

Resilience as interdependence: learning from the care ethics of subsistence practices

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The word resilience has entered into our language through science and as such it is not a word that is easily used in day to day life (Hine, 2013a). From a scientific perspective, it concerns the management of human-nature systems, measuring and understanding the ways in which systems adapt, specifically their capacity to recover or evolve, from a crisis. The term doesn't tell us much about how to think critically of the ethical aspects of our lives. Moreover, as scholars in the field of urban and development studies have pointed out very well, resilience as an urban project can reinforce social and ecological injustices (Allen, 2015). As the geographer Simin Davoudi noted, the unmediated translation of ecological resilience to social contexts has become "highly charged with ideological overtones as it refers to self-reliance, [...] a quintessentially American idea, referring to the ability of people and places to 'pull themselves up by their bootstraps and reinvent themselves in the face of external challenges' (Swanstrom 2008:10)." (Davoudi 2012: 305). In response, this chapter aims to introduce care and social reproduction to our understandings of resilience, this necessitates a shift away from seeing resilience as something concerned with 'self-sufficiency' to one that involves ethical interdependence. By introducing some of the background of feminist work on care, the chapter seeks to highlight the ways that resilient practices require a commitment to social reproduction and mutual interdependency, taking examples of subsistence practices as a point of departure.

'Subsistence' in its dictionary definition is "the action or fact of maintaining or supporting oneself at a minimum level" (OED 2015), but this emphasis on 'minimum' is somewhat misleading. A more critical understanding could follow Maria Mies and Veronika Bennholdt-Thompsen, who point out that it is a different mode of production, namely *a different material organization of daily life* (1999:17-19). While involving 'self-provisioning', Mies and Thompsen explain it goes beyond this to include self-determination, and the 'moral economy' of such a way of life. The history of subsistence practices in Europe which were prevalent until shortly after the second world war they explain, show that: "A well functioning network of neighbourhood-help existed as well as mutual aid, the values of the old peasant 'moral economy' which survived also in cities" (1999: 17). Similarly, Illich resurrected the word 'vernacular' to describe it: "a word that denotes autonomous, non-market-related actions through which people satisfy everyday needs" (1980: 72) and drew on the Roman meaning of vernacular as "sustenance *derived from reciprocity patterns imbedded in every aspect of life*, as distinguished from sustenance that comes from exchange or from vertical distribution." (my emphasis 1980: 71). Traditional subsistence practices are thus a special point of interest here as they counter the idea that self-sufficiency takes place at the level of the household. The examples presented in this chapter aim to illustrate some of the collective and reciprocal dimensions of subsistence practices and highlight that, in producing resilience at a local level, they do so in ways that redistribute resources to counteract socio-economic vulnerability, rather than exacerbating it. Yet significantly, while they each illustrate different forms of social and ecological solidarity, they risk remaining *politically ambiguous* in how they do so. Who is included in a collective? Is 'inclusion' enough? And what dynamics, hierarchies and injustices nevertheless emerge in their informality? In considering how resilient practices might constitute an ethical shift away from the idea that individuals or communities 'should be more resilient' and 'self-reliant' in the face of austerity and crisis, I am interested not only in identifying their mutual and collective aspects, but also concerned to point to their political ambiguity and therefore points of ethical potential in the future.

The chapter then, begins by introducing feminist perspectives on care and social reproduction, before discussing some of the ethical implications and contradictions of the marketization or commercialisation of care and other affective labour or relationships. The chapter then proceeds by looking at examples of non-market, rural subsistence practices to elaborate this form of resilience as interdependence; an interdependence that holds ethical potential but raises certain political tensions.

Acknowledging care and dependency

In 1995 the political theorist Joan Tronto wrote:

“Because the provision of care in human society has almost always proceeded by creating rigid hierarchies (castes, classes) by which some are able to demand the services of others, care has basically been of little interest to those in positions of power. The exclusion of care from politics grows out of an unwillingness to look at care on its own terms.[...] care is a complex process that ultimately *reflects structures of power, economic order, the separation of public and private life and our notions of autonomy and equality.*” (1995: 12) (my emphasis)

Making the question ‘who is caring for who?’ central reveals hierarchies, dependencies and exclusions. Not only are all relationships of dependency spatial, but their spatiality often conceals the dependency and thus ensures their continuing devaluation and exploitation. In the field of architecture, it is perhaps more common to visualise dependency and sustainability in terms of materials and energy, such as researching the provenance of materials, using calculations to understand a material’s embodied energy or its water footprint. We are less apt to consider dependency in social terms. From an urban and architectural perspective, this means considering all who make our cities and regions liveable: teachers, cleaners, youth workers, communities workers, those who grow food and so on. In our current economic mode of organising, we cannot actually maintain the societies in which we live, materially and socially, without acknowledging the interdependencies of care and social reproduction.

Across the disciplines of political science and economics feminists have long argued that the independent ‘subject’ is something of a myth (e.g. Tronto 1994; Feder Kittay 1999; Feder Kittay and Feder 2003) Equally mythical is the idea of cities such as London, being ‘independent’ or capable of being an independent city-state.¹ We are not easily able to acknowledge our dependencies on others in the context of neoliberal ideology and society, and as Richard Sennett noted in our culture dependency has acquired a shameful status (Sennett, 2003: 63-4). In a time that values the ‘self-sufficient’ individual and considers others burdensome, Sennett argues that “the fact of social needs” is denied, as are the ways that “inequalities are inescapable facts of social life.” (ibid: 64).

A number of feminist activists and scholars (for instance Maria Rosa Dalla Costa, Silvia Federici, Leopoldina Fortunati, Maria Mies, Nancy Folbre and many others) have brought care and domestic labour to the fore, challenging not only ideas of dependency, but ideas around the notion of the ‘unproductive’ housewife and the *location* of critical knowledge.² Critiquing the Marxist perspective, they showed the myriad ways that ‘the worker’ and ‘the economy’ are made possible by all the work that is disavowed and undervalued.³ They brought the realm of reproductive labour into political economic analyses and in seeking the valorization of unwaged work, they identified the ways that nurturing

¹ Doreen Massey (2007) dispatched the myth of London’s independence some years ago in her book *World City*.

² American sociologists, Dorothy Smith & Nancy Harstock in particular pointed out that the ‘housewife’ constituted an epistemological standpoint, akin to Marx’s epistemological standpoint of the factory worker. See Smith and Harstock in Harding’s *Feminism and Methodology*.

³ For instance, the worker who has been clothed, fed, educated (e.g. even at the most basic level, such as being toilet trained), socialized, their living conditions cleaned, all by unpaid others.

and of taking care of other living beings and of our environments was productive in the way it creates the material base for life, sustains relationships and produces subjectivities. As Silvia Federici has argued social reproduction is “not only central to capitalist accumulation, but to any form of organization” and therefore “reproductive life and work are at the center of any transformative project” (Federici, 2016). Precisely because it is productive in these ways, making people and relationships, feminists have argued that they constitute a possible site from which transformation can occur. In this sense resilient practices constitute a potential locus for developing neighbourhood level resilience that brings different values, both ethically and economically.

Care and Measure

In considering the values that social reproduction brings, there is something ethically difficult in acknowledging that as a nation the UK buys and imports care, such as social workers, nurses, midwives, cleaners. This import reproduces structural inequalities through the gendered and racial division of work (Gottschlich 2013: 8) and emerges from our dominant economic model and lack of social sustainability, which is displaced to different, poorer regions. The sociologist Arlie Hochschild argued that love and care “have become the new gold” as an imperial form of extraction from poorer regions by richer ones (2005: 41).

Care labour involves concrete physical activities and at the same time involves more intangible qualities, feelings and motivations. Just as the labour of reproductive work is devalued and commonly seen to be ‘outside’ the economy, it is the affective dimensions of care that are also considered to be beyond economies or money, and even antithetical to them. During a seminar together the writer and cultural activist Dougald Hine noted “you might pay me to look after your children [...] but you cannot pay me to *care* about them.” (Hine, 2013b). This is an interesting provocation in the context of what Hochschild called emotional labour. She argued that even when emotions are put to work and managed in capitalist contexts, those feelings are often still genuinely felt to varying extents⁴. Amidst the increasing prevalence of the ‘commercialization of feeling’, Hochschild suggested that in response “as a culture we have begun to place unprecedented value on spontaneous, [...] authentic or ‘natural’ feeling” (2012: 128) and the idealisation of authenticity seems to be at play in the idea that care or love cannot be bought. The idea that if care is ‘authentic’ it will not be as a result of the payment, but of course it may emerge in spite of it.

In the varying imports of care there are nevertheless moral boundaries and physical limits to how much emotional labour can be outsourced before the relations themselves, and the people involved, are damaged. In his work on the gift, Lewis Hyde pointed to similar effects, arguing that if you have something a friend urgently needs and you ask them to pay you for it rather than simply giving it to them, you may have altered and even damaged that friendship (Hyde, 2007: 58-75). A ‘first world’ example Hochschild gives, is of a busy parent who has outsourced the planning of their child’s birthday party. Hochschild relays the child’s dismay upon realising their parent had not make this effort, but had paid someone else to do it (1983: 137). The ethical relations we have involving care bring different economies with different rules, which money and commercialisation are prone to disrupt and undermine.

As Marx famously revealed money, as a representation of value, is thus also representing *a social relation* (Harvey, 2010: 33), and in different ways anthropologists can also teach us about this. In David Graber’s book *Debt*, for example, he recounts the cultural anthropologist Laura Bohannan’s arrival in rural Western Nigeria (Bohannan, 1964, in Graber 2011: 104-5). As a gesture, one of the neighbours offers her three eggs as a gift to welcome her. Unsure as to how to respond, she follows advice from two neighbours who explain that yes, she should give something back (even

⁴ For example, in her case studies of flight attendants, some could not ‘switch off’ their upbeat, smiling persona, while others had to create distance between themselves and their role to protect themselves, from stress, from becoming burned out and so on (2012 [1983]: 18).

money) as acknowledgment and as thanks, but the return gift must not be three eggs nor should it be the exact cost of three eggs, it must be something that is just a little bit more, or just a little bit less. The reason being, is that if things are not quite equal it allows the continuation of exchange. Graeber explains, to give back exactly what she had received would be to annul the relationship (2011: 104-5). An attempt to make it equal, to 'bring it back to zero,' would communicate that you would no longer want anything more to do with this person.

Money, in some contexts achieves the opposite of the gifts in this story, in that its function is precisely to equalize. David Harvey, in his introduction to Marx explains the function of money in capitalist societies and commodity-market exchange very well. As a 'universal equivalent' money is a representation of value, needed for exchange, and at the same time is a medium of its circulation (Harvey, 2010: 56). As a measure, £1 should be worth £1 irrespective of its bearer, and therein lies a quality, its disembedded-ness. When we pay with exact and equal measure, we return the counter to zero and this is what ensures, we are told, individual freedom. Money gives things, which are not equal, the impression that they can be equally measured and suggests that things can be counted. When someone says 'you cannot buy' care, love or friendship, the reference is to the attachments and ethics involved in those practices, with the belief that these feelings and responsibilities exist beyond a monetary economy and are defined as such. Yet while the value of care can be quantified in the sense that there is a price attached to the task that some individuals are willing and able to pay, the primary point is that *when we quantify things we change their qualities*. In the case of care work such as nursing, political scientists have discussed the ways its quality is often undermined by its commoditization, and thus further exacerbates the crisis of care and social reproduction (Gottschlich, 2013: p8). In the case of outsourced domestic work, care is displaced, and a deficit created elsewhere, along a series of chains.

Resilient practices then, need to firstly recognise already existing interdependencies and orient their own organisations and practices to create more ethical relations. And secondly, some of the complexities of ethical relations in monetarised contexts raised above, point to the imperative of organising against the marketization of relationships between people, and between people and the environment. In the creation of a different material organization of daily life, subsistence practices potentially offer another perspective on relations of dependency in non-monetary contexts.

Subsistence practices and ethical interdependence

Ivan Illich once suggested that subsistence labour is intimately connected to our ethical lives. He wrote that "people who live on wages and therefore have no subsistent household, are deprived of the means to provide for their subsistence and feel impotent to offer any subsistence to others" (1980: 6). Illich then recounts an anecdote of a Mexican man who moves to Berlin and is shocked to find a society where no-one shares with those who need it most. In Mexico at that time, he considered that generosity and hospitality would be offered without question. The man finds that in Berlin, compared to those in Mexico, everyone is much richer and more comfortable, but everyone behaves 'as if' they are poor (ibid). For Illich this is the result of dependence on a wage, of not being in control of your own subsistence and therefore of your own future. What Illich does not discuss at this point, but does appear to be ethically significant is rather *the 'common' dimensions of subsistence practices*. These are practices that exist within groups rather than individuals, and their ethics is a cultural aspect of their economies. Examples of the ethical, cultural dimensions of subsistence practices are present in the historical, or traditional forms of commons, as well as in later rural village and peasant life (discussed further below).

Historically in England, commons were spaces for collective subsistence practices and would have involved, for example, the right to gather wood for fire, the right to take fish from a stream, gather nuts, graze animals on common pasture land, grow food for your self and for animals and so on. The work of feminist scholars like Silvia Federici and

historians like Peter Linebaugh help us understand that these practices of the commons were not divided and remunerated differently (Federici, 2004; Linebaugh, 2008; Neeson, 1993), but rather would acknowledge and work with conditions of interdependence, both socially and ecologically. They stress the ways that many of the activities were part of an economy that were also bound up with the relationship to the environment. Linebaugh, describes some of the instances of sharing responsibility, maintaining things collectively such as irrigation and fences. He gives examples of reciprocal exchange: such as by allowing animals to use the pasture they provide manure to fertilise the soil; allowing pigs to roam at certain times meant they fed on acorns, thus removing something poisonous to other animals, and so on (Linebaugh, 2008). The commons was both a collective economy and a democratic system of environmental management, with strict, place-specific rules about what and when things could be done. Practices of taking, were regulated by seasons, and the number of animals in pasture (stint) was regulated by mutual agreement and so on. Commoners could never take too much from the space which is supporting you. The rules were strict, but they were democratically agreed upon annually, or bi-annually by the commoners. They set their rules where their decisions were based on their own knowledge and experiences of the space (Thirsk, 1984, p.36). In the language of resilience science, what can be found here is a 'self-managed system' with 'immediate feedback' (Biggs, 2012).

What 'immediate feedback' means here is that there was necessarily a very direct relation to the future, in which the actions of commoners directly effect themselves, their family, neighbours and community. If too many animals were put on pasture the land would degrade, reducing its capacity for others and for the future; if things were harvested too soon or too much, the supply would be reduced for others or for the following year. Participating meant taking responsibility and as such, it produced a different kind of ethical space.

As Maria Mies and Veronika Bennholdt-Thomsen write, "commons presupposes a community" (1999:163), no commons can exist as such without a group to care for it. Commons across the world have sustained and been sustained by communities for millenia. As, Peter Linebaugh says, commons "are entered into by labor" (2008: 45) and he, along with others argue that when commons are viewed as 'resources', be they seas, forests, cultural heritage or knowledge, the very labour that is involved in their making is concealed (2008: 243-4). When we reduce commons to resources not only do we lose sight of the care labour involved in both creating and maintaining them, *we also transform our relationships to each other, and to the environment*. When commons are seen as resources, we risk entering into an 'accounting' frame of mind. Counting signifies a shift away from amicable relations in that it is rather the practice drawn on when a relationship has broken down, characterised by a lack of trust. Just as with the need to 'bring things back to zero', when we count everything we change our relationship to environment and to others, to one that is no longer ethically common.⁵

The enclosures of commons and the rise of consumer markets, gave rise to 'the problem' of welfare (Polanyi 2001 [1944]: 84-89; Federici, 2004: 82-85). Dismantling the commons and with it, rights to subsistence generated a landless, rural poor. To those out of work or with insufficient wages, parish or public support was offered, for a time. But, providing a 'right to live' constituted a barrier to the establishment of a labour market. (Polanyi, *ibid*) and still today, state assistance draws criticism from those who see a problem with a system that allows people to live without (waged) 'working'. In terms of welfare, not only was the access to the means of subsistence and autonomy cut by privatising the space, but importantly so were the social ties connected with that space (Polanyi, *ibid*; Federici, *ibid*).

Commons without a space: women's rural, domestic economies and production

Silvia Federici in particular shows how that the enclosure of commons, brought with it the modern separation between production and reproduction, and the different kinds of values attached to them. Yet, even after the enclosure

⁵ This is also problematic about resilience's associated term Ecosystem services, as an accounting approach.

of the commons, rural household practices in the late 19th and early 20th centuries reveal some ‘common’ qualities and responsibilities to others, where mutual practices existed around food and food preservation, such as drying, pickling, conserving, as well as the timing of certain activities, such as the slaughtering of animals, which were done as part of an economy and community of mutual aid. I will try to explain what this means with examples from *EcoNomadic School*.

Eco Nomadic School is a mobile and temporary school for the mutual learning and teaching of eco-civic practices in different regions of Europe. It brought together a network of people of different backgrounds across varying European locations and was organized by four partners: the architecture practice *aaa* (Paris), AGENCY, a research group at the Sheffield School of Architecture (UK), the artist group *my villages* (Netherlands and Germany) and the Foundation for Community and Local Development, Brezoi (Romania).⁶ The aim of the school was to “reinforce democratic values by the transfer of skills and knowledge on issues of resilience in different urban contexts” (Rhyzom, nd.)

During one of the workshops organised by the artist Kathrin Böhm in Southern Germany in 2012, we visited the Farmer’s Museum in Frensdorf.⁷ The museum, whose buildings originate from the late 1600s, documents everyday peasant life and culture as it would have been in the early 20th century. Their exhibition ‘Sauerkraut and Ketchup: A journey through three centuries of stockpiling’ (2012) was specifically about the history of food preservation, and through this exhibition one could see that in this rural peasant situation, just as in the commons, everyone was responsible for their future in a very direct way. Their economy and provisions were directed to the future, where you accumulate and store to survive, rather than to profit. Resilience science suggests that in any resilient system, there must be some slack, some give or reserves in order that a crisis can be absorbed, or there is adequate capacity to respond (Biggs et al, 2012). In the case of German peasant life at this time, the curator explained, the reserves were not only directed towards survival over the winter, when there would be less produce, but one in every four years, you could expect to have a poor harvest, and one in every ten there would be serious failure and death. Preserving and conserving are protection for the future and pickles, the curator suggested, are common to many cultures across the globe. These resilient practices thus point to a very different logic than the capitalist’s engagement with ‘futures’ as markets, whose uncertainty is an opportunity for speculation.

In the Museum, there is an example of a traditional peasant’s house as it remains today. This house in former times would have had every space, every niche, crammed with food storage. Living here, you would have needed to know which herbs or wild plants you can pick, when to harvest things, how to protect crops, how to safely preserve different kinds of food, drying, storing, pickling, jams, wines, vinegars, eggs, curing meats and so on. These practices require a very high level knowledge and skill, which were also part of a broader economy, not just within the home. In this rural context each person (specifically each woman) had a responsibility to undertake these life-preserving tasks, not only for oneself or for one’s family, but often for others when they experienced a crisis. It concerned responsibility in the village, because there would also be a time when you would be the one in need. But such an offering was of course, not universally extended. The practices of the peasant and the farmer have notoriously been tied to national identity and were used ideologically to forecably evict others, particularly Roma and Jewish people. The Nazi idealisation of this rural life is now worryingly being re-invoked by far right groups in America today (Pearce, 2017). So while these practices can tell us about resilience and mutuality, their historical connection of community to ‘the land’ demands that the questions and rules of mutual arrangements not only be made explicit, but point to the urgent fact that new resilient practices will need to cultivate an ethics and politics of governance whose participants and beneficiaries extend well beyond the exclusionary categories of race and ‘local’ communities.

⁶ For more information please see Böhm, K and Petrescu, D. eds. 2017. *Learn to Act*.

⁷ Please see: www.bauernmuseum-frensdorf.de

[INSERT FIGURES 15.1 AND 15.2 HERE]

Spaces for a more common life

During the workshop some of the women expertly made sauerkraut in a traditional way, using a cabbage slicer (Fig. 15.1 and 15.2). The slicer is around 1m long, with sharp blades that are angled very precisely. What interested me about this object was its use and distribution as this would have been a shared object and not everyone would have had one nor had to store one. Objects like this would have moved across the village and across the community. As we were making our sauerkraut the women told stories of the ‘cabbage man,’ who would travel through your village. The women explained that you would not grow your own (huge) white cabbages for sauerkraut, but would have bought them from a traveling farmer when in season. So these moments and events of mutuality are not only tied together by objects but marked in your calendar. In this rural context, there is no space you could point to as a commons, but there are objects that are held in common and events that mark a more common life.

In the workshop we visited Haus der Bauerin (roughly translated as ‘house of the female farmers’). This pre-war building housed women’s collective activities, where some tasks were done together and in which you could share facilities such as an apple press, a slaughter room, a laundry room and later, freezers. Whilst some of the spaces in the Haus der Bauerin have been replaced with other things like meeting rooms, the apple press and slaughter facilities are still in use today. These were and are an interesting spatial proposition, in that through a building not only can collective domestic activities be accommodated, but that status and visibility is given to domestic work. However, as the sociologist Elizabeth Myer Renchausen explained to us, such status is double edged. There were a number of facilities such as these in Germany at that time and, by socializing it and according status, were also an attempt to make housework more attractive to women and keep them away from the ‘real work’ of agriculture.⁸ In this respect new resilient practices and the work of resilience, even if socialised, will need to attend to the wider politics, especially the gender politics of their organisation.

Through the *Eco-Nomadic School* network, workshops also took place in a small town called Brezoi in Romania. In Brezoi there are a number of inhabitants who still perform a high level of subsistence work, and again these women and men have very high levels of skills and knowledge of making, growing, cooking, looking after animals and making medicines. During our time in Brezoi, we all remarked that the level of hospitality we received was exceptionally high and especially remarkable as, materially speaking, there is less money. After a long walk in the mountains, we dropped into our host Micaela’s garden, who was able to welcome 24 of us there in her courtyard, with fresh walnuts and home made wine (fig 15.3). Or during a trip to the surrounding mountains two of our hosts kindly produced a feast for 24 people out of their backpacks. During the trip we reflected on the ethical nature of these actions and nature of hospitality. Why would a private space become more common? Is it something culturally specific to this group of people, or is it somehow connected to economy of reproduction and care, and thus also resilience? How do we account for our experiences here in light of unstated power relations; between more wealthy, Western European visitors and Eastern European hosts? Some of us speculated that, as Illich had stated, this different materialist arrangement of economies and relations gives rise to generosity. Namely, this different access to subsistence can be linked to a certain ethical capacity, giving rise to different ethics and ethical spaces, be they common ones or hospitable ones.

[INSERT FIGURE 15.3]

⁸ Elizabeth Myer Renchausen in informal conversation at the EcoNomadic School, Haus der Bauerin 2012.

From these few examples, we can understand resilient practices as ones that are not about self-sufficiency per se, but something more like acknowledged dependency and a network of mutuality. In this chapter I have tried to argue that subsistence work and care work are not only practices of resilience, but ones that point to the ways that *resilience involves ethical interdependence*. Each example illustrates a form of ecological and social solidarity that bring specific ethical qualities, that if ‘counted’ or given a price, would undermine the very resilience they seek to achieve. From the perspective of architecture, the key points will be to not only better understand the ways that care and social reproduction are key to any future projects and organisations, but constitute an ethical imperative.

These local examples of resilient practices are however politically ambiguous, considering the historical exclusions and violence against other races, or the risks of entrenching stereotyped gender roles and capacities through ‘traditional’ forms of work. As the quote by Joan Tronto at the the beginning states, to make care the centre of attention, means to pay attention to power, class, exclusions and hierarchies. Practices of care both bring differences in power, conflicts and negotiations and demand attention to them. All situations where ‘*some demand the services of others*’ (my emphasis, Tronto, 1995) are often relations between unequal partners. In the mutual practices of subsistence cited above, while solidarity is offered, it is done so based on often undisclosed social rules. This demands *a practice of care*, not care as a ‘benevolent’ sentiment, but one that starts by paying attention to and engaging with such conditions. It means engaging with the politics of care to ensure that new resilient practices resist such tendencies and push their ethical possibilities, extending opportunities for genuine participation in a different material organisation of everyday life.

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