

**THE COST OF LIFE | 20<sup>th</sup> Annual Historical Materialism London Conference | 9-12 November 2023 | Marxist Feminist Stream Call for Papers | Deadline 12 June 2023**

This year's Marxist feminist CfP echoes the general conference theme which is based on a core revelation of Marxist feminist theoretical work: *life as such is under attack by capitalism*. This is true not just of working-class life which, in its diversity, provides the 'human resource' to be squeezed out of its labour-power from which capitalist profits accrue. Social and biological life (on any scale) is largely controlled, penetrated or enclosed by capital – to the point that a distinction between 'production' and 'social reproduction' is often blurred. Being alive means being captured in the myriad processes of accumulation; and dying, as the Covid 19 pandemic so clearly showed, means also to be captured by economic relations organised by a capitalist logic: profits first, life last.

Within this capitalist 'logic', we are faced with capitalism's ultimate irrationalism: the scientifically asserted fact that humanity and other species are led to extinction-time *under capital and for capital*. Through social Darwinism as bourgeois-fascist ideology, humanity is being prepped for years now to 'tech-transform' into some version of the posthuman as a historical inevitability dictated by capitalist development while nature continues being seen as a non-agential commons ready for extractivism. The 'design' solutions of capital are ridiculous - 'replace the old engine cars with electric cars!', we are told - without asking how the working classes in debt will buy profit-led new tech or what is the cost (to life somewhere else!) of lithium batteries replacing gas-fueled engines in cars. This being just an example, it says all we need to know: in capitalism lowering 'the cost of life' in one region means having a huge 'cost to life' in another. In an Earth system ruled by capital, 'interconnectedness', so prized in contemporary politics of care, takes the form of imperialism, colonialism, organ harvesting, the South giving to the North, migrants dying in scores so that welfare systems survive, or whatever other devastatingly exploitative hierarchy says: 'my life requires your death!'

Women are often at the centre of resisting myriad processes of subjugation, extraction, death organised by capital, including variations of the capitalist state that must keep women in their place. The rallying cry of the brave Iranian protesters spurred to action by the state murder of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini in September last year – Women! Life! Freedom! – brought forth a radical emancipatory agenda

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The Cost of Life  
Oppression, Exploitation and Struggle  
in the Time of Monsters

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that pushes far beyond limited visions of equal rights for women that so long dominated mainstream feminist discourse and politics. The notion that life itself is at stake is widespread, cropping up in struggles against pension reform in France and the UK, against neoliberalising farming in India, for the abolition of policing and the carceral state in the US, for access to abortion in Argentina and Chile, to name just a few.

However, the forces of capitalism, and capitalist life-making, while strained, remain strong. Movements from below are difficult to sustain against an on-going authoritarianism and far-right resurgence. As people are forced to migrate from one hostile territory to another, as incarceration and police murders of racialised and Indigenous peoples do not diminish, as queer and trans folk risk their lives and dignity every day, as the Earth's life-making and life-sustaining tissue is exhausted and polluted, as the women of the working classes suffer increasing economic violence, it feels as though the very struggle to survive is all-encompassing, leaving so many people without hope that change will, or can, be made. Is it still the case that 'where there is life, there is hope'? What can Marxist feminism, as theory and politics, do to make this true?

Indicative topics of interest are (but are not limited to):

- **Social Movements:** What can Marxist feminists learn from the past two decades of struggle and setback, from the organisational, theoretical and political challenges that social movements so often led by women and feminised people face?
- **Epistemologies and Knowledge Systems:** Where can existing theories of Marxist feminism be deepened and amended? Do we have the right tools for a Marxist feminist revolution? Epistemological questions/debates/breakthroughs/affinities. What can be done to strengthen *anti-capitalist* feminist politics and theory?
- **Obstacles and Solidarity:** What new or renewed political avenues or obstacles to emancipation and organising against exploitation become apparent? How do we account for and build upon international solidarity as Marxist feminists?
- **Capital as a Social Relation:** How can we theorise the irrationality of capitalism (e.g. the destruction of life on a planetary scale) from a Marxist feminist perspective?
- **Extracting Value from Life:** How is it done? On which scale? What is the relationship of capitalist technology (there is no other) and women as workers in the 21st century?
- **Urgencies of Life:** what are they from a Marxist feminist perspective?

We welcome submissions for panels and individual papers. Abstracts should be under 300 words, and submissions should indicate that it is for the "Marxist Feminist Stream."

The deadline for submissions is **Monday 12 June 2023**

To submit a paper or panel proposal visit:

**<https://conference.historicalmaterialism.org/e/hm2023>**

Please note that this is an in-person conference.

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