



Roots of Social Reproduction Theory in Marx and Engels: A Total Analysis of Society and Life

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ABSTRACT: The social reproduction theory aims to construct a total analysis of the production of things and the production and reproduction of people. Therefore, it broadens social production by including the care and reproduction work—by women—rather than just seeing it as capital accumulation/commodity production and reproduction of capital. Social reproduction theory is a materialist theory of (social) life and has its roots in Marxism. Historical materialist premises provide both a materialist explanation of social reproduction and women’s role in it and a ground for the struggle with capitalism and patriarchy. In this paper, I will argue that the materialist conception of history and methodology that Marx and Engels developed in *The German Ideology* establishes the ground for social reproduction theory. For this, I will show that, first, their consideration of human-beings as the product of their own labor, second, their evaluation of the production and reproduction of the human being as one of the three moments of history, and third, their thinking of human relations in a broader sense—*Verkehr*—are significant contributions to social reproduction theory. I will also argue that social reproduction theory makes an essential contribution to rebuilding the Marxist conception of totality based on a materialist conception of history and materialist dialectics to encompass the entire life and society, by expanding the concept of labor, putting the production and reproduction of life at its center, and including reproduction work that is overwhelmingly performed by women.

KEYWORDS: Social reproduction, *The German Ideology*, *The Origin*, materialist conception of history.

Introduction

The Covid 19 pandemic has displayed how important social reproduction is. The pandemic has also shown that production and reproduction activities, from childcare to elderly care, from formal to university education,

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from access to vaccines to health services, and from ecological concerns to agricultural production are the most crucial aspects of life. Moreover, we witnessed, especially during the lockdown, how production and reproduction activities are intertwined. Pandemic conditions also revealed the vital role in social reproduction, in Tithi Bhattacharya's (2020) words, of the "life-making activities" of women. Thus, the COVID-19 pandemic should be understood, as Alessandra Mezzadri (2022) puts it, as a systemic crisis of social reproduction—a crisis of capitalist life.

The economic crisis, accompanying the pandemic conditions and getting worse, has once again revealed the importance of social reproduction. The circumstances of the crisis we have been through in Turkey have deadly affected the lives of working-class households because of high inflation and increasing unemployment. Therefore, again, the struggle for social reproduction becomes a struggle against capital. As Cynthia Arruzza (2016, 11) claims, the notions of financial and economic crisis alone are not sufficient to give an account of the current crisis in the survival conditions of the working class. The conception of social reproduction within the framework of a total theory allows us to understand the current crisis not only in economic terms but as a general crisis of the reproduction of society in all its dimensions. Therefore, the struggle for social reproduction—the struggle for health, education, shelter, food, etc.—is a part of the class struggle.

To explain the general crisis of the reproduction of capitalist society, that is, the crisis of capitalist life, we need to have a total theory of life. The social reproduction approach expands social production by including human production and reproduction, rather than just seeing it as capital accumulation/commodity production and reproduction of capital. Social reproduction theoreticians, arguing that social reproduction is essential to capital accumulation, contend that production and reproduction are "an integrated and unified process" (Ferguson 1999, 9).

To maintain our living, we need food, clothing, proper housing, etc. We also need to be cared for and loved. The fulfillment of these needs is the essential condition of human existence. Social reproduction theory encompasses all aspects of our life. On the one side, there is capital accumulation, commodity production and the value creation process. On the other side, there is another labor process, which is invisible and unpaid—the reproduction of life in the households by women. Most of the goods and services we need are not produced under capitalist conditions but by the unpaid labor of women in the houses. It means that it is mainly women's unpaid

labor that produces and reproduces people as humans, members of society, and productive forces. Women do not get paid for these labor activities, and the goods and services they produce are not commodities. They do not create value but produce and reproduce labor power daily and generically for capital. Thus, they provide capital with its unique source of value. So, they provide, in Isabella Bakker and Stephen Gill's (2003, 22) words "both a productive potential and a condition of existence for the expanded reproduction of capital and social formation."

However, this workload is the biggest obstacle for women to participate in wage work and to realize their human potential. It also continuously reproduces male domination and women's dependence on men.

What Marxist feminist theory calls social reproduction has three dimensions: (a) Biological reproduction of the species, (b) Reproduction of the labor force, and (c) Reproduction of provisioning and caring needs. Social reproduction theoreticians also expand the analysis to other relations, institutions, and organizations such as schools, hospitals, migrant workers, etc. Social reproduction thus involves fundamental social processes and institutions through which communities are reproduced and develop over time and upon which all production and exchange ultimately rest (Gill and Baker 2006, 41).

The production/reproduction of human beings and the reproduction of society as a whole bring up a new relationship between social sciences and humanities. A theoretical recognition of caring labor as critical for the reproduction of people is necessary for any adequate materialist analysis of science. Moreover, it is a crucial precondition for an alternative epistemology and method that will help us construct a new science and a new technology (see Rose 1983, 83). Besides, anthropological findings, biological facts, health sciences, educational sciences, technological innovations in agriculture, genetically modified foods, innovations in household appliances, industry 4.0 discussions, technological developments in biological reproduction, etc., open up essential debates in this context.

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Social reproduction theory is a materialist theory of (social) life and has its roots in Marxism. Marx and Engels made the first step of total analysis of the production of things and the production and reproduction of people.

In their work we call *The German Ideology*,¹ a well-known work written in 1845–46 but unpublished,² Marx and Engels included the production of humans as one of three essential historical acts:

[. . .] life involves before everything else eating and drinking, housing, clothing and various other things. The first historical act is thus the production of the means to satisfy these needs, the production of material life itself. And indeed this is an historical act, a fundamental condition of all history, which today, as thousands of years ago, must daily and hourly be fulfilled merely in order to sustain human life [. . .] The second point is that the satisfaction of the first need, the action of satisfying and the instrument of satisfaction which has been acquired, leads to new needs; and this creation of new needs is the first historical act [. . .] The third circumstance which, from the very outset, enters into historical development, is that men, who daily re-create their own life, begin to make other men, to propagate their kind: the relation between man and woman, parents and children, the family. (Marx and Engels 2010b, 41–43)

These three moments, three *historical materialist premises* (Gimenez 2018, 3) draw a *methodological framework* to analyze society and historical development. They encompass all the production and reproduction processes of life and acknowledge so-called family relations.

In this paper, I will argue that these premises also establish the ground for social reproduction theory. Many social reproduction theoreticians accept this and begin to develop social reproduction perspective from here. For example, Susan Himmelweit (1992, 203) points out that according to Marx and Engels, human reproduction should be analyzed alongside the production of things if a materialist account of history is to be developed. However, only a few, such as Frigga Haug (2015b), Tithi Bhattacharya (2017b), Susan Ferguson (1999) and Lise Vogel (1983) elaborate on it.

I want to take it further and argue that Marx and Engels's early perspectives made three interconnected contributions to social reproduction theory. As I mentioned above, Marx and Engels acknowledge that people have produced and reproduced themselves by their labor since the dawn of human societies. I will try to show that their evaluation of the production and reproduction of the human being as one of the three moments of history

1. However, the title “The German Ideology” is not found anywhere in the original manuscripts known as *The German Ideology*. See Carver (2014, 1).

2. There were several attempts by Marx and Engels to have their 1845–46 manuscripts published as a whole or even in parts. During their lifetimes, they succeeded to publish a part of it and some other parts were published later on by Peter von Struve and Eduard Bernstein.

is the first step in a total theory of production and reproduction. However, before that, I want to point out another conception of Marx and Engels, which is a precondition of it: human beings as the product of their labor. So first, I will argue that this conception logically provides a ground for a total theory of life. For Marx and Engels, the starting point of the materialist understanding is the real, living, acting, and producing human beings. As Marx posits in the eighth thesis on Feuerbach that all social life is essentially practical, social-reproduction-theoreticians begin by broadening the definition of labor as the producer of society, life, and labor itself. However, there is no comprehensive Marxist feminist analysis of Marx and Engels's this early conception except for a few references, such as Haug (2015b). She (2015b, 76) argues that Marx's theses on Feuerbach are significant for the feminist critique of mainstream science. The lesson she draws from Marx for contemporary feminism is the role of "real life." Starting from this, I will try to look at the thoughts of Marx and Engels a bit deeper and discuss them briefly in the context of social reproduction. After that, I will return to the fact that they have included reproduction alongside production—the *second* contribution—, which is—in a way—a logical consequence of the previous notion and gives it a concrete structure. And third, I will argue that their thinking of human relations in a broader sense—*Verkehr*—is a significant contribution to social reproduction theory. While producing their means of subsistence and producing/reproducing themselves, women and men enter into various social relations. Marx and Engels highlight that people realize these production processes through their *intercourse* (*Verkehr*) with each other and under a specific division of labor. *Verkehr* is also a logical consequence of Marx and Engels' consideration of human beings as the product of their own labor. This early insight of Marx and Engels has not found much place in Marxist debates, let alone Marxist/socialist feminist debates. Only a few Marxists, such as Göran Therbon (1976) or Georges Labica (1980), refer to the concept but not in the context of social reproduction. They find that *Verkehr* is inconvenient with the Marxist theory of history because of its broad meaning. On the contrary, I will try to show that this notion is at the heart of the social reproduction theory. It comprises essential social relations associated with social reproduction processes such as childcare or elderly care. Moreover, it provides a ground for discussing many patriarchal norms and linkages, such as "motherhood," "family," and "love."

In this work, I also want to draw attention to the fact that social reproduction perspective makes a critical contribution to rebuilding the Marxist

conception of totality based on a materialist conception of history and materialist dialectics to encompass entire life and society. As social reproduction feminists argue, Marxists have generally ignored how biological reproduction, housework, sexuality, and caring activities are arranged, and have taken them as “natural” or outside human history. Although Marx and Engels had a broader social production perspective in their early writings, they did not maintain it in their later work. Still, Engels turned back to this conception in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State* (*The Origin*, hereafter) writing in the Preface that according to the materialist conception, the determining factor in history is the production and reproduction of immediate life. However, he, too, did not maintain it in the rest of the book.

Marxist/socialist feminists brought these issues back to the fore and developed a total analysis of society. They argue that women’s domestic labor provides capital with the condition of existence through its role in the reproduction of labor power and the production of human beings. The social-reproduction-feminist perspective enables a genuine total analysis of society and reveals the connection between male domination and capital. And therefore, as Susan Ferguson and David McNally (2013, xxxvii) argue, it opens up the possibility of a more genuinely historical materialist reading of the social relations of power by identifying the conditions under which race, gender, sexuality, and class are (co) reproduced, transformed and potentially revolutionized.

I will then conclude that the social reproduction approach contributes to the Marxist conception of totality by expanding the concept of labor, putting the production and reproduction of life at its center, and including (re)production work that is overwhelmingly performed by women. It also provides socialist/Marxist feminists a ground for a united struggle against capital and male domination.

The Roots of Social Reproduction Theory in the Materialist Conception of History

Social reproduction theory is a materialist theory of life. The materialist conception is an approach that posits the existence of a real, material world, one which conditions the social, political, and intellectual processes in general (Armstrong and Armstrong 1983, 9). The ways people co-operate to provide for their daily and future needs establish the framework

within which all human activities take place. In *The German Ideology*, breaking free of the qualitative and ontological separation between civil society and the state, economy, and culture, and between the political and public sphere and the private and familial, Marx [and Engels] present an integrated, constantly elaborating historical/social space—a social unity what social reproduction theory suggests (see Haug 2015b, 111). This understanding is significant for social reproduction approach since by conceiving the material foundation of social life as the productive and reproductive activities of everyday life, the social reproduction approach offers a materialist understanding of social relations that is better able to take account of contradictions and complexity than one based on the market alone (Ferguson 1999, 2).

Marxist scholars and feminists—such as Lise Vogel, David Ryazanov, Vladimir Adoratsky, August Cornu, C. J. Arthur, and Cohen and his colleagues—generally think that Marx and Engels developed “historical materialism” or the “materialist conception of history” in *The German Ideology*.³ However, according to some, such as Göran Therbon (1976, 368), although Marx and Engels drew the first sketch of historical materialism, the first part of *The German Ideology* cannot be regarded as a summary of historical materialism. I will turn to this issue in the next chapter.

Yet, Marx and Engels did not use either term—i.e. materialist conception of history or historical materialism—anywhere in the original manuscript (See Carver and Blank 2014, 1). Nevertheless, almost forty-four

3. Lise Vogel, one of the founders of feminist social reproduction approach points out that *The German Ideology* marks a turning point in the development of Marx and Engels’s work (2013, 51). For her, it also contains their first comprehensive formulation of a theory and history of the family. David Ryazanov, the founder of the Marx-Engels archive in Soviet Russia and the editor of the historical edition of the collected works of Marx and Engels, described it in his Introduction to the Feuerbach section of *The German Ideology* as being the earliest account of the materialistic conception of history See Carver and Blank (2014, 19). Similarly, Vladimir Adoratsky, the successor of Ryazanov, claimed that “I. Feuerbach” must be seen as the “first systematic exposition of their [Marx and Engels’s] historical-philosophical conception of the history of man” Carver and Blank (2014, 32). August Cornu (1957, 100), one of the greatest French Marxist writers, wrote that Marx and Engels saw the fundamental causes and purposes of human activity in the organization and production of material life. To Cornu, thus, they arrived at a materialist conception of history, and this is how historical materialism was formed. According to C. J. Arthur (1986, 149), the editor of one of the editions of *The German Ideology*, historical materialism was outlined and defended for the first time in this book. Similarly, according to the editors of *Marx and Engels’ Collected Works* (Cohen et al. 2010b, xiii), it was in *The German Ideology* that the materialist conception of history—or historical materialism—was first formulated as an integral theory.

years after this work (in 1888), in the Preface to his *Ludwig Feuerbach and the end of Classical German Philosophy*, Engels referred to their old manuscript as an exposition of the materialist conception of history (Engels 2010b, 519).⁴

By historical materialism or the materialist conception of history, we refer to “a guiding principle” Marx and Engels developed for their lifelong studies. Marx (2010c, 262) mentioned this early manuscript (i.e. *The German Ideology*) in his introduction to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* as an essential work in which he arrived at a general conclusion—a guiding principle—for his studies. In other words, starting from real and active human beings, and on the basis of their real life-process, demonstrating the development of the ideological reflexes and echoes of this life process, Marx and Engels established their methodological stance (see Marx and Engels 2010b, 36). Marx himself saw in this work the methodological prerequisite for a new political economy. In a letter to the German publisher Leske on August 1, 1846, he wrote that the polemical work against the German philosophers was necessary to prepare readers for his view on economic science (Marx and Engels 2010c, 50).⁵ It indeed constitutes the basis of social analysis of any kind.

This early insight takes us to the foundations of the social reproduction perspective. When analyzing contemporary society and the capitalist mode of production, we should start with living people, their labor processes (of whatever kind), and their relations with each other. While producing/ reproducing their life, people transform themselves, their thoughts, and the world. This conception has also established the ground for the methodological framework developed by Marx and Engels in *The German Ideology*.

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4. “I have once again ferreted out and looked over the old manuscript of 1845–46. The section dealing with Feuerbach is not completed. The finished portion consists of an exposition of the materialist conception of history.” Engels used the term “historical materialism” for the first time in his letter to Schmidt on 5 August 1890 (Marx and Engels 2010e, 8). In his letter to Kautsky on 16 February 1884, Engels (Marx and Engels 2010d, 103) mentioned it again: Within the limits set by his subject, Morgan rediscovers for himself Marx’s materialist view of history, and concludes with what are, for modern society, downright communist postulates. Further, in his 1886 letter to Schlüter (26 November), Engels (Marx and Engels 2010d, 529) writes that his *Anti-Duhring* revolves around the materialist-economic view of history.
5. Marx (Marx and Engels 2010c, 50) wrote the following: “For it seemed to me very important to precede my positive development with a polemical piece against German philosophy and German socialism up till the present. This is necessary in order to prepare the public for the viewpoint adopted in my *Economy*, which is diametrically opposed to German scholarship past and present.”

All Social Life is Essentially Practical

The roots of Marx and Engels' materialist understanding go back to their earlier writings, such as Marx's *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* or *the Holy Family*. In the *Manuscripts of 1844*, Marx, following Hegel, considered the real individual the outcome of her own labor. Marx takes this conception from Hegel but he begins with a real, sensual, and acting being rather than a self-conscious contemplative being (Santilli 1973, 76; Cornu 1957, 86; Arthur 1986, 161). In his eleven theses on Feuerbach, Marx made a parallel critique of idealism and mechanical materialism to posit the notion of action in the sense of practical activity and work (See Cornu 1957, 95). In the eighth thesis, Marx posits that all social life is essentially practical. Similarly, in *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels criticize contemporary German philosophers for not starting from real people but remaining in the world of ideas. On the contrary, the key to understanding the process of historical development lays in their physical productive activity. They write:

The premises from which we begin are not arbitrary ones, not dogmas, but real premises from which abstraction can only be made in the imagination. They are the real individuals, their activity and the material conditions of their life, both those which they find already existing and those produced by their activity. (Marx and Engels 2010b, 31)

Two things are essential here: On the one hand, Marx and Engels posit that people produce their life through their practical activities. On the other hand, they consider an individual “in all her peculiarities as a product of labor transforming both the external world and the individual himself” (Ilyenkov 1977, 253).

First, in opposition to the idealist view, Marx calls our attention to the crucial linking element between the natural basis of human life and the history we make.⁶ In the *Manuscripts of 1844*, he (Marx 2010b, 272) pointed out that the entire so-called history of the world is nothing but the creation of people through human labor.⁷ Marx emphasized that a period in social history cannot be understood without knowing the “industry of that period, the immediate mode of production of life itself” (Marx and Engels

6. As Arthur (1986, 159) asserts, Marx's historical materialism is materialism that prioritizes practice, material practice.

7. In *The Holy Family*, Marx and Engels developed it further and took a new step forward in clarifying the decisive role of material production in social development. (see Cohen et al. 2010a, xvii).

2010a, 150). This “immediate mode of production of life,” which consists of the reproduction of human beings both daily and generically, takes us to the theoretical framework that Marx and Engels developed in *The German Ideology*.

Second, naming labor as a life activity, Marx (2010b, 272) showed that it produces not only commodities but also both labor itself as a commodity and the worker.⁸ Here we find the roots of Marx’s theory of the reproduction of labor power and the laboring population, which he posited—but did not fully develop—in the *Capital*.

Thus, following Marx and Engels, our starting point is living and acting people. For this, we should analyze how people survive and by whose labor they meet their—basic—needs. Once more, as Pat and Hugh Armstrong (1983, 9) argue, production in this view is not simply an arena in which commodities are produced. As Ferguson (1999, 4) highlights, it is a broader system through which people organize to meet all their human needs. The central element of this organization is the daily and generational production of individuals, which, in the capitalist era, takes place mainly in the houses by women’s labor.

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According to Marx and Engels, by developing their material production and intercourse, people change their actual world as well as their thinking and the products of their thinking. People are also the products of the social conditions under which they do those activities. These conditions, which are both they find already existing and those produced by their activities,⁹ also determine their thoughts. As Ilyenkov points out (1977, 283), Marx and Engels established that the external world was not given to the individual as it was in itself simply and directly in her contemplation but only in the course of its being altered by her. The production of ideas, conceptions, and consciousness is directly interwoven with the material activity and the material intercourse of people (Marx and Engels 2010b, 36). Hence, “consciousness [*das Bewusstsein*] can never be anything else than conscious being [*das bewusste Sein*], and the being of men is their actual life-process” (Marx and Engels 2010b, 36). Here another crucial point lies: It is through material production that we reproduce ourselves, learn about

8. In these years, Marx had not yet introduced the distinction between labor and labor-power.

9. While the materialist conception of history concedes its reality to the external world, it still regards its concrete reality as the product of the concrete practical activity of women and men. (see Cornu 1957, 96).

our world, and develop our social and human potentials (Arthur 1986, 159). Ilyenkov elaborates this more subtly in *The Dialectical Logic*:

Between contemplating and thinking, man and nature in itself there existed a very important mediating link through which nature was transformed into thought, and thought into the body of nature. That was practice, labour, production. It was production (*in the broadest sense of the word*) that transformed the object of nature into the object of contemplation and thought [emphasis added]. (Ilyenkov 1977, 257)

Marx summarizes it as follows:

In the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political, and intellectual life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness. (Marx 2010c, 263)

Just like the last sentence of the well-known paragraph above reads, according to the materialist conception of history, people themselves and their consciousness are determined by their social existence (Marx and Engels 2010b, 37). Therefore, a human being is, above all, one who produces herself objectively and is conscious of doing so, both in the activity itself and in the works produced (Santilli 1973, 76).

From Reproduction of Labor Power to Reproduction of Life

Marx and Engels included the production of humans as one of three essential historical acts in *The German Ideology*, which is a critical step for social reproduction approach. However, they did not maintain this point of view in their later works—except Engels's *The Origin*. However, the concept of reproduction was one of Marx's essential concepts—not in the context of human production but in the reproduction of labor power and the reproduction of capital. Social reproduction theorists constructed their perspective by developing the theory of reproduction of labor power that Marx left incomplete in *Capital*.

Reproduction of Labor Power and Reproduction of Capital

Reproduction is, first, the reproduction of capital. Marx (2010a, 565) writes that whatever the form of the production in a society, it must be a continuous process and go periodically through the same phases. Thus, he started to analyze the reproduction of capital in the first volume of *Capital* and devoted much of the second volume to elaborating it. He pointed out that there are two types of reproduction processes—simple and extended. When capitalist reproduction is a mere repetition of the process of production on the previous scale, it is simple reproduction. Extended reproduction is accumulation on an increasing scale—creation and reinvestment of an ever-increasing amount of surplus value. Simple reproduction is valid in all societies. However, extended reproduction gives capitalist production its specificity.

Second, the reproduction of labor-power is central to Marx's theory. In a capitalist society, labor power has become a commodity, but it has different characteristics—it is a specific commodity. It is inseparable from its owner, and its reproduction consists of activities such as feeding, sheltering, sleeping, etc. It also involves physiological and emotional concerns, such as compassion, love, care, etc. Since living labor is the sole source of value, the production and reproduction of labor are essential for capital accumulation. As Marx (2010a, 572) writes in *Capital*, "The maintenance and reproduction of the working class are, and must ever be, a necessary condition to the reproduction of capital." Marx (2010a, 181) writes that given the individual, the production of labor power consists in her reproduction of herself or her maintenance. Here he accepts—implicitly though—the labor required to reproduce labor power. However, he then ignores all the labor processes associated with this maintenance, such as women's unpaid labor, and "safely" leaves laborer's reproduction to her instincts of self-preservation and propagation. As Pat and Huge Armstrongs (1983, 9) write, Marx, like the capitalists, leaves the reproduction of workers mainly to themselves. Besides, his account fails to explain an essential social fact that people also have to be produced if capitalism is to continue (Himmelweit 1992, 202).

Thus, Marx's theory does not encompass the reproduction of society as a whole, nor does it take into account the unpaid labor activity of women in the reproduction processes. Drawing attention to these shortcomings (Bhattacharya 2017a; Vogel 1983; Ferguson 2016), the social reproduction theorists try to develop further what Marx leaves unexamined (see Bhattacharya 2017b, 73):

- What are the implications of labor power being produced outside the circuit of commodity production, yet being essential to it?
- What other social relationships and institutions are comprised by the circuit of social reproduction?

Another essential point to discuss in this context is that some social reproduction feminists claim that Marx had failed to integrate the reproduction of labor power into his theory of capital. However, this is an inappropriate criticism since it is the only commodity that cannot be produced thoroughly under capitalist conditions. The problem here is not that Marx failed to integrate the reproduction of labor power into his theory of capital. On the contrary, Marx argues that the reproduction of labor power cannot take place under capitalist conditions. If it were, the worker could not be a “free” laborer—she would become a capitalist’s commodity like any other means of production. In a way, she would have ceased to be a free person and become a “slave” —not a commodity owner but a commodity (Marx 2010a, 178). In this case, the creation of surplus value would not be possible. In short, this criticism has been misplaced. Production within the household is not immediately related to the capitalist production process and therefore cannot be integrated into capitalist production. Martha Gimenez (following Louis Althusser) (2019, 298) argues that this criticism is wrong. She claims that Marx distinguishes “levels of analysis” —mode of production and social formation—for different social phenomena. Michael Lebowitz (2003, 65) participates in this debate, which has not found much space in the Marxist literature, by defining the production of labor power as the “second moment” of production as a whole. According to Lebowitz, not only human production but also the production processes of various use objects that provide input to human production are outside capital. He states that capitalist production consists of the production of capital and the production of wage labor, which are discrete moments of a whole.

The problem with Marx’s theory of reproduction of labor power is that Marx did not elaborate on it in detail and did not consider the gender division of labor. Social reproduction feminists start from the reproduction of labor-power and expand it to the reproduction of humans and society. Therefore, “social” reproduction has a broader meaning for social reproduction theory. Johanna Brenner and Barbara Laslett suggest a functional distinction between societal and social reproduction, with the former retaining the original meaning as Marx has used it and the latter referring to:

[. . .] the activities and attitudes, behaviors and emotions, and responsibilities and relationships directly involved in maintaining life, on a daily basis and intergenerationally. It involves various kinds of socially necessary work—mental, physical, and emotional—aimed at providing the historically and socially, as well as biologically, defined means for maintaining and reproducing population. Among other things, social reproduction includes how food, clothing, and shelter are made available for immediate consumption, how the maintenance and socialization of children is accomplished, how care of the elderly and infirm is provided, and how sexuality is socially constructed. (Brenner and Laslett 1991, 314)

Producing and Reproducing Life

The primary condition of life, and therefore the living person, is to have the means to sustain her life: She must be brought into the world, fed, cared for, and thus reproduced, both biologically and socially. They wrote:

. . . the production of life, both of one's own in labour and of fresh life in procreation, now appears as a twofold relation: on the one hand as a natural, on the other as a social relation—social in the sense that it denotes the co-operation of several individuals, no matter under what conditions, in what manner and to what end. (Marx and Engels 2010b, 43)

Starting from the living human beings, Marx and Engels posited the production and reproduction of humans as one of three essential historical acts. In the first section of the Book, “Feuerbach”, Marx and Engels posited that social activity has three aspects, one of which is the reproduction of human life—the relation between women and men and the family. In brief, these are three moments that people begin to have a history: 1. Production of the means of subsistence and satisfying needs, 2. Creation of new needs, and 3. Production and reproduction of people.¹⁰ None of these moments are to be given the status of a primary fact.

Engels maintained this conception in *The Origin*, positing that according to the materialist conception, the determining factor in history is, in the last resort, the production and reproduction of immediate life. Here Engels went a step further by merging the first two aspects of social activity they exerted in *The German Ideology* into one. Now we have only two moments: “the production of the means of existence [. . .] and of the tools necessary for that production” on the one hand and “the production of human beings

10. According to Santilli (1973, 80), the third moment is social interaction, *Verkehr*.

themselves, the propagation of the species” on the other—production and reproduction.¹¹

The emphasis on reproduction by socialist feminists can be viewed as an elaboration of the simplifications inherent in Engels’s initial formulation. Engels here offers a theoretical and methodological guideline for the origins of women’s oppression by formulating the relationship between the spheres of production and reproduction. Vogel (1983, 1996) argues that Engels’s methodological perspective in the Preface opens up a fruitful line of research into the dialectical histories of class and sexual divisions, which does not reduce the latter to the former.

Unfortunately, Engels did not maintain the theoretical approach he promised in the Preface, and he did not analyze reproduction throughout his book. Socialist feminists, in general, criticize him for not giving sufficient weight to reproduction.¹² Still, many of them appreciate him for integrating reproduction into the analysis of society as a whole. That is, in Humphries’ (2009, 11) words, “a path-breaking attempt” to develop a feminist methodology in the sense that reproduction is identified along with production as constituting the material basis of society.

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Consequently, Marx and Engels included reproduction and family in their analysis as the fundamental premises of the historical materialist conception of the world. This approach suggests encompassing a broader dimension of social life which establishes the ontology of social reproduction theory. Social reproduction theorists have constructed a more comprehensive meaning of reproduction, including several labor processes and physical and emotional relations.

Social Relations/Intercourses in Production and Reproduction

Marx and Engels posited that there is no production of life without a form of social interaction. Marx (2010b, 333) writes in *Economic and Philosophic*

11. In a letter to Joseph Bloch (21 September 1890), Engels (Marx and Engels 2010e, 34) wrote that, according to the materialist view of history, the determining factor in history is, in the final analysis, the production and reproduction of actual life. Engels continued: More than that was never maintained either by Marx or myself. Now if someone distorts this by declaring the economic moment to be the only determining factor, he changes that proposition into a meaningless, abstract, ridiculous piece of jargon.

12. For an overview of the critiques, see Yaman (2022).

Manuscripts of 1844 that the *real, active* orientation of human-being to herself as a species-being, or her manifestation as a human being, is only possible if she brings out all her *species powers*—something which in turn is only possible through the cooperative action of all of the people. Several Marxist feminist scholars draw attention to the importance of social interaction and cooperation in Marx and Engels' thought. For instance, Sara Carpenter and Shahrzad Mojab (2017, 81) highlight that for Marx and Engels, the social reality is a human activity, and social life is made up of all the labors we perform in cooperation with one another. Therefore, they (2017, 49) write, it is the notion of human co-operative activity on which Marx's ontology, put forward in *The German Ideology*, is based.

Those conditions under which people labor and live consist of the several kinds of relations that people have with one another to produce their life—the material relation between people and between people and nature. Producing life involves, thus, before everything else, eating and drinking, housing, clothing, and various other needs (Marx and Engels 2010b, 31–32). Their dialectical relation with these needs brings about the first system of material bonds between people. And it is the starting point of all history, in which production and need reciprocally engender one another (Labica 1980, 283). Thus, for Marx and Engels, the production of use-values to fulfill needs and the social relations of the production of human beings together form the basis of their materialist conception of history (Himmelweit 1992, 203). In his “Notes on Adolph Wagner,” for example, Marx (2010d, 539) criticized Wagner for he considered that people in satisfying needs find themselves in theoretical relation to the things of the outside world. On the contrary, he wrote they begin by actively behaving, availing themselves of certain things of the outside world by action, and thus satisfying their needs.

Therefore, while people establish relations during production/reproduction, their material relations determine their production and reproduction processes and themselves.¹³ As Georges Labica (1980, 283) writes, the most elementary relationship imaginable between human beings and nature is, for that reason, already historical and social, something which even materialist Feuerbach was unable to grasp. Following Labica, we can say

13. On the one hand, human life would not exist without humans living and working in cooperative social relations to produce and reproduce their lives. Carpenter and Mojab (2017, 49). On the other, production and the material instruments of individual activity are determined by social interaction. See Santilli (1973, 81).

that the most elementary social relationship has been perhaps the relation between a child and her caregiver(s)—the mother(s).

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Marx and Engels (2010b, 32) pointed out that the production process only makes its appearance with the increase in population. They added that people realize this production process through intercourse with each other and under a specific division of labor. They used the German word “*Verkehr*,” which means intercourse in general. The term is peculiar (Cohen 2000, 142–43) to *The German Ideology* and a central notion (Therbon 1976) of this work. However, there are a few references even among Marxists to this early notion, much less Marxist feminist debates. Marx and Engels seemed to use the term in its broad meaning, including emotional and familial as well as commercial and productive intercourse, as the social reproduction approach suggests. However, there is no consensus on the content of *Verkehr* among Marxists. Some scholars, such as the editors of *Marx-Engels Collected Works* (Cohen et al. 2010b, 590) and Göran Therbon (1976, 256), refer to the broad meaning of this term and write that it encompasses the material, commercial, emotional, and moral intercourses of both individuals and social groups. Therbon also points out that it sometimes becomes social relations themselves. Labica (1980, 283) takes a step further and writes that this concept has a considerable scope since it is concerned simultaneously with relationships between people, social groups or classes, and nations. Similarly, Lawrence Krader (1973, 274) asserts that *Verkehr* means the relations between the public, the external constitution of society, and its institutions. On the other hand, the personal side of social relations pertains to the individual and the subjectivity of humanity. The objective and the subjective sides are brought together, he concludes. Yet, some, such as Emile Bottigelli (1967), argue that the very generality of the concept *Verkehr* involves its usage in a certain ambiguity. He (1967, 187) writes, “the basis of relationships between human beings may be affective, familial, commercial, etc. The form assumed by these relationships does not imply a determined economic and social structure.” Similarly, Therborn and Labica find using the notion improper. For Therborn (1976, 368), it is a pre-Marxist concept since the notion of the relations of production is not present in the idea of *Verkehr*, and it is less an anticipation of historical materialism than an echo of Hegel and Adam Smith. He writes that what Marx and Engels have in mind when they discuss the *Verkehrsform* is Hegel’s civil society. For that reason, he thinks *The German Ideology* cannot

be regarded as an overview of historical materialism. Similarly, Alex Callinicos (1989, 161) writes that the first version of historical materialism in *The German Ideology* bears some resemblance to the views of the eighteenth century Scottish historical school such as Adam Ferguson, Adam Smith, and John Millar. However, he finds *The German Ideology* is a work of fundamental importance because it identifies as the source of historical change in the contradiction between the development of the productive forces and prevailing social relations (albeit not yet specified as the relations of production), which have become fetters on this development. Yet, Therborn (1976, 368) asserts that, in the construction of historical materialism by the later Marx and Engels, “Verkehr” was replaced as a central idea by *relations of production* and is related to a technological anchorage, which anticipates the later concept of the *forces of production*. Similarly, Cohen and his colleagues (Cohen et al. 2010b, 590) think that *Verkehrsform* is a precursor of *relations of production*. Moreover, they consider that Marx and Engels introduced the concept of *relations of production* to distinguish the social relations people have in production, which are accepted as the primary relations underlying everything included under the term intercourse.¹⁴

Contrary to these criticisms, I find this use of the concept compatible with what Marx and Engels *put forward theoretically*. They seemed to mean the broad meaning of the concept, including social and familial relations alongside production and commercial relations. In this context, their inclusion of reproduction, family, and woman-man relations as the third moment of history is an essential step. They also pointed to unequal relations and male domination within the family several times, such as the “latent slavery” (Marx and Engels 2010b, 33) in several works. They (Marx and Engels 2010b, 46) wrote: “the unequal distribution, both quantitative and qualitative, of labour and its products, hence property, the nucleus, the first form of which lies in the family, where wife and children are the slaves of the husband.” Further, the “Verkehr” should have referred to sexual intercourse and care as well, for “increase in population” entails biological reproduction, childcare, and nutrition. However, they did not work out these topics. Nevertheless, whether or not they alluded to emotional, social, and moral intercourse and care-work, the theoretical framework they established includes them all. At least it opens the door to a unified theory,

14. In an endnote, they (Cohen et al. 2010b, 590) write that Marx and Engels used the term in *The German Ideology* to express the concept of relations of production, which was taking shape at that time in their minds.

including production, reproduction, and the intercourses associated with these processes. The etymology of the term gives us some clues about it. “Verkehr” is a noun from the verb *Verkehren*. “Verkehren” means traffic, interaction through movement in somebody’s sphere, and exchange. Surprisingly, *kehren*, from which the term was derived, has a meaning of “to care about” (reflexive).

Consequently, *Verkehr* refers to several relations between people, including reproduction and family. He (Krader 1973, 274) writes that for the materialist interpretation of history one would have to know not only history, including economic history, but also the system of economics aside from its historical aspect, and other matters of society, social history, etc., as well.

However, the conception of a broader social life so often referred to in the early Marx and Engels was relatively neglected in their later work (see Bakker and Gill 2003, 17; Himmelweit 1992, 196). It is the social reproduction feminists that bring about it into theoretical debates. And their consideration of the broad meaning of relations (of production and reproduction) resembles Marx and Engels’ earlier notion of *Verkehr*.

Materialist Conception of History and Its Implications for Social Reproduction Theory

Up to now, I have focused on three notions as the contributions of Marx and Engels to social reproduction theory: their consideration of human-beings as the product of their own labor, their evaluation of production and reproduction of the human being as one of the three moments of history, and their thinking of human relations in a broader sense—*Verkehr*.

Now, I would like to go over these briefly and draw a few conclusions on their implications in the context of social reproduction.

First of all, Marx and Engels’ view of social life as essentially practical and human beings as the product of their labor gives us a materialist perspective to consider the work of reproduction in a broader sense. What Marx and Engels identify as “the first premise of all human history” is the conception of labor at the heart of social-reproduction feminism. Social reproduction theoreticians broaden the concept of labor, defined narrowly by Marxism within the framework of capitalist value creation, as the producer of society, life, and labor itself. As Bakker and Gill (2003, 19) argue, that work broadly mediates relations between social and natural orders and

combines the theoretical and practical activity of human beings in an understanding of movement and change. This is a process that takes account of past, present and future. Bhattacharya (2017a, 2) highlights that the fundamental insight of social reproduction theory is, simply put, that human labor is at the heart of creating or reproducing society as a whole. Ferguson (2016, 39) explains this more subtly:

[. . .] in historicising the work it takes to reproduce human labour-power, and positing it as essential to capital's existence but not directly under capital's control, social-reproduction feminism broadens and complicates our understanding of labour, conceiving of it as a 'concrete unity', an ontological category that captures—and a lived experience that mediates and produces—a richly differentiated, historical, and contradictory totality. This multi-dimensional concept of labour (or human practical activity) invites a dialectical understanding of the social [. . .] It allows us, in other words, to develop a rigorous integrative theory of the social.

It means that “practical human activity” creates life, people, their relations, and their ideas. That is, on the one hand, women produce and reproduce people and thus create life by their labor. On the other, they produce and reproduce themselves as “women”—the *second sex*. This does not mean that the oppression of women has its roots in women themselves. This means that women find themselves in established relations such as the gender division of labor and familial ties caused by patriarchal inequalities and that these unequal relations load reproduction and care work on their shoulders. This primary “duty” prevents women from developing their human potential. It creates difficulties in their participation in education, science, philosophy, employment, and politics. It, therefore, retains women from reaching social resources, keeps them out of decision-making processes, and enables men to maintain their domination over women. The oppression of women, then, is not merely an ideological problem. On the contrary, it has a material basis and is based on—gendered—labor relations in which women find themselves and reproduce them. Furthermore, the ideology of gender inequality is a reflection of this reality. These labor conditions also provide them the means to fight against capitalism and male domination and, therefore, open the ways for their emancipation.

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“Life-making activities” has a significantly broad content and comprise “the activities and attitudes, behaviors and emotions, responsibilities and relationships directly involved in the maintenance of life on a daily basis,

and intergenerationally” as Laslett and Brenner (1989, 382) defined it earlier. Antonio Gramsci (1999, 177–8), differentiating these activities from “labor” for capital, labels them as “work.” According to him, work is the specific mode by which people actively participate in natural life to transform and socialize it more and more deeply and extensively:¹⁵

[It is] the discovery that the relations between the social and natural orders are mediated by work [and] by man’s theoretical and practical activity [. . .] [that] provides a basis for the subsequent development of a historical, dialectical conception of the world, which understands movement and change [. . .] and which conceives the contemporary world as a synthesis of the past, of all past generations, which projects itself into the future. (Gramsci 1999, 178)

In other words, through participating in practical human activity, we become part of a wider reality, and we begin to understand it more deeply, change it, and create it anew. Ferguson (2016, 49) argues that this paradigm equips us with the necessary concepts and language to make it evident. On the other hand, Himmelweit (1995) questions labeling women’s domestic “contributions” as “work” since “work” is a category borrowed from economics. She argues that, therefore, much of such caring or self-fulfilling activity is excluded and remains in the background, essential to but unrecognized by the economics of work and by a society that operates within it:

However, these tendencies made visible the work that women were doing in the home only to the extent that it conformed to a notion of work derived from a model of commodity-producing wage labor in manufacturing. One unintended effect therefore was to reinforce a tendency within the economy to render invisible those domestic activities and needs which do not take a work/consumption form. (Himmelweit 1995, 15)

Tattwamasi Paltasingh and Lakshmi Lingam (2014, 45) point out that the traditional sociological definition of work has restricted its meaning to activity for the acquisition of financial resources. But women’s work is mainly concentrated in the unpaid household sphere. Problems in the concept of work are not as simple as raising the question of whether work is paid or unpaid but are more fundamental to the question of what constitutes work (see Beneria and Sen 1981).

15. “Here lies the ontological significance of Marx’s and Engels’s insight,” see Ferguson (2016, 49).

How should we name women's domestic labor in order to place it in the context of social reproduction, make it visible, and give it the value it deserves?

If we follow Gramsci, women's domestic activities should be called "work". Gramsci seems to follow Engels' claim in a footnote to the fourth German edition of Marx's *Capital*:

The English language has the advantage of possessing different words for the two aspects of labour here considered. The labour which creates Use Value, and counts qualitatively, is Work, as distinguished from Labour; that which creates Value and counts quantitatively, is Labour as distinguished from Work. (Marx 2010a, 57)

So, according to Engels, "work" could be used for all activities, regardless of their social context, while "labor" was associated with productive activities beneficial for capital—the creation of value. However, there is no such conceptualization in Marx.

Let's look at Marx's concept of labor a bit closer. Marx writes in *1861–63 Manuscripts* (Marx 2010e, 55), "real labor is purposeful activity aimed at the creation of a use value, at the appropriation of natural material in a manner which corresponds to particular needs". He wrote in German, where there is one common word for work and labor—*Arbeit*.¹⁶ The term *Arbeit* was translated sometimes as "work" and sometimes as "labor".

In the *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, Marx made a distinction between two forms of labor:

As useful activity directed to the appropriation of natural factors in one form or another, labour is a natural condition of human existence, a condition of material interchange between man and nature, quite independent of the form of society. On the other hand, the labour which posits exchange value is a specific social form of labour. (Marx 2010c, 278)

In *Capital*, he developed the categories of *abstract labor* and *concrete labor* and clarified that these two are characteristics of labor, not types of labor:

All labour is, speaking physiologically, an expenditure of human labour power, and in its character of identical abstract human labour, it creates and forms the

16. Although there is also the term *Werktaetigkeit*—the activity of creating works—that is a much more general concept, but tends to be hardly used in German (see Fuchs and Seignani 2013, 240).

value of commodities. On the other hand, all labour is the expenditure of human labour power in a special form and with a definite aim, and in this, its character of concrete useful labour, it produces use values. (Marx 2010a, 56)

Hence, for Marx, abstract labor and concrete labor are dual characteristics of—the same—labor. As Diane Elson (1979, 144) points out, “these are not concepts of different *types* of labour”. It is not that some labor is concrete and some abstract; they are concepts of different aspects of labor: “the ‘two-fold nature’ or ‘dual character’ of labor embodied in commodities; and as such they are all one-sided abstractions” (Elson 1979, 144). Here Engels seems to attribute the abstract character of labor to “labor” and the concrete character of labor to “work”. Therefore, the distinction Engels made between labor and work does not belong to Marx and seems incompatible with Marx’s—labor—theory of value.¹⁷

Moreover, as Olivier Frayssé (2014) points out, the distinction between work and labor is not germane to English as a lexical distinction, “it is a split that few people can make sense of in the English-speaking world” (Frayssé 2014, 469 quoted from Kley 2008).

Besides, the etymology of these concepts can say something. Labor, in general, means practical, physical, and manual work. It refers specifically to hard physical effort. Its etymology goes to Middle English *labouren*, to Old French *laborer*, to Latin *laborare* (“to labor, strive, exert oneself, suffer, elaborate”), and to labor (“labor, toil, work”) (See Patridge 2006, 1965).¹⁸ Therefore, I suggest calling women’s care and reproduction activities labor. Surprisingly, the etymology of labor also includes “to give birth”.¹⁹ However, “work” means mostly the material used by someone at work or what she produces. Its etymology goes to “energy” and “erg” and to Greek “or-

17. Engels’ distinction also brings about the following problem. How do we name the labor of a worker who works as a waged worker under capitalist conditions but is not involved in the *immediate* value creation processes, such as a waitress in a restaurant? According to Engels, we cannot call it “labor” while we are naming that of her coworker, let’s say a cook, as “labor.”

18. The effective base of labor is Latin *lābi*, to glide, to slip, (hence) to fail. Closely akin to *lābi*, a (heavy) weight, under which one totters or staggers, hence fatigue, hence work which causes fatigue. Labor has derivative *laborāre*, to bend under a (heavy) weight, to be engaged in heavy, hence difficult work, hence to be in difficulty or in pain. (see Patridge 2006, 1965).

19. Sense of “physical exertions of childbirth” is attested from 1590s, short for labour of birthe (early 15c.); the sense also is found in Old French, and compare French *en travail* “in (childbirth) suffering” (Online Etymology Dictionary).

ganon”, something used in working (Patridge 2006, 3818). Therefore, contrary to Himmelweit, I argue that we can call women’s domestic “contributions” “work” as well. Calling them “work” also helps give unpaid labor equal weight with paid work. As a result, “labor” refers specifically to people who labor—the *subject*—whereas work refers specifically to what or how workers produce—the *object*—. Consequently, I suggest using both terms to take women as producing subjects and their activities as significant as paid work.²⁰

Nevertheless, whatever we call their domestic activities, they are mainly women who produce and reproduce people as humans, members of society, and productive forces. The COVID-19 pandemic and the current economic crisis we have been through have revealed the vital role of the “life-making activities” of women.

Thus, socialist feminists redefine the concept of labor to include all the activities and behaviors related to social reproduction. Consequently, as Ferguson (2016, 39–40) points out, this multi-dimensional concept of labor (or humans’ practical activity) invites a dialectical understanding of the social and allows us to develop an integrative theory of the social.

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Second, for Marx and Engels, the third moment of historical premises is the production and reproduction of people. Thus, commodity production (*production*) and women’s non-commodity domestic production (*reproduction*) would be expressed in a unified theory within the framework of the interaction of capitalism and male domination.

In this context, we should appreciate Engels’s contribution (in *The Origin*) to social reproduction theory. Naming both spheres “production”, he established the starting point for this approach. Production and reproduction indeed condition and determine each other; in other words, as Marx writes in the *Capital* (2010a, 564), every production process is a reproduction, and the conditions of production are also those of reproduction. Similarly, every act of production is necessarily at the same time an act of social and economic reproduction (Paltasingh and Lingam 2014, 48). However, some Marxist feminist scholars, such as Lise Vogel, do not accept it. According to Vogel (2013, 143–44), while any production is at the

20. This does not mean that “work” and “labor” have exactly the same meanings. For example, one cannot substitute “work” for “labor” when speaking of the Labor unions, nor can one say he or she is looking for “labor” when in quest of employment. (see Frayssé 2014, 469)

same time a reproduction, reproduction is not a form of production. However, as Stevi Jackson (1999, 19) explains, the distinction between production and reproduction is spurious and nonsensical—something cannot be reproduced without first being produced. He notes housework is not only reproducing but also producing. As he highlights, rejecting that housework is a kind of production contravenes Marx’s position.

Social reproduction theoreticians analyze the dialectical relationship between production and reproduction by focusing on reproduction processes. Beginning with the reproduction of labor power that Marx left underdeveloped, they extend the analysis to the reproduction of society and capitalism. As Himmelweit (1992, 210–11) highlights, workers’ role in the relations of production as suppliers of labor power depends on their physical reproduction as human beings. “Labor power cannot be obtained in any form but as a personal attribute of living people. The number and physical well-being of the working class are therefore crucial aspects of the reproduction of the capitalist economy and its class relations”.

They also focus on the domestic labor of women and show women’s vital role in social reproduction. Moreover, they elaborate on women’s domestic work burden and its function for capital, especially in crises or pandemics. They also investigate the effects of capital on social reproduction processes, focusing on the connection of the households, institutions of education and health, social policies, etc., to capital. They show how capitalism determines the reproduction processes of social reproduction, especially of working class “families,” and draws the limits of the survival conditions of poor households.²¹

Further, social reproduction theoreticians have extended the analysis to include social life outside the household. They incorporated other social relations, institutions, and conditions that, in one way or another, contribute to the social reproduction of labor power and life in the theory. Thus, they included care institutions, the education and health system, and retirement. Gill and Bakker (2006, 36–37) further expanded the framework of social reproduction by examining monetary and fiscal policies. Ferguson et al. (2016, 31) included global institutions of imperialism, border policies, and immigrants in this framework. As a result, the domestic labor debate has moved to the axis of class relations and has also been associated with inequalities based on ethnic origin.

21. Social reproduction theoreticians, in general, claim that capitalism determines the social reproduction of people entirely, and they subordinate social reproduction to capitalism. I criticized their arguments elsewhere. (see Yaman 2019; see also Oksala 2015)

Therefore, social reproduction theoreticians broaden the class struggle to include the struggle for the reproduction of life—not only for wages but also for health and education services, child and elderly care institutions, or food. For example, Bhattacharya (2017b: 86) argues that every social and political movement “tending” in the direction of gains for the working class as a whole, or challenging the power of capital as a whole, must be considered an aspect of class struggle. She concludes that reproduction is, therefore, a site of class conflict.

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While reproducing and laboring, people establish various relationships with each other and with nature. The material conditions of their life—the relations they find already exist and those produced by their activity—determine their production and reproduction processes. It shows that social reproduction is related to many factors, including social inequalities such as class, gender, and race, ecology, social policies, and economic crises.

First of all, capitalism determines people’s reproduction through wages, social policies, and economic crises. That is, social reproduction is a class-based phenomenon, and the tendencies of capital accumulation determine the survival conditions of working-class houses. Moreover, women do unpaid reproduction work under patriarchal inequalities. Besides, they are responsible for reproduction work just because of the sexual division of labor grounded on patriarchy. These coercive conditions and the workload determine women’s life—from participation in paid work to realize their human potential. Apart from these, reproduction work involves several activities and attitudes, behaviors and emotions, and responsibilities and relationships such as love, care, and social and familial ties. Most of these emotions and social links are significant for humans and society. However, they put an additional burden on the shoulder of women and are indeed the means to make women responsible for all care and reproduction work. For an individual to develop as a human being and a social being, she definitely must be brought up in social relations. There is no necessity for the caregivers to be women at all.

As a result, much more complex and multilayered relations are involved in reproduction than mere relation of production in the Marxist sense. It is similar to Marx and Engels’ very early concept of intercourse—*Verkehr*—which Santilli (1973, 80) sees as the third moment of historical premises.

Conclusion

In this paper, I argued that the materialist conception of history and methodology that Marx and Engels developed in their early works, especially in *The German Ideology*, establishes the ground for social reproduction theory. I have tried to show that Marx and Engels' three notions—i.e. their consideration of human-beings as the product of their own labor, their evaluation of production and reproduction of the human being as one of the three moments of history, and their thinking of human relations in a broader sense,—*Verkehr*— are significant contributions to social reproduction theory.

Moreover, I suggest that the social reproduction approach contributes to the Marxist conception of totality by expanding the concept of labor and production, putting the production and reproduction of life at its center, and including (re)production work that is overwhelmingly performed by women. The social reproduction perspective shows how the production of goods and services and the production of life are parts of a one integrated process. It also identifies the activities involved in the daily and generational reproduction of life and allows for an explanation of the structures, relationships, and dynamics that produce those activities (see Luxton 2006, 36–37).

Thus, social reproduction can reveal the driving dynamics of both capitalist social relations and patriarchal relations and the social forms and relations in which they are hidden and reproduced. It can therefore open up new possibilities for organizing the struggle against these systems of exploitation/oppression.

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