

Care and Political Strategies: Servitude and Services

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Abstract

The Spanish movement Las Kellys, initiated by hotel housekeepers back in 2014, is a paradigm for the redefinition of salaried work as a whole. In an era when labor is being redefined as a feminine and feminized issue, Las Kellys fights against two sources of stigmatization: female domesticity and feminized externalization. This paper analyzes the threads of servitude, its continuities, and, through the struggle of the hotel housekeepers, its ruptures. It presents their strategy of political struggle, which has been divided into seven points, and its social and political consequences, concluding that the emergence of Las Kellys (the women who clean) as a political entity entails a re-politicization of the concept of care from a feminist perspective. Our exposition of this exemplary case study allows us to single out some analytical elements in order to spur debate on the feminist articulation of production and reproduction today.

Keywords

production, reproduction, visibility, feminization, work

As Genevieve Fraisse reminds us, feminism has historically worried about ‘housework,’ privileging “reflection on invisible, unpaid work,” as opposed to domestic service, studied by sociology.¹ The French philosopher stresses the need to reflect on housework and domestic service together if we are to combat the bias that inevitably afflicts studies on reproduction from a feminist perspective. Christine Delphy had already pointed out before Fraisse the political character of the devaluation of domestic work, of women’s work. Her proposal of the concept ‘domestic production’ made it possible to understand the material bases of sexist oppression, as well as their specificity.²

I will focus on a position that intersects both problems and facilitates analysis of the tensions between reproduction and work, for this is also a paradigmatic example of the present-day care crisis unfolding in a peripandemic context that revives the consequences of the crisis of domesticity during the twentieth century.³ Therefore, approaching the work of housekeepers and the program they have articulated since 2014 provides a particularly interesting opportunity to examine their contribution and to investigate what conflicts such as this one may mean for the remapping of society in the face of the current crisis. Today, in the era of the redefinition of work

¹ Genevieve Fraisse, *La controversia de los sexos: Identidad, diferencia, igualdad y libertad* (Madrid: Minerva, 2002), 227.

² Christine Delphy, *Por un feminismo materialista* (Barcelona: Verso, 2023). For a re-reading of Delphy’s approach, see Luisina Bolla and Victoria Estermann, “A las vueltas con el enemigo principal: Capitalismo y patriarcado en la teoría de Christine Delphy,” *Zona franca*, no. 29 (2021): 46–77.

³ For a broader approach to the crisis, see Maria João Cabrita and Ana Leonor Santos, “Reproductive Work in Times of Pandemic Crisis and the Retreat of Gender Equality,” *Danish Yearbook of Philosophy* 58, no. 1 (2025).

as “female and feminized,”⁴ Las Kellys represents the paradigm of “the redefinition of salaried work as a whole,”⁵ thereby confirming the issues pointed out by Fraisse: the redefinition of common living space, the articulation of the public and private spheres based on the sexual construction of reality, the expansion of labor rights in line with the principles of autonomy and human dignity, and so on. All of these issues begin with the visibility of women struggling in their trench, always on the border. As I have discussed elsewhere,⁶ the Las Kellys movement can be characterized as a series of ‘boundary struggles’ according to Fraser’s theoretical proposal.⁷ This visibility involves overcoming two sources of stigmatization: female domesticity and feminized externalization.

The potential of the demands posed by Las Kellys, a paradigmatic example of a collective haunted by externalization and precarity, springs from the organization’s visibility strategy (i.e., the visibility of the collective and of the ties of sex and gender-related exploitation), which is based on the appropriation of digital technologies not only as a means to attain the mechanization of work (which is rather scarce anyway), but also as a tool for political struggle and for the articulation of the network through members’ participation in the Grupo Las Kellys. According to Ernest Cañada,⁸ in 2014, Eulalia Corralero and Ana Belén García created the Facebook group “Las Kellys.” In March 2016, Corralero registered the name and incorporated the so-called Asociación Las Kellys. In June, the association’s board of directors expelled Eulalia Corralero, who administered the Facebook group, resulting in the emergence of new territorial associations known as the Confederated Kellys. Since the split, the Asociación Las Kellys prioritized Twitter and its own website, while various groups calling themselves Kellys Unión continued to sprout up on Facebook.

The agency of this group, characterized by its invisibility and passivity—as per the sex-gender system—promotes reflection on the transmutation of the sexual division of labor, the social value of the reproduction sphere, and the necessary revision of production nowadays: the feminization of precarious work,⁹ global care chains¹⁰ that respond to the commodification of care, qualification by algorithms,¹¹ outsourcing and precariousness, the impact of tourism,¹² and so on. As Las Kellys itself pointed out in its placard issued on May 1, 2019, “Against precariousness, struggle is the only way.” Increasing the visibility of contradiction is the key to success since, in this case, “precariousness and low status go hand in hand.”¹³ As Antonella

⁴ Donna J. Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 166.

⁵ Fraisse, *Controversia Sexos*, 227.

⁶ Yolanda Martínez Suárez, “Producción, reproducción y esfera pública: Las que limpian,” *Eikasía: Revista de filosofía* 114 (2023): 35–56, doi:10.57027/eikasía.114.579.

⁷ Nancy Fraser and Rahel Jaeggi, *Capitalism: A Conversation in Critical Theory* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2018).

⁸ Ernest Cañada, “La rebelión de las camareras de piso,” in *Movimientos sociales y derecho a la ciudad: Historias de dignidad, resistencia y Esperanza*, ed. P. Ibarra et al. (Barcelona: Icaria, 2018), 118–133.

⁹ Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*.

¹⁰ Arlie R. Hochschild, “Las cadenas mundiales de afecto y asistencia y la plusvalía emocional,” in *En el límite: La vida en el capitalismo actual*, ed. Anthony Giddens and Will Hutton (Barcelona: Tusquets, 2001), 187–208; Amaia Orozco, *Cadenas globales de cuidado* (Santo Domingo: INSTRAW, 2007).

¹¹ Lucía Velasco, *¿Te va a sustituir un algoritmo?* (Madrid: Turner Libros, 2021).

¹² Alan Valenzuela, Ana Gálvez, and Verna Alcade, “Invisible Room Attendants: Outsourcing as a Dispositive of (In)visibility and the Resistance of Las Kellys in Spain,” *Work, Employment and Society* 37 (2023): 1646–1663, doi:10.1177/09500170221092353.

¹³ Verna Alcalde, Ana Gálvez, and Alan Valenzuela, “No Clean Rooms, No Hotel Business: Subversion Tactics in Las Kellys’ Struggle for Dignity in Hotel Housekeeping,” *Annals of Tourism Research* 91, no. 4 (2021): 1.

Picchio stresses, invisibility is not about care/caretakers, but rather about “the production-reproduction relationship that characterizes the capitalist system.”¹⁴

This article is divided into three sections. The first section explains the genesis of the work of reproduction in order to explicate the complexity of its elements in the transfer to market logic. It pays attention to the identification of the profession and the related professional training. The second section, after establishing the theoretical basis for the creation of the profession of ‘women who clean,’ presents invisibility as a guiding feature of the occupation and the resulting stigma. Finally, the third section traces the emergence of the ‘women who clean hotels’ as a political subject and identifies seven fighting strategies. The article concludes by presenting the thesis of the repoliticization of care from a feminist perspective.

1. The Links between Service Work and Domestic Servitude

In order to establish the links that bind service work and domestic servitude, I will follow Fraisse’s recommendation and consider the identification of the profession and the related professional training to be a fundamental aspect of the genesis of domestic service, and I will do so in a context that intersects the extension of domestic work¹⁵ and service work, marked by inherited servitude.

Fraisse argues that in the wake of the ‘crisis of domestic service’ that occurred at the beginning of the twentieth century, “it was necessary to educate the individual and identify the job,”¹⁶ hence pointing out the ingredients for the transformation of female servitude, in the domestic sphere, into a ‘job.’

The first step toward the description of a job is drawing up a list of the duties it involves, setting up a schedule, and establishing the corresponding remuneration. However, in the case of reproduction work, the identification of the tasks is a complex issue.

In fact, the discussion of job definitions—following the introduction of care studies—has even raised the question of whether it is possible to talk about the implementation of tasks as such, or whether it would be more exact to talk about ‘need satisfaction,’¹⁷ which would make categorization even more difficult. There are manifold reasons for this problem in the realm of care work, the main ones being the fact that it entails workload transfer and the nature of the job itself: its borderline position between the public and the private, the fact that it entails a relationship and certain subjective aspects, and so on. All these features make it difficult to provide a definition in labor terms, since its initial construction was carried out according to the opposite terms, according to the dichotomous liberal logic.

The second step in the description of a job, according to Fraisse—worker training—intersects with the first one—task identification. The use of reproduction is characterized by the classification of a series of chores traditionally carried out by women at home, but mostly

¹⁴ Antonella Picchio, “El trabajo de reproducción, tema central en el análisis del mercado laboral,” in *Las mujeres y el trabajo: Rupturas conceptuales*, ed. Cristina Borderías, Cristina Carrasco, and Carme Alemany (Barcelona: Icaria, 1994), 454.

¹⁵ Federici refers to care work as that which is carried out by displaced housewives. Silvia Federici, *Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction, and Feminist Struggle* (New York: PM Press, 1991).

¹⁶ Fraisse, *Controversia Sexos*, 225.

¹⁷ Cristina Carrasco, “La paradoja del cuidado: Necesario pero invisible,” *Revista de economía crítica* 5 (2006): 39–64.

undertaken—from that moment on—by other women in other homes or private premises (hotel rooms, offices, ship cabins, etc.) and turned, once again,¹⁸ into a trade.

The simplicity of task transfer, that is to say, the identification of tasks and their “transformation into waged work,”¹⁹ is directly proportional to the fragmentation of the tasks and to their distance from the subjects. The degree of the relationship between workers and customers makes it complex to categorize them, since it transfers to the public market an uncomfortable issue created under the dichotomous logic of the private reproduction sphere: affections. Thus, “it is much simpler to capture, measure and categorize activities such as washing or cooking than those that involve emotional support and care.”²⁰ This is why tasks that can be classified in the category of infrastructure (such as cleaning, preparing food, and shopping²¹—that is, indirect care tasks) have experienced a faster consolidation in the labor market than those entailing reproduction or the organization of care, that is, direct care tasks, which involve a one-to-one relationship with the persons at whom they are aimed. The differences between sectors (such as the cleaning, catering, and hospitality sectors) and between job categories (head housekeeper, hotel housekeeper, valet, etc.) are determined by other factors, and we shall pay attention only to those that are relevant for the case in point in this article. Another fundamental cause that must also be considered is the sex-gender category, intersected by categories such as national origin, class, and others, of the individuals in the groups under analysis. This is also the case with the legacy of reproduction, which has been inherited by women without a reading of the will and is therefore difficult to waive. As Donna Haraway points out, the events of the ‘New Industrial Revolution’ “are neither gender- nor race-neutral.”²² And in the specific case of care, Joan Tronto²³ points out that “In fact, not just gender, but race and class, distinguish who cares and in what ways in our culture”; thus care provision, in both the public and private spheres, is an activity governed by gender.²⁴ The relationship between the tasks and those who carry them out is based on feedback. Delphy points out that “What constitutes ‘domestic work’ is not each concrete operation, nor even the sum of all of them, but its particular organization, which in turn is the result of the production relationships in which the performer is immersed: for example, ... ‘at home’ means ‘free for the husband.’”²⁵ Several care theoreticians, including Tronto herself and Delphine Moreau, point out the existence of a vicious circle, emphasizing “the fact that these two aspects reinforce each other since, on the one hand, these activities are considered unimportant, trivial and even degrading, and are often poorly paid and the working conditions are difficult; and, on the other hand, those who carry them out occupy

¹⁸ Cristina Borderías, Cristina Carrasco, and Teresa Torns, “Introducción. El trabajo de cuidados: Antecedentes históricos y debates actuales,” in *El trabajo de cuidados: Historia, teoría y políticas* (Madrid: Catarata, 2011), 13–96.

¹⁹ Pilar Carrasquer, Teresa Torns, Elisabet Tejero, and Alfonso Romero, “El trabajo reproductivo,” *Papers* 55 (1998): 108.

²⁰ Borderías, Carrasco, and Torns, “Introducción,” 38–39.

²¹ Carrasquer et al., “El trabajo reproductivo.”

²² Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*, 166.

²³ Joan Tronto, *Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument for an Ethic of Care* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 112. This author is only mentioned with respect to her proposal about the invisibilization of reproductive labor. Her thesis of subalternation versus the aforementioned feminization is therefore not assumed.

²⁴ Joan Tronto, “Mulheres e cuidados: O que as feministas podem aprender sobre a moralidade a partir disso?,” in *Género, corpo, conhecimento*, ed. Alison Jaggar and Susan Bordo (Rio de Janeiro: Rosa dos Tempos, 1997), 186–203.

²⁵ Delphy, *Feminismo materialista*, 83.

marginal positions.”²⁶ Thus, reproductive tasks require from women and lower classes certain features that can be summarized under one heading: invisibility. They are body in the Aristotelian sense.²⁷ They are often described according to their physical appearance, being considered ‘dirty’ and more ‘natural.’²⁸ They are women who do the dirty work and are both physically and socially stigmatized.²⁹ They are invisible bodies performing invisible tasks. Thus, “the invisibility of these tasks also means the invisibility of the foreign workers—especially foreign female workers—from lower classes who carry them out.”³⁰ Tronto classifies the four complementary processes whereby caregiving tasks are rendered invisible, namely: the alleged inferiority of the activities and the people who perform them; the apparent simplicity of the tasks and the absence of associated training; their naturalization; and, finally, discretion as a gifted talent, when it comes to caregiving and to caregivers or cleaners.³¹

2. On the Invisibility of Care

Thus, given its close relation with the issue of feminization, the main feature of caregiving is invisibility. Celia Amorós insists on the servile nature of domestic work and its associated invisibility. She emphasizes the linearity of “domestic work outside the home” and “extra-domestic work within the home,” both within the “logic of female work.” “For women,” Amorós writes, “discredit accumulates and is reinforced: domestic work inside the home and domestic work outside the home (in paid care tasks), the economy of domestic work outside the home and, finally, the economy of extra-domestic work within the home.” Both the caregiving tasks and the people who perform them are rendered invisible, in a process whereby the origin of the stigma is hidden. Are those tasks invisible because they are performed by women? Or are women the reason why those tasks are invisible? The matter is clear for Amorós. She refers to “the most ancient and implacable of all coding systems: patriarchy, as a machine that generates prestige and discredit, that systematically assigns the masculine and feminine genders to socially prestigious or discredited tasks, respectively.”³² Or, to use Delphy’s words, it is “the authority exercised by the performer that determines how society values the ‘usefulness’ of the task.”³³ In any case, caregiving tasks and caregivers or cleaners form part of a vicious cycle with a strong feedback loop. Thus, due to their association with women and lower classes, reproductive tasks take on certain features that can be summarized in one word: invisibility.

Invisibility becomes tangible and takes different forms—not only between, but also within direct and indirect caregiving tasks. At this point, it is worth noting the difference between domestic workers hired by customers directly and those who are accountable to an intermediary

²⁶ Delphine Moreau, “¿De quien preocuparnos? El care como perspectiva política,” In *Pensar desde la izquierda: Mapa del pensamiento crítico para un tiempo en crisis*, ed. Alain Badiou (Madrid: errata naturae, 2012), 131–145.

²⁷ Aristotle, *Politics*, trans. Carnes Lord (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013).

²⁸ Tronto, *Moral Boundaries*, 114.

²⁹ Alcalde, Gálvez, and Valenzuela, “No Clean Rooms,” 1.

³⁰ Moreau, “¿De quien preocuparnos?,” 133.

³¹ Tronto, *Moral Boundaries*.

³² Celia Amorós, *Mujeres e imaginarios de la globalización: Reflexiones para una agenda teórica global del feminismo* (Rosario: Homo Sapiens Ediciones, 2008), 47–49. For a re-reading of Amorós’s approach to care work today based on the quoted text, see María Xosé Agra, “Hilvanando violeta: Patriarcado e imaginarios en la era global,” *Atlánticas: Revista internacional de estudios feministas* (forthcoming).

³³ Delphy, *Feminismo materialista*, 80.

instead of to the customers themselves. Whereas Lucía Berlin, in her collection of short stories titled *A Manual for Cleaning Women*, advised cleaners to slightly move furniture or decorations to show zeal in their work,³⁴ in the case of maids, zeal is demonstrated by leaving everything meticulously in place, according to the head housekeeper's plan. Hotel housekeepers and their job must be invisible to customers, but not to the head housekeepers who supervise them and act, de facto, as the maids' bosses. Yet, paradoxically enough, the responsibility for the outcome of the task does not fall on the intermediaries, but on the maids themselves. At this point, algorithms, by "mediating between the people who perform the tasks and the customers,"³⁵ increase inequalities based on sex-gender and national origin by increasing the control and pressure exerted on female workers. Verna Alcalde, Ana Gálvez, and Alan Valenzuela talk about "monitored visibility,"³⁶ which embodies the paradox of being exposed to greater control due to outsourcing, which increases the pressure on workers by overexposing them to the head housekeeper and to other intermediate figures, while their visibility as far as customers—the hotel guests—are concerned decreases. There is, therefore, a proportional relationship between invisibility and the exploitation of the women who clean, which maintains the echoes of servitude in the work of reproduction. And as Silvia Federici points out, "We might not serve one man, but we are all in a servant relation with respect to the entire male world."³⁷ The sex-gender category is evident in the labor sphere on the border between reproduction and production: the service sector. Following Richard Gordon and his definition of the "homework economy," picked up by Haraway,³⁸ Cristina Morini characterizes the figure of the worker who assumes the features of female work, which entail "the possibility of being used as a labor reserve, as servants rather than as workers, subject to paid and unpaid work hours that ignore the agreed-upon schedule."³⁹

It would also be worth considering the differences between the tasks and the caregivers in the various positions of the private-public domain and their derived strategies, ranging from the most opaque and fragmented situation of live-in housekeepers to public contracts. Here I will offer a general reflection as well as a reflection about the specific case of chambermaids at hotels, since this will enable us to pin down invisibilization and present the different strategies these women employ in order to defy it. At the transnational level, the common traits of hotel housekeepers are feminization and racialization, flexibility and precarity. They are underclass and immigrant women. They are vulnerable and their rights are infringed by outsourcing, which involves an increase in flexibility and workload and, consequently, a decrease in guarantees and job security.

³⁴ "(Cleaning women: Let them know you are thorough. The first day put all the furniture back wrong ... five to ten inches off, or facing the wrong way. When you dust, reverse the Siamese cats, put the creamer to the left of the sugar. Change the toothbrushes all around.)" Lucía Berlin, *A Manual for Cleaning Women: Selected Stories* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2015), 47.

³⁵ Velasco, *¿Te va a sustituir un algoritmo?*, 66.

³⁶ Valenzuela, Galvez, and Alcalde, *Invisible Rooms*.

³⁷ Federici, *Revolution at Point Zero*, 18.

³⁸ In *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*, Donna J. Haraway presents a snapshot of the 'homework economy,' a term she borrows from Richard Gordon, outside the home. She uses this term to refer to the processes of work feminization, subsuming service work into the dynamics of servitude that have historically characterized female work.

³⁹ Cristina Morini, *Por amor o a la fuerza: Feminización del trabajo y biopolítica del cuerpo* (Madrid: Traficantes de sueños, 2014), 74.

3. Political Strategies of Las Kellys

In order to exemplify the invisibilization and exploitation described above, I will describe their impact and confrontation in a specific case, namely, the case of the Spanish association of hotel housekeepers. Las Kellys was created in the context of a deep economic, social, and labor crisis of transnational scope, which coincides with the growth of the tourism sector on the international level. The 2010s witnessed the consequences of the economic crisis of 2008. In 2012 the Spanish government approved a labor reform that allowed the outsourcing of hotel housekeepers. Against this background, we must mention two key events that took place in 2014. First, the International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco, and Allied Workers' Associations (UITA-IUF) launched the first international campaign to dignify the working conditions of hotel housekeepers, using the 'maid service' door sign as a symbol but with a new inscription: "Make up my workplace. Dignity for hotel housekeepers." Second, the newspaper with the largest circulation in Spain, *El País*, published a story entitled "Las que limpian" ("Women who clean").⁴⁰ That initial piece of reporting, published in a national newspaper, went viral on the digital social networks and triggered a series of comments from housekeepers, laying the foundations for their association and organization into a movement.⁴¹

Two years later, in 2016, after months of self-organizing activity on the internet (mainly on Facebook), they constituted a national association; then, in 2018, they consolidated themselves as a union⁴² and as a political group.⁴³ As Heidi Hartman pointed out, "If women want to be free, they must fight against both patriarchal power and the capitalist organization of society."⁴⁴

In the following section, I will summarize the emergence of Las Kellys, breaking it down into seven political strategies: (1) political organization; (2) self-identification; (3) sorority; (4) technological appropriation; (5) bidirectional communication; (6) hypervisibility; and (7) work conceptualization. These seven strategies are based on a reading of the feminist political philosophy of Celia Amorós and on Silvia Federici's approach to reproduction.

1. Political Organization

Federici reminds us that "Women have always found ways of fighting back, or getting back at them, but always in an isolated and privatized way."⁴⁵ By grouping and organizing politically, Las Kellys, just as other political movements have done, solved the problem and moved beyond the private redoubt, the anecdote, thus establishing the category. As Amorós pointed out, "power has individuation effects and parity effects": "obviously enough, it always belongs to

⁴⁰ Ernest Cañada, "Las que limpian los hoteles," *El País*, July 30, 2014, https://elpais.com/elpais/2014/07/30/alterconsumismo/1406706574_140670.html.

⁴¹ Martínez, "Producción, reproducción."

⁴² To address the segmentation of the labor market, Las Kellys Cataluña consolidated as a union in 2018.

⁴³ The association has become a multilevel political subject (by succeeding in meeting with the president of the Government of Spain at that time, Mariano Rajoy, as well as by maintaining an intense agenda of meetings with local, regional, and European political authorities).

⁴⁴ Heidi Hartmann, "Capitalismo, patriarcado y segregación de los empleos por sexos," in *Las mujeres y el trabajo: Rupturas conceptuales*, ed. Cristina Borderías, Cristina Carrasco, and Carme Alemany (Barcelona: Icaria, 1994), 292.

⁴⁵ Federici, *Revolution at Point Zero*, 18.

groups and not to isolated individuals.”⁴⁶ By registering as an association, the members of Las Kellys stepped up into the public sphere, making their own voice heard and laying the foundations of an “initiatory space,” a prerequisite for political action, according to Amorós.⁴⁷

2. *Self-Identification*

Las Kellys did so by appropriating the hetero-designation assigned to them by the patriarchal capitalist system. And not in an uncritical, but in a creative way—a trait that, as Federici recalls, appears in movements only when they are confident “enough to believe that our words will be heard.”⁴⁸ By claiming their own name, Las Kellys—an abbreviation for “Las que limpian” (the women who clean), the name by which female hotel housekeepers are colloquially known—they identify themselves with the role assigned to them by the sex-gender system, thus freeing themselves from the slavery that perpetuates the lack of self-identification. Following Amorós,⁴⁹ it could be said that Las Kellys are the ‘Marías’⁵⁰ who clean the hotels. But these ‘Marías’ know who they are and can defend themselves. The choice of a generic term commonly used to refer to them as a collective, distinguishing them “in the public sphere, the sphere of visibility and recognition,”⁵¹ has great transformative potential. Furthermore, it allows them to establish solidarity and defense strategies. They shake up the stereotype by focusing on the contradiction between what is said about them and what they do. By using the name Las Kellys, the ‘identical’ claim to be ‘equal’ fighting deprofessionalization and shielding their self-esteem.

3. *Sorority*

In turn, the name reinforces Las Kellys’ sense of belonging to the group, counteracting their exclusion as a result of the externalization process that deprives them of their own spaces. Sorority protected Las Kellys from retaliation by their employers by allowing them to maintain their individual anonymity and freedom. They fought the segmentation of the labor market through the autonomy of classic trade unions; and they fought the segmentation of their niche by reinforcing the ties between female colleagues from different categories. Their emergence responds to the need for a movement that would allow their claims and complaints to be heard while easing the fear of retaliation that had kept them silent so far. Thus, through sorority, they tried to fight against the growing inequalities they faced with respect to men and also with respect to other women—inequalities promoted by externalization, as the different hiring modalities correlate to different categories and thus promote fragmentation.⁵²

Thus, for example, one of the most effective sorority tactics is to organize for protests in such a way that employees of a particular hotel cannot be identified in acts against that hotel.

⁴⁶ Celia Amorós, *La gran diferencia y sus pequeñas consecuencias... para las luchas de las mujeres* (Madrid: Cátedra, 2005), 452.

⁴⁷ Celia Amorós, “Hongos hobbesianos, setas venenosas,” *Mientras Tanto* 48 (1992): 59–67.

⁴⁸ Federici, *Revolution at Point Zero*, 96.

⁴⁹ Amorós, *Gran diferencia*.

⁵⁰ A Spanish term pejoratively used to refer to housewives or to women who carry out housekeeping or care-related tasks. Amorós uses it in order to point out the exchangeable nature of women in the eyes of the patriarchy: we, women, are identical, and are symbolized by the same proper noun.

⁵¹ Amorós, *Gran diferencia*.

⁵² Ernest Cañada, “Too Precarious to Be Inclusive? Hotel Maid Employment in Spain,” *Tourism Geographies* 20, no. 4 (2018): 653–674, doi:10.1080/14616688.2018.1437765.

To this end, Las Kellys dispatch women from other companies to protest against a specific hotel in order to guarantee the job security of their colleagues.

4. *Technological Appropriation*

Apart from their use of identifying symbols in the real world (their colors—white and green—and their motto “Fight outside interference, self-organize!”), Las Kellys also build their collective identity in cyberspace, appropriating technologies to go public, doing away with their invisibility and making their voices heard to negotiate their rights.

Even so, we should not forget that, as Haraway points out, technologies empower labor control systems, because they are structured through power relations; technologies too “are the crucial tools recrafting our bodies”⁵³ and social relationships. Thus, paraphrasing Federici, as a diagnostic tool and as a reflection of power, one can measure the “abyss between socially available technology and the technology that slips through”⁵⁴ and reaches the hotel housekeepers. The former is varied and updated, the latter is scarce and basic. Therefore, this shows that caregiving is constructed as something natural and easy. Regarding the transformative potential of technology, the appropriation of technologies in line with the cyberfeminist movement,⁵⁵ fundamentally through the creation of spaces in Digital Social Networks, has allowed Las Kellys to organize themselves and to feed their horizontal strategy, coordinating autonomous work groups and subverting the stereotype that rendered them invisible: silent and passive.

5. *Bidirectional Communication*

The symbol of lawful communication between guests and hotel housekeepers is a sign hung on the door bearing a phrase like “Do not disturb,” which restricts the access of the female cleaners, telling them that they should not come in or clean the room. It is a message in which the sender and the receiver are not interchangeable. Communication always takes place in one direction only. The customer speaks and orders. The hotel housekeeper listens and obeys. Las Kellys resignify this symbol, in addition to their hetero-designation. Appropriating it and integrating it into their imagotype as an icon, Las Kellys Association⁵⁶ uses the silhouette of the hanging tag that guests place on the doorknob in their group image, modifying both the message and the communicative act. Hence, they become the transmitters, and the world is their receiver. The “Do not disturb” message is enriched with the tagline “We are changing our future.”

6. *Hypervisibility*

The mere fact that the voice and the discourse of cleaning women is heard in the media, thus entering the public sphere and, hence, the offline social sphere, implies a subversion, as long

⁵³ Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*, 164.

⁵⁴ Federici, *Revolution at Point Zero*, 59.

⁵⁵ For more information on the appropriation/reappropriation of digital tools from a feminist perspective, see Saleta de Salvador Agra, “Guerrillas ciberfeministas: La batalla desde los códigos,” *Revista andaluza de antropología* 14 (2018): 133–153, doi.org/10.12795/RAA.2018.14.08.

⁵⁶ In turn, the Confederated Kellys use a key icon, also with a high transformative symbolic content, as their logo. See the iconic game in the next listed strategy.

as their invisibility is the key that changes their situation and releases them from oppression into freedom. Making the contradictions of the public-private dichotomous system visible has a transformative potential that Las Kellys have been able to invoke in order to fight against the precarity of the sector. By showing their real tasks, and by showing themselves as workers, they are making the production-reproduction relationship that characterizes the capitalist system visible, and they are denouncing the unworthy working conditions that expose them to greater vulnerability. “Giving visibility to the problems of female housekeepers, as well as contributing to improving their quality of life” is the main objective of the association.⁵⁷ And in order to do this they deploy the following strategy.

7. *Work Conceptualization*

Las Kellys Association demands that the harshness of their work, which they conceptualize as “hard” be recognized. The statistics regarding physical and mental health problems in the sector⁵⁸ support this thesis. Las Kellys demand a series of rights that can be summarized as early retirement, recognition of the difficulty of their job, recognition of occupational diseases, and rejection of outsourcing. They also denounce several occupational risk factors: prolonged contact with chemical products; neglect of ergonomic recommendations due to time pressure brought about by outsourcing; anxiety and stress, aggravated by the increase of their employers’ control over them and a heightened demand for invisibility in front of guests; and also self-medication to deal with physical pain and discomfort. In order to fight the vulnerability⁵⁹ of their position, Las Kellys appeal to the conceptualization of their work, separating it from “the sacrificial logic”—to quote Morini⁶⁰—that characterizes housekeeping work and places it at the production pole.

Conclusion: The Feminist Repoliticization of Care

In conclusion, the fight of the association of female hotel housekeepers against the lack of definition of caregiving work contributes to satisfying the debt owed for free, invisible housekeeping work. Although Las Kellys do not self-identify as feminists, their movement has led to “a repoliticization of the care concept”⁶¹ from a feminist point of view.⁶² The multilevel character of their emergence has precipitated their leap from the labor arena to the political arena. The key to their success is that they did not undertake just a union fight for the recognition of their labor rights, but a political fight for their repositioning in the world, as full-fledged workers, as political subjects who negotiate their own lives and whose voices must be heard. With their strategy, which involves changing the focus of grievance (from themselves to the clients), Las Kellys move the debate on the universality of care to the market. With their

⁵⁷ “Manifiesto,” Las Kellys website, <https://laskellys.wordpress.com/manifiesto/>.

⁵⁸ Ernest Cañada, *Las que limpian los hoteles* (Barcelona: Icaria, 2005).

⁵⁹ For a deepening of the response to and from vulnerability from the perspective of reproductive justice, see Tomeu Sales Gelabert, “Politicizing Reproduction and Reproductive Justice: An Approach from the Perspective of Vulnerability,” *Danish Yearbook of Philosophy* 58, no. 1 (2025).

⁶⁰ Morini, *Por amor*, 98.

⁶¹ José Luis López-González and María Medina-Vicent, “Las Kellys y el turismo: De la invisibilidad del cuidado a la visibilidad política,” *Digithum* 25 (2020): 1–13.

⁶² Martínez, “Producción y reproducción.”

visualization of the contradictions and paradoxes of the dichotomous system on which the logic of the capitalist sex-gender system is based, Las Kellys fuel the debate on care.

The COVID-19 crisis, which coincided with the phase of multilevel political emergence of the group presented here, has, on the one hand, brought confirmation of the fact that the demands of Las Kellys are a social need, in order to attain greater security and dignity in a context of global health crisis; but, on the other hand, the pandemic has once again fractured a group that was strengthening its bonds of political solidarity, by reinforcing precarity and increasing the consequences for the Kellys of what I have called ‘feminized externalization.’ This source of stigmatization spreads the consequences of ‘female domesticity’ to larger groups, generalizing the features of servitude that have traditionally characterized the domestic work performed by women for other groups, mainly in the service sector. That is, the heritage of servitude has also been bequeathed to other genders, articulated, once more, together with social class, origin, and so on. And this entails a double stigmatization for women: ‘female domesticity’ and a feminized externalization.

Cleaning hotels is a job that has inherited from domestic work the servitude that feeds back into the stigmatization of those who are bound in such servitude, through the construction of care tasks—understood in a broad sense—as if they were invisible tasks. Although cleaning, as a type of indirect care, is one of the reproduction niches that has best adapted to the market, hotel housekeepers have to deal with the legacy of reproduction and its invisibility.

The demands of Las Kellys have focused on the fight against outsourcing in their attempt to break the dynamics of invisibility, stigmatization, and feminization of care labor. By identifying the proportional relationship between invisibility and exploitation, this group has organized itself by appropriating its heterodesignation, fighting deprofessionalization and shielding its self-esteem, establishing strategies to reinforce sorority and the fight against inequalities, and appropriating the technologies necessary to amplify their authorized voices and to highlight the contradictions of the patriarchal system that assumes them to be passive and mute. By demanding recognition for their work, relocating it on the side of production, they repoliticize cleaning and, by extension, care. By focusing on their situation, Las Kellys force us to revisit the sexual division of labor in times of labor feminization. Although cleaning is only one side of reproduction, by sharing the sacrificial logic of care, the analysis of the struggle of Las Kellys has allowed us to move on in the debates over the conceptualization of work, the division of the public and private spheres, and the assignment of tasks based on sex/gender, class, origin, and so on. And all this took place in the context of a global health crisis, where there is an even greater urgency to reconceptualize and negotiate categories.

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