

Whose idea of socialism? Conflicting conceptions of the family and women's subordination

Philosophy and Social Criticism

2025, Vol. 51(3) 480–500

© The Author(s) 2023



Article reuse guidelines:

sagepub.com/journals-permissions

DOI: 10.1177/01914537231184488

journals.sagepub.com/home/psc



Lois McNay 

University Oxford, UK

Abstract

This article compares Honneth's attempt to revise socialist thinking on women's subordination in the family with feminist work on the topic. Both identify economism as the reason why socialism has historically failed to come up with an adequate account of women's oppression in the family. However, their attempts to overcome economism proceed in different directions. Feminists overcome economism by expanding and enriching ideas of the economic and value producing activity and applying these reworked categories to women's reproductive labour. Honneth overcomes economism by suspending materialist explanation and focussing on emancipatory ethical dynamics implicit in the family. In comparison to feminist work, Honneth's ethicised account of gender and family is as reductive as the economism it aims to surmount. First, his progressive historiography engenders a Whiggish narrative of the steady expansion of women's social freedom in the family that downplays ambiguous and negative historical developments related to the changing nature of patriarchy. Second, his reified archetype of the family obscures the systemic causes of persistent gendered asymmetries within households. Finally, his Hegelian endorsement of institutionally expressed normativity leads in a reformist political direction and away from the radical, deep-democratic options that socialist feminists deem necessary to counteract women's subordination.

Keywords

economism, family, feminism, gender oppression, Honneth, socialism, care-work nexus, social reproduction

Corresponding author:

Lois McNay, Department of Politics, Somerville College, University Oxford, Woodstock Road, Oxford OX2 6HD, UK.

Email: lois.mcnay@some.ox.ac.uk

Introduction

The critique of economism has been a major driving force in the theoretical development of socialism since Marx. In the name of overcoming overly narrow concentration on the industrial working class and the economically determinist account of society that ensues, a succession of socialist thinkers have sought to revise mono-causal accounts of power to better capture complex social relations. Socialist feminists have been prominent amongst those taking up the critique of economism as part of their attempt to improve on orthodox explanations of gender oppression as a merely derivative effect of primary class exploitation. Although, socialists have acknowledged the role that the family plays as the 'crucible of women's subordination', they have made relatively little theoretical effort to analyse these oppressive domestic dynamics in their specificity or how they might play out in ways not assimilable to the drive to extract profits. For orthodox socialists, the family is a simple adjunct to capitalist accumulation, the main mechanism through which women's reproductive capacities are exploited and a steady supply of labour power ensured. Women's emancipation is conceived in similarly reductive terms as following unproblematically from prior class emancipation. In seeking to surmount this economism, feminists have produced an extensive body of theorising on the different ways that oppressive gendered dynamics play out in the family according to intersecting vectors of power such as sexuality, care, race and violence, not just class. They have sought to explain the value and significance of women's reproductive labour independently of commodity production. They have also been at the forefront of theorising changing patterns of gender oppression in the context of an unfurling 'crisis of care' rooted in an ever-more dysfunctional relation between women's reproductive labour and neoliberal accumulation. Throughout this varied body of feminist work, the effort to surmount economism has not involved rejecting economic explanation outright, so much as reworking and enlarging it. By redefining orthodox notions of work and the production of value, they have applied economic categories to previously neglected domains of women's reproductive practice, enriching and extended materialist understanding of power and the foundations of gender oppression in the family.

Against this backdrop, I consider Axel Honneth's *The Idea of Socialism* because there appears, at first sight, to be a promising theoretical overlap between his thinking about the family and socialist feminist theorising. Like the latter, Honneth identifies economism as the fundamental reason why mainstream socialism has, by and large, failed to reckon with gender oppression and the part that the family plays in perpetuating it. Indeed, in his view, socialism's attachment to an outdated 'economocentric' worldview is the cause not just of its theoretical failure to grasp intersectional gender oppression but also of its practical failure to be regarded as a convincing political option for modern democracies. Honneth seeks to surmount this perception of obsolescence by outlining an alternative interpretation of socialism that combats economism and reignites its 'vital spark' as both a critical social theory and inspiring progressive politics. There are two main planks to his re-vivifying efforts. First, he reorients socialism around the Hegelian idea of social freedom which he argues provides a normatively potent way of reconciling the fundamental democratic values of freedom and equality, of individual self-realisation and social

solidarity. Second, he reworks key conceptual and methodological tenets of orthodox socialism to enable it to develop an expansive and non-economistic account of those societal relations it has historically neglected including, *a fortiori*, the family and gender subordination.

These shared objectives of overcoming economism and improving socialist analysis of gender and the family seemingly promises a fruitful theoretical conversation between Honneth and feminist thinkers. I argue however that, on closer inspection, this promise is illusory and that rather than enhancing socialist understanding of the family and women's subordination, Honneth's reworked critique undermines it. The root of the problem is the approach he adopts in combatting economism, one that involves bracketing material considerations in favour of an ethicised variant of critique. The purpose of critique is to disclose the 'independent moral principle' that exists, in semi-realised form, at the heart of every major sphere of social action or lifeworld. This immanent principle imbues the practices of a given sphere with an autonomous ethical character that cannot be explained with reference to a determining economic logic. The task of critique is to utilise this moral principle as a descriptive and normative benchmark against which existing social freedoms – the extent to which are realised or blocked in a lifeworld – can be assessed and emancipatory proposals devised. The governing ethical principle of the family is derived from the modern idea of love and is one of reciprocity and complementarity. It is against this standard that changing dialectics of freedom and constraint for women can be judged. Crudely put, Honneth's attempt to overcome economism moves in the opposite direction to that of feminist theorists; instead of creatively reworking the category of the economic as part of an expanded materialist account of gendered familial dynamics, he suspends it altogether. My contention is that ethicised critique is as reductive as the economism it replaces because, in reifying the family as a normative archetype, it reveals nothing of significance about why gender subordination persists or the part that families play in this process.

I concretise this general claim by showing how, in comparison to socialist feminist thought, each of Honneth's three main theoretical revisions to socialism obfuscate understanding of gender asymmetries in the family. His first revision is to replace the orthodox socialist idea of historical inevitability and capitalism's eventual collapse with the seemingly less determinist idea of progress. I argue that this revised historiography is not much less tendentious than a telos of revolution in so far as it engenders a Whiggish narrative of the steady expansion of women's social freedom in the family that downplays ambiguous and negative historical developments. It occludes the ways in which changes in the family under capitalism have created new problems for women even as old ones have been solved and the way that these changes are indissociable from the changing nature of patriarchy. Honneth's second revision is to replace the conventional base-superstructure model of power that underpins economic determinism with a pluralised, centripetal and non-reductive model captured in the idea of functional differentiation. I show how the normative inflection he gives to this differentiated idea of power obscures rather than illuminates gendered asymmetries within the household by bracketing the socio-economic context and reifying the family as an ethical archetype. The silo-like focus on the family's internal ethical logic forecloses precisely the type of relational

analysis that socialist feminists regard as essential to grasping gendered dynamics in the household, above all the work–family nexus. That is to say that what women do in households is inseparable from their position in the labour force, and vice versa, the work that women ‘choose’ to do outside of the home is constrained by the demands of family life. By collapsing the systemic interaction of work and family into interpersonal ethical imbalances, Honneth fails to grasp the reasons why gendered asymmetries in families persist. This diagnostic failing leads to normative shortcomings in the idea of social freedom. It’s essentially reconciliatory logic, that gender equality is brought about by aligning family practices with immanent norms of reciprocity and mutuality, is an inadequate normative response to the contradictory tendencies of patriarchal capitalism, namely its simultaneous dependence on and hollowing out of women’s reproductive labour. In the light of this contradiction and its dysfunctional social effects, women’s social freedom cannot merely be a matter of enhancing putative ethical mutuality in families but must necessarily involve more radical transfiguration of gendered social relations.

Honneth’s final revision is methodological rather than conceptual and involves replacing socialist vanguardism with an ‘experimental’ method grounded in responsiveness to all types of social struggle and suffering, not just class conflict. I show how, even as Honneth affirms the normative importance of this bottom-up, experientially grounded approach, he undermines it by asserting that emancipatory values are only ‘authoritatively’ embodied in institutions, not in citizen practice because it is too ephemeral and contingent to be morally representative. As well as being inconsistent with his declared experimentalism, Honneth’s endorsement of institutionally expressed normativity leads in a reformist political direction and away from the radical, deep-democratic options that socialist feminists argue are necessary to counteract women’s subordination both within the family and social life more generally. I conclude that Honneth’s ethicised variant of socialist critique both fails to improve insight into the family and women’s subordination and empties socialism of precisely the type of materially grounded analysis that has traditionally distinguished it from other types of normative political thought.

Overcoming economism

Despite overlapping emancipatory concerns, the relationship between socialism and feminism has never been especially easy. A main complicating factor in what Hartmann famously called an ‘unhappy marriage’ has been the theoretical blinkers that socialism’s lingering attachment to economic explanation imposes on understanding gender oppression. While, following Engels, orthodox socialists have readily acknowledged the family as the ‘crucible of women’s subordination’, they have devoted relatively little attention to theorising its oppressive gendered dynamics in anything other than class terms. The family is a simple adjunct to capitalist accumulation, ensuring the ideological interpellation of individuals as privatised workers and consumers, and, accordingly, women’s emancipation is thought to follow unproblematically from prior class emancipation. It has fallen to feminist thinkers therefore to use socialism’s potent conceptual toolkit to develop a fuller account of women’s domestic subordination and to challenge

the economistic dismissal of the family as an epiphenomenal institution. Extrapolating from the factory to the household, they have expanded orthodox understanding of value producing activity to include not only the production of commodities but also the reproduction of social relations and meeting of human need more generally (see [Ferguson 1999: 5](#)). They have thus moved the family and women's 'invisible' work from the margins to the heart of an account of capitalist society. Capitalist accumulation is fundamentally dependent on the subordination of women in the household and the continuing exploitation of their reproductive labour because of its requirement for a steady supply of disciplined workers or what Marx terms the 'peculiar commodity' of labour power ([Ferguson and McNally 2013: xxiv](#)). Yet, for all that socialist feminists have successfully challenged the relegation of the family to the superstructure, they have not always managed to avoid implicitly reproducing a different variant of economism in their own analyses (see [Arruzza 2016](#)). The renewed significance they have given to the family as a site of exploitation has sometimes had inadvertent functionalist entailments and deprived gendered household dynamics of independent purpose or rationale other than market logics: the family is held to 'belong' entirely to capitalism ([Gibson-Graham 2006: 33–4](#)). Part of the problem is the 'theory-driven' nature of early socialist feminist theorising which, reliant on abstract, technical categories such as accumulation, reproduction and surplus value tended to be relatively impervious to socio-cultural difference. The pursuit of a 'unitary', cross-societal account of women's oppression meant that household organisation was conceived as a relatively invariant phenomenon and important differences in women's lived reality of family life were obscured. Illustrative of such shortcomings is the well-known critique mounted by Black feminist theorists of socialist feminist denunciations of the 'anti-social' family for being too narrowly based in the experiences of White, relatively privileged, heterosexual women ([Barrett and MacIntosh 1982](#)). They point out that Black women's experience of family life has been markedly different to that of White women because, unlike the latter, they have been historically compelled to participate in the labour force in exploitative, brutal and dehumanising conditions. In these alienated circumstances, domestic labour undertaken for their own kin has been regarded as relatively humanising, and family life in general experienced as a refuge from the racism of the wider world, a place of security and comfort, even resistance, and not simply one of domestic isolation and oppression ([Carby 1982](#)). In other words, a monolithic account of domestic exploitation meant that socialist feminists overlooked the family's other constitutive functions – for instance, as a site of nurture, refuge and resistance – functions that don't just unproblematically reinforce an exploitative economic imperative.

In response to such criticisms, successive waves of socialist feminism, or social reproduction theory as it commonly known nowadays, have devoted considerable effort to overcoming residues of economism in their thought largely by historicising their analyses of the family and gender oppression ([Ferguson 1999: 6](#)). An important aspect of this historicization has been the development of relational analyses of the family that interpret its gendered dynamics not only through abstract categories of value production but in their interaction or 'consubstantiality' with other socio-cultural realms and institutions, such as the state, welfare and work. The aim is to replace abstract, universal and therefore

potentially misleading models of the family with more developed understanding of specific types of family organisation and kin networks that, in turn, better capture divergent experiences of race, class, sexuality and so on (e.g. [Stack 1970](#)). The 'work–family nexus' occupies a particularly important place in this relational analysis for, as socialist feminists maintain, it is not possible to understand women's position in the household in isolation from their position in the labour force ([Collins 2000a](#), 4). It overcomes the outdated idea informing early socialist feminist theorising that the household is the main locus of women's oppression. Instead, what women do in households is understood as indissociable from their position in the labour force, and vice versa, the work that women 'choose' to do outside of the home is constrained by the demands of family life. Focussing on the work–family nexus in this way therefore brings more sharply into view the often starkly differing lived realities of family life as they are mediated through converging structures of class, race and sexuality, for instance, the ways in which: 'Black women's disadvantaged labor market status .. has important implications for patterns of Black family organization and income, and subsequently higher rates of Black poverty' (2000: 45). Relational analysis thus goes some way to addressing the Black feminist objection that the 'anti-social family' thesis is too reliant on a monolithic account of patriarchy that generalises White, middle class women's experiences of domesticity as representative of all women's experience. It is also more compatible with a bottom-up, experientially grounded approach that begins not by imposing 'abstract structures and functions' so much as attending to 'the real social relations and the human agents that produce, shape and sustain those structures and functions' ([Ferguson 1999](#): 12). A space is created for theorising women's agency and the ways that, in meeting the needs of their dependants in all their complexity, they do not always straightforwardly replicate exploitative gendered logics and may even resist and subvert them ([Gibson-Graham 2006](#)). In short, relational analysis of the family dislodges reductive economism and enriches materialist understanding of gendered dynamics as an intricate mixture of 'volition and coercion', not just as mechanisms for supplying capital with docile, labouring bodies.

A second historicising strand in socialist feminist theory has been to complicate functionalist accounts of the family by placing greater emphasis on the contradictions, dysfunctions and instabilities that characterise its place in capitalist reproduction. Rather than seamlessly bolstering the accumulation process, the family under neoliberal capitalism is theorised as a key site where constitutive societal contradictions and crisis tendencies are played out and is thus rendered a more unstable institution than early socialist feminists envisaged. At a societal level, these instabilities are understood as emerging from the necessary yet contradictory and destructive relationship that exists between women's reproductive labour and capitalist accumulation in its neoliberal phase. Even as it is fundamentally dependent on women's reproductive labour, capitalism gradually depletes this vital capacity through its relentless drive to maximise profits. This involves privatising care and reproductive labour, driving down its costs, and allowing deregulated market logics to penetrate ever more deeply into domains previously untouched by commodification ([Vogel 2013](#): 163). Taken in conjunction with the restructuring of welfare provision around market principles and the growing precarity of women's labour, this privatisation of care sparks a generalised crisis of social

reproduction. This crisis disproportionately effects women from working class, Black and other socially disadvantaged groups because of the pivotal position they occupy within the family as carers and ‘shock absorbers’ of economic and state dysfunction and because of their weak position in labour markets. At the level of family life, it manifests itself in growing poverty and vulnerability and social depletion where capacities for caring and maintaining households and broader communities are eroded. In the extreme, then, capital’s unfettered drive to extract profits through intense marketisation places its own foundations, qua dependence on the family and women’s reproductive labour, in jeopardy.

Social freedom and the family

Albeit a brief and schematic overview, this feminist work provides an instructive context in which to situate Honneth’s *The Idea of Socialism* because it highlights certain theoretical priorities that are arguably central to the revitalisation of socialist thinking on the family and gender. At first sight, Honneth’s thought does indeed seem to align with these feminists concerns in that he too holds that overcoming economism is pivotal to rectifying socialism’s historical failure to adequately theorise the family and women’s subordination. Honneth begins his book with the contention that, nowadays, socialism is widely perceived as having little analytical or practical relevance to many of the problems facing contemporary societies and the main reason for this is the enduring attachment displayed by many of its thinkers to an outdated economism. Honneth defines economism as based in three tenets: that the formal industrial sphere is the primary locus of social struggle; that the industrial working class is the privileged agent of revolutionary change; that capitalism will collapse and give way to socialism. While once pertinent to the critique of early industrialism, these tenets and associated ‘economcentric’ worldview are now too schematic to explain the complex relations of contemporary capitalist orders. Gender oppression is singled out by Honneth as one of the most glaring examples of this explanatory failure. The ‘tense and unhappy’ relationship that socialism has historically had with feminism arises from its inability to recognise the ‘family and personal love relations’ as the primary site of women’s subordination (2017a: 85). Early socialists either ignored the family and intimacy altogether or granted it only limited significance by viewing it through the reductive lens of how it bolstered relations of production and consumption. Women’s emancipation was conceived in similarly one-dimensional terms as being a simple matter of better integration into ‘associative relations of production’ and, likewise, the future shape of the family was imagined only according to the role it would play within wider labour relations. In short, economism has prevented socialism from properly theorising the specific and autonomous logics of gender oppression and from recognising that gender parity requires not just equal labour rights but also far-reaching cultural shifts to overcome patterns of behaviour and stereotypes that have their roots in the family as ‘the hatchery of male power’ (2017a: 86).

Honneth’s attempt to surmount the ‘inherited burden’ of economism and revitalise socialism’s ‘vital spark’ consists, at a general normative level, in re-reading its core tenets through the Hegelian idea of social freedom or freedom in solidarity. The normative potency of social freedom resides in the way it reframes the relation between the founding,

co-original ideals of modernity – liberty, equality and solidarity (fraternity) – as dialectically connected instead of in a trade-off relation. In contrast to individualist, negative ideas of liberty, social freedom or ‘freedom in solidarity’ presumes that the individual cannot experience herself as truly free unless the conditions of recognition, mutuality and solidarity that enable autonomous self-realisation are already objectively realised in social life. In keeping with Honneth’s neo-Hegelian sociology, the family is the most fundamental of these enabling matrixes and he aims to give it renewed centrality to a socialist critique of capitalism by showing how the potential for egalitarian and solidaristic co-existence lies latent but partially unrealised within its relations. By elucidating this implicit normative potential, socialism is able to reaffirm its progressive political force focussed on the expansion of the social freedom in all spheres not just the economy.

In addition to this normative reorientation, Honneth proposes three supporting conceptual and methodological amendments explicitly intended to combat socialist economcentrism. First, he suggests a different way of anchoring socialist thinking in history, replacing the orthodox teleology of revolution with the idea of modernity’s gradual and irreversible tendency to progress, an idea derived from Hegel and Dewey. If there is a discernible direction or pattern to societal development, it is not capitalism’s inevitable collapse but the ‘fact’ that in every era, an ever-present pressure for social improvement is gradually realised in continuously more inclusive fashion. This progressive pressure emanates from the recurrent upsurge of struggles of subordinated groups against social marginalisation and their demands for recognition that eventually give rise to the inexorable expansion of channels of democratic participation. By calling attention to this ‘continuing line of progress’, socialism augments the visibility of these citizen struggles, and acts as ‘an advocate for victims’ demands to be included in social communication’ (2017a: 66). Second, by jettisoning strong teleology and other *idees fixes*, socialism is freed to adopt what Honneth terms ‘experimentation as a historical-practical method’ which involves paying attention to the practices and struggles of all groups trying to find solutions to societal injustice, not just the proletariat (p. 47). Experimentalism entails a shift in the theorist’s stance from the intellectual vanguardism typical of Leninism to a more open-ended process of learning from below. Socialism, Honneth writes, should endeavour to cultivate a ‘pulsing attentiveness to the most diverse topics and perspectives’ (p. 98) which would form an archive or ‘memory bank’ to guide future attempts at constructing alternative, collective ways of living (p. 70). The final theoretical modification is to replace a base-superstructure model of power, the corner stone of economic determinism, with a sociology of functional differentiation which allows power relations to be conceived in multilateral and polycentric terms.

In so far as Honneth intends these amendments to correct major gaps in socialist critique including its tokenistic treatment of the family and women’s subordination, the promise of a fruitful cross-fertilisation of ideas with feminist theory is held out. The progressive historiography allows him to replace functionalist interpretations of the family as the principal site of unrelenting domestic exploitation with a more nuanced understanding of shifting internal dialectics of gendered freedom and constraint. The praxis-theoretic focus on everyday experimentation and struggle is compatible with feminist efforts to circumvent single-lens analysis based too heavily

in abstractions of accumulation, surplus value, exploitation etc. and instead theorise diversity in family organisation and practice. The sociology of functional differentiation, probably the most pivotal of all these historicising amendments, affords a conception of the family as sphere of action whose constitutive interpersonal bonds of love and affection have an autonomous rationale that cannot be explained with reference to underlying economic imperatives. Unlike, say, in Weber or Bourdieu, where functional differentiation is envisaged as a mechanism of societal rationalisation and control, Honneth invests the idea with a primarily moral meaning. By separating empirical from ethical relations, functional differentiation captures the 'independent moral logic' (p.85) that lies latent but incompletely realised in social spheres, rendering them distinct from each other. In the sphere of the family, this guiding logic is derived from modernity's conception of the 'love relation' based in an ethical rationale of mutual supplementation. Naturally, there are many obstacles and distorting hierarchies of gender that prevent the full realisation of this mutuality, in family life. But once the underlying principle of 'free cooperation in social attachments based on mutual love' is recognised as the implicit norm informing family attachments, so an implicit moral standard is revealed from which to challenge the myriad barriers that prevent women from achieving social freedom (p.86).

Even from this brief account, it should be evident that, despite superficial resemblance, Honneth's attempt to combat economism and historicise socialist thinking on the family goes in a very different direction to comparable endeavours of socialist feminism. Although diverse, a common thread running through feminist theories is that they strive to bypass economism not by rejecting economic explanation altogether so much as historicising and complicating materialist explanation to avoid functionalist, single-lens explanation (see [Ferguson 1999](#): 1). Differently put, the category of the economic is expanded; instead of being conceived as a fixed, formal domain of activity analytically separable from other domains, the economic is conceived as a 'living set of social relations' which are 'historically changeable' and 'the product of people's practice' that changes over time and space ([Arruza 2016](#): 26). In contrast, Honneth combats economism by bracketing the socio-economic context altogether and concentrating instead on the family's putative ethical essence. The problem with this approach is that it effectively places the family in a kind of sociological and historical vacuum and thus dissolves any seeming convergence with feminism in as much as it forecloses exactly the type of relational mode of analysis that the latter deems vital to grasping patterns of gender subordination in the family. Instead, a singular logic or ethical essence is ascribed to the family as the truth of the institution, thus suspending relations of power and obscuring the variable ways in which gender subordination plays out.

From a feminist perspective, Honneth's family archetype is, in Marxist terms, a 'simple abstraction', that is, 'an abstraction which universalizes what is historically specific and therefore yields only partial or misleading knowledge' ([Arruza 2016](#): 23). If socialist thinking about the causes of women's continuing subordination is to be improved, it is not a simple abstraction that is required but a determinate one. Analysing gender through determinate abstractions is not an exercise in idealising or purifying family bonds but examining the different lines of power, antagonism and contradictions that traverse them

and, in doing so, also disclosing possible lines of flight and ways out. In the following sections, I consider more closely what it means to think about the family in these determinate terms, as a 'saturated site of power' and use this to underscore the limitations of Honneth's ethically sublimated account of women's subordination (Collins 2019: 235). Focussing on his three theoretical and methodological amendments to socialist theory, I show how each in turn misdiagnoses or obscures fundamental gendered realities in the family, starting with the historiography of progress.

Progress in the family

The first cluster of obfuscations arise from Honneth's historiography of progress which, when it comes to mapping shifting gender relations in the family, is as skewed and tendentious as the teleology of revolution that it replaces. Emphasis on modernity's steady ethical improvement engenders a Whiggish narrative that notes positive moral developments and downplays, even effaces, ambiguous, contradictory and regressive aspects in women's changing social position, aspects which are not so amenable to historical stylisation. Honneth's irenic narrative is propelled by the strong assertion that, since the beginning of modernity, the ideal of mutual complementarity has been the guiding thread around which the modern family has been consolidated: 'all relationships of love and affection since the beginning of modernity can be understood as relations founded on the normative idea that those involved mutually supplement and enable each other to realize themselves... the freedom of each is the condition for the freedom of the other' (2017a: 84). Feminists might immediately be suspicious of the central determining role that Honneth attributes to the ideal of mutual supplementation in shaping the historical formation of the family. They might think instead that struggles over power as well as a mixture of political and strategic considerations (social mobility, inheritance, financial advantage, legislation, welfare policy, political advancement and so on) are more likely determinants of the way that intimacy, marriage and family life have been organised through much of modernity. They might be inclined to regard transcendent notions of mutual supplementation as 'sugar-coated' fictions that function in a way not dissimilar to the notorious racialised doctrine of 'separate and equal', that is, an ideological recasting of entrenched inequality and domination as a spurious equality in difference. For them, the romantic ideas of gender complementarity that Honneth lionises represent not so much the advent of equality in the family but a mystification of the transformed but continuing 'patriarchal bargain' which shifts from a paternal feudal mode to a fraternal, democratic one. Modernity's founding social contract establishes the equality of men as brothers while its implied sexual contract ensures women's continuing inferior status (e.g. through laws of *couverture*) albeit wrapped in a naturalising mythology of romantic love and complimentary equality (Kandiyoti 1988, Pateman 1988). Indeed, for some feminists, the persistence of a gender division of labour means that, even in late modernity, family organisation is in some of respects more accurately described as a 'feudal domestic' set up rather than one of ethical reciprocity (e.g. Fraad, Resnick, Wolff 1994; Benston 1979).

Of course, it would be foolish to overstate a narrative of domestic servitude and ignore the undeniable improvements to women's legal and socio-economic position, especially

since the Second World War. Nonetheless, such improvements do not straightforwardly translate into enhanced interpersonal reciprocity as Honneth's sanguine narrative of family life supposes. Indeed, some feminists would contest the empirical basis of such a narrative since, regardless of the pervasive ideologies of love surrounding the family, there is evidence that reciprocal bonds have in fact weakened in important material senses as modernity has progressed. As women have acquired greater economic independence through wage labour and welfare support, so relations within the family have become more susceptible to default and moral hazard. Men it seems are more prepared to abandon partners and children precisely because they can see that there are other sources of financial support available to them (Folbre 1994: 118). It is even 'rational', in a thinly instrumental sense, for them to do so because the strain of divorce for men is transient whereas, for women, it is chronic. After relationship breakdown, men's income soon rises by approximately a third whereas, because of elevated risks of poverty and single parenting, women's income falls by a fifth and remains low for many more years (Leopold 2018). This is partially expressed in poverty statistics on single parent families, 90% of which are headed by women and 49% of which are classified as living in poverty.¹ As Nancy Folbre puts it, modernity's 'new terms of endearment reproduce, even intensify, some gender inequalities' (1994: 113).

Honneth might well acknowledge such uneven, negative developments, but his Hegelian historiography, driven by ideas not material circumstances, minimises their significance. Consequently, he regards negative developments as mere temporary setbacks in the longer *durée* of modernity's 'democratisation of love', where family organisation becomes ever more inclusive and internally equitable (Honneth 2014). This modernising process is inexorable because, on a uni-directional account of progress, there are certain democratic breakthroughs that are supposedly irreversible. Honneth does not specify which breakthroughs he has in mind but presumably legalisation of same-sex marriage, protection of women's reproductive freedoms, extension of welfare rights after divorce, etc., represent 'altered legal structures and shifts in mentality that can no longer be rolled back' (2017a: 73). This idea of the inevitability of progress is of a piece with other modernisation theses in sociology which hold that the global spread of secular democratic values steadily erodes traditional practices and ushers in more egalitarian forms of intimacy based on mutual satisfaction, or 'pure relationships' (Giddens 1993). For this linear, implicitly triumphalist view of historical change to be convincing, however, a considerable amount of conflicting historical evidence must necessarily be overlooked. Certainly, modernising forces have eroded some traditional family practices, but this has not produced 'a monolithic planetary transformation of intimacy' because these same forces have also catalysed contradictory and regressive changes (Stacey 2011: 191). Resistance to what is perceived as Western domination, for instance, has provoked a resurgence of religious fundamentalisms in parts of the world which have often re-instated 'severe patriarchal regimes' and 'homophobic repression' worsening the oppression of women and other minorities. (Stacey 2011: 190). Nor are such fundamentalist backlashes confined to non-Western, religious societies, they also occur in established democracies often in tandem with the recent rises in right-wing populism across the United States and Europe. Assaults launched by authoritarian regimes on

seemingly inalienable democratic rights belie the idea of irreversible progress. The overturning of *Roe versus Wade* in the United States, widespread assaults on women's reproductive autonomy, denial of basic liberties and rights of LGBTQi people in Poland and elsewhere might well be regarded as grave curtailments of democratic freedoms rather than blips in a longer arc of progress. Migration flows and transnational cultural exchanges further complicate the idea of unstoppable democratisation and progress. Secular societies are witnessing a rise of traditional practices such as arranged marriages, mail-order brides and informal modes of polygamy, none of which favour gender equality. Factor in also the estimated 25% rise in cases of domestic violence and abuse against women and children during the pandemic and a different, less rosy picture of family development emerges in which the social freedom of women and minorities is far from assured and the danger of democratic failure and regress ever-present.

In short, far from being a 'happy march of unambiguous progress', the development of the family under capitalism been an uneven and contradictory progress and, for women, this has created 'new problems' 'even as it solves old ones' (Folbre 1994:124). Omitted from Honneth's unilinear narrative in other words is any sense of the ways in which patriarchy has changed in modernity and therefore of attendant shifts in gendered patterns of family organisation. As socialist feminists frequently observe, the nature of patriarchy has transformed under capitalism from a private to largely public mode, that is, from direct, interpersonal domination to impersonal, systemic oppression (e.g. Young 1990). Gender oppression operates not so much through women's personal dependence on men as their subordinate position within the workplace and mass dependence on state welfare institutions. This structural reconsolidation of patriarchy around impersonal cycles of gendered vulnerability has correspondingly intensified divisions of race and class amongst women (e.g. Nicholson 1986: chpt 1). Under the exploitative conditions of 'cannibal capitalism', pay and working conditions have worsened for the working class, Black and ethnic minority women (as well as women in the global south) who make up most of the low-paid workforce in care and reproductive economies. The neoliberal reduction of welfare support that accompanies this mass proletarianisation renders these already precarious conditions of existence even more severe. One way these changes in gender oppression are reflected at the level of family life is in growing problems of poverty and debt. Even as overall social levels of wealth have increased, single parent families face twice the risk of poverty as families headed by couples (OPFS 2019-20). This worsens when race is factored in, for example, in the United Kingdom, 46% of children from Black and ethnic minority families are living in poverty compared to 26% of children in White families.² As inflation rises and wages in the gig economy fall below the cost of socially necessary reproduction, debt and hardship levels have correspondingly risen particularly amongst women because of their lower income and family responsibilities. Indeed according to Nancy Fraser, debt is now the main driver of neoliberal accumulation: 'it is increasingly through debt... that capital now cannibalizes labour, disciplines states, transfers wealth from periphery to core and sucks value from households, families, communities and nature' (Fraser 2016: 112-3).

In short, there has been a renegotiation of modern family life and its gender relations far more complex than the story of continuous improvement told by Honneth. To map these complexities, the family must therefore be treated not as a generic entity but according to its context and specific sociological composition. However, as we will see in the next section, such specificity is foreclosed by Honneth's ethicised archetype of the family and, as a result, he fails to understand the reasons why its gendered asymmetries persist or what might be done about them.

Reifying the family

The history of the family and women's position cannot be told in isolation from wider economic trends given the inextricable imbrication of the two in shaping gender oppression. Yet this is precisely what Honneth attempts to do not just in his history but also in his social theory and the counterpart of a skewed progressivism is a model of the family as ethical archetype which has similarly obfuscating effects. Viewed through the prism of its supposed unchanging moral core, the family is detached from the wider context of power, the separation of social spheres reified and its co-constitutive relation or 'constitutability' with other domains of activity foreclosed (Arruzza 2016: 13). Amongst these co-constitutive relations, the work-family nexus is pivotal, as we saw earlier, to feminist explanations of why, in formally equal societies, gendered asymmetries in household labour, are seemingly so difficult to dislodge. Even though women make up at least half of the paid workforce, in some cases outnumbering men (in the United Kingdom, for instance, they represent 52.7% of the labour force), they continue to do the bulk of caring and reproductive labour in the home.³ Feminists describe this domestic asymmetry in terms of the 'care-work' penalty defined in the most general terms as the structural tendency of patriarchal capitalism to 'disempower those who invest in the capabilities of other people, putting women at a particular disadvantage' (Folbre 2021). The material and symbolic devaluation of women's work in labour markets translates, at the level of everyday family relations, into their reduced bargaining power when it comes to renegotiating the division of labour. Women's work is both less well remunerated than men's and, just as crucially, perceived as less 'demanding', hence generating widespread social acceptance that women should continue to shoulder the burden of keeping the household going and caring for children and other dependants. In other words, the 'double shift' is shored up by sexist norms that naturalise reproductive and care work as essentially 'feminine' activities thus engendering psycho-sexual resistances on the part of both men and women to its reorganisation in the home. As Folbre puts it 'women are allowed to wear trousers, but men remain terribly afraid of dresses' (Folbre 1994: 101). Far from diminishing over time as the idea of ethical progress implies, the care-work penalty has in fact become more burdensome in recent years with neoliberal disinvestment in social reproduction. Cuts to wages and welfare support, have meant that women's workday in the paid sector has lengthened while, at the same time, they have taken on extra domestic burdens to make up the shortfall in social services (Folbre 1994:108-9). The pandemic has also intensified the care-work penalty. In the formal economy, women experienced greater employment losses relative to men, were more likely to work in exposed

‘essential’ job and experienced a larger reduction in income. Yet, at the same time, they were doing more domestic labour than men and were more likely to drop out of the labour force because of the demands (home-schooling etc.) placed on them during the pandemic (see [Cohen and Rodgers 2021](#)). In short, the care-work penalty operates like a ‘force field’ on ordinary domestic dynamics subtly constraining the matrix of options available to women and therefore entrenching a gendered division of labour regardless of whether it is consciously chosen or not ([Williams 2001](#): 30).

Yet, despite its far-reaching influence on gendered patterns of domesticity, Honneth has little to say about the care-work penalty, or, for that matter, any of the co-constitutive relations that pertain between the family and other social institutions and are instrumental in reproducing women’s subordination. He is of course not unaware of the ways in which women’s social freedom in the family is blocked, mentioning ‘economic dependency’ ‘violence-based tutelage’ and ‘one-sided labour within the hatchery of male power’ (2017a: 86). Simply listing these obstacles is not an adequate theoretical response, however, for it does not obviate the need to develop a conceptual framework capable of explaining the systemic reasons why these obstacles are seemingly so embedded in modern family life. Honneth is unable to mount such an explanation because of the epiphenomenal, personalist account of power implicitly invoked by ethicised critique, that is, power dynamics framed primarily as interpersonal or face-to-face interaction. This surface level account of power renders the structural causes of gendered asymmetries in the family conceptually inaccessible, misinterpreting them as imperfectly aligned ethical bonds. This is not to discount the significance of coercive interpersonal dynamics in sustaining subordination; there is indeed an important sense in which the family might be described as a ‘hatchery of male power’. But Honneth’s interpretation of power doesn’t encompass these either because it is doubly rarefied: power is reduced to interpersonal relations and these in turn are refined to ethical bonds. Analysing the family with reference only to ‘constitutive [moral] rules’ and misaligned ethical relations is a far from adequate explanation of gendered inequalities because it ignores the effects of underlying structures of constraint on behaviour. Conversely put, gendered asymmetries in the family will not be overcome simply by allowing women to ‘become equal partners in relationships based on mutuality, and.. free and reciprocal affection’ and allowing ‘free articulation of genuinely feminine experiences’ (2017a: 86–87). It is not that these don’t ultimately represent desirable ethical goals, but to proffer vague, and curiously essentialist notions such as the ‘free articulation of genuinely feminine experiences’ as a normative response to women’s subordination, in the absence of a supporting account of structural inequality, is superficial at best. Honneth is putting the cart before the horse in the sense that he ignores the material conditions that need to be in place for such ethical improvement to be a realistic possibility.

Given that women’s subordinated position in the family has ‘deep systemic roots in the structure of our social order’, what is required for their social freedom is a deeper, more radical transfiguration of existing social relations ([Fraser 2016](#): 100). Feminists have long recognised that overcoming gender subordination in the family cannot depend only on enhancing interpersonal bonds – valuable as that may be – but on addressing the structural contradictions from which it arises, namely capitalism’s simultaneous dependence on and

erosion of women's reproductive labour. It follows that changing women's status in the family depends on also altering gendered conditions in the labour force – low pay, disesteem, segregation, casualisation – from which they are inextricable. Contrast, for instance, Honneth's idea of ethical recalibration with the range of far-reaching structural proposals that feminists have put forward over the years including, wages for housework, socialisation of domestic labour (Davis 1981), transformation of work more generally (Weeks 2011), social wage, asset building (Collins 2000a), improving the provision of public goods, especially welfare, to offset private inequalities, overcoming debt (Fraser 2016), even at the extreme, abolishing the family (Lewis 2022). Ultimately, Honneth's ethics is incapable of producing radical normative responses because of the reconciliatory Hegelian logic governing it, where social problems are overcome by bringing practices into alignment with a pre-existing normative potential. Aligning behaviour with norms in this way tackles only the symptoms of oppression, leaving untouched the underlying structural causes of the problem and thus Honneth's reconciliatory ethics is inherently reformist rather than emancipatory as he claims.⁴

Honneth's might respond that his ethicised interpretation of the family is not intended to be sociologically accurate so much as indicative of a general emancipatory orientation for socialist thinking on women's subordination. He indicates this when describing his endeavour to renew socialism as a 'metapolitical' exercise that makes 'no attempt to draw connections to current political constellations and possibilities for action' (2017a: 5). But the question of determinate sociological content cannot be so easily put aside, given the immanent connection between fact and norm that neo-Hegelians like Honneth presume. In the light of this connection, it follows that incomplete or questionable reconstruction of family relations may lead to normative misdiagnosis. This is one of the reasons why feminists emphasise the importance of not relying on misleading ideal types or 'false universals' when thinking about gender and the family because of the danger of legitimating conventional nuclear set-ups over other modes of domestic organisation. The care-work penalty, for instance, affects all women, whether they have dependants or not, in that it reinforces a general systemic devaluation of their paid and unpaid work. However, it has a far greater impact on some women – members of economically and racially disadvantaged groups – than others and therefore it can only be addressed meaningfully in the context of the disparate experiences and life chances to which it gives rise. Differences of race, class and gender are in other words not mere particularities incidental to an unchanging ethical core but are constitutive of the lived reality of family life and therefore, by implication, of the remedial normative responses that might be required.

Consider, for example, the adverse way a generalised 'crisis of care' specifically plays out for poor, Black women as erosion of the subjective capacities needed to care for their families. Social depletion or 'weathering' denotes the cumulative psycho-somatic impact of chronic poverty, discrimination and marginalisation on disadvantaged groups that undermines a 'key set of social capacities: those available for birthing and raising children, caring for friends and family members, maintaining households and broader communities, and sustaining connections more generally' (Fraser 2016: 99). For Black women, the effects of weathering are often especially stark because of their 'triple'

oppression, role as primary carers, and the way that violence is “stitched” into the fabric of family life (Lorde 1995: 119). Shatema Threadcraft, for instance, describes how the accumulated effects of having to perform heavy ‘male’ labour and service White families under exploitative, racist conditions have ‘profoundly diminished’ Black women’s ‘intimate capacities’ for sustaining personal relations (Threadcraft 2016: 33). Others discuss weathering as transgenerational trauma; a process where epigenetic changes resulting from Black women’s cumulative life stress are passed on to their children as measurable psychological and physiological impacts (Woodly 2021: 90). Overcoming this depletion is fundamental to realising social freedom and ‘intimate justice’ for marginalised and disadvantaged women and would seem to require restorative and redistributive strategies that are normatively more far-reaching than the dyadic ethics advocated by Honneth. It is not that ethics has no normative bearing on this type of gendered injustice in the family; Woodly, for example, outlines a radical care ethic aimed at healing the ‘social trauma’ that distorts Black family life and is the effect of sustained oppression, discrimination and ‘lethal’ racial disadvantage. But, unlike Honneth’s underspecified ethos of mutuality, she elaborates this radical ethics in concrete, political terms, as a collective rather than interpersonal, semi-privatised endeavour. The collective aspect of this political ethics signals its distinctiveness from communitarian ethics more compatible with hegemonic ideas of ‘fortress family’. It also avoids shifting too great a normative burden on to individuals worn out by chronic deprivation, marginalisation and discrimination. In this respect, Honneth’s ethics of mutuality is potentially misjudged because it imposes a supervening layer of normative responsibility ill-suited to the lived reality of many poor women and their families. Put bluntly, from where are these individuals supposed to find the energy or motivation to take personal responsibility for a confluence of social injustices that are beyond their control and, indeed, often ‘aimed at the ascriptive group of which they are a part’ (Woodly 2021: 117).

Reconstructing the Family

The shortcomings in Honneth’s conception of women’s social freedom arise not only from his problematic archetype of the family but also from an unresolved tension in his reconstructive normative method. On the one hand, key to combatting socialism’s vanguardist tendencies is the method of social experimentalism which, as we have seen, is grounded in responsiveness to social struggles in all their diversity, not just those of class. These struggles are the drivers of democratic change, and it is the members of oppressed groups who, because of their intrinsic interest in challenging the status quo, are responsible for genuinely ‘subversive reinterpretation of social norms’ (2017b: 915; also 2017a: 61–62). If social freedom is to be construed as inclusively as possible, socialist theorists need therefore to cultivate greater receptiveness to these groups and to act as a mouthpiece for ‘those countless other interests that have not yet been articulated at all’ (2017a: 72). Yet, on the other hand, even as Honneth declares that those most ‘affected by problems’ are an indispensable source of normative inspiration for socialism, he dismisses them because they represent an insufficiently reliable expression of ‘desired progress’. Citizen praxis is too ‘narrow’ ‘ephemeral’ and ‘contingent’ in nature to be a ‘true

embodiment' of a 'self-standing epistemic interest in emancipation' (2017a: 72–3). Thus, it turns out that institutions, not citizens, are in fact the authoritative or 'real' expression of modernity's normative aspirations. In as much as they express 'publicly accepted breakthroughs' in accepted norms, institutions are 'much more reliable indicators of the chances of socialism than even the most frequent appearances of social movements' (2017a: 73).

This contradiction remains unremarked upon by Honneth who, in any case, reverts to privileging the institutional over the experimental perspective as the most authoritative expression of normative aspirations. But aside from inconsistency, this Hegelian construal of institutions as moral repositories is a problematic reconstructive strategy because it undermines his declared desire to find radical solutions to social problems and compounds the reformist tendencies of his ethics noted earlier. The source of difficulty is that the depiction of social institutions as normative beacons is an untenable idealisation that overlooks the extent to which they are sites of political conflict and ideological capture. The family, for instance, is a deeply contested social institution, which in the last few decades has been the subject of fierce ideological dispute about its meaning and role partly because of its centrality to debates about welfare. Since the 1970s, welfare policy (especially in the United States and United Kingdom) has arguably been less about alleviating poverty and social inequality and more about enacting the ideological goal of minimising 'dependency' on the state even though this might mean keeping individuals in poverty. These neoliberal welfare policies have been accompanied by a discourse of family values that is reactionary and deeply contradictory. For even while it lauds a conventional gender division of labour and virtues of good parenting, in actuality, it profoundly devalues care and reproductive labour. Stingy and punitive welfare support undermines the ability of certain types of family – poor and single parent families to name the obvious examples – to care for their dependants properly (Folbre 1994: 115ff). A discourse of individual self-sufficiency instrumentalises and exacerbates insidious distinctions between deserving and non-deserving families and engages in a moral scapegoating of those in receipt of welfare support which has been described in the US context as 'ritual degradation' (Fox Piven 1999). Stigmatising and punitive regimes of benefit administration pressurise single mothers into taking on poorly paid jobs. While they may well be spared the humiliation of being labelled feckless and irresponsible, they often have a more difficult time managing financially than those who receive state support. Given the ideological war of position that surrounds the family, the fraught battles over its social significance, it seems wilfully quixotic of Honneth to define it according to an independent normative principle that supposedly stands intact, above the political fray, waiting to be reactivated as a guiding force by emancipatory struggles. Contra this idealisation, the normative significance of the family is contestable all the way down in the sense that it is a focal point for disputes over power between groups who, for their own political ends, stipulate who qualifies for inclusion in this institution and the scope of its ethical bonds. In short, Honneth's Hegelian longing for Geist or a normative reference point that transcends social reality prevents him from recognising that 'normativity is... a battleground...located in the realm of actually existing social identities, social structures and social totalities' (Saar 2020: 63).

To criticise Honneth's irenic view of institutions is not to say that a reconstructive approach to normativity, broadly construed, isn't a potent alternative to the social 'groundlessness' of moral constructivism (Honneth 2014:1). The search for emancipatory potential in present social conditions is one of the hallmarks of radical critique but, in Honneth's case, it is misdirected. The top-heavy focus on institutions as authoritative expressions of a 'free standing interest in emancipation' not only contradicts his supposed bottom-up experimentalism but also locks critique into a reformist rather than radical political trajectory. Reformist because, as entrenched gendered asymmetries in the family reveal, social change is often path-dependent rather than straightforwardly progressive; institutions are likely to internalise and reproduce traditional inequalities in complex ways rather than simply overcome them. To focus on institutions then as beacons of stable normativity is to work within parameters that might in fact be instrumental in replicating certain problems and therefore in need of alteration themselves. So, for instance, Honneth doesn't question whether given the endemic problems it presents for women and disadvantaged groups, the privatised family is in fact the best way of organising intimacy and care. In contrast, abolitionist feminists argue that, given the foundational role of the family in naturalising heteronormative and individualistic modes of governance, kinship and care need to be creatively rethought outside of its constraining parameters (Lewis 2022). Equally as sceptical about the compatibility of a conventional family set-up with gender equality, Black feminist theorists have been at the forefront of reimagining care and kinship relations in deprivatized, communal terms captured in ideas such as othermothering and revolutionary mothering (e.g. James 1993; Collins 2000b; Gumbs, Martens, Williams 2016). As well as questioning the status quo, these alternative ethical proposals are noteworthy because they are derived from the practices of disadvantaged and marginalised groups who actively seek to alter their oppressive conditions of living. By conflating a supposedly transcendental moral perspective with an institutional one, Honneth is in danger of reifying the status quo and watering down emancipatory solutions. In short, the institutional needs to be strongly counterbalanced by the experiential point of view for, as Sally Haslanger puts it: 'oppositional consciousness and the norms it invokes are not justified by reference to a secure and universal foundation. A critical standpoint is achieved through collective reflection on and evaluation of the testimony and insights of others in spaces open to heterodox ideas and feelings' (2020: 46). Honneth might do well therefore to look to citizen practice as a valuable normative resource instead of deeming it too partisan and thereby confining himself to a reformist and ultimately ineffectual idea of social freedom.

Conclusion

Reflecting on comparable attempts to revitalise socialist thinking for the present day, Honneth is particularly dismissive of 'so-called analytical Marxism'. He contends that, by refining socialism to a 'purely normative alternative to liberal theories of justice' (52), analytical philosophers have emptied it of real-world transformative impact. As apposite as this criticism may be, Honneth's own ethicised approach seems to come perilously close to similarly emptying socialism of concrete emancipatory force. If an outdated and

reductive economism is the main obstacle standing in the way of socialism's ability to reckon with social complexity and intersectional oppression, then, as I have argued here, the solution is to enrich and expand materialist understanding of power. Socialist feminist theorising is a valuable exemplar of how such an expanded account of power can help elucidate the complex ways in which the family functions as the crucible of women's oppression. By redirecting socialist critique so strongly away from material conditions to ethical potential, Honneth fails to elucidate anything of significance about why gendered asymmetries in the family are so enduring or what might be done to counter them. More generally, his ethicised approach threatens to strip socialism of one of the key characteristics that distinguishes it as a mode of emancipatory political thought. Unlike liberals, socialists frame normative questions of equality and freedom not as formal principles but as the social conditions that need to be in place for these principles to be meaningfully realised. Yet, in Honneth's reconfigured socialism, analysis of actual social conditions is suspended, and institutions idealised to such an extent that the idea of social freedom appears to be precisely the type of groundless normative principle that Honneth ostensibly rejects. On this evidence, it is difficult to disagree with the growing number of voices who lament the capture of Frankfurt School theory by a certain liberal normative agenda, its consequent domestication, and abandonment of its original animating ideal to undertake a radical critique of power.

ORCID iD

Lois McNay  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1727-5505>

Notes

1. <https://cpag.org.uk/child-poverty/child-poverty-facts-and-figures>
2. <https://cpag.org.uk/child-poverty/child-poverty-facts-and-figures>
3. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/hmrc-and-valuation-office-agency-gender-pay-gap-report-and-data-2022/hmrc-gender-pay-gap-report-2022>
4. By linking socialism to ideas of social freedom, Honneth aims to rebut the charges of reformism, abandonment of radical democratic aims and political conventionalism that were levelled at *Freedom's Right* by a number of critics.

References

- Arruzza, C. 2016. "Functionalist, Determinist, Reductionist: Social Reproduction Feminism and It's Critics." *Science&Society* 80, no. 1: 9–30.
- Barrett, M., and Macintosh, M. 1982. *The Anti-social Family*. London: Verso.
- Benston, M. 1979. "The Political Economy of Women's Liberation." *Monthly Review* 21 4: 13–27.
- Carby, H. 1982. 'White Women Listen!: Black Feminism and the Boundaries of Sisterhood' in *Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, The Empire Strikes Back: Race and Racism in 70s Britain*. London: Routledge.
- Cohen, J., and Rodgers, Y. 2021. "The Feminist Political Economy of Covid-19: Capitalism, Women, and Work." *Global Public Health*, 16, no. 8–9: 1381–1395.
- Collins, P. H. 2019. *Intersectionality as Critical Social Theory*. Durham: Duke University Press.

- Collins, P. H. 2000a. "Gender, Black Feminism and Black Political Economy." *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 568, no. March: 41–53.
- Collins, P. H. 2000b. "Black Women and Motherhood." in *Her Black Feminist Thought*. London: Routledge.
- Collins, P. H. 1998. "It's All In the Family: Intersections of Gender, Race and Nation." *Hypatia* 13, no. 3: 62–82.
- Davis, A. Y. 1981. "The approaching obsolescence of housework: a working-class perspective." in *Women, Race and Class*. New York: Vintage.
- Ferguson, S. 1999. "Building on the Strengths of the Socialist Feminist Tradition." *Critical Sociology* 25, no. 1: 1–15.
- Ferguson, S., and McNally, D. 2013. "Capital, Labour-Power, and Gender Relations: Introduction to the Historical Materialism Edition of Marxism and the Oppression of Women." In *Marxism and the Oppression of Women: Toward a Unitary Theory*, edited by L. Vogel. Chicago: Haymarket.
- Folbre, N. 1994. *Who Pays for the Kids?: Gender and the Structures of Constraint*. London: Routledge.
- Folbre, N. 2021. *The Rise and Decline of Patriarchal Systems: An Intersectional Political Economy*. London: Verso.
- Fox Piven, F. 1999. "Welfare and work." In *Whose Welfare?* edited by G Mink, 83–99. New York: Cornell University Press.
- Fraad, H., Resnick, S., and Woolf, R. 1994. *Bringing It All Back Home: Class, Gender & Power in the Modern Household*. London: Pluto Press.
- Fraser, N. 2016. "Contradictions of Capital and Care." *New Left Review* 100, no. July/August: 99–117.
- Gibson-Graham, J. K. 2006. *The End of Capitalism (As We Knew It): A Feminist Critique of Political Economy*. Minnesota University Press.
- Giddens, A. 1993. *The Transformation of Intimacy: Sexuality, Love and Eroticism in Modern Societies*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Gumbs, A., Martens, C., and Williams, M. 2016. *Revolutionary Mothering Love on the Front Lines*. Toronto: PM Press.
- Haslanger, S. 2020. "Taking a Stand: Second-Order Pathologies or First Order Critique." In *Debating Critical Theory: Engagements with Axel Honneth*, edited by J. Christ, et al. London: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Honneth, A. 2017a. *The Idea of Socialism: Towards a Renewal*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Honneth, A. 2017b. "Is there an Emancipatory Interest? An Attempt to Answer Critical Theory's Most Fundamental Question." *European Journal of Philosophy* 25, no. 4: 908–920.
- Honneth, A. 2014. *Freedom's Right: The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- James, S. 1993. "Mothering: A Possible Black Feminist Link to Social Transformation." In *Theorizing Black Feminisms: The Visionary Pragmatism of Black Women*, edited by S. James, and A. Busia. London: Routledge.
- Kandiyoti, D. 1988. "Bargaining with Patriarchy." *Gender & Society* 2, no. 3: 274–290.
- Lewis, S. 2022. *Abolish the Family: A Manifesto for Care and Liberation*. London: Verso.

- Leopold, T. 2018. "Gender Differences in the Consequences of Divorce: A Study of Multiple Outcomes." *Demography* 55, no. 3: 769–797.
- Lorde, A. 1995. "Age, Race, Class and Sex: Women Redefining Difference." In *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African-American Feminist Thought*, edited by B. Guy-Sheftall. New York: New Press.
- Nelson, H., ed. 1997. *Feminism and Families*. London: Routledge.
- Nicholson, L. 1986. *Gender and History*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- OPFS. 2019–2020. *The Impact of Poverty on Single Parent Families: Stories of Lived Experience*. Edinburgh.
- Pateman, C. 1988. *The Sexual Contract*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Saar, M. 2020. "Immanent Normativity and the Fact of Domination: Notes on "Immanent Critique"." In *Debating Critical Theory: Engagements with Axel Honneth*, edited by J. Christ, et al. London: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Stacey, J. 2011. *Unhitched: Love, Marriage and Family Values from West Hollywood to Western China*. New York: New York University Press.
- Stacey, J. 2002. "The Family is Dead, Long Live Our Families." In *The Socialist Feminist Project: A Contemporary Reader in Theory and Politics*, edited by N. Holstrom, 90–101. New York: Monthly Review Press.
- Stack, C. 1970. *All Our Kin*. New York: Basic Books.
- Threadcraft, S. 2016. *Intimate Justice: The Black Female Body and the Body Politic*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Vogel, L. 2013. *Marxism and the Oppression of Women: Toward a Unitary Theory*. Chicago: Haymarket.
- Vogel, L. 2017. "Foreward." In *Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentring Oppression*, edited by T. Battacharya. London: Pluto Press.
- Weeks, K. 2011. *The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics, and Postwork Imaginaries*. London: Duke University Press.
- Williams, J. 2001. *Unbending Gender: Why Family and Work Conflict and What to Do about it*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Woodly, D. 2021. *Reckoning: Black Lives Matter and the Democratic Necessity of Social Movements*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Young, I. 1990. "Five Faces of Power." in *Her Justice and the Politics of Difference*. Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press.