

The Feminised Labour of Care – Social Reproduction under Capitalism

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We are now going to turn our attention specifically to Aotearoa and consider how work was organised before this land was colonised by pākeha, how women and their work were valued and how all this changed once capitalism and other Western frameworks were imposed upon tangata whenua. I'd like to acknowledge that I am not Māori myself, some of you in this room may have more knowledge than me on this topic so please feel free to contribute your thoughts later on. The information I'll be presenting is largely drawn from Ani Mikaere's book *He Rukuruku Whakaaro/Colonising Myths -- Māori Realities* and Rangimarie Rose Pere's book *Ako: Concepts and Learning in the Māori Tradition*.

Before colonisation, Māori society was based on the collective not the individual. This was driven by the principle of whanaungatanga, the interrelationship of all living things, and balance. Tikanga asserts that each person is tapu, that they have intrinsic value. All tangata whenua are connected through whakapapa to Papatūānuku and Ranginui, the female and male counterparts whose sexual and spiritual union created the foundations of the earth. Whakapapa connects each person to other members of their whānau, hapū, iwi and other Māori; to generations past, present and future. It is the responsibility of the collective to ensure that each of its members are looked after to secure the survival of all.

Looking at Māori understandings of how the world was created, or Māori cosmogony, we see sex, reproduction and birth as powerful acts. Women and those who bear children are framed as strong and wise figures. The potency of birth is apparent in the womb symbolism of the movement from Te Kore (the realm of potential being), through to Te Pō (The night or darkness), in which Papatūānuku was conceived and had children with Ranginui, and into Te Ao Mārama (the world of light). Before they were brought into Te Ao Mārama by their children, Papatūānuku and Ranginui's embrace united them as one deity, this was a loving and balanced partnership. It was Papatūānuku who enabled the creation of the first human being, sending her son Tānemahuta to her pubic region, Kurawaka, to collect the red earth from which he formed the first woman, Hineahuone. Tāne and Hineahuone had a daughter, Hinetītama and in time, Hinetītama and Tāne had children of their own. When Hinetītama discovered that Tāne was her own father as well as being the father of her children, she left him for one of the underworlds, Rarohenga, reciting a karakia so he could not follow her. She became Hinenuitēpō and instructed Tāne to take care of their children in life, while she cares for them in death.

The theme of powerful wāhine continues in the stories of Māui. In order for Māui to accomplish his many feats he needed the guidance of kuia. These kuia held sacred knowledge and had supernatural abilities, they recognised that Māui was worthy of learning from them and that his resulting achievements would benefit their own human descendants. However, they placed limitations on what their knowledge could be used for. When Māui attempted to reverse the process of birth by crawling up Hinenuitepō's vagina, instead of being given the gift of immortality which he desired, he was given the gift of death and crawled into Rarohenga.

Through this brief overview of some aspects of Māori cosmogony we can see the collective nature of Māori society and deep respect that is held for women. This will help ground our understanding of the way that work is traditionally organised by tangata whenua.

The concept of ohaoha refers to the production, distribution and consumption of goods. Before contact, the economy was based on a system of exchanging gifts rather than exchanging money for goods and services. However, for the most part, whānau produced everything they needed to survive themselves. They were responsible for growing, hunting and gathering food, constructing the buildings they lived in and making tools and clothing. Whānau were often comprised of three to four generations of people connected by a shared whakapapa and were much broader groups than the nuclear family unit that was imposed after colonisation. Most property and food resources were held collectively by the community and shared.

Rangimarie Rose Pere of Ngati Kahungunu and Tuhoe Potiki, whose work I am drawing on for this segment, grew up on an ancestral block of land, Ohiwa, near Waikaremoana. In their community, there were no rigid divisions of work according to gender, except for dangerous tasks such as felling trees or deep-sea fishing which traditionally were predominantly done by men. Where it differed, men and women's work was seen as complementary. As was customary in their whānau, adults and children of all genders worked alongside each other, allowing the different generations to learn from one another. Men and women were expected to complement, respect and support each other to maintain the wellbeing of the group.

Pere's writing about ohaoha is grounded in the knowledge passed down from her tūpuna and relates specifically to her hapū, however, she does not claim that this more balanced organisation of work was at all unusual for other Māori communities. When we look at tikanga and Māori cosmogony, it makes a lot of sense that work would be organised in this way.

In traditional Māori communities, parenting was seen to be the responsibility of the whole whānau. This meant the natural parents of a child could continue to participate in all other aspects of their community. The older generations had the most important role in raising and teaching the young. Across a child's parent's generation, all the women were referred to as "whaea" or mother and the men as "matua" or father. Grandfathers and fathers would participate in childcare to the same extent as grandmothers and mothers.

The collective nature of these communities also protected women from sexual and other forms of assault. Rather than being seen as possessions to be transferred from father to husband through marriage, as was the case in Pākehā society, women always retained their identity and remained connected to and supported by their whānau. If a woman chose to live with her partner's whānau, they had a duty to ensure her safety and wellbeing. Sexual assault could result in death for the perpetrator or complete ostracisation by the community. The lack of boundaries between public and private spheres also ensured the safety of women, couples were not isolated and frequent interaction with other members of the community allowed ongoing awareness, support and intervention if required.

The sharing of childcare across the wider community meant that women who were mothers were free to pursue other callings. Women, like the kuia in the stories of Māui, held an important position as keepers of knowledge, responsible for maintaining and passing on iwi history through waiata, pepeha and whakataukī. They were leaders in the military, political and spiritual spheres. Women were also primarily responsible for performing whakanoa rituals which lifted the restrictions of tapu, an enormously powerful role which requires great mana. They also performed the role of spiritually protecting men on the marae-atea through karanga.

Though it is clear that Māori women have never stopped being leaders, mothers, keepers of knowledge and spiritual protectors, colonisation forced many of them into unpaid domestic work. Pākehā warped Māori cosmogony and tikanga and the respect for wāhine ingrained within it. The social structures of whānau, hapū and iwi were dismantled through the seizure of land, population decline due to war and introduced diseases and the imposition of Christianity, patriarchy and capitalism. Māori could no longer sustain themselves off the land and were forced to split into nuclear families and migrate to urban centres in search of work. Rather than being supported by their whānau, many women became dependent on men's wages for their survival. The work of social reproduction which had once been shared across the whole community was now expected to be performed by women in the isolation of the home. Due to the poverty many Māori were now living in, women were often required to work for wages as well, this multiplication of labour is known as the double shift.

We will find echoes of these methods of dispossession as we begin to look at primitive accumulation in Europe, the process that brought about the conditions that enabled capitalism to take root. In the colonisation of Aotearoa, the introduction of patriarchy divided Māori and weakened their resistance. As we will soon see, a similar method was used in Europe. We are now going to take a step even further back in time to the end of the Middle Ages to help us understand the model of work that was imposed on tangata whenua, one that was hierarchically divided according to gender. How was this model shaped historically and why? For this section I will be drawing on the work of marxist feminist scholar Silvia Federici.

In the feudal society of the Middle Ages, there were two main classes of people: lords and serfs, also referred to as peasants. Serfs were given a small plot of land in exchange for working for the nobility, which they could use to grow food and keep animals to support themselves. This arrangement was predominant instead of the exchange of money for wages, rent and taxes. Serfs and their possessions were owned by the lords. Serfs were bonded to the lords and every aspect of their lives was determined by them. As well as these plots of land, peasants also had access to the commons, these were meadows, forests and lakes which provided people with wood, food that could be foraged and hunted and pastures to graze their animals on. As well as these important resources, which were essential for the survival of many, the commons had a significant social function as spaces where people could gather, make decisions collectively, work together and hold festivals and games. These spaces were particularly important for women because they had less access to land and less social power. The commons were necessary for their subsistence as well as being a social centre where they could exchange news and knowledge and form their opinions separately from men.

In feudal society, there was no division between work which produced goods and social reproduction, both kinds of work were valued equally. Land was usually given to the family unit as a whole, families worked to support themselves off this land, producing what was needed for their survival. Having access to land meant that women were not so dependent on men for their subsistence. Women worked in the fields and tended to animals on the commons as well as washing, spinning, cooking and raising children. Where work was divided according to gender it was often done collectively rather than in isolation, this meant that it could be a source of solidarity and strength for women. Though men and women were not treated as equals at this time, we do not yet see the hierarchical division of work that was to become prevalent later.

Having access to land gave peasants a degree of self-determination that enabled them to revolt. During conflicts with the lords, serfs could hold their own without

fear of starvation. Lords would not often remove serfs from the land as it was difficult to find new workers and peasants often resisted as a collective. This operated on a political and ideological level as peasants came to see the land they lived on as belonging to them unconditionally. Peasants began to oppose the labour services that they were required to perform in exchange for their land as well as resisting the taxes and burdens imposed by the nobility. One of the outcomes of these revolts was the commutation or conversion of labour services to money payments for rent and taxes.

By the 15th century the peasant rebellions had become all out wars, involving entire regions and armed struggles that aimed to dismantle the rule of the nobility. This had much to do with the Black Death or the bubonic plague which killed between 30% and 40% of the European population. This dramatic population decline flipped the power balance between the nobility and the peasantry. Social discipline disintegrated under the fear of death. Workers were scarce and land was plentiful, the peasantry could no longer be suppressed by the threat of removal from their land, now they had the upper hand, threatening to deprive the nobility of workers by moving elsewhere for better conditions. Refusal of rent and labour services and the payment of taxes became collectivised, sometimes involving entire villages. Wages dramatically increased across Europe and the difference between male and female wages was significantly reduced. People insisted on working less hours, would only hire themselves out for specific tasks and demanded other benefits such as being fed by their employers and being paid for coming to and from work. The nobility were also shocked by their new fondness for flamboyant clothing! Though the rebellions were brutally defeated by the state, they brought about the end of land bondage, with serfs becoming free farmers who would only work for a substantial fee.

All of this is important because it helps us see that capitalism was not a harmonious linear development from feudalism but a violent counter-revolution. The development of capitalism was not inevitable, the growing power of the working class at this time shows us that things could have gone a different way. The ruling classes were desperate to retain their power in the face of a formidable revolt and set in motion a series of attacks which would enable them to exploit new workers, increase the amount of work that could be extracted from people and create divisions within the working class that would destroy its resistance to this offensive. A fundamental part of this was the dispossession of people from the land, their means of survival. Land enclosures were accompanied by social enclosures as social reproduction was moved from public spaces into the home where this role was performed in isolation by women. Women were stripped of their control over biological reproduction and faced the extensive devaluation of their labour, making their bodies available as sites for producing new workers and forcing them into unpaid domestic work.

The unrelenting disciplining of women in Europe, primarily through the witch-hunts in the 16th and 17th centuries, was a fundamental means by which social and economic relations were transformed and capitalism was able to be imposed. In the torturing and execution of hundreds of thousands of women under the conviction of witchcraft, women's resistance to capitalism was extinguished while growing male supremacy and fear of women broke class solidarity. The witch-hunts enabled the ruling classes to eradicate certain behaviours and practices that threatened the new social and economic order.

In England, land privatisation occurred through what are known as the "Enclosures". The "Enclosures" refer to the methods by which lords and wealthy farmers alienated communal land and acquired more property. This was achieved through the fencing off of the commons and the elimination of the cooperative open-field system of agriculture. The enclosures dismantled the collective nature of feudal society, forced people who could no longer sustain themselves off the land into wage labour and created an increasing number of vagabonds who moved around looking for work. The physical enclosure of land was accompanied by a social enclosure, with the regulation and banning of collective social and sexual activities.

The enclosures were strongly resisted by the peasantry, with a significant number of women participating in and leading these struggles. The introduction of the market-economy, where people had to work to buy the food they had once grown, caused wages to drop, the gender pay gap to increase significantly and the price of food to rise. Widespread starvation meant that struggles came to be centred around food, with women often leading these uprisings. Around the same time, at the end of the 16th and beginning of the 17th century, the witch-hunts intensified. The ruling classes' fear of organised revolt manifested in the prosecutor's fixation on the Witches Sabbat: a nocturnal gathering that involved subversive sexual behaviour and feasting, while also invoking a rebellious political meeting. Poor peasant women who relied on public assistance or begging for their survival were the main targets of the witch-hunts, often accused by the wealthy and powerful. The witch-hunts constituted an attack on the poor, who the ruling classes greatly feared at this time, with the aim dismantling their opposition to capitalism by repressing women.

The shift from an economy based on subsistence to one based on money had disastrous consequences for women. Where producing goods and reproducing people had previously been intertwined and equally valued, the new monetary economy saw the production of goods to sell as creating value and domestic labour as valueless and not real work. This is where these activities came to be hierarchically divided according to gender. With the eradication of collective social reproduction which had previously taken place on shared land, women became "the new commons", their work and their bodies came to be seen as communal goods.

Social reproduction was disguised as a natural process existing outside of the economy and as work that women were biologically predisposed to performing. At the same time that people began to be dependent on wage labour for their survival, women were being increasingly excluded from the waged workforce, making them reliant on men.

Dispossession did not end with the land enclosures and social enclosures, it was accompanied by the enclosure of women's bodies and a brutal campaign to control women's reproduction. During the time of the witch-hunts, women were redefined as being emotionally and sexually unrestrained, lacking in self-control and rebellious. Alongside this, we also see the development of a new ideology that saw the wealth of a nation as determined by its number of workers. In order to control women's behaviour and harness their labour and biological reproduction, new laws and forms of torture were established. Severe punishments were introduced for the practices of contraception, abortion and infanticide as well as for prostitution, birth out of wedlock and adultery. Sexual perversion and reproductive crimes featured heavily in the witch trials: witches were accused of bestiality, sacrificing children to the devil and making potions with their flesh, causing abortions and destroying the reproductive capacities of people and animals. There were even reports that witches stole men's penises and kept them as pets! The witch-hunts sought to eliminate female practices of healing and sorcery, which were a threat to the new work discipline and undermined the power of the state. Significantly, these practices also encompassed knowledge of contraception and reproduction which needed to be erased in order to bind women to producing new workers. Midwives were targeted through witch-hunting and were displaced by male doctors. The community of women that had previously overseen the process of birth were removed from the delivery room and midwives were forced to surveil women for reproductive crimes. Women's sexuality came to be viewed with fear and disgust and through these disciplining processes was harnessed as reproductive labour that would serve men and the state.