THEME SECTION Generating dependence: New configurations of gender, kinship, and labor

Battlegrounds of dependence Reconfiguring labor, kinship and relational obligation

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Abstract: Interdependence is a fundamental characteristic of human existence. The way in which certain dependencies are acknowledged as opposed to those that are hidden, or the ways in which some are validated while others are denigrated, is central to how social inequalities are reproduced and recreated. In this introduction we explore how particular dependencies are categorized, separated, and made visible or invisible as part of their performative effect. In particular, we explore the distinction between wage labor and kinship as two forms of relatedness that are often separated in terms of the (in)dependence that they are seen to embody. Even though they are practically entangled, their conceptual separation remains important. These conceptual separations are central to how gender difference is imagined and constituted globally.

Keywords: dependence, gender, inequality, kinship, wage labor

In the spring of 2020, the COVID-19 disease overturned everyday life across the world. As the virus spread to every corner of the globe, governments took measures that were unparalleled in modern history. One effect of the virus was to make dramatically visible relations of human interdependence across multiple scales and reconfigure ongoing debates about how to interpret and morally evaluate them. From the outset, the COVID-19 outbreak provided both an instance and an illustration of the shifting fault lines of globalized capitalism and the intense interdependence of lives and livelihoods throughout the world. Within weeks of the outbreak, stock markets plummeted, international travel came to a grinding halt, and rates of unemployment soared.

During the first months of the pandemic, governments across the industrialized world divided workforces in two. On the one hand, white-collar professionals were required to stay at home to prevent the spread of the virus. On the other, "essential" or "key" workers—including care workers, cleaners, food producers, delivery workers,



transporters, and other blue-collar employees were compelled to keep working, both to support themselves and to prevent societies from collapsing. Citizens across many parts of the world gathered on balconies to applaud these workers upon whom, it was now recognized, our collective well-being depended, and toward whom, therefore, the national "we" were obliged. Governments often expressed this collective dependence on the working class in morally optimistic, nationally inclusive idioms, as flags waved from balconies and political leaders emerged from their homes and offices to applaud.

The sudden visibility and ensuing appreciation of these long-existing relations of dependence highlight the core concern of this special issue, namely the contingency of who or what gets to be described as "dependent" upon shifting social, economic, and political conditions. As the case of COVID-19 forcefully illustrates, a pandemic and the politics it provokes can reconfigure our understanding of who is "dependent" upon whom and the moral implications of this recognition. In one moment, grocery store workers can be considered redundant economic agents, in another, they are part of the human infrastructure upon which we all "depend," with warm appreciation. Debates about dependence always entail debates about control and obligation. To speak of one's dependence on healthcare workers is to recognize the limits of one's agency, one's independence, and the contingency of one's own life upon forces beyond one's own control.

Yet, just as shifting political or epidemiological conditions may visibilize certain ties of dependence, others remain invisible or relegated to the shadows. At the time of writing, the recognition of North American and European societal reliance on blue-collar workers is limited to certain workers within a nation: supermarket shelf stackers, truck drivers, and healthcare workers. Although the global interconnections on which we depend are sometimes implicitly acknowledged (as in UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson's acknowledgment of the "migrant" healthcare workers who saved his life after being hospitalized with COVID-19), the increased awareness of reliance on certain categories of workers is still largely limited to those located *within* national or regional borders.

Recent anthropological discussions of dependence (Ferguson 2013, 2015; Li 2010), while rightly drawing attention to the growth of "surplus populations" in some parts of the world deemed irrelevant from the perspective of capital accumulation, have led some to erroneously conclude that we are transitioning to a "post-labor" economy. The dependence of almost all humans, especially those in North America and Europe, on global supply chains and on the largest global working class in human history, however, contradicts the notion that "the end of work" is on the horizon. One could imagine alternative crises that bring other dependencies into broad daylight. If the Chinese workers who produce the computers that European professionals need to maintain their home offices were blocked from getting to factories or the Filipino ship workers who move goods across the oceans could no longer keep the supply chains flowing, it would be impossible to overlook our collective dependence upon these global networks of working activity.

Much as "dependency theory" exposed the lie of global modernization through "development" half a century earlier, so current worries about "jobless growth" and workplace automation exposes the teleological fantasy that the expansion of a wage labor economy will provide the mechanism for creating "independent" adult citizens across the world in the image of the European or North American postwar wage laborer. Rather than either moving to a "post-labor" world or toward a world in which wage labor provides the basis for independent personhood, the current global situation is the latest stage of the continual reconfiguration of relations of production and circulation, mutual obligation, and interdependence.

Labor and kinship

The articles in this collection ethnographically investigate the processes by which the dependencies that structure the global political economy are rendered visible or invisible. These processes involve forms of relational obligation that transcend the "economic" as conventionally understood. "Kinship" is one of the key idioms through which such relational obligations and responsibilities are allocated. As an idiom it is often contrasted with wage labor. While wage labor is often characterized as a means of adult independence from both kin and society (in the form of the state), kinship is frequently viewed as entailing enduring (inter)dependencies within and between generations. The articles in this collection demonstrate that in practice these two idioms of relational obligation are highly entangled. This does not mean, however, that their idiomatic or analytical separation is illusory or unimportant. The conceptual distinction between wage labor and kinship is central to contestations over obligation and dependence, as illustrated in the battles over the nature of employment between white business owners and black workers detailed in Lotte Danielsen's account in this issue of postapartheid South Africa. This tendency for wage labor relations to be structured in terms of kinship idioms and relations from which they are often conceptually separated is found across a wide range of contexts. It can be seen, for example, in the work of Geoff Dench et al. in the postwar East End of London (2006), where kinship relations outside of the factory were used a key means of recruitment to the labor force. The use of kinship as means of recruitment strengthened industrial labor discipline as elder men would be held responsible for the behavior of the younger family members they recommended, thus extending the discipline of the workplace outside into the home and the community (e.g., Dench et al. 2006: 123 - 125).

Battles over the extent to which kin are responsible for each other or should be independent of each other are neither separate from nor mere outcomes of the operations of a global political economy and national welfare regimes. As access to wage labor diminished in austerityridden southern Europe, for example, people were thrown back upon forms of kinship interdependence that they would otherwise have wished to avoid. Susana Narotzky's article in this issue demonstrates the particular importance of the reshaping of intergenerational interdependencies, as changes in the wage labor market force adults into extended periods of dependence upon their aging parents. Likewise, in the United Kingdom, changes in welfare provision seem to enforce new forms of intergenerational interdependence upon some welfare recipients, again illustrating the ways in which welfare, wage labor and kinship relations remain intertwined (see the article by Katherine Smith in this issue). Related processes are occurring in South Africa, where massive loss of jobs in mining sectors of the economy have pushed black workers into more "kin-like," domestic forms of employment as house workers, cleaners, gardeners. These are forms of wage labor that many employees reject as overly paternalistic (see Danielsen's article in this issue). These examples show that even as we are skeptical of the proposition that wage labor is the basis of an independent personhood that people everywhere and at all times desire, it is often perceived as providing the means of freedom from onerous kinship obligations. This is the case in Cuba, where in recent years, hundreds of thousands of citizens have moved into new forms of legalized labor in the island's growing private sector. People's access to formal labor and income enables them to cultivate a sense of personal autonomy, an image of being "cut off" from the social fabric (see the article by Ståle Wig in this issue).

The rendering of kinship as invisible in capitalist political economy can be traced, in part, to theories of modernity that anthropology inherited from nineteenth-century social evolutionary theorists such as Morgan whose ideas were taken up by Marx and Engels (Engels 1972). The centrality of kinship to anthropological studies of "premodern," stateless societies was the other side of the coin of sociological theories that kinship had become restricted to the domestic domain of nurturing and child-rearing in modern society. The conviction that kinship no longer played a central role in capitalist-industrial society may in part be explained by the historical context in which Western social science operated in the mid-twentieth century. The period between the end of World War I in 1918 and the collapse of the post-World War II mixed economy consensus in the late 1970s was the only period in human history in which inherited wealth inequality lessened in Europe and North America (Piketty 2014). It is understandable that in this context the argument that kinship was declining in importance made sense as people became more dependent upon salaries that were allegedly the result of a meritocratic competition (Yanagisako 2019). It is also understandable that, more recently, kinship would return to the forefront of attention, as scholars such as Piketty (2014) documented the primary importance of inherited wealth in the structure of inequality in advanced, capitalist societies.

Recent anthropological scholarship (e.g., Mc-Kinnon and Cannell 2013) has shown that kinship not only plays a powerful role in contemporary societies but also that wage labor relies on kinship to provide the excess meaning and resources crucial to continuity of the work relation over time (Bear 2015). These revelations of the hidden dependence of wage labor on kinship shatters the illusion of its independence from other social relations. Just as much of private enterprise and the reproduction of social class depends on kinship for inherited capital, so wage labor relies on a hidden dependence on kinship.

Kinship, the state, and gender

Just as the "free market" is dependent on the state, so wage labor is dependent on the state for a welfare safety net without which it becomes precarious. It is therefore no accident that the concept of "dependence," which is so intimately linked to the relationship between wage labor, kinship, and state welfare, has also taken an increasingly prominent role in anthropological discussions in recent years (Ferguson 2013; Martin and Yanagisako 2020; Vigh 2019).

This collection of articles carves out an analytical pathway that draws on these critical observations. To understand why certain actors are described as "dependent" and others as "independent," we need to pay attention to the interrelations between domains that are often considered separately, in particular wage labor, state regulation, and kinship. It is at the intersection of these domains that the local "battles" over dependence take place. Again, the COVID-19 crisis provides a case in point. As schools were closed during the pandemic lockdown, governments temporarily gave the responsibility of child education back to the nuclear family, thus shifting the duty of care from the state to kinship, and in particular women. This, however, had implications for other forms of relational obligation, in particular wage labor. A large part of the desire of European governments to reopen schools at the time of writing is driven by the concern that those parents who are now homeschooling are no longer available for economic production. As the state sought to revamp wage labor activity, it then reassumed its role as educator, illustrating how state regulation, wage labor, and kinship are triangulated idioms for the organization of relational obligation and the reproduction of persons and economic value.

The process of allocating and limiting relational obligations through such conceptual separations inevitably produces highly gendered interdependencies, as a number of classical ethnographic accounts of "traditional" kinship systems observed throughout much of the twentieth century. But more than this, the ascription of dependence or independence, through conscious or unconscious processes that make particular dependencies visible (such as the stigmatization of welfare recipients) or invisible (such as the dependence of wage labor on kinship) is itself a central part of how responsibilities and obligations are allocated and organized in a hierarchy of value. What the articles in this collection share, despite the wide range of settings and ethnographic subject matter they cover, is attention to the processes by which dependence is allocated to particular groups of people in ways that both build upon and restructure assumptions concerning the gendered nature of kinship and its obligations.

Contemporary concerns around dependence build upon well-established lines of anthropological inquiry. In addition to postwar "dependency theory," which drew attention to structural inequalities between the North and South as parts of a global system, Marxist and feminist scholarship have long questioned the taken-for-granted nature of distinctions between home and work, domestic and public, productive and unproductive, women and men-and the ways in which such distinctions are implicated with related distinctions between dependent and independent persons (e.g., Fraser and Gordon 1994; Harris and Young 1981; McKinnon and Cannell 2013; Strathern 1988). Ascriptions of dependence are always built upon strongly gendered distinctions and practices, such as the differentiation between "wage labor" and "domestic labor," where the (often male) participant in the former practice is considered "independent" while the latter remains their "dependents." Such ascriptions rhetorically separate those who are seen to produce their own independence out of relational entanglements and those who are seen to sustain or be trapped by entanglements such as kinship.

Today we are arguably entering a period in which ascriptions of dependency, wage labor, and kinship are likely to be radically redrawn. Shifts in the labor force and technology have led some analysts to call into question the viability of wage labor as the primary means of support for populations around the world (Ferguson and Li 2018). This entails different dynamics in different locations. For example changing expectations of wage labor have played out differently in parts of Eastern Europe following the collapse of the Soviet system than they have in parts of Western Europe. In both cases, however, it has resulted in increasing pressure on past associations between productive labor and personal independence. This is illustrated by the global rise of campaigns for basic income grants that are decoupled from participation in the labor market (see Ferguson 2015; Weeks 2011).

We know historically that such shifts always entail shifting assumptions about the gendered nature of dependence. So, for example, the war on welfare dependency that was so central to the emerging neoliberal consensus in the United States and United Kingdom in the 1980s was built around particular gendered figures, such as the single mother whose rejection of legitimate dependence on a male breadwinner left her rhetorically constructed as choosing to be illegitimately dependent upon the state (e.g., Skeggs 2004).

The decline in wage labor today might present us with new and unfamiliar types of gendered ascriptions of legitimate and illegitimate (in)dependence. Ferguson argues that the common association between "productive" labor and full (male) citizenship is increasingly untenable, leading to the reemergence of a moral panic concerning welfare "dependence" and "surplus populations" dating back to the time of Malthus (1986 [1798]). Kinship is often put forward by political leaders and advisers as the prop upon which the poor-that is, those who cannot be supported by state welfare or wage labor-should depend. This is seen clearly in the work of the British sociologist Michael Young. Young was one of the architects of the postwar welfare state, being a co-author of the 1945 Labour Party election manifesto. Yet in his later work, he became increasingly skeptical that claims of individual entitlement to state benefit were unsustainable and worked to undercut the kin-based community networks that he had cataloged as being at the heart of working-class life in his classic work Family and Kinship in East London (Wilmott and Young 1957). By the end of his life, he was openly attacking the way in which he considered that universal benefits undermined the old "mutualist morality" of welfare within working-class communities that had been, "based on the needs and efforts of families, not just individuals" (Dench et al. 2006: 207). This move away from using kin as the first source of support in times of need and toward letting individuals rely on state benefits was seen by Young and his co-authors as meaning

that the "dignity has been taken out of citizenship. Dependency is encouraged, the principle of reciprocity has gone" (Dench et al. 2006: 209). In contrast to any assumption that kinship is simply relegated to the private sphere by modernizing processes, the empirical evidence might suggest that kinship, wage labor, and state support ebb and flow in their relative importance in sustaining livelihoods and that kinship support can go from being seen as a problematic barrier to economic development to being seen as an indispensable social support within which wage labor-based forms of economic development have to be embedded.

This means that changes in the economic relations of "production" also simultaneously imply changes in the relations of "reproduction" that are often considered to be part of the realm of kinship (Yanagisako 2002). These changes are often experienced by many as the shift from particular configurations of relational dependence to new forms of gendered independence or dependence. For example, the rise of male wage labor in many parts of the world throughout the twentieth century, such as the plantation economies of the South Pacific or mining and industry in Southern Africa, led to a renegotiation of kinship obligations and a sense that customary authority was being undermined by young men whose wages no longer made them dependent upon elders. Today, in many parts of the world, it is young women (such as women from the Philippines or Eastern Europe who move to Western Europe or North America to work as domestic labor) who depart for long periods of time, producing new reconfigurations of kinship and gender identities to be ethnographically analyzed (e.g., Fedyuk 2016; Muehlebach 2012; Tacoli 1999).

The notion that a state of independence is morally validated, while dependency is horror, has been central to much modern Western political theory from Hobbes to more recent theorists who, despite their disagreements, share the desire for an "erasure of dependency" as Sullivan-Dunbar (2017: 35) describes for the libertarian philosopher Robert Nozick. This is a position that Kittay (2002: 168) also describes as fundamental for Nozick's communitarian rival Rawls, and that is also the basis for the genderblind ontological individualism that unites their otherwise-opposed perspectives (see also Bird 1999). The critique of the assumptions of "dependence" underpinning this liberal individualism and the ways in which they politically marginalize subaltern populations also have a long history (e.g., Macpherson 1962; Sullivan 1982). Feminist theory, which has sought to draw attention to the ambiguous ways in which ascriptions of dependence were gendered, has been a central component of this critique, which includes the work of feminist scholars who drew attention to the role of ascriptions of gendered dependence in the construction of the postwar welfare state in the United Kingdom (e.g., Daly 1994) or problematized the productive/domestic labor distinction (James 1994).

Feminist scholarship more generally has debated the extent to which the liberal conception of the independent modern political subject is inherently androcentric (e.g., Schwartzman 2006) or the extent to which it is potentially compatible with feminist perspectives that take gender inequality into account (e.g., Nash 1997; Nussbaum 1997). This debate has continued into the current century, most notably with the strong focus on gendered aspects of dependency in the volume *The Subject of Care: Feminist Perspectives on Dependency*, edited by Feder and Kittay (2002).

Articles

All the articles in this collection address this configuration between kinship, wage labor, state regulation, and provision of care. The detailed case studies show how various gendered ascriptions of (in)dependence come in and out of view as a result of the use of these different idioms to extend or limit relational obligations.

Holly Wardlow's article maps the effects of debates around personal dependence and autonomy concerning women receiving treatment

for HIV in Papua New Guinea (PNG). As Wardlow observes, access to antiretroviral medicine ties PNG into global webs of political economic dependence upon wealthier donor nations. Her analysis observes how wealthier economic actors from the Global North are in part motivated by a fear that more HIV survivors will intensify the problem of "dependence" as large populations are physically debilitated to the point that they can no longer provide the cheap labor and, rather, demand long-term care. At the village level in PNG, allegations of dependence haunt a new generation of HIV survivors who face angry denunciations and stigmatization from friends and relatives who claim they have made themselves economically dependent upon kin by virtue of contracting a debilitating disease that no longer kills them. This becomes the basis for what Wardlow describes as "a demotion from full personhood."

Being cast as illegitimately dependent has long been described as the basis for such a demotion in liberal political theory. As Macpherson (1962) famously describes for adult men in early modern England, social norms considered "dependence on other men" through wage employment to disqualify a man from full citizenship. For the PNG women in Wardlow's article, full personhood is seen more as the achievement of the correct gendered position in a web of reciprocal obligations that are largely organized through kinship, as opposed to independence from such obligations as is the case for Macpherson's "possessive individual." By being cast as being unable to contribute their part to the web of interdependencies as a result of their own misguided actions, villagers cast them as illegitimately dependent upon kin in a one-way manner. The women themselves challenge such perspectives, by pointing to a lack of care from the state, which only sporadically provides required medicines. Fighting their battle against these ascriptions of dependence, the women also highlight their continuing contribution to household economies and point to how their kin's earlier lack of care are at least in part responsible for their debilitating illness.

Susana Narotzky's article deals with the intergenerational issues of transmission of wealth and obligation through kinship networks in the context of neoliberal austerity and economic restructuring in southern Europe. A process of political economic restructuring creates new possibilities and challenges when it comes to framing who is dependent upon who; an ongoing series of contests that are themselves fundamental to the trajectory of these processes of economic restructuring. The removal of secure employment has produced a generation that is in a "precarious" position, compared to their parents and grandparents. Although kinship networks have often been central to granting the kinds of secure employment that Narotzky describes as rapidly disappearing, the wage that they provided often also provided the basis for the subsequent economic independence of those who were able to secure it. This state of affairs has left those unable to find work also unable to claim a valorized state of independence; forcing them instead into an ongoing and one-way reliance on their parents well into adulthood. When wage labor fails to provide a means of self-reliance and the state abrogates a sense of responsibility for economic well-being, kinship steps in as a means of support. Narotzky calls this situation a "Janus-faced conundrum" in which the ideological push toward individual responsibility for one's own well-being makes people question their self-worth, as austerity politics forces them to recourse to kinship and state benefits to make a living.

Katherine Smith's article examines the introduction of a new form of state welfare payment in the United Kingdom, whose avowed intention is to socially engineer their recipients out of "dependence," as explicitly flagged up in their title, the "Personal Independence Payment" (PIP). Smith explores how different ascriptions of dependence are played off against each other in different contexts in the life of welfare recipients. For example, the rhetorical construction of welfare recipients as illegitimate dependents on the state acts as precursor to removing support or making its provision ever more condi-

tional. In turn, these changes throw people ever more closely upon community and kin-based interdependencies, thus thwarting the kind of construction of upwardly mobile independent living through training and wage labor that the reforms are supposed to encourage. Smith focuses in particular on the relationship of motherhood and how the gendered assumptions of care that underpin that relationship impact the performance and constitution of dependence that sustains and constrains the lives of mother and son alike. As with Narotzky's Spanish example, where a neoliberal reconstruction of wage labor fundamentally reconstructs kinship at the same time, so here does a neoliberal reform of welfare reconstruct kinship networks, and not merely the atomized and responsibilized individual that it is intended to bring into being (see also Shever 2008).

Lotte Danielsen explores a situation in contemporary South Africa that nuances Ferguson's (2013) influential argument concerning "dependence" in the region. In contrast to Ferguson's argument that "dependence" is culturally validated in Southern Africa (in contrast to the Western liberal tradition), Danielsen argues that the black African workers that she conducted research with engage in such relationships out of necessity and seek to avoid them or use them as a means by which their own children can acquire more "independent" existences. She begins her analysis with a description of a protest by black domestic workers in the area that exposes white-owned businesses' reliance on their labor in a manner reminiscent of the way that COVID-19 has exposed capital's reliance on such labor on a global scale. As with the other articles in this collection, gendered idioms of kinship interact with idioms of wage labor in a process of mutual constitution. Employers and employees alike seek to assert or reject that their relationship is purely one of wage labor or is in fact (or should be) considered to be more like a kinship relationship with enduring personal obligations, depending on the needs of the particular context. This is a process that brings different dependencies in and out of vision and is central to the postapartheid reconstruction of the economy in this part of South Africa.

Based on ethnographic research in Havana, Cuba, Ståle Wig's article probes the flipside of dependence, investigating what it takes for men and women to be perceived as agents who are free from social constraints, by cultivating their "imagined individuality." The article's starting point is the ongoing market reforms in Cuba, what state authorities call an "update" of the island's socialist socioeconomic model. Since the first decade of the Cuban revolution, nearly all formal employment was centered in the state sector. However, after the fall of the Soviet Union, the purchasing power of state wages plummeted. Wig analyses how, against this backdrop, the rise of formal labor in the growing private sector inspires hopes of personal independence. Whereas in Spain, economic restructuring through austerity politics has undermined people's ability to assert personal independence, Wig probes the reverse process: how state-driven market reforms, which recognize market entrepreneurs as "workers" and give them a chance to earn better, enable and inspire people to cultivate their sense of personal autonomy.

And yet, even a chest-pounding, self-declared lone wolf will, in certain situations, turn around to rhetorically highlight the opposite, namely their dependence upon kin or friends, as a way to signal their moral obligations. Such maneuvering highlights once more the insight that who or what gets to be described as "dependent" is contingent upon social, economic, and political conditions across multiple scales, be it a pandemic, upending everyday life across the globe, or a singular speech act by a market trader declaring ties of dependence toward an importer, aiming to get a "fair price."

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