the power of disposing of the labour power of others.’¹² While Marx himself never wrote a systematic account of the origins of women’s devalued position in class society and his position was never fully developed, after his death, Engels used his notebooks to explain how the state developed to protect private property through the creation of the patriarchal family. There has long been a

tendency among activists and writers to accuse Marxism of economic reductionism when it comes to discussions of race, gender, and sexuality, of reducing all social questions, including women’s oppression, to class relations. For example, even Heidi Hartmann, a feminist broadly sympathetic to Marxism famously concluded that “attempts to integrate Marxism and feminism are unsatisfactory to us as feminists because they subsume the feminist struggle into the 'larger' struggle against capital. To continue our simile further, either we need a healthier marriage, or we need a divorce”.¹³

With the increasing influence across the left of what is termed ‘identity politics’ these accusations have intensified, but usually rest on the false assumption that Marxism subordinates’ women’s oppression and other oppressions around race and LGBTQI to the more important arena of the class struggle, or worse, ignores oppression altogether. One of the reasons for this, Eleanor Leacock points out, is that ‘[i]n western academic circles second-hand knowledge of (or assumptions about) Marxist ideas are legion, but Marx’s and Engels’ works are all too seldom read. The usual practice is to set up Marxist theory as the straw man of economic determinism and then to knock it down.’¹⁴ Marxist theory does place a great deal of emphasis on economic relations, but this does not

prevent Marxists from treating questions of women's oppression with the upmost seriousness or playing a leading role in the fight against oppression in all its forms.

The Marxist approach to oppression seeks to illustrate how the origins of oppression are rooted in class society; this is not the same thing as reducing oppression to class. Marxism is based on an understanding that it is the material world that shapes the ideas in our heads, not the other way round. Therefore any understanding of women's oppression must be rooted concretely in a historical analysis of particular societies, not in sweeping generalisations about human nature. Capitalism is the prism through which all of our sexual relations are currently distorted, and this means that Marxists share with feminists a deep loathing of misogyny, arguing that women have yet to achieve genuine liberation. Marx and Engels' thinking on these questions was developed and refined over several decades. In *The Communist Manifesto* (1848), they were clear that the 'traditional' patriarchal family is a structure predicated on the oppression of women, and that its ending is necessary for women's emancipation. They note: "Differences of age and sex have no longer any distinctive social validity for the working class. All are instruments of labour more or less expensive to use, according to their age

and sex'.¹⁵ As China Miéville notes in his superb study of the *Manifesto*, Marx and Engels are here implicitly acknowledging how capitalism uses 'sexist norms' to lower the cost of labour power by employing women while simultaneously using their labour to maintain downward competition on the rates for male workers, although the insight is not yet fully developed in terms of a more systematic analysis of capitalism.¹⁶ The *Manifesto* doesn't neglect women's oppression in the family either, nor women's exploitation, nor their specific role as women workers. With the overturning of capitalism, Marx and Engels argue, the bourgeois family will be swept away, ending the oppression of women, as women, within its structures. Yet they are also clear that it is as workers that women can most effectively effect change and liberate all of humanity.

In 1884, Engels published *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*. It is broadly understood as one of the fundamental texts within the Marxist tradition on the question of women's oppression. It was written after Marx's death, but Engels drew heavily on Marx's detailed notes along with his own to develop his argument. More recent scholars like Heather Brown have highlighted some important differences between Marx's notes and Engels's *Origins* that point to some differences in

perspective. However, the broad themes of their analysis are similar.¹⁷ Engels argues that the male dominated family has historical roots that can be located in the emergence of class society during the transition from nomad hunter/gather societies to more permanent settled agricultural societies. This transition saw the emergence of private property and with it the rise of class society. The family became institutionalised as a means of protecting property and wealth and ensuring that they were passed from father to son. The only way a man could know if a child was his offspring was for women's sexuality to be tethered to his own, with women's chastity emerging as a key factor in class relations. Women during this period began to be reconceived as the property of their husbands. Far from being an unchanging feature of human biology or an unchanging idea in people's heads, women's oppression, Engels argues, arose with the emergence of class societies:

The first class opposition that appears in history coincides with the development of the antagonism between man and woman in monogamous marriage, and the first class oppression coincides with that of the female sex by the male. Monogamous marriage was a great step forward; nevertheless, together with slavery and private wealth, it

opens the period that has lasted until today in which every step forward is also relatively a step backward, in which prosperity and development for some is won through the misery and frustration of others.¹⁸

Women's oppression cannot be understood as something separate from capitalism, rather it plays a central role in its perpetuation. Capitalism relies on the central role that women have in the 'private' family as it is here that the next generation of workers are cared for. Engels' work has been subjected to a broad range of criticism and it is not without its problems. Some critics argue that Marxism cannot explain the more personal aspects of women's oppression because it locates the root of women's oppression in class society. Certainly, Marxists stress the economic roots of inequality precisely because we seek to understand how seemingly different forms of oppression have come to play a crucial, and often interdependent role in maintaining a system of exploitation. Yet, more work needs to be done to understand why men without property, without a stake in the system continue to abuse and demean women, especially if we are to develop a unitary theory of gender and oppression. Heather Brown, who has done important work on Marx's *Ethnological Notebooks*, points to Engels lack of nuance and lack of fidelity to Marx's notebooks. She argues that in

contrast to Engels, Marx treats the working class as a more diverse political subject, including women, who were considered to be revolutionary political subjects.¹⁹ Nevertheless, the essence of Engels' analysis of women's oppression remains important; the source of women's oppression is located in their role within the family and in the family's role as an economic unit within bourgeois society. This subordinate role in the family is connected to other facets of women's oppression in society at large. The other significant contribution that Marxism makes to an understanding of the family and gender oppression is around the question of reproduction.

Reproduction is typically conflated with childbirth and childcare. Marxism acknowledges and reimagines the interconnectedness of production (the act of creation) and reproduction (the act of creating again).²⁰ In *Capital*, Marx understands reproduction as the reinvesting of some of the products of accumulation into maintaining the means and forces of production. Without reproduction capitalist society could not reproduce itself. In the factory, degraded machines need replacing over time; so too in the life of workers, who must spend their wages in order to feed and clothe themselves and care for the children, who in their turn, become the next generation of workers. Marx writes:

'If production be capitalistic in form, so too will be reproduction'.²¹

This is, as Susan Ferguson argues, a necessary and a contradictory process: 'It is *necessary* because capitalists need human labour power, an essential condition of value production which they do not produce themselves. And workers ... of course, need the wages and social services through which they can meet their basic ... needs.' It is also *contradictory* because capitalists must create conditions 'whereby meeting human needs is subordinated' to profit, requiring the constraint and control of 'wages and social spending that pay for the renewal of the workforce, and of life itself'.²² Capitalism relieves some of the tensions by ensuring that most of this 'reproductive' work is gendered and done for free, within the structures of the family.

Thinking about capitalism in what has become known as social reproduction theory allows us to recalibrate the relationship between gender and class. That said, social reproduction theory is now a broad church, frequently divorced from its Marxist origins. Too often it appears as a sort of shorthand, cataloguing practices and institutions and is used to describe, rather than to explain or analyse gender and its relationship to capital. At its best, however, it can help us better understand not just gender and

the family, but also race, colonialism, sexuality and other oppressions that are implicated in the necessary but contradictory relationship with capitalism.

Gender and oppression today

Let us return now to the question of gender and Irish society. One of the challenges in understanding the oppression of women and the role of the family in Irish society is that too often women are treated as a monolith group, with little attention paid to questions around class. For example, the current debate around Article 41.2 of the Constitution or the ‘Women in the Home’ article as it is known, is as much defined by class today as it was in the 1930s. There is a tendency today among feminists to emphasise discriminatory practices like the Marriage Bar which from the late 1920s until 1973 required women in certain public service jobs to leave upon marriage. The image that is conjured up is too often, as Heather Laird and Emma Penney argue, ‘of a frustrated middle-class woman forced to stay at home rather than engage in validating work outside the house’.²³ Yet this is only one aspect of the experience of women who are mothers and work outside the home; the story also includes a long history of working class mothers who had little or no choice but to combine motherhood and paid labour.

A key reason for this, is that, in general, women’s paid work is assigned a distinctly marginal role in Irish labour history, even in celebrated accounts such as Peter Berresford Ellis’s *A History of the Irish Working Class*. Ellis’s book is largely an account of working class men in the partially-industrialised Ireland of the 19th and early 20th centuries.²⁴ However, unlike Britain, in Ireland it was service jobs rather than production jobs that constituted the majority of working class jobs and central to this was the paid household labour provided by women, both married and single.²⁵ For example, the 1911 census indicates that 93 percent of Irish indoor servants were women.²⁶

While women’s participation in the paid workforce declined after 1922, the demand for paid household labour continued. Historian Maria Luddy’s work shows how domestic service remained ‘the largest single source of female employment until the 1950s’ in the south of Ireland.²⁷ Simply focusing on the impact of Article 41.2 on middle class mothers who were denied equal access to the workplace also ignores how the Irish State failed to provide any support for working class women who wished to stay at home. Article 41 of the Constitution understood the man as head of a gendered household that conceived of women and children as male dependents.

It was around this idea of women as dependents that the gendered welfare system was constructed, relieving the state of the responsibility of providing adequate support for women and children well into the 1990s. Historian Mary Daly estimates that approximately 125,000 women were in dependent relationships with men in 1987, but because of the way poverty is measured, she notes, ‘we do not know precisely how many men fail to hand over sufficient money in the home.’²⁸ What we can assume is that for every man that failed to hand over money, there was a woman either forced to work outside the home or to navigate a social welfare system that only recognised her as a dependent. In this context, the State’s conception of women and the family can be viewed as a constitutional clause which prevented some women from rejecting low wage and exploitative jobs with working class women experiencing the consequences of this gendered inequality far more severely than middle class women.

Article 41 ‘The Family’ in the Irish Constitution, sub-section two, focuses on the question of care work in the family. Arguably it could be understood to represent a constitutional affirmation of the public and essential good that care work provides to the State, largely by women within the family unit. Yet, in practice, it has never amounted to anything more than rhetoric providing

no material benefit to women who do work exclusively in the home. Social issues for the Irish state have always found themselves subject to constraints of liberal individualism and the protection of private property. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that the Irish courts have always been allergic to the idea that the 1937 Constitution should be interpreted as having a social dimension. For example, Supreme Court Justices have consistently found that the individual property rights of the owning spouse (husband), are protected by Article 43 of the Constitution, and are not capable of being eclipsed by the States’ obligation to protect the elevated position of the family and women/mother’s in the home in Article 41, once again demonstrating the traditional and standard antipathy shown towards the contributions of female homemakers in Ireland. Nor has the Supreme Court ever interpreted Article 41 as imposing additional financial obligations on the State to support mothers in the home given the tax and social welfare impacts on public expenditure. For example, in the 1992 Supreme Court Case, *L v L*, the Court rejected an argument grounded in Article 41.2 to support a married women’s claim to a 50 per cent share in the family home on the basis that Article 41.2 did not give the Courts jurisdiction to make a transfer of property in favour of a mother. Furthermore, when the Supreme

62 Court thinks about ‘The Family’ it only ever interprets Article 41 as a family founded in marriage (after 2015 to include same-sex couples). Yet, one in five people in Ireland live in a one parent family and one in four families with children is a one parent family.²⁹ While legislation and public policy may recognise broader definitions of the family, like for example, the provision for one parent families in the social welfare code, only one type of family enjoys constitutional protection. This has real-life implications for many. Consider, for example, the case of John O’Meara from Co Tipperary. His long term partner and mother of his children died tragically in early 2021 but because they were not married his relationship was not recognised by the State and he was denied a Survivors Pension.³⁰ At the same time, the State routinely recognises co-habitation, but for the purpose of depriving people of benefits in the social welfare code. The system of social welfare inspection leaves women in receipt of single parent payments vulnerable to abuse of power, with many reporting unannounced visits and searches of personal possessions. Women who attempt to challenge the abuse of power by these inspectors, who are often men, are threatened with having their payments stopped.³¹

The essential nature of unpaid labour within the home, the majority of which is

performed by women was thrown into sharp relief by the Covid-19 pandemic. Yet women’s experiences were, at best, forced to the margins of the public debate and, at worst, rendered completely invisible. Covid-19 disproportionately impacted the lives of working class people in general, but it was women who found themselves at the coalface. Research conducted by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) found that the pandemic had a “disproportionate impact” on women and that it was undoing many of the gains of workplace equality achieved in recent decades and exacerbating disparities: “Previous crises have shown that when women lose their jobs, their engagement in unpaid care work increases and that when jobs are scarce, women are often denied job opportunities available to men”.³² Furthermore, it found that women’s jobs were 1.8 times more vulnerable to the Covid-19 crisis than men’s, with women accounting for 54 percent of overall job losses though they account for just 39 percent of global employment.³³ In Ireland women exited the workforce at a faster rate than men and carried a heavier share of the unpaid care and domestic work. According to research by the UN titled ‘Women Before COVID-19 Hit’, women on average spent six more hours than men on unpaid childcare every week. A survey of nearly 1500 women by the National Women’s Council in May 2020 revealed that some

85 percent of women believed their caring responsibilities had increased dramatically since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, suggesting they were unfairly shouldering the burden of unpaid work.³⁴ This is confirmed by recently published research by the ESRI which shows that since COVID-19, women now spend 31.5 hours per week more on unpaid childcare than men. This ‘second shift’ equates to almost an extra full-time job.³⁵

One of the most concerning features of the COVID-19 pandemic was the horrifying global surge in domestic violence which the UN has referred to as “the Shadow Pandemic” revealing something important about the nature of the family under capitalism.³⁶ We cannot simply reduce the family to the key political and economic unit of capitalism. For many people, the family can be the one place we receive unconditional love and support - a haven from a sometimes brutal world. However, this experience is far from universal as the family can also be a site of much unhappiness, pain, and violence. Domestic violence accounts for a significant portion of recorded violent crime in Ireland and the most common scene of murder is the home. In 2022, 12 women died in violent circumstances in Ireland, making it the worst year in a decade for violence against women. Between 1996 and April 2023, a total of 258 women died violently in Ireland. The

statistics show that 165 of these women had been killed in their own homes.³⁷ Women who are raped are also more likely to be attacked by someone they know – often within the home. In Ireland, 1 in every 6 women over the age of 15 have experienced physical or sexual violence from a partner.³⁸ The physical and sexual abuse of children is also more likely to happen inside the home than outside. None of this should be particularly surprising as the family is an institution based on hierarchical relationships and sexual repression. The family promises happiness and safety, but frequently it delivers insecurity and sadness. While it can sometimes function as a haven from the cruelty of the outside world, it cannot be a genuinely secure retreat. Pressures on the family, particularly working class families, from unpaid bills to unemployment, from problems of parents working shifts to difficult relationships, all impinge upon it and have been exacerbated in recent years by neoliberalism. In their manifesto for 21st century feminism, *Feminism for the 99 percent*, Cinzia Arruzza, Tithi Bhattacharya, and Nancy Fraser point towards the catastrophic effects that neoliberal privatisation and the deregulation of welfare and care services have had on individual families. ‘In some cases,’ they argue, ‘it has marketised public services, turning them into direct profit streams: in others, it has shunted them back to individual families, forcing

them – and especially the women within them – to bear the entire burden of care.’³⁹

If the family is supposed to be a *haven in a heartless world*, we should begin by asking what kind of world would be so heartless as to require it? What kind of world would render such an institution irrelevant? How do we achieve a different world? As Marxists, we understand that this involves an organised and global struggle against capitalism to create a world that puts people, not profit, at its heart. To help us achieve this we need to better develop our understanding of how our world operates under capitalism, in other words, a theory of capitalism and resistance to help us win. This requires Marxist political economy capable of integrating an analysis of reproduction within an analysis of economic production. If we want to understand the position of women under capitalism, we need to understand political economy, but if we want to understand political economy, we need to analyse the position of women under capitalism. This is not simply a case of adding gender and stirring the mix. It means creating a form of Marxism that does more than simply make space for an analysis of race and gender; rather it needs to analyse how race and gender affect the outcome of production under capitalism.

Endnotes

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