



# Social Reproduction: A Key Issue for Feminist Solidarity Economy

*Isabelle Guérin, Isabelle Hillenkamp, and Christine Verschuur*

The current organization of social reproduction, based on unequal gender, class and race relations, on oppression and dispossession, is the condition for accumulation in the globalized capitalist system. It is also, increasingly, a terrain for struggles and social transformations. We define social reproduction as *all the activities, social relations and institutions that are necessary for the reproduction of life, today and for future generations*. This definition is enriched by the contributions of the practices and

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I. Guérin (✉) · I. Hillenkamp

French Institute of Research for Development (IRD), Centre for Social Science Studies on African, American and Asian Worlds (CESSMA), Paris, France  
e-mail: [isabelle.guerin@ird.fr](mailto:isabelle.guerin@ird.fr)

I. Hillenkamp

e-mail: [isabelle.hillenkamp@ird.fr](mailto:isabelle.hillenkamp@ird.fr)

C. Verschuur

Anthropology - Sociology and Gender Center, The Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, Geneva, Switzerland  
e-mail: [christine.verschuur@graduateinstitute.ch](mailto:christine.verschuur@graduateinstitute.ch)

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political struggles of the most marginalized groups and thus needs to be contextualized, as the various case studies in this book show.

This concept, which has emerged from various theoretical and political currents, particularly from critical Marxist feminist literature, has been enriched by the contributions of feminist movements in alter-capitalist, agro-ecological, migrant, violence against women and peace struggles, both local and transnational. Examples of these are the Chipko women's movement in India, defending the forests (Shiva, 1993); the Zapatista women's movement in Mexico; defending the struggle for life; or the *Ni Una Menos* movement, started in Argentina, against gender-based violence, whose struggle is part of a political critique of the system. The understanding of social reproduction has been renewed on the basis of the practices and political struggles of feminist or women's movements in the Global South (Arruzza & Gawel, 2020). It includes the notions of maintenance and renewal of life, human and non-human, of bodies and territories. It emphasizes the importance of social interactions, the affective, spiritual, cultural dimensions as well as material interdependence or social relationships and institutions.

Given the importance we attach to the concept of social reproduction, in relation to the critique of the global financialized capitalist system and the search for ways to transform it, we will first clarify in this chapter the theoretical and political bases of the debate. After discussing the crisis of social reproduction, we show how a feminist analysis of social reproduction allows for a renewed understanding of it, nourished by political practices and struggles. We argue that social reproduction is a powerful concept for understanding the possibilities of resistance and social change and for implementing it. This concept is central to understanding under what conditions the solidarity economy, analysed from a feminist perspective, could be a path for transformation of the global financialized capitalist system. We also clarify the theoretical differences between care and social reproduction and insist on the politicization of social reproduction, which requires collective organization and political struggles. Finally, we present the feminist epistemologies and the decolonial perspective in which the research of this network took place. This allows us to recall that the *process* of research is part of social change.

## THE CRISIS OF SOCIAL REPRODUCTION: PERILS AND OPPORTUNITIES

In the context of globalized financial capitalism, we are facing a crisis of social reproduction, with increasing inequalities, dispossession and pauperization on the one side, and accumulation and prosperity on the other. It entails the devastation of the environment and of the bodies of subaltern people, the erosion of the social fabric, power concentration and political turbulence, leading to a number of authoritarian regimes.

Crises, however, following their etymological meaning, also conduct to taking decisions and opening opportunities. Numerous initiatives for change in situations of a crisis of social reproduction can be found in the past, to name but some, the dynamics of associativism in the nineteenth century in Europe (Laville, 2000; Riot-Sarcey, 2016) and in North America (Mohandesi & Teitelman, 2017), of communal villages in Mozambique in the 70s (Verschuur, 1986), of the communal kitchens in Peru in the 70s (Anderson, 2015), of various forms of women's self-help groups in West Africa and Europe in the 90s (Guérin, 2003), of collective childcare facilities (Fournier et al., 2013), of fair trade indigenous women's groups in Bolivia (Charlier, 2011; Wanderley et al., 2014; Hillenkamp, 2015) or women's groups in the informal economy in various parts of the world in the 2000s (Kabeer 2013). These practices were not only ways of mitigating a critical situation of daily survival, a consequence of the crisis of social reproduction, but also of questioning the dominant organization of the economy, power and politics, and of trying to build different and more egalitarian social relationships.

Feminist historians have shown how social reproduction, whether based on wage labour or on unpaid work, was an essential but neglected component of the working-class struggle at the time of the industrial revolution. Initiated mostly by working-class women, these struggles combined everyday networks of mutual aid, associations and cooperatives with large-scale political protests (Mohandesi & Teitelman, 2017). Likewise, peasant, indigenous and rural women waged workers, marginalized urban, migrant or domestic female workers, struggled around issues related to the crisis of social reproduction, at the same time as they strived for empowering forms of organization. Feminist peasant studies have shown how women participated in struggles around issues like land, territory, forests, water, food prices, seeds, health centres, mills or fish smokeries, as well as in constituting rural cooperative groups, communal

or associative movements (Deere & León, 1980; Goetz, 1989; Flores, 1994; Agarwal, 1994; Mbilinyi, ; Destremau & Lautier, 2002; Federici, 2005).

The crisis of social reproduction has resulted “from massive cuts in government spending for social services, the continuous currency devaluations, the wage freezes, the liberalization and privatization policies” (Federici, 1999, 52), from expropriations and privatization of land, commercialization of agriculture and damages to subsistence agriculture, the “institution of a state of endemic warfare [...] and the attempts to create a world where nothing escapes the logic of profit” (id.). The struggles of “grass-roots feminists”, indigenous and third-world feminist remind us that “the discourse on equality cannot be separated by a critique of the role of international capital in the plunder and recolonization of their countries and that the struggles that women are carrying on, on a daily basis, to survive, are political struggles and feminist struggles” (id., 63).

The pervasive nature of present globalized financial capitalism and the huge power differences that it generates may make struggling for the construction of more egalitarian social relationships seem a utopia or outdated. Yet, at a time when the crisis of social reproduction has probably never been more acute (Federici, 1999; Verschuur, 2013a; Fraser, 2017), we observe myriads of initiatives that are bubbling up in all parts of the world, where people—and this is the central argument of this book—are reimagining social relationships, opening possibilities to challenge gender and power relationships and to constitute new political subjectivities. In these initiatives, people are organizing their livings along the principles of solidarity economy, reframing the meaning of work and democracy. From a theoretical point of view, we consider that the fundamental contribution of these initiatives is to question, in practice, the way in which social reproduction is and may be organized. In this sense, solidarity economy offers a ray of hope, as our colleague Kalpana (Chapter 3) argues.

Solidarity economy pursues more inclusive and egalitarian principles of organizing production, consumption and exchange, not based on sole-for-profit (for a full discussion, see Chapter 2). *Solidarity is understood here as inclusive and egalitarian voluntary relations of interdependence* (Guérin, 2003; Servet, 2007; Hillenkamp, 2013). It aims to contribute to “the democratisation of the economy based on citizens’ commitments” (Eme & Laville, 2006, 303).

As we will see in this book, people in these solidarity initiatives not only join together and struggle to defend their livelihoods, their rights, their recognition as workers, for better social protection and healthier lives and environment. They also join to construct more inclusive and egalitarian non-capitalist and non-exploitative social relationships. They are inventing ways of communally organizing activities necessary for the reproduction of life (Hainard & Verschuur, 2005; Federici, 2010, 2012; Verschuur, 2012; Fournier et al. 2013). Their practices often embrace what we call a “cultural reinvention of politics” (Verschuur, 2008), where the voices of the subaltern can be heard and deliberative practices are encouraged. Solidarity economy offers examples of collective initiatives of persons who are looking for a sense of achievement from their own perspective, going beyond individual achievement as the sole horizon of “modernity”. These initiatives defend a sense of belonging and social recognition in their territories. Territories constitute a space where material interdependence, kinship relations, history and memory, cultural, affective and spiritual dimensions are incorporated (Escobar, 2008). They create conditions to redefine values, to reframe the meaning of work and social relations, to resist against the destruction of the environment and bodies, and to constitute oneself as subject of rights.

Studies and policies on solidarity economy are increasing worldwide, especially in Europe and Latin America (Hart et al., 2010; Utting, 2015; Vaillancourt, 2013; Saguier & Brent, 2014; Rivera Ruiz, 2019). Yet only a limited body of literature is specifically concerned with building up a feminist approach of solidarity economy (to name but a few Guérin, 2003; Nobre, 2003; Matthaei, ; Guérin et al., 2011; Degavre & Saussey, 2015; Farah, 2016; Saussey 2018; Guérin 2019; Hillenkamp & Lucas dos Santos, 2019). The main part of the growing literature on solidarity economy remains surprisingly gender-blind, although solidarity economy initiatives are highly gendered, and a majority of persons involved are subaltern women. Additionally, many women’s informal collectives, analysed by feminist studies, are not considered as part of the institutional field of solidarity economy, whether by scholars in this field of study or in public policies, even where solidarity economy is recognized as is the case of several countries in the world (like Argentina, Bolivia and Brazil, which are discussed in this book). Not surprisingly, many of these collectives deploy activities in the field of activities of social reproduction—like preparation of food, childcare facilities, care for the

environment (Guétat-Bernard & Saussey, 2014)—that are considered women’s main responsibility.

Gender as an organizing principle permeates the perception of the world, institutions, social processes and the whole social organization, and thus necessarily also solidarity initiatives. These are often—but not only—deploying activities in fields that are considered in their specific context as “feminine”. But they also illustrate subaltern women’s agency and contestations against their subordination and the devastating consequences of the crisis of social reproduction.

These initiatives are intersected by gender, class, race and caste divisions of labour and power. Indeed, we do not intend to essentialize women’s solidarity groups by supposing that they are exempt from power imbalances or by negating tensions and divisions, which are present in any group or community, nor to pretend that they function smoothly. Neither do we presume that solidary economy would magically change the world. Definitely, these initiatives are often fragile and sometimes ephemeral. They may sometimes be locations where gender identities and inequalities are reinforced, increasing the burden and mental load of work of subaltern women. But they are also spaces where experiences are lived, where the voices of the powerless are released, where common private and problematic issues are discussed and awareness of women’s rights arises, where also joy and a sense of bonding are shared. Despite their fragilities and ambivalences, they are part of lifeworlds in the sense of Habermas (1997), where communicative rationality unfolds, resisting colonization by instrumental rationality, and where subaltern women’s political subjectivities may emerge.

What difference does it make to acknowledge the huge participation of women in solidarity economy initiatives and to state that they are gendered? As Louise Tilly, a feminist historian, wrote, “studying the vanquished allows us to better understand the victors, to understand how and when they won [...] and to take possible alternatives seriously, for example those sought by women” (Tilly, 1990, 167). Despite the weaknesses and contradictions that these solidarity initiatives may entail, they confirm that subaltern women are making history (Verschuur, 2014).

Notwithstanding the gendered dimension of these initiatives, the growing interest on solidarity economy by both academics and politicians had not until very recently been irrigated by the considerable feminist body of literature. A major consequence of this is that feminist scholarship on social reproduction was not taken into account. We believe

the reflections on gender and social change in the context of the global crisis of social reproduction require putting this issue at the centre of our thoughts.

## SOCIAL REPRODUCTION: A POWERFUL CONCEPT FOR A FEMINIST ANALYSIS OF SOLIDARITY ECONOMY

Feminist studies have identified social reproduction as a central issue to understand the reproduction of inequalities and the expansion of capitalist development. Challenging women's subordination in the family and the unequal sexual division of labour is since long part of the struggles of feminist movements.

We define social reproduction as all the activities, social relationships and institutions that are necessary for the reproduction of life, now and for the next generations. Social reproduction includes the renewal of the workforce, caring for oneself and the others—dependent persons as well as non-dependent persons—and caring for the environment. It implies maintaining the social fabric and social institutions.

Social reproduction is performed under different forms of social relationships. It is carried out either by the families, associations, communities—where domestic or solidarity-driven forms of social relationships prevail—or by the state (schools, nurseries, retirement homes, infrastructures,...) and the market (private institutions, employees in households), where capitalist social relationship prevail. In all these institutions, it mainly relies on an unequal division of work—organized along gender, class and race lines—and on poorly valued or unpaid labour.

Social reproduction encompasses all kinds of activities, from the production, preparation and processing of food to small-scale market production; from the maintenance of one's home to that of one's environment; from the education of children to the caring of relatives; from cultural and festive activities to the preparation of meals for social events or the cleaning of the church; from claiming a right to obtaining social protection. While social reproduction includes care, it is much broader than that. It encompasses activities in both the intimate and structural dimensions of life. These activities reveal social reproduction both as a place of labour exploitation and as a space for political struggles.

International organizations and mainstream discourses on gender equality largely recognize now the unequal share of unpaid domestic and care work as one of the main constraints to women's access to paid

jobs and the benefits associated with it, social rights and protection, and empowerment. The issue is now even included in the Sustainable Development Goals for 2030 set by the United Nations (SDG target 5.4) and calls are made to recognize, reduce, revalue and redistribute care. It is an important step to move forward towards more gender equality. Besides, the concept of care has enriched the discussion on social reproduction, since it includes emotional and ethical dimensions that were rather absent from the earlier debates.

However, while it is crucial to increase the recognition and to measure unpaid care and domestic work, care appears as rather consensual, without the critical and political dimension attached to social reproduction. Thus, while the concept of social reproduction seemed out-passed, we argue that it is much larger, richer and political and consider it is time to revisit this powerful concept. The political struggles of feminist and women's movements in the Global South for the defence of life contribute to renewing the understanding of this concept (Arruzza & Gawel, 2020).

We use the concept of social reproduction, inspired by critical feminist and decolonial theories, who have highlighted the work of subalternized and racialized women to feed the prosperity of the globalized capitalist system, who emphasized women's subordination at the family level and who acknowledged the emotional dimension of women's work that relies on human relations (Mackintosh, 1977; Verschuur, 2013b, 2017; Federici, 2014). This concept embodies an understanding of its interdependency with a territory, considered as a space with material and social, cultural, affective and spiritual dimensions. "Body and place are ineluctably the bases for human existence" (Escobar, 2008, 153).

Feminist studies have underlined the need to analyse female subordination in the family and society to understand and change the relations of social reproduction, permeated namely by gender but also race, class, caste and other unequal power relations. The "relations of human reproduction – the subordination of women, the control of their sexuality, their fertility and their children – are the means by which the reproduction of labour power and the insertion of individuals into the class structure are controlled under capitalism" (Mackintosh, 1977, 124). Discussing these issues and women's rights at the domestic level is highly political, as many recent reactions against the so-called "gender ideology" illustrate, and central to the fight against the reproduction of the capitalist economy.

Since the 1960s, feminist movements in different continents have highlighted the issue of unpaid women's work, invisible, for the "others",



in the name of nature, love or maternal duty (Kergoat, 2000; see also: Pedro, 2013; Bhattacharya, 2017). Feminist researchers have theorized on “domestic work”, deconstructing what is work—paid and unpaid—and the male bias attached to it, domestic labour, paid and unpaid care (Benería, 1979; Combes & Devreux, 1992; Souza Lobo, 1992; Folbre, ; Razavi, 2007; Salazar et al., 2012; Laugier, 2015; Degavre & Merla, 2016). Intense debates have taken place on the patriarchal and “domestic mode of production” (Delphy, 1970), on the political economy of social reproduction and the constructed separation between “production” and “reproduction” (Benería, 1979, 1998; Combes 1991; Devreux, 1995; Mackintosh, 1977).

Whether domestic work was seen as productive or not had political consequences, since only so-called “productive” workers were considered as political agents of change, thus excluding non-wage working women from social struggles. Nonetheless, as feminist historians have shown, women workers have indeed participated in struggles (Tilly & Scott, 1978). And not surprisingly, the feminist social movements in the 60s mobilized specifically around the issues of recognition of unpaid domestic work as work.

The separation between production and social reproduction is born with the capitalist mode of production. The separation of the “free” worker from his/her means of production went alongside with the gendered separation of production and social reproduction, through the process of primitive accumulation or what Marx also called accumulation by dispossession. “The expansion of capitalist relations is premised today as well (no less that at the times of the English Enclosures, the *conquista* of the Americas, and the Atlantic slave-trade) on the separation of the producers from the means of their (re)production” (Federici, 1999, 53).

Social reproductive work is not a survival of previous forms of work, “pre-capitalist” or deemed to disappear, it is shaped by capital and essential for the reproduction of capitalism, still and moreover today. Domestic economy is not isolated nor external to capitalism, but articulated to it. It belongs to the “sphere of circulation” of capitalism, supplying it with labour power and food, while it remains mainly outside the capitalist “sphere of production”. It is by maintaining organic links between capitalist and domestic economies that the former ensures its growth and prosperity (Meillassoux, 1975; Rey, 1976; First, 1977). Gender as an organizing principle, intersected with other categories of exclusion like race, caste, class, constitutes the “magic” power that helps maintain this

organic link between the capitalist economy and the domestic economy (Verschuur, 2008).

In fact, the relevant question in the debate on social reproduction is not the *nature of work*, but its *mode of appropriation*, domestic or capitalist—both permeated by patriarchal relations of exploitation. In the domestic mode of appropriation, the work is supposed to be done “for free”—for a husband, a father, the family or the community—and by doing so it is giving a huge and invisible “gift” to the global system (as Federici formulated it, 1999, 54). In the capitalist mode of appropriation, the work is supposed to be done in exchange of a monetary payment, sometimes with a wage earner status, although often lowly valued and not in decent working conditions (Verschuur, 2013b). What is at stake are the social relationships within which the work is performed. To understand how the whole system reproduces itself, it is essential to acknowledge and to understand the articulation between the domestic and capitalist economies.

While Marx mentions the hierarchies in the family, and talks of the “latent slavery” that relies on the appropriation of women and children’s work by the men in their families (Marx, Engels 1976, cited by Holmstrom, 2010, 307), he, as most political economists, had a pernicious productive bias. Marx concentrated his analysis on what he called “productive” work in capitalism, defined as what produces surplus value. This means failing to recognize the production of *use values*, necessary for the reproduction, maintenance and reconstitution of the labour force, both biologically and socially. Besides the productive bias, recognizing women’s subordination to men in families has generally been neglected by theorists of social reproduction (Mackintosh, 1977). More largely, as feminist and decolonial studies have underlined, the intersection of domestic social relationships by gender, class and race divisions of power has been until recently disregarded.

Rosa Luxemburg (2015 [1899]), in her controversy with Lenin, had already stated that domestic and peasant economy is indispensable for the reproduction of capitalism, which explained why the latter maintains the former. Vast debates have taken place on the domination and “hegemonization” of the capitalist mode of production over other modes of production and on the transformations of modes of production (Castex, 1977). While there is no “domestic mode of production” which would not be both articulated to and dominated by other modes of production, it is fundamental to acknowledge the persistence of domestic forms

of social relationships as well as of relations of subordination in the families. Understanding the relations of social reproduction, including the underlying patriarchal values, and their articulation with other social relationships, is thus central in the search for solidarity-driven social relationships.

The question of the transformation of the capitalist mode of production and of the articulation with one or more modes of production has been revisited with different perspectives from the South. The Peruvian heterodox Marxist José Carlos Mariátegui had a major influence by asserting that in non-European societies socialism could come from an organic evolution of local practices and forces, especially indigenous ones, and not from a revolution led by a non-existent working class (Arico, 1980). In this vein, Anibal Quijano later drew attention to the destructive effect of the colonial/modern power pattern on the subjective conditions of social change and on the open character, “without any historical guarantee of victory” (Quijano, 2008, 15) of this change. From this perspective, he characterized solidarity economy “as a heterogeneous universe of social practices” and a “vital expression of the no less heterogeneous and contradictory movement of today’s society” (ibid. 12). Sharing this hypothesis of structural heterogeneity and of non-deterministic social change, the Brazilian economist Paul Singer (2000) defended that the solidarity economy may constitute, through the work relations that it institutes, a distinct mode of production and distribution not necessarily subordinated to capitalism, under certain conditions. On this key point, these Marxist authors converge in some way with the theory of the solidarity economy developed in France from the legacy of the plural economy of Marcel Mauss and Karl Polanyi, which recognizes the existence of a plurality of economic principles and forms of property within predominantly capitalist economic systems (Laville, 2013).

In solidarity economy, work is supposed to be subject to a collectively constructed democratic will, with social relations of solidarity taking precedence over individual interest or material profit (Eme & Laville, 2006). According to Singer, the concrete possibility that the solidarity economy constitutes a distinct mode of production and distribution that would not be subordinated to capitalism rests on the organization of workers at two main levels. At the level of solidarity economy initiatives, firstly, workers face the challenge of self-management. Organization and experimentation are the necessary conditions for building new collective management skills indispensable to escape the unequal division of work in

capitalist enterprises. The organization between solidarity economy initiatives, secondly, is crucial to create an “integrated sector” that brings together these initiatives and other institutions in order to generate their own modalities of financing, marketing, circulation of knowledge and relations with governments. Internal democracy through democratic self-management and external autonomy through the institution of an integrated solidarity economy sector are therefore two key conditions for solidarity economy to constitute a mode of production and distribution that can co-exist with capitalism without being subordinated to it. Paul Singer’s analysis, inspired by the experience of production cooperatives and centred on solidarity economy as an alternative to capitalist relations of production, deserves to be confronted with the theories of the relations between men and women in the family or in workers’ organizations, and with the debates on social relations of reproduction. Indeed, “no conceptualization of a particular mode of production is complete unless it can account for the reproduction of the people within the system and of the system as a whole” (Mackintosh, 1977, 126). Transforming the capitalist mode of production requires rethinking the articulations between the domestic, capitalist and solidarity economies.

Solidarity economy may offer spaces of resistance to both domestic and capitalist economies, all the more solid and extensive as they rely on strong internal democracy, provided that they consider gender, race and class power inequalities. Our findings show that this requires connecting the myriad of existing initiatives to each other and weaving organic links with feminist networks, movements, scholars and allies, including non-governmental, governmental and intergovernmental and transnational institutions or movements.

Solidarity initiatives may not represent radical transformations of a system on their own. But aggregating experiences and articulating with feminist, solidarity and other social movements may open, here and now, paths of emergence of alternative spaces to the expansion of capitalism in all spheres of life. Obviously, the role of the state to offer conditions to make this possible is part of the issue, while also being part of the problem (as we will develop in the conclusion).

Feminist and decolonial debates on social reproduction shed light on the powerfulness of this concept. We defend the idea that *a feminist perspective on solidarity economy requires putting social reproduction at the centre of the analysis*. Through a feminist analysis of solidarity economy,

we propose to enrich the discussion of the concept of social reproduction, grounded on in-depth studies of grass-roots women's collective initiatives. We are interested in understanding under what conditions solidarity economy may offer some spaces to organize social reproduction differently, without reproducing gender, class, caste and race inequalities, in other words, rethinking the social relations of reproduction and rearticulating domestic, capitalist and solidarity economies.

*We argue that solidarity economy can offer transformative and sustainable paths for feminist social change.* This means reorganizing social reproduction, constructing new social relationships, neither domestic nor capitalist, but based on solidarity. This requires internal democracy, putting gender, race, caste and class equality at the forefront of political debates, at all levels, from the household to the communities, the market and the state.

## FEMINIST EPISTEMOLOGIES AND CONTRIBUTIONS FROM THE GLOBAL SOUTH

Based on the ideas exposed, and in line with the stands defended, a research was conducted in grass-roots initiatives in the field of solidarity economy in the Global South. It explored the specific conditions under which solidarity economy initiatives may represent possibilities of resistance against capitalist and domestic modes of appropriation of work and the unequal global division of labour. It investigated the possibilities of emergence of new social relationships, neither domestic nor capitalist but driven by solidarity and feminist values, to reorganize social reproduction.

The book presents the results of a feminist collective research project initiated between a network of researchers from Latin America, India and Europe. The reflections presented are at the same time the result of maturation of long-standing personal research questions and of shared ripening of thoughts, through collective work, interactions, dialogues, joint research and writings that fed the theoretical discussions at the heart of the book. The researchers, coming from varied disciplinary backgrounds—anthropology, sociology, political economy, political science, agronomy, law—constructed a shared feminist epistemological perspective and discussed methodological choices.

Feminist epistemologies are based on principles of collaborative, participatory, non-hierarchical, reflexive and transformative research. They are inspired by the long history of feminist studies and movements that have

forged the concept of gender. This involves recognizing the political and heuristic scope of gender as a category of analysis that helps understanding and questioning the power relations between women and men. By developing analytical and reflexive capacities, feminist epistemologies break the contested dichotomies between theories and practices, between academics and professionals or activists. They also contest the homogenizing and victimizing vision of women as poor and powerless (Mohanty, 1988). Using feminist epistemologies implies being aware that “our embodiment as members of a specific class, race, and gender as well as our concrete historical situations necessarily play significant roles in our perspective on the world [...]. Knowledge is seen as gained not by solitary individuals but by socially constituted members of groups that emerge and change through history” (Narayan, 2004, 218). This implies being conscious that no perspective has a universal validity, contesting Euro-centric visions and valuing the knowledge of “others”, feminist scholars from the South, local women’s or feminist organizations.

The decolonial perspective is defined as an alternative for thinking *from* the historical and political specificity of the societies themselves, and not only *towards* or *on* them, as has been defended by the decolonial current born in Latin America since the 1970s (Fals Borda, 1970, Quijano, 1991, Escobar, 2019, Viveros, 2019). The latter considers that culture is intertwined with political-economic processes, and that globalized neoliberal capitalism cannot be understood without taking into account the race and gender discourses that organize the population in an international division of labour (Castro-Gomez & Grosfoguel, 2007). The term decolonial thus responds both to the demand to shift perspectives from the points of view of the “others” and to the criticism that postcolonial studies are deserting the terrain of real social struggles (Verschuur & Destremau, 2012). In India, too, there are currents of thought which aim to decolonize research, by revealing and dismantling unequal power relations in knowledge production processes and institutional practices and by shifting perspectives from those expressed by the “other”, the subordinate (Spivak, 1988).

The decolonial current has thus criticized the coloniality of power and knowledge that runs through the social sciences, including gender/feminist studies. Despite the fact that we defend this perspective, the constitution of this research network could not escape all the constraints linked to the coloniality of power. Research conditions are often more unfavourable in the Global South, especially for women and/or racialized

women researchers, and even more so in tense political contexts. They are more likely to have part-time or precarious commitments, heavy service, teaching and administrative burdens in institutions, besides heavy personal ones. Some people in research institutions in the Global South have to juggle between consulting assignments, various institutional commitments, activism and research. These inequalities are sometimes reflected in the ability to find time and resources for writing. In addition, the need to use a dominant language such as English—which was not the mother tongue of any of the researchers in this network—has made exchanges between certain teams difficult, particularly for Latin American teams—despite efforts to find help with interpretation and translation. These various constraints also explain why some teams, while having extensively contributed in the theoretical debates, provided less detailed and lengthy written pieces than others.

Feminist epistemologies and the decolonial perspective inspired the way the network conducted the research with grass-roots women's groups and produced the results, which are part of the dynamics of concrete social struggles. We are therefore committed to an approach that postulates, among other things, that the research *process* itself is part of social change.

As we will develop in Chapter 2, our epistemological perspective includes a position that is both critical (paying a constant attention to structural mechanisms of oppression) and open to “possibilism” (i.e. the idea that change within any context is possible, but it may take hidden forms and may follow hidden rationalities and that research must look at these counterintuitive and hidden forms of change). This resonates with feminist approaches that claim that in order to understand something one has to change it (Mies, 1979), and that recognize personal and collective room to manoeuvre for change (Scott, 1986; Rauber, 2003). It also resonates with the call for epistemologies of the South (de Sousa Santos 2011), recognizing the different ways of knowing, forged by their social position, by which women and men organize their lives and give meaning to their existence, with the approach of pedagogy of the oppressed (Freire, 1974) and participatory action-research methods (Fals Borda, 1999) used by some of our partners in their work.

The case studies presented are drawn from countries from the Global South (Argentina, Bolivia and Brazil, as well as Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu—India) where intellectual collaborations between the researchers of the network exist since long. The case studies are specific

to each country and depend upon the specificities of each context. We did not look for “best-practices” or emblematic initiatives, but privileged the field knowledge and collaborative experiences of the members of the network and those initiatives which were the most relevant to answer our research questions. This network’s common methodological basis also includes a qualitative and careful use of comparison between the different contexts. Comparison aims either at highlighting divergences and similarities or at raising new questions (the confrontation with new contexts helps going beyond conventional frameworks). Both objectives were pursued here.

Comparison and pluridisciplinarity are easier said than done. They require multiple precautions in order to avoid misunderstanding and “false-friends” (a same word is used in different disciplines or geographical areas but with a different meaning). The countries studied are characterized, whatever the disciplines, by specific intellectual traditions, embedded in local histories, which are also specific ways of thinking of what must be taken into consideration. We identified two major conditions for collaborative research, which are often under-estimated (Kanbur & Shaffer, 2007; Bardhan & Ray, 2008): mutual respect and a common epistemological position. A research protocol was designed during a kick-off workshop, where epistemological stands were discussed. Halfway through the project, a collective field visit to one of the case studies, in Vale do Ribeira in Brazil, was organized where methods, concepts, the framework and the work in progress were discussed. A pluridisciplinary approach, combining concepts and methods from feminist anthropology (lived experience, subjectivities, power relations), political economy, a substantive and plural approach to the economy (market and non-market practices) and political science (public action, social movements, the public space and subaltern counterpublics) was adopted, following common feminist epistemological perspectives.

Based on ethnographies and interdisciplinary case studies, the book discusses how grass-roots collectives organize themselves, often in connexion with external organizations, and how social relations are being (re)constructed in these spaces, intersected by gender and power relations. We explore under what conditions marginalized women, majoritarian in these initiatives, can constitute themselves as subjects of rights, to transform the reproduction of gender and social inequalities. We analyse the practices, the social and power relationships through which social reproduction is organized. We investigate whether and how the high level



of participation of marginalized women leads to power negotiations, at the domestic, local and global level. We also explore the contribution of solidarity economy to the renewal of public action and policies, and whether and how the inclusion of feminist agendas in the field of social reproduction is negotiated. We study both the tensions and opportunities to imagine and build new social relationships, to open breaches in the dominant economic and political models and renew public action. These initiatives are approached as *processes* where power relations are at play, and which may as well or at the same time reinforce unequal gender, race and class relations and capitalist accumulation and open spaces of reinvention of the economy and of doing politics.

The conjunction of the subversive power of solidarity grass-roots women's and feminist organizations and of a feminist focus on women's rights, gender equality and power transformations emerge as paths of resistance to both domestic and capitalist modes of appropriation of subaltern women's work and their subordination. It suggests the possibility of emergence of different social relationships, not based on gender, class and race exploitative relations but on solidarity and egalitarian values. It offers glimmers of hope to resist the hegemonic worldview that sustains the financialized global capitalist system, permeated by patriarchal values, coloniality of power and racial hierarchies. A feminist solidarity economy ambitions to rethink, beyond the context of the crises, the enlarged reproduction of life, now and for the future generations. At the same time, as we will see all along the book, social change must always be contextualized and historicized. Point-to-point comparisons make little sense: only *processes* can be compared, and achievements can never be taken for granted. Contexts change rapidly, and practices are constantly evolving. What is gained today may be lost tomorrow. Moreover, given the multiple nature of oppressions and struggles, what is gained here may be lost elsewhere. However, even ephemeral victories are never lost; women's collective struggles and dreams contribute to experiences of awareness and changing perceptions and interpretations of everyday life. They are part of the continuous feminist and political struggle in times of crisis of social reproduction.

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