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Pluralizing social reproduction approaches

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ABSTRACT

The concept of social reproduction (SR) has gained renewed interest in the past decade. Discussed and elaborated by generations of feminists, the concept offers a rejection of productivism and the possibility of (re)telling the history of capitalism and its contemporary dynamics through the work and practices of "life making." Yet, it is undeniable that much of the "old" and "new" theorizing around SR comes predominantly from the Global North. Hence, we argue, a pluralizing of SR approaches (SRAs) is needed. This article draws on existing debates on SR to pluralize their theoretical premises, disciplinary boundaries, and empirical reach to suggest a global progressive agenda centered on SRAs that is able to speak to the challenges and complexities of processes of life making worldwide. Foregrounding such complexity, the article considers conceptual issues, argues that location is central to pluralizing SRAs, and discusses the associated methodological and political questions. We conclude that pluralizing SRAs through paying attention to location is the first step toward identifying the multiple and heterogeneous ways in which processes of SR are structured and operate under capitalism and toward developing solidarities able to challenge the oppressions of global capitalism and reclaim life-making activities and spaces.

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Introduction

The last decade has seen a revival of studies and theorizations anchored to the concept of social reproduction (SR). A term originally deployed by Marx in relation to the transmission of inequalities in a capitalist society (Federici 2021; Naidu 2023), it has been reappropriated and expanded analytically by generations of feminist scholars. Since the 1970s, SR feminists have mobilized the term against productivist understandings of capitalism, thereby decentering and recentering the global history of capitalism as one starting from the "production of life" (Elias and Rai 2019). This history includes multiple trajectories of exploitation, epitomized not only by waged labor, but also by the myriad of experiences of wage-less and/or unpaid workers, who have always represented by far the lion's share of those laboring across the planet (Mezzadri 2019). Crucially, this rejection of productivism and the decentering and recentering of the history of capitalism around its complex "life-making aspects" (see Bhattacharya 2017) can enable analyses to finally account for the gendered and racialized experiences of work, labor, exploitation, and life within capitalism, all of which, as argued by the Marxist historian Jairus Banaji (2003), come in very diverse and distinct "forms."

From this perspective, SR analyses offer the possibility of accounting for slavery and indenture, colonial and patriarchal histories of labor surplus extraction, as key aspects of the global history of capitalist extraction and plunder (see Gago and Mezzadra 2017; Wolpe 1972). Yet, while practices of resistance against the invisibilization, devaluation, and lack of support for the life-sustaining labor constituting SR can be found worldwide, it is undeniable that so far much of the generally acknowledged "old" and "new" theorizing around it comes from the Global North. Indeed, both early SR analysis (ESRA) and SR theory (SRT) was either introduced by scholars from the Global North or mostly focused on reproductive experiences speaking to realities of the Global North, notwithstanding efforts by both frameworks to develop theories accounting for capitalism as a global process and social relation. Moreover, while one can arguably find many linkages and interconnections between different moments in SR theorizing and varied analyses centered on Global South experiences – examples would be the outstanding work by Rohini Hensman (1977) on domestic work as "productive consumption" in the Indian context, or Bridget O'Laughlin's (1998, 2013) work on women-headed households and the production of affliction in southern

Africa – often, as noted by Ben Cousins et al. (2018) in the case of southern Africa, such analyses may have not deployed the term "SR" in exploring life-making processes.

Indeed, location matters enormously when it comes to theorizing. Substantial scholarship from the Global South speaking to and about SR processes is often marginalized due to the use of different analytical grammars, and the epistemological privilege of the Global North in theory making. In fact, this scholarship is often seen as providing case studies that are illustrative of already established and dominant theoretical frameworks; the challenge that some of these cases pose for Global North theory building is overlooked. Based on these considerations, and aiming at decentering and recentering voices and frameworks of SR in ways that may be inclusive of Global South theorizations, this article has two aims. First, it calls for a conceptual pluralization and shift from SR "theory" or "theories" to SR approaches (SRAs), inclusive of all analyses concerned with the regeneration of life and capitalism across the world – but specifically pointing us toward the importance of theorizing *from* and *for* the Global South.[1] Crucially, this implies centering colonialism as a key moment for the organization of both life and capitalism, globally. Second, the article reflects on the key role played by location in this process of pluralization, and explores its implications for concepts, methods, and politics centered on SR.

This project is the result of several years of reflection, exchange, and collective thinking. Between 2020 and 2022, some of us met online, during the COVID-19 crisis, to discuss our reflections regarding how the concept of SR may affect global conversations on care, labor, exploitation, and struggles taking place outside the Global North. Over two years, in monthly meetings, and then in a workshop in 2023, we discussed the important issues that the concept of SR raises across disciplines and plural scholarly traditions for developing feminist political agendas. In our effort to promote an agenda aimed at pluralizing SRAs and stressing location as a key analytical factor in setting the perimeters, context, and content of theorizing, we build on these collective discussions in this article by working through and addressing three specific questions: (1) How can we account for multiple complex experiences and practices of life making across the world, in particular considering how location shapes concepts and methods?, (2) How do activism, struggle, and resistance help us to pluralize SRAs?, and (3) When is location not enough, or, rather, what is location a step toward? What does it achieve? Through answering these questions, we seek to understand how pluralizing SRAs *through location* affects different forms of activism and solidarities.

The article is organized along the lines of our questions. Starting with an analysis of definitions and concepts, the next section explains our call to pluralize SRAs, what we mean by it, and how this agenda may differ from one

framed on care. The third section explores the centrality of location in SR research, and the fourth and fifth sections discuss, respectively, methods and politics. The sixth and final section concludes the analysis, also reflecting on the limits of location-informed analysis. We hope that this article is a solid initial response to the above questions. Yet, we also hope that these questions set a thought-provoking agenda with which other scholars and activists concerned with the production of life under capitalism, including the SR feminists who inspired our collective reflection, will engage.

Pluralizing our gaze: social reproduction and "life making" across the world

Tithi Bhattacharya (2017) has defined SR as the work of "life making," as opposed to "profit making." Building on this powerful definition yet stressing the inextricably entangled nature of the two processes, here we collectively understand SR to mean the "production of life" (Elias and Rai 2019) in its entanglements with capitalism (see also Bakker and Gill 2003). In this broad conceptualization, SR refers to biological reproduction, the production of life-sustaining goods and services in the home and in the community, the regeneration of culture and ideology (Rai, Hoskyns, and Thomas 2014), and how the processes and activities above interplay with capitalist relations of production (Katz 2001a, 2001b), whose trajectories are inextricably entangled with colonial and neocolonial histories (see for example O'Laughlin 2013; Reddock 1984). We embrace this definition because of its inclusive nature, and to us this inclusiveness is crucial to pluralize the meanings, reach, and contours of the debate.

Historically, when it came to explaining the entanglements of life and capitalism, the analyses openly centered on SR as a leading concept focused on a variety of key conceptual tropes and relations, including work/labor, exploitation/oppression, depletion/wellbeing, extraction/survival, and/or resistance/solidarity. For instance, ESRA, linked to the so-called housework debate, was greatly concerned with debates around work and labor, particularly in relation to the interconnections between paid and unpaid (or waged and wageless) work, and the value-generating nature of reproductive activities (see for example Fortunati 1981; Picchio 1992). It was also greatly focused on exploitation and its relation to gendered oppression, particularly in a "home" created through the transition to capitalism (Federici 2004). It highlighted domestic work as greatly depleting – an issue later far more extensively explored by Shirin Rai, Catherine Hoskyns, and Dania Thomas (2014) in their study of "depletion through social reproduction" – and pinpointed linkages between exploitation and extraction in relation not only to women's labor, time, and bodily integrity, but also to nature and its plunder (see for example Mies 1986; Mies and Shiva 1993).

ESRA, then, had clear political implications. Many analyses led to calls for specific campaigns on Wages For and Against Housework (Dalla Costa and James 1972; Federici 2012). Others instead called for the socialization of domestic and care work as well as its socialization by the state (see for example Mies 1986).

Notably, developed more recently, SRT addresses similar tropes and relations, while placing emphasis on different aspects. For instance, many SRT analyses engage with processes of neoliberalization of reproductive work, labor mobility, and migration; they explore the co-constitutive nature of oppression and exploitation through critically engaging with intersectional analyses (Bhattacharya 2017); and they unveil the links between the reorganization of SR, the dismantling of the welfare state, and the rise of financialization and debt-led life (see for example Bezanson and Luxton 2006; Fraser 2017; Natile 2020). In opposition to neoliberal feminism (Rottenberg 2018), they call for a "Feminism of the 99%" and support reproductive workers' struggles and campaigns, across many life-regenerating sectors such as health and education (Arruzza, Bhattacharya, and Fraser 2019).

Indeed, analytical lenses centered on SR are particularly useful in illuminating the processes leading to the reproduction of global socio-economic inequalities (Alessandrini and Okonjo 2023; Stevano et al. 2021a). In this respect, ESRA and SRT provide at least three key points, especially when also enriched by the insights of Third World feminists, Black feminists, and scholars of racial capitalism. The first is about the interconnection between spheres of production and SR under capitalism for the purpose of value extraction, accumulation, and financialization – with the boundaries of each sphere constantly redrawn (Arruzza, Bhattacharya, and Fraser 2019; Cavallero and Gago 2021; Mezzadri 2019; Naidu 2023; Ossome 2021; Raghuram 2016). The second concerns the continued centrality of unpaid and devalued labor in the home and the community as a structural element of global production (Banks 2020; Federici 2004; Mies 1986). The third is about the role that social hierarchies and divisions – such as race, gender, class, migration status, and coloniality – play in these processes of labor exploitation and devaluation, on the one hand, and capital accumulation, on the other (Bhattacharya 2017; Davis 1983; Federici 2004, 2021; Tamale 2020; Vergès 2020; Wolpe 1972).

By allowing a systematic exploration of life making entrenched in varied social relations of work, labor, and exploitation, analyses framed around SR enable us to understand gendered histories as co-generated by histories of colonialism (Tamale 2020), racial capitalism (Bhattacharyya 2018), planetary migrations (Carstens and Bozalek 2021), and struggles over legal status (Tazzioli 2023). Moreover, as the ecological crisis worsens, we also understand SR in terms of planetary crises (Fraser 2017), of life (see for example Goldblatt and Hassim 2023; Mezzadri 2022; Rai 2024) and capital (see for example

Stevano et al. 2021b). As a result of this crisis, life itself is in peril; thousands of refugees from climate crises are forced to migrate for safety and to feed and house themselves (Barca 2020). The planetary crisis of reproduction adds both an urgency to thinking about capitalist accumulation as well as reminding us of its globality, even though Global North–Global South distinctions mark its consequences (Wiegratz et al. 2023). This underlines the fact that any attempts to theorize SR in the Global North are incomplete without an understanding of how this process unfolds in other places.

Crucially, outside the Global North, forms of social arrangements, labor, and households may be significantly different, and need to be studied not as "deviations" but as part of the multiplicity of ways in which capitalism has unfolded in different regions (see for example Bhattacharya, Kesar, and Mehra 2023 on India). These forms may be analyzed by frameworks and analytical lenses concerned with one or more of the tropes identified above as central to analyses of SR, yet without deploying the "grammar" of SR. For example, as Lyn Ossome and Sirisha Naidu (2021, 68) argue in the context of agrarian economies, it is crucial to reorient the analysis toward "the reproduction of life, or the political economy of survival of the labouring classes under conditions of a global surplus population." This also alerts us to the fact that it might be necessary to move away from some debates predominant in the Global North in the context of Global South experiences of everyday life. The centrality of land, from a social, economic, cultural, and political perspective, emerges as a key aspect of SR in the (agrarian) Global South (Cousins et al. 2018; Ossome and Naidu 2021; Yeni 2024) that has been largely neglected in literature oriented toward the Global North. Other scholars in the Global South provide theorizations of and empirical insights into what we consider to be SR without using that very term (see for example Cousins et al. 2018; O'Laughlin 1995; Tsikata 2009). This also challenges the Global North epistemological privilege. By locating the key tropes and relations of concern of SR within a broader focus on the simultaneous regeneration of life and capitalism – or on the entanglements of life making and profit making – we can move beyond jargon and identify common traits in feminist analyses across different settings and contexts. In doing so, we are aware of the dangers of Anglo-American supremacy, Eurocentrism, and epistemic violence into which our exercise may also fall. Indeed, we do not want to impose a conceptual "cage" on analyses equipped with different theoretical tools. Yet, we contend that it is exactly to avoid epistemic violence – in the form of erasures and marginalization – that we set out to recuperate feminist insights concerned with SR processes but not yet recognized or acknowledged as central to SR analysis due to the different conceptual language.

In fact, we see this process of decentering and recentering SR debates, methods, and politics as critical to moving away from Anglo-American

supremacy and Eurocentrism. In this regard, we argue that it is important to map these practices and start from the research conducted in and on the Global South, instead of making sense of SR practices (in different contexts) through the "mainstreaming" of Global North frameworks.

Using different standpoints/experiences might be important for three reasons. First, in any feminist theorization, it is necessary to consider hierarchies of power between "feminisms," and this also needs to be considered in approaches aimed at capturing SR. Second, the concepts used in theorizations of SR – including care, community, affection, solidarity, and emotional labor – might have different contextual meanings, and universalizations might be shaped by Global North ideologies. Third, it is important not to romanticize some supposed "non-capitalist structures" – for instance, in the Global South, those at the margins of the formal economy and/or at the intersection of local practices and global dynamics – while also investigating how different economic/political systems might impact the interplay between the regeneration of life and processes of accumulation. Moreover, in the Global South, SR might more often take on forms of value production (see Bhattacharya 2017; Ferguson 2019; cf. Mezzadri 2019, 2020; Naidu 2023), or have a far more pronounced life-sustaining role than in the Global North, given the size/reach of the subsistence economy, as illustrated by several feminist analyses during COVID-19 (Agarwal 2020; Ossome 2021; Stevano 2022). By contrast, SR may also be understood as value producing globally, since it replenishes workers for their paid work everywhere (Federici 2018).

Recognizing the great variation in meanings and manifestations of SR worldwide, we argue for the need to *pluralize* SR analysis into SRAs. In developing our argument, we acknowledge the potential tensions between universal ontologies and locally embedded social practices. Unlike Isabella Bakker and Stephen Gill (2019), we are not attempting to work toward a global "social ontology" of SR while mapping the "variegated forms" in which it may take place. While we appreciate the analytical clarity of this approach, we contend that it may suggest too strong a schism between conceptual and material aspects, between abstract and empirical manifestations of SR. A distinction between a global ontology and its variegated manifestations may replicate – from the vantage point of life making – visions of capitalism as a mode of production with "pure" inner logics and where regional social inequalities may be merely represented, in the words of anthropologist Anna Tsing (2009, 148), as "decoration on a common core." Global hierarchies, in this reading, are reproduced. That said, however, while challenging the perils of structuralist theorizing of the global as emanating from a central nucleus and radiating worldwide, our take on pluralizing SRAs does not reject a unitary theory of capitalism either. For instance, in our view, the recognition of the plural ways in which SR may organize regionally does not necessarily entail their belonging to "diverse economies," as

famously theorized by J. K. Gibson-Graham. Indeed, different reproductive arrangements may intersect with varied *systems* of production and life (Gibson-Graham 2008). Yet, these may be at work within – and be co-constitutive of – the same dominant (capitalist) *mode* of production. In other words, we conceive our agenda to pluralize SRAs as working through and celebrating the manifold ontological and material complexities of SR across the world – as co-eval, co-existing, co-constitutive, and globally articulated. Hence, quite simply, we define SRAs as all of the approaches focusing on the regeneration of life making as entangled with various trajectories and experiences of capitalism worldwide.

This pluralization is required, we argue, by the great variations in the activities involved in the (re)production of life and capitalist relations across our planet, as well as by the different forms of political mobilization, activism, and solidarity used to defend life making worldwide. From the perspective of the Global South, or the majority world, it is very evident that the physical and structural boundaries between life-making and profit-making activities are much less defined than they might be in the Global North; in fact, this is a core feature of capitalist life in the periphery (Mezzadri 2019; Naidu 2023). Therefore, inclusive takes on SR need to be able to account for or reflect these complexities and contradictions of capitalist life. Furthermore, the organization of everyday and intergenerational reproduction is profoundly different within and across the Global South, based on geographic and historical context, manifesting different temporal and spatial dynamics as well as the involvement of different actors (Elias and Rai 2019).

By focusing on SRAs and amplifying the great difference in understandings and experiences of SR across the planet, we are de facto suggesting the impossibility of any single SRT. In fact, we contend that only a process of pluralization of SRAs may capture the great variation in planetary experiences of life making and their embeddedness in historical relations of power, gendered and racial regimes of life and labor, and accumulation trajectories. This pluralizing method, we argue, may be a fruitful way to bridge conceptual and methodological gaps opened up by a more globally encompassing theorization, enabling us to analytically connect experiences that are otherwise assumed to be discrete or separate, such as experiences of housing precarity and insecurity, experiences of the cost of living crisis, experiences of unpaid/underpaid care labor., anticipation/fear of future unmet care needs, and experiences of community activism connected to yet also exceeding care.[2]

SR – as a political economy approach embedded in Marxist-feminist thought – explores processes regenerating life *in their entanglements* with capitalist relations, in a framework where the two processes – life and capitalism – cannot be separated. Hence, our agenda to pluralize SRAs encompasses processes of life making that *vary by context in and of themselves as well as in how they interconnect with capitalist relations*. In other words, SR

can be understood as a bundle of material practices and forms of work, subsistence, and care – unpaid and paid, waged and unwaged – underpinning the existence of all people and all economies and societies as we know them. Politically, this also means that analyses framed around SR offer the possibility of moving beyond issues of recognition, remuneration, and redistribution – characteristic of care frameworks and demands – and refocus attention toward the broader structural changes required in the political and social relations that govern most of the world.

Location, space, and political geographies of social reproduction

Undoubtedly, there may be varied ways to pluralize SRAs. For instance, one could focus on specific concepts, structure the debate around disciplinary boundaries, or, indeed, disrupt binary categories (see for example Prügl 2021; Winders and Smith 2019). Here, the key underlying assumption in our agenda to pluralize SRAs is that location matters. First, theorizing is always embedded in location, and the ways in which the former informs the latter must be unpacked. Second, a focus on location challenges and undoes the Anglo-American supremacy and Eurocentrism of many SR analyses.

We are not arguing here in favor of empiricism; we recognize that theory operates through abstraction. Yet, abstraction can also obscure the specific history of concrete experiences in ways that may misrepresent them as immutable logics. Location does not upend concepts; it opens them up and it is necessary, we contend, for inclusive theorizing, especially when its understanding is cross-cutting, embedded in the geography, history (including its epistemic implications), and socio-economic relations of specific places. Notably, our emphasis on the importance of location in theorizing SR does not translate into a call for "localizing" against "globalizing." "Location" and "localizing" are not synonyms. Besides, there are many ways to articulate location as central to the very making of global relations and processes. As already argued by Parvati Raghuram (2012, 170) with reference to global care, ours is a call to acknowledge that each locale "has its own distinctive way of thinking about care but this multiplicity must play a constitutive role in making the global."

So, if location matters to SR, *how* does it matter? We argue that it matters across three axes: the geographical, the historical, and the social. First, location matters geographically, to capture variations in how SR is framed, accessed, and performed. Across sites, histories, and social formations, life under capitalism is produced, accessed, and performed through a plurality of experiences, and these in turn should be central to inclusive understandings of what SR *is*, from different locational standpoints. Second, it matters

historically, as we understand location as more than merely physical and geographical sites. Anglo-American centrism and Eurocentricism are not only produced through a gaze that privileges a specific geography; they are also reproduced in the mainstreaming of a specific history as dominant, an issue that is the starting point of postcolonial critiques. Histories of colonialism and slavery that cast long shadows of economic, political, and epistemic violence need to be considered when we theorize, and when we assess theorizing. Increasingly, feminist work has been paying attention to these histories, and we think that SR debates can learn from these. Third, location manifests socially, as given geographies and histories shape the social world in ways that are unique and that, in turn, should not be lost in abstraction as if merely ornamental. Indeed, locational context matters because the social relations under capitalism are not singular. Different historical trajectories have led to different pathways of capitalist development, which in turn manifests variously in the ways in which exploitation acquires distinct "forms" (Banaji 2003) and how SR is organized.

The complexity of location and its geographical, historical, and social inequalities concretely manifests in a cascade of other differences central to the organization of SR. For instance, locational inequalities are also evident in the growing disparities between rural and urban geographies. In the Global South, the exponential expansion of urban centers is intensifying the depletion of those "left behind" as they struggle to organize SR work. In countries such as India, COVID-19 has laid bare – and even spectacularized – these trends (see for example Agarwal 2021; Sinha 2021), which however have always been at work. Remittances mitigate this depletion, but precarious work, migration, and/or labor circulation mean that SR remains fragile as it copes with food production and consumption, the financialization of everyday life, and ecological pressures on water and climate (Barca 2020). Migration, then, is an important locational element in understanding SR today – across labor regimes in both global commodity and care chains (see for example Geymonat, Cherubini, and Marchetti 2021; Raghuram 2016; Valiani 2012; Yeates and Pillinger 2019). It also mediates debates about SR, surplus populations, and disposable people (Dieng 2024; Mezzadri 2022) all of which are gendered and racialized. Sometimes these differences are perceived as "cultural" because capitalism intersects with localized forms of oppression, which some understand as pre- and non-capitalist modes of production or meaning making (see for example Sanyal 2007), regenerating families and households, and organizing and shifting work within highly informal domains (Kesar 2023). Indeed, the local–global scale, while the subject of multiple theorizations, remains inadequately theorized, or better theorized in ways that pre-ordinate Global North trajectories and subsume them as "global," with Global South trajectories remaining instead "local," residual, and subordinated. The pluralizing power of a focus

on location, instead, might finally counteract the homogenizing tendencies that come with centering the Global North in processes of global theorizing.

The above structural conceptualization of location as mediating geographies, histories, and social outcomes owes much to the conversations between Marxist feminists and Black feminists, with the latter having pointed to the universalizing tendencies of SR analyses by the former already in the 1970s and 1980s. Indeed, the challenge of feminists such as Avtar Brah, Gail Lewis, Claudia Jones, Angela Davis, Patricia Hill Collins, and the Combahee River Collective to early debates on SR has been invaluable. These analyses and critiques have highlighted that unfree and unpaid labor has always been fundamental to the reproduction of colonialism and racial capitalism; hence, these could not be theorized as the gendered product of the "home" or domestic labor alone. In fact, for Black people, for instance, not only was the home a site of oppression, but it also represented instead a liberated domain against state violence or a site of underpaid work for domestic workers (see for example Davis 1983; hooks 1984). Recently, Gargi Bhattacharyya's (2018) work on racial capitalism has also added much needed nuances, besides offering a framework that accounts for both racial capitalism and SR.

One could argue that these critiques of SR centered on race, while crucial, still confine the debate to the Global North, as primarily informed by the experiences of non-white women in settler colonial states (Pulido 2018). Their situatedness makes them not necessarily able to speak for Global South experiences. Yet, their insistence on the centrality of race and racialization adds significantly to the debates on SR, by centering histories of marginalization and complicating location as a concept always mediated by distinct experiences. Crucially, the history of racial capitalism is not monolithic and merits engagement with location to understand how race articulates with other relations of power in specific historical and geographic contexts, as compellingly illustrated by the historical and contemporary literature on race in South Africa (Ashman 2023; Hart 2002; Wolpe 1972).

In fact, observations on the relative and fractured nature of location further strengthen our call to pluralize SRAs. A locationally different vantage point necessarily modifies the kinds of questions that we are posing in relation to SR: what it is; why and how it functions and endures in different Global South contexts; its articulation to different processes of laboring, survival, and accumulation that may be considerably distinct from those in the Global North; and which actors might be rendered more visible than others – peasants, or street vendors/informal laborers (Naidu and Ossome 2016), or surplus labor populations – in processes and struggles over life making. Obviously, while considering the above, we also need to be wary of the interconnections *between* locations in structuring SR worldwide, as studies on global care chains or global householding remind us (see for example

Brickell 2012; Hochschild 2000; Safri and Graham 2010). When SR is structured across multiple locations, in fact, SR itself may also be globally reorganized along those colonial and neocolonial lines that already shape its local distinctiveness regionally. Furthermore, in this case, we can remain true to an agenda to pluralize SRAs, such as by mapping these processes of globalization of SR not only from the vantage point of the Global North but also from that of the Global South "peripheries" sitting at the end of the reproductive chain (see for example Valiani 2012).

Notably, centering location in the pluralization of SRAs must also mean accounting for different states and processes of state and community building (Chilmeran and Pratt 2019; Sauer and Wöhl 2011). Indeed, the significance of SR in relation to state building is crucial, as highlighted by analyses that emphasize the "crisis of social reproduction" in the context of specific "social reproduction regimes" (Fraser 2017). Yet, in postcolonial contexts, reproductive depletion may have a far longer timeline than in the Global North, where it is now often ascribed to neoliberalism. Here, we need to reconstruct complex historical trajectories to make sense of which "crises of social reproduction" may be at work (see for example Bargawi, Alami, and Ziada 2022; Kunz 2010; O'Laughlin 2013; Ruwanpura 2023). In fact, countries in the Global North can learn much from the distinctiveness of the crises of SR experienced in the Global South, how these were socialized and overcome, and the role of life-regenerating processes in their resolution.

A process of pluralizing SRAs centered on location needs to also interrogate the relation between varied SR trajectories, state building, and state practices. It can unveil the complex processes through which SR may lend itself to building internal coherence and stabilization of specific national projects or supporting specific ethnic and/or gendered communities. From this perspective, and by way of example, SR analysis may shed light on the internal reproduction of resources for resistance (see for instance Taha and Salem 2019 on Egypt), state building, and war making (Chilmeran and Pratt 2019). In contexts of settler colonialism, such as Israel–Palestine (Bargawi, Alami, and Ziada 2022), the SR of Indigenous communities is targeted, rendering it a site of resistance against settler erasure (Chilmeran and Pratt 2019). In these contexts, the terrain of SR becomes the shelter against state racism, as already the home in Black feminist analyses (hooks 1984). In Middle East and North Africa and parts of sub-Saharan Africa, where colonial legacies shaped constitutional law in ways that enshrine the heteronormative family as the building block of the nation (see for example Tamale 2020 on Uganda), SR may become the terrain for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) resistance (see for example Gore 2022). In other contexts, we also need to be wary of the ways in which SR may become the terrain where reactionary forces are forged, supporting the growth of extreme right ideologies (Erel 2018). Evidence already suggests how the women's

rights agenda, for instance, can be easily hijacked for reactionary purposes, including racist projects (see for example Farris 2017). In short, concretely, we need to keep in mind that SR functions as a social/economic process but also, importantly, as a political process.

Once again, also from the standpoint of ideology and the material inequalities that SR co-produces, we should avoid homogenizing understandings of it and its perimeters, and we should center location in our analysis. If, for example, we examine caste relations in India, we find that the processes of SR interact, in key ways, with other social processes that are likely to be context specific. If we take this into account, the conversation about SR can revolve around the questions of (1) how caste-based privileges (and disadvantages) impact the imperatives of SR, (2) how the marketization of care responsibilities might exploit the already existing caste hierarchies, thereby also subsidizing a sustained reproduction of the existing system, and (3) how one accounts for these differentiations when forming alliances for collective action. Economic stratification along caste lines often takes the shape of occupational and industry segregation (apart from access to labor market opportunities), while social stratification manifests in social capital and social interactions (see N. 2014 on women's employment in India). Access to land and resources may play another important role in how SR becomes vital and organized, also in response to water pollution or to the management of other natural resources needed for life making (see for example Asumang-Yeboah, Kumeh, and Brobbey 2022 on forest management in Ghana). Through the lens of SR, debates on dispossession can finally move away from considerations of economic growth, and recenter their gaze toward economic justice (Yeni 2024). Another area where SR theorization has still a long way to go is thinking about the natural habitat and nature with reference to both human and non-human living beings – animals not only as sources of food or transmitters of disease, but also as members of the household and companions in loneliness, as we saw during the COVID-19 lockdowns.

Notably, by centering location for pluralizing SRAs, in the ways in which we suggest above, our approach transcends other location boundaries applied to and by other economic and social analyses. For instance, the "lessons" of SRAs clash with those of production-centered modernizing analyses, which tend to see the Global South as the past of the Global North, and which propose a completely different understanding of location and its historical and socio-economic features. In this light, one could argue that SRAs can offer a fertile terrain of potential interplay with anti-colonial, postcolonial, and decolonial agendas and theorizations, insofar as they respect and center regional specificities in processes of accumulation, exploitation, and life making. Finally, while stressing different locational specificities, features, and roles, an analysis that pluralizes SRAs may also be able to grasp key

parallels around SR across different locations and identify where similarities rather than differences can be found, despite major locational differences. By pluralizing SRAs through understandings of location as geographically, historically, and socially contingent, we can interrogate and conceptualize entangled trajectories of life making and capitalism shaped by complex histories of colonialism and neocolonialism, while at the same time also unveiling key ways in which such trajectories interplay with one another.

Method(ologies) of social reproduction approaches

Pluralizing SRAs entails the recognition that the organization of social life under capitalism occurs in multiple forms and declinations, depending on historical, geographical, and social location. In turn, the methodological approaches that support SRAs should be equipped to capture the diversity of and relations within the capitalist socio-economic system. For a start, some lessons might be learned from the discussions on methodology in Marxist political economy, given the shared concern with understanding capitalism. In this sense, any investigation of specific declinations, forms, and aspects of capitalist life should be recognized as being part of a totality – capitalism on a world scale – analytically, concretely, and historically (Bernstein 2021). Therefore, a suitable methodological approach should allow researchers to locate the specific object of study in such a totality, though also recognizing the specificities of the object in terms of temporal, spatial, and social context.

In feminist SR thinking, the centrality of the relations between specific objects of study and a totality is recognized, implicitly or explicitly, through the call for or use of methodologies that allow for multi-scalar and multi-temporal analysis. Methodologies that enable us to trace the spatio-temporal connections that distribute life-making chances in the global economy are important to pluralize SRAs. The notion of "geographies of social reproduction" is used by Cindi Katz (2001a) to capture the local constitution of the global through material practices that are specific to historical moments and geographical locations. The spatial and temporal dimensions of SR connect the everyday of local realities with global socio-economic transformations (Elias and Rai 2019; Katz 2001a). Here we can also think through the potential of what Laura Harjo calls "jumping scale" for connecting the body not only to the local but also to the global, and "reconceptualizing transformative justice as more than a set of local processes, but as a way of life" (Harjo cited in Smith 2023, 4). We also take from her that "jumping scale" shows how links and solidarities are imperative. Her work points to the relations between prison build-up and migrant detention, but we could add the relations between racism and environmental pollution/climate change, austerity and gender violence, trade/investment/finance and land grabbing/wealth

concentration; and this perhaps speaks to questions of activism and solidarity too.

Methodologically, we also find it useful to refer to migration research, where we are forced to move away from binary understandings of "here" and "there" and Global North versus Global South when we study the social reproductive lives, needs, and relations of different migrant populations. For example, in the Warwick "Care, Caring and Carers" study (2021–2022), we saw how long histories of individual, household, and community SR were intertwined in the past and present with varying practices, ethics, expectations, and needs around care (Akhter, Elias, and Rai 2022; Lingham, Rai, and Akhter forthcoming). As a caveat, we would be wary of reducing this to an essentialist analysis of different "cultures" – but this is still the tendency within much policy-oriented work on care.

Furthermore, while we do not wish to lose sight of the totality of SR, there may be a conceptual and methodological advantage in breaking down this totality by, say, focusing on specific resources and practices that constitute SR: food, water, education, care, health care, and basic infrastructure, to name the most important ones. To date, there is not much scholarship that unpacks – conceptually and methodologically – the provisions of these fundamental goods/services using SRAs.

More concretely, a focus on specific resources and practices can open up interesting avenues for the use of qualitative and quantitative methods to generate data on SR practices, with the aim of capturing both quantitative and qualitative dimensions. The discussion of specific methods for SR is somewhat lagging behind, with some exceptions. For instance, in the introduction to a Special Issue on "Feminist Global Political Economies of Work and Social Reproduction," Alessandra Mezzadri, Susan Newman, and Sara Stevano (2021) highlight three key methodological characteristics of SRAs engaged in empirical investigations: (1) the use of multi-sited or long-term fieldwork to unveil the complexity of work organization, (2) the use of life histories as interviews that can uncover life trajectories and transformations, and (3) the combination of qualitative and quantitative methods to uncover tensions and contradictions or, borrowing from Katz (2001b), the mutual constitution and tension between reproduction and production.

Seeking once again to draw lessons from the sparse discussions of method in Marxist political economy, we can deduce that no method is inherently Marxist; some methods may be more amenable to the empirical investigation of Marxist categories and other methods may not (Mezzadri 2021). In this sense, something similar applies to SRAs, where some methods may be amenable to this type of research if deployed in certain ways while others, such as randomized controlled trials, are informed by theoretical and political stances that are incompatible with the ethos of SRAs.[3] In feminist research

more generally, it is the way in which methods are used that matters (Berik 1997; Harding 1987). Feminist epistemologies are about countering male-biased accounts of reality, recognizing women and marginalized people as "knowers," and foregrounding the "for what/for whom" of any research project (Berik 1997; Brannen 2005; Harding 1987; Jackson 2006).

A key method and metric that is almost naturally linked to SR is time use, as this is the only data that captures the extent of, for example, unpaid and reproductive work. However, to date, there is relatively little work that has sought to explicitly use time-use data in a SR framework (recent exceptions are Naidu and Rao 2022; Rao et al. 2024; see also Rai 2024). We are therefore interested in how we can encourage a broader understanding of SR via a more systematic collection of data. Time-use surveys are an obvious starting point, and one challenge is to improve these so they are able to unpack more than they currently do. There is also a need to collect such data more systematically and across more countries. Recent initiatives to integrate a time-use module into labor force surveys (ILO 2021) could be a promising way to collect data on unpaid domestic and care work more systematically, while recognizing that this type of work constitutes only one part of SR. Beyond large-scale time-use surveys, there is an urgent need to engage with multi-method explorations of time use and temporal dynamics, to capture important aspects that most often remain hidden in time-use surveys. For example, small-scale time-use surveys designed to address specific contexts and used in combination with other methods, such as observation and qualitative interviews (Rai and True 2020), offer compelling data to understand the organization of SR in the everyday (Rao et al. 2024; Stevano 2020). Furthermore, there is a challenge in capturing the various webs of SR at both the micro and macro level. At the micro level, there is a need to bring familial as well as migrant labor and institutional organization of SR into one analysis, for example. There is a tendency to do one or the other but not provide a holistic view of this.

An important cross-cutting issue in reflections about methodology and method in SRAs is how we can embed practices of co-production of knowledge with people with whom we work in our research, including its design. Given the emphasis that feminist research places on the inclusion of the experiences and knowledge of those who are marginalized, power relations in the research process are at the very core of a reflexive research practice (Jackson 2006). In the process of pluralizing SRAs, it is important to consider power relations between feminisms too: these power relations involve both epistemological privilege and material resources to invest in particular struggles. This is why the pluralizing of SRAs needs to correspond to a pluralizing of research methods (conventional and not). Though, as mentioned above, specific methods may be suitable for feminist research depending on *how* they are used, the very process of data collection can fall within

forms of data extractivism that perpetuate the inequalities that feminists want to overturn (Marchais, Bazuzi, and Lameke 2020).

Survival, struggles, and resistance

Pluralizing SRAs is important not only for the analysis of SR, but also for developing strategies for struggles and alliance building and solidarity. Standing in different landscapes of SR allows for a granular and grounded understanding of social relations that affect the reproduction of life.

SR is a struggle; it involves coping with conditions under which life is reproduced, which for most people is depleting. This depletion is marked by location as well as the social relations of global capitalism. Depletion generates harms that undermine life making. These harms are experienced at both individual and societal levels (Rai 2024; Rai, Hoskyns, and Thomas 2014). SR has been called a site of resistance – where the reproduction of life pushes back against the erosion of life. However, as Nithya Natarajan and Katherine Brickell (2022, 474) have argued, resistance

> is not always a grandiose project, but also constituted of incremental, everyday acts that ensure survival and form the basis for larger projects … "Survival work" calls for an expansive conceptualization of work … , which recognizes the gendered labour that underpins everyday survival.

This survival work also adds to depletion. We would suggest that survival rather than resistance marks the lives of most poor women who cope with life work under conditions of deprivation, conflict, and increasingly frequent ecological crises – unrecognized, undervalued, and unsupported. To survive is not to thrive, however. Resistance to cuts to vital infrastructure for SR (such as a living wage, properly funded health services, and education) is inevitable.

For life to be reproduced and not to be depleted, we need an understanding of the challenges that SR faces. We have been arguing that the challenges today are of intersectional inequalities relating to class, gender, race, and sexuality, planetary destruction, and systemic inequalities (rooted in the long history of colonialism) between the Global North and the Global South. As the world heats up, and hollows out in pursuit of ever-increasing consumption, the forces of capitalism affect the lives of all who are engaged in SR; the labor that goes into reproducing life is increased in contexts of environmental degradation, war and conflict, and deepening social inequalities. The resistance to these challenges takes many forms. Mobilizations of people to protect the planet have seen the emergence of new social movements, legal challenges, sabotage, and prefigurative imaginaries.

Take, for example, the strike as a mode of resistance. The strike has a long history in economic and political mobilizations and provides a radical

approach to struggle against capitalism as well as colonialism. Women's strikes have played an important part in challenging oppression as well as marginalization. Among the earliest such strikes were those against colonial powers in the Global South, such as the Aba Women's Market Rebellion in 1929 in response to the imposition of direct taxation, the Ludlow Mill Strike in 1928 in colonial Bengal, the Grunwick Strike in London in 1977 (Anitha and Pearson 2018), the longest hunger strike (2000–2016) by Irom Sharmila against state oppression in Manipur, India, and the women's strike in Latin America against abortion restrictions (Gago 2020). As Samita Sen (2008) argues, women-led strikes, especially in the Global South, are often cast in terms of violence against them, rather than as mobilizations by them. Excavating the history of women's strikes in the Global South can then be a useful approach to pluralizing the histories of SR (see also Geymonat, Cherubini, and Marchetti 2021).

If strikes are an important form of resistance, so too are the growing struggles for land rights by landless, dispossessed, and Indigenous communities as well as struggles against extractivist industry to protect land, livelihood and lives through legal redress (Goldblatt and Rai 2018; Rai 2024). The commoning of food production (Agarwal 2020; Barbagallo, Beuret, and Harvie 2019) and the ownership and reparation of land (Tuck and Yang 2012) are also emerging as important struggles for ensuring that SR is not depleting; these struggles focus on mobilizations for a collective "good life." As Corinna Dengler and Mariam Lang (2022, 1) argue, degrowth approaches to SR propose

> an incremental, emancipatory decommodification and a commonization of care in a sphere beyond the public/private divide, namely the sphere of communitarian and transformative caring commons, as they persist at the margins of capitalism and are (re-)created by social movements around the world.

Pluralizing approaches to struggles for securing SR and for minimizing depletion is important. We have been arguing that location is critical for studying SR as theory/theories and as practice and that location also affects the costs of SR. These insights are equally crucial for action, as by pluralizing SRAs we also multiply the possibilities for struggle, learning from all of the distinct, localized experiences of disrupting capitalist power across the world economy, and possibly harnessing their combined potential for a global politics of reproductive resistance.

Conclusion

A theory of SR is a powerful way of structuring our understanding of locational experiences of life making. At the same time, transcending location to search for shared experiences, in the hope of building solidarities across locational boundaries, is also what we need to think through.

We have shown how the concepts of labor, work, gender, race, "home" and the public sphere, the economy, and the environment are embedded in specific locations. As has been argued by others, the necessary practice of pluralizing the history of global political modernity needs to involve processes of provincializing Europe (Chakrabarty 2000), as well as globalizing counter-hegemonic narratives of colonialism and coloniality (Tamale 2020) and racial capitalism (Bhattacharyya 2018; Robinson 2000). Challenging historically Global North-centric universalisms, we have demonstrated, is important for pluralizing SR theorizations. We conclude by arguing that pluralizing these concepts and exploring what they mean in different contexts and how they are linked (or not) to particular forms of capitalist exploitation and oppression can help us both to map out commonalities and differences and to identify potential grounds for transnational struggles (without needing blueprints for action).

Retrieving these commonalities is important for solidarities that are both grounded in location and able to transcend it. To do this, as Rai (2019) has argued, we need to develop a "reflexive solidarity" that is based on a recognition of differences of locations, a vision of the "good life" that is shared, and a practice of politics that rejects the tropes of rescue and civilizational normalization (see also Escobar 1992; Mies 1986). In the words of Rahel Jaeggi (2001, 291),

> compassion and altruism are likely to mark the relation between unequals, the relation between those who need and those who provide help. In contrast, solidarity is, at its core, a symmetrical, mutual, and reciprocal relation … [I]t seems somehow to transcend the very dichotomy between altruistic and egoistic motivations.

However, without pluralizing theory and the consequent practices of politics, we cannot achieve this. Pluralizing SRAs, then, is the first step toward identifying the multiple and heterogeneous ways in which the production of life is structured and operates under global capitalism and toward developing solidarities that are able to challenge capitalist oppressions and reclaim SR.

Notes

1. With this, we refer to theorizations by authors from the Global South or focusing on the Global South, as well as those who center experiences, relations, and processes at work within and across the Global South. We reject essentialist readings of "Global South theorizing" as either monolithic or unitary.
2. Notably, the conceptual perimeters of SR differ substantially from those of care. While the two concepts are connected, they are not synonyms. Obviously, care, as a concept, is also concerned with the regeneration of life (see for example Dowling 2022), as care work is a form of social reproductive labor (see for example Kofman 2012; Raghuram 2012). Both concepts – care and SR – help us to reveal the unrecognized nature of gendered and racialized work and its

costs, and enable us to challenge this. Notably, there is now important work on the commodification of care and social policy that synergistically deploys both terms in conversation (see for example Geymonat, Cherubini, and Marchetti 2021; Lombardozzi and Pitts 2020). As such, the terms and frameworks should be understood as close allies, able to shed different light on similar concerns. Hence, while committed to the use of the term SR, in this article we do appreciate and consider its important productive entanglements with care, and in this spirit the text includes reference to care work and activities.

3. Randomized controlled trials are underpinned by a theory of behavioralism grounded in methodological individualism that conceptualizes individual behaviors as detached from economic structures and social relations and instead based on individual access to information, income, and cognitive abilities (see Stevano 2020). Such an individualist theorization of behavior is incompatible with SRAs.

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