

Towards More Ethical Futures: Workplace Cooperative Practices'  
Contributions as Demonstrated by the Mondragon Corporation

by

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## **Abstract**

The amelioration of persistent alienation, exploitation, and social injustice is the focus of post-capitalism. Some post-capitalist theorists have examined the potential of workplace cooperative practices at the Mondragon Corporation to counteract negative externalities and transform subjectivities to be more communal and ethical. Mondragon's practices identified as offering subversive potential are knowledge sharing, workplace democracy, and arrangements around surpluses. Assessing these practices at headquarters, it appears that these factors possess great transformative and emancipatory potential for post-capitalism. However, applying considerations regarding reproductive labour and an ethics of care lens, and looking to Mondragon's practices internationally, exposes the limitations to their emancipatory potential. By employing these theoretical lenses and a broader perspective to the analysis of its cooperative practices, this thesis demonstrates that Mondragon offers inspiration, but not a complete model, of cooperative practices upon which post-capitalist futures can be built.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

As the world has become more connected through technology, trade and the conglomeration of businesses, global occurrences of exploitation, alienation and social inequalities have accelerated. Despite increased awareness of situations of structural oppression, major reorganization of the practices that sustain them has not occurred. Whereas many theorists have long debated and analyzed the origins of social inequality and structural oppression, more recently theorists looking to emancipatory movements have focused on how to amend these situations so as to achieve more equitable futures. Locating the individual as the subject of change, the practices that influence their subject constitution have been identified by poststructuralists, postcolonialists, feminists and post-capitalists, as sites to be reorganized. With this in mind, some theorists have concentrated specifically on how cooperative practices that reorganize social, economic and labour practices, can invoke structural readjustments so that more ethical futures can be developed (cf. Santos, 2006b; Gibson-Graham 2006b). This thesis aims to contribute to this literature.

As cooperative practices exist in multiple arrangements (including, but not limited to, worker cooperatives, producer cooperatives, consumer cooperatives, and housing cooperatives) this thesis will narrow the focus to worker cooperatives, where worker members own and direct the business they work in, to determine the model they can provide in addressing exploitation, alienation and social inequalities

through their divergent practices from those of most capitalist firms. For pragmatic reasons this thesis further limits its scope to a single case study of the Mondragon Corporation, one of the largest and most successful businesses with worker members participating in cooperative practices (Bretos & Errasti, 2017), to specifically examine the capacity of its workplace cooperative practices to transform subjectivities and address negative externalities through its different social, economic, and labour arrangements. This will be done to address the following central research question: what model can workplace cooperative practices contribute to the development of more ethical futures? As the aforementioned authors (Santos, 2006b; Gibson-Graham 2006b) have argued, cooperatives that reorganize social, economic, and labour practices can invoke structural readjustments so that more ethical futures can be developed. However, their examinations through a post-capitalist lens have not brought into consideration concerns raised by feminists in relation to reproductive labour and ethics of care. When these considerations are incorporated, additional discoveries are revealed about the emancipatory potential of the workplace cooperative arrangement of the Mondragon Corporation. Thus, the objective of this thesis is to provide a framework to evaluate the potential of worker cooperatives to build more ethical futures.

This thesis employs a theoretical framework that combines post-capitalist considerations in relations to practices, subjects, and sites to be transformed to produce more ethical futures, with a feminist and ethics of care lens to deepen the assessment of the emancipatory potential and ethicality of the cooperative practices

at the Mondragon Corporation. This thesis argues that despite multiple theoretical examinations of the successes and limitations of the Mondragon Corporation, a broadening of focus is required to fully assess the emancipatory potential of workplace cooperative practices to build more ethical futures. This is pertinent as deficiencies in present analyses persist in two major ways. First, no critical assessment of Mondragon focuses on post-capitalism's interest in knowledge sharing, workplace democracy, and arrangements of surpluses in any one analysis to reveal how they correlate and potentially lend themselves to emancipatory ends. Second, an interrogation into cooperative members' ability to recognize and reorganize sites of social injustice, as well as a critical examination into the ethicality of cooperative practices has not been conducted. For this reason, combining post-capitalist areas of focus with feminist considerations of reproductive labour and an ethics of care lens reveals further considerations in regards to Mondragon's<sup>1</sup> successes and limitations, and offers a means to test the validity of its emancipatory potential. This thesis argues that while cooperative practices provide a starting point from which more ethical futures can be built, they do not offer a complete model because they fail to resolve several situations of exploitation, alienation, and social injustice through their practices.

To critically examine Mondragon's cooperative practices I conceptualized a model to evaluate their transformative potential to develop more ethical futures by identifying five clusters of indicators. These five indicators are: 1. The production of

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<sup>1</sup> For the entirety of this thesis, the use of the moniker "Mondragon" is used as a shortened form for the Mondragon Corporation and does not refer to the town of the same name, in which the corporation operates.



ethical subjects through knowledge and discourse, 2. The reduction of alienation and exploitation of workers through workplace democratic practices, 3. The transformation of post-capitalist mentalities, the reduction of exploitation, and improvement of social inequalities generated through different arrangements of surplus appropriation and distribution, 4. The ability to identify and address social inequalities produced through a valuation of reproductive labour, 5. Improvements in the well-being of workers through caring practices that I define as an ethics of care.

I identified observable practices to measure each indicator as follows: First, changes in subjectivities are approached by the way practices of knowledge about cooperative principles are shared and disseminated between employees at the headquarters and internationally. I explore how dissemination of knowledge contributes to the dismantling of hegemonic conceptions of capitalism, contributes to an ecology of knowledges, and underpins tensions in the extension of knowledge internationally. The second indicator, workplace democracy, is observed through the engagement of workers in collectively determining the direction of the company. I focus on the ability of workplace democracy to transform subjectivities away from individualistic mentalities through practices of solidarity and examine the reduction in the alienation and exploitation of workers who participate in corporate decision-making and the election of management. The third cluster, concerning arrangements around surpluses, is examined by observing the transformative potential of processes of collectivization and commoning. I will analyze how these

processes affect subjectivities to make cooperative members more forward-looking and less focused on individualized consumption. Moreover I will examine how these processes impact mentalities by exploring how cooperative members are concerned with the well-being of others. The fourth indicator examines the ability of cooperative workers to identify and amend social inequality that derives from present arrangements towards reproductive labour by inspecting the solutions they present to ameliorate it. I will explore the collective decisions made in relation to paternal leave, childcare, health and well-being, as well as decisions pertaining to the reproductive labour of international workers to determine if the alternatively arranged workplace practices influence cooperative members to create more ethical futures. The fifth indicator, ethics of care, is approached by assessing attentiveness, which I define as the ability of individuals to recognize the needs of others and respond to them, as well as the responsiveness, that I define as a process of understanding concerns raised by those in vulnerable situations, of cooperative members so as to evaluate the ethicality of cooperative practices.

To measure the presence and absence of these practices this thesis uses the following sources of information: one, annual reports from the Corporation, which identify the policy directions of the corporation and provide statistical information pertaining to cooperative membership and international growth; two, the Corporation's website that provides detailed information regarding their principles, and corporate and cooperative practice; and three, ethnographies and evaluations made by academics, which provide insight into the Corporation's practices at

headquarters and internationally. These sources provided comprehensive insight into the successes and limitations of Mondragon's cooperative practices and, in turn, their ability to provide a model from which more ethical futures can be drawn.

This thesis is organized as follows. Chapter two provides the first half of the theoretical framework that builds on post-capitalist literature. This section discusses post-capitalism's appeal to transform practices, subjects, and sites to create more ethical futures. An examination of the role discourse and knowledge play in producing 'reality' and constituting subjectivities is presented through a post-capitalist lens, which aims to dismantle hegemonic conceptions of capitalism, affect modifications to current social and economic practices, and transform subjectivities. In an effort to further contextualize how to transform subjectivities, this section explores the influence of the modern work ethic. This focus distinguishes how subjectivities may be reconstituted to change current social and economic existences. I then discuss the interest some post-capitalist theorists have in the practices of workplace democracy and worker directed surplus appropriation and distribution to effect change to workers subjectivities and contribute to the creation of more ethical futures.

Building on the literature review in chapter two, chapter three presents the second half of the theoretical framework that includes feminist considerations and discusses the necessity to evaluate the ethicality of Mondragon's cooperative practices through elements of an ethics of care to determine their emancipatory

potential. This chapter argues for feminist considerations concerning reproductive labour to be applied to post-capitalist pursuits, as they disclose further sites to be reorganized if subjectivities are to be transformed and ethical futures are to be achieved. As reproductive labour has been devalued in regards to its contribution to the capitalist mode of production and has maintained inequalities between women and men, and women and the economy, the reorganization of conceptions and practices in relation to it need to be amended if social injustices are to be ameliorated. The role of the wage and commodified solutions in subjugating women and exacerbating divisions between people is discussed to expand considerations for emancipatory projects, such as post-capitalism. The theoretical partnership potential for post-capitalism and feminism is exhibited in the emancipatory potentials that collectivization and commoning present for both ontologies in regards to transforming social and economic practices, as well as subjectivities. In the discussion that follows, concerning the subversive potential of collectivization and commoning practices, caveats are presented as a means of inquiring into the meaningfulness and ethicality of these practices in operation. Following from this, I put forward a proposal to employ ethics of care as a lens through which to further assess the ethicality of emancipatory projects and practices.

In chapter four, I apply the post-capitalist and feminist theoretical considerations proposed in the previous chapters to the case study of the Mondragon Corporation. In this chapter I provide background and an overview of the Mondragon Corporation and its arrangements around knowledge sharing, workplace

democracy, and surplus appropriation and distribution. I then present decisions and practices that have resulted from their alternative structure and examine the successes and limitations of Mondragon's subversive potential by bringing into view their operations in international subsidiaries in France, Brazil and China. As tensions are revealed in extending practices and the benefits that result from participating in them, the emancipatory potential of Mondragon's cooperative practices are called into question. To assist in making a determination on the extent that Mondragon offers subversive potential, feminist considerations related to reproductive labour are applied to examine Mondragon's solutions towards parental leave, childcare, care and well-being in the home, reproductive labour concerns in their international subsidiaries, and wage reproductive labour within the corporation, to determine the extent that practices at Mondragon have transformed subjectivities so that they can recognize and address situations of social inequality. To further the examination of Mondragon's emancipatory potential to contribute a model from which ethical futures can be built, I apply the ethics of care elements of attentiveness and responsiveness to the revelations disclosed in the examination of Mondragon's practices, decisions, and impacts to determine their ethicality.

Finally, in chapter five, I provide concluding remarks on the evaluation of the Mondragon Corporations' cooperative practices. I reassert that the successes and limitations examined in chapter four indicate that cooperative practices at Mondragon offer a point of departure, opposed to a complete model, from which

more ethical futures can be constructed. I offer grounds for further considerations by post-capitalist theorists in regards to cooperative practices and reassert the value of applying feminist considerations regarding reproductive care and an ethics of care lens to deepen analyses on ethicality.

## **Chapter 2 - Post-Capitalist Pursuits to Transform Practices, Subjects & Sites**

This chapter will review literature on post-capitalism, that incorporates considerations from poststructuralism, postcolonialism, postdevelopment and autonomist Marxism, to examine two things. First, how discourse and knowledge impacts the constitution of subjectivities. Second, how different practices, more specifically arrangements around surpluses and workplace democracy, can transform subjectivities through which post-capitalist futures could potentially be built.

The purpose of examining these considerations is to thoroughly interrogate how hegemonic conceptions of capitalism persist and constrain the ability for post-capitalist futures to be developed. Moreover, this chapter presents an understanding of how subjectivities are constituted and how they can be transformed to develop more ethical futures.<sup>2</sup> These considerations will be applied to the case study of the Mondragon Corporation in chapter four to analyze their ability to transform subjectivities through cooperative practices of knowledge sharing, workplace democracy, and surplus arrangements, which in turn could provide a model for post-capitalist futures.

Post-capitalism was selected as a component for my theoretical framework as it aspires to develop futures in which situations of alienation, exploitation, social

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<sup>2</sup> This thesis will define post-capitalist futures and ethical futures as desired futures where social, economic and labour practices mitigate present inequalities and structural oppression, and include various practices and knowledges that have previously been discredited by hegemonic conceptions of capitalism. These terms will be used interchangeably throughout this thesis as post-capitalist futures should not be considered separate from other emancipatory aims to create ethical futures.

injustice and structural oppression are ameliorated by identifying locations to be reorganized and rectified. As studies on the Mondragon Corporation, and the corporation itself, present its cooperative practices as a means to create a better and fairer society (Mondragon Corporation, “Annual Report 2017”) the application of post-capitalist considerations offer a means to explore the subversive potential of its workplace cooperative practices.

In advance of discussing the theoretical considerations presented in this chapter a brief overview of post-capitalism is required to provide foundational context.

### 1. Post-Capitalism

Post-capitalism, which is an interdisciplinary emancipatory approach, is concerned with effecting modifications to current conceptions of capitalism as well as economic, social and labour practices. This approach includes the methods of other emancipatory movements like feminism and other theoretical approaches with the prefix ‘post’, including postcolonial, postdevelopment and poststructuralist, that scrutinize the relationships between meaning, knowledge, power, identity and social relationships. Building off these approaches, post-capitalist theorists offer strategies to dismantle the dominant hegemonic conception of capitalism and bring to light the various economic and social interactions presently operating across the world. The aim of post-capitalism is to reveal the multiple economic practices and identities that are stifled by the current representation of capitalism as the dominant actor in a binary relationship with non-capitalism (Gibson-Graham, 2008, p. 623). The intended result of post-capitalist theorists’ strategies is to destabilize



discourses of dominance and reveal various social and economic practices operating currently, thus challenging individuals' conceptions of the world and their location in it. The anticipated consequence of this transformation of perception is for individuals to be encouraged to identify, and engage in, alternative social and economic practices. Post-capitalist theorists assert that the reconstitution of individuals' understandings combined with their reorientation to different economic and social practices have the potential to transform their subjectivities, meaning the particular personal perspectives of individuals (Chandler & Munday, 2016). Moreover, these transformed subjectivities present the possibility of reorienting individuals so that they create and participate in the development of more ethical futures that mitigate the negative externalities of certain capitalist practices. As a point of clarity, post-capitalist pursuit should not be presumed to be an annihilation of all capitalist practices, as proposed by most Marxists. The aim of post-capitalism is to mitigate social and economic inequalities and structural oppression to enable more ethical futures.

### 1. 1 Building Ethical Futures: The Contribution of Post-Capitalism

In my exploration of the aforementioned strategy of dismantling discourses of dominance, I have selected J.K. Gibson-Graham, two poststructural Marxist feminist authors who publish under a singular moniker, that are directly invested in pursuing post-capitalist futures. I have drawn from Gibson-Graham as they present discourse strategies aimed at analyzing and dismantling hegemonic representations of capitalism with the intended purpose of transforming subjectivities towards more ethical futures.

As post-capitalism has built off of other emancipatory movements and other academic traditions, I have likewise incorporated other theoretical approaches that share similar aims, certain concepts, and methods, and have ascribed to them the post-capitalist epithet. These theoretical approaches, which will be elaborated on below, include postcolonial and postdevelopment theoretical strategies presented by Boaventura de Sousa Santos, Sandro Mezzadra, Cristina Rojas, and Arturo Escobar, whose intentions are to examine capitalist practices as they related to discourse, knowledge, power, the production of 'reality', with the intention of altering hegemonic conceptions and transforming subjectivities. Additionally, I draw from the feminist and autonomist Marxist work of Kathi Weeks, who contemporizes the work of Max Weber to discuss how subjectivities are constructed through the capitalist work ethic. I then return to Gibson-Graham to explore how subjectivity is developed through conceptions of capitalism and work practices. To elucidate further on how work practices, such as surplus distribution and workplace democracy, can contribute to subject constitution I will be drawing from David Schweickart's theoretical strategies that align with and contribute to post-capitalist objectives outlined above.

This examination is pertinent to the analysis of the case study of Mondragon as their ability to dismantle discourses of dominance and transform subjectivities through knowledge sharing and work practices requires an understanding of how

knowledge and subjectivities are currently constructed through dominant conception of capitalism.

## 2. Transforming Capitalist Practices

In their works the *End of Capitalism (as we knew it)* (2006a), *Postcapitalist politics* (2006b) and *Diverse Economies* (2008); Gibson-Graham challenge the way capitalism has been represented in theoretical discourse concerning political economy and political transformation. They attempt to dismantle representations of capitalism as totalizing and impenetrable with the aim of diversifying the way theorists discuss it to affect change to social imaginaries.<sup>3</sup> In this pursuit, they draw inspiration from feminist and queer activist scholars' reexaminations of the concept of gender and apply this to their efforts to reexamine capitalism and the economy to create space for multiple forms of alternative social, labour and economic practices. In this tradition, and building off post-structuralist approaches, Gibson-Graham challenges the binary and totalizing representations of capitalism by identifying the proliferation of multiple alternative practices, like workplace cooperative practices. This in turn is intended to "recontextualize capitalism in a discourse of economic plurality [that] destabilizes its presumptive hegemony" (Gibson-Graham, 2006a, p. 15) as hegemonic understandings of economy present a limited typology that closes off ethical and political options (Gibson-Graham, 2006b, p. 111). To this end, Gibson-

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<sup>3</sup> While I will not be drawing from Charles Taylor elsewhere in this thesis I have employed his term of social imaginaries from his work *Modern Social Imaginaries* that defines it as "the ways people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations" (Taylor, 2004, p. 23). Analogous to strategies theorists present in this chapter, Taylor calls on individuals to pluralize their conceptions of modernity, a concept often tied to capitalism, and in turn impact their subjectivity through the modification of these social imaginaries. I have applied this understanding to my work as the term social imaginaries conveys a more ubiquitous and communal connection than subject constitution might in certain instances

Graham cautions theorists to move away from the notion that capitalism has an unchanging core and challenges representations of capitalism as a unified object in discourse, stressing the political role of theoretical discourse in creating or reinforcing conceptions of the world we live in.

Gibson-Graham critiques the theoretical discursive approach that some modern Marxists take that essentializes hegemonic representations of capitalism and the economy, arguing that they have “often been privileged as the fundamental, necessary or essential constituent of social systems and historical events” (2006a, p.24). This essentialist approach limits what can be considered sites for potential transformations of economies, as well as social and labour practices, as they discredit and obscure other conceptions of the world. This includes workplace cooperative practices that are often perceived as doomed to fail, consistently in a state of degeneration into fully capitalist firms, or simply perceived as invalid. In an effort to dismantle the monolithic representation of capitalism in discourse, Gibson-Graham promotes the use of poststructuralist anti-essentialist approach to theoretical discourse and draws from Althusser’s overdetermination (2006a, p. 25-28). The intent of the anti-essentialism approach in discourse is to counter reductionist narratives concerning the identity of capitalism and to view it as a proliferation of various economic and labour practices across different geographies, contributing to a production of an “ontology of economic difference” (Gibson-Graham, 2008, p. 614-615), to which anti-essentialist assessments of workplace

cooperative practices contribute. This strategy will be applied to my examination of workplace cooperative practices in chapter four.

This discursive strategy is further developed in Gibson-Graham's later work where they advance a proposal for theorists to consider the ethical, political and performative role of discourse, proposing that theorists apply the strategies of ontological reframing, re-reading for difference, and thinking creatively, to dismantle totalizing representations of capitalism (2008, p. 620). This discursive shift and ontological reframing is proposed as a strategy towards emancipatory transformations as it pluralizes capitalist conceptions by including many conditions and practices of economies and labour variegated across landscapes (Gibson-Graham, 2006a, p. 99; Gibson-Graham, 2008). Furthermore, by bringing into consideration the existing varieties of economies and labour practices, social imaginaries are altered, broadening narrow conceptions of the world. The workplace cooperative practices at Mondragon contribute to the process of broadening epistemologies by not only sharing cooperative principles with their members, but by also existing as a successful organization that does not ascribe to dominant conceptions of capitalism concerning how to organize social, economic and labour practices. This in turn expands considerations of possibilities for creating more ethical futures. However, the extent that workplace cooperative practices commit to knowledge sharing, and if this practice will come into conflict with the need for the business to remain competitive, will be explored in chapter four.

The ability to transform subjectivities through discourse strategies will be examined in chapter four in relation to the Mondragon Corporation's ability to transform subjectivities through knowledge sharing about cooperative practices and principles to create post-capitalist futures. I will now provide further considerations concerning how to transform capitalist practices through discourse and knowledge sharing.

### 2.1 Ecology of Knowledges

The importance of affecting a theoretical shift in discourse as a strategy towards affecting change in the world remains a central objective of post-capitalism. It is against this background that we can apply Boaventura de Sousa Santos' theoretical proposals to dismantle discourse of dominance as post-capitalist strategies.

Santos' *The Rise of the Global Left: the World Social Forum and Beyond* (2006a), *Another Production is Possible* (2006b), and *Another Knowledge is Possible* (2007) elaborate how the hegemonic conceptions of capitalism are strengthened through the production of non-existence, that hides, discredits, and trivializes ways of being and thinking that are not considered 'modern' and perceives them as non-credible alternatives. (2006a) Santos argues that the production of non-existence is partly established by the 'monoculture of knowledge' (2006a, p. 19) that re-asserts the discursive conception of capitalism as totalizing and global in scale and represses counter-hegemonic practices and agents (2006a, p. 14). Analogous to Gibson-Graham, the author appeals to theorists to pluralize their discourse through the

broadening of epistemologies assisted by the development of an ecology of knowledges that contains a multiplicity of ideas that include local practices, and cites the World Social Forum as an example of this practice in action (Santos, 2006a). Santos submits that it is through this process that theorists can develop a “sociology of emergence” (2006a, p. 29) that aims to identify and enlarge the signs of possible future experiences by acknowledging and identifying what is already existent and is presently being resolutely ignored by hegemonic rationalities and discourse.

Akin to Gibson-Graham’s antiessentialist approach, the ecology of knowledges offers a means to validate knowledges from multiple perspectives and does not rely on the singular dominant lens of capitalism. Moreover, it offers a critique of productivism, which privileges growth through market forces and leaves out multiple considerations of what ‘achievement’ entails, especially as it pertains to well-being. Considerations of the ability of workplace cooperative practices to contribute to and employ lessons from an ecology of knowledges will be employed in my case study. This will be particularly relevant in examining the ability of different knowledges to transform subjectivities into mentalities interested in communal well-being.

While a semiotic analysis is outside the scope of this thesis, I would like to note that Santos’ use of the term ‘ecology’ is interesting as Gibson-Graham similarly draws

from biological terminology and imagery<sup>4</sup>, used by Stephen Jay Gould, as a means of elucidating on the evolution of economics as varied and not a singular all-encompassing fixed depiction of capitalism (Gibson-Graham, 2006a, p.113-114). In appealing to these biological conceptions to break apart the monolithic representations of capitalism, Santos and Gibson-Graham present examples of the ontological reframing strategy in practice that intends to broaden epistemologies, which in turn affect subjectivities. I believe these biological metaphors assist in the acceptance of interpretations and are a useful discursive strategy for affecting subjectivities towards post-capitalism. I will expand further on the importance of subject constitution to post-capitalist pursuits below. First, I will return to the discussion on post-capitalism's intent to affect theoretical discourse and its impacts on the production of knowledge as necessary elements to reorient individuals towards the creation of more ethical futures. I return to this discussion as it is pertinent for emancipatory projects, including the cooperative practices of Mondragon, to consider the potential political and colonizing affects of knowledge so that they do not subjugate others in their extension of knowledge and instead contribute to an ecology of knowledges that can assist in the development of subjectivities interested in post-capitalist futures.

## 2.2 Considerations Concerning Discourse and Knowledge

The works of postcolonial and postdevelopment theorists (Santos 2007; Rojas 2007; Mezzadra 2011; Escobar 2018) reflect the emancipatory possibilities that exist in

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<sup>4</sup> Gibson-Graham use the imagery of a bush to discuss the developmental process capitalism underwent to develop into its current articulations. The intention of this representation is to dismantle conceptions that capitalism arrived fully formed, as well as to challenge monolithic representation of capitalism (2006a, p. 112-119).



pluralizing discourse regarding capitalism. Sandro Mezzadra takes an emancipatory approach and, I argue, provides post-capitalist approaches to discourse in his aim to address the “habits of thought that continue to shape political and theoretical discourse” (2011, p.153). Mezzadra instructs theorists to pluralize their comprehension of capitalism in an effort to problematize and decenter their conceptions and reflect on how it has influenced the shaping of subjectivities, particularly those oriented towards labour.<sup>5</sup> (2011) Similar to Gibson-Graham’s approach to decenter and reconsider representations of capitalism, postcolonial approaches enhance post-capitalist arguments for addressing theoretical discourse and the production of knowledge by considering the colonializing impacts and political implications of the development of this discourse and knowledge. The postcolonial consideration of the production of knowledge has identified that the dominant understanding of capitalism that has secured its economic reproduction has been bolstered by the selection and promotion of discourses supportive of the capitalist system (Rojas, 2007, p. 575). Moreover, these dominant understandings are deeply entrenched in ways of being, knowing, and doing and have resulted in contemporary crises of inequality and social injustice (Escobar, 2018). This process of enforcing a singular understanding of economic and social relations on the world was the goal and product of colonialist pursuits; therefore dismantling these singular conceptions of the world by analyzing the relationship between knowledge and power and decolonizing them is one of the central objectives of postcolonial [and postdevelopment] pursuits (Santos, 2007) and should be used to bolster and

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<sup>5</sup> For a further discussion on subject constitution and labour please see sections entitled “Transforming Subjects – capitalist identities and work ethics” and “Transforming Sites - surplus distribution and workplace democracy” in this chapter.

enrich post-capitalist discursive strategies. Santos' ecology of knowledges, referenced above, is a strategy for reorienting the knowledge and power relationship so that it recognizes and creates new configurations of knowledges granting equal opportunity to different kinds of knowledge that have been discredited (2007), which will in turn contribute to more democratic and ethical futures. I argue that more democratic and ethical futures cannot be built through theoretical discourse and the pluralization of knowledge alone. It is essential that emancipatory movements like post-capitalism examine how subjectivities are constituted beyond theoretical discourse so that they can effect change in individuals' orientation towards perceptions of capitalism, as well as economic, labour, and social conceptions. I will expand on this in the section entitled: "Transforming Subjects – capitalist identities and work ethics" and "Transforming Sites – surplus distribution and workplace democracy" in this chapter.

### 2.3 Application to Case Study on Cooperative Practices

This thesis draws from post-capitalist proposals concerning discourse and knowledge, and incorporates postcolonial and postdevelopment considerations under the epithet of post-capitalism to build a theoretical framework. The examination of the Mondragon Corporation through this element of the framework will analyze cooperative members' dedication to knowledge sharing as a means of transforming subjectivities. It will also assess members' interest in sharing knowledge as a means of analyzing if their mentalities have been transformed away

from thinking influenced by productivism<sup>6</sup>, especially in instances where knowledge sharing may come in conflict with goals of competitiveness. This will provide an assessment of the potential model workplace cooperative practices can offer for post-capitalist projects. Furthermore, in concurrence with the consideration and strategies previously outlined in this chapter, this thesis will employ the discursive strategies to the case study of the Mondragon Corporation so that the assessment of its economic, social, and labour practices are not evaluated within the hegemonic framing of capitalism. As Gibson-Graham elucidates: “Research on alternatives should be conducted in the spirit of openness and possibility rather than in familiar negative spirit in which co-optation, failure, and falling short are expected and confirmed” (2006a, p. vii). This approach intends to contribute to the creation of a counter-discourse that dismantles capitalism’s hegemonic framing, and to advance an ecology of knowledges to strengthen political imaginaries.

#### 2.4 Tensions: How They Will Be Addressed in the Case Study

A tension between poststructuralism and Marxism exists in Gibson-Graham’s discourse strategy to dismantle capitalism’s hegemonic understanding. While they are “loath to define [capitalism], since this would involve choosing among a variety of existing definitions” (Gibson-Graham, 2006a, p. 3) they immediately provide a Marxist interpretation of capitalism, setting up a binary between capitalist and non-capitalist practices. They swiftly disengage with this Marxist definition and challenge binary structural conceptions of capitalism through a poststructuralist

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<sup>6</sup> As referenced in the section entitled: Ecology of Knowledges, this thesis defines productivism as thinking that privileges growth through market forces. This growth relies on the maximization of profits, often through cost cutting measures to increase competitiveness.

lens to “question the theoretical categories and concepts as well as the understating of knowledge that grounds them” (Gibson-Graham, 2006a, p. xix). This process leads to some frustrations for the reader in interpreting what they mean when they use the term capitalism later in their work. While I am receptive to this poststructuralist approach and post-capitalist practice to broaden social imaginaries, it proves challenging to apply to a case study analysis as a working description of how a majority of capitalist practices operate is needed so as to identify varieties within it and outside of it. To assist in this endeavor I will be deferring to Gibson-Graham’s description of capitalism as a social relation in which nonproducers appropriate the surplus labour in value form from free wage labourers (2006a, p.3n) when referring to capitalism in this thesis. However, this definition should not be considered as practices belonging solely to capitalism, or as the only way that capitalist practices are exhibited. This definition is merely used to provide clarity on how *some* capitalist practices operate, as a point of reference to compare alternatives against.

In addition to the above, Gibson-Graham exemplify the difficulty in the practice of dismantling binaries as they continue to use the term noncapitalist and alternative throughout their works, which could be perceived as contributing to the strengthening of capitalist and binary understandings. In the updated introduction of *The End of Capitalism (as we knew it)* Gibson-Graham addresses this criticism noting that the use of the terms noncapitalist and alternative are not used to reinforce a capitalist hegemony in discourse but “signals there is something wrong with the status quo” (2006a, p. xxi) and contributes to “ the theoretical downsizing

of capitalism” (2006a, p. xxiv) by opening space for inquiry and investigation of various sites and practices. They note that while these discursive strategies aim to reorient perspectives and conceptions towards social, economic, and labour possibilities they still “involve “starting where you are,” one of the time honored theoretical practices” (Gibson-Graham, 2006a, p. xxi). In the updated introduction, Gibson-Graham expounds on their use of alternative and noncapitalist practices by providing a representation of diverse economies that offer examples of alternative and noncapitalist enterprises, alternative paid and unpaid wage labour, and alternative market and nonmarket transactions, as a means of dismantling the binary that the terms alternative and noncapitalist may imply to some readers. Employing their discursive strategy to my case study, I will draw from their diverse economies definitions, taking care not to represent capitalism as a structural and systemic unit, a social totality, and existing in a binary with a singular conception of noncapitalism. I also intend to contribute to representations of diverse economies by thoroughly examining Mondragon’s cooperative practices that exist outside of a capitalist binary. While I will define some practices and processes as pertaining to certain forms of capitalism to create an understanding of diverse economies this will not be done to undermine the importance of discursive strategies, or essentialize discourse, but to build off them to assist in creating new political imaginaries.

### 3. Transforming Subjects: Capitalist Identities and Work Ethics

As previously established, discursive strategies aim to dismantle hegemonic representations of capitalism and produce an ecology of knowledges that identifies the proliferation of multiple alternative practices and knowledge. The intended

result of which is to affect individuals' conception of 'reality' through inquiry, resulting in shifts in their understandings of the world, and creating potential for change to social, economic, and labour practices. Though discursive shifts are potent, it is as yet unknown whether this alone will generate change towards more ethical futures, especially in regards to workplace cooperative practices. In my intimation, if emancipatory movements like post-capitalism want to influence change in individuals' practices and conceptions of capitalism, an examination into how subjectivities are constituted is imperative.

As the constitution of the subject is understood by structural determinists as behaviors resulting from interactions with social structures (Chandler and Munday, 2016), Gibson-Graham affirms, "it is partly our own subjection...that constructs a 'capitalist society'" (2006a p. xvi; 2006b, p xxxvi). The way people interact and think about the world is structured by conceptions of capitalism as totalizing. In turn, this dominant and totalizing understanding of capitalism structures peoples' subjectivities, creating a feedback loop that strengthens the dominant understanding of capitalism. Anne-Marie Willis calls this a double movement of ontological designing, meaning "we design our world, while our world acts back on us and designs us" (2006, p. 2). Therefore, to properly address this double movement theorists will need to examine why dominant concepts of capitalism, as well as social and economic relations, remain difficult to transform despite efforts to broaden theoretical discourse and knowledge. While the approaches of pluralizing discourse and recognizing the political impacts of knowledge production can

reorient how individuals conceive of social and economic relations, they only partly assist in denaturalizing capitalism's embeddedness in human subjectivities. An exploration into why capitalism has remained resistant to denaturalization and dismantling, despite the increase of awareness of alternative economic and social relations through academic pursuits, media coverage and a plethora of internet resources, is critical if subjectivities are to be fully effected so as to reshape the world we live in and change the way the world we live in shapes us.

As previously discussed, part of Gibson-Graham's post-capitalist aim, as well as part of the aim of postcolonialism and postdevelopment, is to affect subjectivities by deconstructing the monolithic representation of capitalism in discourse. This approach takes lessons from feminism that has long recognized that "transforming the world involves transforming sites, subjects and practices worldwide" (Gibson-Graham, 2006a, p. xxvii). With the intention of further exploring how to transform these practices, subjects, and sites, Gibson-Graham draws from feminist and queer activist scholars that have challenged and dismantled the hegemonic binary of hetero-normativity. Gibson-Graham inquires into why capitalism has not undergone a similar process to that of gender and sexuality and undergone an 'identity crisis' (2006a, p. 260). In response to this inquiry, I believe that the subject constitutions of sexuality and gender as lived bodily experiences are more identifiable as personalized social constructs and therefore more easily deconstructed. I argue that Gibson-Graham is attempting to create a more bodily interpretation of capitalism and globalization in an effort to denaturalize it in their chapter entitled Querying

Globalism by associating the language of capitalism and globalization with the language of rape, as the language of both normalizes, and hinders resistance to, these events (2006a, p. 122). However as this approach has had an inverse effect for some readers and survivors,<sup>7</sup> as they identify in the updated introduction, I will not focus on this approach. My case study will, however, examine the extent that alternative knowledge and practices can align to destabilize individual conceptions of capitalism, as well as examine where dominant conceptions of capitalism remain resistant to change.

### 3.1 Subject Constitution in Relation to Class and Surpluses

Even though capitalism is an experience rooted in and resulting from political, economic, and social practices (Gibson-Graham, 2006a) it is often not dissected by most individuals as an integral part of their interpretation of the world and how they identify themselves. Conceivably, the historical materialist understanding of capitalism that implies an inevitableness of capitalism naturalizes it and restricts its analysis as a social construct. In an effort to “collapse the temporality inherent in Marx’s historical analysis” (Gibson-Graham, 2008, p. 623) Gibson-Graham uses the entry point of class as an example of how to dismantle the dominant class-based assumptions of historical materialism and to pluralize individual conceptions of their location in economic and social relations in an effort to denaturalize totalizing perceptions of capitalism. By pluralizing individuals’ conception of their class location in relation to capitalism, Gibson-Graham intends to agitate conceptions of

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<sup>7</sup> As stated in Gibson-Graham’s updated introduction some readers rejected this chapter as the use of the language of rape was considered to be flippant in tone and insensitive (2006a, p. xxxii).



capitalism that “situates a wide range of economic practices and identities as the same as, opposite to, a complement of, or contained within capitalism” (2008, p. 623), as well as agitate the subjectivities informed by these conceptions. With this aim, Gibson-Graham shifts the understanding of class away from a group of people to focus on the experiences of individuals in appropriating and distributing surplus. In *The End of Capitalism (as we knew it)* Gibson-Graham explores the manifold social and economic interactions concerning the various forms of appropriation and distribution of surpluses every individual participates in on a daily bases. Presenting a case study of the various ways a Filipina woman in an Australian mining town appropriates and distributes surpluses, and has her own surplus labour appropriated, Gibson-Graham reveals the difficulty in attributing a class distinction to individuals (2006a, p 60-62). Through this example, Gibson-Graham eradicates the singular conception of a specific class-based existence for individuals “highlight[ing] the different ways in which surplus in its various forms is currently produced, appropriated, and distributed” (2008, p. 623) which complicates a dominant conception of class and capitalism. Moreover, the result of fracturing class conceptions and making differences visible is to shift individuals’ understandings of themselves, so as to reorient and transform their subjectivities. This process also frustrates historical materialist conceptions of class and capitalism that identify both systems as totalizing categories. If class is not singularly defined and naturalized an opening is created for further self-exploration of how one’s identity relates to other social constructs, including capitalism, which in turn contributes to

transforming our subject constitution. This example provides a theoretical exercise that could instigate the transformation of subjectivities.

The ability of Mondragon's cooperative practices, which differently organize interactions with surplus appropriation and distribution, to transform subjectivities will be explored in chapter four.

The previously discussed strategies towards theoretical discourse, considerations of the relationship between power and knowledge, as well as examining subject constitution in relation to the naturalization of capitalism, are presented as means to pluralize our conceptions of economic and social relations and facilitate the beginning of the journey towards ethical futures. As stated above, analyzing class provides an entry point into dismantling and denaturalizing conceptions of capitalism and affecting subjectivities as it reveals the variety of social and economic relations we participate in, obscuring the singular visions of hegemonic capitalism and our place in it as definite. The process of dismantling singular conceptions of capitalism's 'identity' and empowering individuals to consider how their subjectivities have been constituted by dominant conceptions of capitalism does not end with the knowledge that individuals reproduce a conception of the world. Alongside these considerations, the practices that perpetuate engagement with, and the reinforcement of, dominant representations of capitalism need to be identified and addressed.

### 3.2 Subject Constitution Through the Work Ethic

A major consideration in the process of reconstituting subjectivities to align individuals towards more ethical, post-capitalist futures is to consider how their subjects have naturalized what Max Weber termed the work ethic, which serves the labour needs of capitalism. As previously indicated, Sandro Mezzadra saw the importance of assessing how understandings of capitalism have influenced subjectivities, especially in relation to labour (2011). Likewise, Gibson-Graham's anti-essentialist approach in discourse recognizes labour practices as an element to be explored if the identity of capitalism, and the identity of individuals, is to be affected and pluralized (2008, p. 615). Furthermore, the broadening of epistemologies and considerations of labour apart from the hegemonic capitalist understanding has been an area of focus for emancipatory feminist movements. Chapter three will elucidate further on feminist considerations of labour, including reproductive labour and the application of ethics of care, to expand considerations for post-capitalist futures.

At present, I will analyze how theorists have examined the interpellation of the work ethic and how it has strengthened capitalism's social and economic positioning, with the intention that this inquiry will contribute to dislodging common conceptions of 'reality' and subjectivities that are informed by the monolithic perception of capitalism.

The tradition of examining how our subject constitution is developed and serves the purpose of capitalist labour needs began with Karl Marx and was expanded upon by Max Weber in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Kathi Weeks, in *The Problem with Work* (2011), contributes to this tradition and explores how the Weberian concept of the work ethic has created social and political subjects. This is done through an examination of the evolution of the work ethic in the United States starting with Fordism and expanding through the post-Fordist world,<sup>8</sup> thus contemporizing the exploration of subject constitution in regards to labour. Drawing from Weber's concentration on the development of workers' subjectivities and social imaginaries, Weeks' work aims to denaturalize and render unfamiliar the concept of work.<sup>9</sup> Weeks upholds that the embeddedness of the work ethic inhibits individuals from reflecting on why we work and discourages the consideration of different potential economic and social futures as it limits conceptions of what alternatives may be possible and constrains other ways of interacting with the world (2011, p. 47).

In charting the work ethic, Weeks asserts that it is an internalization process that is subject generating and serves to cultivate docile subjects for capitalist labour

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8 Gibson-Graham would take issue with Weeks representing history of twentieth-century capitalist development in terms of a series of progressive steps from pre-Fordism to Fordism to post-Fordism, as it places economic organisms on a ladder of sequential adaptation. (Gibson-Graham, 2006a, p. 113) For the sake of the summary of Weeks' work I have opted to leave her representation in, despite it reinforcing a Marxist historical materialism that Gibson-Graham and other post-capitalist theorist refute. This representation will not be used in the rest of this thesis and has been used to solely to describe the perimeters within which Weeks arranges her analysis.

9 As defined by Kathi Weeks, "the label 'work' will refer to productive cooperation organized around, but not necessarily confined to, the privileged model of waged labor" (2011, p. 14). Other conceptions of work outside of waged labour will be considered in chapter three, specifically reproductive labour.

purposes. Through the naturalized belief that the work ethic is a path to independence, individual achievement, and social belonging, it creates subjectivities that are socially (as well as economically) dependent on wage labour, which in turn rationalizes and mystifies the exploitation and alienation of workers. (2011) Weeks affirms that the embeddedness of the work ethic has reinforced capitalism's positioning as it has moralized and legitimized the economic and social privileging of certain individuals over numerous gendered and racialized groups (2011, p. 62). Therefore, it is crucial that the work ethic's influence on subjectivities is exposed if current capitalist practices that perpetuate inequalities are to be transformed.

In an effort to dismantle current dominant conceptions and practices of capitalism and the work ethic that supports it, Weeks applies the theoretical practice of inquiring into how discourse generates knowledge and power and produces subjectivities, previously discussed as post-capitalist theoretical strategies. Similar to the pursuit of Gibson-Graham to 'produce knowledge of exploitation and a social process to contribute to more self-conscious and self-transformative subjectivities' (2006a, p. 53), Weeks applies the discourse analysis strategy to critique the dominance of work in individuals lives and to challenge, more specifically, the ethical and moralizing discourse that provides meaning and primacy to work in social and economic life (2011, p. 31). This process is particularly pertinent as the currently high levels of precarious work, defined as professions that provide no predictable income, no pension, no benefits or sick pay (Hennessey & Tranjan, 2019) has had the effect of amplifying the work ethic as individuals seek secondary

jobs. Though difficult to evaluate actual numbers,<sup>10</sup> the rise of the secondary jobs in the gig economy<sup>11</sup> has led to individuals spending more of their time in work so as to supplement their incomes, which reduces their leisure hours. Combined with the fact that public social expenditures on old age, health and disability benefits, housing, and unemployment have been on the decline in the United States and the United Kingdom since 2010 and Canada since 2015 according to OECD statistics (OECD, 2019), an intensification of more unstable work has advanced the valuing of the work ethic as a solution to social and economic disparities, which in turn has further exacerbated social and economic inequalities as free market economic solutions are being sought over policy solutions. As Weeks elaborates from Weber, “The precarious position that so many workers find themselves in echoes that of Weber’s Puritan, whose restless anxiety and uncertainty kept his nose to the grindstone” (2011, p. 69). This amplified commitment to work that limits leisure time has had several outcomes that reproduce capitalism’s hegemony. Among them has been the strengthening of social imaginaries and subjectivities that give work centrality in our lives by limiting our exposure to different conceptions of social and economic practices, particularly communal practices that could assist in reorienting life towards practices concerned with enhancing human happiness and health, for example. Time provided to participate in different economics, labour and communal experiences could broaden our conception that would perpetuate further inquiry

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10 The United States Department of Labor’s bureau of Labor Statistics have three different estimates on individuals employed in the gig economy, while the Federal Reserve’s Report on the Economic Well-Being of U.S. Households in 2017 presents different numbers to those of the U.S. Department of Labor. (cf. Bureau of Labour Statistics (2018); Federalreserve.gov (2018)

11 Gig work is defined by the Federal Reserve’s Report on the Economic Well-Being of U.S. Households in 2017 states that “Gig work is largely done in addition to a main job, so this is often distinct from those who work as contractors in their main job” (Federalreserve.gov, 2018,p. 27).

into why work and capitalism hold centrality in our lives, which could lead to demands for social and economic policy to enable further ability to participate in alternative labour, social and economic practices.

As a means of destabilizing the ethical discourse of work and its central positioning in social imaginaries and the lives of individuals to create post-capitalist futures, Weeks looks to autonomist Marxists<sup>12</sup> tradition for solutions to the stubborn naturalization of the work ethic so as to decenter capitalist practices that maintain social and economic inequality. Central to these pursuits of autonomist Marxists is the “restoration of methodological and political primacy of subjectivity” (Weeks, 2011, p. 93). To achieve these ends, autonomist Marxists call on individuals to participate in a refusal of work, which is not an outright rejection of work but a call to shorten time spent at work and evaluate how work shapes our social and economic processes and relations. In this sense, the refusal of work strategy should be considered a post-capitalist pursuit, as its aim is to inquire and modify dominant understandings and practices, not to completely overthrow them. As Weeks states, “the refusal is, in this sense, a process, a theoretical and practical movement that aims to effect a separation through which we can pursue alternative practices and relationships” (2011, p. 100). Applying the already considered discussion on ontological reframing by affecting how we moralize and conceive of work, and de-sanctify its centrality to our lives we can effect the way we appreciate and shape

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<sup>12</sup> Autonomist Marxism grew out of Italian social movements in the 1960s and 70s interested in revolutionary agitation that sought to restore the political primacy of subjectivity. One of their main proposals to achieve this end was the refusal of work as (Weeks, 2011, p. 92-93)

work, which in turn changes the way work shapes us. My case study in chapter four will assess whether Mondragon's cooperative members' experiences with different organizational practices has reoriented the way they evaluate work and capitalism, and if it has resulted in their additional involvement with alternative social and economic practices.

#### 4. Transforming Sites – Surplus Distribution and Workplace Democracy

As discussed, the reorientation of subjectivities towards work impacts how individuals conceive, are shaped by, and reshape work. This assists in the post-capitalist pursuit to attain more ethical futures. Building off of the exploration into subject constitution and how to affect subjectivities through practices and demands, such as a refusal to work, post-capitalists conjointly focus on the distribution of surplus as a site to be transformed. With this aim, Gibson-Graham explores the different ways and means of distributing surpluses as a way of dismantling capitalism's dominant narrative as the only conceivable successful mode of operating (2008, p. 615). Moreover, they identify that exploitation arises through certain practices of appropriating surplus.

Likewise, Weeks maintains the autonomist Marxist perception that for individuals to change their subjectivities away from the work ethic, the capitalist valorisation, meaning the "system of values grounded in the production of surplus values" (2011, p. 95), needs to be resisted and modified. With a view to modify dominant understandings and practices of capitalism and to contribute to an ontology of economic differences and broaden epistemologies both Gibson-Graham and Santos



(cf. Gibson-Graham, 2006b; Gibson-Graham 2008; Santos, 2006b) examine alternative economic organizations and labour practices as they relate to the appropriation of surplus. They do this in the interest of presenting practices that can be drawn from to create more ethical futures and produce more communal subjectivities. Cristina Rojas and Gibson-Graham both maintain that surplus appropriation and the “distribution of surplus are connected to the construction of ethical communal subjects” (Rojas, 2007, p. 579). Using the case study method in chapter four, I intend to contribute to post-capitalist pursuits by exploring how working in a cooperative with different practices relating to surplus appropriation and distribution can contribute to the creation of more ethical subjects and potentially provide a model from which post-capitalist futures can be built.

In addition to examining existing alternative practice in an effort to contribute to an ecology of knowledges about various economic, labour and social practices, my case study investigation of the Mondragon Corporation will also examine how workplace democracy can contribute to the reorientation of surplus appropriation and distribution, and subjectivities leading to the advancement of post-capitalist pursuits. This approach builds upon the post-capitalist ambitions of David Schweickart as laid out in his work *After Capitalism* (2011), which calls for the development of counterprojects, meaning systemic alternatives to the hegemonic conception of capitalist systems that address its inequalities. Akin to the previously discussed theorists’ dialectical strategies, Schweickhart’s counterproject aims to provide theoretical illuminations into what is possible, as well as provide empirical

evidence on existing alternatives that may point us to a more ethical future (2011, p. 9). In support of this aim, Schweickhart focuses his attention on economic democracy, which includes the redistribution of surpluses through the application of workplace democracy. In addition to examining surplus distribution in my case study, as previously indicated, I will be expanding on Schweickhart's focus on the impacts of workplace democracy on subjectivities, analysing if these practices create more communally focused individuals, affecting their conception of, and relationships with, dominant conceptions of capitalism and providing emancipatory potential.

The focus on workplace democracy as a practice with emancipatory potential is grounded in the experiences of workers participating in the practice of voting on the direction of their workplace by determining what should be done with the surpluses appropriated over the year. This process mitigates the impacts of alienation as it enables individuals to express themselves in the work place, the opposite of what Marx identified as the estrangement of being, leading to an alienated life for workers (Marx, 1964). Practices of workplace democracy that enable workers to vote on their management also provide emancipatory potential as elected managers are more accountable to workers, reducing despotism and exploitation of the workforce, thus dismantling the authoritarian practices experienced in some

capitalist workplace organizations.<sup>13</sup> Applying the dialectical method, Schweickhart questions the contradictions in the relationship between democracy and capitalism:

It is a striking anomaly of modern capitalist societies that ordinary people are deemed competent enough to select their political leaders – but not their bosses. Contemporary capitalism celebrates democracy, yet denies us our democratic rights at precisely the point where they might be utilized most immediately and concretely: at the place where we spend most of the active and alert hours of our adult lives. (2011, p 48)

The application of workplace democracy's practices, that present emancipatory potentials, prompts further examination as these practices offer prospective insight on how individuals may realign themselves towards work, capitalism, and their community as a result of their interactions with alternative practices. In practicing workplace democracy, individuals are called to participate in communal and solidarity oriented practices that modify the individualizing process that some organizations of firms and dominant understandings of capitalism inspire. The case study in this thesis aims to examine the successes and limitations of workplace democracy to transform subjectivities into more communal ethical subjects, and if alternative practices can be built upon to create more ethical post-capitalist futures.

## 5. Conclusion

With the intention of contributing to post-capitalist pursuits, as delineated in this chapter, the case study in chapter four will analyze the practices of knowledge

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<sup>13</sup> While I am trying to produce a pluralized conception of capitalist practices, tensions do arise when trying to describe differences in practice. In this instance I draw from Schweickhart's definition of traditionally operating firms that describe their practices as authoritarian, which he also determines to be the capitalist form of workplace organization [2011, p, 48]. I will not be defining all capitalist workplaces as a singular form of organization but use this somewhat totalizing interpretation in this instance to compare it to variances in practices.

sharing, workplace democracy, and surplus appropriation and distribution at the Mondragon Corporation to explore how subject constitution can be affected through these cooperative practices. This exploration will also assess the extent experiences with cooperative workplace arrangements provide an example that can contribute a pathway towards ethical futures. The case study will apply the post-capitalist anti-essentialist discourse strategy with the intention of destabilizing discourses of dominance and revealing various social and economic practices operating currently, thus contributing to an ecology of knowledges. The subsequent chapter will advance this pursuit by interrogating how consideration surrounding reproductive labour and an ethos of care assist in dismantling hegemonic conceptions of capitalism, as well as present means to assess the ability of workplace practices to transform subjectivities into communal individuals who are able to identify and rectify situations of social injustice and act ethically.

### **Chapter 3 – Creating Ethical Subjectivities and Futures: Contributions from Reproductive Labour, Commoning, and Ethics of Care.**

In discussing post-capitalist strategies and practices in the previous chapter that aim to dismantle hegemonic conceptions of capitalism, transform subjectivities, and contribute to more ethical futures, I submit further considerations to achieve these ends in this chapter. The focus of this chapter concentrates on the critical insight of feminist theorists regarding reproductive labour as this insight lends itself to post-capitalist objectives in two ways: first, by contributing to an ecology of knowledges (Santos, 2006a) by demystifying and revealing value that has been hidden by capitalism<sup>14</sup> and Marx's analysis; and second, by disclosing locations of inequalities and structural oppression that require reorganization if subjectivities are to be transformed and ethical futures are to be achieved. Additionally, this chapter presents post-capitalist and feminist considerations in regards to the subversive potential of commoning<sup>15</sup> activities to transform subjectivities and reorganize practices that produce inequalities, which can contribute to the development of more ethical futures. Furthermore, as practices that intend to amend inequalities can be intimated as caring practices, the ethics of care are introduced as a means through which their ethicality and emancipatory potential can be measured.

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14 This thesis will define capitalism as a social relation in which nonproducers appropriate the surplus labour in value form from free wage labourers (Gibson-Graham 2006a, p.3n). The intention of this definition is not to consider these relations only pertaining to capitalism or represent a singular understanding of capitalism, but to provide a loose definition to the reader so that other considerations can be measured against it.

15 Ash Amin and Philip Howell in *Releasing the Commons: Rethinking the Futures of the Commons* present the concept of commoning as the verb tense of the noun 'commons'. It is used to describe a process of collaboration and collective orientation that is based on reciprocity and empathy, that results in the establishment of a commons (Amin & Howell, 2016, p. 2 and p.4). This will be discussed further in the section entitled: Building Ethical Futures: Potentials of the Commons in this chapter.

In view of examining if cooperative practices at the Mondragon Corporation present a potential path towards more ethical futures, the feminist considerations of reproductive labour will be applied in my case study to inspect the practices and subjectivities of cooperative members. Post-capitalist and feminist convictions of the ability of commoning practices to transform subjectivities will be examined in chapter four to determine the capacity for workplace cooperative practices to reorganize and amend inequalities through commoning. Moreover, the subversive potential and ethicality of cooperative practices at Mondragon will be assessed through an ethics of care lens to determine their potential to provide a model from which post-capitalist futures can be built.

### 1. Building Ethical Futures: The Contribution of Feminist Approaches to Reproductive Labour

As stated above, to enhance a post-capitalist evaluation of the Mondragon Corporation I will be drawing from feminist theorists to add to a broader ecology of knowledges and to provide a more comprehensive assessment of inequalities and subjectivities produced or amended through cooperative membership. The works of Silvia Federici and Kathi Weeks will be added to my theoretical framework to assess how cooperative practices at Mondragon address reproductive labour and amend inequalities created through waged labour, social and economic relations, and

capitalist accumulation<sup>16</sup> and production. This will be done to evaluate the transformation of members' subjectivities to identify if they are able to recognize and rectify situations of social inequalities.

In advance of extrapolating on the considerations of Federici and Weeks, an overview of reproductive labour is warranted. Feminist theorists have identified the home and sites of work involving care as locations of labour necessary for capitalist production as it reproduced peoples' capacity to work on a daily basis. This reproductive labour, which encompasses intricate activities and relations, including but not limited to cleaning, meal preparation, caring for the elderly, childcare, companionship and sharing knowledge, has long been hidden and devalued in capitalist relations. The acknowledgement that reproductive labour directly supports the capitalist system while being devalued by it has resulted in feminist appeals for its recognition and valuation in the public sphere. In this effort, feminist theorists have pursued analysis regarding the value of reproductive labour so as to make it an object of inquiry, policy, and to identify it as a site from which to gain emancipation. Additionally, through these theoretical revelations, feminists have made several demands to reveal and correct the subordination of women to men, and women to the economy, brought about through women's naturalized imposition to perform reproductive work. The socialized necessity and constituted

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<sup>16</sup> Capitalist accumulation in this thesis should be considered interchangeable from primitive accumulation. I have borrowed from the feminist and post-capitalist understanding of primitive accumulation that identify the process of primitive accumulation as ongoing and necessary for capitalism's continued survival (Federici, 2012, p. 101); (Harvey, 2005, *The New Imperialism*, p. 139). This stands apart from some interpretation of Marx's conception of primitive accumulation that allowed for "the process of transformation of the feudal mode of production into the capitalist mode..." (1990, p. 916).

subjectivities of women to perform reproductive labour in the home has resulted in some women in the present, and most women in the past, being dependent on men and their wages for their security, resulting in the subordination of women to their husbands and male family members. In their appeals for reproductive labour to be demystified and valued, and to have imbalances corrected, feminists have presented consideration and made provocations that challenge the current social and economic structure in an attempt to produce more ethical futures.

Federici and Weeks both contribute important insight concerning reproductive labour and broaden discursive considerations, but provide different approaches for post-capitalist projects to contemplate. Federici's exploration of Marx's deficient consideration of gender, her demands for wages for housework, and examination of divisions created between people through the commodification of reproductive labour reveal a more fulsome understanding of inequality and exploitation that demand consideration. Contributing to this critical analysis, Weeks provides further insight into the role of the wage in creating exploitative positioning towards reproductive labour and bases her proposal of refusal to work on this determination. Weeks also broadens the location of reproductive labour, which expands locations where subjectivities can be transformed, and likewise examined, in relation to reproductive labour. The theoretical contributions of Weeks and Federici lend themselves to post-capitalist projects, put forward by Amin & Howell, Gibson-Graham, Cameron & Healy, and Harvey, who examine practices of commoning as a means of reorienting subjectivities towards more ethical futures,



which will be discussed in this chapter in the section entitled: “Building Ethical Futures: Potentials of the Commons”.

Beginning with Federici I will illustrate how these authors’ works will be applied to the case study in chapter four in an effort deepen my analysis of the potential for workplace cooperative practices to contribute a model for post-capitalist futures.

## 2. Demands and Provocations Established by Reproductive Labour Revelations

Silvia Federici’s *Revolution at Point Zero* (2012) presents 35 years of essays concerning theories and praxis regarding feminist struggles in relation to reproductive labour. Federici submits these essays to exhibit how reproductive labour has been devalued in discourses concerning capitalism and to examine divisions between people produced through waged labour, as well as through capitalist accumulation and production. Federici provides three significant insights into reproductive labour that can be applied to post-capitalist pursuits to broaden consideration in achieving more ethical futures. These three insights are: first, the identification of limitations to Marx’s critical analysis; second, how the wage creates divisions between people and perpetuates structural oppression and inequality; and third, how the commodification of reproductive labour propels inequalities forward and assists in limiting possibilities for emancipation.

### 2.1 Expanding Marxist analysis

Beginning with the first insight, Federici’s focus on reproductive labour has led her to pursue a critique of Marx’s interpretations of capitalism as it omitted

considerations of reproductive labour in its analysis of capitalist production. In what I deem a post-capitalist orientation towards pluralizing discourse and adding to the ecology of knowledges, Federici adds a critical account of reproductive labour to Marxist understandings of capitalism and productive labour. She does this by bringing into view reproductive labour's contribution to capitalist production by reproducing the work force needed for production. Federici argues that Marx's neglect to consider women's unpaid reproductive labour in capitalist production leaves the analysis deficient in revealing the true extent of exploitation of labour and the role of the wage in creating divisions between people (2012, p. 92). Moreover, the failure of Marx to consider the value of reproductive labour limited his perspective on the location of emancipation and confined it to waged industrial labour (Federici, 2012, p. 95).

While Federici acknowledges the importance of Marx's analysis, despite his gender blind spots, she concurs with feminism's rejection of waged industrial work as the only site for social transformation. This is evidenced through her concentration on the subversive potential that a reevaluation of reproductive work could present. This subversive potential for reproductive labour begins with the insight that reproductive labour supports capitalist production and is currently a hidden element of a structural arrangement of oppression. By valuing reproductive labour differently through critical insight, individuals' conceptions can be transformed, promoting a shift in how individuals organize and engage in reproductive labour. This process can in turn foster subversive results as actors begin to relate to each

other and capitalist production differently, prompting them to make demands to reform social, economic and labour arrangements.

## 2.2 Wages for Housework

Proceeding onto Federici's second insight on inequalities and divisions created through the wage, she puts forward an effort to produce more just social relation by identifying the unequal dynamics between reproductive labour and waged labour and makes demands to rectify these dynamics. As previously stated in the overview of reproductive labour, one of the means through which women are subordinated to men has been produced through women's naturalized responsibility for this unwaged and devalued labour, as well as their reliance on men's wages. Federici's discernment that the wage creates unequal power dynamics between the waged and the wageless and institutionalizes sexism and racism (2012, p. 92) provides the foundation for her demand that the state should provide wages for housework. This demand is proposed as a provocation to reconsider the value of reproductive labour and to reconsider what constitutes work. While I am not analyzing the state's role in emancipatory movements in my case study, the considerations put forward in the demand for wages for housework provide valuable insight into broader dynamics and epistemologies to be considered in evaluating emancipatory potentialities. A brief overview of the wages of housework movement is necessary here, as it provides the basis for considerations of reproductive labour that I will explore in my case study.

The movement of wages for housework, which began in 1972 in Italy (Della Costa, 2002), identifies reproductive labour as the location of women's oppression and exploitation in capitalism. Unlike other feminist appeals that called for women's entrance into the workforce as a means of gaining emancipation from social inequalities, wages for housework's demand for compensation for reproductive labour recognized that the naturalized and gendered orientation towards reproductive labour persisted in the lives of women who participate in waged labour. Feminists proposing wages for housework determined that the entrance of women into the workforce was not accompanied by a shift in the recognition of the value of reproductive labour; it was superseded with women working a 'double day' of both waged and unwaged labour (Weeks, 2011, p 110). These conditions persist as women in waged labour continue to earn a fraction of each dollar earned by men, ("Employment Standards in Ontario", 2019) and continue to perform more unpaid reproductive labour than their male counterparts<sup>17</sup> (OECD, 2019), reproducing uneven power dynamics between the genders that perpetuates social divisions. This persistent inequality is the reason Federici used the demand of wages for housework in her early essays as a provocation to make visible the value of reproductive labour, on which capitalist production is dependent, and to expand an assessment of inequalities produced and maintained through waged labour. This reevaluation is essential as post-capitalist aims of creating more ethical futures

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<sup>17</sup> According to 2018 OECD statistics, women in Canada ages 15-64 spend 224 minute per day on unpaid work (reproductive work) while their male counterparts spend 148 minutes per day on unpaid work (OECD, "Time use" [https://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=SOCX\\_AGG#](https://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=SOCX_AGG#)).

cannot be achieved if reproductive labour remains devalued and relations towards it are not augmented to alter social and economic inequalities that persist.

### 2.3 Commodification of reproductive labour

Building on this insight, Federici's more contemporary essays explore the divisive elements capitalism produces through the commodification of reproductive labour. Federici third revelation identifies that the onslaught of commodification of reproductive labour has resulted in the burden of reproductive labour, like childcare and elder care, falling on women from the Global South (2012, p. 69). This increased reliance on waged reproductive work from women from the Global South has resulted in the creation of a new division between women at the site of reproductive labour. Federici maintains that this division is created through hierarchies produced by the use of the wage and the racialized exploitation of women from the Global South that often have to forgo their own reproductive labour, like caring for their own families, so as to produce a wage in the global north (2012, p. 71-72).

The introduction of the wage into the sphere of reproductive labour is shown to exacerbate and expand the divisions created through wage relations instead of transforming the value of reproductive work by providing a wage for housework. (Weeks, 2011, p. 137) Despite this insight, which calls into question the demands for wages as a solution to inequalities, the provocations of the movement for wages for housework still provide critical insight into the hidden value of reproductive labour, the inadequacies of the wage system in its current organization, and the harms of

commoditizing reproductive labour, all of which require adjustment if social inequality is to be properly addressed. If feminist and other emancipatory movements wish to ameliorate inequalities between people, the dilemma of divisions created by commodified labour and devalued reproductive labour need to be rectified. I will expand on practical consideration to amend this process presented by feminist and post-capitalist authors below in the section entitled: “Building Ethical Futures: Potentials of the Commons”, but will first return to the impacts of commodified reproductive labour.

The commodification of reproductive labour has had farther-reaching impacts beyond creating divisions between women and expanding inequalities produced through the use of a wage. A secondary impact of the commodification of reproductive labour has been the continuation of the naturalized imposition that reproductive labour is primarily the domain of women and the continuation of subjectivities oriented towards this ideology. In discussing the impacts of waged reproductive work, Federici argues that the employment of domestic workers has exacerbated the assumption that women are “responsible for the work of reproduction and weakens the struggles against the division of labor in the family, sparing women the task of forcing their male partners to share this work” (2012, p. 71). Not only has the commodification of reproductive labour hindered its reorganization so that it is shared more equally between people, as it has naturalized gendered oppression and created divisions between people, but commodification has also enabled disinvestment from the state. Through the

commercialization of reproductive labour, workers have acquired an ideology that presumes their responsibility to take on the cost of their own reproductive labour (Federici, 2012, p. 100). This ideology has become more deeply entrenched in subjectivities as state disinvestment has grown, making the purchase of the means of reproduction the only possibility for individuals without the time and social support necessary to reproduce their lives. These circumstances have expanded capitalist accumulation's grip on reproductive labour, strengthening the alignment of subjectivities towards waged based solutions. This is evidenced in the steady incline in Canadian household debt over the past 30 years (Bank of Canada, 2018, p. 1) as individuals have increasingly purchased the means to reproduce themselves and their families. Furthermore, Federici argues that the commodification of reproductive work, especially childcare and elder care, has not resulted in the liberation of "any time for ourselves, but only our time for additional work" (2012, p. 32), thus intensifying capitalist production and the subjectivities tied to the capitalist work ethic that presumes that being productive is a moral virtue (2012, p. 32).<sup>18</sup> Moreover, the reduction in leisure time assists in limiting individuals' ability to participate in practices that have emancipatory potentials, like participation in political and social organizations, which sustains their current subjectivities. The subjectivity conditioned by the capitalist work ethic and commodified reproductive labour also advances environmental destruction as some commodified means of reproduction, like meal kits, use excessive amounts of plastic and packaging. These

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<sup>18</sup> For a more in-depth examination of the impact of the work ethic on subjectivities please refer to chapter two in the section entitled: Transforming Subjects – capitalist identities and work ethics.

services bolster a temporality focused on present needs that hinder forward-looking mentalities thereby keeping subjectivities grounded in capitalist thinking.<sup>19</sup>

Through a critical analysis of reproductive labour, Federici reveals the importance of reproductive labour to capitalist production, and identifies the sites of wage and commodification as sites perpetuating social and economic inequalities in relation to reproductive labour. Federici calls for reproductive labour to be considered anew and to reorganize it so as to correct these inequalities and to transform the subjectivities that preserve them. I will be applying these consideration in my case study to analyze how cooperative practices at Mondragon: first, value reproductive labour through an assessment of how they address reproductive needs; second, by evaluating how their alternative arrangement of wage relations impact divisions between people; and third, how they engage with environmental sustainability and solidarity activities directed at creating more ethical futures. These three considerations will be applied to my analysis to determine if cooperative membership can assist in the construction of alternative ethical futures.

### 3. Feminist Considerations and Demands

Building from Federici's analysis, Kathi Weeks' *The Problem with Work* (2011) can be applied to provide depth to the critical assessment of reproductive labour's role in supporting structural inequalities. Federici and Weeks' work converge in their focus on reproductive labour as a site of emancipatory potential and in their

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<sup>19</sup> Capitalist thinking, in this thesis, should be understood as a "system of values grounded in the production of surplus values" (Weeks, 2011, p. 95), and oriented towards waged based means to sustain life.



conviction that reproductive labour contributes to the formation of subjectivities that support capitalist production. Weeks' work advances Federici's critical analysis in distinguishing that reproductive labour and productive labour no longer exist in separate spheres (Weeks, 2011, p. 27). In mapping the development of work structures over time, Weeks expands on Federici's insight concerning reproductive labour. Weeks states that: "The interpenetration of production and reproduction has deepened as domestically produced goods and services continue to be replaced with commodified forms, and as many modes of service and caring labor are transformed into waged forms of employment" (2011, p. 140). Weeks further argues that work has been transformed by post-Fordism, requiring more flexibility, incorporating more caring activities, and demanding more emotional input from workers (2011, p. 70 & 72). In turn, the locations of reproductive labour and thus emancipatory potential expand from the household to include waged reproductive and productive labour in the workplace. While Federici identified waged reproductive labour as a divisive practice hindering the subversive potential of reproductive labour, she still located reproductive labour as operating mostly in the household (2012, p. 11). For this reason wages for housework, and Federici's other critical insight, targeted the household as the site of transformation in relation to reproductive labour as it identified it as essential in producing a particular type of subjectivity that conforms to a particular work discipline for capitalist purposes (2012, p. 97) and sustains divisions and inequalities. Although Weeks sees the household and family as a necessary element in organizing subjectivities towards reproductive and productive labour she diverges from Federici's analysis by arguing that subjectivities are

produced both within and outside the family and the wage relation (Weeks, 2011, p. 141). From the basis of this consideration Weeks proposes that the autonomist Marxist practices of a refusal of work be applied to every expression of waged and unwaged reproductive and productive labour so as to transform subjectivities and address where social and economic inequalities are generated.

As previously discussed in chapter two,<sup>20</sup> Weeks asserts that the practice of refusal of work is “a process, a theoretical and practical movement that aims to effect a separation through which we can pursue alternative practices and relationships” (2011, p. 100). The intent of refusal of work is to reconsider what constitutes work, valuing reproductive labour, and demanding a reduction in time spent in all forms of labour (2011, p. 153). This demand for less work attempts to change subjectivities produced through ethics of both work and family that manufacture individuals’ consent to participate in capitalist practices that legitimate inequality and rationalize exploitation (Weeks, 2011, p. 53) by reorganizing relations to reproduction and production. By refusing work, more time away from labour while receiving the same amount of pay (Weeks, 2011, p. 161) and social support for reproductive labour (Weeks, 2011, p. 163) is demanded, which will enable more time for leisure, creativity, community and polity (Weeks, 2011, p. 161). It is through new practices, provided for by time apart from labour, that new understandings and considerations can be forged (Weeks, 2011, p. 34). Moreover, it enables the potential for new subjectivities to be formed that desire to

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<sup>20</sup> Refer to the section entitled: Subject Constitution Through the Work Ethic.

reappropriate and reconfigure existing forms of production and reproduction (Weeks, 2011, p. 99) in an effort to create more ethical futures. With these considerations in mind I will be examining how cooperative members' subjectivities are constituted through their practices at work. I will do this by analysing how reproductive labour is valued within the organization by examining if jobs involving reproductive labour are included in the benefits provided for in cooperative membership and collective practices at Mondragon. Additionally, I will examine if cooperative members have made any demands to reduce hours of work while maintaining their pay as a means of assessing if their practices at work have inspired an interest in reorganizing relations to reproduction and production.

The provocation of refusal of work and wages for housework, previously discussed, both serve as methods to elicit collective practices, and epistemological and ontological reframing through new considerations and practices that in turn reconstitute subjectivities (Weeks, 2011, p. 131). With the intention of transforming subjects through processes of reconceptualising and making collective demands, both Federici and Weeks focus on the possibilities for collectivization producing new senses of self (Weeks, 2011, p. 90) that have the capacity to address inequalities outside the logic of capital and the market (Federici, 2012, p. 111). It is through these processes that the proposals of Federici and Weeks can be assessed as emancipatory potentials and provide for collectivized practices that could contribute to building commons, which I will expand on in the following section. I intend to apply these concepts to explore if subjectivities of cooperative members

encourage them to participate in commons building outside of collectivizing surpluses and if their experiences with commons affects their connection to work ethics making them more inclined to make demands for less hours of work. In my estimation, the building of commons and collectivized practices provide emancipatory potentials to reorganize social and economic structures as well as reconstitute subjectivities interested in more ethical futures.

#### 4. Building Ethical Futures: Potentials of the Commons

Prior to extrapolating on the emancipatory potentials and practices of collectivization and commons it is essential that I discuss the development of what constitutes commons. Karl Marx's interpretation of the commons was of a natural resource used collectively by peasants for activities that sustained their lives, such as collecting firewood (1990, p. 878). The commons were essential in his critical analysis of how transition from feudal economies to capitalist economies were produced as enclosures of lands held in common forced independent people off the land (Marx, 1990, p. 885) and pushed them towards waged labour to sustain their lives (Marx, 1990, p. 888). Since Marx, the interpretation of what constitutes a common has expanded beyond tangible natural resources to include any resources held in common. Contemporary conceptions of the commons include, but are not limited to, knowledge and cultural commons (Harvey, 2011, p. 103), economic resources held in common (Gibson-Graham, 2006b, p. 125), as well as digital commons and acquire entitlements. (Federici, 2012, p.139) This broadening of the consideration of what constitutes commons beyond tangible categories has been accompanied by the assertion that the building and protection of commons is a

social practice that aims to fulfil common interests and create transformative effects (Harvey, 2011, p. 103).

Contributing to these considerations is the critical analysis of Amin and Howell who elucidate that the commons can be understood as something produced through various kinds of cooperation and ethical relationships to include discursive, affective and political practices (Amin & Howell 2016, p. 12). Gibson-Graham, Cameron and Healy (2016) also identify the commons as including intangibles, equating commons to an activity, process and practice ( p. 196). Through this appreciation the commons has been expanded beyond its noun form to include an interpretation of commons in a verb sense (Amin & Howell, 2012, p. 4), birthing the term commoning. Amin and Howell present the concept of commoning as a process of collaboration, collective orientation, inspiration for political action and organization based on reciprocity and empathy, as well as a process necessary for collective existence and future stewardship (Amin & Howell, 2016, p. 2 and p.4). Moreover, the process of commoning is aimed at distributing the benefits accumulated by the practice in ways that takes into account the well-being of others (Gibson-Graham, Cameron, & Healy, 2016, p. 195), which offers an alternative practice that could contribute to the creation of ethical futures. In this estimation, new practices of commoning reorganize sites, such as reproduction, surpluses, and wages, so that inequalities are addressed by members who are interested in accounting for the well-being of others. Through the process, individuals participating in commoning learn to be affected (Gibson-Graham et al., 2016, p. 200)

by way of their participation with new practices and new considerations of social and economic impacts. In this way, commoning offers a means to transform subjectivities through practice and the reorganization of resources. As an aside, commoning practices also contribute to post-capitalist pursuits discussed in chapter two of this thesis<sup>21</sup> as their existence destabilizes capitalism's presumptive hegemony (Gibson-Graham, 2006a, p. 15) by contributing examples of alternative organizations of economic and social relations that furnish understandings of diverse economies.

As previously discussed in this chapter, the present arrangement of the work ethic and commodification of reproductive labour grounds subjectivities in capitalist thinking fixated on temporalities of the present. The act of commoning offers a remedy for this, as commoning should always be about prospecting a 'commons-that-might-be' while simultaneously protecting the 'commons that are' (Gibson-Graham et al., 2016, p. 195). To assist in the endeavours of expanding temporal context to commoning practices, Gibson-Graham et al. offer the tool of the intergenerational commons yardstick (Gibson-Graham et al., 2016, p. 199) as a means by which individuals can think forwards. By demarcating every 25 years as a generation, commoning projects can identify not only their successes but estimate the gains that could be made in the future through their efforts. Gibson-Graham et al. apply the intergenerational commons yardstick to commoning practices aimed at correcting the impacts on the ozone layer produced by greenhouse gas emissions,

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21 For further discussion please refer to the section entitled: Transforming Capitalist Practice

but this tool could easily be applied to all commoning practices to assist in forward thinking. It is with these considerations in mind that I will be analysing how practices of commoning by cooperative members at Mondragon have contributed to producing forward thinking subjectivities.

#### 4.1 Considerations and Cautions for Commoning

The considerations of commoning practices, as a means to produce more forward thinking subjectivities interested in the well-being of others and ethical futures, does not come without its cautions. David Harvey, in *The Future of the Commons* (2011), caveats the transformative potential of commoning by noting that in certain circumstances one commons may need to be protected at the expense of another (2011, p. 102). This contingency could possibly hinder the practices of empathy, well-being of others, and future stewardship that is supposed to result from commoning. In examining the commoning practices of cooperative members at Mondragon it will be necessary to consider if the commons they create and preserve take into consideration the well-being of other commons or are singularly focus on the well-being of its members. This consideration is critical in assessing if Mondragon's cooperative practice can be drawn on to achieve post-capitalist futures.

A secondary cautionary consideration to assess if Mondragon's commoning practices can contribute to post-capitalist futures is in identifying if their financial commons, meaning the collection of money produced through surplus appropriation and held in common, is created as a result of the exploitation and

suffering of other people. As expounded upon in the above section entitled “Wages for Housework”, the current social division of labour in capitalism that perpetuates the naturalization of gendered and racialized inequalities through the use of the wage and the devaluation of reproductive labour need to be reorganized if paths to ethical futures are to be made. While commoning advances subversive potentials by breaking apart enclosures that delivered individuals to capitalist production (Marx, 1990, p. 887) and reconstituted their subjectivities to capitalist thinking, it may have its transformative potential eradicated if it does not elicit communal thinking and practices that reject the continuation of exploitation and inequalities. Federici upholds that if commoning is to have meaning it has to result in the production of communal subjects and communities that upholds responsibility to others and the earth, refusing to base their lives on the suffering of others (2012, p. 145).

A major hurdle in accomplishing meaningful commoning remains limited access to commons and community building as a result of precarious labour. As discussed in chapter two,<sup>22</sup> precarious labour has amplified the work ethic as individuals seek secondary jobs to support themselves. This in turn reduces their leisure time that could enable time for self-exploration and community building. Moreover, precarious labour inhibits work collectivization needed to make demands (Federici, 2012, p. 105), as individuals involved in precarious and part-time work have no leverage, limited opportunity to collectivize at work, and often have no access to union representation, as union participation ordinarily requires full time and

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<sup>22</sup> More specifically, impacts of precarious labour can be found in the section entitled: Transforming Subjects – capitalist identities and work ethics



permanent employment. Collaterally, community building and meaningful<sup>23</sup> commoning is often hindered in the workplace as the stability and benefits enjoyed by permanent employees partially result from the precarious labour used to cut costs, thus creating a commons based off of the exploitation of others.

Weakening of community building and meaningful commoning in relation to precarious labour extends beyond corporate environments. As discussed in the section entitled “Commodification of Reproductive Labour” in this chapter, waged reproductive work in the Global North often relies on the labour of women from the Global South (Federici, 2012, p. 69). These waged jobs in reproductive labour frequently involve situations of precarity that contribute to the exploitation of women and visible minorities, who are proportionately more likely to be involved in precarious work. (Provincial Government of Ontario, 2017, p. 46) Combined with the sacrifices individuals in waged reproductive labour commonly make in regards to their own reproductive labour so as to earn a wage (Federici, 2012, p. 71-72), the consistent devaluing of reproductive labour, and the sustainment of precarious labour it permits, produce inequalities and divisions between people that inhibit community building and meaningful commoning.

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23 From an examination of Federici’s *Revolution at Point Zero*, I have interpreted ‘meaningful’ used in relation to commoning to mean practices that transform subjectivities so that members consider the consequences of their actions, overcome the state of denial that enables social and environmental destruction (2012, p. 144-145), and promotes the amelioration of inequalities and exploitation through their practices, contributing to more ethical futures. It should be noted that not all commoning practices intend to subvert or reorganize current structural oppressions. This is why the term ‘meaningful’ is used as a signifier in this thesis.

This devaluation of the reproductive labour of people from the Global South extends beyond the household and precarious care work. While women from the global south are hindered in their ability to collectivize and make demands concerning the valuation of reproductive labour, their compatriots in the Global South also face hurdles to commoning and collectivisations through the devaluation of their means to reproduce life. In her critical analysis, Federici details how the process of structural readjustment, debt crisis, and austerity programs (2011, p. 103) have culminated in the expulsion of people from land so that products for export can be produced. These processes have enabled capitalist accumulation to create reproduction crises through the establishment of regions in the Global South with near-zero reproduction (Federici, 2012, p 103). This process devalues life and further inhibits communal organization, as people are separated from their means to reproduce life, are unable to sustain their cultures and knowledges, and are forced to migrate to metropolises for waged labour. This process strips away people's ability to reproduce themselves, which limits, if not erases, their ability to participate and benefit from practices of commoning. The consideration of how life and reproductive labour are devalued and sustain social inequalities<sup>24</sup> need to be considered by practices of commoning that purport to interest themselves in well-being and creating better futures. The examination of how commoning practices value reproductive labour and organize in relation to it can be used as a litmus test to evaluate the meaningfulness of their commoning. The

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<sup>24</sup> Social inequalities is used here to represent practices that promote structural oppression and exploitation but also includes environmental costs that are incurred as the removal of environmental access from people and future generations creates inequalities between people as one is able to enjoy and benefit off it, to the detriment of others.

considerations of how cooperative practices of commoning engage with reproductive labour, precarity, protection of the well-being of others will be considered so as to discern if Mondragon's cooperative practices could produce more ethical futures.

### 5. Measuring the Ethicality of Cooperative Practices

Thus far, I have concentrated on the desire to produce ethical futures by examining theoretical and practical considerations and proposals. In chapter two, I explored the ethical role of discourse and knowledge development and their contribution to the constitution of subjectivities. Moreover, I examined how some ethics, more specifically the work ethic, can strengthen economic and social impacts, some of which reinforce the exploitation, oppression, and inequalities resulting from logics of capitalism and colonialism. In light of this, I discussed subversive potentials of practices, like the reorganization of surplus distribution and workplace democracy, to transform subjectivities into more ethical subjectivities. In this chapter I expanded considerations of locations and practices that require transformation. In disclosing how reproductive labour and its current arrangements have supported structural oppression I proposed a need for the transformation of orientations and practices that support this oppression so that ethical futures could be devised.

Practices were discussed as means through which more ethical subjectivities and futures could be created. Central to this were practices of commoning, which could not only reorganize practices to address oppression and inequalities, but could modify subjectivities away from mentalities that supported these negative externalities. This discussion presupposes that through the practice of commoning

ethical individuals would be developed. This was not without its caveats, which discussions in the previous section cautioned that assessments of commoning should inquire into to determine their meaningfulness. This meaningfulness was presented as a measuring stick to evaluate the ethical potential of commoning practices.

While the negative outcomes and necessary amendments to current structural oppressions were discussed, what is specifically meant by ethical futures and ethical subjects was not. This was done intentionally, as considerations of what ethical futures entail and the ethical subjects that provide for them will constantly evolve as new considerations, outcomes of practices, and new knowledges are revealed. This process aligns with Gibson-Graham's practice of 'weak theorizing', which "involves refusing to extend explanation too widely or deeply, refusing to know too much" and provides space for possibilities (2008, p. 619). Moreover, the intention of presenting unrefined representations of ethical futures and ethical subjects was to align with the ambitions of utopian thinking that functions to "generate estrangement from the present and to provide the desire for, imagination of, and movement towards a different future" (Weeks, 2011, p. 213). While I intend to participate in weak theory, I will be borrowing from the feminist ethics of care to contribute to the deepening of an evaluation of the ethicality of practices in my case study.

While a fulsome review of the feminist ethics of care is outside the scope of this paper, I believe the ethical elements of care detailed by Joan Tronto in *Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument for an Ethic of Care* (1993) provide useful consideration through which practices can be evaluated as being ethical. These four ethical elements of care involve attentiveness, responsibility, competence and responsiveness (Tronto, 1993). While an interrelationship between these four elements and considerations of well-being, learning to be affected, and future stewardship exists, the elements of attentiveness and responsiveness will be drawn on in my evaluation of the ethical potentials of cooperative practices at Mondragon. I will borrow from these two elements as I feel they more explicitly assist in determining if practices at Mondragon are ethical and if, in turn, they can contribute to ethical futures and ethical subjectivities.

As these two elements will be applied to my case study I will provide brief insight into their meaning.

Beginning with attentiveness, Tronto presents this element as the ability of individuals to recognize others needs and respond to them, as opposed to willfully ignoring them (1993). This echoes Federici's call to "overcome the state of constant denial and irresponsibility, concerning the consequences of our actions" (2012, p. 145) if meaningful commons are to be established. The element of responsiveness builds on these considerations. Tronto asserts that the element of responsiveness involves care that is "concerned with conditions of vulnerability and inequality"

(1993, p. 134) and involves a process of understanding concerns raised by those in vulnerable situations. It also entails a deeper interconnectedness to an ever-enlarging circle of human beings (Schweickhart, 2011, p. 17). These two elements offer a means to more concretely name practices that indicate ethical behaviors without providing a strict set of parameters to define them. They also correlate to considerations of valuing reproductive labour, and offer a means to identify if practices of commoning, knowledge sharing, surplus appropriation, and workplace democracy exercise ethics of care by exploring how these practices identify, interact with, and possibly resolve inequalities.

## 6. Conclusion

With the view of revealing sites to be reorganized to amend inequalities and oppression, this chapter has drawn from the works of feminist theorists interested in demystifying reproductive labour's value and revealing how waged labour maintains divisions between people perpetuating exploitation. The provocations and demands of feminist theorists were expanded upon to further a critique of current arrangements of reproductive labour. They were also provided to elucidate the threat commodification of reproductive labour poses to reorganizing practices so as to amend inequalities and transform subjectivities grounded in temporalities focused on present needs that hinder forward-looking mentalities. Furthermore, the contemporizing of understandings on the location of reproductive labour from the household to include the workplace broadened sites where subjectivities and orientations towards reproductive labour can be tested.

The second half of this chapter discussed the solution of commoning proposed by feminists and post-capitalist theorists. According to these theories, the solution of meaningful commoning provides opportunities to reorganize, amend inequalities and oppression, and transform subjectivities. This solution was presented as a means through which not only reproductive labour could be revalued, but also ethical futures could be produced. These practices resolved to transform subjectivities through cooperation, empathy, and forward thinking into ethical individuals. This proposal came with considerations on how to examine the transformative potential of commons. These included the need for commons not to hinder the well-being of other commons and the assurance that commons are not built through the exploitation of others or through the destruction of the means through which others reproduce their lives. To deepen my analysis of meaningful commons and the practice that portend to produce ethical futures and individuals I indicated my intention to use elements of ethics of care. These considerations and analysis will be applied to my case study to examine if cooperative membership at Mondragon can contribute a path to ethical and post-capitalist futures

## **Chapter 4 – Assessment of the Contribution of Workplace Cooperative Practices to Post-Capitalist Projects Through the Case Study of Mondragon Corporation**

In this chapter, I assess how cooperative practices contribute to post-capitalist futures using the case study of the Mondragon Corporation. In my previous chapters I provided an overview of post-capitalist considerations of knowledge production and sharing, workplace democracy, and surplus appropriation and distribution and how they could contribute to transforming subjectivities through which post-capitalist futures could be built. Revelations of the devaluation of reproductive labour were also presented as a site requiring transformation to produce ethical futures. I proposed that an application of elements of ethics of care should be applied to deepen the evaluation of the ethicality of practices and subjectivities produced through cooperative practices.

The aim of this chapter is thus threefold. First, I evaluate how cooperative practices of knowledge sharing, workplace democracy, and surplus appropriation and distribution differ from capitalist practices, produce different subjectivities, and result in decisions that succeed and experience tensions in ameliorating alienation, exploitation and social inequalities using the cooperative practices of the Mondragon Corporation as a case study. Second, I further evaluate the emancipatory potentials of the Mondragon Corporation's cooperative practices by assessing how the corporation tries to address inequalities resulting from the devaluation of



reproductive labour to identify if it presents subversive solutions. Third, I apply an ethic of care lens, using the elements of attentiveness and responsiveness, to explicitly evaluate the ethicality of the cooperative practices and subjectivities in extending care,<sup>25</sup> instead of participating in capitalist practices that legitimate inequality and rationalize exploitation (Weeks, 2012, p. 53). This will be done to identify the model workplace cooperative practices can contribute to the development of post-capitalist futures.

### 1. Choice of the Mondragon Corporation as a Case Study

In the interest of examining how post-capitalist futures can be established, I have focused on how cooperative practices can contribute to the process of transforming subjectivities. In an effort to evaluate practices that may provide for this transformation I have concentrated on alternative arrangements of work, specifically cooperative practices, as their arrangements differ from those of most firms that operate in an authoritarian manner and place primacy on economic interests over worker well-being. As I have elucidated previously, I will be using the contemporary case study methodology (Yin, 2009) to assess the potential for the Mondragon Corporation's cooperative practices to contribute a model from which post-capitalist futures can be built.

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<sup>25</sup> Care in this usage should be understood as "provisions of what is necessary for the health, welfare, maintenance, and protection of someone or something" (Oxford Dictionary, "care | Definition of care in English by Oxford Dictionaries") and comprehended as falling in line with feminist and post-capitalist interests of preserving the well-being of others, as discussed in chapter three.

The Mondragon Corporation was selected for my case study as it is the world's largest worker owned cooperative (Tremlett, 2013). Established in 1956 in Arrasate/Mondragon<sup>26</sup> in the Basque region of Spain (Arando, Gago, Jones & Kato, 2015, p. 399) as a democratic cooperative, the Mondragon Corporation was founded on "the notions that all the workers were partners, financiers, and co-owners of the enterprise" (Bretos and Errasti, 2018, p. 36). The corporation developed over time into one of the "leading Spanish business groups" (Mondragon Corporation, website, 2019) operating as an umbrella corporation of 261 small corporations and subsidiaries employing both members and non-member workers in four business areas: finance, industry, retail, and education (Mondragon Corporation, "Annual Report 2017"). Mondragon's current configuration as an international organization employing 80,818 people around the world (Mondragon Corporation, "Annual Report 2017") began with the amalgamation of economies into the European Union in the 1980's (Mondragon Corporation, "FAQs"). This international expansion followed the model of 'multi-localization', which entails opening new operations abroad without closing existing operations in the Basque region (Bretos & Errasti, 2018, p. 37). The Mondragon Corporation has pursued this process as they have committed to corporate values that include a pledge to develop its social environment (Mondragon Corporation, "About us"), which they have done in the Basque region of Spain through practices of job creation and job protection for cooperative members, which will be discussed further in this chapter.

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<sup>26</sup> I have used both the Basque name and the Spanish name of the town as it is referred to by both in various literature.

Truly, what makes Mondragon an alternative organization to be evaluated as a model for post-capitalist futures is not only its practices of job protection but its commitment to cooperative practices based in knowledge sharing, workplace democracy, and surplus appropriation and distribution; practices that post-capitalist theorists have identified as sites with subversive potentials. These practices enable the potential for the transformation of subjectivities as they incorporate acts of commoning,<sup>27</sup> solidarity, and care. However, tensions exist within the organization in its current international articulation as only 101 of the 261 corporations and subsidiaries operate as cooperatives (Mondragon Corporation, “FAQs”), therefore limiting the potentially transformative practices to cooperative members who are located in Spain.

As stated above, this chapter will provide a thorough examination of the tensions and successes within each of the practices of knowledge sharing, workplace democracy, and surplus appropriation and distribution in Mondragon. This will be done in an effort to evaluate their potential to transform members into more ethical individuals by reconstituting their subjectivities away from perspectives informed by hegemonic conceptions of capitalism, that enables social and economic inequalities to persist, towards communal mentalities interested in the well-being of others.

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<sup>27</sup> For discussion on commoning refer to chapter three in the section entitled: Building Ethical Futures: Potentials of the Commons

## 2. Knowledge Sharing

Detailed in chapter 2,<sup>28</sup> sharing knowledge of alternative practices offers opportunities for ontological reframing by broadening social imaginaries,<sup>29</sup> in turn affecting subjectivities and contributing a strategy towards emancipatory transformation. The process of knowledge sharing about alternative social, economic, and labour practices advances post-capitalist pursuits as it contributes to the development of an ecology of knowledges that creates a counter discourse that dismantles capitalism's hegemonic framing. The Mondragon Corporation advances post-capitalist potentials as it is committed to sharing knowledge of its cooperative practices of workplace democracy and surplus appropriation and distribution directed by workers, which differ from most capitalist practices in corporations. Based on the Rochdale cooperative principles, the Mondragon Corporation has expressed its dedication to education about cooperative principles and social transformation (Gibson-Graham, 2006b, p.104-105). This is exhibited in their commitment to set aside human and financial resources for co-operative, professional, and youth education to promote the corporation's principles<sup>30</sup> (Mondragon Corporation, "Our Principles"). Moreover, the importance of knowledge production and sharing in the Mondragon Corporation is evidenced in their creation of a cooperative university in 1997 (Mondragon Unibertsitatea, "Mondragon University Cooperative University") that amalgamated previous educational

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28 This information can be found in chapter two in the section entitled: Transforming Capitalist Practice.

29 For a definition of social imaginaries refer to chapter two in the section entitled: Transforming Capitalist Practices.

30 These principles include open admission, democratic organization, sovereignty of labour, instrumental and subordinate nature of capital, participatory management, payment solidarity, inter-cooperation, social transformation, universality and education (Mondragon University, "Our Principles").

institutions of the Mondragon Corporation. This amalgamation included the higher polytechnic school dedicated to educating future cooperative workers and updating the skills and knowledge of cooperative workers (De Sousa Santos, 2006, p. xxx), a Masters program in social economy and cooperative enterprise that draws from the Mondragon Corporation's experiences in solidarity, equality and democracy, and is open to the public ("Economía Social y Empresa Cooperativa"), and the LANKI institute of cooperative research focused on analysing the cooperative movement, to promote social and solidarity economies, and to promote social innovation "to help create a fair and better society" ("Cooperativism").

### 2.1 Tensions with Knowledge Sharing

Despite the virtuous intentions of the Mondragon Corporation in regards to cooperative education, these goals have come under strain beginning with the corporation's expansion of operations abroad through multi-localization. At present the Mondragon Corporation has 125 production plants abroad ("Internationalization model") employing around 13, 672 people.<sup>31</sup> This multi-localization process has resulted in a hybrid organization with a cooperative headquarters and international subsidiaries operating like traditional capitalist firms, which Anjel Errasti has named a coopitalist structure (Errasti, 2015, p 480). This structure presents tensions to the potential for the Mondragon Corporation to produce transformations to social imaginaries through knowledge sharing as the corporation does not currently share its cooperative knowledge and principles, as

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<sup>31</sup> This figure was calculated by subtracting the total amount of jobs in Spain, provided for in Mondragon's employment distribution webpage (Mondragon Corporation, "Employment Distribution"), by the total number of employees reported in Mondragon's annual report for 2017.

well as opportunities for cooperative membership, to most of its international subsidiaries. In their ethnographic interviews at Mondragon subsidiaries in France, Errasti, Bretos, and Etxezarreta discovered that workers had little knowledge of the Mondragon Corporation and its principles (2016, p. 447). Furthermore, the workers in French subsidiaries confirmed that they had not received any cooperative training or information when Mondragon purchased their firm and had only received information about productivity improvements at the plant (Errasti et al., 2016, p. 448). In a separate exploration of Mondragon subsidiaries in China, Bretos and Errasti confirmed an absence of training for unskilled workers in the Chinese Kunshan Industrial Park where the Mondragon Corporation operates. (Bretos & Errasti, 2018, p. 38) These revelations presents concerns as it would seem to indicate a deterioration of the corporation's principles concerning education and social transformation as it establishes more production plants abroad. Moreover, it would imply that as international expansion continues, Mondragon's principles tend to be subverted for goals interested in profit maximization over social transformation through knowledge sharing that could transform subjectivities. What this revelation indicates is that Mondragon's present constraint in sharing knowledge of workplace cooperative practices to its international subsidiaries contributes to the strengthening of hegemonic conceptions of capitalism by not diversifying conceptions of labour practices that are not organized in an authoritarian, alienating and exploitative manner. Furthermore, it indicates that limitation in the proliferation of knowledge of Mondragon's cooperative practices require adjustment if it is to be considered a model for post-capitalist futures.

In an effort to understand why the Mondragon Corporation does not share knowledge of its cooperative practices with its international subsidiaries I reviewed the corporations' annual reports from the years 1998 to 2017<sup>32</sup> to determine if the deficiency in sharing this knowledge was intentional. In the examination of annual reports, a shift in discourse was evident in the central messaging found in the executive summaries and president's messages. Early annual reports from that time period referenced a non-exclusive vision of solidarity (Mondragon Corporation, "Annual Report 1998", p. 6) with a commitment to information and knowledge sharing of its principles and values (Mondragon Corporation, "Annual report 2010", p. 5). This discourse changed over time as the central messaging after 2010 no longer made reference to sharing knowledge of its principles and values but focused on innovation and R & D development to promote the corporation's competitiveness and to create wealth in their (Spanish) environment (Mondragon Corporation, "Annual Report 2016", p. 9). This indicates a shift in the corporation's aims towards profit maximization. However, this alteration in discourse does not completely substantiate a claim that Mondragon's cooperative principles do not offer some model for post-capitalist futures in regards to sharing knowledge of workplace cooperative practices. What it does present are tensions to be addressed so that more ethical futures can be developed through knowledge sharing about cooperative practices.

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<sup>32</sup> This range of dates of annual reports reflects what is available online at: <https://www.mondragon-corporation.com/sobre-nosotros/magnitudes-economicas/informe-anual/>

The Mondragon Corporation is aware of their deficiency in sharing knowledge about cooperative principles and practices to their international subsidiaries. In their defense, the corporation has identified that legal and cultural challenges exist abroad that inhibit their ability to extend their cooperative principles and practices (Mondragon Corporation, "FAQs"; Bretos & Errasti, 2018, p. 40), which in turn dissuades the sharing of knowledge pertaining to cooperatives with international workers. Despite this, the Mondragon Corporation has stated that they share their management model, based on transparency and the participation of workers, with management in their international subsidiaries (Mondragon Corporation, "FAQs"). This is unsurprising, however, as management positions, especially general management positions, in international subsidiaries tend to be occupied by expatriates members from headquarters (Errasti, 2013, p. 487) who are already trained in cooperative principles. Moreover, the ability of managers to share knowledge regarding cooperative principles was identified as near impossible by Mondragon members (Errasti et al., 2016, p. 448) as managers from headquarters are only temporarily placed in international subsidiaries.

Mondragon does however demonstrate its commitment to transparency in information (Mondragon Corporation, "Annual Report 2011"; Mondragon Corporation, "Annual Report 2012") evidenced in their detailed website in multiple languages and the publication of its annual reports online for the years 1998 to 2017, which extends their knowledge sharing beyond their cooperative members.



This process of knowledge sharing through the Internet still lacks full emancipatory potential as this knowledge is limited by what the corporation has decided to release publically and requires individuals to have access to the Internet.

While all of this is discouraging when assessing the emancipatory potentials of the Mondragon Corporation through the sharing of knowledge about cooperative principles, the corporation has attempted to amend certain aspects of this internationally. Fagor Ederlan, a Mondragon cooperative created in 1963 (Fagor Ederlan, "We belong to Mondragon"), participated in multi-localization to Brazil creating a production plant in that country. As Ederlan's longest-running foreign subsidiary (Bretos, Errasti, & Marcuello, 2018, p. 15) a receptiveness to cooperative principles and practices in Brazil was identified resulting in the introduction of social equity policies in regards to salaries and employment (Bretos, et al., 2018, p. 15), as well as internal promotion practices similar to those of the Basque cooperative headquarters (Bretos & Errasti, 2018, p. 39). In support of these practices a commitment to workers' continuous labour training, similar to the model of their cooperative headquarters, was also implemented (Bretos & Errasti, 2018, p. 39), extending knowledge about cooperative values to the international workers in Brazil.

The receptiveness of cooperative values in Brazil resulted in the Ederlan Governing Council studying the possibility of transforming the Brazilian plant into a worker cooperative (Bretos & Errasti, 2018, p. 39). The determination of this study was that differences between Basque and Brazilian cooperative legislation, as well as

differences in cultural conceptions of cooperatives, proved too large a hurdle for the transformation of the plant into a worker cooperative. (Bretos & Errasti, 2018, p. 18) Despite this outcome, the Brazilian plant still enjoys knowledge sharing and training, as well as some practices that reflect those of the headquarters. This practice of sharing knowledge about different labour practices contributes to the transformation of subjectivities and the creation of post-capitalist futures through the broadening of workers' perception of how labour can be differently organized, which dismantles hegemonic conceptions of capitalism and provides potentials to change social, economic, and labour practices through the development of new social imaginaries.

While knowledge sharing regarding cooperative values and principles remains absent in almost all of their international subsidiaries, the Mondragon Corporation has dedicated itself to knowledge production and sharing amongst cooperatives. This is evidenced in their university and cooperative training institutes previously detailed. In addition to this, the Mondragon Corporation directs part of its appropriated surplus to the promotion of the co-operative world (Mondragon Assembly, "Mondragon Assembly Annual Report 2017", p. 35), specifically by providing "substantial financial contributions to the International Cooperative Alliance" (Gibson-Graham, 2006b, p. 122) that provides a global voice and forum for knowledge concerning cooperative values and practices and advocates the interests of cooperatives (International Co-operative Alliance, "ICA Cooperative mission").

Applying a post-capitalist lens to these considerations to evaluate the effect on subjectivities through knowledge production and sharing by the Mondragon Corporation it is evident that international workers, with the exception of Fagor Ederlan Brasileira, are provided with little opportunity to have their perceptions of the world, that is informed by hegemonic conceptions of capitalism, transformed through the awareness of other social, economic, and labour practices that could be provided for through the sharing of knowledge of cooperative practices and principles. This brings into question the effect of knowledge sharing by the Mondragon Corporation on the subjectivities of its cooperative members. The current articulation of the coopitalist model of the Mondragon Corporation does assist in dismantling the binary between capitalist and non-capitalist practices (Gibson-Graham, 2008, p. 623) and contribute to an ecology of knowledges for its members by advancing different ways of being and operating in the world.

If the Mondragon Corporation's principles are dedicated to education about cooperative principles and social transformation (Gibson-Graham, 2006b, p.104-105), as well as creating a better, fairer society (Mondragon Corporation, "Annual report 2017"), then it would seem that, insofar as its knowledge sharing activities are mainly limited to Spanish members, the espoused principles mainly orient subjectivities of cooperative workers toward the interests and well-being of other cooperative members. As cooperative members have not demanded the extension of cooperative principles with its international workers, the emancipatory potential of sharing knowledge is called into question, as is the ethicality of their practices. I will

evaluate ethicality later in this chapter but would like to note that the willingness to reproduce structural oppression by consciously omitting discourse that could broaden individuals' conception of ethical economic and social practices indicates a structure that requires some adjustment if it is to be considered a model for post-capitalist futures to draw from.

As I stated in chapter two, it is essential that emancipatory movements like post-capitalism examine how subjectivities are constituted beyond discourse so that they can effect change in individuals' orientation towards perceptions of capitalism, as well as economic, labour, and social conceptions. Elucidated in the same chapter, alternative practices of workplace democracy and surplus appropriation and distribution offer emancipatory potentials in regards to transforming subjectivities of individuals who participate in them as they create more communally focused individuals. This in turn affects their perception of, and relationship with, dominant conceptions of capitalism. As the structure of the Mondragon Corporation is based in alternative practices of workplace democracy and surplus appropriation and distribution, which diverge from practice in most capitalist firms, it provides a specimen to examine how subjectivities can be affected by alternative labour practices to create more ethical individuals. The following section will provide a brief overview of how workplace democracy and surplus appropriation and distribution operate at the Mondragon Corporation.

### 3. Workplace Democracy

In examining the impact of the practice of workplace democracy on individuals at Mondragon it is important to clarify that only cooperative members are provided with the opportunity to participate in these practices. As stated in chapter 2,<sup>33</sup> the process of providing democratic input to workers enables cooperative members to make decision regarding the direction of the corporation and their labour processes, mitigating their alienation and acquainting them with collective processes. This section will explore how membership is managed and how workplace democracy is practiced within the Mondragon Corporation. This will be done to examine how Mondragon's workplace democracy can contribute a model to post-capitalist futures, as well as identify limitations that need to be addressed.

As elucidated, only cooperative members are able to participate in the cooperative practices of workplace democracy, and surplus appropriation and distribution. To provide context to the reader, this membership is obtained after a probationary period of not less than six months (Arando, Gago, Jones & Kato, 2015, p. 405) and after paying a one-time joining fee, also called a capital contribution, of around €15,000 (Mondragon Corporation, "FAQs"), or equal to 30 percent of a worker's annual remuneration (Arando, et al., 2015 p. 403). As a cooperative member the individual is able to engage in workplace democracy through various means, principally through the General Assembly, Cooperative Congress, and the Social

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33 See section entitled: Transforming Sites – Surplus Distribution and Workplace Democracy

Council.<sup>34</sup> It is through the General Assembly, which is based on the principle of one member, one vote, that cooperative members are able to vote directly on the performance of the last year, establish guidelines for the future, and appoint members to the Governing Council, which is responsible for monitoring, hiring and firing managers (Campbell, 2011, p. 329-330). Cooperative members also participate in workplace democracy through the Cooperative Congress and the Social Council, but in the form of representative democracy, where cooperative members are elected to represent the concerns of their particular cooperative. The Cooperative Congress, which decides “the strategic criteria governing and guiding the Corporation” (Mondragon Corporation, “Press dossier”) and coordinates the activities voted on at the General Assembly, is comprised of 650 members elected by the worker members<sup>35</sup> of each cooperative (Mondragon Corporation, “Organization”). This Congress provides its cooperative members with the power to set policy directions collectively and imparts them with the authority to elect the members of the Standing Committee from amongst themselves, which functions as a monitoring committee for Mondragon (Mondragon Corporation, “Organization”).

As both the Cooperative Congress and the General Assembly meet only once a year<sup>36</sup> (Ferretti, 2015, p. 45), the creation of councils, such as the Social Council that meet more routinely enhance the impacts of workplace democracy as they provide

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34 The assemblies through which cooperative members at Mondragon democratically participate are numerous. I have chosen to focus on these components of the Mondragon Corporation’s democratic structure as they are the central planning bodies and are comprised of the largest amount of worker owner members.

35 The term worker members is used here in place of cooperative members to delineate a difference between cooperative members who are workers and cooperative members who hold managerial positions.

36 An emergency meeting of the General Assembly can be called but requires support of 2/3 of the worker members.

further representation for workers. As the Social Council, which is composed of worker members elected by worker members from each department, meets once a month it provides for more efficient responsiveness to issues raised by cooperative members concerning conditions of work and management (Ferretti, 2015, p. 39). These experiences with representative and direct democracy in the workplace restore agency to workers in their place of work as it enables them to make their own choices and have their voices heard.

Additionally, Ferretti argues that workplace democracy provides for a more egalitarian workplace in cooperatives at Mondragon as most managers come from within the cooperatives and are elected every four years by their peers, making them more accountable to the workers who elected them and instilling them with a larger incentive to act in the interest of worker members (2015, p. 45). This runs in contrast to a top-down authoritarian approach of most capitalist firms and contributes in reducing despotism and marginalization of workers that engenders alienation through labour. Moreover, the practices of workplace democracy in Mondragon cooperatives provides potential for members to hear and consider communal concerns and decide on directions collectively that affect the community as a whole, enhancing their orientation towards practices of solidarity with their cooperative colleagues. The emancipatory potential of workplace democracy to transform subjectivities into more ethical individuals concerned with collective interests over individualized wants can be witnessed in the solidarity decisions

cooperative members have agreed upon concerning the sustainability of their community and cooperatives, which will be addressed in the following section.

### 3.1 Solidarity Through Workplace Democracy

As mentioned above, cooperative members propose and vote on the policies and guidelines that govern the Mondragon Corporation at the General Assembly and the Cooperative Congress. In an effort to extend principles of solidarity that cooperative members practice through workplace democracy to their geographic environment, members have agreed to fix the starting wages at approximately the same rate as similar jobs in the Basque region to discourage price increase and layoffs in the region (Whyte & Whyte, 1988, p. 44). Moreover, cooperative members have committed to an ethic of regional business solidarity in their local community in the town of Arrasate/Mondragon by deciding not to duplicate businesses already locally established so as to not heighten competition (Gibson-Graham, 2006b, p. 113).

These principles align with the current Annual Report objectives of creating a better, fairer society (Mondragon Corporation, "Annual Report 2017") and creating wealth in their environment (Mondragon Corporation, "Annual Report 2016", p. 9). It also contrasts with usual business practices by most capitalist firms that concern themselves with competitiveness over the well-being of the community in which they operate. Furthermore, the effect of practices of workplace democracy, collective decision making, and solidarity on the subjectivities of cooperative members can be witnessed in the Mondragon Assembly's pledge to only work with international businesses that recognize the rights of collective bargaining (Mondragon Corporation, "Informe Annual", 2017, p. 37) as it demonstrates an



extension of care and consideration for the protection of the well-being of other workers.

Solidarity practices and the communal mentality of cooperative members can also be perceived in their decisions to reduce working hours and their own wages to enable cooperatives to overcome moments of financial crisis (Ferretti, 2015, p. 42). This should not be considered the same as the reduction of work hours called for by autonomist Marxists in their proposal for a refusal of work, as it is more similar to a reduction in hours of work practices that some capitalist firms employ in time of financial difficulty. The difference between these two processes of reduction in hours and in wage is that: first, all cooperative members have a voice through the democratic process to choose this direction while most capitalist firms do not open the decision up for employee input; and, secondly, the reduction in hours of work and pay for cooperative members affects all cooperative workers, not just those who do not have a formal employment contract, as would be the case in most capitalist firms. While I could find no direct evidence of increased communal participation<sup>37</sup> by cooperative members as a result of reduced hours of work it should be noted that a general interest in spending leisure time in communal activities pervades in the region.<sup>38</sup>

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37 As previously noted, the Mondragon Corporations contribute 10 percent of their net profits to the Basque society. Despite this, I was not able to determine, through empirical evidence, that members were more communally focused than other Basque people.

38 This can be evidenced in the popularity of democratically run communal supper groups called txokos that pool resources to provide lower cost meals. For further insight see Hess, A. (2007) The social bonds of cooking: Gastronomic societies in the Basque country. *Cultural Sociology*, 1(3), 383-407.

Overall, these commitments exhibit the communal mentalities and ethicality of members' subjectivities over individualized mentalities unconcerned with the well-being of other people.

### 3.2 Constraints in Workplace Democracy

The decisions regarding reductions in wages and hours of work demonstrate that cooperative members' subjectivities are oriented towards concerns for communal sustainability over personal consumption, indicating a potential for democratic workplace practices to transform individualized mentalities away from capitalist work ethics towards ethical communal mentalities. However, the emancipatory potential for democratic workplace practices at Mondragon is frustrated by tensions that constrain its transformative potential to a select group of workers. As indicated previously, the participation in workplace democracy at the Mondragon Corporation is confined to cooperative members who make a capital contribution to obtain said membership. While the Mondragon Corporation's cooperative principles state that the cooperative experience is open to all without discrimination (Mondragon Corporation, "Our Principles"), this does not take into account the potential inability for certain individuals to accumulate the capital required in the 18 to 36 months provided for by the cooperatives (Ferretti, 2015, p. 44).

Furthermore, as discussed above, cooperative membership has not been extended outside of Spain, resulting in a labour hierarchy based on the inability of international workers to obtain cooperative membership and participate in workplace democratic practices that mitigate their alienation. Conceivably, having

other cooperative members, who have demonstrated an orientation towards solidarity, making decisions for other workers would generate superior working conditions abroad to those produced by the decisions of executive management or a board of directors at most capitalist firms who are more removed from the realities of the working environment. This appears to be the case as the Mondragon Corporation has set environmental safety and quality standards similar to those at Headquarters in its international subsidiaries (Bretos & Errasti, 2018, p. 38). Whether the extension of certain provisions to international subsidiaries indicates an ethicality of members' subjectivities remains to be determined. However, the model of workplace democracy at Mondragon offers emancipatory potential as it addresses alienation and inequalities in the workplace and has demonstrated an ability to transform individuals into more caring and solidarity focused beings. While it presents limitations in its extension outside of the membership community it offers a model to be built on to develop more ethical futures.

To advance my exploration of the model the Mondragon Corporation can provide to post-capitalist futures I will now assess its alternative practices of surplus appropriation and distribution, which is affixed to practices of workplace democracy.

#### 4. Surplus Appropriation and Distribution and Commoning Practices

As referenced in chapter two, autonomist Marxists maintain that for individuals to transform their subjectivities away from work ethics that support capitalist exploitation, their interactions with surplus values need to be modified (Weeks,

2011, p. 95) Likewise, Gibson-Graham uphold that processes of “marshaling surplus and directing it toward the expansion of a cooperative economy is intricately connected with the becoming of ethical communal subjects” (2006b, p.125). As the Mondragon Corporation upholds that full sovereignty should be attached to labour as a means to transform society and individuals (Mondragon Corporation, “Our Principles”) they have instituted practices that provide for the full control of surplus appropriation and distribution to their cooperative members through workplace democracy, since the corporation’s inception. Ahead of identifying how processes of surplus appropriation and distribution can transform subjectivities into more ethical and communal subjects, a brief overview of the Mondragon Corporation’s practices in relation to surpluses need to be illustrated to contrast it to practices in most capitalist firms. These practices consist of democratic decision-making regarding surpluses, the creation of commons,<sup>39</sup> and pay solidarity.

Gibson-Graham’s description of capitalism as a social relation in which non-producers appropriate the surplus labour, in the form of value from free wage labourers (Gibson-Graham 2006a, p.3n) is contrasted with the surplus appropriation and distribution by all cooperative members at the Mondragon Corporation. A fundamental strategy in developing cooperatives at Mondragon has been collecting the surpluses of all cooperatives in the Mondragon Corporation and allowing cooperative members to democratically decide on how to distribute them

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<sup>39</sup> As discussed in chapter three in the section entitled: Building Ethical Futures: Potentials of the Commons, commons pertain to anything that is collectively produced or protected and is not necessarily a tangible thing. Chapter three expands on the potential for subjectivities to be transformed through the collective process of managing things held in common, which was given the name ‘commoning’.

(Gibson-Graham, 2011, p.6). This not only diverges from the practices of most capitalist firms because of its democratic approach but also because workers who produce the surplus through their labour control the surpluses they generate instead of having them decided upon by a board of directors and distributed as profits to shareholders or bonuses to management. This eradication between identities of ownership of surplus and producers of surplus frustrate capitalist conceptions of class, not only adding to the pluralization of different arrangements of social and economic practices, but contributing a means through which cooperative members can experience new ways of being that affect their subjectivities.

Within Mondragon, the surpluses that remain after taxes and other deductions, such as input for raw material and wages, are provided to the cooperatives as retained earnings and to cooperative members as dividends (Gibson-Graham, 2006b, p. 124). Both of these retained earnings and dividends are deposited in the Caja Laboral Popular (Gibson-Graham, 2006b, p. 124), a cooperative bank created by the Mondragon Corporation. The surplus submitted to the Caja Laboral remains in the accounts of members until they retire<sup>40</sup> (Gibson-Graham, 2005, p. 18). This process, in partnership with the deposited retained earnings of cooperatives, amounts to a pooling of profits and creates a finance commons that provides a source of funds that are used to sustain existing cooperatives and provide start-up capital for new

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<sup>40</sup> Cooperative members can access the interest accumulated on the surpluses in their capital account (Gibson-Graham, 2006b, p. 125) and can obtain low interest loans based off the capital in their accounts. The dividends in their capital account act as a long-term loan to cooperatives (Ferretti, 2015, p.44).

cooperatives within Mondragon (Gibson-Graham, 2006b, p. 125). This contributes to the expansion of alternative labour practices and their potential to offer a model of post-capitalist futures.

The impact of practices of surplus appropriation and distribution and the commoning<sup>41</sup> that results has motivated the development of subjectivities interested in solidarity and communal well-being over mentalities interested in individualized benefits through a capitalist work ethic. This is demonstrated in the Mondragon Corporation's commitment to pay solidarity that is decided upon by the Cooperative Congress. This dedication to pay solidarity has minimized wage differentials to a ratio of 1:6 between entry-level workers and top management<sup>42</sup> (Mondragon Corporation, "FAQs") in contrast to the average pay differential in the United States of 1:361 (Hembree, 2018). The decisions governing wage regulations at Mondragon were based on internal solidarity "which meant that the need to reward superior performance and service had to be balanced against the need to minimize status differences based on pay" (Whyte & Whyte, 1988). This in turn mitigates the internal labour hierarchies created through the wage that contribute to divisions between workers. Moreover, this pay solidarity that reduces exorbitant pay for executives, allows surplus that, in a corporate context, would have been distributed to CEOs, to be redistributed to all workers. This increases the surpluses

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41 As describe in chapter three, in the section entitled: Building Ethical Futures: Potentials of the Commons, the act of commoning is described as a process of collaboration and collective orientation that is based on reciprocity and empathy, that results in the establishment of a commons (Amin & Howell, 2016, p. 2 and p.4). It also entails a process of distributing benefits accumulated by the practice in ways that take into account the well-being of others (Gibson-Graham, Cameron, & Healy, 2016, p. 195).

42 A few exceptions to this ratio exist, reaching a ratio of 1:8 for top level managers (Mondragon Corporation, "FAQs").

produced annually and contributes to the potential of their finance commons to proliferate more cooperatives into the economy.

The commitment to community sustainability and well-being by cooperative members can be further witnessed in their decision to create their own health and social welfare insurance system called Lagun Aro in 1959. The objective of creating this system was to solve welfare problems of health, assistance, and social security for cooperative members and their families who were not covered under the State Social Security system at that time (Sanchez Bajo & Roelants, 2011, p 183). Members pooled their money to create an insurance commons to provide support to each other, which today provides a pension system that “costs less and gives more benefits than in ordinary businesses”<sup>43</sup> (Sanchez Bajo & Roelants, 2011, p 183). While these benefits serve to increase the well-being of its cooperative members they also provides for their job security in the event that a cooperative closes, coordinating the redeployment of members to other cooperatives, covering costs for retraining, and in cases where redeployment is not immediate, provides generous and lengthy unemployment insurance for up to two years (Sanchez Bajo & Roelants, 2011, p. 204; Santos, 2006, p. xxxi). This is antithetical to the experience of workers in traditional firms who would be laid off and responsible for obtaining new employment when firms experience economic crisis; indicating that processes of commoning and collectivization produce new sense of self (Weeks, 2012, p. 90) that

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<sup>43</sup> Cooperative members also benefit from state pensions paid to self-employed workers (Mondragon Corporation, “FAQs”) as cooperatives are no longer barred from accessing the State Social Security system.

have the capacity to address inequalities outside the logic of capital and the market (Federici, 2011, p. 111).

Through the insurance commons and the job security it provides, the Mondragon Corporation is able to retain individuals with communal subjectivities cultivated through practices of collectivization, solidarity, and commoning within the organization and demonstrates a collective concern for the well-being of its members. This process lends itself to the continuation of the cooperatives and contributes a model of alternative social and economic practices, providing an example from which ethical futures could be built.

#### 4.1 Tensions and the Meaningfulness of Commons

Drawing once again from Silvia Federici, if commoning is to have any meaning it has to result in the production of communal subjects and communities that uphold responsibility to others and the earth, refusing to base their lives on the suffering of others (2012, p. 145). As I have identified, the commoning produced through practices of surplus appropriation and distribution have been developed through a communal dedication to pay solidarity and pooling of capital for communal benefit. While the commitment to commoning indicates that the subjectivities of members are transformed away from mentalities interested in only individualized consumption and the capitalist work ethic that promotes it, their relation to non-members and international subsidiaries require examination to assess if these commoning processes are truly meaningful.



Beginning with an assessment of surplus appropriation by cooperative members, a friction in the ethicality of subjectivities and practices emerge when temporary employment in the cooperatives is taken into consideration. At present, each cooperative is permitted to have 25 percent of its workers be non-member workers, in accordance with Basque Cooperative Law (Autonomous Community of the Basque Country, “Basque Cooperative Law”, 1993). Moreover, these non-members make around 80 percent of the wages of cooperative members and do not receive dividends, (Cheney, 1999, as cited in Gibson-Graham 2003, p. 143n), enabling cooperatives to benefit from lower wages to increase their surplus base. This calls into question the ethicality of the communal subjectivities of cooperative members and the meaningfulness of their commons if; first, they appropriate the surpluses of non-member workers<sup>44</sup> without including them in practices of democratic decision-making; and, second, if members benefit off of surpluses produced through reduced wages and precarious labour. This appears to enable the perpetuation of structural oppression and exploitation through the capitalist mode of production and requires correction if the practices of surplus appropriation and distribution are to be considered a model from which to develop more ethical futures.

In recognition of the limitation of its practices the Mondragon Corporation has demonstrated a commitment to mitigating inequalities created through divisions

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<sup>44</sup> It should be noted that not all non-member workers are temporary workers. Aranda, Gago, Jones & Kato state that many of non-member workers in the Eroski retail chain are in fact prospective members on probation. (2015, p. 401) Despite experiencing a separation from decision making and benefiting from the distribution of surpluses this state of being would then only be temporary. This opens up a much larger discussion on ‘acceptable’ levels exploitation to retain future benefits that is outside the scope of this thesis but should be taken into consideration by emancipatory projects committed to eliminating inequalities.

between members and non-member workers. First, the cooperatives voted in 2008 to allow their retail sector stores, Eroski, to transform into cooperatives (Mondragon Corporation, "Timeline 2008"), which expanded their membership base outside of the Basque region into the rest of Spain and indicates an appetite to extend membership outside of headquarters. Second, they have committed to investing around 10 percent of their net profit to socially orientated activities. "In 2015 the figure corresponding to applications of this fund amounted to 22.7 million euros" (Mondragon Corporation, "FAQs"). Third, the Cooperative Congress of 2016 approved a paper that focused on new pillars of 'living the values' that identified the need for cooperatives to work on responsible solidarity and social transformation of the environment (Mondragon Corporation, "FAQs"). These actions indicate a corporation under constant adaptation and adjustment.

In fact, the corporation underwent a massive growth of employees in a short period of time, more than tripling employment in a ten-year period between 1997 and 2007<sup>45</sup> while it expanded internationally. This rapid growth and extension into new markets naturally produced tensions within Mondragon's cooperative structure, with which the corporation is still contending. These tensions can be witnessed internationally to this day as not only membership, but also job security and pay solidarity within Spain is not extended to its subsidiaries. While Mondragon aspires to work in conjunction with the regions they operate in by fixing the starting rate for unskilled workers at the prevailing rate for similar jobs in the private sector (Whyte

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<sup>45</sup> Based off the Mondragon Corporation Annual report of 2007, employment grew from 34 397 employees in 1997 to 103 731 in 2007 (Mondragon Corporation, "Annual Report 2007", p. 56).

& Whyte, 1988, p. 44), this has resulted in pay levels in the Global South that are drastically reduced to those at the Basque Headquarters. This is particularly evident in Mondragon's Chinese subsidiaries in the Kunshan Industrial Park. Whereas the average hourly wage of a Basque worker is around 21 euros an hour, Chinese workers in the Mondragon subsidiary are paid the equivalent of 1.5 euros an hour (Errasti, 2015, p. 487), resulting in economic benefits for the Mondragon Corporation due to low cost of labour abroad.<sup>46</sup> These pay levels have also resulted in Chinese workers increasing their hours of work to increase their wage packet, resulting in general workers working 11 hour shifts with a one-hour meal break (Errasti, 2015, p. 489). This working day contributes to the strengthening of capitalist work ethics as workers are provided with limited leisure time to experience other social and economic practices. Moreover, job security is not extended abroad and dismissals were found to be commonplace in the Chinese subsidiary (Errasti, 2015, p. 490), resulting in precarious labour, which juxtaposes the stability enjoyed by members at headquarters.

Through an extensive examination of academic literature, news articles and corporate information in the forms of news releases, website information and annual reports, I could not find any evidence of the Mondragon Corporation expressing intent to amend the wage gap between the wages of members and

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<sup>46</sup> In my research I was unable to find the wages of management in international subsidiaries. As most managers abroad are expatriates (Bretos & Errasti, 2018, p 38) it can be surmised that they are paid rates equivalent to those at headquarters. This calls into question the pay solidarity ratios abroad and the level of exploitation based on wage differentials that are occurring.

temporary and international workers.<sup>47</sup> This has led Bretos & Errasti to conclude that international expansion was pursued as a means to secure job security for cooperative members at the expense of cooperative culture and practices (2018, p. 41), in turn leading to a prioritizing of members jobs and well-being over those of international workers. Certainly, the wage differences create an international labour hierarchy and reveals how the wage continues to rationalize the exploitation and alienation of workers. It could also imply that the capitalist work ethic, that legitimizes economic and social privileging of certain groups over others (Weeks, 2011, p. 62), still persist within the Mondragon Corporation. What it does connote is that the commoning created through surpluses produced through low wages and precarious labour has a limitation to its meaningfulness as it is partially created through the oppression of other people despite providing communal well-being for others. Despite this evident shortcoming, Gibson-Graham, Cameron & Healy remind us that commoning is a relational process that often involves struggles of negotiating access, benefit, and responsibility (2016, p. 195), a struggle that takes time to resolve and one that the Mondragon Corporation is currently undergoing.

#### 4.2. Forward-looking mentalities and Environmental Commons

The limitations in extending its commons internationally, that diminishes its meaningfulness, is countered with the impacts of commoning on the subjectivities of cooperative members who demonstrate forward-looking mentalities interested in

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<sup>47</sup> I was, however, able to find a vague statement in their Business Strategy FAQs concerning how Mondragon is responding to globalization that expressed an interest in developing from sustainable competitive positions more valuable employment (Mondragon Corporation, "FAQs"). This is not a confirmation or even a promise to amend the wage gap between the wages of members and international workers, or even to expand membership, but it does speak to an awareness that their current employment arrangement requires amendments.

the extension and protection of environment commons. This is witnessed in Mondragon's commitment to sustainable development and environment protection as a guarantee for the future (Mondragon Corporation, "Commitments") that has resulted in the corporation being awarded a total of 73 ISO 14001 certificates (Mondragon Corporation, "Annual Report 2017"). These international standards certificates denote that the corporation voluntarily uses environmental management systems that direct environmental responsibilities towards environmental sustainability (International Organization for Standardization, "ISO 14001:2015", 2015). This achievement is significant in comparison to the number of ISO 14001 issued in the same year across Canada, which was reported at 1172 certificates (International Organization for Standardization, "The ISO Survey", 2017). This achievement indicates that members consider the consequences of their actions at work and are overcoming a state of denial in regards to environmental destruction, signifying that their subjectivities have been transformed through their workplace practices to be more forward-looking and communally focused. Forward-looking mentalities within Mondragon are also exhibited through the creation of a knowledge commons in relation to environmental protection through its Green Community Forums. These forums allow workers to share their concerns and ideas about the green economy (Mondragon Corporation, "Mondragon Green Community") and how the corporation can participate in future stewardship, demonstrating a shift in subjectivities away from a "system of values grounded in the production of surplus values" (Weeks, 2011, p. 95). Furthermore, these measures to protect environmental commons should be identified as prospecting 'a-

commons-that-might-be' (Gibson-Graham et al., 2016, p. 195) and protecting environmental commons that benefit all people and contribute to their well-being, resulting in meaningful commoning. It is important for emancipatory movements to consider that there is no possibility for ethical post-capitalist futures to be built if the environment, which reproduces life, is consumed and destroyed for our present wants to the detriment of future generations. Thus, Mondragon's cooperative decision-making has contributed to its prioritization of the corporation's environmental impact, demonstrating how processes of collectivization and commoning produce forward-looking mentalities interested in the well-being of others.

The Mondragon Corporation currently participates in multiple commons that benefit a community, protecting their well-being and transforming their subjectivities into more communal and forward-looking mentalities.

Simultaneously, the corporation's practices produce inequalities between workers based off of wage differentials, job security and ability to participate in surplus appropriation and distribution. The resulting image of Mondragon regarding commoning is thus contradictory, which hinders a determination of whether its cooperative subjectivities and practices can offer a model for emancipatory movements like post-capitalism.

## 5. Reproductive labour

Drawing from feminist literature discussed in chapter three,<sup>48</sup> the examination of how the Mondragon Corporation values reproductive labour can be used as a means of determining whether cooperative practices and subjectivities offer a model for emancipatory movements. As discussed, tensions exist in the extension of meaningful<sup>49</sup> commons, which frustrates the potential for Mondragon's cooperative practices to provide a model from which to build post-capitalist futures. To expand the examination of how cooperative practices can contribute to more ethical futures, an assessment of decisions made to address reproductive labour can provide insight into the ability of cooperatives to identify and dismantle social inequalities

As outlined in chapter three, reproductive labour's value to the capitalist mode of production has been hidden and devalued, leading to the oppression of women and the strengthening of capitalism's hegemony to the detriment of creating more ethical futures. As expressed above, the Mondragon corporation is invested in protecting environmental commons, which reproduces life, but a deeper examination of Mondragon's engagement with reproductive labour through their cooperative practices is necessary; particularly in relation to how they recognize

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48 A detailed examination of reproductive labour can be found in the section entitled: Building Ethical Futures: The Contribution of Feminist Approaches to Reproductive Labour.

49 As discussed in chapter three, in the section entitled: Considerations and Cautions of Commoning, I have interpreted 'meaningful' used in relation to commoning to mean practices that transform subjectivities so that members consider the consequences of their actions, overcome the state of denial that enables social and environmental destruction (Federici, 2012, p. 144-145), and promotes the amelioration of inequalities and exploitation through their practices, contributing to more ethical futures.

and address reproductive concerns through their finance commons and decisions they make collectively.

### 5.1 Parental Benefits

Indicated above, cooperative members established Lagun Aro to solve welfare problems of health, assistance, and social security for members and their families. As Lagun Aro operates as a cooperative, its policy directions concerning benefits are established by the General Assembly through workplace democracy (Lagun Aro, “Valores”). Considering that these benefits are established by members practicing collectivization and commoning to manage the well-being of the community, it offers an opportunity to identify if participation in these practices produces subjectivities that value reproductive labour differently from state-based and other work-based approaches. By concentrating on the benefits provided for parental leave for members, this section offers insight into the orientation of subjectivities at Mondragon as both their maternity and paternity leave provide superior benefits to those offered by the state (Bull & Ridley-Duff, 2015, p. 31).

At present, Lagun Aro allows for sixteen weeks of maternity leave with full pay (Lagun Aro, “Seccion Sexta – Maternidad”) and offers paternity leave for four weeks with full pay (Lagun Aro, “Seccion Septima – Paternidad”). In comparison to the paternity leave granted by the state, which until recently provided for fifteen days paid paternity (Escot, Fernandez-Cornejo & Poza, 2014, p. 422), Lagun Aro was providing improved terms. In the case of maternity leave, the allotted days remain equal to those legislated by the state; however, the rate of pay provided by the state



while on maternity is determined by a multitude of factors, such as salary, contributions to the social insurance system and the company for which the individual works (Expatica), and in most cases does not result in the individual receiving their full rate of pay, making benefits provided by Lagun Aro superior.

Despite Lagun Aro providing for better benefits than the Spanish Social Security system, it still does not mitigate issues around the naturalization of gendered roles in reproductive labour. While care for newborns is intimately tied to lactation, it is not solely defined by these parameters and requires various other forms of reproductive labour that is not biologically tied to a woman. Thus, providing equal parental leave time for both partners would contribute to correcting gender imbalances in regards to reproductive labour. Conceivably, this is why the Spanish Government has recently announced measures to amend the gendered burden of reproductive labour for new parents by introducing legislation to equalize paid paternity leave with maternity leave by 2021 (Álvarez & Valdés, 2019). If this legislation is ratified it will be interesting to study the actions members of Lagun Aro take in future policy decisions regarding parental leave. At present, the communal determination of benefits surrounding parental leave suggest that members are supportive of reproductive labour but, with its discrepancies towards gender equality, it does not connote a realignment of subjectivities interested in alleviating social inequalities produced through reproductive labour.

## 5.2 Childcare

In regards to other reproductive labour concerns addressed by the Mondragon Corporation, it has established cooperative schools that provide childcare that are open to the community at a rate of 240€ (around \$362 CAD) a month for children between the ages of one and seven years of age (Etxeberria, personal communication, March 14, 2019). Compared to childcare rates in the city of Hamilton, Ontario<sup>50</sup> of \$931 a month for preschoolers and \$1052 a month for toddlers (MacDonald & Friendly, 2017, p. 11 & 13), the rates offered in their centers in the province of Gipuzkoa provide for much more equitable measures to address childcare needs. Even though these childcare centers accept all children from the community at a lower rate than in Canada, these provisions do not offer a meaningful indication of a shift in cooperative members' valuation of reproductive labour. If these childcare centers enabled increased leisure time over work time for the individuals who used them, then it could be seen as a possible tool with subversive potential, as individuals could participate in alternative social and economic practices outside of work. However, this evaluation would have to include considerations of wages, benefits, precarity, and work hours of the staff and if those performing these waged jobs were doing so to the detriment of their own reproductive labour<sup>51</sup> to determine if this form of childcare offered ethical solutions through which to achieve post-capitalist futures.

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<sup>50</sup> The city of Hamilton was chosen as a comparative case for Canada as its population is comparable to that of Gipuzkoa, with the former having 747,545 and the latter having 693,845 inhabitants as reported by Statistics Canada and Instituto Nacional de Estadística for the year 2016.

<sup>51</sup> As was found to be the case for many women from the global south working in waged reproductive labour in the Global north. For a more detailed discussion see Federici, 2011.

### 5.3 Commodification of Reproductive Labour

As feminist theorists have revealed, “the reproduction of labour power involves a far broader range of activities than the consumption of commodities” (Federici, 2012, p. 96). The conception of commodity consumption as a solution for the reproduction of labour can be witnessed in the Mondragon Corporation’s corporate profile, which contains a section entitled healthcare, ageing and well-being (Mondragon Corporation, “Corporate Profile”, p. 32). This section summarizes Mondragon’s approach for improvements to individuals’ quality of life by outlining the cooperative’s medical, socio-medical and nutritional solutions and services that can be purchased. While Mondragon acknowledges that the home is a space to “care for others” (Mondragon Corporation, “Corporate Profile”, p. 35), it presents its solutions towards leisure and care for people through home automation and home comfort with no mention of how these will directly contribute to well-being or address the need to value the reproduction of labour and care that takes place in the home. This commodified approach epitomizes how “reproductive activities have been reorganized as value-producing services that workers must purchase and pay for” (Federici, 2012, p. 99) and reproduces capitalist ways of thinking that reinforce work ethics and produce mentalities focused on individualized consumption as a means of meeting needs. In this way the Mondragon Corporation is impeding the progress of post-capitalist futures by supporting measures that hinder the development of mentalities interested in producing communal solutions to well-being through the reorganization of reproductive labour outside of commodified forms or processes that reinforced its naturalized gender imbalance and divisions

between people. Moreover, the commodification of reproductive labour by the Mondragon Corporation expands capitalist accumulation's grip on reproductive labour, strengthening the alignment of subjectivities towards waged based solutions.

#### 5.4 Reproductive Labour in Subsidiaries

In exploring the tensions that exist in the Mondragon Corporation's practices internationally in section three and four of this chapter I determined that the constraint in extending cooperative membership abroad could indicate that the subjectivities of cooperative members may be tied to mentalities informed by productivism.<sup>52</sup> This was inferred as the benefits members acquired through commoning practices were partially produced through the exploitation of international workers, which increased surpluses produced annually. Returning to Mondragon's practices internationally, neglect towards reproductive labour can be witnessed. This is most evident in Mondragon's Chinese subsidiaries where workers often work overtime hours and lodge in factory provided dormitories during the week (Errasti, 2015, p. 489). This existence leaves little space for reproductive labour, producing a zone of near-zero reproduction and reflecting what Federici outlines as a structural component of capitalism that destroys human life in the process of accumulating labour power, fostering a reproduction crisis (2012, p. 104). In significantly hindering the ability of international workers to reproduce their labour, let alone experience leisure time, members are signaling their

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<sup>52</sup> As discussed in chapter two in the section entitled: Ecology of Knowledges, this thesis defines productivism as thinking that privileges growth through market forces. This growth relies on the maximization of profits, often through cost cutting measures to increase competitiveness.

willingness to remain in a state of denial concerning the suffering of others, through which they are able to develop their own benefits and commons to address their reproductive labour concerns. Furthermore, they are contributing to the strengthening of structural oppression, exploitation and social inequalities through the capitalist mode of production.

### 5.5 Waged Reproductive Labour Within Mondragon

In examining the reasons why reproductive labour has not been valued differently by members who collectively practice solidarity and commoning that takes into consideration the positions and well-being of members, I found that at present 42.9 percent of cooperative membership at Mondragon is made up by women<sup>53</sup> (Mondragon Corporation, “Annual Report 2017”). A possibility exists for concerns to be heard on how Mondragon addresses reproductive labour if women, who participate in more hours of reproductive labour, constituted an equal percentage of membership. This could in turn assist in transforming subjectivities to mentalities interested in reorganizing reproductive labour as members are made aware of different lived realities. The possibility of cooperative members addressing reproductive labour so that it is valued and does not continue to promote gendered inequalities is made more plausible as the Mondragon Corporation includes employees who work in waged reproductive labour jobs in childcare centers, the

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<sup>53</sup> This speaks to structural issues that persist for women as the largest percentage of membership in Mondragon comes for the Industrial Area, who represent 73.8 percent. (Mondragon Corporation, “Annual Report 2017”) As this sector includes engineering and R&D jobs it is possible that the low representation of women in STEM has resulting in the disparity in female representation in membership. The reduction in representation of women in cooperative membership at Mondragon could also be attributed to their lower numbers in Mondragon University programs, which often lead to jobs in cooperatives. Numbers on gender enrollment in Mondragon University can be found at: <https://www.umultirank.org/study-at/mondragon-university-rankings/>

university, catering and consulting in their cooperative membership. As Weeks affirmed, subjectivities towards reproductive and productive labour are partially formed within waged relations (2012, p. 141), therefore practices of workplace democracy and surplus distribution offers sites where transformation could occur as members employed in waged reproductive labour can have their experiences, concerns and voices heard.

Assessing cooperative members at Mondragon's relations to reproductive labour through parental leave, childcare, and commodified solutions indicates that members are interested in supporting aspects of reproductive labour. This interest, coupled with the ability for concerns regarding reproductive labour to be heard enables some optimism that reproductive labour could be addressed and valued differently at Mondragon in the future. However, in their present form the solutions offered, coupled with the reduction of reproductive labour in their international subsidiaries, do not offer an emancipatory solution and instead perpetuate social inequalities by reinforcing the naturalized gender roles of reproductive labour, encourage individualized consumption, and strengthen exploitation through the capitalist mode of production. These outcomes denote areas to be rectified if practices at Mondragon are to be considered a model for ethical futures. While the inclusion of waged reproductive labour in membership, and therefore democratic discussions and decision making, opens up possibilities for subversion of practices in the future, many other sites at Mondragon need to be assessed to determine

where limitations in ethicality lie so that they can be amended and contribute to building post-capitalist futures.

### 6. Ethics of Care lens

In establishing the extent that cooperative practices at the Mondragon Corporation offer a model for post-capitalist futures I have thus far examined how the practices of knowledge sharing, workplace democracy, and surplus appropriation and distribution, and the decisions that result from them, contribute to the development of subjectivities interested in well-being. This examination laid bare limitations in relation to non-member workers and reproductive labour, revealing a frailty in practices, outcomes and the complete transformation of subjectivities into communal mentalities interested in the well-being for others.

In an effort to determine what aspects of cooperative practices at Mondragon can offer inspiration for ethical futures and which require reorganization, an analysis through an ethics of care lens will be applied. This theoretical lens will be implemented as practices that aim to contribute to post-capitalist futures can be intimated as caring practices as they intend to address social inequalities and structural oppression to produce more ethical futures.

This section will consider the cooperative aspects of the Mondragon Corporation previously addressed in this chapter through an ethics of care lens. This will provide an additional layer of analysis regarding the ethicality of cooperative practices and subjectivities they produce.

In an effort to evaluate the practices at the Mondragon Corporation, the elements of attentiveness and responsiveness, two elements of the ethics of care developed by Tronto, will be employed to determine their ethicality. According to Tronto, care involves: “a species of activity that includes everything we do to maintain, contain, and repair our 'world' so that we can live in it as well as possible” (1993, p. 103).

To provide more insight into the elements of ethics of care that I will be using in my analysis I will provide a brief overview of what the elements of attentiveness and responsiveness involve.<sup>54</sup>

Concerning the element of attentiveness, Tronto presents this element as the ability of individuals to recognize others needs, and respond to them (1993, p. 127). Tronto identifies that attentiveness is a difficult task, as it requires an ongoing effort to recognize the needs of those around us and requires constant work to avoid ignorance. Therefore when attentiveness is accomplished it is a moral achievement (Tronto, 1993, p. 127). Thus, applying an evaluation of attentiveness to practices of care to assess the achievement of these ends can determine their ethicality.

With respect to the element of responsiveness, Tronto characterizes it as the element of care that is “concerned with conditions of vulnerability and inequality” (1993, p. 134) in interrelationships. Tronto maintains that responsiveness involves

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<sup>54</sup> See chapter 3, section entitled “Measuring Ethics” for more information on the elements of ethics of care



a process of understanding concerns raised by those in vulnerable situations and should be used to highlight inequalities in power dynamics (1993). Practicing care that enables concerns of those in situations of inequality and vulnerability to be heard, as well as identifying and addressing them, constitutes ethicality and contributes to a deeper interconnectedness to an ever-enlarging circle of human beings (Schweickhart, 2011, p. 17).

Overall, this analysis reinforces the previous conclusions that, though Mondragon demonstrates ethical behavior domestically, its lack of extension of these practices as it expands internationally limiting its ethicality. Mondragon is thus limited in its ability to foster ethical futures.

#### 6.1 Ethicality of Knowledge Sharing

Applying the element of attentiveness, that requires individuals to recognize the needs of others and respond to them instead of wilfully ignoring them (Tronto, 1993, p. 127), to the practices of knowledge sharing conveys the ethicality of these practices within Spain. As both members and non-member workers in Spain are offered training on cooperative principles and professional training to assist in their personal and professional development (Mondragon Corporation, “Commitments”), the Mondragon Corporation is demonstrating recognition of the need to provide workers with the means to achieve personal fulfillment.

Through the employment of the element of responsiveness, that is “concerned with conditions of vulnerability and inequality” (Tronto, 1993, p. 134), and entails an

interconnectedness between people; knowledge sharing by the Mondragon Corporation demonstrates an ethicality. This is substantiated as knowledge sharing broadens the epistemologies of members and non-members in Spain away from mentalities that support the hegemonic positioning of capitalism and capitalist practices that create conditions of vulnerability and inequality between people and silence other knowledges.

Analysing the elements of attentiveness and responsiveness in knowledge sharing internationally frustrates a determination of ethicality. As knowledge sharing about cooperative principles and training is mostly eliminated in international subsidiaries,<sup>55</sup> it demonstrates a willingness to ignore needs for personal development of international workers. Additionally, a compliance in maintaining the hegemonic positioning of capitalism abroad, with its resulting inequalities and exploitations is evident demonstrating a lack of both attentiveness and responsiveness. This restraint in extending knowledge practices could potentially indicate a recognition of the colonizing capacity of knowledge (Mezzandra, 2011; Rojas, 2007) by the Mondragon Corporation and signal responsiveness to the needs of other knowledges not to be silenced through the privileging of one knowledge over another. However, this is not evident in the literature produced by the Mondragon Corporation. Moreover, sharing knowledge is not necessarily a process of subjugation as processes of producing an ecology of knowledges (Santos, 2007)

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<sup>55</sup> The exception being the sharing of management models and training for workers in Brazil as discussed in this chapters in the section entitled: Tensions with the Knowledge Sharing

enables all knowledges to co-exist. Thus, the constraint in sharing knowledge about cooperative principles in international subsidiaries strengthens the colonizing aspects of capitalism and enables the continuation of structural oppression by not diversifying conceptions and possibilities for social and economic practices. These considerations result in a determination that the ethicality of knowledge practices by Mondragon is only limited to a select group, resulting in a fragmented ethicality. This also suggests that the subjectivities of members are only interested in the well-being of individuals in their geographic location. Nonetheless, a conclusive determination is not possible without examining the ethicality of Mondragon's other practices.

## 6.2 Ethicality of Workplace Democracy

Scrutinizing the Mondragon Corporation's practice of workplace democracy through the element of attentiveness demonstrates a recognition of the needs of others, and provides an ability to respond by creating a means for members to have their voices heard in the workplace through practices of both direct and representative democracy. Moreover, workplace democracy has resulted in the reduction of vulnerability for cooperative members as they elect their own management who are less inclined to act despotically and marginalize workers, as discussed in section three of this chapter. Cooperative members have also demonstrated attentiveness to the needs of workers in their geographic vicinity by fixing starting wages to ensure they do not provoke lay offs in other companies in the region. Furthermore, they have committed to regional business solidarity by not creating products that other companies in the region already produced so as to not heighten competition and

ensure economic stability in the Basque region of Spain. This demonstrates attentiveness and responsiveness, and thus ethicality, as the Mondragon Corporation and its members are aware of the possibility of creating situations of vulnerability and inequality for workers in the region and do not willfully ignore the potential results of their decisions that may affect market conditions and workers' well-being.

As discussed early in this chapter, practices of workplace democracy are only extended to cooperative members resulting in the needs of other workers to be less likely recognized and, in some situations such as in international contexts, being willfully ignored. While the corporation is committed to working with businesses that recognize the rights of collective bargaining, they are not directly providing a means through which non-member workers can have their voices heard, demonstrating a paucity in their attentiveness and responsiveness.

In regards to the practice of regional business solidarity that sets starting wages to a similar rate of those in the region, this has resulted in international workers making a significantly lower wage than cooperative members based on the location of their corporation. This has led some international workers to increase their work hours to acquire a better wage packet, indicating that their needs to maintain their well-being are not being met by the rate of hourly wages being paid. That is to say nothing about the inequality produced through wage differential that contribute to the development of a global labour hierarchy. These results demonstrate a

disconnectedness between workers in the Mondragon Corporation based on the geographic location, which compromises the extent that the practice of regional business solidarity can be considered attentive or responsive, and therefore ethical.

### 6.3 Ethicality of Surplus Appropriation and Distribution

As affirmed by Gibson-Graham, “the process of marshaling surplus and directing it toward the expansion of a cooperative economy is intricately connected with the becoming of ethical communal subjects” (2006b, p.125). The ethical outcomes of surplus appropriation and distribution is evident in the Mondragon Corporation through its attentiveness in reducing the exploitation of its members by allowing them to directly benefit from the surpluses produced by their labour. This has resulted in members developing communal subjectivities that have exhibited attentiveness through the creation of commons for health and leave benefits, as well as responsiveness through job security measures that address situations of vulnerability for its members. Additionally, responsiveness produced through surplus appropriation and distribution is evident in the communal decision to implement pay solidarity that reduces wage gaps between members and eliminates the payment of bonuses to executives resulting in the equal distribution of surpluses to all members so that communal needs are met, which in turn strengthens their interconnectedness.

Once again the international expression of attentiveness and responsiveness by the Mondragon Corporation demonstrates a deficiency in ethicality through the constraint in the extension of practices. As the practice of surplus appropriation and

distribution are only granted to cooperative members, they are both becoming ethical communal subjects amongst themselves while exhibiting unethical behaviors internationally. Central to these unethical behaviors is the attainment of surpluses and benefits that result through the alienation and exploitation of non-member workers who are often paid a lower wage than cooperative members.<sup>56</sup> These lower wages enable the expansion of surpluses from which members benefit. Moreover, disparity in the ethical behavior of members is demonstrated through the production of precarious labour internationally that contributes to the surplus base from which the job security of members is derived. The awareness of cooperative members to these conditions is not wholly evident to determine if they are willfully ignoring them, but these circumstances do suggest a lack of attentiveness and responsiveness as they have not exhibited an extensive concern for the conditions of vulnerability and inequality that result from the current manifestation of practices at the Mondragon Corporation. Therefore the practices of surplus appropriation and distribution at Mondragon and the subjectivities of cooperative members cannot be deemed ethical in an international context.

#### 6.4 Ethicality of Environmental Protection

The Mondragon Corporations' actions towards environmental protection should be included in the consideration of the ethicality of its practices as it suggests Mondragon's alternative practices develop attentive forward-thinking and ethical subjectivities. Mondragon's commitment to sustainable development and

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<sup>56</sup> I am referring to not only pay differentials internationally but the reduced wage temporary workers received, as discussed in section four entitled: Tensions and the Meaningfulness of Commons.

protection, as evidenced through ISO certificates and corporate principles, demonstrates attentiveness to the needs of human beings to engage with nature to not only reproduce their lives but to enhance their well-being. It also identifies the needs of future generations to come. Additionally, the commitment to protecting environmental commons demonstrates responsiveness as it considers the vulnerability of the environment to capitalist accumulation, recognizes the interconnectedness of everyone to the environment, and attends to these situations. Furthermore, the Mondragon Corporation provides a forum to hear the concerns and proposals of workers regarding environmental sustainability and protection, which enables responsiveness through the understanding for concerns raised regarding vulnerable environmental situations that the corporation can address. While I could find no indication of Mondragon's engagement with environmental organizations to promote sustainability and protection, their commitment to these practices internally signal the ethicality of the subjectivities of its members; members whose communal and forward-thinking subjectivities were developed through practices of knowledge sharing, workplace democracy and surplus appropriation and distribution.

### 6.5 Ethicality of Solutions Towards Reproductive Labour

As previously determined the Mondragon Corporation's relation to reproductive labour through parental leave, childcare, and commodified solutions do not offer emancipatory solutions at present. What these practices do indicate is an interest in supporting aspects of reproductive labour, which demonstrates attentiveness.

However, as inequalities derived from reproductive labour are not amended the

responsiveness of the actions are called into question. A willingness to ignore conditions surrounding reproductive labour has not been verified, and in fact the inability of the Mondragon Corporation to address these conditions are likely a result of the continued hidden value of reproductive labour and its role in creating inequalities. As the devaluation of reproductive labour is systemic and members are likely ignorant of its complexities, it is unfair to fully determine that cooperative subjectivities and solutions put forward by the Mondragon Corporation are unethical. Nevertheless, the individuals who are aware and permit the continuation of situations of near-zero reproduction in their Chinese subsidiaries demonstrate a lack of attentiveness and responsiveness by condoning the sustainment of these situations without identifying and addressing the circumstances from which they result.

Amalgamating these considerations of ethicality through the elements of attentiveness and responsiveness results in a conclusion that the ethicality of Mondragon's practices decay over distance. Whereas members benefit from the ethical results of practices, these benefits are not wholly extended resulting in an ethicality that mirrors the hybrid coopitalist structure of Mondragon. What the ethics of care lens reveals is that a subversive potential to transform subjectivities into more ethical mentalities exists through cooperative practices, practices which are not provided for in most capitalist firms. While imperfect in its present articulation the Mondragon Corporation does provide a point of departure for post-capitalist projects intent on developing more ethical futures.



## 7. Conclusion: Contributions of the Cooperative Practices of Mondragon to a Post-Capitalist Future

This chapter examined the contribution that cooperative practices could provide for the development of post-capitalist futures through the case study of the Mondragon Corporation. In so doing the emancipatory potential of the practices of knowledge sharing, workplace democracy, and surplus appropriation and distribution, which post-capitalist theorists identify as sites that offer subversive potential, were analyzed through a theoretical framework that included post-capitalist and feminist theoretical lenses. The first section of this chapter applied a post-capitalist lens to three things: first, how practices at the Mondragon Corporation differed from those at most capitalist firms; second, how cooperative members' subjectivities were transformed through these practices; and third, it examined the successes and limitations of Mondragon's practices of ameliorating alienation, exploitation and social inequalities. The second section of this chapter employed feminist considerations regarding reproductive labour to the decisions that cooperative members make to provide insight into the ability of cooperatives to identify and dismantle social inequalities. The third section of this chapter applied the elements of attentiveness and responsiveness to examine the ethicality of the practices and subjectivities produced through cooperative practices through an ethics of care lens.

The analysis of the cooperative practices at the Mondragon Corporation through this theoretical framework determined that complexities exist in the ethicality of its practices and the subjectivities it produces, thus limiting its contribution to post-

capitalist futures. Despite ameliorating alienation, exploitation and social inequalities for its cooperative members and producing communal subjectivities interested in the well-being of other members, these practices were not extended to its international workers. This constraint in extension maintains the alienation and exploitation of international workers and enables the perpetuations of social inequalities and capitalism's hegemonic positioning internationally. Through an examination of the Mondragon Corporation's solutions towards reproductive labour a deficiency in their present ability to address social inequalities was witnessed, however their practices of workplace democracy presented an avenue through which these inequalities could be addressed in the future. Finally, the examination of practices and subjectivities through elements of the ethics of care revealed the duality in Mondragon's ethicality, confirming the need for cooperative practices to amend their relation to their international workers and address social inequalities and the structural oppression they sustain if they are to provide a complete model from which post-capitalist futures can draw.

As a caveat, identifying these tensions should not be read as a failure of the cooperative form to offer a model that can contribute to the subversion of structural oppression and social inequality produced through the capitalist mode of production. The ability of different social, economic and labour practices experienced through cooperative practices should in fact be drawn on for inspiration as they have exhibited a certain level of success in creating subjectivities that participate in communal and ethical behaviours that have reduced experiences

of alienation, exploitation and social inequality. The examination of tensions and limitations in extending the entirety of the Mondragon cooperative model to post-capitalist processes provides an identification of antagonisms that persist in corporate practices that should be further assessed and altered in post-capitalist pursuits so that more ethical futures can be developed.

## **Chapter 5 – Conclusion**

In this thesis, I have analyzed how cooperative practices could contribute to the development of ethical futures using the case study of the Mondragon Corporation. This examination applied a theoretical framework that employed post-capitalist and feminist considerations as a means to better understand the subversive potential that alternative practices of knowledge sharing, workplace democracy, and surplus appropriation and distribution present for transforming sites, subjects and practices.

Regarding post-capitalism, the analysis identified the subversive potential of cooperative practices at the Mondragon Corporation and indicated that the subjectivities of cooperative members were transformed into more forward-looking communal mentalities interested in the well-being of other people. This was evident in decisions made regarding pay solidarity, job security benefits, environmental protection, and reduction of work hours and pay in times of crisis. This examination also identified a limitation in the subversive potential of Mondragon's cooperative practices to transform sites, subjects, and practices, as they did not extend membership and cooperative practices to their temporary and international workers, thus calling into question the ethicality of their practices and their ability to address social inequalities.

Feminist considerations of reproductive labour were brought into the analysis to assess if cooperative practices affected subjectivities so that they could identify and address social inequalities that result from its continued devaluation. I determined that cooperative practices had not demonstrated an ability to amend social inequalities that result from the current valuation of reproductive labour as they presented commodified solutions and provided benefits that did not reorganize and amend the gender imbalance. However, I distinguished that increased female participation in cooperative membership, and therefore workplace democracy, provided opportunities to consider and address reproductive labour differently in the future.

In the final section of this thesis I analyzed the ethicality of Mondragon's cooperative practices and members' subjectivities through an ethics of care lens using the elements of attentiveness and responsiveness. Complexities in ethicality were revealed, as membership, cooperative practices, and the benefits that result from communal decision-making, were not extended to their international subsidiaries. This indicates that the ethicality of the Mondragon's cooperative practices and subjectivities decayed over distance. Nonetheless, the analysis identified that cooperative practices and the subjectivities they produce exhibit ethicality in relation to membership and, to a certain extent, the geographic region of Spain as members were able to identify and address the needs of others, and ameliorate multiple situations of vulnerability and inequality. This conclusion intimates that the cooperative practices of knowledge sharing, workplace

democracy, and surplus appropriation and distribution can offer a point of departure, instead of a complete model, from which more ethical futures can be constructed.

This determination offers grounds for further consideration by post-capitalist theorists in regards to cooperative practices in a few major ways. First, why subjectivities that have demonstrated a transformation through knowledge of, and practices with, different economic and social relations maintain a certain level of alienation, exploitation and social inequality, especially in relation to international labour? Drawing from Bretos and Errasti, who have concluded that multilocalization was developed by Mondragon to preserve jobs at headquarters by accessing new markets (2018, p. 27), the willingness for cooperative members to permit levels of alienation, exploitation and social inequality to persist internationally results from their need to maintain and control the benefits and commons they have produced. This calls into question the ability of corporations to transform subjectivities into fully communal and ethically minded individuals if their practices are constrained by corporate needs to remain viable, which maintain situations of inequality between people internationally. This leads to the second major consideration: what amount of social inequality and structural oppression in cooperative practices are permissible in the development of more ethical futures for it to be considered a model from which post-capitalist projects can draw? This question is not put forward to dismiss cooperative practices that maintain a degree of social inequality in their present incarnation, but asked to determine what makes something a model

for ethical futures? Moreover, post-capitalist theorists should consider if true ethicality is ever achievable. As considerations of what is ethical will adapt as new perspectives and realities are revealed then perhaps post-capitalism is best conceived as a never-ending process of consistently adapting to new considerations and practices, and fostering an openness to change from individuals.

In conclusion, this thesis has maintained a broader goal of upholding post-capitalist theoretical traditions by examining tensions without interpreting them through the ideological lens of capitalist that confirms all disparities as eventual failures of alternative forms (Gibson-Graham, 2006a, p.vii) perpetuating capitalism's hegemonic position in discourse. In this way, this thesis has contributed to post-capitalist pursuits by bringing into visibility cooperative practices that displace the binary of capitalist/non-capitalist practices through its particularities, which in turn diversifies conceptions of social and economic realities and possibilities, and dismantles hegemonic conceptions of capitalism.

As a final note, I hope that the use of feminist considerations for reproductive labour and elements of ethics of care to examine the subjectivities and cooperative practices of Mondragon highlights the strength of applying a feminist and ethics of care lens to deepen analysis on ethicality and social inequality. I contend that cooperative practices and corporations should employ ethics of care considerations and examine their relation to reproductive labour to identify locations to be amended and assist in their continued adaptation into more ethical practices.

This is especially pertinent for emancipatory projects as no ethical future can be developed through the subjugation of other people, knowledges, or ways of being in the world.



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