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AFFECTIVE Value

On Coloniality, Feminization and Migration

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Post-Marxist scholars have identified affective labor as one of the axes of production in the knowledge, media, information and creative industries. While this analysis mainly engages with what has been described in Marx's terms as the sphere of production, little attention is given to what has been coined as the sphere of reproduction. Feminist debates in the 1970s have been central in shedding light on how the sphere of reproduction is intrinsically connected to that of production. Focusing on domestic work, Marxist feminists have demonstrated that this labor is necessary for the reproduction of society.[1] Despite feminist campaigns for "wages for housework," insisting on the "surplus-value" accumulated by this labor, and evidence demonstrating the constitutive character of domestic work for societal reproduction, the devaluation of this labor persists in society.

Little has changed since Marxist feminists demonstrated that the social devaluation of domestic work is intrinsically linked to the feminized and racialized character of its labor force.[2] Consequently, the question of value in domestic work needs to be re-addressed as it signals the persistence of processes of feminization and the coloniality of labor in organizing capitalist

modes of production. Domestic work is not a singular expression of how these two processes configure the stratification of society, but it is symptomatic of the organization of the production of capital today. This discussion on affective value, exemplified by the analysis of domestic work, goes beyond the sole focus on domestic work. Rather, it invites us to consider domestic work as affective labor through which affective value is produced as paradigmatic for today's modes of production. Feminization, as *Precarias a la Deriva* discuss, characterizes the new forms of employment, exploitation and codification of the labor-force and labor power marked by precarity.[3] However, the new modes of production are not only shaped by the characteristics attributed to feminized labor, but also to the mechanisms of subalternization entrenched in the coloniality of labor as we will discuss here through the example of domestic work.

Numerous studies have delved into the dynamics produced in the employment relationship between two women in regard to domestic work, characterized as "a bond of exploitation."[4] However, as I will show this relationship of exploitation is complicated when we regard domestic work as affective labor. What we see then is that while one woman is employed to serve another woman and the household, both are affected by this labor in similar, but also different ways, at the same time that this labor is affected by their affects. The vital character of this labor as *living labor* is sustained by the affects produced and absorbed within it. Domestic work as affective labor is an expression of global inequalities, which are impressed on women's bodies. As Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo observes, globalization has created new regimes of inequality, in which the intersections of "race," gender and class have been re-shuffled.[5] These new regimes of inequality are reflected in private households. Migrant women from Eastern

Europe and the global South are taking over the household work that is still left in women's hands.

The expression, impression, transmission and circulation of affects in the private households employing a domestic worker, in some cases subjected to the legal status of (undocumented) migrant, evolve within the socio-political dynamics of their emergence. Affects do not only unfold context, but emerge within a concrete historical and geo-political arena. While they emanate from the dynamics of our energies, impulses, sensations, encounters,[6] affects also carry residues of meaning. They are haunted by past intensities, not always spelt out and conceived in the present. Immediate expressions and transmissions of affects may indeed revive repressed sensations, experiences of pain or joy. Although not explicitly expressed as such, they are temporal and spatial constellations of certain times, intricately impressed in legacies of the past and itineraries of the present/future. Contextualizing the transmission and circulation of affects in domestic work within the chain of value coding, I will argue in the following for the significance of the production of affective value for societal reproduction. First, I will introduce the question of value, followed by its contextualization within Anibal Quijano's framework of the coloniality of labor and Marx's concept of temporal incommensurability relating it to the 'double bind' of modernity/coloniality. From this perspective we will then approach the question of the codification of *living labor* by focusing on the dimension of "surplus value" in domestic work and its affective quality, concluding with some thoughts on affective labor and affective value. Let us now take a closer look at the question of value.

Value

The analysis of value lies at the heart of (Post-)Marxist theory. Focusing on the interchange between exchange-value and use-value, Marxist theory has made us think about the relational character in which value is produced, articulating a social and cultural consensus. Therefore, the question of value, as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak reminds us, is inherently linked to its cultural coding as she argues, "to set the labour theory of value aside is to forget the textual and axiological implications of a materialist predication of the subject."[7]

Spivak argues here for an analysis of value that takes into account the "materialist predication" of culture as well as the "cultural predication" of capitalist production. As a cipher, resulting from the intrinsic relationship between superstructure (ideology) and base (materiality), value signals the transversal nature of the logic of labor exploitation and capital accumulation. It is the queering point of capital, where its logic becomes tangible, on the one hand, and remains dispersed, on the other. As such, value is indexed by two apparently diametrically opposed movements: substance (consolidation), on the one hand, and fluidity (dispersal), on the other. The first dimension refers to its historical becoming, its ontological character, and the second to its transgressive rhizomatic nature, conditioned by social dynamics, processes and events. As Marx tells us in regard to the commodity, the value of a commodity might not tell us about the corporeal character of the labor force that went into its production, but the sensorial abilities of its producers are what infuse the commodity with value:

> "A commodity is therefore a mysterious thing, simply because in it the social character of men's labour appears to them as an objective character stamped upon the product of that labour; because the relation of the producers to the sum total of their own labour is

> presented to them as a social relation, existing not between themselves, but between the products of their labour. This is the reason why the products of labour become commodities, social things whose qualities are at the same time perceptible and imperceptible by the senses. In the same ways the light from an object is perceived by us not as the subjective excitation of our optic nerve, but as the objective form of something outside the eye itself. But, in the act of seeing, there is at all events, an actual passage of light from one thing to another, from the external object to the eye."[8]

A commodity is a "mysterious thing." While it seems to have an "objective character," detached from its producers and emanating out of its relationship to other commodities, it is conditioned by the perceptions of its producers. The social quality of a commodity, is thus both "perceptible" and "imperceptible by the senses" if we disregard the affective relationships from which this product emerges. When the question of how products are also related to our "subjective" side, to our "senses," to the circulation of affects, is disregarded, we cease to understand the cultural and social fabric of capital production. For Marx, production is linked to our "senses" and cannot be reduced merely to a thing, "the commodity." The sole focus on the "commodity" as appearance (Erscheinungsform) hides the elements that have contributed to its production, the labor-force, labor power and labor time, in short its *living labor*. Further, the perception of a commodity as something useful or value generating also results from its relational character. It is only through its relation to other commodities and their producers that value is produced, attributed, performed, expressed, impressed, transmitted and experienced. Affects play a significant role in this regard as affective relations shape the relationship between

commodity and producer/consumer. What lies behind the commodity is not only a complex web of social relations or a cultural script of codification of value. Rather, there are a range of sensual experiences related to the labor force and its ability to feel. These affective relations occur within a geo-historical framework and are articulated by different concrete forms of work. One of them is domestic work, a synecdoche not only for the persistence of feminization, but particularly for the endurance of the coloniality of labor in advanced capitalism.

Coloniality of Labor

While the demand for domestic and care workers in the EU is increasing, due to the growing incorporation of women into the labor market, an aging population and the privatization of social care,[9] in the last ten years there has been a restriction of entry and settlement for non-EU citizens. Meanwhile, State programmes that seek societal answers to domestic and care work are rare. Refusing to assume sole responsibility for the household, professional women opt with their household members, to delegate this work to another person. This job is increasingly delivered by a group of women, circumscribed by the legal imperatives of migration and asylum policies to the confines of "undocumented migration" and precarious feminized labor. Left in a working rights grey zone, ranging from partial regulatory measures, to complete deregulation, the labor-power of these workers is socially devalued through its cultural predication as feminized and racialized labor. Juxtaposing the private households within the dynamics of global interdependencies, the local face of the gendered and racialized division of work of the modern/colonial world system becomes a tangible and immediate reality in private households in Western Europe. It is in this regard that the legacies of a colonial order,

reactivated through racial and gendered segregation in the labor market and dehumanizing migration policies, are felt on an individual level and mobilized in our everyday encounters, bringing us back to Anibal Quijano's analysis of the 'coloniality of labor'.

A colonial logic implicitly operating on the assumption of ethnicity and "race" divides is still in place in contemporary societies. As Santíago Castro-Gómez and Ramón Grosfoguel observe, "the transition from modern colonialism to global colonialism, a process which has certainly modified the forms of domination unleashed by modernity, has not altered the structure of the center-periphery relationship on a global scale."[10] This perspective entails perceiving current forms of governing as entrenched in a social classification system based on the colonial category of "race" and its modern interpretations along ethnic, cultural and religious divides, through which the "Other" of "European/Occidental modernity" emerges. Whilst not explicitly spelt out in national EU migration policies, the divide between "EU" citizens and "non-EU" citizens is reminiscent of this colonial classification system. In the case of Latin American migration to Europe, this has produced a shift in the public perception of this group. In the 1970s on the basis of their asylum petitions Chileans, Argentineans and Uruguayans found hospitality in the UK, Germany, France and Spain, for example, but nowadays the term "exile" has almost disappeared from public discourses and been replaced by policies attempting to regulate and restrict entry to European territories. While not specifically denoting racial and ethnic differences, migration policies operate on the epistemic grounds of "colonial difference."

As Walter Mignolo asserts, "colonial difference" entails the hierarchical differentiation and racial classification of populations from "the" European perspective.[11] The interpellation and treatment of migrants and refugees as "invaders," "impostors" and

"aliens" by migration policies, invoke this population as the "Other" of the nation, codifying it as a body subjected to technologies of governance, information, surveillance and control. A closer look at the field of "undocumented migration" reveals how institutional definitions play into a logic of subalternization. The logic of governing migration and asylum through control and surveillance technologies stands at the center of the modern/colonial world-system and shapes its modern expression of the coloniality of labor. It is through these dynamics that "colonial difference," the creation of an "exteriority"[12] to Europe is created, not only as Enrique Dussel describes outside of European territory, but within it. This "exteriority" within Europe is created in the interpellation and enunciation of non-European or Eastern European migrants and refugees as the racialized, ethnicized and gendered "Other" of the nation. This is a position that evidences a form of existence, constituted through the material living conditions imposed by migration policies and endured within the logic of capitalism.

Codifying Living Labor

Departing from a decolonial perspective on transnational migration studies, and in particular on domestic work, drives us to consider what Marx coins "temporal incommensurability" (Ungleichzeitigkeit). That is, the parallel existence of two time periods, occurring in one and the same place. One way of exploring this diachronic synchronicity between two temporalities shaping the modes of production is the focus on the entrenchment between modernity and coloniality in advanced capitalism. No longer stopping at the gates of the factory, capital expands into the social sphere, into private interpersonal networks, absorbing the labor power created outside the commands of

organized production. This labor power emanates from the vital force of human beings, their subjective faculties, their abilities to be creative, relational and affective. Through the compression scales of time and space, productivity is acquired from the flexible flows of production emerging from the cooperative, creative and affective character of *living labor*. It is in this regard, that the biopolitical features of the workers, their creative, cooperative and affective capabilities, become a target for capital accumulation. This has brought scholars like Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt to conclude that production is organized on the level of the biopolitical.

The productivity extracted from our vital forces, from *living labor*, "the diversity of human faculties, of practices of cooperation often developing outside the direct command of capital, of 'forms of life' that make up that productive power,"[13] has become the target of capital accumulation. In their analysis of *Empire*, they state that the incorporation of new technologies and production of "immaterial goods," information, knowledge, images, languages, require other faculties of the labor force than the ones demanded in the Fordist manufacturing industries.[14] The subjective, creative, communicative and affective faculties of the labor force are salient for the quality of labor required in the re-organization of labor emerging in the late1980s.[15] Within this development of capital production, Negri and Hardt identify affective labor as one of the crucial aspects of the new quality of labor. It is in this regard that Negri argues that "the theory of value loses its reference to the subject."[16] Instead affect becomes the new cipher for capital accumulation as labor increasingly, "resides in affect, that is, in living labor that is made autonomous in the capital relation."[17]

This approach, while focusing on the creation of 'new post-Fordist subjectivities,' driven by neo-liberal entrepreneurial commands to

life and work, characterized by the increasing precariousness and feminization of the labor market (Precarias a la Deriva), omits the fact that these new strategies of capital accumulation are realized only in combination with modes of production, reminiscent of the logic of the coloniality of labor and feminization. Domestic work represents an articulation of the diachronic relationship to time of the current modes of production, engaging directly with prevailing modes of production in advanced and flexible capitalism, but also drawing on forms of capital exploitation reminiscent of "slavery, serfdom, vassalage, patriarchal relations of subordination."[18] Thus, while analysis of capital production dismisses domestic work as a constitutive mode of production in advanced capitalism, it is paradigmatic for the modern/colonial modes of production in advanced capitalism.

Affective Value

The value form of domestic work is thus inextricably attached to historical genealogies and social processes of hegemonic struggle. Serving as inscription and indicator of a specific historical social order, value has a two-fold character. On the one hand it relates to material conditions of production and on the other, to a cultural script of production. It is from this onto-phenomenological perspective that domestic work simultaneously operates as inscription and corporeality, manifested in its affective qualities, but also in the gendered and racialized inscription of its labor force. In domestic work the labor force is characterized by feminized faculties, correlating with the coloniality of labor. Domestic work, thus, is configured within and through a field of contextualized social practices and situated meaning production related in particular to processes of feminization and racialization.

The productivity acquired from the *living labor* in domestic work attends a hidden script of disciplinary capitalism, in which feminized and racialized subjects are targeted as "raw material" as their labor is codified as "natural," not in need of capital investment or the pursuit of a strategy of capital accumulation. In fact, capital invests in this labor in so far as it is artificially maintained outside of the circuits of capital accumulation by ignoring and negating its constitutive contribution to it. Domestic work in general, and "undocumented domestic workers," in particular, thus, engender the place of "exteriority"[19] or "colonial difference."[20] Their presence remains dictated to by temporalities and conditions absent from a script of modern progress and prosperity. Symptomatically, this is exposed in the working conditions of domestic workers characterized by oral contracts, unregulated working times, unsafe and vulnerable working conditions and high dependency on the employer. Through domestic work capital absorbs the imprints of life, the biopolitical power of human social relations. Therefore, while capital does not invest directly in domestic work, its productivity forms the basis for capital accumulation. It is in the interpenetration between new modes of labor organization and classical mechanisms of labor exploitation that domestic work emerges at the juncture of different temporalities, contributing thus to the production and accumulation of "surplus-value," produced not only by the absorption of physical and emotional labor power, but also by its affective potential.

The focus on the affective dimension of domestic work and its consideration as affective labor raise the question of the onto-phenomenological dimension of value.[21] This is so as the correlation between the societal recognition of domestic work and its labor force, commonly racialized and feminized, reveals how labor is not only constituted by its quality, but by its quantifiable

character in terms of who does the work. Domestic work is not badly paid because it is signified as non-productive, but because those doing this work are feminized and racialized subjects considered as "inferior" to the hegemonic normative subject. Again, the devaluation of domestic work is culturally predicated and reflects hegemonic perceptions. The value attributed to domestic work cannot be measured in Marxist terms of use-value or exchange-value as this categorization does not conceive the specific biopolitical quality of this labor as reproductive, emotional, and affective labour. In order to decipher the intrinsic value produced and extracted in this labour we need to consider affective value.

Affective value in regard to use-value and exchange-value represents a "third category," one that denotes the relational and societal character of human interactions. It focuses on the value produced through the energies, sensations and intensities of human encounters within a hierarchical system of colonial classification, entrenched in the logic and dynamics of the modern/colonial world system. Affective value, thus, foregrounds the cultural predication of and corporeal dimension in, the production of value. Drawing from this perspective, domestic work is understood as a site of social reproduction, where the expression, impression and circulation of affects and their transmission – affection - reveal the corporeal and sensual dimensions of apparently "emaciated and emotionally spare categories"[22] like labor and value. In the interpersonal relations between domestic workers and their employers these categories become "animated and animating," releasing their "performative and interpellating potential."[23] Thus, the value produced, exchanged and accumulated in domestic work is not just an articulation of the "bodily intensity of performing surplus labor," but it is the

expression of "the affective intensity associated with exploitation."[24]

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[1] Hartman, "The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism;" Delphy, *Close to Home*; Dalla Costa and James, *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community*.

[2] James and Dalla Costa, cit. op.

[3] *A la Deriva. Por los circuitos de la precariedad feminine.*

[4] See Romero, *Maid in the U.S.A.*, 3 and also the discussion on how "race" is configured in the relationship between domestic workers and their employers in Rollins, *Between Women*. Also the negotiation of class and "race" between employers and domestic workers has represented a main topic in research engaging with global inequalities. See discussion in Hondagneu-Sotelo, *Doméstica*; Constable, *Maid to Order in Hong Kong: Stories of Filipina Workers*; Anderson, *Doing the Dirty Work*; Lan, *Global Cinderellas*; Salazar Parreñas, *Servants of Globalization.*

[6] Stewart, *Ordinary Affects*, 3.

[7] Spivak. "Scattered Speculation of the Question of Value," 89

[8]Marx, *Capital*, 43. In original: "Das Geheimnisvolle der Warenform besteht also einfach darin, dass sie den Menschen die gesellschaftliche Charaktere der Arbeitsprodukte selbst, als gesellschaftliche Natureigenschaften dieser Dinge zurückspiegelt, daher auch das gesellschaftliche Verhältnis der Produzenten zur

Gesamtarbeit als ein außer ihnen existierendes gesellschaftliches Verhältnis von Gegenständen. Durch dies Quidproquo werden die Arbeitsprodukte Waren, sinnlich übersinnliche oder gesellschaftliche Dinge. So stellt sich der Lichteindruck eines Dinges auf den Sehnerv nicht als subjektiver Reiz des Sehnervs selbst, sondern als gegenständliche Forme eines Dings außerhalb des Auges dar. Aber beim Sehen wird wirklich Licht von einem Ding, dem äußeren Gegenstand, auf ein andres Ding, das Auge, geworfen. " (MEW 23, 86)

[9] See for further discussion Escriva and Skinner, "Moving to Spain at an Advanced Age"; Williams and Gavanas, "The Intersection of Childcare Regimes and Migration Regimes: A Three-Country Study"; Anderson, "A very Private Business: Exploring the Demand for Migrant Domestic Workers".

[10] Castro-Gómez and Grosfoguel, *Prólogo. Giro decolonial, teoría crítica y pensamiento heterárquico*," 13.

[11] Mignolo, *Local Histories*, *Global Designs*, 16.

[12] See discussion in Dussel, *The Invention of the Americas.*

[13] Mezzadra discussed this in regard to Jason Read's analysis of the micro-politics of capital. See Mezzadra, "Living in Transition" and Read, *The Micro-Politics of Capital*.

[14] See discussion in Hardt and Negri, *Empire*.

[15] For further discussion, see Lazzarato, "Immaterial Labour."

[16] Toni Negri, "Value and Affect", in: *Boundary* 2 26(2), pp. 77-88, here p. 79.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Marx and Engels Collected Works: *Economic Works, 1861-1864*, 94.

[19] Dussel, *The Invention of the Americas*.

[20] Mignolo, *Local Histories, Global Designs*.

[21] Spivak, "Scattered Speculations on the Question of Value", 74.

[22] Gibson-Graham et al, *Class and Its 'Others'*, 7.

[23] Ibid.

[24] Ibid.