Dialogues in Human Geography

Conversations Forum

Dialogues in Human Geography
2023, Vol. 13(3) 473–483

DOI: 10.1177/20438206231177072
journals.sagepub.com/home/dhg
Sage

Social reproduction, women's labour and systems of life: A conversation

Marianna Fernandes
Geneva Graduate Institute, Switzerland

Luisa Lupo
Geneva Graduate Institute, Switzerland

Asanda Benya
University of Cape Town, South Africa
University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa

Saniye Dedeoğlu
Muğla Sıtkı Koçman Üniversitesi, Turkey

Alessandra Mezzadri
SOAS University of London, UK

Elisabeth Prügl
Geneva Graduate Institute, Switzerland

Abstract

This conversation brings together feminist scholars from various backgrounds and epistemological traditions around a central topic in feminist debates that is today more relevant than ever, social reproduction. It begins by examining social reproduction as a concept and its entanglements with the dynamics of global capitalism from human geography and feminist international political economy perspectives. We ask, what does the lens of social reproduction bring to light? We discuss how social reproduction is a fundamentally political concept that bridges classic labour struggles with demands around housing, service provision and the reproduction of life in general. As a concept, it makes visible the systems of life that support the labour process, both daily and intergenerationally, in sites of production along global supply chains, from the garment industry, to mining and agriculture. Nevertheless, there is a need to consider how gendered dichotomies of productive and reproductive that underpin its modern origin may or may not undermine this concept and to rethink how, ultimately, we organise around social reproductive struggles. The conversation took place in June 2022 and has been edited for clarity.

Corresponding author:
Luisa Lupo, Department of International Relations/Political Science, Geneva Graduate Institute, Geneva 1211, Switzerland.
Email: luisa.lupo@graduateinstitute.ch

Keywords
Feminist politics, global capitalism, labouring women, social reproduction, solidarities

LL/MF

This conversation is a follow up to a roundtable held at the 2022 IAFFE Annual Conference titled 'Transforming Global Governance for Social Justice'. Our goal is to think through the big concept of social reproduction, what it means and how it is connected to global supply chains and production arrangements. We're joined today by Asanda-Jonas Benya (AB) from the University of Cape Town and the University of the Witwatersrand, Saniye Dedeoğlu (SD) at Muğla Sıtkı Koçman Üniversitesi, Alessandra Mezzadri (AM) from SOAS University of London, and Elisabeth Prügl (EP), aka Lisa, from the Geneva Graduate Institute. How does social reproduction shape and get shaped by global supply chain capitalism? We will also look ahead at some of the ways in which feminist politics can be advanced thanks to this concept. To begin with, we want to ask you all about your research and how you have been engaging with the concept of social reproduction. What does it mean to you?

AB

My work looks at working and living experiences of women miners in South Africa. Around 2011, I was working underground with women mineworkers asking questions about identity, the construction of gendered subjectivities using the mine as site of enquiry. In South Africa, around 2004, women started working underground, doing the work that was, for a very long time, seen as men's work. I was interested in how women in this supposedly very masculine space understood who they were. But one of the things that struck me was that they would start around 4:30 or 5 in the morning and, by the time they got to work, they spoke about a million other things that they had been doing before getting to work. I suppose it should not have struck me, but it did. If a shift starts at 5 in the morning, you are expecting someone to just say 'well, I woke up and I came to work', right? However, these women had a whole lot of things they had been doing from 2 am until the time they got to work, such as preparing their kids for school, helping their husbands prepare for work and doing all sorts of other things around the house to prepare everyone for the day. I also heard how their husbands who were working in other shifts just went to work, in other words, they 'woke up and came to work'. In this way, the topic of social reproduction started emerging in my research. It was clear that women were doing a lot of invisible or taken-for-granted work between their shifts underground.

Another way in which the concept emerged was through my work with women in Marikana, a small mining town on the outskirts of Rustenburg the hub of platinum mining in South Africa. In Marikana a massacre took place in 2012, on the 16th of August about 34 mineworkers were shot and killed by state police for demanding a living wage. As an activist and a scholar, I started going to Marikana to show solidarity with the workers and, in those visits, I interacted a lot with the women. In the conversations women talked so eloquently about their involvement in the strikes. Again, I was struck by their absence when looking at journalistic reports in newspapers. They were absent in the narratives around the strikes, but I knew from my conversations with women that it was not just the men at the Marikana hill who were shot and were affected by the massacre, or by the struggle for a living wage, it was also women. They were involved, supported, and sustained the strikes in direct and indirect ways. In conversations with women in the community, one of the things that they kept talking about was how the wage was not just a workplace issue; it was something that affected them directly and had a direct bearing on their living conditions. They could directly relate with what was happening inside the mine, in this underground and supposedly faraway space.

Women told me stories about the deep entanglement between their day-to-day lives and what was happening underground, talking about how it shaped the rhythms of their lives and their priorities throughout the day, etc. I started interrogating how these women who were not employees of the mine could be so deeply entangled with the mine. How could a mine that did not pay them direct their lives so much, order their days, their goings and comings, how could their lives – in a more direct and traceable way – be so deeply entangled with what happens at work? Social reproduction emerged as a very useful lens here too, because in the case of the Marikana massacre, it helped to illuminate the multiple and the different actors that were completely absent in the national narrative around the struggles that workers were waging. Though absent in this narrative, women were deeply implicated in what was happening in the social life around Marikana. They were very clearly directly and daily reproducing the labour power and the miners themselves and without their day-to-day work, the mines would very clearly not be as profitable.

In relation to your question about how I understand the concept of social reproduction, or how I have been using it, to think about the work that both these groups of women have been doing in Marikana and inside the mine, it is to think about social reproduction as the reproduction of life in its entirety. Life and work by extension, and how workers show up at work. Because that is something that women also talked about: 'If I don't do A B C D at home, my husband will not be able to get to work and be a productive worker', and 'after rocks fall underground, or when there are accidents underground, if I'm not able to calm him down at home, chances are when he gets to work, he isn't going to be as productive as he would be if things at home were stable'. Women made these direct links between what was happening at home and at work and, in some ways, travelled this divide between the so-called production space and the reproduction space. And that is how I came to incorporate social reproduction in the work that I do.

SD

I realise social reproduction has always been in my research. But it has acquired more importance in recent years. In my early research, I identified social reproduction as a set of relationships in the household: as the practices of women with different statuses and as a gendered relationship between women and men in the household. I approached it as a way of bargaining in the home that creates leverage for women to engage in economic activities.

In Istanbul's garment sector, which has been the topic of my early research, women have been working in small-scale workshops or as home-based workers. Their role in social reproduction activities and the identity that they fashioned through these practices were entangled with and helped them bargain with family members to take part in productive activities. Only by representing themselves according to those social reproductive roles, for example, as good mothers and good wives, women were able to reach out to economic activities and were allowed to work in small-scale garment workshops. But I also identified many women working there as unpaid family workers and observed how workshop owners manipulated their kin relations to be more successful, to be in the business and to remain in it. Having access to women as unpaid family workers made these businesses successful or helped them survive in this very competitive segment of garment supply chains.

However, in recent years, I also approached social reproduction by looking at the actual time and labour that seasonal agricultural workers, particularly Syrian migrant women in Turkey, dedicate to domestic tasks and care activities. They are burdened in many regards and their responsibilities are often invisible. What happens through women's reproductive labour is migrant families' integration into seasonal agricultural work, because their tasks and activities enable seasonal agricultural families to access this precarious form of work. Therefore, in my recent research, I approach social reproduction as an enabler and facilitator for agricultural work and production. I focus mostly on daily forms of social reproduction, such as labour time and tasks. This is my journey of tackling women's contribution, whether it is in the industrial workshops of the garment industry or in agricultural production. What I try to do in my research is to make this invisible labour, or invisible contribution, more visible, and to point out the entanglement of production with women's social reproduction tasks.

LL/MF

Indeed, social reproduction is a powerful lens that can help challenge taken-for-granted categories like what it means to be a worker. It seems to us that examining global supply chains through the lens of social reproduction can help understand capitalism and capitalist processes more fully, as well as advance feminist claims and build solidarities across different issue and domains, from the struggle for a living wage to the fight for a liveable planet for all beings on earth. However, some have been critical of this concept for its emphasis on the 'social' and for its Western origins. Alessandra and Lisa, do you think this lens is compatible with ecofeminist, as well as post-colonial and decolonial approaches?

AM

It is impossible to understand the labour process without looking at the different intersections that occur between the productive and reproductive spaces. In my work on Indian sweatshops, I started off by trying to make sense of how employers socially build the labour process and engage in labour control, looking at their use of social identity, gender, racialisation, ethnicity and mobility. But then I realised that other realms of life were much more systematically mobilised to extract surplus in this very complex production system. This is how I 'discovered' social reproduction in practice. For me, a useful definition is one that stresses social reproduction as all the processes and activities that regenerate life, daily and intergenerationally, as well as the capitalist relations. It is a 'messy' definition, and one that is put forward by Cindy Katz (2001) – who explicitly refers to its 'messiness' – and Isabella Bakker (2007), among others. This 'messiness' is also central to distance it from 'care', to which the concept of social reproduction is connected, but from which it also differs. Moreover, it is useful to differentiate it from 'societal reproduction' (Laslett and Brenner, 1989), which is closer to what Marx, who coined the term in the first place, referred to – on this point one can refer to the work of Martha Gimenez (2018), or Paul Cammack (2020).

I would like to engage with the question on ecofeminism, and post-colonial and decolonial approaches. There are a lot of productive possibilities of interplay between social reproduction and these different theorizations because social reproduction is a lens. Moreover, social reproduction entangles with production differently, in different settings, in ways which depend on the specific political economy of given regions. Post-colonial critiques, with their very different timelines, had the question of the specificities of post-colonial capitalism at heart. Hence, one could engage with social reproduction in post-colonial settings by looking at the way in which colonial and post-colonial relations have reorganised productive and reproductive realms. It is also possible to explore social reproduction through approaches centred on coloniality or decoloniality; for instance, if you focus on early settler colonial capitalism or processes of land dispossession. Some people have done this very productively on the issue of land dispossession. Brenna Bhandar's *Colonial Lives of Property* (2018) is a great attempt to link these issues together, exploring how coloniality impacts on the possibilities of social reproduction through the shaping of specific – racialized – property relations. Also looking at race, Gargi Bhattacharyya has worked on *Rethinking Racial Capitalism* (2018), specifically by adopting a social reproduction lens. And in Françoise Vergès' (2021) *A Decolonial Feminism* social reproduction and care work emerge as key terrains where racialisation and exclusion are regenerated. Finally, social reproduction is naturally linked to ecofeminist analysis since Mies' early theorisation of housewifization. There is fantastic work on this recently, for instance, by Stefania Barca (2020) on what she calls the *Forces of Reproduction*, which connects the exploitation of nature with the exploitation of life, and by Shirin Rai, through her concept of depletion (Rai et al., 2014).

EP

Listening to you, I am struck by how much our understandings of social reproduction are tied up with where we come from empirically. I have to say that I am quite confused about the concept, and I would like to share with you some of my confusion. I was very happy to hear Alessandra talk about messiness and hear Saniye talk about entanglements. There are several tensions in social reproduction as a concept. In my opinion, these tensions are not unrelated to the origins of the concept in Marxism, because Marxism comes from a particular historical period and from a particular location in Europe and European industrialisation. The concept originated in that background of industrialisation and was picked up in European theorising again in the 1970s.

There are two problems with this concept. The first is that we reduce social reproduction to a form of labour – the labour of the housewife – which is often understood to be unpaid labour. It is the kind of labour from which surplus is being extracted. Reproductive labour is understood as being subordinate to productive labour. The point of social reproduction theory was to counteract that subordination and to talk about the way in which social reproduction, to quote Susan Ferguson (2017), is part of an integrated process that entails the production of life, as well as goods and services. The crucial part is the entanglement of production and reproduction in an integrated process. Ferguson does not say labour, she says it is the production of life and it is the production of goods and services. Narrowing down social reproduction to labour might not be a problem in certain situations. The mining example that Asanda mentioned sounded quite convincing. But there is a commodification of social reproduction happening in the sense that it is becoming paid labour, and the pandemic was a great reminder of that, with its impact on labour in health, in education, in social work. A lot of the unpaid work that women have often done and are still doing, also exists in a paid form, such as paid care labour. This is, to some extent, a labour like any other in what we consider the sphere of production. What is it that distinguishes these kinds of labour? Commodified reproductive labour is certainly more devalued. It is also often publicly funded and thus part of the state, which should lead us to ask how it is regulated. Reproduction is thus an industry with a distinctive form of regulation.

The second problem with social reproduction is that it seems to derive from an utterly binary way of thinking. There is production and reproduction, paid and unpaid work, home and work, etc. It maps these binaries that subtend political economy more broadly because of its modern origins. Home-based labour is actually a great example to show how treacherous these binaries are. And Saniye's study illustrates well that they are treacherous with regards to space and time. Industrial production and social reproduction often happen in the same space. And that space needs to be negotiated precisely because of that entanglement. There is also a temporal mixing of activities that become very difficult to separate. Thinking through my research on agriculture, and small-scale farmers, it is very difficult to separate what is production and what is reproduction on a farm. The United Nations System of National Accounts tries to draw what they call a production boundary, reproducing a deeply gendered distinction to the point where the boundary is basically drawn through gender: the kind of work that mostly women do (care and domestic work) is excluded from the definition of production. This binary separation is problematic. By continuing to draw it, we are complicit in reproducing the gender binary. There is a need to queer political economy, and I am not certain that the concept of social reproduction contributes to that… Or maybe it can if the focus is on the entanglements between production and reproduction and on the fact that these two realms are not separate after all.

LL/MF

Thank you for these provocations, Lisa. We'd like to focus on these entanglements, specifically on the relationship between global production systems and social reproduction. What does your research tell us about the relationship between social reproduction and the operations of global capitalism? And how does a social reproduction lens illuminate struggles for survival around sites of production, or the operations and governance of supply chains that would otherwise remain invisible?

EP

I have been part of a project on land grabs where we were thinking about land grabs through a gender lens. There is a really brilliant article in the book that came out of this project by my colleagues, Alice Beban and Joanna Bourke Martignoni (2022), about indigenous populations in the northeast of Cambodia and the impacts of their loss of land. One of the really striking findings that they describe in this piece is the violence of losing land in the context of intensive commercialisation. However, people who lost land were also wondering about what they would do in their old age. They wondered if their children would still be around to take care of them even if there was no longer land to pass down. And they concluded that it would depend on whether there was love or not. The implicit contract to provide social security across generations with the promise of inheriting land was being disrupted and replaced by an individualised relationship. In this particular context, it was usually the daughters who inherited the farms because there was an understanding that they would take care of the old people. This is a situation where the creation of industrial agriculture does more than change labour arrangements. It moves people from a farming environment into wage labour, but it also affects social reproduction; it affects social security and how that security is provided materially, going back to the ecofeminist question of how security is provided by virtue of having a tie to the land. There is a governance aspect that happens in those kinds of changes that maybe is also worth making visible, in addition to the changes around labour arrangements.

AM

The ways in which social reproduction reopens up the debates about capitalism are quite crucial. Social reproduction represents capitalism as a social system, and one that organises life in a very specific way, as opposed to a mere system of production, which for the most part, political economy has taken capitalism to be. And when we apply this view to the realm of labour, then we see everything that is around labouring, all that supports the labour process and its existence and that shapes, paraphrasing from Silvia Federici (2004), 'the kitchens and the bedrooms' of the 'social factory'; a concept that really captures the way in which we work on our planet (Massimo de Angelis, 2007). Applying these insights to supply chain capitalism abolishes and erases dichotomies, because it shows the ways in which the entirety of realms that pertain to the livelihoods of workers are drawn into the process of production. And this is particularly visible in global supply chains, and increasingly so. I work in areas characterised by factory systems where there is a very tight integration between factories and industrial areas, and the industrial hamlets or dormitories where the workers – mostly migrants – reside. There are very strong connections between the factory and these systems of life. So much so, that workers can be recalled into the assembly line as in a perpetual cycle of the labour process. It's a sort of expansion of the assembly line that draws on realms of daily social reproduction. At the same time, the factory can also use the fact that workers are entangled with other trajectories of social reproduction. They come from villages and peri-urban areas, and this is utilised by the factory system to expel workers who are not needed very quickly from the system, and villages will act as a sort of 'reverse subsidy' (an expression used by Dev Nathan et al., 2022) to employers by reabsorbing them. During the COVID-19 pandemic, this was seen on a massive scale; the ability of commodity chains to expel labour very quickly with villages effectively subsidising chains by re-accommodating returning workers and performing the role of the 'global housework of capitalism', if you will. Finally, another way in which social reproduction enmeshes with production in global production circuits is in relation to the incorporation of home-based work, which is endemic in global supply chains. Here, we are not talking about something that is transitioning back into forms of more organised labour, as many have argued. This – homeworking – is a very stable relation. In home-based labour relations, which are widespread in supply chains, you have a total enmeshing between productive and reproductive spaces, times and activities. So much so that even in labour surveys it isn't easy to distinguish what is a consumption expense from what is the production expense. So, these are examples in which social reproduction dissolves work-life dichotomies, in ways that make binary representations unable to capture concrete trends and processes.

SD

I'd like to follow up on Alessandra's point on the meshing between productive and reproductive spaces, times and activities. In my latest research, I looked at seasonal agricultural workers, who work at the bottom of agricultural supply chains. In Turkey, to work as seasonal agricultural workers, people usually need to move from their usual place of residence to areas where they can find work. When they do so, they move together with their family members and bring their belongings with them. They often live in tents pitched on the bare ground in the open air, with no access to refrigeration, running water or electricity, all of which make the domestic tasks that women undertake to help their families survive more difficult. For example, women must gather wood to cook, collect water to clean, wash dishes and basic hygiene. All these activities are more exhausting and require more time in the tents than in usual conditions.

Lisa, this is connected to your point about how, especially in rural settings, production and reproduction are quite difficult to separate from each other. My point is, without these activities that women undertake, it's really difficult to become an agricultural worker or for families to seek agricultural work. Engaging in this work would not be sustainable for an individual worker. The domestic tasks that women perform to meet the needs of their families is vital for those working families to engage in seasonal agricultural work. For this reason, I argue that activities in the realm of social reproduction not only make agricultural labour cheap but also play an enabling role for these families to engage in this precarious form of work. What emerged from my most recent research in Adana, Turkey, is that the control of women's reproductive labour is an important part of production. It's important not only for workers' families, but also for farmers because it ensures access to workers and the smooth running of the supply chain.

AB

I want to take a step back in relation to some of the provocations raised by Lisa earlier, especially around the production of life, just to share a little story, and then use that as a segue to talk about global supply chains. One of the things that we read in the literature on the South African mining industry, historically, relates to an almost abstract 'production of the working class'. Yet, in some of these communities, you can see how the biological reproduction of workers happens and feeds directly the mines with workers. It's very visible. Some of the workers in the mines where I was doing my research came from the same families, they were the third, fourth or fifth generation of mineworkers and this was not a coincidence. There was a deliberate attempt by the government alongside the mines to source mineworkers from particular regions of the country through particular laws – meaning there was a directly line of supply from the biological reproduction of children by families to supply mines with labourers. It struck me how you could literally trace it from generation to generation. I do not think it is necessarily specific to South Africa, rather, it is a global phenomenon across mining industries, that you have generations of mineworkers coming from the exact same regions and families. After the Marikana massacre, in relation to the biological production of workers something happened. One of the things that trade unions alongside employers agreed on was that, from each of the families that had lost a family member in the massacre, the families would, again be given an 'opportunity' to have a family member replace and take the job of the miner who was killed. If you were the wife or child or sibling of a mineworker who was killed in the massacre, and you wanted to work in the mines, you could take the place of your deceased relative. As a result, children of deceased miners took up the places of their fathers. This was a deliberate project of intergenerational reproduction of workers, whereby the state and mining capital relied on the biological reproduction of mineworkers, i.e. the labour force, by women in the 'labour reserves'.

Back to the question that was posed around global supply chains, you cannot talk about mining without talking about the global capitalist system, you can't talk about mining without talking about production cycles, what is being extracted, from where, by whom and where it moves, and ultimately goes. But one of the difficulties with the traditional global supply chain literature is where that story starts. In the traditional literature of global supply chains, most of the focus is on the point of extraction and trading of the commodity and on the global. We need to take a few steps back before we talk about global supply chains and look at the worker, look into the conditions under which the worker works, where the labour power – if you use social reproduction analysis – is produced, where and under what conditions these people are working. In the case of mining, the focus is often on when the gold has been extracted and processed, or when the platinum has been processed and is about to be exported out of South Africa. There is a lot that gets marginalised and, to some extent, a lot that gets erased in relation to the conditions under which workers are produced, and also under which workers do the actual work of producing these commodities that are supposedly highly valued once they are exported.

We need to bring back multiple actors into the equation of global supply chains and those multiple actors being not just the workers at the point of production but also women at the point of social reproduction. I do not know if I am working with the binary here or trying to trouble the binary or doing a bit of both. But I think taking a few steps back brings into view these other actors who are completely erased from the mainstream of global supply chains discourse. Taking more steps back brings to light the work that defines, and in so many ways confines, the lives of women in mining communities and that the mine is not something that is far away from what they do on a day-to-day basis. In fact, it completely determines their daily routines. Yet, the frame of global supply chains does not allow for all these activities to be fully taken into account and illuminate the contribution of all of these different and very important actors in the production of these commodities, which then move across the globe in particular ways.

When you think about the conditions under which labour power is produced, there is also a need to consider the conditions in which miners work. When looking at some of the mining companies or the communities where the mines operate in South Africa, what is striking is that, in almost all these communities, people are not just super-exploited at work, but they are also being pushed out of the places in which they live – land grabs, forced removals of communities. In fact, people are pushed out of the mine hostels, because although they enable the mines to extend the working day, to some extent, they are a cost for mining companies. Workers are being pushed out of the hostels into informal settlements around the mines. Therefore, there is a complete outsourcing of all these responsibilities to women. There is no longer a hostel where there is food that is ready.

Currently, there are a whole host of informal settlements that are directly connected to and are produced by these global supply chains. Yet, the informal settlements are completely invisible because of where the story often starts. Against the backdrop of the mine, which has all the innovative, high-tech technology, you have these informal settlements that do not even have clean water, we are talking about people who are literally living 500 m away from each other. You have these executives who are earning millions, while at the same time not allowing workers, because of supply chain pressures, to live in decent conditions and be paid the fair wages that they are demanding.

LL/MF

There are so many points for reflection here. Keeping these in mind, we want to ask the others, how do you envision the concept of social reproduction evolving in the future, to advance feminist claims?

EP

This is a huge question, so you get a huge answer, but I'll keep it short. To me, the question is really related to what social reproduction is. One thing that resonates with me is Saniye, Asanda and Alessandra's insistence that their research is about making social reproduction visible. I am thinking of it as an intensely political concept because it's a concept that brings into view women's labour, unpaid labour, precisely all the things that I was criticising it for doing just minutes ago. If we think about what that concept has done, it is useful to recall its origins in the social movement of the Wages for Housework campaign. It was a political concept and was always tied up in a political agenda. It seems to me that the question that we probably need to ask ourselves is, what kind of organising is necessary here?

There is actually a lot of organising that is happening already that takes on the issues that we are concerned with. Maybe not enough, but it exists: unions have advocated for wages and social protection; they have done that for many years and are increasingly becoming more gender sensitive. Also, there are environmentalists who have been advocating for the idea of having a different relationship with the environment as a basis for producing life. And, of course, there is the feminist movement. And maybe, as some feminists argue, the issue isn't just labour, but also the exploitation of the feminine, whether that is bodies and labour, or whether that is nature, which leaves me with the question of whether we *need* the term social reproduction. From a political perspective, Is this a powerful frame? Is this something that resonates and that brings people together around a movement? Maybe part of the reason why people are talking about care more extensively than social reproduction is that care is a less technical concept and resonates better. This is the question I want to leave you with. What is the resonance of social reproduction?

AM

I just do not see the two terms in competition with each other at all. I think we feminists must claim it all – care *and* social reproduction – claim the entire space. This has been quite clear since the COVID-19 crisis and related organising, seeing how we benefited from escalating, intersecting demands focusing on care, as well as on social reproduction. On this point, the debates around essential work have been very instructive. One can say that the term should be handled carefully, as argued by Sara Farris and Mark Bergfeld (2022), as it's instrumental and very fuzzy – as demonstrated, for instance, by the comparative analysis by Sara Stevano, Rosimina Ali and Merle Jamieson (2021). But I would say that, politically, instead, debates on essential work may also be strategic to link care and social reproduction. They highlighted, on the one hand, the centrality of care work and in doing so, they enabled us to build or imagine new policies around it and around the 'caring economy'. On the other hand, these debates also allowed other types of work to emerge as 'key' or 'essential', as 'reproductive'. These are the very precarious, racialised, and gendered forms of work that allowed us to subsist during lockdowns. Therefore, I think you can harness both avenues of care and social reproduction. What, in my view, the social reproduction-centred agenda does is to allow us an articulation that bridges classic labour struggles, such as wages and demands around social contributions, with demands around life, such as housing and service provision, and campaign for all these, together. I'm very happy that Lisa mentioned Wages for Housework because I think, again, that if you look at the type of politics that came out of the pandemic, it centred around a basic income. What I believe should also be on the table is a self-determination income, which activists connected to the early social reproduction debates have been campaigning for a long time. This exceeds the conceptualisation of basic income, one can refer to the work of Cristina Morini (2010), and on India to the recent analysis by Prabha Kotiswaran (2021).

AB

One of the things that most of my colleagues who work on social reproduction have in common is an acknowledgement that there is a crisis of social reproduction, generally; it is not a new crisis, but it has deepened with neoliberal capitalism. This crisis, for me, necessitates that we think about connections because all these struggles are deeply entangled, whether we are talking about spaces, or whether we are talking about struggles in terms of regions. Inter-connectedness is something that is very important. I do see potential in the concept of social reproduction because it allows us to make those connections and appreciate the deep entanglement between all of these struggles and also build solidarities. What we've seen with COVID-19 is that there was a public health crisis, it affected wages and a whole lot of other realms. Being explicit about the connections among related struggles is important but what is equally important is to rethink how we organise in relation to these struggles. I have misgivings about unions and what they have been able to do. Oftentimes, they have emboldened employers or capital, instead of truly empowering workers and helping them make radical demands.

AM

I'll make one additional point. When it comes to the externalisation of costs of social reproduction to workers, different types of kinship networks and life-spaces, we clearly observe the pernicious nature with which capital operates to try to pay less than the cost of regenerating life. However, I would say that if you look at this process from the point of view of organisers, the fact that you have the incorporation of these spaces in the realm of production provides new avenues for organising, and we have seen this play out across different regions. The fact that dormitories – like in China – are now an integral part of the factory system has meant that workers started organising in these dormitories. Activists, unions or labour non-governmental organisations (NGOs) can reach them also in these spaces. And in India, there has been a lot of evidence that even informal industrial settlements can become cradles of resistance and upheaval. In fact, many workers' protests in the past 5 years have come out of areas like Kapashera in Delhi, and the same goes for dormitories or hostels around Bangalore. Also, there are unions and labour NGOs that start organising with workers in their places of origin, before they embark on the journey to actually reach the industrial area. What I am saying is that, yes, there is an instrumental use of these life-regenerating networks to minimise costs by capital but, at the same time, we are also witnessing a reappropriation of these networks for new forms of labour organising. I would say that it's all up for re-appropriation, but this requires the focus to shift from systems of production to systems of life.

LL/MF

This has been an enlightening discussion and we'd like to thank you all for participating. There is still much more that could be added but let's stop here and reiterate what Alessandra just said: 'it's all up for reappropriation, but this requires the focus to shift from systems of production to systems of life', what a promising way to end this conversation!

Declaration of conflicting interests

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The authors received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

ORCID iD

Luisa Lupo https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3788-1422

References

Bakker I (2007) Social reproduction and the constitution of a gendered political economy. *New Political Economy* 12(4): 541–556.

Barca S (2020) *Forces of Reproduction: Notes for a Counter-Hegemonic Anthropocene (Elements in Environmental Humanities)*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Beban A and Martignoni JB (2022) Social security in the extractive state: Gender, land inheritance, and Agrarian change in Ratanakiri, Cambodia. In: Martignoni JB, Gironde C, Golay C, et al. (eds)

Agricultural Commercialization, Gender Equality and the Right to Food: Insights from Ghana and Cambodia. London: Routledge, 204–222. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003202004.

Bhandar B (2018) *Colonial Lives of Property: Law, Land, and Racial Regimes of Ownership. Global and Insurgent Legalities*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Bhattacharyya G (2018) *Rethinking Racial Capitalism: Questions of Reproduction and Survival*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

Cammack P (2020) Marx on social reproduction. *Historical Materialism* 28(2): 76–106.

De Angelis M (2007) *The Beginning of History: Value Struggles and Global Capital*, 1st Edn. London; Ann Arbor, MI: Pluto Press.

Farris SR and Bergfeld M. (2022) Low-skill no more! Essential workers, social reproduction and the legitimacy-crisis of the division of labour. *Distinktion: Journal of Social Theory* 23(2–3): 342–358.

Federici S (2004) *Caliban and the Witch*. Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia.

Ferguson S (2017) Social reproduction theory: What's the big idea? Available at: https://www.plutobooks.com/blog/social-reproduction-theory-ferguson/ (accessed 21 February 2023).

Gimenez ME (2018) *Marx, Women, and Capitalist Social Reproduction: Marxist-Feminist Essays*. Leiden: BRILL.

Katz C (2001) Vagabond capitalism and the necessity of social reproduction. *Antipode* 33(4): 709–728.

Kotiswaran P (2021) Toward a model of universal care, one manifesto at a time. *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society* 28(4): 854–864.

Laslett B and Brenner J (1989) Gender and social reproduction: historical perspectives. *Annual Review of Sociology* 15: 381–404.

Morini C (2010) Il lavoro di cura come archetipo del bio-capitalismo. Altre ragioni per il diritto al reddito. *Associazione Basic Income Network Italia*.

Nathan D, Bhattacharjee SS, Rahul S, et al. (2022) *Reverse Subsidies in Global Monopsony Capitalism: Gender, Labour, and Environmental Injustice in Garment Value Chains*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009058179.

Rai SM, Hoskyns C and Thomas D (2014) Depletion. *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 16(1): 86–105.

Stevano S, Ali R and Jamieson M (2021) Essential for what? A global social reproduction view on the re-organisation of work during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Canadian Journal of Development Studies / Revue Canadienne D'études Du Développement* 42(1–2): 178–199.

Vergès F (2021) *A Decolonial Feminism*. London: Pluto Press.