

The Gendered Impact of the Crisis: Struggles over Social Reproduction in Greece

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Abstract

The global financial crisis (GFC) has triggered a dramatic transformation of employment in the weakest Eurozone economies. This is evidenced in deteriorating work conditions, limited employee negotiating power, low pay, zero-hours contracts and, most importantly, periods of prolonged unemployment for most of the working population, especially women. We offer a critical analysis of the boundaries of formal and informal, paid and unpaid, productive and reproductive work, and explore how austerity policies implemented in Greece in the aftermath of the GFC have transformed women's everyday lives. In contributing to critical discussions of neoliberal capitalism and recent feminist geography studies, our empirical study focuses on how women's struggles over social reproduction unfold in the public and private spheres. It proposes that women's temporary retreat to unpaid work at home constitutes a form of resistance to intensifying precarization, and, at times, contributes to the emergence of new collective forms of reproduction.

Keywords

Feminism, reproductive labour, unpaid work, unemployment

Introduction

The recent crisis of neoliberal capitalism (also described as the 2008 global financial crisis or GFC) is linked to a range of state policies that have intensified pre-existing gender inequalities, particularly in the European South (Gill and Roberts, 2011; Karamessini and Rubery, 2013; Hozic and True, 2016). Women are greatly affected by such policies, and by economic downturns more generally (Pollard, 2013). In Greece, for instance, recent evidence suggests that austerity has disproportionately affected women and the most vulnerable (Kosyfologou, 2018; Vaiou, 2016). Emerging research from other European Union countries somewhat less affected by the crisis, such as the UK and Germany, also indicates that, in addition to perpetuating and/or deepening gender inequalities in unemployment, cuts to public spending dramatically reversed gender equality gains (Annesley and Scheele, 2011). The policies' consequences of reduced wages and a shrinking welfare state impact negatively on women's ability to sustain themselves and/or their families through work (Fawcett Society, 2012); yet this crucial dimension is often overlooked. We address this gap by revealing struggles for social reproduction in Greece, the Eurozone country most affected by the GFC.

Drawing on prior work on feminist economics (Elson, 2017; Smith, 2016; Roberts, 2015; Pollard, 2013) and recent debates on social reproduction (e.g. Bhattacharya, 2017; Fraser, 2016; Hopkins, 2015), this article examines the effects of the neoliberal crisis, and argues the importance of studying the impact of austerity on women in terms of changing power relations at work, in the family and beyond. Our starting point is that a full assessment of the impact of the 2008 GFC on the gender division of labour must consider women's triple burden of care work, housework and paid work (Moser, 1993).

In particular, we focus on how ‘Greek austerity’ and three Economic Adjustment Programmes implemented between 2011 and 2015 have transformed both productive and reproductive roles in women’s everyday lives. The personal narratives of Greek women in the wake of the GFC reveal that the boundaries between production and social reproduction are being reconfigured, potentially creating spaces to resist the capitalist crisis and capitalism. In showing the tensions and struggles of unemployed (mainly professional) women, we challenge the ‘production–reproduction’ binary (Klausner, 1986; Dyck, 1990; Hierofani, 2016). Following the work of radical Marxist feminists (e.g. Federici, 1975; Fortunati, 1995), we reiterate that the ‘official economy’ must include not only waged labour, but also productive *and* reproductive work performed within the household, with its gendered labour and familial mode of governance (Weeks, 2016). In stressing interdependencies between ‘private’ and ‘public’ spheres, we also argue that transformed gender relations and identities in households may counterintuitively signal the emergence of new potentialities to disrupt the gendered binary of productive and reproductive work.

The article is structured as follows. First, it articulates the gendered outcomes of austerity, and discusses unemployment and public service cuts in relation to social reproduction (Adkins, 2012; Fraser, 2016; Bhattacharya, 2017; Aruzza et al., 2019). We then describe the context of this research, and discuss feminist arguments on social reproduction and the impact of neoliberal reforms on women’s roles within and outside the home. Employing illustrative examples from our empirical research, we reflect on the GFC’s impact on women’s productive and reproductive roles, and particularly the spaces being created for gendered forms of resistance to neoliberal reforms.

Austerity and the crisis of neoliberal capitalism: Feminist views on social reproduction

In a special section in *Environment and Planning A* on the role and influence of feminist work in economic geography, McDowell (2016: 2097) stressed that 'theoretical analyses that take gender difference into account must be an essential part of an economic geographer's toolkit'. Feminist scholarship not only contributes to 'the ongoing project of rethinking how economic geography is conceived and practised' (Pollard, 2013: 403), but also prioritises agency in the context of the recent crisis. In doing so, feminist geographers stress 'how feminist (and other) work on subjectivities can revisit some familiar subjects in different ways that helps to repoliticise understandings of financial markets' (Pollard, 2013: 417), thus offering better understandings and formulating critical responses to the socio-economic effects of the GFC.

Feminist economic geographers critically interrogate neoliberal discourses and policies, demonstrating their implicit, normalised, gendered assumptions and uneven outcomes (Elson, 2009; Nagar et al., 2002; Pollard, 2013). For example, in discussing structural adjustment programmes (SAPs),¹ Nagar et al. (2002) compare such stabilisation programmes, introduced into struggling economies throughout the developing world by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank in the 1980s and 1990s, with 'capital's first phase of primitive accumulation', when social reproduction was the primary and 'fundamental terrain for the restructuring needed' (Dalla Costa and Dalla Costa, 1993: 1-2). As neoliberal states withdraw their provision of social services, women in the feminised spaces of household and community assume a disproportionate role in caring and domestic work (Moser, 1987; Nagar et al., 2002). Thus, women's gendered roles and identities as mothers

and housewives are reinforced by their increasing care responsibilities when social forms of welfare provision are withdrawn (Roberts, 2004).

Furthermore, since women constitute the bulk of temporary and contract workers, jobs held primarily by women are the first to be cut (ITUC, 2009). In 2010, the European Parliament adopted a resolution on precarious women workers, which highlighted women's overrepresentation in precarious work as a key contributory factor to the gender pay gap. This overrepresentation arises from 'the constraints they face because of child-care and domestic responsibilities' (ITUC, 2011: 16), which force them to seek part-time or 'non-standard' work, with the risks of short hours, low pay and limited access to benefits. However, as Pearson and Elson (2015: 10) argue:

In a crisis, existing gender norms may be reinforced, or they may decompose, with individual men taking on roles normally associated with women, and vice versa. Or they may be transformed through deliberate collective action, by civil society groups, or by governments, to overcome gender stereotypes.

According to McBride and Whiteside (2011: 60), 'austerity has been a salient policy feature over the past thirty years, yet it has also been selective ... it is also inexorably intertwined with growing affluence experienced by those few who are most well off'. Whiteside (2016) explores how austerity measures differentially affect economies in the so-called developed world (e.g. UK, US, Canada and South Europe), and suggests that the GFC marked a departure from the distributive or consumption-oriented welfare state, and a modification of the neoliberal paradigm based on 'selective austerity' (Whiteside, 2016: 367). Similarly, Baines and McBride (2015) discuss feminist critiques of neoliberalism by rethinking and deconstructing the discourse of austerity. McDowell (2014) writes about a new gender contract that reflects the economic and social changes brought about by strict austerity regimes in the UK and elsewhere. She agrees that this is not solely a consequence of crisis and

austerity but is significantly exacerbated by them, yet she recognises that ‘the patriarchal bargain in which women exchanged independence for support by men of their own generation is also increasingly irrelevant as the basis for contemporary gender relations’ (p. 35). Overall, eradication of the patriarchal contract (Pateman, 1988) as the basis of the modern state has been due predominantly to a lack of secure employment, followed by a lack of a regular income, a home and a family.

Previous research suggests that the production of crisis-induced precarious subjectivities stems from the differential valuation of labour (see Federici, 2004, 2009, 2012; Fraser, 1992, 2016). High unemployment and precarious work conditions contribute significantly to the commodification and exploitation of women’s bodily capacities, as these are projected yet again as ‘untapped resources’ (Roberts, 2015). This can be seen in the circumscription of women’s productive and reproductive powers and abilities, whereby the household bears heavier adjustment costs, which fall disproportionately on women, who thereby become more economically vulnerable.

Through alienation of the proletarian subject from her body, capitalism has constructed the female of the gendered (men/women) binary as key in the atomisation and privatisation of social reproduction (Motta, 2013). Fraser (2016) argues that this is another manifestation of capitalism’s inherent contradiction between economic production and social reproduction: of its dependence on reproductive labour, which it undercuts by lowering wages to achieve maximum profitability. When household resources decline, women become disproportionately burdened with various forms of reproductive labour, not only maintaining the family’s food and health, but also providing emotional support and taking responsibility for young, ill and elderly family members (Peterson, 2005). This, we suggest, has a double effect: on the one

hand, it forces women back to their historical ‘responsibility’ for caring activities; yet on the other hand, they turn to these consciously as a means to resist the cheapening of their skills in the (public) marketplace.

During the 2008 financial crisis, characterised by job scarcity and social welfare cuts (for example, in relation to childcare and care for the elderly), women have yet again been constructed as more ‘useful’ back at home. Their ‘return’ to unpaid labour has a useful function at this stage of neoliberal capitalism, and is framed as a helpful and unselfish family decision (Vaiou, 2014a, 2014b; Roberts, 2015; Worth, 2016). This is despite women already performing various forms of reproductive labour. Women are still responsible for unpaid work at home, and comprise a large proportion of part-time and contract workers (IMF, 2013; Worth, 2016). For example, on average, in low- and moderate-income countries, women spend twice as much time as men on household work, and four times as much time on childcare (Duflo, 2012), thereby ‘freeing up time for male household members to participate in the formal labour force’ (IMF, 2013: 8). The household sector acts as a ‘shock absorber of the last resort’ (Elson, 2007, 2009), making the financial system more resilient. During times of high unemployment, employers seem to support male employment, even in traditionally female-dominated sectors such as education (Elson, 2009).

Thus, neoliberal capitalism ‘authorises finance capital to discipline states and publics in the immediate interests of private investors, not least by demanding public disinvestment from social reproduction’ (Fraser, 2016: 113). In advocating a reduced state role in ensuring liveable standards and protecting vulnerable sections of the population at times of capitalist shocks, the neoliberal order reduces physical reproduction, while simultaneously shifting various forms of reproductive work which was partly stabilised through public provision to the private sphere.

Unsurprisingly, women's labour in social reproduction roles within and outside the house forms a buffer at times of crisis, as women take on (additional) work to substitute for services they can no longer afford to buy and/or that the state no longer provides. As services that assist those with caring roles and provide for those in need (childcare, social care services, etc.) are cut, women 'pick up the tab' and fill the gaps (Fawcett Society, 2012; Kosyfologou, 2018).

Analytical framework

Although gender is incorporated into many economic analyses, resistance to gender still prevails as an analytical category; hence, more work is needed to fully incorporate the theoretical implications of feminist scholarship into economic geography (McDowell, 1991; MacLeavy et al., 2016; see also Peterson, 2005). Whilst early evidence suggests that the GFC has exacerbated pre-existing inequalities (Floro et al., 2010), little is known about how women have responded. This is surprising, given the rapid and dramatic reduction of social care provision and intensification of precarious labour in post-2008 production and social reproduction (Standing, 2011; Federici, 2006).

A recent collection of essays edited by Bhattacharya (2017) re-articulates the importance of considering productive and reproductive labour as part of a single integrated work process. Renewing interest in social reproduction theory in the 'shadow of neoliberalism', several feminist theorists (e.g. Aruzza et al., 2019; Fraser, 2016; Federici, 2012; Bezanson and Luxton, 2006; Folbre, 2002) argue that the production of goods and services cannot be viewed in isolation from social reproductive roles in the home and community. Reproductive labour has typically been conceived as reproducing the next generation of workers, ensuring the health, productivity and socialisation of the current workforce, and caring for those

(including the jobless) who cannot support themselves. In the process of capitalist accumulation, women's unpaid work and exploitation in the private sphere demonstrate how 'the degradation of women [and their bodies] are necessary conditions for the existence of capitalism in all times' (Federici, 2004: 13). Propelled by debt, neoliberal capitalism squeezes this reproductive capacity beyond breaking point by imposing austerity policies on indebted governments (Fraser, 2016).

Previous research acknowledges that these changes have affected communities differentially (see Walby, 2009; Annesley and Scheele, 2011; Seguino, 2010). We join feminist approaches in critiquing the separation of public (masculinised) and private (feminised) spheres, arguing that this limits and devalues women's social power (Motta, 2013), and raises a barrier to political action. Hence, we stress the importance of making visible women's unpaid labour at home, and unveiling the historical experiences of the oppressed as a means to critique capitalist political economy (Federici, 2014; Motta, 2013). Research on such vital topics as interactions between paid and unpaid work and the unequal conditions that render some bodies, workforces and communities far more precarious than others (Meehan and Strauss, 2015) may help us to develop frameworks to better understand how to counteract such inequalities.

To advance our critique, we turn to what Ferguson calls 'experience', which links the (conscious) self and society, and captures the dialectical interplay between the subjective and the social. Accordingly, we reveal how 'distinct experiences or subjectivities are part of the same, over-arching set of social relations' (Ferguson, 2008: 48). Drawing on Bakker and Gill (2003), Ferguson brings the notion of labour back to the heart of social reproduction feminism. Work/labour are not abstract entities (like economies or households), but lived, creative experiences that

incorporate ‘survival strategies’ outside formal paid labour (Ferguson, 2008). We argue that these constitute a distinctive context for investigating alternative conceptualisations of organising working/non-working lives and ways of disrupting the gendered binary separating productive and reproductive work.

In particular, through illustrative empirical research, we demonstrate that housework and care in the private sphere are important strategies to counteract neoliberalism and structural adjustment policies (Federici, 2006; Peterson, 2005; LeBaron, 2010; Roberts, 2015). We also highlight how, in many European countries, austerity has given rise to various solidarity economy initiatives, some of which are supported and strengthened through the significant presence and activism of women (author/s, 2017; author/s, 2018). These initiatives, it is argued, may disrupt the gendered binary of productive and reproductive work, constituting spaces where women can resist further squeezing of their social reproductive capacities by participating in alternative ways of organizing their (working) lives.

Overall, we stress the need to engage with such political forms, which may reveal women’s significant involvement in various forms of resistance, and bring to the fore other ways of structuring reproduction. Hence, we demonstrate that, in assuming key positions in neighbourhoods and communities, women demystify capitalism in its gendered dimension, and exercise their politics in autonomous spaces where they can build new relations and take control of their bodies and lives (see Federici and Sitrin, 2016; Motta et al., 2011). First, we discuss the ‘Greek crisis’ and the impact of the austerity regimes imposed on the country since 2010.

Research context: The Greek crisis

In May 2010 Greece, the most indebted Eurozone country, agreed to the First Economic Adjustment Programme, also known as the first bailout package or the first

Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). The country received financial support from Euro-area countries and the IMF on condition that it slashed public spending. Between 2010 and 2012, disposable household income per capita fell by 14% yearly, almost double the rate of GDP contraction, and the total three-year loss was 38%. According to the MoU, ‘cuts in average wages and pensions are therefore indispensable to achieve the required adjustment, even considering the authorities’ commitment to reduce employment and control wage drift or freeze the indexation of pensions’ (MoU, 2010: 15). In July 2015 the third Memorandum was launched, and Greece’s commitments included further pension reforms and a comprehensive review of its entire social welfare system. The income of the bottom 40% of households had declined by 41%, and rising unemployment had affected these households disproportionately (World Bank, 2015).

The structural adjustment policies have transformed Greek labour and product markets. Abolishing workers’ collective bargaining has made redundancies much easier, allowing employers to offer partial employment without benefits. Full-time contracts have been replaced with hourly-paid work, and minimum monthly salaries have dropped from about 750 to 400 Euros. Austerity policies have significantly weakened organized labour and labour rights, shrunk the public sector, increased precarity and, crucially, disrupted women’s career paths (Simosi et al., 2015).

In 2013 Greece had the highest unemployment rate in Europe (28%), with youth unemployment at 60.5%. By 2017 it had undergone seven consecutive years of economic contraction, shrinking by 26% between 2010 and 2016. Half of small firms established before the 2008 crisis and many larger ones had closed down. Unemployment had more than tripled, from 7.7 % in 2008 to 24.3% in 2012, and long-term unemployment reached 14.4% (Trading Economics, 2017). Unemployment

among women under 25 years of age increased from 36.6 % in 2009 to 65.0% in 2013, while the equivalent figures for men rose from 12.1% to 52.0% (Hellenic Statistical Authority, 2009–2013). These rates would have been much higher had not over half a million Greeks (many of them highly educated) left the country since 2010. Spending on healthcare fell below 5.3% of GDP in 2013, well below the EU average of 6.3%. Overall, the health budget was cut by about 40%. From 2009 to 2013, public spending on education fell by 30%, and 14.5% of primary school units and 4% of secondary school units were merged. Finally, successive cuts reduced higher pensions by up to 60% and lower ones by 25% to 30% (Manganara 2014). Drops in pension, healthcare and education further expose women to poverty. Austerity has also curtailed services designed to end violence against women (VAW) and support victims of violence. In the UK, for example, funding for VAW services was cut by 31% in 2010, and 9% of women seeking refuge were turned away due to lack of space (Towers and Walby, 2012). The European Women’s Lobby reported that domestic violence cases had increased in Greece and Portugal in 2012 (EWL, 2012).

According to the OECD (2017), Greece also scores poorly on all three indicators of labour-market inclusiveness. It has the second-highest proportion of working-age people living on low income, after Spain; its gender labour income gap is the fourth highest after Japan, Korea and Mexico; and it has the second-highest employment gap between prime-age men and disadvantaged groups, including mothers with young children (OECD, 2017). Overall, women are worst affected by unemployment, precarity, salary and pension cuts, poverty and deprivation, shrinking social rights and mounting everyday violence (Vaiou, 2014a, 2016), with the possible exception of other marginalised populations such as migrants and LGBT+.

Methodology and research approach

We draw on our ongoing ethnographic work in Greece (2012–2019), which employs a range of methods to capture the socioeconomic impact of and citizens' responses to the crisis. Our analysis is informed by the full range of data collected over the last seven years, and our direct and sometimes activist engagement with organisations, movements and groups. Specifically, we have undertaken participant observations and unstructured interviews with workers' cooperatives (author/s, 2017), SSE initiatives (Gritzas and Kavoulakos, 2016 author/s, 2018) and anti-extractivist women's movements (author/s, 2017), and 60 semi-structured interviews with men and women who had lost their jobs or could not find work due to the sustained period of recession and austerity. Thirty-five interviewees were women university graduates, and almost half had postgraduate degrees (see Table 1).

[Insert Table 1 about here]

The women included in the semi-structured interviews had previously worked in precarious work positions, and had experienced repeated periods of prolonged unemployment. While some had lost their jobs in 2011, shortly after the First MoU was introduced (two subsequent MoUs were implemented in 2012 and 2015), others had found it difficult to find permanent employment since leaving university. As a result, they had accepted low-paid, fixed-term contracts in the service sector (catering, secretarial positions, babysitting), and in some cases informal and unpaid work (volunteering or internships). Despite being educated to tertiary level (and some to postgraduate level), few had found work in their chosen profession, or even matching their qualifications.

Our overarching research objective was to explore the impact of crisis-induced unemployment and austerity on women's productive and reproductive roles. Our

analysis begins by identifying issues that appeared significant to participants in relation to how they described themselves vis-à-vis paid and unpaid work. We focus on these women's narratives of both paid and unpaid labour, which enabled them to articulate who they were, what they were doing and why. We examine their responses to the crisis, austerity and unemployment, and their social identities and reproductive roles. To achieve this, we analyse how they discursively constructed their productive and reproductive roles and identities as women, daughters, wives and mothers, and their social identities as employees and activists. This allows us to discuss how women co-constitute and redefine contested spaces in which they balance attempts to find work or resist joblessness during times of high and persistent unemployment, with fulfilment of their reproductive roles as they perceive them.

Findings

Returning to unpaid care work at home

Many of the women we interviewed had found it very difficult to get work relating to their chosen careers, and had resorted to hourly-paid work, and zero-hours and fixed-term contracts. Others had turned to the private sphere because their skills were devalued in the public sphere. With little prospect of finding full-time, paid work, they had decided to devote substantial time to caring for the material, emotional and psychological needs of their families, which became more acute in the crisis. This was apparent in Vagia's discourse. She had tried to find work for almost two years before deciding to work in catering to help her sister, both physically and financially: 'it's a good thing I don't work in the mornings this period, so that I can be in my sister's new flat when new furniture comes'. As 27-year-old Vagia contemplated: 'Now that my sister is getting married, it's time that I take care of my mum who has been ill for

a while and cannot be left home alone. I owe everything to her (father died when I was young), and now it's time that I take care of her.'

In attempting to reconcile her career plans with care responsibilities at home, Vagia hoped that her younger sister would take up her caring role in the future: 'My youngest sister will soon finish high school. So I guess that somewhere between her studies and her looking for employment, she can take over from me and take care of our mum.' Ypatia (a 42-year-old designer) had also decided to care for her mother after failing to find work and being unable to obtain state support for health and social care costs:

We spent quite a lot of money that was saved for healthcare issues and we can't find support anywhere. I had to look after her, take her to specialists in Athens, and stay with her all through the night in the hospital ward. My brother would come and visit but he did not stay ... once we had my aunts staying, trying also to help, but I was there every night.

Historically, the Greek welfare state was very weak, with the family substituting for low welfare provision (Petmesidou, 2007). However, shortly before the crisis, this gap had narrowed, with the proportion of GDP spent on social protection rising to 29.1%, compared with the EU average of 30.2%. Following the implementation of austerity policies in the aftermath of the GFC, the need for a social safety net became greater than ever; yet provision of social protection, including health and childcare, was cut significantly (by 22% in 2013 alone), and some benefits such as housing benefit were completely abolished. Reductions in social spending outstripped reductions in GDP (Matsaganis, 2013). Unsurprisingly, women's labour in social reproduction roles within and outside the house forms a buffer in times of crisis, as women take on (additional) work to substitute for services they can no longer afford to buy and/or that the state no longer provides. This work is invariably unpaid.

In our study, women narrated their positioning inside/outside the labour market. As Ypatia's account reveals, in times of austerity, the work women do as daughters 'is often more important than the work they do in the labour market in maintaining social hierarchy and the class inequalities that underpin it' (Reay, 2005: 113–14). Unpaid care work creates an immaterial layer of social and cultural capital relations which, as Jarrett (2014) argues, 'does not have direct translation into the materiality of hard currency, factory walls, or material good, but which is not separate from the structures of economic exchange'. Such labour is involved in a process of production, yet is only indirectly linked to capital.

This becomes ever more pronounced when earnings capacity is severely curtailed in the labour market, as experienced by many women in post-crisis Greece. For instance, Domna, a 40-year-old unemployed translator, explained how being a single, unemployed female came with certain social expectations that made her rather anxious: 'I can feel the responsibility of taking care of my parents as the "daughter" of the family ... I will have to look after them.' This account shows the multidimensional nature of women's traditional, never-ending labour in the private sphere. Their experiences of embodied labour are defined not merely through its monetary value, but in terms of producing social relationships that maintain the social order (social, cultural or affective capital).

Temporary retreat to the 'heteronormative home'

Motherhood, another area of reproductive labour intertwined with the financial and debt crisis, complements and maintains capitalist, patriarchal modes of production by reproducing dominant, hierarchical power structures and public/private gendered role divisions, for example in care work. Historically, motherhood was seen as having little or no value, even though it was essential to the reproduction of these power

structures and capitalist accumulation (Mies, 1986). This was maintained through gendered mechanisation of the female and/or feminine body, and exploitation and commodification of the body as a site of reproduction under capitalism (author/s, 2017; Motta et al., 2011). Katz (2018) argues that the vast majority of children in the US are suffering the devastating consequences of disinvestment in the public sphere, and the impact of precariousness stemming from the financial crises of the past decade: ‘In the domestic realm, the middle-class family is [a] fortress – policed and policing the reproduction of its members’, but it must be ‘managed and contained’ (Katz, 2018: 726; see also Katz, 2011).

In our study, we noted that affective struggles over care were indeed bound up in economic inequalities in family relations and class-based economic restructuring and welfare reforms (see Haylett, 2003). Iris (30 years old) had a BA in French literature and was living with her parents. After working part-time as a private tutor, she had managed to secure an hourly-paid job in a state school for a year. However, pay and working conditions were very poor, so she had decided not to work there again. She was considering ‘becoming a mum and working as a manicurist or hairdresser from home’. Similarly, having failed to find work as a teacher, Amalia (23 years old) had considered seasonal employment, but was now contemplating starting a family, and her strategically chosen profession (school teacher) could be combined with motherhood and housekeeping:

No, I am not working at the moment. I would surely like to find a job related to my profession; I will soon start thinking about having a baby ... the work schedule in a school is convenient for a woman who also plans to become a mum and look after a house (Amalia).

The study shows that despite its continued undervaluation, our respondents withdrew to the private sphere to perform reproductive labour, especially when work

outside home was poorly paid or unavailable. This suggests that they ascribed implicit value to such work, despite society devaluing it. However, this also meant that they assumed a double-shift logic, as confirmed by Lia, with a BA in classical studies, and Iris, with a BA in French literature. Lia (28 years old) was expecting to work from home while having a baby: 'Working from home is not that bad after all; I've started enjoying doing it, plus it will enable me to complement my husband's income while bringing up my baby.' Thus, despite rising de-sexualisation and de-gendering of housework, most women undertook material and immaterial reproduction, even when they had a second, albeit underpaid and insecure, job (Federici, 2006).

In addition to deteriorating economic conditions, such as reduced wages and/or hours, research demonstrates that women face labour-market vulnerability owing to gendered norms that view men as more 'legitimate' job holders when jobs are scarce (Ghosh, 2010; Seguino, 2010). Annetta (29 years old with a BSc in communications) had worked for a couple of years in a secretarial position in a private company, but had found no other work since. This experience had led her to believe that the 'value' of any future income of her own would be complementary to the work of child rearing: 'I have been thinking about tutoring school pupils privately from home. This will enable me to contribute to the family income ... while bringing up my own child, when I have one.' Marian's dream of going abroad and working as an architect had been put on hold. Tellingly, despite her partner's insufficient income (they also received family support), they would not move abroad to search for jobs unless her partner became unemployed:

I was thinking of going abroad ... then my parents provided a flat for me to live with my partner who is currently working. He does not earn very much, and paying no rent is a great help for us. If he loses his job as well, though,

we will seriously consider the possibility of going abroad (Marian, 28 years old).

Similarly, Mina (29 years old) had studied fine arts, but had worked briefly as a part-time cook. Since meeting her partner, she had stopped looking for work abroad and accepted that 'John's work is very important to him and he provides for both of us now'.

Such discourses of legitimacy, or whose career was prioritised, echo previous findings that women are more likely than men to fit their paid work around the needs of their partner, parents, children and other family members, or take career breaks, with significant implications (Moen, 2003; Pixley and Moen, 2003; Mousli and Roustang-Stoller, 2009; Rusconi et al., 2013; Baker, 2012). Gender intersects with crisis in complex ways, but a common feature is the lesser value ascribed to women's work. Put simply, the financial crisis is both gendered and gendering. Men continue to be constructed as 'legitimate jobholders' whose careers come first, a condition that seems to be intensified at times of high unemployment, precarious labour markets and social and financial crises.

Our respondents' references to both family and motherhood highlight that reproduction takes place not just through labour processes, but also through other channels such as marriage. The family is part of the mode of production, and 'the very production of gender ha[s] to be understood as part of the "production of human beings themselves"', according to norms that reproduce the heterosexually normative family' (Butler, 1998: 40). Although the 'heteronormative home' (Oswin, 2010) does not seem to be essential to the survival of capitalism, scholars argue that the heterosexual family has been central to the production of hierarchies and state-building, and their elimination is highly unlikely while capitalism persists (Peterson,

2005; see also Bennholdt-Thomsen, 1981; Boyd, 1999). The reproduction of gendered subjectivities depends on ‘the social relation of the family and, indeed, on the reproduction of the heterosexual family as a site for the reproduction of heterosexual persons, fit for entry into the family as social form’ (Butler, 1998: 40). Research on how and whether these dynamics are manifested in non-heterosexual and non-traditional families is scarce (for an exception, see Rosneil and Budgeon, 2004). Our empirical illustrations focus predominantly on ‘traditional’ households or families, that is, married or single heterosexual women with or without children. However, the family is ‘historically contingent and, in principle, transformable’ (Butler, 1998: 40).

Such transformation would require massive investment in socialising the family and redistributing resources ‘away from production toward the reproduction (living standards) of those without access to the means of subsistence’ (Boyd, 1999: 378; see also Picchio, 1992). To address the need for real change and Butler’s call for ‘expansion of the economic sphere’ to reproductive work, feminist economics has introduced ‘an alternative economic strategy that insists on the incorporation of reproductive and care work into economic analysis and economic policies; a feminist Plan F, rather than a Plan B’ (Pearson and Elson, 2015: 9). Arguably, rather than attempting to position women *within* the capitalist work system, this Plan F might constitute a refusal to reproduce the capitalist order.

Women refusing precarity: From austerity to alternatives

Austerity measures and neoliberal reforms have severely undermined the key pillars of familial welfare and have resulted in a political economy of generalised insecurity (Papadopoulos and Roumpakis, 2013), particularly for women. However, women are not merely passive recipients and victims of the crisis. Our participants did not consider themselves to be victims and were not powerless. In attempting to resist

precarious work futures and escape the cycle of exploitation and uncertainty, they had decided to return to the private sphere and undertake reproductive roles or volunteer for meaningful work. Alternatively, retreating to the domestic sphere may be a conscious choice to return to the 'conventional' private sphere, rather than becoming part of the growing precariat. Although neither motive promotes social change and empowerment through women's participation in the labour market, they do resist the neoliberal capitalist onslaught on living wages. When real wages are low and workers must toil endlessly to support themselves, they may choose to engage in reproductive labour, including care and motherhood, and return to unpaid work at home to resist cheapening of their work and retain their dignity.

We show that this retreat to 'domesticity' or unpaid work is women's way of resisting neoliberal precarity. This retreat, which may be temporary, may also constitute what Weeks (2011) describes as active refusal to work in a labour market that degrades paid labour through insecure work contracts, low wages and poor working conditions. While working part-time to make ends meet, some women had found time to do unpaid work teaching young adults at an evening school: 'I enjoyed my voluntary experience so much since I love my profession, and I'm thinking of doing it again even though it is unpaid work' (Stella, 26 years old). In deciding to contribute freely to young adults' education, Stella rejected the cheapening and devaluation of her skills in the labour market. Gradual rejection of conventional paid work and precarious work identities was also observed in Elena's case: she would try to find different work, rather than working for little or no pay. She reclaimed her self-worth by advocating her reproductive role and refusing precarious, low-paid forms of employment:

I prefer to stay at home rather than work with little or no pay and at the same time being overworked. I know people who work hoping that they will get paid!! Don't get me wrong, I still want to find work but not this kind ... there must be another way (Elena, 40 years old).

Veronica (with a BA in education) also expressed her dissent and indignation about precarious forms of work. She had questioned her potential working future following the labour-market structural reforms in Greece. In engaging reflectively with issues of exploitation (such as being paid an extremely low salary of 200€ gross per month), 23-year-old Veronica was seeking ways to mediate the effects of the crisis, and proposed collective organizing to restore dignity at work:

Probably everyone feels trapped in a shell, because they have scared us and persuaded us that we need to rely on these 200€. I think the best way is organising in small collectives, which assert and protect workers' rights in different sectors, social groups and social strata, against the state.

These narratives present a critique 'not of creative or productive activity, but of the present configuration of the work society and its moralised conception of work' (Weeks, 2011: 32). These women had rejected the endless search for work in a highly unstable and precarious labour market, and sought what Gibson-Graham (1995: 275) calls 'the possibility of anti-capitalist and non-capitalist economic interventions'. Some viewed precarious work as unviable for securing their livelihoods, and were willing to explore alternatives.

In our work with alternative organisational forms, such as the Skouries anti-extractivist movement (SOSHALKIDIKI) in Halkidiki (author/s), refugee support groups, and the solidarity economy initiatives that are gaining strength around the country (author/s), we have also witnessed women filling gaps beyond the private sphere of the home and becoming active in the public domain. They are running workers' cooperatives and engaging in solidarity activities to resist the consequences

of the crisis. In particular, we have observed women actively participating in the establishment of solidarity schemes in social grocery stores, pharmacies and clinics, as well as occupying public spaces and participating in workers' collectives. Such initiatives normally operate outside regulated market activities and attempt to re-constitute social bonds, mainly through relationships of solidarity and collective action (see also Mohanty, 2003; McDowell, 2004).

For example, the Beaver café in Athens emerged under acute austerity, and is solely owned and run by women. The café is 'open to people and groups who find it otherwise difficult to "belong" somewhere, and that would be also a fun hangout for us to meet. It was that concept that brought all of us together and finally came to fruition in September 2013'. The eight co-founders of the Beaver women's cooperative support:

...the de-education from the capitalist mode of labour relations and the cultivation of solidarity, comradeship and mutual understanding, as opposed to individualism, the rationalism of achieving maximum individual benefit, and individual solutions ... the need of creating horizontal networks of cooperation, of abolishing the misconceived notion of competitiveness, steering clear from the concept of masters/bosses and other similar calamities (<http://beavercafe.blogspot.gr/2013/11/p-margin-bottom-0.html>).

Their activities also include disseminating the idea of collectivism by building solidarity networks with similar autonomous groups. As they explained, in participating in these collective feminist groups, they try to give priority 'to women's creativity' and raise 'awareness on women's issues', including violence against women, which has increased during the crisis.

We see women attempting to resist by finding alternatives, and refusing to become part of a ruthless, precarious labour market (author/s, 2017). As recent research on alternative organisational forms (Gibson-Graham, 2006; Parker et al.,

2014) stresses, wider forms of economic activity are taking place beyond capitalism in the aftermath of the GFC, allowing us to see ‘a plural or heterogeneous socio-economic landscape as opposed to a homogenous one, often prevalent in the current imagination’ (Hesketh, 2016: 879). These forms are supported and maintained mainly by women, who are often ‘excluded from “the market” but dynamically fighting back in private and public everyday spaces’ (Vaiou, 2014b: 536). Women are thus not merely docile recipients of neoliberal policies; ‘rather they challenge both the masculinist exclusion of women’s claims as citizens and the neglect of women’s particular concerns, such as the provision of social welfare’ (Nagar et al., 2002: 264; see also Lind, 2005; Bowlby, 2012).

Furthermore, solidarity initiatives provide women with alternatives to precarious forms of employment, and re-embed them in spheres of political activism and resistance to neoliberal capitalism (see Gonick, 2016). Although some initiatives existed previously, the financial crisis profoundly influenced their growth and radicalisation. Straddling the public–private and formal–informal economic spheres, they co-constitute community spaces for care, empowerment and social justice (Staheli, 2003). This is also evidenced in women’s participation in self-organised initiatives to resist the neo-extractive industry’s activities in rural Greece, which have been enabled by the financial crisis since attracting investment ‘at any cost’ has become imperative for all Greek governments (author/s, 2020). Such instances of care for the environment, promoted by women’s organising, support Federici’s argument that ‘the question of reproduction is ... central to any true revolutionary process – that is, any process of genuine transformation of society’ (Federici, 2014).

Conclusion

The 2008 GFC instituted a new period in the evolution of employment relationships, towards growing precariousness, but also produced a new conceptualisation of how people define themselves in relation to work, organisations and society. In this article, we argue that the connection between capitalism and the gendered division of labour should be acknowledged, as a test case for feminist economic geographers and other scholars concerned with the gendered consequences of the crisis. In so doing, we focus on instances of resistance to austerity regimes and intensifying precarisation, and alternative modes of organising work.

This article highlights the gendered impacts of the GFC, and how austerity policies have transformed the productive and reproductive roles of the female workforce in Greece. Our study's elucidates various forms and causes of respondents' refusal to participate in the formal labour market, which degrades and diminishes their work, and their conscious retreat to various forms of reproductive care. While not arguing for the naturalisation of housework as a female vocation, we refuse to ignore the emancipatory potential of domesticity (Federici, 2019), especially when this is rendered public and common (Kouki and Chatzidakis, forthcoming). We demonstrate the importance of holistic, grounded accounts of 'economy' that resist attempts to separate the formal and informal, the paid and unpaid, the productive and reproductive (Nagar et al., 2002). Capitalism is predicated on separating social reproduction from economic production, by associating the former with women and obscuring its importance and value, despite economic dependence on these disavowed processes of social reproduction (Fraser, 2016).

Neoliberal financialised capitalism exposes these contradictions by causing a crisis of social reproduction, where productive work cannot sustain social

reproduction. We demonstrate that women are aware of this and find ways to oppose it, even if they do not self-identify as feminists. Taking care of their families and communities, and concentrating on these reproductive forms of labour infuses their lives with meaning, as they refuse to participate in neoliberal capitalism's cheapening of their labour. Such actions might represent forms of resistance to financialised capitalism, thus responding to the present crisis of social reproduction originating from it. The very limited support gained from paid work prompted our participants' different choices. As Federici (2012: 7) puts it: 'Reproductive work is undoubtedly not the only work where the question of what we give to capital and "what we give our own" [citing bell hooks] is posed.'

This study also extends theorisation in feminist economic geography by showing how women appropriate their reproductive labour to resist precarisation of their bodies and lives, thus demonstrating the importance of 'unvalued' and unpaid care labour as a mode of resistance. Specifically, we highlight a return to the private sphere, which paradoxically contributes to the anti-capitalist goals of the feminist project by empowering women, as a way to counteract the acute alienation of capitalist commodification and marketisation. Feminist scholarship has long struggled to establish gender as an analytical category in macroeconomics and, crucially, to conceive of the economy so that the mutually constitutive links between private, state and household outputs become visible (Elson, 2007). With a plethora of possible trajectories and life choices, the women's stories cannot easily be ignored or treated as homogeneous, as they are caught up in power relations and policy frameworks implemented on urban, national and European/international scales (Smith, 2013).

This reinforces the importance of exploring the formation of new gendered subjectivities and geopolitical economic moments when gendered subjectivities are

reconfigured and renegotiated for different ends (Pollard, 2013). As Mohanty (2003) argues, we need to explore what and how new femininities are being produced in debates about global capitalism and feminist solidarity. Using the case of Greece, as the weakest Eurozone member most severely affected by the financial crisis and ensuing austerity, we borrow from ideas developed by postcolonial transnational feminists (Mohanty, 2003). We draw attention to the intricate relational geographies that constitute financial globalisation, with rising incomes for some and financial crises for others (see, for instance, Wright, 2006, cited in Pollard, 2013), and use the least developed Southern European country to illustrate how similar logics may, at times of capitalist crisis, be applied to the Eurozone itself. Until 2006, Greece was a model country growing at an average of 5% per annum (peaking at 5.8% in 2003 and 5.7% in 2006), but it is now one of the most indebted countries in the world, with a debt-to-GDP ratio of 190%. Following a series of failed bailouts administered by the troika of lenders (the European Commission, the European Central bank and the IMF), it has now become the ‘feminised other of the advanced economies’ of the Eurozone (Nagar et al., 2002: 265).

Hence, in our analysis, we do not seek to erase the historical and cultural contexts in which these women are situated by constructing them as a homogeneous group based on their shared experiences. Although our analysis did not directly elaborate on the distinct social and cultural factors that affected Greek women’s responses to the crisis, we recognise that cultural dynamics and patriarchal structures specific to the Greek political economy do shape how social reproduction is organized and the extent to which it is valued. We thus acknowledge that divisions in the labour of social reproduction should be theorised through culturally-specific logics of gender practices that configure their political and social meanings and socially-situated activities in

different historical contexts. Yet, ‘underlying much of the commitment and passionate engagement of transnational feminist movements, indeed what brings feminists together, is the imperative of trans-forming patriarchal institutions in all their manifestations—from violations of intimate relations to the discriminatory and inequitable gender norms of political, economic, social, and cultural institutions’ (Baksh-Soodeen & Harcourt, 2015: 29).

Crucially, a feminist social reproduction analysis enables us to go beyond notions of gender and class, to articulate and explain the differentiated-yet-unified experience of multiple oppressions created and deepened by neoliberalism (Ferguson, 2016), not only for women but also for entire countries, regions and continents. As McNally and Ferguson (2015) explain, through the interconnection of waged and unwaged work, social reproduction feminism presents us with a complex, differentiated yet unified understanding of social totality:

Certain workers, indeed increasingly so, are more vulnerable to heightened oppression than others – not due to any difference in the ways in which capitalist laws of accumulation operate, but because oppressive relations beyond the workplace mediate the social reproduction of labour-power, ensuring not only that workers arrive at capital’s doorstep, but that they do so embodying varying degrees of degradation or dehumanization (McNally and Ferguson, 2015).

Yet, there is a ‘dialectical interplay between the subjective and the social’ (Ferguson, 2008) – a ‘*dialectical* relationship between the capitalist whole and its differentiated parts’ (Ferguson, 2016: 38). With our empirical study of Greek women’s experiences, we offer a starting point for the study of ‘nexuses of oppression’ in austerity politics, not only in terms of contingent economic and cultural forces, but also in ‘the embodied nature of that activity, the biophysical differentiation and spatial location of the labouring body’ (Ferguson, 2008: 55). Our findings

overwhelmingly demonstrate that women are disproportionately affected by financial crises, and that the macro-economic patterns of inequality alluded to above are gendered (Pollard, 2013). Women thus continue to bear the brunt of high unemployment and retrenched public services arising from the GFC. However, they deploy different strategies, involving the appropriation of various forms of reproductive labour, to retain control and oppose the cheapening of their work under conditions of neoliberal crisis. Uncovering these strategies, as Mohanty (2003) rightly stresses, reveals women's agency, power and resistance.

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Notes

¹ Structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) consist of loans provided by the IMF and World Bank to countries experiencing economic crises. In order to obtain new loans, the two institutions require borrowing countries to implement certain policies. These programmes aim to reduce borrowing countries' fiscal imbalances and/or adjust their economies to long-term growth. The IMF usually implements stabilisation policies, and the World Bank is in charge of adjustment measures. In the case of Greece, the European Central Bank and the European Union were also responsible for executing the Memoranda.