

Editorial

Is it better to be a coal-heaver or a nursemaid; is the charwoman who has brought up eight children of less value to the world than the barrister who has made a hundred thousand pounds? It is useless to ask such questions; for nobody can answer them. Not only do the comparative values of charwomen and lawyers rise and fall from decade to decade, but we have no rods with which to measure them even as they are at the moment.

(Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* 1929, 45)

In this special issue, *Atlantis* focuses on unpaid work, asking several questions: what is unpaid work and what role does it play in the economy? How does it relate to paid work? Why is most unpaid work, particularly caregiving, done as domestic labour in private households? Why is unpaid work predominantly women's responsibility and what are the implications for women? What barriers exist to men's participation in domestic labour? What are alternative ways of organising paid and unpaid work to improve both? What are the roles of states and markets in increasing or decreasing the amount of care work done in private households? What are the consequences of on-going struggles over the extent to which care is a private responsibility of individuals and their families, is provided by the market, or is offered by government or charity?

The articles in this issue illuminate the wide scope of unpaid work. They discuss the work involved in caring for children over the life course, in supplementing the educational work of schools, in sustaining communities by helping friends and neighbours and in volunteering in women's support organisations. They reveal the costs extracted from the women and men who do such work and show the close association between the way unpaid work is recognised and valued and the relative social status of women. We are excited that this issue permits readers to compare the situation in Canada with examples from South Africa, New Zealand, the

United Kingdom, Sweden, and both West Germany and the former German Democratic Republic. A number of the articles pose challenges to the politics of the feminist movement in Canada and internationally. Individually and collectively, they reveal the vital need for more international attention to unpaid work and the people who do it. *Atlantis* is proud to contribute to this initiative.

One of the major contributions of the women's movement internationally has been its insistence that women's unpaid work in the home is not something that they do naturally for their families, but is important, socially necessary, economically valuable labour that contributes to the society as a whole. This "domestic labour debate" assessed the contribution of domestic labour to the economy. Others mobilised the concept of "social reproduction" as a way of understanding all the activities involved in the daily and generational reproduction of the population. From this perspective, they documented the extent of women's work in the home, showing the complex skills required, especially for caregiving. They showed how caregiving is both an expression of love and endlessly demanding hard work, made harder by the lack of social support and recognition available to those who do it.

By revealing the importance of women's unpaid domestic labour, the women's movement drew attention to unpaid work generally, demonstrating how widespread but unrecognised it is and showing that women contribute a disproportionate share of unpaid labour, not just in their homes but in the labour force, the community and in a wide array of other situations. Feminists also exposed the ways in which women's responsibilities for unpaid labour are often oppressive, hampering their ability to participate in public life, particularly in the paid labour force, and increasing the likelihood that they will be poor. The work itself is often demanding, requiring time and energy as well as considerable skill. At the same time, many people want more time to maintain their homes and care for the people they love. The

demands of paid employment often prevent workers from providing the caregiving they would like to give their own families. Feminists have demanded that women's (and men's) unpaid contributions be recognised and valued by their families, their communities, their national governments and by the international agencies that set economic and social policies.

Responding to such challenges, the member countries of the United Nations committed themselves to "measuring and valuing unpaid work" - with specific attention to women's family caregiving - "reproduction and household activities" at the 1985 United Nations Conference on Women in Nairobi, Kenya (Status of Women Canada 1990). In 1995, the United Nations reported that, internationally, the monetary value of unpaid labour was \$16 trillion; \$11 trillion of it produced by women (United Nations Development Programme 1995, Chapter 4). Statistics Canada took seriously the agreement to measure and value unpaid work and has been recognised as one of the leaders internationally in both collecting and analysing such data. As part of such initiatives, Statistics Canada conducted studies to investigate what domestic labour was done in Canadian households, who typically did the work and how much time it took. They found that since 1960, women have continued to do about two thirds of all unpaid work in Canada; women do more domestic labour than men, even as teenagers (Statistics Canada 2000, 97). Women who are employed do more than their male partners; in fact, men living with employed women do less than men whose wives are not employed (Statistics Canada 2000, 111). The 2001 Census reported that women were 2.5 times more likely than men to spend more than thirty hours a week looking after children without pay, 2.9 times more likely to spend more than thirty hours a week on unpaid housework and 2 times more likely to spend ten or more hours on unpaid caregiving to seniors (Statistics Canada 2003).

Statistics Canada evaluated the value of domestic labour performed in Canada by estimating its replacement costs, that is, by calculating how much workers in the paid labour force doing the same work are paid. They concluded that in 1992, the value of household work was \$285 billion, equal to 41 percent of the Gross Domestic Product and 60 percent of personal disposable income. Comparing

women's and men's contributions, they concluded that the domestic labour done by women was worth almost \$17,000 per year and that done by men worth about \$13,000 (Chandler 1994). Since then, there have been no national studies to permit updates, but domestic labour continues to make a major (though still unrecognized) contribution to Canada's economy. Domestic labour not only takes up enormous amounts of time and energy and contributes extensively to the national economy, but also plays a critical role in ensuring the well-being of the population.

The on-going struggles of the women's movement have focussed on efforts to win social recognition and support for interpersonal caregiving. Feminists, labour movement and social/economic justice activists have fought for a wide range of workplace policies to help workers manage the demands of paid employment and domestic responsibilities, from better pay and benefits, reduced and predictable working time, to paid maternity, parental and other leaves. They have called for greater social support and collective responsibility for caregiving, for the provision of free or affordable high quality care for children, the elderly and people with disabilities and illnesses.

However, a neoliberal approach has dominated international economics and governing practices since the 1980s. This framework undermined initiatives to recognise, measure and value unpaid work. Neo-liberalism favours the deregulation of markets, including labour markets, and encourages states to decrease spending on social services and infrastructure. As a result, the pressures on individual women and men to contribute even more unpaid work for their own livelihoods and in their workplaces and communities has increased. For example, one growing area of unpaid work is in the paid labour force where more and more employees are working overtime without pay. A survey of employees in a number of major workplaces in Canada found that while ten percent worked overtime without pay in 1991, that proportion had increased to twenty-five percent by 2001 (Duxbury, Higgins, and Coghill 2002).

One of the dominant themes in this issue is the impact of neo-liberalism and changes in the welfare state on paid and unpaid work. Maureen Baker, Lynne Marks and Jacinthe Michaud all

demonstrate the consequences of the failure to value unpaid work and particularly caregiving. They show that cuts to social services and income assistance programmes elevate paid employment while failing to assist women who want to stay home with their children. Contrasting Canada to New Zealand, Baker explores the consequences of the marked reduction in social provisioning by the New Zealand state to those whose primary job is child rearing. Declining levels of state support and pressure to enter paid work, Baker argues, contribute to poorer health, undermine well-being and often complicate lone mothers' transition to paid work. Marks illustrates a similar dynamic in Canada by exploring the impacts of clawbacks in social assistance transfers and pressures on mothers to engage in paid work. Arguing that decisions to care for children on a full-time basis have not been sufficiently addressed or theorised, Marks argues that feminists' orientation to women's labour force participation leaves women receiving social assistance in particular, in a vulnerable position. She challenges feminist scholars to acknowledge a diversity of individual decision making, while simultaneously developing supportive state policies. Michaud's exploration of work to welfare initiatives in Canada, and their implications both for individual women and the feminist movement, offers another take on the effects of neo-liberalism and welfare state retrenchment.

Freya Kodar, Donna Baines and Barbara Mitchell show how the refusal to value unpaid work makes women vulnerable to poverty and in the context of economic restructuring and social service cuts, intensifies unpaid work. In the context of the "crisis in social reproduction" and the rise of precarious employment, Kodar traces changes in the Canadian pension system at the national level. She provides evidence of increasing pension insecurity for women. Kodar suggest possibilities for reform, noting the necessity of addressing and not merely accommodating gender divisions in paid and unpaid labour. Shifting the focus to paid work, Donna Baines examines the processes associated with economic restructuring that have increased unpaid work in Canada. Using qualitative interview data from three provinces, she shows how social service workers, particularly those of minority ethno-racial origin, subsidize state services. She exposes the way fewer resources and leaner staffing put pressure on

employees to increase their unpaid work on the job, in their communities and in their own homes. Focussing on households, Barbara Mitchell notes that in the current period, many young people are economically unable to set up their own households, instead returning to live in their parents' homes. She examines the socio-cultural and economic dimensions of intergenerational living arrangements in a Canadian, urban centre by comparing the decisions to "return home" among young adults from four groups (British-, Chinese-, South European- and Indo-Canadian). Mitchell shows the implications of these decisions for women's unpaid work.

From two very different perspectives, Glenda Wall and Claudia Gather reveal the politics affecting the organisation of unpaid work. Wall makes explicit the connections between neo-liberalism and current preoccupations with scientific theories of child development. Analysing scientific findings about infant and child brain development, she demonstrates how these theories are used to promote intensive "motherwork" for middle-class mothers, while setting unattainable goals for working-class and poor mothers who lack access to the resources necessary for such mothering practices. Gather relates unpaid labour to increasing social inequalities in Germany, starkly illustrating the harmonising down effect of reunification on women's equality. Analysing shifts in the participation rates of women and men in paid and unpaid work in West Germany and the former German Democratic Republic (GDR), she situates these changes in the context of intensifying social stratification since unification, particularly for transmigrant labourers. This exploration of the dynamics of change in the two Germanies offers insight into some consequences of the Canadian experiment with market-modelled welfare states.

Another theme explored in this issue is the importance of recognising and valuing unpaid work. Artist Shlomit Segal has highlighted domestic labour in much of her art work. Her digital image "washing dishes #2" that graces the cover of this issue is a tribute to the work that sustains households. We are also pleased to include creative contributions by Mary Ebos, Donna J. Gelagotis Lee and Alexandra Pasian. Debbie Budlender and Ann Lisbet Brathaug report on important work they have been doing in South Africa, one of the first

countries to take up the UN challenge to calculate the value of unpaid labour. Analysing data from the South African Time Use Survey, Budlender and Brathaug examine four methods for calculating the value of unpaid labour. They demonstrate variation among these methods of valuation and provide valuable data for future comparisons. Two articles in this issue expand conceptualisations of unpaid labour by considering the unpaid labour of work in children's education. Elisabetta Pagnossin Aligisakis uses United Nations' statistical data to examine the significance of parents' educational work with their children. She asks how class and gender shape this form of unpaid work and asserts the importance of such work for children's development of human capital. Nancy Mandell and Robert Sweet present new data from Canada's National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth. They examine women's educational labour as an under-considered aspect of unpaid labour. Mandell and Sweet draw connections among unpaid educational work and educational aspirations, level of mothers' education and the reproduction of gender and class relations. Andrea Doucet studies fathers who self-identify as primary caregivers. She examines gender differences in the way men and women parent, showing how fathers' emotional responsibility for children meet the promise and possibility of shared caring, while at the same time creates tensions for feminism and the politics of unpaid work. Doucet proposes some theoretical routes to address these tensions while recognising and supporting fathers' ability to care and simultaneously valuing women's contributions. Finally, Lesley McMillan examines women's complex and multifaceted motivations in undertaking unpaid voluntary work in refuges and rape crisis centres in the United Kingdom and Sweden. Her study shows, in particular, the importance of their supportive relationships with other women and their political demands for an end to violence against women.

With this issue, we hope to provoke further discussion and debate about unpaid work in a changing socio-political context. The retrenchment of welfare states in Anglo-American nations, combined with a rise in precarious work, poses enormous challenges for women attempting to manage the work of social reproduction and paid labour. The persistence or, in the case of the former

GDR, the re-assertion of gender-based care work ideologies and wage disparities compound these pressures. Feminist efforts, nationally and internationally, to measure and value unpaid work are important steps in recognising invisible labour. The expansion of understandings of what constitutes unpaid work, including voluntary work that builds social capital, parental work in providing educational supports to children and unpaid overtime work, offer avenues to redress, in social policy if not gender relations, the unequal distribution of various labours. The continued policy choice of informalising care work and shifting it onto families/households, supported by neo-liberalism promises to counter positive advancements.

Unpaid work and gender equality are not centrepieces of current political discourse. In Canada, a precarious future looms for the National Action Committee on the Status of Women. Gains, however, have been made in some areas, notably the extension of parental leave times in Canada. "Motherwork," its intensification and escalating expectations, along with new insights about fathers as primary caregivers, provide rich terrain for debate about caregiving at the household level. Poverty within families and contradictory state-level policies about mothers as workers-citizens suggest that class dimensions of the organisation of unpaid work still require considerable attention. The recent emphasis on "social capital" within international policy discourses provides terrain for forcing recognition of the work of social reproduction as primarily the unpaid, voluntary work of women, which fosters and sustains local social cohesion. Whether via social policies which underwrite the work of caring for children, those with varying abilities and the frail elderly, or via taxation and income redistribution policies which offer financial and service support to parents who are not in the labour force, the domestic labour debate is far from over. Feminist demands continue to call for a reorganization of society so that love and care can flourish as creative social forces.

Kathryn Bezanson, Brock University

Meg Luxton, York University

Katherine Side, Mount Saint Vincent University

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[INSERT My first memory graphic here]

"Fieldworker"

Mary Keczan Ebos