

Reproduction, the Care Sector and the Question of Unproductive Labor in Braverman's *Labor and Monopoly Capital*

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ABSTRACT: Braverman's (1998) *Labor and Monopoly Capital* offers a seminal account of the processes that shaped the labor process in modern capitalism. Since the 1970s, expanding low-wage productive labor has coincided with increasing demand for care work, a consequence of women's integration into the workforce and consequent pressure on families as sites of reproductive labor. Developing Braverman's observations about the changing composition of the labor force and his discussion of the universal market and unproductive labor, we argue that exponential expansion of "unproductive labor" has circumvented the potential barrier, identified by Braverman, to the expansion of low-wage work. Our goals are threefold. First, we offer a discussion of the category unproductive labor to explore shifting patterns of paid and unpaid care work in modern economies. Second, we combine Braverman's underdeveloped discussion of unproductive labor with Marxist feminism to make sense of how care work has become critical to the valorization of capital and subject to processes of value production. Finally, we argue that Braverman's deskilling thesis pre-empts aspects of the literature on precarity as it applies to care work. Service workers in already undervalued occupations are pushed into barely survivable conditions even as their work becomes indispensable to capital valorization and labor reproduction.

Introduction

Harry Braverman's seminal *Labor and Monopoly Capital* (LMC) opens with a problematic drawn from the conventional opposition between manual and service work, in North American terms, the difference between blue- and white-collar labor. Braverman's commendable contempt for mainstream sociology makes his volume readable and enduring. It was not a product of passing fads, resisted affiliation with Stalinism, and predated the turn toward French skepticism that began in the 1970s and would lead to interpretive dead ends in much theorizing for several decades, until the resurgence of interest in Marxian political economy in the late 2000s. The richness of Braverman's analysis is clear when one considers that his work is still widely cited fifty years after it was written (e.g., Chapman 2023) and that it can easily be brought into dialogue with modern literatures about precarity, social reproduction and

care, digital Taylorism, global supply chains, and a great many more. We argue that Braverman's work identifies issues that were developing into a social crisis in the early 1970s but have moved to the forefront of struggle since then in ways Braverman could not have anticipated. It is implicitly clear that LMC, in keeping with the Marxist tradition generally, imagined that working-class consciousness was likely to form in the deskilled and deskilling sections of the industrial proletariat (Braverman 1998, 314–15).

In the 2020s the conditions of labor in Western countries have changed unrecognizably from the situation Braverman knew and analyzed, yet nonetheless conform to many of his predictions, requiring us to think with and beyond Braverman to make sense of contemporary processes of deskilling and the marketization of reproductive labor. The first section takes as its starting point Braverman's discussion of

unproductive labor in LMC's final chapter, providing a discussion of the controversy surrounding the concept and explaining how massive expansion of unproductive labor has occurred in reproductive sectors Braverman did not anticipate. The second section examines how Marxist feminist work has developed arguments about social reproduction and the labor process that complement and extend portions of Braverman's work through a discussion of a "missing link" between Braverman's discussion of unproductive labor and family structure in his chapters on the Structure of the Working Class and the Universal Market. In the third section we examine empirical changes to the nature of the care sector through a discussion of commercial care in the United Kingdom, drawing on insights from LMC and the work of Marxist feminists. Finally, we argue that, taken together, these trends explain a developing situation where service workers in already undervalued occupations are pushed into barely survivable conditions even as their work becomes indispensable to capital valorization and labor reproduction.

Unproductive Labor: A Suspect Legacy

Braverman's discussion of productive and unproductive labor is one of the least developed but most potentially suggestive portions of his analysis. Given the sensation caused by the release of the late David Graeber's (2018) *Bullshit Jobs*, interest in unproductive labor (of which Graeber's bullshit jobs concept captures one subjective aspect [Soffia, Wood, and Burchell 2022]) has not gone away. Gough (1972, 47) noted that the concept of unproductive labor was "one of the most suspect legacies of classical political economy." What, then, is unproductive labor and why does it potentially retain importance for re-readings of *Labor and Monopoly Capital* fifty years after it was written? To answer this question, we will first explain and define the term and the controversy surrounding it before linking it to the chapters "The Universal Market" and "The Structure of the New Working Class and Its Reserve Armies" in the second half of LMC. According to Marx (1968), productive labor, from the perspective of capital, is waged labor that produces surplus value; unproductive labor is any form of labor that does not.

Along with classical political economists, notably Adam Smith, Marx makes a distinction between labor exchanged against capital and labor exchanged against revenue. However, contra Smith who claims that only physical commodity production and not services can be considered productive (Mohun 2012), Marx (1968, 304) argues that the nature of the product of the labor is immaterial; "[t]he use value of the commodity in which the labor of a productive worker is embodied may be of the most futile kind." The classic example given by Marx (1968, 303) is that of a "jobbing tailor who comes to the capitalist's house and patches his trousers for him, producing mere use-value for him." In other words, the essence of the controversy around productive and unproductive labor is about the degree to which activities do or do not produce surplus value for the capitalist, rather than whether the labor is useful, since a great deal of extremely useful labor may be considered unproductive in terms of its relation to surplus value. This is also the definition of unproductive labor found in LMC: "to put the matter from the point of view of the capitalist, to hire gardening labor to maintain his family's lawn is unproductive consumption, while to hire the very same gardening labor in order to realize a profit from its work is to set in motion productive labor for the purpose of accumulating capital" (Braverman 1998, 285).

Unproductive labor was a subject of particular interest in the 1970s and 1980s for two main reasons, one theoretical and one empirical. Theoretically, the Sraffian (1960) critique of the labor theory of value caused significant adjustment to trends in Marxist economics (Steedman 1977). Sraffa's neo-Ricardian critique in some ways embedded the Marxian notion of labor further in the historical conditions in which labor is performed and away from a naturalist conception of labor's role in the labor process (Screpanti 1993), but it also decentralized the critical role of money in the analysis of capitalism in favor of creating a system of technical coefficients for understanding the relationship between wages and profits (Arthur 2004). Perhaps the best-known response to this critique is value-form theory, which offered an avenue out of this theoretical impasse by refocusing the question away from productive and unproduc-

tive categories and towards Marx's division of labor under capitalism into abstract and concrete (Pitts 2018). A second, roughly contemporaneous literature focused on the expansion of finance, the rentier economy, and outsourcing in the United States and United Kingdom in the mid-1980s. This empirical development presented a challenge to the orthodox account of the split between productive and unproductive labor, triggering interest in the expansion of unproductive labor and its potential implications for the tendency of the rate of profit to fall (Savran and Tonak 1999). The main source of this interest was the ballooning financial and advertising sectors (Tarbuck 1983; Barba and Vivo 2012), both of which constitute unproductive labor in the sense in which the term is used in classical political economy and Marxian economics.

In keeping with the surge of interest in unproductive labor around the time LMC was written, Braverman shows perceptive appreciation of a nascent tendency in the capitalist economy of the 1970s that would intensify significantly over the next five decades, and his choice of domestic work as an example is particularly apposite. While the concept unproductive labor was primarily a means by which Marx attempted to understand the distinction between production and circulation activity in the capitalist economy, it is empirically clear that as the quantity of labor invested in commercial forms of unproductive labor was rising, so too was the quantity invested in reproductive activities of various kinds (Mohun 2014), something by no means lost on scholars engaged in the debate on unproductive labor from the 1970s onward, including concerns that excluding reproductive labor might appear sexist. Mohun (2012, 11–12), for instance, offers this justification of the exclusion of care and housework from productive labor:

To call such activities unproductive has been interpreted as an example of the way in which a patriarchal theory systematically ignores the activity of women. A response might be that this confuses the reproduction of capitalist relations of production with the reproduction of wider society. There are all sorts of complex inter-relations between the two, structured by the evident truth

that children (and thus future workers) are not produced under capitalist relations of production. ... But the reproduction of capitalist relations and the reproduction of wider society are not identical, and the theoretical categories used to analyze the one are inappropriate for the other.

He continues, "If all activities that indirectly contribute to surplus value are considered productive, the term loses any focus and precision, for it is hard to conceive of any activity that cannot be so interpreted" (Mohun 2012, 15). Indeed, this view is still represented among Marxist feminists. Bhattacharya (2017) and Fraser (2017), working in a tradition now often referred to as Social Reproduction Theory (SRT) (Munro 2021), maintain that reproductive labor is productive of labor-power but not surplus-value, for instance. As we shall see, this is not an uncontroversial position, but the argument about the status of unproductive labor in the capitalist economy is essentially a question of whether reproductive labor in the round produces surplus value.

Wages for Housework, Care, and the Universal Market

While not explicitly gendered, the unproductive labor literature implicitly positions the (historically male) production worker as the central creator of surplus-value in the labor process. This, however, is by no means to suggest that Marxist economists were unaware of the importance of reproductive labor to the functioning of the capitalist economy, and it is notable that the status of paid and unpaid caring work is thorny from the perspective of Marxist economists. The critical importance of reproduction, both of capitalist relations and society generally, is repeatedly acknowledged in this literature. Consider Miller:

Capitalism depends on productive labor, but reproduction can be sustained on the basis of production labor. Contradictions between these two spheres, hidden by the uniformity of appearances in a capitalist exchange economy, emerge concretely in the political and social struggles surrounding the state and the household. Attacks on big government and support for the sanctity of the family are part of a desperate struggle by capi-

tal to ensure that the priorities of accumulation dominate over those of reproduction (1984, 152).

Economists in the orthodox Marxist tradition have tended to focus on the traditional split between productive and commercial activity, understanding the former as productive and the latter as unproductive, in other words, as a net drain on surplus-value creation. Reproduction here is understood as two distinct though related spheres: reproduction of capitalist relations and reproduction of wider society. The first of these is specific to capitalist society, while the second is a general precondition of all societal forms (Izquierdo 2006).

Marxist feminists have long argued that social reproduction in capitalist society is conditioned by historical development specific to capitalism and therefore form-determined in just the same way as reproduction of capitalist relations (Federici 2009). Contrary to the orthodox Marxist position that “children (...) are not produced under capitalist relations of production” (Mohun 2012, 11–12), Marxist feminists refocus the Marxian approach to “the circuits producing the most extraordinary commodity of all under capitalism; namely, the worker” (Mezzadri 2019, 36). Nonetheless, there are important distinctions between feminists working on this issue. SRT broadly argues that “reproductive, unpaid labor is essential labor, and hence important for capitalist accumulation, but itself is unproductive in that it does not produce surplus-value” (Bieler and Morton 2021, 13).

By contrast, “wages for housework” feminists assign a productive character to women’s reproductive work because “domestic labor produces commodities and surplus value” (Arruza 2013, 90). Descended from the domestic labor debate (Dalla Costa and James 1975; Smith 2013), this argument rests on the position that, without the reproductive labor undertaken primarily by women, the most important value-producing commodity in the capitalist economy—labor power—would not be (re)produced (Picchio 1992), refuting Mohun’s aforementioned concern that expansion of the notion of productive labor robs the concept of “focus and precision.”

Meléndez (2013, 136) argues that reproductive labor is properly neither productive nor unproductive, but notes that “in an indirect manner the reproduc-

tive labor does contribute to the valorization process, not only through the reproduction of labor-power but also through the indirect production of surplus value for capital.” Therefore, within the capitalist system, reproductive labor is indirectly productive labor. This contrasts with the argument of SRT, which classifies reproductive labor as essential in the creation of labor power but unproductive in its relation to surplus-value, and the orthodox view, which largely brackets the gendered aspects of social reproduction, seeing it instead in terms of its role in the reproduction of capitalism.

In the rest of this article, we adopt a definition of social reproduction largely derived from the work of “wages for housework” feminists. We view reproductive labor as always indirectly productive of surplus-value. Indeed, an essential component of the argument made here is that the boundary between paid and unpaid reproductive labor is becoming increasingly porous as capital seeks to extend valorization directly into the reproductive sphere. For this reason, “the reproduction of labor power in capitalist society is not virtuous ‘life-making’ but rather one aspect of a larger process that perpetuates the capitalist organization of society” (Munro 2021, 3). The central contradiction that needs to be grasped for analysis of the capitalist system, then, is that between production and reproduction. Here again, LMC dovetails with an important preoccupation of scholars of social reproduction. Braverman’s observation of the difficulties that would confront the family as a reproductive unit proved extremely prescient, not only his observation that the increasing workforce integration of women was the leading driver of the expansion of the working class in both industrial and non-industrial settings (1998, 274), but also that the universalization of the market and the creation of the dual-earner family as the standard unit of capitalist social organization would force families to

go to market and only to market, not only for food, clothing, and shelter, but also for recreation, amusement, security, for the care of the young, the old, the sick, the handicapped. In time not only the material and service needs but even the emotional patterns of life are channeled through the market. (Braverman 1998, 191)

Although Braverman clearly envisages unproductive labor as primarily commercial activity, he makes (1998, 287) the highly suggestive comment that

It is now clear that while unproductive labor has declined outside the grasp of capital, it has increased within its ambit. The great mass of labor which was reckoned as unproductive because it did not work for capital has now been transformed into a mass of labor which is unproductive because it works for capital, and because the needs of capital for unproductive labor have increased so remarkably [emphasis in original].

What is missing in Braverman's discussions of unproductive labor is a direct link between this expansion and his discussion of the universal market that produces the conditions under which significant portions of this expansion can take place, something clearly identified by Marxist feminists.

LMC's discussion of the universal market is closely linked to Braverman's understanding of the changing structure of the working class. Federici (2020) notes that in North America during the 1970s the expansion of the service sector reflected women's increasing rejection of housework and the tendency for this work to be redistributed outside the home and waged. This is undoubtedly part of the story, but it is also clear that the stagnation identified by Braverman in mass industrial occupations; access to new industrial reserve armies in the majority world (Global South) and formerly closed Soviet bloc (Harvey 2019); and the falling real value of the male wage created an increasing social requirement for some women, especially women of color and migrant women, to work for wages rather than to work unwaged in the home, often in insecure or poorly paid work, with significant wage differentials compared to men (Hooks 2000). This is even more acute in the majority world where women's "labor 'circulations' are shaped by productive and reproductive temporalities and pressures based on individual/collective caring responsibilities and debt" (Mezzadri and Majumder 2021).

The burden of unmet care needs has not disappeared but been displaced from the family, which was the enforced site of most reproductive labor since

the beginning of capitalism, to the private sector. In other words, when presented with a potential barrier of its own creation to continued accumulation in the reproductive sphere, capital has found a way to circumvent it through a mixture of private, family, and limited social access to caring resources (Federici 2020). This has had profound implications not only for the social division of labor and the composition of the labor force but also for the reproductive labor process.

Indeed, Braverman's prediction that a universal market was likely to emerge has proven correct, at least in the minority world (Global North). Increasingly significant quantities of reproductive labor are now commoditized on the market. In the case of the United Kingdom, the social care sector is thought to have accounted for between four and six percent of the UK labor force by 2008 (Moriarty et al. 2008). By 2023, the number of employees in adult social care in England was estimated at around 1.5 million (King's Fund 2023), with a further 325,000 employed in early years childcare settings, of whom 98% were women (Dawson, Williams, and Nancarrow 2023, 39). This second statistic does not even include the number of (primarily women) working in paid informal and casualized childcare (Gebrial and Bettington 2022) nor does it capture UK society's reliance on unpaid elderly and childcare.

What is striking is the speed and scale of the transition to market reliance, which was uncommon in the 1970s among all but the wealthiest to a situation of mass participation in commoditized reproductive labor either as producers or consumers. Whether we understand domestic work as productive of surplus value or as unproductive labor, it is quite clear that the reproductive sphere has been transformed into an important site of valorization of capital.

In the case of the UK social care sector, it is particularly critical to note that many of the practices Mezzadri et al. (2021) identify as permanent features of work in the majority world apply to largely female workers in the UK care sector, many of whom are from working-class or migrant backgrounds, with migrants, now largely from the majority world, comprising around 20% of the sector's workforce

(Emberson and Trautrim 2019). In other words, in the UK, social reproduction has become not only a site of valorization but also, because of the low profit margins and the preponderance of wages as a share of costs, a site of intense exploitation. Conditions in the social care sector in the UK, in which many people from the majority world are employed, increasingly approximate the kinds of pressures historically placed on all types of workers outside the minority world even during the high era of the welfare state (Munck 2013). Reproductive labor therefore remains undervalued because of the introduction of additional productive pressures as part of the accumulatory regime of contemporary capitalism. In the next section we will consider more fully how the reliance on commoditized reproductive labor has produced a distinctive labor process that systematically pushes workers into barely survivable conditions even as their work becomes indispensable to capital valorization and labor reproduction.

Home from Home: The Expansion of Reproductive Labor and the Care Sector

We develop arguments made in previous sections about the reproductive sphere as a site of capital valorization through a discussion of the development and conditions in the paid social care sector in England. First, we briefly sketch out the structure of social care in England before discussing the size and composition of the social care workforce to illustrate our contention about the acceleration of valorization in the reproductive sphere and the critical importance of superexploited migrant labor to the English care sector and therefore wider social reproduction in England. We also acknowledge the critical function that the undervaluation of care work, both in financial and ideological terms, plays in sustaining super-exploitative conditions. The Department of Health and Social Care (2015) in England defines “care and support” as “the help some adults need to live as well as possible with any illness or disability they may have.” The demand for paid social care work (excluding informal care) is usually defined as the “range of activities to help people who are older or living with disability or physical or mental illness [and their carers] live independently and stay well

and safe” (King’s Fund 2023), and is growing globally (International Labor Organization 2018). This reflects increasing life expectancy, a global aging population, declining birth rates, and the rising prevalence of disability among the adult working-age population (Department for Work and Pensions 2024). Consequently, there has been an expansion of the labor market and a reorganization of reproductive labor away from the family toward a mixture of for-profit and not-for-profit care homes. These developments can be understood using Braverman’s notions of proletarianization and the universal market, but they exceed his articulation of these ideas in important ways.

The Structure of Social Care and the Social Care Workforce in England

The UK social care system, though under devolved authority across the four nations, differs significantly from the universal and free at the point of delivery National Health Service (NHS). Social care has historically been commissioned and funded to some extent by local authorities but has been subjected to means testing and out-of-pocket expenditure since the establishment of the welfare state after 1945, with its origins tracing back to the nineteenth-century Poor Law. Since 1948, the social care system shifted from institutions to the community and local authorities, and from the public to the independent sector (voluntary and for-profit organizations) (Thane 2009). Since the 1980s, however, public services have experienced sustained fiscal retrenchment, while social care provision by local authorities has become a minority of the total amount of social care provision (Brown 2021). More recently, as the digital economy has evolved and, in an attempt, to address the care deficit, there has been an increase in digital platform-mediated home care labor and the unstable and precarious working conditions that accompany it (McDonald et al. 2023; Khan et al. 2023).

Fraser (2017) argues that reproductive labor experienced three distinct phases in the minority world that map directly to the development of the UK social care sector. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, care was considered entirely the preserve of the family; from 1945 to the mid-1970s,

reproductive labor was socialized and to some degree subsidized by the state. From the 1980s onward, the state and capital began to reject the logic of socialized reproduction and instead attempted to re-enforce the division of productive and reproductive labor. As Braverman points out, this has led to the increasing exposure of families to the market for basic reproductive needs.

Moreover, the degree of need for reproductive labor is steadily increasing. In 2021–22, the total expenditure on adult social care in England was £27 billion, over £3 billion more than in 2010–11 (King's Fund 2023), and it is expected to rise by £2.8 billion between 2022–23 and 2023–24 (Institute for Government 2023). In 2021–22, there were 1.79 million adult social care posts in England, of which 152,000 were vacant, with the highest vacancy rate in London, reflecting the ongoing workforce crisis (Skills for Care 2023; King's Fund 2023). The number of people working in the sector was estimated at 1.52 million in 2022–23 (Foster 2024). In 2022–23, this sector added £55.7 billion to the economy in England, 8.5% more than in 2021–22 (Skills for Care 2024). The need for care remains higher than supply, and therefore, in 2022 the government added social care staff to the Shortage Occupation List (SOL) (Department of Health and Social Care 2021).

The same trend can be identified across the minority world, where long-term care (LTC) (institutional and home-based) spending has been growing since the Coronavirus pandemic and is expected to overtake health spending soon (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development 2023). In 2021, 1.8% of gross domestic product (GDP) was allocated to LTC across OECD countries, demonstrating that Braverman's contention about the potential for expansion of the market into many areas of basic need is borne out across Western countries. In line with LMC's predictions and in keeping with the historic preferences of many minority world governments (Jessop 2002), it is the market that has been identified as the potential solution to the reproductive crisis confronting capitalism. Starting from a relatively low base, the expansion of the for-profit social care sector has been significant, and this growth shows signs of acceleration, with a greater

share of reproductive labor integrated into the market as a means of generating surplus value directly rather than indirectly in the family (Fraser 2017).

During the Coronavirus pandemic, social care workers were designated essential workers. Autin and Ezema (2023) describe the essential worker category as paradoxical, noting that the roles considered most essential are also the most economically and socially undervalued. This devaluation of reproductive work is closely related to the demographics of the adult social care workforce, which comprises paid formal carers who represent a large portion of social care employment, volunteers working for charities or voluntary organizations, and unpaid informal carers such as family, friends, or neighbors (Brown 2021). The social care workforce is diverse, and the great majority have traditionally been women (Skills for Care 2023; Foster 2024). Skills for Care (2023) estimates that 81% of the adult social care workforce (excluding unpaid carers) in 2022–23 was female. The gendering of care work illustrates that market exposure has yet to alter the traditional gendered division of reproductive labor. This phenomenon is now evident not only in informal but also in formal care work, meaning an extension of work from home to care homes, the family to the labor market, and from the domestic sphere to the sphere of capital. It underscores the continued reproduction of gender inequalities and the expansion of low-wage productive labor, as well as the double burden of female care workers permanently overloaded by paid and unpaid work commitments (Lallement 2023).

The adult social care workforce is on average older and more ethnically diverse than the overall English workforce (Foster 2024). In ethnic composition, individuals of white background comprised 74% of the workforce, contrasting with 83% of England's population. Individuals of Black/African/Caribbean/Black British ethnicity constituted 14% of the workforce, much higher than the 4% found in the overall population (Foster 2024). The pandemic had unprecedented and disproportionate consequences for minority ethnic social care staff, who had higher death rates than any other group (House of Commons Health and Social Care Committee 2020a, 2020b).

The disproportionately minoritized composition of social care is likely to intensify due to the international recruitment plan implemented by the Johnson government, which is likely to strengthen the feminized and racialized nature of the workforce, as well as the exploitative conditions and negative perception of care work. Furthermore, it highlights the transition from domestic and home-based care to not only care homes but also the exploitation of existing labor inequalities, given the substantial international and foreign recruitment of migrant workers to the UK.

Regulation and Super-Exploitation of the Care Workforce

While Braverman accurately predicted the expansion of marketized reproductive labor, he was largely concerned with proletarianization processes in the minority world. The creation of the Health and Care visa regime was designed to expand the English social care workforce through the recruitment of staff from overseas demonstrates a regulatory commitment to valorization in the reproductive sphere and a tacit acknowledgment that reproductive needs in England can only be met through the superexploitation of the British working class and migrant care workers, principally from Eastern Europe, West Africa, and South Asia. Areas with large social care workforces have often experienced significant rates of deindustrialization, where social care work replaces previously secure, relatively well-paid jobs in manufacturing (Winant 2021). In 2021–22, a quarter of care staff were employed on zero-hour contracts, compared to 3.4% in the wider economy, including 54% of home care workers (Skills for Care 2023; Foster 2024). Social care wages are among the lowest in the UK economy and average hourly wages of residential and home care workers were below the OECD average (OECD 2023). According to Skills for Care (2023), care workers' real median hourly pay in March 2023 was £10.11, down 35p from March 2022.

An enduring challenge in social care is staff shortages and recruitment, intensified by the 2008 financial crisis, Brexit and the end of freedom of movement from the EU/EEA in December 2020, and the Coronavirus pandemic. This problem has been resolved largely through the internationalization

of the labor market in social care and concomitant proletarianization processes among workforces in the majority world. In 2021, the Department of Health and Social Care (2021) announced the “biggest visa boost for social care” with changes to the Health and Care Visa scheme for care workers, care assistants, home care workers, and support workers for a 12-month period. Introduced in August 2020, the Health and Care Worker visa allows care workers and other medical practitioners to either migrate to or remain in the UK for employment with the NHS, an NHS supplier, or within adult social care. The visa offers a 50% reduction in visa fees, exemption from the Immigration Health Surcharge, and accelerated processing of applications.

Such measures have helped fill the UK's reproductive labor deficit with immediate and visible effect on the number of vacant posts in adult social care between 2021–22 (10.6%) and 2022–23 (9.9%) (Department of Health and Social Care 2021; Skills for Care 2023), with 40,416 visas granted in 2022–23 alone (Institute for Government 2023). These measures have contributed to the expansion of transnational care work and reflect that social care is an increasingly global labor market. Patterns of movement point from the majority to the minority world with carers, predominantly women, migrating to rich nations to provide care and love to family members of other people. As Hochschild (2014, 261) puts it, “the low value placed on caring work is not due to the absence of a need for it, or to the simplicity or ease of the work, but to the cultural politics underlying this global exchange.”

Despite relatively easy workforce recruitment following implementation of transnational recruitment policies, the Migration Advisory Committee (MAC) stated in 2023 that the cause of the enduring challenge within social care work of staff shortages and recruitment remains the underfunding and undervaluation of the sector, and expressed concern about the current overreliance on the immigration system for the recruitment of care workers and the “increasing reports of exploitation and abuse on the route” (MAC 2023). According to the MAC (2023), 99.9% of care workers sponsored through this new Health and Care Visa scheme now originate from countries

outside the European Economic Area, chiefly India, the Philippines, Bangladesh, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, and Ghana. Although government-to-government agreements exist for the first two countries on health and social care workforce recruitment, the World Health Organization's (2023) Workforce Support and Safeguard List, which promotes ethical international recruitment and employment of health and social care workers, classifies the latter four countries as "red list" countries, indicating that recruiting social care workers from these countries should be avoided due to their own pressing workforce needs.

Evidence does not support the commitment set out in the Code of Practice for International Recruitment of Health and Social Care Personnel in England stating that health and social care recruitment organizations and agencies should not actively recruit from these countries (Department of Health and Social Care 2023). Some accounts of exploitation include potential modern slavery and human trafficking through long working hours or document falsification. Unseen (2023), the UK's Modern Slavery and Exploitation Helpline, recognizes the higher risk of abuse and exploitation of workers in the care sector in comparison to other workers, due to their poor working conditions and overreliance on temporary employment contracts. They reported 712 cases of potential victims of modern slavery and 106 cases of modern slavery in the care sector in 2022, a staggering increase from previous years (in 2021, for example, there were 63 cases of potential victims of modern slavery and 15 confirmed cases of modern slavery in the care sector). Reflecting the composition of the sector, most of the victims were female adults, originating from the aforementioned "red list" countries. Cases of high levels of debt, many times to cover the sponsorship certificate costs, which should be covered by the employer, alongside cases of illegitimate, non-related care sponsors, have also been reported to Unseen. Finally, unethical recruitment methods using false promises and statements, and labor abuse, such as financial control, physical, emotional and sexual abuse, induced substance abuse, threat to harm, threat to destroy documents, poor and crowded accommodation, and many more, have all been reported to Unseen. As Justine Carter, Unseen's

director, put it, "the issue with care workers experiencing exploitation is that very vulnerable people are being employed to care for vulnerable people" (Unseen 2023).

Some migrant care workers are qualified professionals in their home countries but undergo deskilling by migrating to and integrating into the labor market in the UK. In response, Skills for Care (2024) announced in October 2023 their plans to develop a new adult social care workforce strategy that will identify this workforce's needs and find solutions for the sector's chronic and long-standing challenges, including appropriate professionalization of social care workers and learning lessons from the other three UK devolved nations. Although tentative movements have been made toward the organization of platform workers and domestic workers (Jones 2021), these movements have largely not extended to social care, leaving a significant gap in attempts to organize reproductive workers who also lack a professional body that regulates the terms of their work. The increasing flexibilization of the social care market further demonstrates the exploitation of traditionally female reproductive activities by capitalist production systems, which assign public caring tasks to women outside the private household sphere with the minimum professionalization requirements at low wages and with little employment protection.

In addition to international recruitment policies, the rise of digital platform-mediated work for health-care workers has also become problematic. According to the International Labor Organization (ILO) (2021), the UK is one of the top countries requesting online labor, while lower- and middle-income countries such as India, Bangladesh, and Pakistan have the highest labor supply. Fairwork (Howson et al. 2021) has also stated that the number of digital platform workers (including healthcare workers) has risen from 6% to 15% between 2016 and 2021 in the UK and has urged for stronger regulation on what is now known as the platformization of labor (ILO 2021). Khan et al. (2023) and McDonald et al. (2023) demonstrate how paid domestic care workers who have used these platforms in Australia have seen the traditionally marginalized, undervalued, and exploitative nature of their work reinforced, despite

these platforms' claims to give greater freedom and autonomy to workers classified as self-employed or independent contractors. Clients, acting as proxy employers, constrain workers' ability to secure fair payments for their services and because workers access these platforms through layered membership, their access to certain types of information is limited, forcing workers to compete among themselves, and as a result accept lower pay rates, which reinforces their exploitation (McDonald et al. 2023).

The English case demonstrates new forms of proletarianization in minority world economies. Amin refers to the "generalized proletariat" to describe the phenomenon of different forms of working-class formation across the world:

The shaping of the societies of peripheral capitalism produced forms of proletarianization specific to each region according to the functions that were assigned to them, and hence different from the forms of proletarianization found in the dominant centers, yet nevertheless complementary to them (Amin 2014, 32)

The integration of a large industrial reserve army—which has been proletarianized under very different conditions in Asia and Africa—into the reproductive labor force in the minority world has shaped the sector and the behavior of capital and the state. When understood in terms of the law of worldwide value (Amin 2010), the importation of workers into the minority world demonstrates another marker of super-exploitation (Marini 2022); dynamics of exploitation operate between core and periphery, within the core and the periphery. The expropriation of reproductive labor to maintain labor-power in the minority world, in Hochschild's (2014) terms, the inequitable redistribution of love across the globe, mirrors dynamics long observed in land and natural resources, capital, and labor. This inequality constitutes a double dispossession: first as the expropriation of workers in the majority world, and second as the imposition of poor socioeconomic conditions in the minority world with limited prospects of stability, organization, freedom, and security. The transition from familial to semi-social and back to privatized means of assuring reproduction of labor in the

minority world has characteristically been achieved through processes of exploitation and proletarianization of women and the domestic and international working class.

Conclusion: The Universal Market and the Care Sector

This article began with a discussion of Braverman's observations focusing on the underdeveloped link between unproductive labor and the extension of the universal market in LMC. We then considered the long-standing literature on "wages for housework," arguing that changes to the structure of the family and its reproductive function identified by Braverman have been dealt with by capital through turning reproductive labor into an activity that takes place through the universal market. Empirical evidence about the growth of the commercial care sector in English-speaking countries points toward the creation of a large, predominantly female, and increasingly migrant workforce. The English care sector was considered here as a primary example of how Braverman's predictions about the universalization of the market to meet the reproductive needs of families have been borne out. Braverman's work on the changing nature of the labor process and how more and more social activity is subject to exploitative valorization offers a way to understand labor that is critical to the reproduction of contemporary capitalist social relations and labor-power generally in modern capitalism. Further empirical research exploring the specific nature of what might be termed the reproductive labor process under intensifying conditions of valorization would be a valuable addition to the traditions of Marxist studies of the labor process and feminist approaches to the concept of social reproduction.

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