Care Crisis, Anti-Gender Authoritarianism and Feminist Possibilities

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Abstract

'Once we have understood housework, we will understand the economy.'

Claudia von Werlhof, Austrian ecofeminist, political scientist and economist

The care crisis, erupting at the height of the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic, exposed the female body and care labour as critical sites for system management. Anti-gender authoritarianism, through increased violence and patronage of a traditional patriarchal gender order, is on the rise globally seeking to keep women in 'their place'. How can feminism, which has so far pursued a liberal approach of integrating into mainstream society, confront this transgression? Guided by this question, the article probes into the patriarchal division of labour, which is at the heart of the care crisis and anti-gender authoritarianism; assesses gender mainstreaming for its capacity to deliver equality; and ends with a reflection on feminist possibilities for emancipatory praxis in responding to the new challenges.

Keywords: care crisis; care labour; anti-gender authoritarianism

The Problem

In 1997, the United Nations (UN) Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) adopted the "gender mainstreaming" agreed conclusion (A/52/3, 1997/2), mandating all units of the Organization to take into account the potential impact of policies, programmes and budgets on women and men. İt was expected that gender equality goals would move from the periphery to the center of governance, thus institutionalizing feminist principles in public policymaking. Gender mainstreaming became a major gender equality method, enjoying popularity within and outside of the UN.

Developments in this respect are linked to the transitions from state-led, to market-led, to neo-liberal capitalism that caused ruptures in the struggles of women's movements against oppression along the axis of gender, class and identity, often following a dialectical path. As neoliberal principles institutionalized, feminist demands gained new space, incorporating gender concerns into the mainstream; albeit with diverse and sometimes contradictory outcomes. Direct engagement of feminists with governance systems locked them into the goal of women's representation in public institutions, which became a measure of success. Gender mainstreaming delivered invaluable gains for women within the existing governance structures.[1]

However, the mainstream neoliberal order, increasingly characterized by the north to south migration of capital, flexible working conditions and the unlimited commodification of care work transnationally, nourished irreconcilable hierarchical formations along gender, class, ethnic and national lines; largely defying the epitome of feminist goals. The collapse of the mainstream system during the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic sharply changed the political economic landscape and turned the attention to the global system crisis, which unmasked these tendencies.[2] The current crisis had been building up for some time. İt embodies mutually reinforcing economic, political and ecological forces that came to fore with the 9/11 attacks on the twin towers in 2001, intensified with the 2008 financial setback, and in the following decade, the outbreak of care crisis during the pandemic made it all encompassing across space and life chances. The spiral of crisis that marks the first quarter of the 21st

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[1] Women's organizing gained momentum, gender policymaking expanded, women's participation rates in public life increased, international standards guided national level legal and institutional reforms, and the feminist movement collaborated with centers of power and decision-making, which was interpreted as "feminists walking the corridors of power" and "governance feminism" (Halley, 2006).

[2] Notion of a global system crisis is controversial. According to some, there is nothing new as crisis is inherent to capitalism. Others point to a qualitative difference in today's crisis, which has provoked a right-wing reaction, with strongman populist leaders mobilizing disenfranchised masses in support of their authoritarian agenda against liberalism.

century has destabilized hegemonic power and institutions, while also exposing the limits of gender mainstreaming as an equality policy tool.

In the heyday of the pandemic, the stagnation of the market and the shutdown of public institutions increased the demand for both paid and unpaid care labour. The less the state was able to provide, the more services were transferred to the private sphere, hence increasing the burden on households and communities. After years of relative success in 'breaking the glass ceiling', middle-class professional women found themselves once again confined to the home as the primary providers of care. Competing demands, increased workload and exploitation heightened women's vulnerabilities and tensions within the household.

The pandemic revealed that women within the modern family remain the last refuge of care obligations, strikingly divulging that gender inequality is far too deeply rooted a problem to be reckoned with mainstreaming gender into a patriarchal-capitalist order. This realization stirred a new awakening among women, which revived the forgotten battle of feminism, i.e., devaluation of care work.

The global surge of the 2020 care crisis, while erupting during the pandemic, is linked to the history of the devaluation of reproductive activities. Neoliberalism has risen above this devaluation, reshaping and deepening gender inequality (Savran, 2020, p.3).   Sylvia Federici had warned years ago that the devaluation of care work would eventually evolve into a crisis too big to ignore. The pandemic did exactly that, reminding us that social reproductive activities, relying on women's body and labour, are critical for the salvation of the state, the market and patriarchy. In this respect, the rising anti-gender authoritarianism is not merely a backlash against feminist ideals; it is a survival reflex of patriarchy.

The anti-gender stream of the authoritarian right populism is the new shield of patriarchy and capitalism, which challenges women's struggles for rights by negating the enforcement of existing laws, confining space for progressive civic action, appeasing reactionary political movements and discrediting norms and institutions of the liberal world order, including the international human rights system. How can feminism, which has so far followed a liberal line to integrate into mainstream society, confront this authoritarianism?

Driven by this question, the article starts with an examination of the gendered division of labour, which is assumed to be at the heart of both the care crisis and the authoritarian transgressions on women's equality;

proceeds to interrogate the equality capacity of the gender mainstreaming approach, and calls for a new vision of a mainstream society that can unravel the "gender knot" entangled at the core of patriarchal-capitalist organization of production and reproduction; it ends with reflections on feminist possibilities for emancipatory praxis.

Production and Reproduction Divide

With the separation of production and reproduction as two distinct spheres of activity under industrial capitalism, the market model formed the nucleus of the mainstream social order, thus, institutionalizing sexual division of labour as the foundation of modern society.[3] The 'ideal type' modern family institution consisted of the working male head of the household, responsible for family livelihood, and women responsible for reproductive tasks at home.[4] This institutional infrastructure, upheld by classical legal norms, subordinates private sphere to public sphere, reproduction to production and women to men.

Feminist scholars, in their response to these binaries, have advocated for a new conceptualization of care to demystify the hidden exploitation of care labour. The patriarchal division of labour that identifies productive labour with the factory and commits women to a domestic regime of unpaid subordinate labour, not only masks the value produced by women, but denies them of their status as potential revolutionary subjects. Further, it undermines the revolutionary potential of a large portion of the male workforce. According to Federici, "…much class antagonism is deflated by men's ability to recuperate on the home front – at the expense of women – power they lost in the workplace" (2021, p.2). Critique of classical labour exploitation theory that ignores women's labour in social reproduction, has brought new dimensions to moral theories and Marxist debates (Fraser, 2016; Federici, 2021).

The capitalist system, where growth and competition overrides the well-being of humans and the planet, bestows upon the male provider model

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[3] Origins of the gender divide is not the subject of this article; the focus here is on the subordination of care on the male "provider" model.
[4] There are different positions of subordination under systems of colonialism, slavery and forced labor situations, where men of color are also enforced into reproductive labor in the household. For further discussion see Nadasen (2023).

monetary value, productivity, rationality and justice. As such, the male model forms the basis of universal ethics. Reproductive activities, confined to private life are associated with love, self-sacrifice and nature, with no corresponding market value. The philosophical belittling of *care* prompted a feminist *ethics of care*, which in its broadest sense denotes moral, political, social, relational, material and emotional conditions that allow the planet and human beings to flourish individually and collectively (Gilligan, 1983; Pettersen, 2008). Care ethics is based on the understanding that giving and receiving care are fundamentals of life and everyone has the capacity to provide care. *The Care Manifesto* (2017), which proposes a collective and communal way of life towards a "universal care", has galvanized the discussions on care.[5]

The contribution of care ethics perspective to moral philosophy and feminist theory is invaluable. İt has also stimulated transformations in mindsets that boosted the debates on the provide-care binary.[6] The concept, however, is criticized for reinforcing essentialist gender roles and romanticizing care responsibilities (Hutchings, 2000). However, it has been argued that these concerns can be redressed by reinterpreting care ethics within patriarchal power relations (Toronto, 1993; Nadasen, 2023).

Unpaid care labour

Non-market "care work" involves all unpaid physical and emotional activities generally organised as women's domain within the household to reproduce the workforce, future generations and their well-being. İn the course of the separation of production and reproduction, domestication of women has been institutionalised. While, over the decades, women's increased integration into the labour force led to changes in traditional formations, a corresponding transformation in the

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[5] More work is needed to give debt to the notion of universal care that can go beyond aspiration and small-scale living spaces.

[6] Care ethics can be seen as a critique of the dominant growth-oriented economy as well as a way to heal the damage done. The assumption that everyone has the capacity to provide care offers a different conceptual dimension to production-reproduction activities by encouraging new subjectivities for both men and women.

devaluation of care work and the private/public dichotomy has not occurred.

Unpaid care work was one of the most important debates of the feminist movement in the 1970s. In 1972, a group of feminists, demanding recognition and remuneration for all care work in and outside the home, launched the International Wages for Housework Campaign.[7] *The Wages for Housework* manifesto declared: 'The crime against us internationally, from which all other crimes against us flow, is our life sentence of housework at home and outside… in order to produce and reproduce the working class'.

It was observed that women in paid jobs (the vast majority of whom worked in the low-wage "female" sectors of the labour market) after returning home had to resume unpaid domestic care responsibilities. Paid and unpaid care workers were, in fact, the same people, a fact that can potentially unite them as a social force. The campaign aimed to organise women around this potential, end women's dependency, reverse power relations, and make visible the value of unpaid work, thus revolutionize gender relations. Women, as unpaid caregivers, would discover themselves as workers, share the same faith with the working class, enjoy greater personal freedom and the feminizing of reproductive work would also be challenged.

The campaign politicized reproductive activities, paving the way for a series of initiatives; including, adoption of 'time use surveys', inclusion of measurement of unpaid care work into the agenda of the 1985 Nairobi Women's Conference and production of sex-disaggregated statistics by international and national organizations. These invaluable outcomes shed light into the gendered dimensions of social reproductive activities and women's unequal access to the labour market due to their unpaid care responsibilities (Neetha, 2010).[8]

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[8] Globally, women perform three-quarters of unpaid care work, or more than 75 percent of total hours. On average, women spend 3.2 times more time on unpaid care work than

There is no country where women and men share unpaid care work equally, however, as countries and families become affluent, a general downward trend follows in the hours spent on unpaid domestic work. This can be attributed to advances in time saving technologies on household chores and the commodification of care, making these services available for purchase.

Globally, women also dominate the paid care economy. According to ILO data, the current global care workforce accounts for 381 million workers, or 11.5 percent of total global employment. Two-thirds of this workforce, or 249 million workers, are women, accounting for 19.3 percent of global female employment. This means that nearly 1 in 5 women are employed in the care sector. The quality of working conditions and wage levels in the care sector are highly uneven. 81.2% of all domestic workers are in unregistered employment. İnformal care workers in private homes are exposed to some of the worst conditions, including vulnerability to abuse and exploitation.[9]

'Wages for housework' was an innovative idea for understanding how the capitalist system is reproduced through unpaid care work, how unpaid workers are divided along gender, race and class lines, their place in the hegemonic wage system and means to resist it. This theory provides a historical background for family politics and contemporary debates on care work.

The eventual adoption of gender mainstreaming as the main equality policy framework led to a shift in focus to identity politics, culture

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men. Unpaid care work accounts for between 10 and 39 percent of GDP (UN, E/CN.6/2017/3).

[9] In the process of neoliberal restructuring, the transfer of industries to the global south radically dismantled traditional livelihoods in the respective countries and detached men and women from the land and the traditional family. Labor market demand for unregulated, flexible and cheap labor targeted young women who migrated in unprecedented numbers to work either in free trade zones or in the care/service sector in global cities, a process referred to in the literature as: "feminization of labor force" and "feminization of migration" (Ertürk, 2016: 119-133). These processes varied geographically contingent upon resilience of patriarchy and impact of religion, culture, legislative systems, etc.

differences and women's representation in public life, leaving patriarchal division of labour and the provide-care duality in the margin. This situation more or less prevailed until the eruption of care crisis during the Covid-19 pandemic, which also saw a rise in authoritarianism and pro-family policies.

Family policies

Fiscal restrictions and neoliberal privatization policies since the 1970s weakened state's regulatory and welfare capacity, thus, jeopardizing human security. With the flexibilisation of labour markets, the inability of the male heads of household to provide for their families and the rising feminist movement, labour use patterns, female labour force participation and family structures increasingly became more complex. At the intersection of patriarchy and neoliberal capitalism the tension between production and reproduction intensified, posing a pressure for the reform of family-related laws, including the family wage system. Consequently, towards the last quarter of the 20th century, care work occupied the agenda and family laws gradually liberalized.

Family laws are the political sites where patriarchal interests and the subordination of women are institutionalised; they are critical in the distribution of rights and responsibilities within and outside the home. Feminists perceive the family as a nexus for the violation of rights in private and public life and family laws as the endorsement of relations of domination. Consequently, cleansing laws of patriarchal biases formed a common goal for women's movements and rights-based advocacy became critical for legislative and judicial reform.[10]

The type and scope of legal reform reflects a complex process of competition among patriarchy, the state and social networks across countries (Ertürk, 2019). İn this respect, the European experience, which constitutes a prototype for the legal reform processes of the 1970s, offers insight into care work in law reform.

Policy debates in European countries, during the 1970's, are also reflected in the contemporary debates on the subject. The discussions centered on how care should be organised: should unpaid care work at

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[10] For case studies on family law reform see: Afkhami, et al (2019), for a global perspective see: UN Women (2020).

home be supported or should it be delegated to the public / private sector? Two main policy approaches emerged from these debates: "women-friendly" and "family-friendly".

The "women-friendly" policies that started in the Nordic countries, were two dimensional: (i) strengthening women's labour force participation capacities by transferring care from the home to the public sector; (ii) encouraging fathers to take a greater role in childcare to ensure equal distribution of childcare responsibilities within the family. It was expected that a gradual transition to a "dual-earner" family model would follow.

"Family-friendly policies" prevailed in continental Europe, where religion dominated politics and women's participation in the labour force was assumed to be temporary and a source of secondary income. Accordingly, policy options included support for women's unpaid care work at home through childcare allowances, flexible working hours for women, tax deductions for household heads with non-working wives, etc. In the following years, with the institutionalization of the welfare state and state-led capitalism, women-friendly policies spread across continental Europe, as well other parts of the world.

Today, family-friendly policies are making a comeback as authoritarian right-wing politicians blame the havoc of the global system crisis on a "gender ideology", which they aim to correct by anti-gender, pro-family policies.[11] At the 13th meeting of the World Congress of Families that convened in Italy in 2019, a chilling "culture war" was declared against abortion, contraception, sex education, LGBT+ rights and other issues that allegedly threaten the "natural family". Advocates, alarmed by demographic decline and the immigrant/refugee influx, appealed to native white women to have more babies, thus displaying a 'racism wrapped in a family-friendly blanket'.

There are significant qualitative differences between the pro-family policies promoted today. European neo-conservatives with liberal

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[11] Human Rights Council resolution on "Protection of the Family", first of which adopted in 2014, is based on a traditional and patriarchal interpretation of the family (A/HRC/Res/26/11).

backgrounds, appeal to a wide audience, including women, by adopting policy proposals that take into account feminist concerns.[12] For instance, 'pro-lifers', known for their hardline position on abortion and sexual rights, are encouraged to develop persuasive strategies that do not alienate women, support women who experience unwanted pregnancies and keep the family stable and strong. Such approaches attract a broad-based passionate women supporter. Patriarchy, in the established democracies, has been domesticated. The conservatives in these countries are driven by the need to guard borders against foreigners rather than encounter women.

Conservatives in most underdeveloped countries, on the other hand, often distance themselves from investing in policies that would strengthen the family, such as collective bargaining, access to the health care system and support for reproductive health. İnstead, they choose a more totalitarian strategy of infiltrating into private life by waging an ideological war to reinforce women's dependance on the family.

Irrespective of these variations, the current law reform processes have tended to strengthen the patriarchal family. Even the most women-friendly laws, which have been ineffective in eroding the provide-care divide, have served to reproduce gender inequality in institutional and legal practices. Policies that expand women's public sector employment to reduce employment gender gaps, do so, at the expense of some women as well as the career opportunities of working women.

The critical issue here is that both pro-family and women-friendly policies operate from within a mainstream system built upon patriarchal-capitalist norms. Gender mainstreaming, while benefitting some women, continues to reproduce the patriarchal division of labour, where care work remains marginal to social policy and the market. State withdrawal

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[12] Although equality is a fundamental principle of European Union (EU) law, the changing political conjuncture between 2016-19 deepened the political polarization within EU institutions and increased the presence of right-wing groups, shifting mindset across the political spectrum towards nationalist and conservative discourses. The European radical right does not have a problem with gender equality but their anti-immigration stance aligns them with anti-abortion and pro-natal policies. Given the growing care gap, racism and sexism will continue to be an enduring pair.

from social policies, feminization of the labour force and an aging population has increased the demand for care work, making it increasingly commodified transnationally.

Care, the forgotten battle of feminism, made a comeback with the eruption of care crisis during the pandemic. The declining fertility levels, anti-immigration politics, prevailing demographic wars and women's unyielding stand for rights signal to a chronic care crisis in the near future. Efforts to confront the problem through home-work balance strategies, flexible work arrangements, spousal sharing of care responsibilities, and import of domestic workers etc. may bear little results given the nature of the mainstream social order.[13]

The Mainstream

Efforts to bridge the care gap through gender mainstreaming have merely transferred the problem from rich families to poor women and from the global North to the global South. The idea of spousal sharing of household chores has not yet gone beyond men "helping" women, the real "owners" of the work. While various strategies to achieve work-home balance eased the workload of some women, they have neither changed the production-reproduction divide, nor the commodification and feminization of care work.

Crisis tendency

According to Fraser (2016), 'crisis tendency' of social reproduction is rooted in every form of capitalist production, which is dependent on social reproduction for continued capital accumulation. Without unpaid reproductive activity the functioning of capitalism would not be possible. Conversely, capitalism's unlimited accumulation drive destabilizes social reproduction. Reproductive activities take place not inside capitalist economy proper as suggested by Marx, but on the border that simultaneously separates and connects production and reproduction, making it crisis prone. Therefore, the pressure on care is not coincidental,

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[13] The International Day for Care and Support (29 October), adopted by the UN in 2023 (A/RES/77/317), is a promising step for paving the way towards a social policy environment that can unravel the 'gender knot'.

but inherently bound to the contradictions of capitalism. The logic of women's subordination to patriarchal domination lies herein.[14]

The organization of social reproduction at different stages of capitalism varies in terms of normative frameworks, family structures and gender regimes. The social reforms of capitalism in the late nineteenth century that aimed to make the labour force more productive and family life stable, largely confined women to the domestic sphere and institutionalized housewifery. Male unemployment, moral erosion, family dissolution and social unrests were attributed to women's work in the factory. Consequently, labour laws, "family wage" policies and various other regulations were devised to direct women to the private sphere. Thus, the new working-class family, created on the basis of women's unpaid labour at home and men's wages in the market, became a universal norm surviving well into mid-twentieth century.

The systematic removal of women from the factory was embraced not only by the state and employers, but also by trade unions and male workers. In other words, the interests of the capitalists' and the proletariat overlapped (Federici, 2021, p.97). Historically, promotion of traditional family and gender relations have always accompanied moments of crisis. The current anti-gender approaches with their pro-family politics are reminiscent of such trends in history.

In the 1970s, with growing influence of welfare state reforms and women's rights movements, the "dual-income" family model replaced the "family wage" system; thus, redrawing the boundaries of production and reproduction and shifting the axis of inequalities and conflict from relations of production to relations of reproduction. This process, which Fraser (2016) describes as "border struggle", is as decisive and groundbreaking as Marxist class struggle, suggesting the need to coalesce the two emancipatory projects of Marxism and feminism (Mojab, 2015).

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[14] According to Marxist-feminists, unpaid domestic labor lies within the three-dimensional needs of capitalist exploitation: (a) biological reproduction of the species; (b) the reproduction of labor power; and (c) the satisfaction of care needs. These approaches, by incorporating the invisible care labor in the private sphere into Marxist value theory, provide a broader analytical framework that connects class and gender, and capitalism and patriarchy (Bhattacharya, 2017; Fraser, 2016; Savran, 2020).

Care crisis is not only a matter of justice but also a matter of social transformation; this begs the question: can gender mainstreaming unravel the 'gender knot' that is entangled in the provide-care duality?

Test of gender mainstreaming with equality

The mainstream neoliberal order, by its very nature, embodies structures of inequality with gender cutting across these structures.[15] The gender mainstreaming approach was devised as a response to the marginalization of gender equality initiatives in isolated units disconnected from centers of power. Building on the sameness-based "equal opportunities" of the 1970s and the diversity-based "positive discrimination" of the 1980s, mainstreaming aims to ensure that the different positions and experiences of women and men are given due attention in policymaking processes.

Compared to other approaches for equality, the state centric character and politics of difference of gender mainstreaming confers it a higher status (Rees, 1998) and a strong foundation for feminist solidarity and action (Walby, 2005).

Gender mainstreaming, adopted by intergovernmental organizations, governments and civil society organizations as the main equality policy tool, remained uncontested until recently. The global conferences of the 1990s, Beijing Platform for Action and ECOSOC gender mainstreaming resolution provided the impetus for expanding gendered policy agendas. Significant progress has been made in this area, notably through

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[15] The term 'gender', in contrast to the biological category of sex, is a political, epistemological, and methodological tool coined to analyze the construction of masculinity and femininity, promising radical possibilities for transformative change. As the term gained popularity its political purpose and transformative content declined. In its initial theorizing the strong association of gender with the word 'woman' caused the two to be interchangeably used; "woman became the gender", "man remained the sex". Subsequently, gender came to be used to distinguish male/female differences. In the former usage, gender is a noun –i.e., female category and in the latter, it is an adjective, describing male/female attributes. Both usages are conceptually inconsistent and politically problematic (Ertürk, 2020). According to Butler (1990) gender is performative, not who one is (noun) but what one does (verb).

approaches such as gender budgeting. İrregularities in implementation have generally been attributed to technical problems, necessitating the development of normative criteria and strategies to enhance the equality outcomes of mainstreaming (Staudt, 2003).

Success of gender mainstreaming depends on the presence of a strong women's movement, receptiveness of public actors to feminist demands and collaboration, availability of gender expertise and experience, strong political will and institutional capacity for effective implementation. These conditions are scarce, unsustainable, and normative and conceptual consensus on the subject is weak, resulting in strategies that are dictated by political conjuncture and local dynamics. In practice, mainstreaming is often reduced to a series of technical procedures and a 'to-do' list in the hands of bureaucrats.

Without questioning 'what is mainstreamed into what' anyone can claim to be mainstreaming gender.[16] For market oriented financial institutions and technocrats, feminist goals such as 'empowerment' and 'equality' are often nothing but idealized fantasies. The ex-post exercise of gender analysis they perform serves to sustain hegemony of neoliberal policy parameters (Baachi and Eveline, 2010, p.55).[17] The real issue, then, is the mismatch between gender mainstreaming method and the hegemonic socio-economic order that operates on the logic of the production-reproduction divide, where care remains trivial.

The active and supervisory state role envisioned by gender mainstreaming poses a challenge to the deregulatory policy of neoliberalism, which favors a minimized state role in the delivery of social services (True and Mintrom, 2001). Conversely, according to some, neoliberalism promotes a market-compatible state model that can support sales and market creativity through gender analysis, suggesting

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[16] İn one of my country visits (2008), as UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, I interviewed a police commissioner, who explained that as part of their gender mainstreaming strategy female officers are sent home early to prepare for *iftar* during Ramadan. This is typical of mainstreaming practices, although some may be disguised under more sophisticated attire.

[17] Mainstreaming practices in the field of health and education are relatively less problematic. Significant gains particularly in basic health, maternal and child mortality have occurred globally.

that the bargaining power and economic interests of the competitive market supersedes gender equality concerns (Shields and Evans, 1998).

In the final analysis, gender mainstreaming operates in a conservative manner, distorting feminist principles and reducing gender equality goals to women's quantitative representation. İn the process, in many countries, women's empowerment programmes and national machineries became marginalized. The transfer of the already insufficient resources from these programmes to other areas created gaps in overall coordination and monitoring. While mainstreaming has increased women's visibility and representation in public policymaking, feminist goals have been stripped of their political content and subordinated to other priorities. Women who benefit from the opportunities offered by mainstreaming, often do so only within institutional limitations and at the expense of other women.

Flexible and accessible nature of gender mainstreaming approach, which accounts for its popularity, is also a source of its weakness. As it tries to be a general policy that addresses programmes at all levels gender equality goals become swept away and as mainstreaming becomes everyone's task, it becomes no one's responsibility (Mehra and Gupta, 2006, p.5). Although, these inconsistencies can be altered with enhanced intervention strategies, given the essentially patriarchal-capitalist character of the mainstream system, it is not realistic to expect mainstreaming to deliver gender equality in the long-run.

Transformative Change

In the long run, a renewed understanding of a welfare state that can change the temperament of the mainstream is needed. Welfare state represents an intermediate space between forms of power and different social segments. The welfare state of the mid-twentieth century, premised on industrial capitalism and patriarchal division of labour, while providing women with social protection and security, essentially reinforced male-dominant institutions (Knijin and Kremer, 1997; Ciccia and Sainsbury, 2018). Notion of care as an ethical value and basic right made its way into welfare state debates as insight into areas such as reproductive work, care deficit, provide-care binary, increased.

The Marxist-feminist stream, which rejects the logic of the neoliberal mainstream livelihood model, makes a particularly strong case for moving towards a new welfare state with care as the organising principle of the economy, the state and the international system. Such a notion of

care is a precondition for "inclusive citizenship" that points to a society beyond insecurity and indifference (Kremer, 2007).

So far, the feminist movement has followed a liberal line to achieve its radical goals. Although gender mainstreaming has been instrumental in engendering the public policy enterprise, it has neither been affective in curbing the crises tendencies of capitalism, nor in eroding the patriarchal gender regime. Liberalism and its institutions have largely failed in meeting the challenges of the twenty-first century.

In the long run, unless the production and reproduction divide and its care crisis are resolved once and for all, gender equality will remain only an aspiration. Liberal social reforms need to give way to radical social transformations that respond to structural inequalities and systemic crises. In this respect, a feminist vision that problematizes patriarchal-capitalism and broadens its strategic partnerships with other progressive movements globally is long overdue. Marxist-feminist approaches referred to in this paper provide guidance in this regard.

Furthermore, transformative change is critical for eliminating the carelessness and destruction against both humans and the planet. Given the prevailing political economy, the call for a transition to a care-centered mainstream society may seem utopian. However, feminist demands and practices for radical collective care practices and networks are increasing in different fields and geographies, demonstrating that collective-egalitarian alternatives to the current crisis and authoritarian front are not a dream.

That said, transformative change is a challenging affair: How can power and resources be distributed to absorb the cost of care as a right? How can the market and a universal norm of care be reconciled? What institutional arrangements are needed to accommodate collective reordering of care? Can men, as beneficiaries of patriarchal power, give up their privileges for the higher value of collective welfare? What are the mechanisms for mobilizing a care-centered social welfare state? Do collective solidarity models, such as communal organizations or cooperatives, offer lessons for change? Therefore, the challenge for the feminist movement now is not how to integrate into the mainstream, but rather how to transform it.

Conclusion

This article started with the assumption that patriarchal division of labour, which devalues care work, lies at the heart of the current mainstream social order. Devalued care work reinforces gender inequality and hierarchical structures, thus complicating women's struggles for rights and freedoms. The encroachments upon women's struggles for equality today, a central tenet of authoritarian politics, are also shaking democracy to its foundation.

The populist backlash and conservative gender policies of the new authoritarianism are a response to perceived 'ills' of equality policies and gender ideologies imposed from outside, including by multinational human rights system. As demonstrated by the care crisis, keeping women in their place, by consent or by force, has become imperative for the hard-liners who aim to restore the conventional patriarchal gender order and family institution.

Given declining fertility levels, anti-migration politics and changing demographic dynamics, a chronic shortage of care workforce in the near future seems inevitable, requiring greater pressure on women. Unless the mainstream is democratized, with care at its center, authoritarian populist transgressions on gender equality are likely to intensify. Placing care as the organising principle of the economy, the state and the international system, as advocated here, promises not only to unravel the 'gender knot' but also to restrain anti-gender authoritarianism.

As a starting point, a two-dimensional strategy may lay the ground for affirmative politics that promotes collective welfare over profits and care over exploitation of women: (i) strengthening the capacity of the current gender mainstreaming method to expand its boundaries; (ii) adopting social policies that gradually de-commodify and de-gender social reproduction, which also implies reorganizing work, to pave the way towards a new social state.

The mutually reinforcing crisis environment of the twenty-first century may be an opportune moment for feminist "border struggles" to demand, imagine and develop workable alternatives for a caring world.

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Partnership, 2016); Co-editor, Feminist Advocacy, Family Law and Violence against Women: International Perspectives (New York: Routledge, 2019); and "Political Economy of Peace Processes and the Women, Peace and Security Agenda" in Conflict, Security and Development (2020).

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