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# Who cares? Market socialism and social reproduction

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## ABSTRACT


This paper provides a feminist critique of market socialism. I argue that two important socialist values, equality and freedom, can only be realised by a form of socialism that adequately distributes and values tasks associated with social reproduction. My argument proceeds in five steps: first, I outline of the main characteristics of market socialism. Second, I provide an understanding of social reproduction and show that its current organisation raises a feminist concern. Third, I discuss the relation between markets under market socialism and social reproduction and draw implications from this for the market socialist project. Finally, I show that market socialism has the potential to bring about a more equal distribution of responsibility for social reproductive work.


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## 1. Introduction

While COVID-19 is testing the resilience of our societies, the picture that emerges shows in brutal clarity the importance of caregiving. That caregiving is essential for our communal living is not new. However, under capitalism caregiving and social reproduction more broadly are unequally distributed along the lines of gender and race and generally undervalued. In this paper, I will analyse whether and to what extent an alternative economic system, namely *market socialism*, can organise social reproduction more equally. Market socialism has been criticised from different directions for being too radical or not radical enough. I join the chorus of critique from a feminist perspective. Rather than thinking about whether markets undermine socialist values or whether social ownership in the means of production curtails the benefits of capitalism, I argue that market socialism needs to do a better job at taking on board feminist insights. Two key socialist values, equality and freedom, can only be

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realised by a form of socialism that adequately distributes and values social reproductive work. A socialist economy that fails to do so, produces and reproduces inequality and unfreedom that individuals experience in virtue of their social position, in particular their gendered- and racialised subject positions.

My main claim is that market socialism will only be up for the task if it organises social reproductive work largely outside of the market and socialises great parts of it to ensure a more equal distribution of responsibility. My argument proceeds in five steps: first, I outline the main characteristics of market socialism (Section 2). Second, I provide an understanding of social reproduction and show that its current organisation raises a feminist concern (Section 3). Third, I discuss the relation between markets under market socialism and social reproduction and draw implications for the market socialist project (Sections 4 and 5). Finally, I show that market socialism has the potential to bring about a more equal distribution of responsibility for social reproductive work (Section 6).

## 2. Market socialism

Different socialist thinkers have criticised capitalism for systematically undermining important values, in particular, freedom and equality.<sup>1</sup> Karl Marx famously stated that while the worker under capitalism is free from feudal bonds, the worker is also free from ownership in the means of production and hence is ‘compelled by social conditions to sell the whole of his active life’ (Marx, [1867] 1992, p. 382). Consequently, the worker has no choice but to sell their labour power to one capitalist or another to make a living.<sup>2</sup> Other socialist thinkers have grounded their critique of capitalism in capitalism’s inherent tendency to hinder the workers’ self-development and self-realisation. For instance, Philippe Van Parijs (1997, p. 5) has argued that many people under capitalism lack ‘real freedom’, namely the effective capacity to act on their life plans. Jon Elster (1986, p. 43) criticised capitalism for thwarting people’s development and exercise of their creative and productive capacities. Socialist thinkers have also challenged capitalism on grounds of inequality. Capitalism, according to Erik Olin Wright (2010, p. 52) fundamentally violates a principle of equality of opportunity. Large inequalities in wealth and earnings provide some people with inherent advantages over others.

The claim that a socialist economy provides a better alternative to capitalism typically rests on the claim that it fares better in realising freedom and equality for all. However, the rejection of a centrally planned economy and its (arguably)

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<sup>1</sup> Socialist thinkers have also challenged capitalism for undermining democracy (e.g. Erik Olin Wright), community (e.g. G. A. Cohen), or solidarity. Since the valuation and distribution of social reproduction threatens in particular the freedom and equality of women and people of colour, I focus on these values here.

<sup>2</sup> Alex Gourevitch (2013, p. 12) calls this ‘structural domination’.

associated problems of inefficiency and lack of democratic participation, has led some to declare that the project of socialism is at best unfeasible at worst undesirable. But we need not throw out the baby with the bathwater. A convincing socialist project that retains the benefits of capitalism while staying true to its core values may be both possible and desirable. This is where market socialism enters the stage and brings with it a set of tools and values which may allow for the formulation of a viable socialist alternative. Proponents of market socialism have argued that integrating markets into the socialist project will stay true and in fact better realise socialist values, while at the same time retaining some of the benefits of a capitalist economy.<sup>3</sup>

Market socialism typically has three features. *First*, the means of production are socially controlled.<sup>4</sup> This can take different institutional forms. David Schweickard (2002) has developed a model of economic democracy, where the means of production are owned by the state and leased out to worker-managed firms and enterprises.<sup>5</sup> John Roemer, on the other hand, has proposed a model of market socialism that does not require public ownership of the means of production. Instead, each person, when reaching a certain age, is provided with an equal number of coupons, which they can use to buy shares in a state-regulated stock market. Each person then receives the dividend from their investment in a given currency. Coupons are to be used exclusively to buy shares and cannot be changed into other currencies. When people die, their coupons and shares go back to the state. Different to traditional forms of socialism, this model does not institute state ownership in the means of production. It does, however, equalise entitlement to the profits of enterprises (Corneo, 2017, p. 186). *Second*, in market socialism, goods and services are allocated through the market. This means that the distribution of (most) goods and services continues to be determined by supply and demand, under the assumption that individuals make choices in a self-interested and utility-maximising way. *Third*, most market socialist proposals retain some possibility for socially controlled forms of investment. While Schweickhart's economic democracy entails a high degree of social planning through democratically accountable public investment banks, in Roemer's coupon socialism enterprises have a higher degree of autonomy.

While the specific institutional design of proposals of market socialism varies, this paper will not focus on the fine differences. The main aspects that

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<sup>3</sup> Whether market socialism does in fact realise socialist values has been an issue of heated debate. For instance, Cohen (2009) has rejected market socialism on the grounds that markets undermine the value of community. For an overview of how the debate between Cohen and proponents of market socialism (in particular David Miller) has unfolded, see Miller (2014).

<sup>4</sup> An alternative vision of market socialism is the Carensian model (Carens, 2003), which (largely) maintains private ownership in the means of production, but introduces direct needs-based provisioning of the state and a radical post-tax income redistribution.

<sup>5</sup> A similar version of market socialism is defended by David Miller (1991, p. 407).

will be relevant for the following analysis are (1) the disempowerment of the capitalist class and (2) the centrality of markets.

In the next section, I outline a feminist concern regarding the organisation of social reproduction, which violates the freedom and equality of gendered and racialised subjects under capitalism. I argue that any socialist economy that strives to provide greater freedom and equality for all needs to address this concern. Market socialism, insofar as it fails to organise social reproduction adequately, fails to realise its socialist values. To understand the feminist concern, it is in a first step necessary to get a better understanding of social reproduction.

### 3. Who cares? Distribution and valuation of social reproduction

#### 3.1. Understanding social reproduction

In her introduction to an edited volume on *Social Reproduction Theory*, Tithi Bhattacharya (2017, p. 1) asks: 'If workers' labour produces all the wealth in society, who then produces the workers?' This question is at the heart of social reproduction theory.<sup>6</sup> It takes as a starting point Marx's insight that human labour is central to producing and reproducing society as a whole. Yet, it moves beyond the focus on commodity production to explore the processes that produce and reproduce human life itself. The assumption expressed in Bhattacharya's question is that the worker needs to come into being and be sustained. Hence there needs to be someone who brings them into being and someone who sustains them.

In the first place then, social reproduction refers to the processes of creating and sustaining human life. This involves childbearing, birthing and feeding human beings. Call this biological reproduction.<sup>7</sup> Yet, social reproduction goes beyond biological reproduction. Social reproduction also involves

forms of provisioning, caregiving and interaction that produce and maintain social bonds. (...) [T]his activity forms capitalism's human subjects, sustaining them as embodied natural beings, while also constituting them as social beings (...). (Fraser, 2014, p. 61)

Nancy Fraser here points to the particular role that social reproductive activity plays in constituting human beings as *social beings*. This involves activities that are aimed at creating and maintaining relations between human beings.

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<sup>6</sup> *Social Production Theory* is a broad church and there are many different ways to understand the concept of social reproduction. I've provided a general understanding here, without going into the fine differences. For a good overview of the current developments in social reproduction theory see Bhattacharya's (2017) edited volume.

<sup>7</sup> This is not a clear-cut definition. Biological reproduction is embedded in social practices and shaped by social norms.

Typically, these activities involve education, building kin relations and friendships, emotional support for others, caring for vulnerable members or community work. Social reproductive activities take place both inside and outside of the market. While activities, such as childcare or care for the elderly, traditionally have been carried out predominantly in the family or community, they are increasingly performed for wages.<sup>8</sup>

The understanding of social reproduction presented is relatively broad and there may be a concern that it is not sufficiently discriminatory. For instance, is the production of food a form of social reproductive work, given that food is necessary for the reproduction of life? What about someone who works to support dependants and their direct caregivers with their income?<sup>9</sup> While these are important questions, I do not take a stance here on whether these activities should or should not be included in an understanding of social reproduction.<sup>10</sup> However, for the purpose of my analysis, I will focus on those forms of social reproduction that are *directly* aimed at sustaining and increasing someone's mental and physical wellbeing and self-development. These activities are typically understood in terms of caregiving.

### 3.2. Caregiving

Caregiving understood as an activity that is directly aimed at someone's mental and physical wellbeing and self-development has two distinct characteristics.

First, caregiving is an activity that involves a specific type of motivation. It is, as Nancy Folbre (1995, p. 75) explains 'labour undertaken out of affection or a sense of responsibility for other people, with no expectation of immediate pecuniary reward.' In that sense, caregiving involves a sense of affection or responsibility which is directed *at other people*. For instance, studies find that one of the motivations that drive care workers is a sense of fulfilment that is grounded in being able to help other people, as well as a strong identification with the person cared for (Bjerregaard et al., 2017, pp. 121–23). Caregiving is hence an inherently relational activity that has the aim to create a specific state of mind and feeling in others. This does not preclude the possibility that there are other motives present as well. Folbre and Nelson (2000, pp. 131–132) challenge the dichotomy between love and money, hence the assumption that motivations can be either altruistic or self-interested. Instead, they present a more nuanced picture where different motivations interact and are not mutually exclusive. On their view, it would be a mistake to think that

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<sup>8</sup> As Bhattacharya (2017, pp. 74–75) points out, processes of reproduction and production of commodities may sometimes take place within the same space. For instance, public schools are both places for the social reproduction of future workers, and places where teachers earn wages.

<sup>9</sup> This is an example from an anonymous reviewer.

<sup>10</sup> This question also features in the Marxist Feminist debates about whether reproductive labour is productive labour in Marx's sense or whether it merely produces use value. See for instance Lise Vogel (2013, pp. 22–23).

care relations outside of the market are exclusively driven by altruism, while care relations inside of the market are exclusively driven by self-interest. In that sense, caregiving can entail a complex set of motivations.

A second feature typical of caregiving is that it is often person-specific and that it cannot easily be standardised (Folbre & Wright 2012, p. 7). Many of the tasks involved in improving the wellbeing of the care recipient require an intimate knowledge of the other person, and an understanding of how best to react to their needs. This will differ from person to person and as a result the activity of caregiving takes different forms in different care relations.

In sum, social reproductive activities are aimed at the creation and reproduction of human life itself. Caregiving is a specific type of social reproduction which involves a particular motivation and person-specificity. As a feminist, however, there are reasons to be concerned with the way in which social reproductive work in general and caregiving, in particular, is organised.

### **3.3. A feminist concern with social reproduction**

The feminist concern is directed at the way in which tasks associated with social reproduction are distributed and valued along the lines of gender and race. Before I outline the concern, it is necessary to make one preliminary remark. My arguments rest on the assumption that gender is socially constructed, by which I mean that the social roles, norms, and expectations around gender are not determined by biology. With respect to tasks associated with social reproduction, I am assuming that no gender is naturally better at providing them or has a natural disposition to do so. Instead, I assume that a propensity to care or a talent to do so are products of processes of socialisation. With this in mind, let me outline why the organisation of social reproduction constitutes a feminist concern.

Tasks associated with social reproduction are clearly distributed along the lines of gender and race, both in the private sphere and the market. For instance, in Europe about 89% of personal carers are women and 71% of teachers are women.<sup>11</sup> Statistics show that in the US, Hispanics/Latinx are overrepresented as maids and housekeepers, compared to their overall percentage in the workforce. Similarly, the share of Black people in the US in who are personal carers is twice as high as their overall share in the working population.<sup>12</sup>

The unequal distribution comes along with a lack of valuation for social reproductive tasks. Wages in the care sector are at lower end of the wage spectrum. The valuation of tasks of social reproduction in the private sphere is harder to assess. However, assumptions about the nature of these tasks,

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<sup>11</sup> Eurostat, 2016, <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/-/EDN-20180307-1>.

<sup>12</sup> Bureau of Labour Statistics, 2019, <https://www.bls.gov/cps/cpsaat11.htm>.

e.g. that they are performed out of love, altruism and affection, means that these tasks often go unnoticed and remain invisible.

The feminist concern is grounded in the assumption that gender and race play a central role in explaining the distribution and valuation of social reproduction. Take the unequal distribution first. This distribution tracks gendered assumptions about women being naturally more suited to perform tasks associated with social reproduction, as they are taken to be more caring and empathetic. In analysing the workings of misogyny, Kate Manne (2018, p. 110) argues that women's provision of feminine-coded goods, such as empathy, compassion or attention, is safeguarded by moral sanctions. Failure to comply with stereotypically female tasks often carries the risk of being called out for it, being described as cold and arrogant and resented for it. 'The publicity of many of these sanctions further serves to enforce this gendered economy of moral and social labour' (2018, p. 111). In that sense, patriarchal norms and expectations around gender take on an important role in organising the supply of social reproductive work. These norms play out differently for different groups of women. Angela Davis (1983, p. 237) has shown that traditional notions of femininity that associate it with domesticity and the home tend to reflect the experience of white middle-class women. Women of colour, and Black women, in particular, have been expected to work in the market since decades, taking care of other women's children or homes. Hence, while gendered norms around caregiving are often associated with the sphere of love and the home for white women, for women of colour they tend to be associated with providing care for others in the market. As Iris Young (1990, p. 52) puts it, '[w]herever there is racism, there is the assumption, more or less enforced, that members of oppressed racial groups should be servants of those, or some of those, in privileged groups.' In addition to gender- and racial norms, the material conditions of gender and race, such as the availability of decent employment options, also matter for explaining the distribution of social reproductive work.

Gender and race also play a role when it comes to the valuation of social reproduction. Nancy Folbre (2001, p. 45) argues that the assumption that tasks associated with social reproduction tend to be done out of concern for others and are intrinsically motivated affects their valuation. Hence, 'if caring is its own reward it need not command an economic return'. There is, differently put, an assumption that the lack of external (monetary) valuation is justified by the intrinsic reward that caregivers receive from their labour. More generally, expectations and norms around the nature of tasks associated with social reproduction, in particular, that these are provided as a 'labour of love', means that they often do not count as something that requires time and energy. Given that the intrinsic motivations which are meant to be displayed in these tasks are closely linked to gender and racial norms, patriarchy and racism have a role to play in explaining the lack of valuation.



In sum, the distribution and valuation of social reproduction are not innocent, as it is in a relevant sense linked to gendered and racialised norms and material conditions. This, in turn, affects the freedom and equality of those who provide it. Freedom is affected insofar as one's social role and the norms and expectations associated with this social role will have an effect on what one can and cannot do. Through a system of sanctions and incentives, gender and race place structural constraints on women and people of colour. As a result, they systematically lack the freedom to develop and exercise their capacities and to determine their projects.<sup>13</sup> The lack of valuation raises issues of equality. On the one hand, there are material consequences. Folbre (2001, p. 22) has shown that there exists a so-called care penalty, according to which those who are primary caregivers, mostly women, are at a higher risk of economic hardship and poverty. Moreover, if stereotypically female jobs and menial labour pay lower wages, this creates and reinforces the gender- and race pay gap. Inequality is not, however, merely expressed in material terms. Inequality in the distribution and valuation of social reproductive tasks also brings about a difference in status. Tasks associated with social reproduction both in the market and outside of it, are not generally associated with power and recognition.

Taking seriously the feminist concern, means to think about the ways in which social, political and economic institutions can be organised differently to organise social reproduction in a more equal way. The move is familiar. In *Capital* Vol. 1 Marx (Marx, [1867] 1992, p. 280) asks us to look beyond the sphere of exchange to discover the hidden sphere of production, which unveils the workings of capitalism. Nancy Fraser (2014, p. 57) asks us to dig even deeper and to uncover 'production's conditions of possibility' behind that sphere. In that sense, to understand the workings of *capitalist production* requires an understanding of the workings of *social reproduction*. Any defensible alternative to capitalism not only has to address inequality and unfreedom in production, but also inequality and unfreedom in social reproduction. Therefore, if, as socialists, we care about equality and freedom, we better get a grip on how to organise social reproduction differently. In the following, I discuss whether and how market socialism can organise social reproduction such that it meets the feminist requirement.

#### 4. Markets

Feminist- and critical race theorists have long challenged socialist projects for overlooking factors beyond class.<sup>14</sup> I locate my critique in this tradition and look at the way in which this critique plays out when markets become part of the mix. In this section, I will outline my understanding of markets. This will

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<sup>13</sup> Iris Young (1990, p. 37) captures this form of unfreedom in terms of oppression and domination. For a similar conception of structural unfreedom see: Jennifer Einspahr (2010).

<sup>14</sup> See for instance: Himani Bannerji (2005); Angela Davis (1983); Heidi Hartmann (1979); Iris Young (1990).

provide the grounds for discussing the relation between market socialism and the organisation of social reproduction (Sections 5 and 6).

#### **4.1. Central features of markets**

According to Debra Satz (2012, p. 15), markets are ‘institutions in which exchanges take place between parties who voluntarily undertake them’. Through price signalling markets communicate the relative scarcity of resources and thereby coordinate the actions of individual market participants.<sup>15</sup> As such, markets constitute impersonal exchange relations. Adam Smith (2014 [1776], 45) famously stated that ‘[i]t is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker, that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest’. The important role of self-interest is also pointed out by Elizabeth Anderson (1993, p. 145): ‘[e]ach party to a market transaction views his relation to the other as merely a means to the satisfaction of ends defined independent of the relationship and of the other party’s ends’. One implication of this is that neither particular aspects about a person, e.g. their social status, nor particular relationships to other market participants, e.g. whether they are friends, are relevant for being able to exchange goods in a market. Markets are not, moreover, isolated institutions. Instead, they are embedded in a wider set of institutions which are conditional for their functioning. Markets depend on a legal, social and political framework which specifies and enacts property rights and the rules of exchange (Satz, 2012, p. 16). This means that markets can take on different roles depending on the type of economic system within which they are embedded (I discuss this point in section 5.4.). In sum, markets can be understood as institutionalised, impersonal exchange relations that coordinate action, and that are embedded in a framework of social, political and legal institutions.<sup>16</sup>

It is important to note, however, that the above is not meant as a list of necessary and sufficient conditions to define markets. Instead, it outlines a number of features that generally characterise market relations. These may be more or less present in particular relations. Consider, for instance, a family who has employed a nanny. The nanny has worked with them for many years and knows them very well. This constitutes a market exchange relation, yet it lacks the impersonality of other market relations. Nothing in my argument requires to draw a clear-cut line between market and non-market relations. I suggest that markets should be understood as a form of continuum, with key features being

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<sup>15</sup> Satz (2012, p. 16) points out that the coordinative function of markets relies on a sufficient number of exchanges which allow market participants to structure their behavior in accordance with the actual or anticipated actions of others.

<sup>16</sup> This is a rather general picture of markets. I do not, however, assume that markets are homogenous. As Satz (2012, p. 4) argues, different markets entail different types of relation and shape culture, politics and identities in different ways. A detailed discussion of different types of markets goes beyond the scope of this paper, however, and is not strictly relevant to my argument.

more or less present in different relations.<sup>17</sup> This understanding is helpful, as it allows for a more fine-grained discussion of the ways in which markets relate to social reproduction. This will be discussed in the next section. To that end, however, it is important to get a clearer sense about the norms that govern market exchanges. For that it is helpful to understand markets not merely as price-mechanisms, but as *social practices*.

## 4.2. *Markets as social practices*

Following Sally Haslanger (2015, p. 21) I understand *social practices* as collective solutions to coordination or access problems with respect to a resource. Resources are things of all sorts that are taken to have some positive or negative value, e.g. food, education, friendship. Within social practices resources are distributed and organised by social norms.<sup>18</sup> The relationship between social norms and resources is dynamic and it plays out in three different ways. First, norms govern how a specific resource is distributed, hence they organise how different types of resources should be allocated. Second, norms tell us what should count as a resource in the first place. Whether or not something will be recognised as a resource depends on the specific context. For instance, whether insects count as food (and hence as a resource) depends on the specific type of cuisine and associated norms around cooking. Third, norms govern how the value of a particular resource should be expressed. Anderson (1993, p. 12) argues that ‘I am capable of valuing something in a particular way only in a social setting that upholds norms for that mode of valuation’. For instance, if I want to express my appreciation of a singer on stage, interrupting them and loudly shouting ‘boo’ does not normally count as a mode of valuing the singer’s performance in British theatres. That is to say, to successfully value a resource I need to adhere to the social norms that govern how that value is generally expressed.

Thinking about markets as social practices means to think of markets as aiming to solve problems of allocation and coordination. To that end, there are particular norms that govern the distribution of resources. These are in particular norms of impersonal reciprocity, freedom to buy and sell resources and norms that govern compliance and enforcement of contracts. These norms serve to distribute resources, e.g. I give you my labour, if you pay me a wage. Both you and I are formally free to enter and exit the exchange, but once we

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<sup>17</sup> I am grateful to the anonymous reviewer for asking me to clarify this point.

<sup>18</sup> This is a simplified picture of Haslanger’s view. Instead of norms, Haslanger talks about ‘schemas’, which are ‘culturally shared mental states and processes, including concepts, attitudes, dispositions etc. that enable us to interpret and organise information and coordinate action, thought and affect’. However, for my aims, talking about schemas invites more confusion than clarity, which is why I decided to talk about norms instead.

have come to an agreement there are particular, contractually enforceable, responsibilities that each of us acquires.

Norms of reciprocity, compliance with contracts and freedom of exchange, do not only govern the distribution of resources, they also set limits on what counts as a resource in the first place. One important factor here is that resources need to take a specific form in order to be exchangeable in the market. More specifically, resources need to be quantifiable. We need to know how many units of good  $x$  exchange for how many units of good  $y$ . The market requirement that a resource be in some sense quantifiable entails a further requirement, namely that it is possible to measure and determine what the provision of a resource entails. Take the example of services: to exchange a service in the market, it is important that it is possible to determine which actions constitute the service and when a service is fulfilled.

Finally, market norms also determine *how* resources are valued. Typically, to express value for a resource in a market exchange, is to pay for it. While it may be nice to be appraised by your boss or customers, the means by which your labour is appreciated in the market is not a warm glow. The value of a resource in a market practice is typically expressed by money.

## 5. Market socialism and the valuation of social reproduction

From a feminist perspective there is a concern with the undervaluation of social reproduction both inside and outside of the market. Understanding markets as social practices allows for a more fine-grained understanding of the ways in which markets affect the valuation of social reproduction, and caregiving more specifically, when it is organised in the market. The following section discusses this relation and outlines implications for market socialism.

### 5.1. Are markets neutral?

One possible way to think about the relation between markets and caregiving is to assume that markets play no causal role in creating or sustaining the undervaluation of caregiving. One may think that markets merely track and reflect pre-existing preferences and values that are formed outside of the market. Folbre (1995, p. 78) calls this a neoclassical understanding of the way in which preferences and values are formed. On this view, the valuation of caregiving is affected by factors outside of markets. In that sense, a low market value for caregiving would merely reflect pre-existing inequalities. This understanding of markets implies that a feminist critique of a market socialist economy should focus its efforts on the social and political institutions and structures within which markets are embedded, e.g. on patriarchy, rather than on markets. The next section, however, rejects this picture and provides an argument for understanding the relationship in more dynamic terms,

with markets playing an active role in contributing to the undervaluation of caregiving.

## **5.2. Markets systematically undervalue caregiving**

To see markets as social practices allows for a better understanding of the dynamic ways in which market norms affect how exchange is taking place, what can be exchanged in the market and how market value is expressed. This understanding casts doubt on the assumption that markets merely reflect a pre-existing lack of valuation of caregiving. In the following, I show that market practices interfere with the values and norms inherent in caregiving in a way that systematically sustains and increases its undervaluation. In that sense, the claim that the culprit for the undervaluation must be found somewhere else, e.g. in capitalism, patriarchy, racism, or all of these working in conjunction, overlooks the important role that markets play.

Before I move to discuss how markets systematically undervalue caregiving, it is important to make one preliminary remark. Different theorists have argued that markets can distort the value of particular goods, e.g. Elizabeth Anderson discusses the way in which surrogacy corrupts the nature of childbearing. The underlying assumption is that some goods need to be valued in specific ways and that some modes of valuation do not adequately express the nature of the good.<sup>19</sup> Drawing on Anderson's theory of value I show how the modes of valuation inherent in market mechanisms systematically undervalue caregiving. My analysis differs from hers, however, in that I do not make an argument about how markets affect the *nature* of caregiving. Instead, I will analyse how the lack of instruments to adequately express their value, leads to a *lack of valuation*, understood in terms of external recognition. Hence, I am not concerned about how markets may (or may not) distort the nature of caregiving but about how they systematically fail to recognise and value it. Let me turn to discuss what happens when caregiving is organised in the market.

My argument that markets systematically undervalue caregiving rests on two claims. First, within a market, norms determine what counts as a resource. Resources need to take a particular form to be exchangeable in a market: they need to be quantifiable and their content needs to be to some extent measurable. Think about the job of a nurse. It is easy to measure the quality of their work with regards to the technical part of their job, e.g. the way in which they clean the patient or record patient data. Yet, it is far more difficult to measure the quality of their care. How they express care, how well it is received, how authentic their caregiving is, will depend hugely on the specific type of relation that

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<sup>19</sup> Debra Satz (2012, pp. 100–104) has critiqued this view by arguing that there are competing interpretations of what the nature of a good entails. Instead she proposes a critique of markets which is grounded in the way in which some markets affect our relationships with others and in particular our equal moral standing.

the nurse enters into with the patient. Social relations are vastly different and what it means to provide care will be very different from one person to the next. Care work cannot be 'standardized or depersonalized' (Folbre, 2001, p. 48). This makes it difficult to provide a clear description of what good quality care should entail, which in turn is necessary to attach an exchange value on the tasks associated with care. Given the personalised, non-standardised nature of care relations, there is a danger that some resources inherent in caregiving, simply will not count as resources in the market and hence not be factored into market valuation.

Second, markets are depersonalised exchange relations that are governed by a specific type of *quid pro quo* reciprocity, i.e. my provision of a service is conditional upon your offer. The type of reciprocity typically involved in caregiving is different in kind. If I care for you, I take your ends to be important. I care for you, for your sake and not for what I can get in return. For instance, G.A. Cohen argues that reciprocity in the market is of a wholly different quality than reciprocity in communal relations. In the latter case, 'I serve you not because of what I can get in return by doing so but because you need or want my service, and you, for the same reason, serve me' (2009, p. 39). There are hence two logics that pull in different directions. As I emphasised above, my concern at this point is not that markets undermine genuine caregiving. My concern is that caregiving is systematically undervalued in markets because market norms come into conflict with caregiving norms. How? The central idea underlying market exchange is that markets provide the best results, because everyone acts in a self-interested way. If the defining feature of caregiving is that it is driven by other regarding motives, this affects the bargaining situation between caregiver and client. Caregivers might be unwilling to strike a hard bargain, precisely because they care about their clients. Moreover, caregivers often have fewer instruments at hand to strengthen their bargaining position. For instance, it is much more difficult to go on strike when you know that this may threaten the wellbeing of the clients (Folbre, 2001, p. 40). Less visible obstacles to bargaining may be the caregivers' own internalised ideas about the intrinsic value of care that should be freely given. Differently put, to the extent that markets reward self-interested bargaining, they will not reward the other-directed concern that governs caregiving. As a result, the bargaining power of caregivers in the market is likely to be lower and with it the monetary valuation of their work.

I argued above that the line between market and non-market relations is not always clear-cut. One implication of this is that the extent to which markets undervalue caregiving will depend on the specific type of market relation: the more impersonal and standardised the market relation is, the more likely it will be that caregiving will be undervalued.

In sum, markets, understood as social practices, do not merely reflect a pre-existing lack of valuation of caregiving. Instead they actively contribute to

sustaining and increasing its undervaluation. I will now take a closer look at how the undervaluation of caregiving in the market relates to the gendered and racialised dimension of the organisation of caregiving.

### ***5.3. Gender, race and the systematic devaluation of caregiving***

In this section, I show that there is a mutually enforcing relation between the systematic undervaluation of caregiving in the market and its gendered and racialised organisation more generally. Assumptions about the value of caregiving and who should perform it are largely grounded in gendered and racialised practices. These assumptions inform the decisions of market participants, how they interact with others and how much they are willing to pay for social reproductive labour. In that sense, markets reflect gendered- and racialised practices that exist outside of it. Yet, as I argued above, markets do not merely reflect the gendered and racialised organisation of social reproduction, they also play an active role in sustaining and reproducing it.

In the first place, the systematic under-valuation of reproductive labour in the market, affirms the lack of valuation outside of it and thereby strengthens gendered and racialised assumptions about the value of caregiving. For instance, if the market value of the labour of a nurse is very low, this may contribute to affirm that the feminine-coded labour involved in the job of a nurse, i.e. taking care of somebody else, does not demand a high degree of recognition in general. One important implication of this is that markets thereby contribute to upholding the gendered dichotomy between a so-called labour of love and wage labour. More specifically, the lack of valuation in the market lends further strength to the assumption that activities done out of a concern for others do not demand market recognition. Nancy Fraser has argued that one of the ways in which capitalism manages to free ride on the unpaid labour of women and people of colour is by separating social reproduction from economic reproduction. 'Associating the first with women and the second with men, they have remunerated "reproductive" activities in the coin of "love" and "virtue", while compensating "productive work" in that of money'. Differently put, while capitalism relies on social reproduction to produce and sustain the very conditions necessary for its existence, e.g. a workforce, it systematically undervalues tasks associated with social reproduction by delegating them to a different sphere. Markets under socialism are different to markets under capitalism. Yet, there remains a concern that the systematic under-valuation of social reproduction in the market, even in socialist markets, will keep alive the distinction between a 'productive' and an 'unproductive' sphere, and that gender will continue to play a role with regards to who gets to be in which sphere. Hence, insofar as the lack of valuation of social reproductive labour in the market contributes to upholding that distinction, this will feed into sexist assumptions about women's labour and the value of it.

The gendered dimension of the under-valuation of caregiving in markets cannot be separated from its racialised dimension. The dichotomy between 'love' and 'labour' entails a specific understanding of femininity that applies in particular to white, middle-class women. Angela Davis (1983, p. 237) has shown that in the United States the social reproductive labour of women of colour and Black women, in particular, has been marketised for a long time.

Black women have had to do their own housekeeping and other women's home chores as well. And frequently, the demands of the job in a white woman's home have forced the domestic worker to neglect her own home and even her own children. (Davis, 1983, p. 238)

Hence, while white women's care labour has generally been relegated to the sphere of love, Black women's care labour has often been marketised. This also means that gendered assumptions about the value and form of 'women's work', differ depending on which women perform them, with race playing a central role. Therefore, while the lack of valuation in markets affects assumptions about the value of social reproduction more generally, these effects differ for different groups of women. In sum, the systematic undervaluation of care in the market affirms sexist and racist assumptions around social reproduction more generally. It also has material effects.

Under capitalism, market value is closely tied to material wellbeing, power and status. A higher income provides people with better options to fulfil their material needs. In addition, market recognition in form of high wages also tends to be linked to status and power. The dominance of market valuation as a mode of valuation means that a systematic undervaluation in the market sphere has real effects on someone's material wellbeing, power and status. Women, and in particular women of colour, are overrepresented in sectors that involve social reproductive labour. The resulting distribution of income, power and status is hence intimately linked to gender and race. Here again, however, it is important to distinguish the role of markets under capitalism from the role of markets under socialism. The crucial question is whether markets under socialism would have similar effects on the material wellbeing, power and status of market participants. If they do, then this would provide a tentative argument against organising social reproduction in markets under socialism.

In sum, market practices systematically undervalue social reproduction. This sustains and supports gendered- and racialised assumptions about the value of social reproduction more generally. It also deepens material inequalities. What does this imply for the organisation of social reproduction in market socialism?

#### **5.4. How should market socialism value social reproduction?**

To the extent that markets in market socialism systematically undervalue caregiving, there exists a *prima facie* argument against organising it in the market.



What are the alternatives? First, it is important to note that the above is not a strict argument against all forms of market organisation. Market organisation is problematic when market relations display a high degree of impersonality and standardisation. More personal and less standardised market relations may not have a similarly bad effect on the valuation of caregiving. It is, therefore, more precise to say that caregiving should be organised in a way that allows for the recognition of the particularity and non-standardised nature of the tasks, as well as the other-directed motivations that govern caregiving. One possibility to do that, would be to organise it in the public sector. This is not a radical proposal. Many states already have state-run healthcare or education systems. These could be further extended under market socialism. Yet, some versions of market socialism provide further valuable insights to think about the organisation of caregiving in the public sector. Market socialists, like David Schweickard (2002, p. 60), have stressed the importance of the democratic organisation of workplaces. Why not extend these thoughts to the organisation of caregiving? While organising caregiving (mainly) outside of the market, might be one necessary step towards ensuring adequate valuation, one further important aspect would be to bring caregivers to the table. They have specific knowledge about the requirements of caregiving, they know what it means to provide care, or how it might differ in different relations. If these workers had more voice, this might lead to a better understanding of the nature of caregiving, which in turn might facilitate a more adequate valuation.

Let me address one potential challenge: part of the lack of valuation for caregiving seems to result precisely from the fact that it has traditionally been relegated to the sphere of love and unpaid labour. Wouldn't a demand to organise caregiving outside of the market simply confirm gendered and racialised assumptions about its value? And wouldn't this negatively impact on the material wellbeing, power and status of those who provide it?

In response to this, it is important to note that markets under socialism will play a different role than they play under capitalism. Under capitalism markets have the role to allocate resources through price signalling. In addition, however, they bring about distributions that reflect the ownership structure of the means of production. As such they are a means to generate profits.<sup>20</sup> The latter function means that market value is closely linked to economic wellbeing and social power: economic wellbeing is closely related to income and wealth. Income is a direct result of labour market transactions, wealth is indirectly related to the market, e.g. through investment opportunities and interest rates. Higher incomes and wealth tend to correlate with more influence, societal recognition and respectability. Contrary to that, receiving gratitude for

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<sup>20</sup> I here follow Nicholas Vrousalis (2019, pp. 11–12) in assuming that in their allocative role markets seem morally unobjectionable. Concerns are raised, however, by their distributive function.

being a good caregiver not only fails to pay bills, it also does not generally provide caregivers with higher status or power. One important implication is that under capitalism, market valuation takes on a dominant role compared to other forms of valuation, given its link to material wellbeing and power and status. Consequently, socialism will need to find a way to counter the dominance of market modes of valuation. Failing to do so risks leaving social reproduction undervalued compared to tasks and labour carried out in the market even in a market socialist economy.<sup>21</sup>

Market socialism aims to eradicate (or significantly limit) the distributive inequality associated with markets under capitalism, e.g. by introducing a coupon shareholder economy, or by socialising the means of production. Markets retain their allocative function, but material wellbeing is untied from market value. 'From each according to his ability to each according to his needs' does not describe a market relation. Instead it envisions a relation where people's needs are a reason to provide them with goods independent of what they can offer in return. If material wellbeing is untied from market value, then an alternative mode of valuation of social reproduction does not need to conflict with people's needs to eat, shelter and clothe themselves. Untying material wellbeing from exchange value can take different forms under market socialism, e.g. the introduction of a universal basic income, or community-based provisioning. Furthermore, by untying material wellbeing from market value, market socialism may also cut the link between market value and social power. To the extent that market socialism will do away or restrict the vast inequalities in income and wealth generated by capitalism, it may also be able to limit the forms of social power that are closely related to it.

Insofar as market socialism can sever the link between market value on the one hand and material wellbeing and power on the other, it may open up space for different modes of valuation to exist on a more equal footing alongside market modes of valuation. Consequently, the concern that a demand for organising caregiving outside of the market would contribute to its undervaluation, is less pressing under market socialism than it is under capitalism. How and in which way modes of valuation will change in market socialism, is a difficult question that requires detailed analysis of the role that markets take on once they are decoupled from capitalist modes of production. This analysis goes beyond the scope of this paper, however.

In sum, if the dominance of market modes of valuation is broken, finding forms of valuation outside of the market need not signal lower value and accordingly, does not necessarily contribute to upholding gendered and racialised assumptions about the lower value of social reproductive work.

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<sup>21</sup> I follow Elizabeth Anderson's (1993, p. 1) argument that there are different modes of valuation that are appropriate for different social relations. My claim here is that a genuine value pluralism also needs to allow for different modes of valuation to be equally 'valuable'.

## 6. Market socialism and the distribution of social reproduction

Social reproductive work is necessary to create and sustain life itself. Hence, it is vital that someone provides it. Under capitalism, this someone tends to be a woman. To address the feminist concern raised by the unequal distribution, market socialism needs to go beyond securing a more equal valuation of social reproduction. Yet, gender and race are an afterthought in prominent market socialist proposals. For instance, while Roemer acknowledges the existence of racism and sexism, his proposal does not offer substantial analysis on how market socialism should address them.<sup>22</sup> Similarly, Schweickhart's proposal for moving beyond capitalism entails a 'Note on gender' (2002, p. 33) with the acknowledgement that gender raises important issues. Yet, there is no systematic theorisation of these issues in market socialism.

Market socialist proposals aim to bring about greater equality and freedom for all, by equalising access to wealth and income. It is, however, by no means clear that this would also bring about a more equal distribution of social reproductive activities. Gendered and racialised expectations, norms and preferences are deeply embedded in the social practices that make up our communal living and they are not reducible to class inequality. A market socialism that aims to bring about freedom and equality *for all* should therefore provide some guidance with regards to how social reproduction will be distributed. I will use the remainder of this section to outline some vantage points for such an analysis.

One step towards limiting the burden of social reproductive work of women at home would be to socialise many of its tasks.<sup>23</sup> Public spending could be dedicated to secure free childcare, education and elderly care for all. Alternatively, or alongside of it, collective forms of caregiving, e.g. community-based childcare or shared parenting, could be established. Socialising social reproductive work does not, however, satisfactorily address the issue. First, some tasks cannot (or should not?) be socialised.<sup>24</sup> Second, even if these tasks are socialised, there is no guarantee that they are equally distributed in the public sphere either. This means that market socialist proposals need to analyse more carefully what the obstacles to a more equal distribution are and how they can be addressed.

One important aspect here will be to look at the material constraints that push many women into providing reproductive labour, including the availability of alternative employment options. Addressing the inequality will involve a number of different policies, including the question of how workplaces are

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<sup>22</sup> Folbre (1994) offers a detailed critique of Roemer's class centered proposal of market socialism.

<sup>23</sup> This proposal was already prominent in the socialist and Marxist feminist debates, e.g. see Lise Vogel (2013, p. 162).

<sup>24</sup> See Brighouse and Swift (2014) for a comprehensive discussion about the value of childrearing in the family.

structured.<sup>25</sup> For instance, the introduction of workplace democracy would allow women to address material constraints and norms that push them to bear the primary responsibility for social reproduction, e.g. the availability of child-care services at work or parental leave policies. A more radical option would be to make it mandatory that all members of society, at some point in their lives, take up social reproductive labour. For instance, Diemut Bubeck (1995, p. 260) has proposed the introduction of a universal caring service, where every citizen would be required to work for a couple of years as a caregiver, e.g. in a hospital or a kindergarten.

There are two theoretical issues underlying these proposals that need to be considered. First, there is a worry that striving for an equal distribution of social reproduction might entail losing out on the benefits of specialisation. On the one hand, being a nurse or a kindergarten teacher requires specific skills that need to be learned and practiced. On the other, if everyone spends a significant amount of time on social reproductive tasks, they have less time developing other skills. Second, some of these proposals entail a tension between freedom and equality. Assigning social reproductive work to all members of society, according to their ability, will place restrictions on freedom. If people are asked to spend a considerable amount of time in social reproductive work, this affects their freedom to choose what to do with their time, e.g. to spend more time working in a different job. Are these restrictions on freedom morally justifiable? Each of these two points demands careful consideration and discussion, which goes beyond the scope of this paper. In the following, I will therefore merely sketch some possible answers to these questions and, where these answers remain incomplete, point out what would need to be shown.

First, with regards to the concern about specialisation, it is important to note that the above is not an argument against the need for specialisation in social reproduction. Being a nurse or a teacher requires skills that need training and special knowledge. Organising social reproduction in more equal ways may start with demanding of everyone to do their share with regards to the tasks that are more easily accessible, e.g. raising children or caring for elderly family members. As of now, these tasks are disproportionally carried out by women, often in the famous second shift, after they come home from work. Assuming that women are not naturally better at providing social reproductive labour, sharing these tasks more equally does not raise the concern of specialisation. The extent to which there is a concern that people will be unable to specialise in other work if they are mainly preoccupied with social reproduction, depends on how much time they would actually spend in social reproductive work. One thought here is that if social reproductive tasks are distributed more equally, the burden would not be significant on each individual member of society.

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<sup>25</sup> For an overview and discussion of different policy proposals that promote gender justice, see Anca Gheaus (2019).

Yet, one thing to note is that the current unequal distribution might already affect specialisation as women and people of colour are asked to spend a bigger chunk of their time in social reproduction, consequently taking away time from working on specialising in other things.

Second, turning to the concern about freedom: there may in fact be a trade-off when freedom is restricted. It is not, however, clear that this is a trade-off between freedom and something else. Instead, it looks like a trade-off between the freedom of some and the freedom of others. While freedom may be restricted if people who have previously not (or barely) taken part in providing social reproductive labour are now required to do so, freedom has already been restricted for those people who have been providing it up until now. Sharing social reproduction more equally might limit the freedom of some but increase the freedom of others.<sup>26</sup>

In sum, while the requirement to demand a more equal distribution of social reproduction raises concerns, there are possible ways to address them. A socialist project which stays true to its socialist values, will need to find ways to address the feminist concern with the unequal distribution of social reproductive tasks. A requirement that everyone does their share in organising social reproduction is a promising starting point.

## 7. Conclusion

Social reproduction creates us, it affects how we grow up, whom we become, and it determines how we relate to each other – it is, in other words essential. If market socialists care about freedom and equality, they should make sure that social reproductive work is adequately valued and more equally distributed. Only then can market socialism ensure freedom and equality *for all*. The revolution needs to be feminist.

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<sup>26</sup> Jan Kandiyali (2020) makes a similar point when he discusses the distribution of drudgery in a communist society.

## Notes on contributor

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