## Unpaid Work, Coercion and the Fear Economy

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**ABSTRACT:** Unpaid work, as a sociological construct, initially emerged in relation to reproductive labour and, in particular, women's unpaid household work. However, unpaid work, in the sense of socially required and routinized labour that is normatively not compensated in terms of monetary and other tangible mechanisms of exchange, has mushroomed in the context of the grim economy. Here, the authors locate unpaid work historically by considering the direct physical force that underlies slavery and work within total institutions, and then analyze the contemporary subtle, indirect pressures exercised by hegemonic ideologies to sustain unpaid internships and unremunerated working days. Secondly, we argue that unpaid work is expanding in the current historical/economic context. Finally, we propose that shifts in the nature of the capitalist economy and the evolution of the so-called 'fear' economy along with the related expansion of the neoliberal state should be seen as key factors precipitating the growth in unpaid work and, therefore, a dramatic intensification of patterns of exploitation.

**KEYWORDS:** Unpaid Work; Reproductive Labour; Household Work; Fear Economy

### Introduction

The concept of unpaid work may seem an oxymoron. In everyday parlance 'work' typically suggests some organized, purposeful and productive activity resulting in some form of compensation, typically money. In the modern capitalist economy, the notion of work without pay would seem to contradict the fundamental meaning of contemporary work activities and the logic of

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capitalism. In modern western cultures, work is generally assumed to be a way of making money and therefore participating in the capitalist economy. Indeed, only 2nd wave feminism has profoundly shaken this connection between work and pay (Waring, 1988). However, closer scrutiny of the past several decades reveals that much work is now not paid.

Historically, slaves epitomized unpaid work and their requirement to work without compensation underlay a wide variety of economies. Generally, dismissed as an artifact of history, unpaid work as a significant economic factor did not re-emerge until feminist political economy was popularized in the 1960s and 70s. Reproductive work, including household work and child-rearing is generally unpaid, commonplace and socially required. Today, unpaid work framed as reproductive work is dramatically expanding. For example, as a result of significant reductions in state-provided services in neo-liberal regimes, increasing amounts of social support, caring and social welfare work is performed by unpaid workers. Routinely, patients in hospital and those discharged from hospital are 'cared for' by family members, typically but not always women. Similarly, growing numbers of aging seniors are cared for on an unpaid basis by spouses and adult children. Reflecting the neoliberal state's individualistic bent, family members and friends are generally expected to pick up the considerable slack left by dramatic reductions in state services. When actually 'counted', this unpaid element of the contemporary economy reveals its significance. Time-budget studies indicate that over the past half century unpaid work in the global North has comprised almost half (44.7 percent) of all time spent 'working' (Williams, 2008).

The proliferation of unpaid work in and out of the formal economy is significant not only because of its dimensions but because of its complex interplay with key social patterns of power and coercion. First, unpaid work is not randomly distributed amongst the labour force; rather, it is deeply embedded in relations of power, reflecting and reinforcing them. In particular, the discourse on household work would be incoherent without recognition of the pivotal role of social class, gender, race and age. Secondly, unpaid work cannot be understood as simply an expression of informal, unregulated work arrangements. Unpaid work is socially contested precisely because in some instances it is indeed paid. The requirement to expend time and energy with no direct reward serves to further enshrine and intensify patterns of social inequality (Brennan and Stanford, 2013, A19). While this has become readily

apparent in the lives of women – notably those who seek to combine paid employment and unpaid labour in the home – the logic can be extended to youth and new workers who shoulder more and more unremunerated work in the guise of required volunteering or unpaid internships.

It follows that unpaid work in contemporary economies warrants scrutiny because it is such an integral element in our lives, because it is core to the functioning of the present-day capitalist state and because it complexly sustains emergent patterns of social inequality. Most importantly, evidence suggests that unpaid work is growing exponentially, particularly under neo-liberalism and in the context of the 'fear' economy. This growth has considerable implications for the consolidation of power relations and the attenuation of social inequalities. Finally, the discourses surrounding unpaid work appear to remain so subtle and nuanced that their coercive implications are frequently obscured or minimized.

When viewed in terms of coerced labour, it is clear that "unpaid work" not only challenges the logic of contemporary capitalism, but draws attention to a maze of central social issues – including compliance/coercion/choice and relations of ruling. These complexities do not suggest that "unpaid work" is an unworkable concept. Rather, we argue that deconstructing "unpaid work" provides an avenue through which we may explore many of the most important dimensions and developments within contemporary capitalist economies. In particular, if unpaid work is conceptualized in more organic and multi-dimensional ways, it speaks to the complex interplay between history, power relations (most notably with regard to gender, immigrant status, social class, race/ethnicity and age), the public and private spheres, and the impact of globalization. Most significantly, it speaks to an important way in which capitalist economic systems are intensifying the exploitation of workers, would-be workers and their families, while clouding their exploitation in the rhetoric of compliance and choice.

**Second Wave Feminism and Naming Unpaid Work**

Unpaid work became an integral element in discussions of labour force activities, thanks in large measure to the efforts of 2nd wave feminists and their proteges (Oakley, 1976; Seccombe, 1974; Waring, 1988; Thistle, 2006) who drew scholarly attention to the contributions made by women in the course of raising children, caring for the home and supporting their partners. These scholars, in

turn, documented that the sheer volume of domestic work and the complex tasks undertaken contributed to both economies and political regimes. Research and analysis has tended to elaborate on the complex and often indirect ways in which women's efforts in the home, though typically uncompensated in direct monetary terms and unrecognized both in terms of skill development and economic calculations of GDP, contribute to the productive as well as reproductive needs of economies.

It is important to formally acknowledge that the work done in the home is indeed work and is socially significant – not only to the individual family but also to the larger economic order and, secondly, that responsibility for this unpaid work constrains women's lives and enshrines their subordination (Gaudet et al., 2011; Neysmith et al., 2010; Ilcan, 2009). That women's unpaid work is generally not acknowledged in terms of compensation, pensions, divorce settlements and prestige and that women are, in fact, penalized when they attempt to participate in the paid labour force is presented as evidence of a profound gender-based inequity. Further, the deconstruction of the hegemonic ideology that women's work is 'freely' chosen as a labour of love rather than socially constructed as the primary adult role for women speaks to the bind women find themselves in – socialized into assuming a role which is socially denigrated, economically marginalized yet culturally romanticized and mandated.

Indeed, central to the critique of women's unpaid work is the absence of 'real choice' along with the coercion women are subject to (Duffy, Mandell and Pupo, 1989). It was not simply that the work was complex, onerous, and often tedious, or that the work was not rewarded in terms of money, status or some other formal compensation. Rather, the central concern was that women, until the 2nd wave of the women's movement, have not had an opportunity to freely examine and question the choices embedded in their roles as wives and mothers.

**From Slavery to Workfare: The Neoliberal State**

Subsequent research on unpaid work has drawn heavily on this attention to domestic labour and its implications in terms of gender inequities. However, more recently, the term unpaid work has increasingly been applied more generally to phenomena as varied as 'compulsory volunteering', unpaid internships, and work outside job requirements. Below we detail many of the

ways in which unpaid work has flourished in recent decades. We argue that, as with gendered household work, unpaid work can be understood as a product of coercion. These coercive power relations may be as subtle and indirect as hegemonic ideologies or as direct and abusive as straightforward oppression. Current historical trends, notably, the growth of neoliberal states have been pivotal in the expansion of unpaid work experiences. Neoliberalism, with its emphasis on fiscal restraint and individualism has, for example, dramatically reduced the paid assistance previously provided to families and individuals in need while simultaneously downloading more of the costs of employment (most notably tuition increases) onto families and individuals (Flavelle 2013, S1). The neoliberal state has at the same time deployed unpaid work – workfare and prison fare, for example – as a direct mechanism to reduce costs and privatize responsibilities. The punitive nature of these policy initiatives – increased reliance on the criminalization of poverty and incarceration of the poor, fits hand in glove with shift in the economic contact.

The 'fear economy' has grown significantly, particularly since the recession and global financial crisis of 2008 (Krugman, 2013). This 'fear economy' is generally characterized by widespread unemployment, underemployment and dramatic increases in various forms of precarious work (Koeber, 2002; Cranford, Vosko and Zukewich, 2003). In the context of this widespread fear and insecurity, it is not surprising that many individuals find themselves acceding to demands for unpaid labour in the hopes that they will retain their toehold in paid employment or that this unpaid work will be the necessary first step towards economic security (Kalleberg and Marsden, 2013).

Contextualized by these political-economic realities, an interesting interplay between unpaid work and coercive practices is evident. As the most extremely coercive form of unpaid work, slavery, past and present, typically entails intense physical and/or psychological oppression. All the benefits of slavery accrue to the owner. The slave complies as a direct result of fear (of physical injury/torture, imprisonment, deportation and/or emotional abuse) combined with an absence of alternatives or possibilities for escape. Prison slave labour – by many accounts a common, if unacknowledged, practice in some contemporary national contexts (most notably, China), is similarly rooted in overt, even physical coercion combined with incarceration. Inmates are physically compelled to work without compensation as a consequence of their sentence. Their labours, however, are productive and may be profitable for those

in control of the institutions. Today, this most coercive form of unpaid labour does persist and emergent national and international inequalities lend themselves to slavery practices.

Less obviously coercive is unpaid prison work in western economies. Often packaged as training or rehabilitation, employment in prison systems has become increasingly popular in neoliberal regimes. Inmates are increasingly expected to work without pay or for nominal wages. The reputed rewards for the worker – apparent rehabilitation, the goodwill of prison authorities – are indirect and intangible while the direct economic benefits of inmates' productivity are funneled to the institution and the state. In institutionalized settings such as group homes for example, young offenders are often expected to participate in some productive activity so as to acquire workplace skills and as testimony to their efforts to reform. Once again, overt coercion is a backdrop but more significantly, there is a complex psychological bullying that encourages inmates/residents to embrace this unpaid work as a path to personal redemption, social reintegration and, ultimately, freedom to leave.

**Youth and the Growth of Unpaid Work**

Outside of total institutions, unpaid work is increasingly mandated by new discourses surrounding citizenship, maturity and education. In the broadest terms, young people are now routinely required to provide for their own training and education, activities previously embedded in many labour force activities as apprenticeships and on-the-job training. In almost all national contexts, the lion's share of the financial costs attached to training and education have been downloaded onto students (Livingstone, 2001). Young people are typically not paid or are paid very little for these efforts but they, in fact, must themselves pay for this access to education. As a result, for many students the first decade of their formal paid employment will entail paying for their previously accrued debts to the state's educational apparatus.

Students – notably high school, but also college or university – are now regularly required as part of their formal education to function as unpaid (underpaid) apprentices or trainees in co-op programs. Any direct or indirect monetary benefit may accrue to the school itself but is often buried in a tit for tat exchange by the educational institution and the organization providing the placement. The educational institutions benefit from a low-cost opportunity to offer their students hands-on work experience while employers enjoy access to

free, semi-skilled labour. Unpaid co-op programs have become an expected part of many secondary and post-secondary educational curricula and many facilities have established an extensive administrative structure devoted to seeking and maintaining co-operative options.

An important variant on this ever more popular arrangement is the *requirement* in many locales that high school students *volunteer* for a specified number of hours as requisite for their high school diploma. In Ontario, for example, high school students are required to provide documentation that they 'volunteered' in one or several community agencies for a minimum of 40 hours in order to 'earn' their high school diploma. While community service is presented in terms of the positive benefits and the significance of participation in the local community, the underlying calculus is coercive – students are required (not encouraged) by the educational system to engage in unpaid labour. This is also experienced in university/college contexts, where students are *required* to engage in a specified number of volunteer/unpaid work hours in a specific context in order to *qualify to apply* for a targeted university program. Similarly, the growing enthusiasm for experiential learning courses rests on the assumption that education and volunteerism are intertwined. Finally, unpaid co-op students 'earn' educational credits for 'working' – often alongside 'real' workers who are actually earning a wage for precisely the same labours.

The dramatic expansion in volunteerism and the voluntary sector is, of course, directly associated with the emergence of neoliberalism regimes and the erosion of state-provided services (Wacquant, 2010; Ilcan, 2009). While these practices are typically constructed as arrangements that benefit students, in actuality the meaning of volunteerism, education and unpaid work are increasingly conflated and confounded. This pressure on youth to participate in diverse forms of unpaid work reflects emergent structures that normalize the integration of unpaid work into youth employment socialization. Nowhere is this more blatant than in the pressures on students, trainees, and unemployed youth to accept unpaid work as a key strategy in building resumes and legitimizing work credentials. In the context of universities, graduate students were recently invited to apply for lengthy unpaid research assistantships at the University of Birmingham and at University College London. While public outcry led to the elimination of these advertised 'opportunities', the possibility of such positions speaks to the growing acceptance of the notion that working for

free is a reasonable part of educational and employment discourses (Perlin, 2013, A2).

This conflation of unpaid and paid work is readily apparent in the popularization of unpaid internships as normative employment practices (Perlin, 2011). Although headlines announce that the exploitation of unpaid interns is now at 'epidemic levels', in actuality relatively little is known about this dimension of the labour force (Oved, 2013: GT1; McNight, 2013, A8). Evidence concerning unpaid internships is largely anecdotal. With extremely high rates of youth unemployment, young job applicants increasingly find themselves offered the opportunity to work for weeks or months as an unpaid intern with no guarantee of employment at the end of that period. While employers promise work-place experience, interns often complain that there is very little in the way of on-the-job training and their responsibilities often involve low-level tasks. Given the murkiness of labour law on internships, interns may find themselves with little to no labour protection (no access to employment insurance benefits, no coverage under work and safety provisions). While recent high-profile cases have called attention to this practice and its inequities, this 'institutionalized wage theft' remains an issue (Hananel, 2013, A21; Brown and Ferguson, 2013, A8). In the 'fear' economy, where 'good' jobs are rare and unemployment is high, young interns are loath to alienate potential employers.

Once hired, workers frequently face the prospect of 'day jobs that never end'. While information technology has established the likelihood that workers of all ages will be 'on call' in terms of e-mail, cell phones, twitter and so on beyond their paid working hours, this is particularly an issue for young workers striving to succeed (Perlin, 2011). This unending responsibility for the creation and maintenance of cultural capital is seen to be simply a necessity in a harsh labour market. This may be further underscored by draconian employment expectations – no paid time-off, no late arrivals or departures, weekend and night availability, no routine breaks or lunchtimes. While intense expectations have been commonplace at the beginning of well-paid professional careers such as law and medicine, they have been extended now to young workers who are working for relatively scant rewards in terms of income, benefits and long-term job security (Wayne, 2013, 7).

**Unpaid Work in the Context of Paid Work**

Despite the concerns about unpaid work articulated by workers – constrained, for example, to finish their tasks or close up the service on their own time when necessary – little academic research has focussed on this aspect. A recent Canadian survey supports this extension of paid employment into 'free' time but provides little clarification of the patterns. Eighty per cent of those surveyed indicated they work during their vacations. Not surprisingly, 80 per cent indicated that technology allowed work to invade their 'free' time (Kane, 2013, S11). The findings invite further research and consideration of national cultures of work. Possibly in countries with a strong labour movement coupled with high rates of unemployment, unionized workers (regardless of gender, ethnicity, job status) will be less vulnerable to compelled unpaid work than those occupying higher ranks without union protection and enjoying high hourly rates in a very competitive job market.

While we often consider many groups of workers as underpaid for the work they carry out, we may re-examine underpayment as a variant on unpaid work. There are two ways in which workers are not compensated for work they do while performing paid employment. First, in a competitive market with employers searching for cost-savings at every turn, employers rely on their labour forces as a reserve of skills, talents, and abilities for which they are often neither acknowledged nor adequately compensated. As Basso (1998, 198) reminds us, profit is "*unpaid working time*", unpaid labour, and one of the primary principles around which capitalism operates is the "*appropriation of unpaid working time*" (199). During the eighties, for example, with the introduction of microtechnology in the workplace, technophiles often found themselves assisting co-workers in teaching computer techniques, programming or re-programming computers, repairing equipment, and adapting the office to various forms of e-work (Zuboff, 1984). For many, the expectation was that they would carry out this work in addition to the tasks identified in their formal job descriptions and their pay was not adjusted to account for the higher price their skills might command in the labour market.

Secondly, under intensified work conditions, many employees report that their work schedule demands that they skip or shorten lunch breaks or rest periods, and that they are expected to accomplish too much for the time that they are employed. As a result, many spend some time at work (or at home) finishing the job for free. In describing the movement beyond a wage-based

economy, Gorz (1999) argues that it is becoming difficult, if not impossible, to identify stable employment with wages based on a set number of hours worked per week. The lines between paid and non-paid time are blurred for knowledge workers, craftworkers, the self-employed, or for those workers–nannies and others in caring occupations and emotional work, for example–who provide services that are "intangible" (Gorz, 1999).

At the extreme end, private sector sweatshops across the globe exploit workers, including children and young workers, not only by paying far less than a living wage, but also by subjecting workers to deplorable conditions without rest breaks or washroom privileges. Anti-sweatshop campaigns exposed Nike and a number of other apparel and footwear companies paying workers only a few cents an hour, forcing overtime with little or no bonus, and requiring shifts of twelve or more hours, frequently extending overnight (Clawson, 2003). Closer to home, Sassen (1988; 1991) and other analysts point to the growth of the "informal economy", referring to the integration of migrant workers–undocumented, underemployed, underpaid–into the post-industrial economy, outside of the formal structures. Growth in this illicit work along with an expansion of lower-end work in the formal service sector support the highly paid service, business and professional workers, easing their demanding schedules by providing relatively inexpensive personal and domestic services while providing a barely adequate buffer against outright impoverishment for the workers.

While many workers, then, are simply not compensated for their skills or for the volume of work they accomplish during paid work hours, other forms of unpaid work may be less visible as they are often done outside the place of employment or after hours. Relatives and friends who contribute freely to "help out" in a business owned by a family member engage in a distinct form of "unpaid market labour" that raise a number of taxation and other policy-related issues (Philipps, 2008). For decades, secretaries and, today, administrative assistants have been often expected by their employers to undertake work that is well beyond their job descriptions–dropping off/picking up dry cleaning, buying snacks for office meetings on their way to work. This work is gendered and replicates domestic and motherhood roles, as women are generally assigned the (unwritten) duties of care, including personal problem-solving, maintaining an inviting front, and in some cases, engaging directly in activities such as decorating the office, cleaning the lunch room, and arranging seasonal events, retirement parties, or other social affairs.

Finally, it should be noted that many of the paid benefits, notably leave provisions, are being eroded in the 'fear' economy. Ironically, despite the intensification of unpaid labour, paid 'free' time may be increasingly scarce. Many of the benefits workers "earn," including leaves, are not implemented. In the U. S., for example, the *Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993* entitles workers up to three months leave *without pay* for personal or family emergencies, while the *Fair Labor Standards Act* is noted for its failure to ensure sick, personal or vacation leaves (Johnson, 2002). The working-class in particular is short-changed by these policies. Similarly, because of the low levels of earnings replacement, many new parents throughout western economies are unable to take advantage of parental leaves. Among couples who do opt for parental leave, mothers whose regular earnings are typically lower, have higher 'take-up' rates than their male partners, thereby leaving intact the traditional gendered division of labour (Evans and Pupo, 1993; Haas, 2004; Marshall, 2008). In this context, the erosion of paid retirement benefits throughout western economies indicates not only that workers are required to work longer and more frequently for no pay, but their opportunities for paid 'free' time are disappearing.

**Neoliberal Welfare Regimes and Mandated Unpaid Work**

Many citizens also find themselves shoved into unpaid work by dramatic shifts in welfare ideologies and practices. Changes in social welfare in contemporary neo-liberal regimes – in particular the shift from an entitlement to an earned approach to benefits – has directly impacted the involvement of welfare recipients in unpaid labour. Today, in the United States, Britain and Canada, for example, recipients are often required to engage in 'volunteer' activities or in 'paid work' activities in order to qualify for their benefits. These new patterns in social welfare provision speak to the complexities of unpaid labour today. In some respects, it may appear that the recipients are 'working' for their welfare benefits, hence the term "workfare." When working side by side with paid workers, workfare recipients are still separate and distinct since they do not share the rights and standing (including, job security, benefits and access to unionization) enjoyed by regular workers. In many contexts, if welfare recipients are permitted to retain their employment earnings, some portion of those earnings are 'clawed back' through reductions to social assistance payments. For example, until recently recipients of Ontario Disability Support were permitted to work only 10 hours a month before their disability payments

would be reduced 50 cents for every dollar they earned (Monsebraaten, 2013, A3). In a sense, as long as they are dependent on the state, some portion of their work time is unpaid. Not surprisingly, recent research speaks to the feelings of coercion often attendant to the work-for-welfare schemes. Moreover, as Andre Gorz (1999) argues required compulsory volunteer work becomes a cul de sac, giving rise to divisions between those who freely volunteer and those who are compelled to do so, and in the process, devaluing the work performed and the services delivered.

In this process, welfare recipients on workfare have even been mobilized as a solution to the problems identified with undocumented workers. In Virginia and other areas of the U. S., government departments (Social Services and the Immigration and Naturalization Service) cooperate to replace undocumented workers with welfare recipient-workers who are "equally exploitable and controllable" (Chang, 2000). Many favour working-for-welfare schemes and especially the replacement of "illegal" workers with welfare recipients because the program simultaneously addresses two contentious contemporary issues–that welfare recipients enjoy a "free ride" and that illegal workers take jobs from Americans (157). Workplaces for both groups are frequently hazardous, dirty, and unhealthy and workers may be exposed to toxins without proper protections and training. Workplace monitoring may be draconian. For example, in San Francisco workfare recipients sweeping streets lose one month's benefits for reporting ten minutes late and, generally, those on workfare are not entitled to any time off (Chang, 2000). Such measures raise questions about the relationship between workers' rights and citizenship or human rights and entitlements (Ruggie, 2008; Swepston, 2007).

**The Intensification of Unpaid Household Work: Class, Race and Immigrant Status Dimensions**

In recent decades, analysts have increasingly emphasized the complexities of unpaid household work and move away from simple gendered approaches (for example, Matthaei, 2001; Eichler and Albanese, 2007). For example, the nature, extent and duration of the work will vary considerably from place to place, from social class to social class and will depend upon the family life course and cultural practices (Gaudet, Cooke and Jacob, 2011; McMullin, 2005). Amongst well-to-do classes, for example in the Philippines and Brazil,

household work may entail hiring, training and supervising domestic staff (as noted in Manrai and Manrai, 1995). Amongst the remainder of the population, unpaid household work may be much more burdensome and time-consuming since labour-saving devices and consumer products are beyond the reach of the family. In many contexts, those with lower incomes spend more time in unpaid work compared to those with higher incomes. Recent research in Canada concludes that women with 'lower' class characteristics, notably, low levels of education, stay at home in unpaid labour for longer periods after childbirth (Gaudet, Cooke and Jacob, 2011). In a few select national contexts, generous state-funded support for work in the home (as reflected in lengthy parental leave provisions, low-cost child care and assistance for seniors) results in more manageable unpaid household work obligations. Further, life course analyses have drawn increased attention to the complex ways in which the pressures of unpaid household work vary over time depending upon the presence of young children or aging seniors, the paid employment schedules of partners and, among other factors, the finances available to 'buy' some services or state provision or support for such services.

Within all these diversities, the overarching historical trends are towards increased individual engagement with unpaid work in domestic labour. The upward pressures on unpaid domestic work reflect first, the growing numbers of neo-liberal regimes around the globe intent on absenting themselves from various familial responsibilities; secondly, the globalized intensification of capitalist work relations which exploit a growing diversity of work arrangements globally and, thirdly, the widespread aging national profiles which tend to multiply demands on families and communities. In addition to mothers and fathers, grandparents, children and teens are with increasing frequency picking up any slack left by women's growing involvement in the paid labour force by engaging in unpaid domestic work. Both family type and background affect teens' unpaid housework.

Mechanisms for the proliferation of unpaid domestic work are not restricted to family members. The contracting out of unpaid domestic work to paid workers may create another avenue for locating support for domestic work. Although in theory, nannies, child-care providers and home cleaners are to be paid for their labours, many of these workers are subject to exploitation as unpaid workers. In particular, immigrant women who come to North America to work as nannies, report that they are routinely expected to work unpaid hours

over and above their paid responsibilities (Ehrenreich and Hochschild, 2002; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2001). Given their position as domestic workers and their vulnerability to immigration policy, it is not surprising that they comply with employers' demands for unpaid work. Similarly, many young women who become baby-sitters and nannies may, by token of their youth, gender and social class, find themselves vulnerable to such exploitation. Women who provide babysitting or housecleaning under near-poverty conditions or to augment welfare payments may also be especially susceptible, and they may regularly work beyond paid-for hours.

The practice of underpaying or not paying in-home domestic workers is so prevalent that, under pressure from its masses of (primarily Latina immigrant) domestic workers, New York State passed the *Unpaid Wages Prohibition Act* in 1997, known as a potent wage enforcement law (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2001; Clawson, 2003). Under this Act, employers are penalized for non-payment with fines ranging from 25 to 200 percent of the back wages owed. Moreover, violations are considered felonies rather than misdemeanours. The majority of domestic workers, however, work without contracts, and even when they are in place, they are very difficult to enforce. Despite the New York case, investigations continue to reveal that exploitation, underpayment and non-payment of nannies, immigrant caregivers, immigrants in general and migrants remain significant social issues (Creese and Wiebe, 2010; Man, 2004; Keung, 2012, A12; Brazao, 2009).

Globalization and recent economic developments have transformed the nature of household work and the place of women within structures of inequality. Joan Acker argues that under globalization, gender is "both embodied and embedded in the logic and structuring of globalizing capitalism" (as cited in Gottfried, 2004, 10) and that women have lost out in the separation of reproduction from production. The mobilization of labour for productive work is heavily dependent upon the availability of labour for reproductive work. Women in the paid labour force not only provide transnational corporations with a source of cheap labour, but also form a stable labour force, thereby decreasing risks of investment and output (11). In this process, as more women remain in the labour force during child bearing years and have shorter periods of work interruption than in previous generations, some unpaid domestic work is shifted through "transnational 'care chains'" (Hochschild, 2003, 18). Domestic workers from across the globe undertake the reproductive work, including

emotional, physical and sexual labour, in the homes and communities of highly educated, professional, wealthy women (Ehenreich and Hochschild, 2002). Meanwhile, many of these domestic workers engaged in cleaning the homes and caring for the children of middle-class individuals leave their own children in the care of their own (unpaid) older children, mothers, grandmothers, and extended family, thereby contributing to the new regime of "transnational motherhood" and the globalization of unpaid domestic labour (Lee and Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2011; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2001).

This pattern of women who provide both unpaid and paid household or caregiving work may, in turn, be related to women's segregation into care-giving occupations in the paid labour force. Not surprisingly, research suggests that shifts in the structure – decentralization of social welfare organizations along fiscal restraints on government funding – have resulted in increased pressures on these women workers to extend their efforts into unpaid work hours in order to meet the needs of their clients or patients (Corman and Luxton, 2007). Considerable research indicates that it is more vulnerable women – recent immigrants, visible minorities, single mother and working-class women who are particularly likely to be found in many caregiver occupations, for example, as personal support workers – groups who are notoriously vulnerable to responsibilities for work beyond their paid hours (Jenson, 1997; Armstrong, Armstrong and Scott-Dixon, 2008).

The growth of the neo-liberal state has not only put increasing pressures on these paid care-givers and their time, it has also put pressure on the mobilization of voluntarism in diverse communities. Susan Brin Hyatt (2001) argues that voluntarism is a neoliberal discourse based on racist, classist and sexist representations of the welfare state and community cooperation and well-being. She argues that formalized structures promoting a volunteer culture override the grassroots, cooperative activities, often spontaneously organized, especially among poor black women. With a mindset of fiscal restraint, eliminating community-based programs and the dismantling of the welfare state, voluntarism becomes an increasingly obligatory aspect of citizenship within working and middle-class communities and negates meaningful forms of cooperation in poor communities. As a result, this platform of neo-liberalism effectively reproduces dependency within a low-paid work force, overriding local community-building activities. An individualistic voluntarism, much more

in keeping with the strictures and structures of paid work, replaces a "community-embedded" collectivist-rooted voluntarism (Eckstein, 2001).

**Unpaid Work in the Context of Unpaid Community Exchange Projects**

At the far end of the continuum stands unpaid work which is not obligatory but which is embraced as a mechanism to improve community relations, re-establishing trust and reciprocity. A very well-known venture in this regard is the American scheme called Time Dollars which has been active for over a decade and which is found in over 200 cities. In this program, participants can earn money credits through their unpaid work. For example, one hour of work earns a credit that may be exchanged for one hour of someone else's time. Credits are deposited in a 'bank' and withdrawn when needed (Burns, 2000). Much of the unpaid work in this context is attached to efforts at social reform and, in some instances, projects are seeking to establish a form of exchange or barter where community members can step outside traditional working relations (Williams and Windebank, 2000). Indeed, research on voluntarism in Sweden concludes that regardless of the expanse of the Swedish welfare state, an extensive volunteer sector exists because people have articulated important needs not addressed within the formal state welfare system (Grassman and Svedberg, 1996).

Studying women's work in charitable activities in Australia, Baldock (1998) argues for inclusion of voluntarism in feminist discourses on unwaged work. Considering motives, choice, and gratification from voluntary work in charities, Baldock concludes that women act outside patriarchal constraints, and act on choice, motive and human agency rather than on compulsion in undertaking this work. This may be confirmed as we consider the collectivist work and caring undertaken by different groups of poor and working-class women across the globe. Mexican workers in the maquiladoras – primarily women – laid off from Levi's, for example, organized a non-profit food and sewing coop, where people sew in an exchange system, and for a day's work leave with some gas money, some clothing, and a share of the meal they cooked together with items the workers themselves brought in (Louie, 2001, 114-116). Indeed, many of these efforts have been intended to address the inequities of women's unpaid and unrecognized labours in the home and in the community. Through the exchange women not only draw attention to their 'work' but also receive compensation for it (Burns, 2000).

Labour movements, activist organizations, ecology movements and other political activities and organizations are largely based upon unpaid labour. Volunteers themselves may benefit from broader achievements of these organizations and activities, gaining a sense of fulfilment and self-respect for standing up for a particular political position. Amongst the issues taken on by labour activists are anti-sweatshop and fair wage campaigns, along with other hours-of-work and working conditions matters. The Chinese Staff and Workers Association in New York City, for example, has taken on sportswear companies, subcontracted by large corporations, for non-payment of wages and violations of minimum wage and overtime laws (Louie, 2001, 19-20) and numerous anti-sweatshop campaigns have challenged manufacturers over health and safety violations as well as fair wages, subcontracting, and labour practices.

In short, in many respects while these activities occupy the far end of the unpaid work continuum – in that they are not coerced and are in fact compensated in real, if not monetary, ways – they speak to the important divide between unpaid work which is compelled or required while not being socially valued, and unpaid work which is discretionary and valued.

**Conclusion**

This approach to the conceptualization of unpaid work, highlights three outstanding features: the work is in some sense coerced, the work that is undertaken is elsewhere in the economy 'paid work' and that participation in unpaid work reflects historically specific patterns of social inequality. Within these parameters unpaid work may take an enormous variety of forms – from highly structured, time-specific training programs to the more autonomous, multi-tasking of a wife/mother.

Several points need emphasis in this conceptualization of unpaid work. First, some aspect of coercion or compulsion or requirement appears core to concerns about unpaid work. Unpaid work, even some volunteer work, is work without pay that one is required to do and work that cannot be left to others. Within this sense of requirement, the actual experience of work may be completely varied and somewhat idiosyncratic, with some elements considered very enjoyable, rewarding and/or educational and fulfilling and some participants extending the boundaries of their 'work'. Other forms of unpaid work – unpaid internships and the 'endless' workday – may be experienced as

oppressive, exploitative and a breach of the social contract that recognizes basic human needs.

The 'obligatory' elements are not only implied in the analysis but are also reflected in patterns of power and subordination. Women, youth, seniors, immigrants, visible minorities, the poor and those who combine these various identities are all heavily implicated in the construction of 'unpaid employment'. Upper-class men (and women) may engage in unpaid work (for example, volunteering to participate in a charitable event or serving on the board of a university) but the notion of coercion (outside of the generally discounted notion of *noblesse oblige*) is not generally understood to enter into these activities. Framed more broadly, this coerced approach to unpaid work likely reflects international power variations (Souza-Poza and Henneberger, 2002). Countries with relatively higher GDP per capita, with strong organized labour movements and enjoying relative affluence are likely to be characterized by lower over-all rates of unpaid work.

Secondly, the 'work' identified is work which in other or the same contexts in the same economy is generally compensated or paid. This feature is increasingly self-evident with domestic labour as increasing numbers of tasks are commodified or contracted out. From child-care, housecleaning to lawn care and small household maintenance jobs, there is little that is routinely performed without pay in many households that is not elsewhere undertaken for pay.

Thirdly, by focussing on the coercive component in unpaid work not only is this approach a direct descendent of the original feminist discussion, but it is suggestive of a whole range of further research into unpaid work. The relationship between women's unpaid caregiving in the paid workplace and in the home would be a strategic point for research. Similarly, the use of grandparents and teens, especially in minority, immigrant and/or poor communities, to provide unpaid domestic help is another promising avenue for exploration. Clearly those with the least economic, social and political power are the most subject to some form of coercion into unpaid work.

Fourthly, this approach to unpaid work is completely compatible with an historical/materialist approach to work. Clearly unpaid work is situated in relations of ruling. Ideologies which rationalize unpaid work – as rehabilitation, education, training or labours of love – can be seen as rooted in contemporary power relations and reflecting particular class, gender, age, and racial/immigrant status patterns of inequality. Changes in these patterns or their constellations are

likely to be reflected in changes in both the ideologies and patterns of unpaid work they support. The aging of the population, for example, in the context of youth unemployment are likely to be reflected in increased demands that seniors exit their paying jobs and, instead, donate or volunteer their time. This is already apparent, for example, in terms of growing numbers of women retiring from paid employment in order to care for their aging relatives–relatives who have been essentially abandoned by the state.

Finally, as clear from the above discussion, this approach to unpaid work situates the work directly in terms of its ties to the state and the economy, both nationally and globally. As the second wave feminists pointed out, women's unpaid work kept the capitalist economy functioning while providing a reserve army of labour. In many countries, this pattern persists. In North America and Europe (notably Spain, Italy, Greece and Portugal), that reserve army of labour has in many respects been deployed and to some degree replaced by unemployed youth and students, immigrants and seniors. For many, underpaid work and unpaid work in the guise of training, education as well as 'volunteer' activities serve to occupy these men and women while maintaining their status in the wings of the labour market.

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