

Special Session:

Beyond Development and Resource Extractivism: Feminist Perspectives

Organizer and Chair: Dr. Miriam Lang, Rosa Luxemburg Foundation

Economy, Ecomony, CareCommony

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Feminist approaches of reproduction analyze capitalism with the help of an 'iceberg': the visible protruding part of the economy is just the tip; under the water remains the care-work. All this together is based on nature/ the Pachamama/ commons. This indicates how much the discussions within recent years about 'reproduction' or 'care' on the one hand and on the other hand 'commons' – which is also crucial in the debate about extractivism – overlap.

Critical economists – starting with Rosa Luxemburg – have pointed out that only extractivism, or more generally the appropriation of commons, make capitalism work. The downside are externalizations. In a broader sense as usual, I see such externalizations currently in three areas:

1. In the social relations to nature:

Beyond economical growth, all its negative consequences: climate change, the destruction of agricultural land and of a liveable environmental space, often associated with evictions (mainly of indigenous people), militarization and the danger of resource wars.

2. With regard to our subjectivities: To expand the image of economic man to women does not alter its restriction as an ideal of very successful career people, which excludes the diversity of human ways of existence and which ultimately no one (albeit in varying degrees) can reach.

3. In relation to care: Forms of exchange beyond the monetary economic relations are either destroyed or exploited.

To oppose to this collateral damage of capitalism, the term 'care' (also instead of 'reproductive economy') is increasingly being put at the centre of the German feminist discussion. This includes a different approach to nature; partially with strong references to an understanding of nature as expressed in the concept of Pachamama: Not to take nature as separate from human beings and as exploitable resource, but to understand the human being as part of the Pachamama.

Emerging forms of alternative economies in the context of commons are usually called 'commons-based peer production'. But while peer production can at least be thought of only in terms of the benefits to an individual, it's exactly the care-logic which we need for another kind of economy: Because if it is care to give food to a patient – why should growing the food not be care? If it is care to bring a child to bed – why should producing the bed not be care?

Silvia Federici criticizes the fact that within the discussion on commons the question of the reproduction is neglected. She sees the appropriation of the reproductive area as crucial: "We cannot create an alternative society and self-reproducing movement if we do not design our new reproduction in a cooperative form and void the separation between the personal and the political, between political activism and the reproduction of everyday life".

Alternative economic activities reproduce the dilemma of reproduction, as long as they stick to the logic of exchanging equivalents: Either it will be outsourced and also privatized, or included and thus subject to rationalization and alienation. This dilemma can only be avoided in a form of economic activity, in which this logic disappears thanks to 'contributing instead of exchanging'. Associated with this is my conviction that in reproductive labour (or to stress this aspect: in care work), something becomes more visible that applies to any form of activity: that they will be inevitably alienated as long as they are provided in exchange for means of subsistence – since this remains coercion.

While the concept of commons has the potential for a new mode of production, Silvia Federici adds, the Left has failed so far to raise the question of how a coherent whole and the basis for a new mode of production could be reached. However, in recent years both in approaches of alternative economic activities and in current protest movements principles can be found that show the possibility of a commons generating peer production as overall economic alternative (I speak of 'Ecommony').

Essentially, there are three principles:

1. 'Possession instead of property': not an abstract owner structure matters, but who really needs and is using something.
2. 'Share what you can' – referring not only to goods, but also to knowledge or activities.
3. 'Contributing instead of exchanging': All activities take place needs-oriented and without alienation, out of inner motivation, while the access to resources is secured.

Only in this way – and by expanding these principles into an 'ecommony' – not only the dilemma of reproductive work (to remain 'below the surface') can be overcome, but the logic for any (economic) activity would turn into care. This could be also called 'CareCommony'.

To conclude, I quote Silvia Federici once more: "the present time is promising for such a project".