

White Rose Research Online

eprints@whiterose.ac.uk
https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk
Universities of Leeds, Sheffield and York

Deposited via The University of Sheffield.

White Rose Research Online URL for this paper:
https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/id/eprint/246958/

Version: Published Version

Article:
Elias, J., Lingham, J.T. and Rai, S. (2026) Everyday crisis, everyday care: a feminist political economy from below. Review of International Studies. pp. 1-20. ISSN: 0260-2105

https://doi.org/10.1017/s0260210526102216

Reuse
This article is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) licence. This licence allows you to distribute, remix, tweak, and build upon the work, even commercially, as long as you credit the authors for the original work. More information and the full terms of the licence here:
https://creativecommons.org/licenses/

Takedown
If you consider content in White Rose Research Online to be in breach of UK law, please notify us by emailing eprints@whiterose.ac.uk including the URL of the record and the reason for the withdrawal request.





Review of International Studies (2026), page 1 of 20
doi:10.1017/S0260210526102216

RIS

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Everyday crisis, everyday care: A feminist political economy from below

Juanita Elias[1], Jayanthi T. Lingham[2] and Shirin Rai[3]

[1]Politics and International Studies, University of Warwick, Coventry, UK; [2]Centre for International Research on Care, Labour and Inequalities, The University of Sheffield, Sheffield, UK and [3]Politics and International Studies, SOAS, University of London, London, UK
Corresponding author: Juanita Elias; Email: juanita.elias@warwick.ac.uk

(Received 15 August 2025 UTC; revised 17 July 2026 UTC; accepted 1 August 2026 UTC)

Abstract
Engaging with International Political Economy scholarship on crisis, this article emphasises the need for a social reproduction approach that recognises the socially necessary labour that sustains life within conditions of *everyday* crisis. We set out a context-sensitive understanding of crisis, attentive to place-based struggles, and long-standing gendered, class, and racialised inequalities – an approach that chimes with calls for greater pluralism and engagement with diverse contexts in the development of social reproduction theorising. Our argument is illustrated through two cases: one from post-war Sri Lanka and the other from the UK during the COVID-19 pandemic. Seemingly distinct, these cases enable reflection on the development of social reproduction approaches grounded in the everyday spaces of both Global South and Global North. We suggest that there is something particularly productive in holding these geographies together in a discussion of crisis. Together, our cases demonstrate how crisis is entangled with the ongoing undermining of social reproduction. At the same time, the comparison keeps in view the multiscalar nature of crisis, showing how crises of social reproduction take shape through wider processes of state restructuring, colonial legacies, and geopolitics, while also recognising the forms of agency exercised in everyday efforts to sustain life.

Keywords: crisis; everyday; feminist political economy; Gender; social reproduction; Sri Lanka; UK

Introduction

The discourse of crisis seems to predominate in our public life largely as a descriptive rather than an explanatory shortcut: from ecological crisis to crisis of care, from health crisis to financial crisis, we are constantly subjected to a narrative that is generative of urgency. And yet, crises seem to be recurring, and the urgency remains unaddressed. Crises appear to ebb and flow rapidly as the 24-hour media lose interest in one crisis and focus on another, leaving behind a residue of anxiety but also letting different crises accumulate or dissipate willy-nilly in our collective imaginations. The political invocation of 'crisis' discursively frames contemporary conversations on global politics, but, at the same time, it is marked by silences around the gendered and racialised hierarchies and forms of violence that are reproduced within the context of crises and the political responses to them.[1]

[1]Laura Sjoberg, Heidi Hudson and Cynthia Weber 'Gender and crisis in global politics: Introduction', *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 17:4 (2015), pp. 529–35; Ben Whitham and Nadya Ali 'Frames of war and welfare', *Progressive Review,* 30:1 (2023), pp. 21–7.

© The Author(s), 2026. Published by Cambridge University Press on behalf of The British International Studies Association. This is an Open Access article, distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution licence (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0), which permits unrestricted re-use, distribution and reproduction, provided the original article is properly cited.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210526102216

Feminist International Political Economy (IPE) scholarship has sought to push beyond theorisations of crisis as merely a discursive frame, collectively highlighting how the material origins and effects of crises are starkly gendered. These interventions have evolved around several interlinked pathways. First, and a perspective that is central to the revival of Marxist feminist work in recent years, is that capitalism is crisis-prone; falling rates of profit lead to a deep-seated systemic tendency towards crisis, stemming from a 'rupture between life-making and profit-making'[2] as the erosion of social reproduction threatens its viability.[3] Such dynamics are experienced profoundly as a crisis of the *labour* of social reproduction which disproportionately impacts women and other marginalised groups[4] (an argument asserted most recently in relation to feminist discussions of the COVID-19 pandemic[5]). Second, while attentive to the idea that crises such as wars, financial market meltdowns, or pandemics reflect a 'disruption' of everyday life, crises are not unexpected 'one-off' events that fundamentally shift the normal order of things.[6] By stressing the continuities of crises, feminist political economy highlights how crises are experienced slowly and relentlessly over time, generating long-term consequences that are experienced in embodied ways and yet are largely unseen and unrecognised.[7] Finally, for many feminist political economists, crises are viewed as creating opportunities for social change when disruption opens political space for collective action. For example, the 2008 financial crisis led to a wave of feminist activism, as women demanded that their voices be heard in the economic recovery process.[8]

We build on these insights by arguing that a social reproduction approach or 'lens',[9] one that centres the socially necessary work of sustaining life,[10] provides a unique vantage point for understanding how multiple crises intersect and are experienced in daily life.[11] Moreover, we make two specific contributions to feminist political economy understandings of crisis. First, we draw attention to how social reproduction is not simply one domain among many affected by crisis; rather, it is the very terrain through which crises are lived, prolonged, and reproduced in everyday life. We do so by highlighting dynamics of depletion through/of social reproduction[12] and exploring how the capacity of individuals, households, and communities to cope with the effects of economic shocks, pandemics, or war/conflict is eroded, progressively undermining resilience to subsequent crises. Second, we contend that feminist IPE accounts of crisis are enriched by adopting a more expansive and pluralistic social reproduction approach, attentive to place-based struggles.[13] Such an approach, we argue, disrupts unitary narratives of capitalism, the state, the household, and the division between waged/unwaged work embedded in much social reproduction theorising,

[2] Smriti Rao, 'Beyond the coronavirus: Understanding crises of social reproduction', *Global Labour Journal*, 12:1 (2021), p 41.

[3] Nancy Fraser, 'Contradictions of capital and care', *New Left Review* 100 (July/August 2016).

[4] Rao 'Beyond the coronavirus'.

[5] Jennifer Cohen and Yana van der Meulen Rodgers, 'The feminist political economy of COVID-19: Capitalism, women and work', *Global Public Health*, 16: 8–9 (2021), pp. 1381–95. Alessandra Mezzadri, 'Social reproduction and pandemic neoliberalism: Planetary crises and the reorganisation of life, work and death', *Organization,* 29:3 (2022), pp. 379–400.

[6] Aida A. Hozić and Jacqui True, 'Making feminist sense of the global financial crisis', in Hozić and True (eds), *Scandalous Economics* (Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 3–20.

[7] Katherine Brickell, *Home SOS: Gender, Violence, and Survival in Crisis Ordinary Cambodia* (John Wiley & Sons, 2020).

[8] Sue Durbin, Margaret Page and Sylvia Walby, 'Gender equality and "Austerity": Vulnerabilities, resistance and change', *Gender, Work & Organisation*, 24:1 (2017), pp. 1–6.

[9] Alessandra Mezzadri, Susan Newman and Sara Stevano, 'Feminist global political economies of work and social reproduction', *Review of International Political Economy,* 19:6(2021), pp. 1783–1803.

[10] Social reproduction refers to the activities necessary to sustain life, including biological reproduction, care work, household production, the reproduction of labour and communities, and the maintenance of cultural norms and ideologies. Shirin M Rai, Catherine Hoskyns and Dania Thomas 'Depletion: The cost of social reproduction', *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 16:1(2014), p. 87.

[11] Rao, 'Beyond the Coronavirus', p. 41.

[12] Rai et al., *Depletion*; Shirin M. Rai, *Depletion: The Human Cost of Caring* (Oxford University Press, 2024), Jayanthi T. Lingham and Melissa Johnston 'Running on empty: Depletion and social reproduction in Myanmar and Sri Lanka', *Antipode*, 57(2025), pp. 494–514.

[13] Alessandra Mezzadri, Shirin M. Rai, Sara Stevano et al. 'Pluralizing social reproduction approaches', *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 27:1 (2025), pp. 6–33.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210526102216

while simultaneously highlighting how context and location matter in thinking through the spaces, temporalities, and violences of everyday life.[14]

Our theoretical discussion is grounded in an examination of two illustrative cases, both drawn from our ongoing research into everyday crises of social reproduction. The first explores social reproduction in conflict-affected Sri Lanka, while the second investigates the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on racially marginalised caregivers and recipients in the UK. The studies, which differ in scope and focus, are not, in the strictest sense, directly comparative since they were not the result of a purposive, predetermined research design. Instead, they reflect a (feminist) commitment to revisiting earlier work.[15] Specifically, we re-examine interview narratives of social reproduction across these two contexts to trace how enduring crises were navigated in everyday life. Indeed, there is an important methodological issue at stake here that reflects our shared unease with the relentless pressure on researchers to produce new empirical data, and on research participants to contribute to studies even as they struggle with the everyday effects of crisis. Thus, we *re*-engage with our existing data, whilst remaining open to new readings. By taking social reproduction as our point of departure, we examine how crises are lived and negotiated from below, impacting the ability of households, communities, and individuals to reproduce themselves. This everyday crisis of social reproduction is, of course, experienced quite differently across these two cases, and yet it emerges via interconnected structural hierarchies of class, race, and gender that produce uneven inequalities and effects. As Spike Peterson argues, such unevenness is 'not a temporary "sideshow" but the enduring "mainstay" of capitalism as an unfettered force'.[16]

We argue that a reflective juxtaposition of cases from the Global South and Global North enables us to better understand the dynamics through which crisis is made everyday – how it is embodied and how it is emplaced. Extending Elias and Rai's work on the everyday and social reproduction as encompassing spatial, temporal, and violent dimensions,[17] we identify the spatial arrangements and temporalities that emerge during crisis and their significance for social reproduction. Moreover, our analysis contributes more broadly to scholarship bridging feminist IPE and feminist security studies,[18] highlighting how everyday agency is both constrained by and co-constituted through, structures of violence, inequality, and state power.

In developing this argument, we proceed in three stages. We begin by reviewing key themes in critical and feminist political economy scholarship on crisis. Moving beyond conceptualisations of a crisis as a temporally bounded event or singular tipping point, we highlight how crisis is constituted and experienced through the everyday dynamics of social reproduction. We then engage with scholarship that seeks to pluralise social reproduction theorising by decentring it from its Global North-centric intellectual tethering and situating social reproduction within diverse historical and geographical contexts. Finally, we provide an analysis of the labour and costs of social reproduction during times of political, social, and economic crisis that came through in our Sri Lanka- and UK-based research. The two cases underline the importance of place-based thinking and, in so doing, we acknowledge the significance of racialised and gendered relations of violence embedded in everyday regimes of social reproduction – how these are constructed spatially and temporally as well as how they are challenged through struggles to reverse the depletion of everyday life.

[14] Juanita Elias and Shirin M. Rai 'Feminist everyday political economy: Space, time, and violence', *Review of International Studies,* 45:2 (2019), pp. 201–20.

[15] This approach aligns with Enloe's call to continually apply a 'feminist curiosity' in reflecting on and returning to research findings – Cynthia Enloe, *The Curious Feminist* (University of California Press, 2004) p. 159.

[16] V. Spike Peterson, *A Critical Re-Writing of Global Political Economy: Integrating Reproductive, Productive, and Virtual Economies* (Routledge, 2003), p. 147.

[17] Elias and Rai, 'Feminist everyday political economy'.

[18] Jacqui True, 'A tale of two feminisms in international relations', *Politics & Gender,* 11:2 (2015), pp. 419–24.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210526102216

From crisis in/of capitalism to the unseen violence of social reproduction

As we discuss below, feminist scholarship has made significant contributions to work on (economic) crisis by bringing social reproduction and gendered social relations to the forefront of analysis. There are certainly multiple points of overlap between critical political economy and feminist IPE scholarship; in particular, both highlight the crisis-prone nature of global capitalism. Located within a broadly Marxist tradition, much critical political economy scholarship since the 2008 global financial crisis has framed crisis in relation to the wider transformation of neoliberal and financialised capitalism[19] that have unleashed what Gills terms 'a unique conjuncture of global crises'.[20] Moreover, capitalism's crisis tendencies are increasingly understood as more than merely disruptive: they are inherently violent and enmeshed in ongoing geopolitical conflicts; crises are never resolved, they merely move around geographically, sustaining ongoing systems of exploitation and oppression as well as war, conflict, and environmental catastrophe.[21] These insights matter, but we also note a tendency in this literature not to engage systematically with the gendered nature, consequences, and impacts of economic crisis, centring productivist understandings of capitalism at the expense of social reproduction, and rolling gender into a more 'generalised' understanding of capitalism's inherent tendency towards crisis.[22]

And yet, as Nancy Fraser writes, a 'general' crisis of capitalism (encompassing 'economic, ecological, and political strands') can only be understood alongside and in '*intersection*'[23] with a crisis of social reproduction. Fraser's perspective, as Jayasuriya observes, differs from the now ubiquitous academic and policy talk of 'polycrisis' that treats the present moment as merely a cluster of concurrent systemic crises.[24] Instead, Fraser foregrounds the fundamentally political roots of polycrisis in the contradiction between capital accumulation and 'the very systems and practices of social reproduction on which it relies'.[25] Perhaps what both critical and feminist political economy accounts of crisis *do* nonetheless have in common is that both traditions seek to unsettle the way that crises are frequently understood as exceptional 'one off' events; a move that operates as a form of 'obfuscation'[26] which, in turn, merely deepens neoliberal logics,[27] distracting attention from the ongoing and never-ending crises of capitalism in favour of short-term political solutions.[28]

That said, a gendered, social reproduction lens does provide a unique vantage point for understanding ongoing and intersecting crises that serve to continually reproduce gendered and racialised inequalities. As Aida Hozić powerfully asserts, feminist scholarship consistently shifts the focus of IPE by 'follow[ing] the bodies'.[29] From this perspective, crisis is understood not only as a macroeconomic or geopolitical event but as a restructuring of social inequalities, something *lived*

[19] David M. Kotz, 'The financial and economic crisis of 2008: A systemic crisis of neoliberal capitalism', *Review of Radical Political Economics*, 41:3 (2009), pp. 305–17; David Harvey, *The Enigma of Capital: And the Crisis of Capitalism* (Oxford University Press, 2010); Gérard Duménil and Dominique Lévy, *The Crisis of Neoliberalism* (Harvard University Press, 2013).

[20] Barry K. Gills, 'Going South: Capitalist crisis, systemic crisis, civilisational crisis', *Third World Quarterly*, 31:2 (2010), p. 169.

[21] David Harvey, 'From globalization to the new imperialism', in Richard P. Appelbaum and William I. Robinson (eds), *Critical Globalization Studies* (Routledge, 2005), pp. 91–100; Harvey, *The Enigma of Capital*; Andreas Bieler and Adam David Morton, *Global Capitalism, Global War, Global Crisis* (Cambridge University Press, 2018).

[22] Alfredo Saad-Filho, 'Endgame: From crisis in neoliberalism to crisis of neoliberalism', *Human Geography*, 14:1 (2021), p. 136.

[23] Fraser, 'Contradictions of capital and care', emphasis added.

[24] Kanishka Jayasuriya, 'Polycrisis or crises of social reproduction', *Global Social Challenges Journal,* 2:2 (2022), pp. 203–11.

[25] Fraser, 'Contradictions of capital and care'.

[26] Hozić and True, 'Making feminist sense'.

[27] Shirin M. Rai and Charlie Dannreuther 'All the world's a stage: Performance and political economy in crisis times', *Review of Evolutionary Political Economy*, 7:1 (2026).

[28] For example via the politics of austerity – see Bob Jessop, 'Recovered Imaginaries, imagined recoveries', in Mats Benner (ed), *Before and Beyond the Global Economic Crisis: Economics, Politics and Settlement* (Edward Elgar, 2013), pp. 234–54.

[29] Aida A. Hozić, 'Follow the bodies: Global capitalism, global war, global crisis and feminist IPE', *International Relations*, 35:1 (2021), pp. 173–7.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210526102216

and *reproduced* through globalised 'gendered circuits of violence', enacted across states, international financial institutions, markets, and wider geopolitical contexts.[30] This includes how systems of indebtedness operate within contemporary financialised capitalism, embedding households within the global dynamics of finance capital in ways that render them ever more vulnerable to economic shocks.[31]

So, feminist IPE scholarship on crisis is characterised by a simultaneous attentiveness to the everyday experience of the crisis of social reproduction and to the gendered assumptions embedded within the global structural transformations that produce crises and shape responses to them.[32] This scholarship includes work critiquing the economic orthodoxies of mainstream masculinised economic institutions that implicitly position the household as a 'shock absorber' in times of economic downturn, able to 'compensate for malfunctions elsewhere in the system'.[33] Such assumptions about households, which stem from a failure to account for and recognise the value of caring labour, are hardwired into macroeconomic thinking, with devastating consequences as households shoulder the growing burdens of social reproduction: from food provisioning[34] and child and elder care[35]; to accessing health services and housing[36]; absorbing higher utility costs[37]; relying more heavily on home-based work[38]; and supporting returning migrant family members.[39]

As noted in the 'Introduction' section, these feminist approaches direct attention to crisis not only as a macroeconomic phenomenon or a disruption in the internal dynamics of capitalism, but as a crisis of social reproductive *labour.*[40] Key here are processes of 'depletion through social reproduction'[41] (henceforth, 'depletion'); that is, how, under capitalist social relations, the labour that sustains and reproduces life is continually extracted yet never fully replenished. The result is a progressive erosion of the capacity of individuals, households, and communities to care for and sustain others.

Pluralising social reproduction through everyday feminist political economy

Building upon much of the feminist literature on social reproduction and crisis already outlined, we adopt a theoretical perspective that views social reproduction as embodied and intrinsically 'fleshy and messy',[42] and operating within *plural* circuits of social reproduction.[43] We further view social reproduction as grounded in the spaces, temporalities, and violences of everyday life that

[30] Jacqui True and Aida A. Hozić, 'Don't mention the war! International Financial Institutions and the gendered circuits of violence in post-conflict', *Review of International Political Economy,* 27:6 (2020), pp. 1193–213.

[31] Kanchana N. Ruwanpura, Smriti Rao and Abena D. Oduro, 'Debt, distress, and defiance', *Feminist Economics*, 32:2(2016), pp. 1–22.

[32] Diane Elson, 'Economic crisis from the 1980s to the 2010s: A gender analysis', in Shirin M. Rai and Georgina Waylen (eds), *New Frontiers in Feminist Political Economy* (Routledge, 2013), pp. 189–212.

[33] Diane Elson, 'The economic, the political and the domestic: Businesses, states and households in the organisation of production', *New Political Economy*, 3:2 (1998), p. 177.

[34] Jacklyn Cock, 'A feminist response to the food crisis in contemporary South Africa', *Agenda*, 30:1 (2016), pp. 121–32.

[35] Emma Dowling, *The Care Crisis: What Caused It and How Can We End It?* (Verso Books 2022).

[36] Cindi Katz, 'Bad elements: Katrina and the scoured landscape of social reproduction', *Gender, Place and Culture*, 15:1 (2008), pp. 15–29; Kate Fakier and Jacklyn Cock, 'A gendered analysis of the crisis of social reproduction in contemporary South Africa', *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 11:3 (2009), pp. 353–71.

[37] Ailiki Koutlou, 'Lived experiences of utilities-based indebtedness in Greece: Tracing the afterlives of austerity', *Geographical Journal*, 191:3 (2025).

[38] Asma Abdi, 'A feminist international political economy of sanctions: Crises and the shifting gendered regimes of labour and survival in Iran', *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 27:1 (2025), pp. 81–104.

[39] Alpa Shah and Jens Lerche, 'Migration and the invisible economies of care: Production, social reproduction and seasonal migrant labour in India', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 45:4 (2020), pp. 719–34.

[40] Rao 'Beyond the coronavirus'.

[41] Rai, *Depletion.*

[42] Cindi Katz, 'Vagabond capitalism and the necessity of social reproduction', *Antipode*, 33:4 (2001), pp. 709–28.

[43] Sirisha C. Naidu, 'Circuits of social reproduction: Nature, labor, and capitalism.' *Review of Radical Political Economics,* 55:1 (2023), pp. 93–111.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210526102216

nurture as well as deplete. These circuits of social reproduction are, of course, already embedded in the long histories of colonialism and slavery, which connect the Global South and Global North through the extractivism of migration, geopolitics, and racism in the labour of caring. It is this more capacious understanding of social reproduction – both locational and historical – that informs our approach to crisis in the following ways:

First, returning to Hozić's call to 'follow the bodies',[44] we suggest that attention to the historicised everyday patterns and practices of social reproduction that shape daily life provides a more embodied perspective on what crises are and how they are constituted, including whose lives are considered to be 'in crisis'; as Strolovich notes, 'conditions of vulnerability, often simply taken for granted as part of the normal social landscape when they affect marginalised populations, become regarded as crises when they affect dominant groups.'[45] In this sense, a crisis of social reproduction should not simply be understood, in Fraser's terms, as 'intersecting' with other crises. It is also fundamentally intersectional, both in its initial impacts and in its enduring effects on people's health, well-being, and capacity to sustain themselves and others. These unequal burdens, borne through largely unsupported or inadequately supported efforts of social reproduction, generate cumulative processes of depletion.[46] This attentiveness to intersectionality also alerts us to reflect upon how states, when confronted with a crisis, find some bodies more disposable than others – a predictable outcome of ongoing colonial structures of power relating to geopolitical histories, anti-migration discourses, and the reproduction of racial inequalities.[47]

Second, our approach responds to recent calls to *pluralise* social reproduction scholarship by foregrounding place-based struggles and Global South contexts.[48] This entails moving away from social reproduction frameworks that have tended to focus their analytical gaze on the decline of the Western welfare state,[49] and thus engaging in a 'decentring' of core social reproduction frameworks. This more grounded and historicised approach calls for social reproduction scholarship to acknowledge the implications of Global South contexts for theorising; to re-evaluate core assumptions about the productive/reproductive binary by better recognising contexts where formal and informal economies are less clear-cut (e.g. due to the prevalence of homeworking, predominance of informal labour markets or subsistence agricultural production[50]) and where home-based work and associated processes of 'housewifization'[51] blur boundaries between domestic and productive spheres. Additionally, we need to reconsider how to think about the state in contexts where institutional systems of welfare provisioning are at best fragile, and where instead regimes of social

[44]Hozić 'Follow the bodies'.

[45]Dana Z. Strolovich, 'Of mancessions and hecoveries: Race, gender, and the political construction of economic crises and recoveries', *Perspectives on Politics,* 11:1 (2013), p. 167.

[46]Shahnaz Akhter, Juanita Elias and Shirin M. Rai 'Being cared for in the context of crisis: Austerity, COVID-19, and racialized politics', *Social Politics,* 29:4 (2022), pp. 1121–43.

[47]Zygmunt Bauman, *Wasted Lives: Modernity and Its Outcasts.* Polity, 2013.

[48]Mezzadri et al., 'Pluralising'; Rahel Kunz 'The crisis of social reproduction in rural Mexico', *Review of International Political Economy,* 17:5 (2010), p. 914.

[49]While writers such as Nancy Fraser highlight how the capitalist economy 'free rides' on a non-monetised realm of social reproduction, productive-social reproductive regimes are understood in her work almost entirely with reference to the advanced economies of the Global North – see Fraser, 'Crisis of care? On the social reproductive contradictions of contemporary Capitalism', in Tithi Bhattacharya (ed), *Social Reproduction Theory* (Pluto Press, 2017), p. 23. There is, nonetheless, growing recognition among social reproduction scholars of the limitations of starting from the standpoint of the Western welfare state. See Bakker, Isabella, and Stephen Gill. 'Rethinking power, production, and social reproduction: Toward variegated social reproduction', *Capital & Class* 43:4 (2019): fn 11. For a broader overview, see Mezzadri et al. 'Pluralising'.

[50]Alessanda Mezzadri, 'A value theory of inclusion: Informal labour, the homeworker and the social reproduction of value', *Antipode*, 53:4 (2021), pp. 1186–205; Yeni, Sithandiwe. 'Land, natural resources and the social reproduction of South Africa's "relative surplus population"', *Journal of Agrarian Change*, 24:3 (2024), pp. 1–18.

[51]Maria Mies, *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale: Women in the International Division of Labour* (Zed, 1986).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210526102216

reproduction have emerged out of highly uneven processes of post-colonial state and nation-building alongside geopolitical dynamics.[52] We draw on these interventions to develop an approach that does not treat the Global South and Global North as distinct analytic sites, but instead attends to the similarities and connections between them, allowing us to demonstrate how crises that appear locally specific are connected through broader structural dynamics (relating to neoliberal globalisation and supposedly gender-blind assumptions about the capacity of households to absorb crisis effects) while also remaining historically and spatially differentiated.

Finally, our two cases demonstrate the importance of focusing on the everyday in developing a more socially emplaced approach: one that pays due attention to the layered and complex character of the crisis of social reproduction and how it plays out in terms of the organisation of care, livelihoods, mobility, and household survival, and becomes inscribed onto gendered bodies, communities, and social relations. As noted above, these complexities can be grasped through an engagement with Elias and Rai's conceptualisation of the everyday, in which they argue that social reproduction *is* everyday life. The everyday is then analysed through a three-part framework of space, time, and violence (STV).[53] This analysis involves attending to the spaces in which social reproduction takes place, its temporal dynamics, and the gendered structural violence – including processes of depletion – that underpin daily life under capitalism. Placing our two case studies in dialogue also reveals further points of similarity and connection. These include how household space itself is transformed under crisis-prone capitalism, in ways that render the boundaries between public and private increasingly 'untenable'[54]; how the crisis of social reproduction produces forms of temporal 'stretching' and disorientation that have embodied impacts; and how everyday forms of violence associated with capitalism's disruptive dynamics are reproduced and resisted. Our everyday approach thus creates greater scope for considering agency, particularly in the ways that people negotiate and resist the inequalities that shape their lives, and how these enactments of agency often constitute forms of social reproduction in themselves.[55] This approach does not reify the everyday. Rather, it offers an entry point for thinking about crises: through our engagement with social reproduction as the everyday we are also able to highlight the multiscalar dynamics of capitalism, geopolitics, the state, and the household that co-constitute the everyday experiences of our interviewees, producing uneven vulnerabilities.[56]

Findings from Sri Lanka and the UK

The theoretical discussion presented thus far has focused on (a) the value of a feminist IPE of crises, and (b) the need to add nuance and complexity to feminist research on crises via the development of a pluralised approach to social reproduction. In what follows, we illustrate how these theoretical ideas are grounded in our empirical research. The studies that we present draw on research conducted in conflict-affected Sri Lanka in early 2020 and the UK Midlands during the COVID-19 pandemic and its immediate aftermath (2020–2022). We draw upon narrative interviews conducted with women respondents[57] in Sri Lanka and the UK. Both projects involved extensive gathering of interview data by Lingham, which we draw upon in this article. These are very different cases, and we recognise that this inevitably limits the extent to which meaningful comparisons can be drawn between them. Nevertheless, both illustrate how crises of social reproduction emerge in relation to, and often through, other events, conventionally understood as crises, while the failure

[52]Yasmin Chilmeran and Nicola Pratt, 'The geopolitics of social reproduction and depletion', *Social Politics*, 26:4 (2019), pp. 586–607; Abdi, 'A Feminist International Political Economy of Sanctions'.

[53]Elias and Rai, 'Feminist everyday political economy'.

[54]Elisabeth Prügl, 'Untenable dichotomies: De-gendering political economy', *Review of International Political Economy,* 28: 2 (2020), pp. 295–306.

[55]Elias and Rai 'Feminist everyday political economy'.

[56]Sara Stevano, Tobias Franz, Yannis Dafermos and Elisa Van Waeyenberge 'COVID-19 and Crises of Capitalism: Intensifying Inequalities and Global Responses', *Canadian Journal of Development Studies,* 42 (2021), pp 1–7.

[57]Participants have been anonymised.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210526102216

to recognise and address the importance of social reproduction further intensifies crisis dynamics. Together, the cases allow us to examine how crises of social reproduction are produced and experienced in everyday life, grounded in specific spatial and temporal contexts that tip individuals, households, and communities towards depletion, while simultaneously shaping the possibilities and constraints of agency. Before turning to this analysis, we first outline the particular histories and dynamics that shape each case.

In the Sri Lanka case, the 'crisis' of war and conflict was officially deemed over in 2009 when a 26-year civil war ended with a militarised post-war settlement imposed by the victorious state. However, data collection in Northern and Eastern Provinces in early 2020 revealed continuing and persistent forms of crisis, as ongoing militarisation and moves to integrate war-affected areas into global markets threatened social reproduction.[58] The Sri Lanka case reflects wider feminist concerns about so-called 'post-conflict' contexts: how even after wars formally end, peacebuilding and development continue to rely on women's unpaid and underpaid labour as the unacknowledged foundation of reconstruction and social repair.[59] Since our fieldwork, Sri Lanka has faced severe economic and pandemic-related crises that have further eroded social reproduction.[60] Specifically, the 2022 Aragalaya movement led to the fall of the Rajapaksa government. The movement was fuelled by a severe cost-of-living crisis, shaped by longer-term processes of rising national indebtedness (as the country's borrowing shifted, post-war, from concessional development aid to commercial credit markets), declining foreign reserves (the COVID-19 pandemic and 2019 Easter bombings, which impacted tourism and remittances), and economic mismanagement, especially in the agricultural sector, which had compounding effects on livelihoods, food security, and inflation. Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 further exposed Sri Lanka's vulnerabilities to global shocks, pressures that were compounded by rising household debt, as families turned to credit to manage everyday social reproduction. These acute conditions intersected with pre-existing crises of debt and survival for directly war-affected populations.[61] Yet the political changes that followed the 2022 protests did little to meaningfully address these ongoing crises confronting war-affected communities in the north and east (the sites of our research), where the economic crisis intersected with longer histories of conflict, violence, and uneven development. These conditions persist under the new administration, which remains aligned with the military, sustains impunity for war crimes, upholds Sinhala-Buddhist majoritarianism, and continues a neoliberal economic agenda. The Sri Lanka case thus enables us to explore themes around continuities and layering of crises, and the everyday crisis of social reproduction, as well as how efforts to bring about change only in response to a 'crisis event' can exclude the needs of long-marginalised populations.

In the UK case, the immediate crisis was the COVID-19 health crisis which, from March 2020, led to a series of lockdowns and other restrictions on everyday life that significantly affected social reproduction. COVID-19 was also a profoundly racialised crisis, disproportionately affecting racially minoritised communities, who were more likely to be employed in frontline occupations and experienced higher rates of infection, hospitalisation, and death during the early waves of the pandemic. The structural vulnerabilities of racially minoritised communities in the UK were long-standing, but were intensified by a decade of austerity-driven economic policies that deepened

[58]Melissa Johnston and Jayanthi T. Lingham (2020) *Inclusive Economies, Enduring Peace in Myanmar and Sri Lanka: Field Report*. Monash University and University of Warwick.

[59]Jenny Hedström and Elisabeth Olivius, 'Insecurity, dispossession, depletion: Women's experiences of post-war development in Myanmar', *European Journal of Development Research,* 32 (2020), pp. 379–403; Shirin Rai, Jacqui True, and Maria Tanyag, 'From depletion to regeneration: Addressing structural and physical violence in post-conflict economies', *Social Politics,* 26:4 (2019), pp. 561–85.

[60]Jayasuriya, 'Polycrisis'.

[61]Jayati Ghosh, 'The gendered nature of sovereign debt accumulation', *Feminist Economics, 32*:2 (2026), pp. 32–8.Chandima Arambepola and Kulasabanathan Romeshun *Debt at My Doorstep: Microfinance Practices and Effects on Women in Sri Lanka* (Centre for Poverty Analysis, working paper series number 30, 2019, available at: {https://www.cepa.lk/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/2019-Arambepola-and-Romeshun-Debt-at-My-Doorstep-WPS-30.pdf}, accessed 2 August 2026.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210526102216

these inequalities and increasingly stigmatised minoritised communities.[62] Our UK research was undertaken primarily in the Midlands region during the 2020 pandemic and the ensuing lockdowns, focusing on how patterns of care and caregiving changed for racially minoritised groups during the pandemic. Specifically, we examined the everyday experiences of racially minoritised carers and older individuals as they navigated the UK social care system, already under strain due to austerity, amid a public health emergency. This research speaks to the importance of understanding how already existing racialised, gendered, and class-based inequalities in society were exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic.[63] Our analysis remains relevant to understanding the uneven impacts of the cost-of-living crisis that followed the pandemic.[64]

While the scope and focus of the studies differ significantly, both were motivated by a desire to better understand the challenges faced by individuals, households, and communities within contexts that we characterise as *steeped* in crisis. This points to the erosion of social reproductive capacities as both an ongoing crisis in its own right and the condition through which subsequent crises (financial, health, ecological, and political) are experienced more intensely. Rather than treating social reproduction as the site of the secondary or downstream effects of economic crisis, we position it as central to both how crisis is lived and reproduced in everyday life and how it is politically produced. It is useful here to turn to Lingham and Johnston's discussion of how conflict and state violence actively degrade the essential labour required to sustain human life, with the 'deliberate depletion *of* social reproductive resources'[65] (not just depletion *through* social reproduction[66]) functioning as a tactic of war and ongoing conflict and of the politics of austerity. A comparable dynamic can be observed under austerity, reflected in our UK case, where the restructuring and withdrawal of state support similarly erode the care infrastructures upon which everyday life depends.[67] While the logics of austerity are not always explicitly framed as a deliberate strategy of social reproductive depletion in the same way as war-related violence, the example of the COVID-19 pandemic in the UK nevertheless reveals how prior decades of fiscal retrenchment and welfare restructuring have systematically produced conditions in which certain racially marginalised populations are disproportionately exposed to risk and precarity.

In both studies, participants were recruited through trusted local community organisations. In Sri Lanka, narrative interviews were conducted alongside the collection of observational time-use data within households.[68] In the UK, COVID-19 lockdown restrictions prevented such extensive in-person observation, so we sought to capture everyday social reproductive labour through our interviews: asking participants to describe their activities and needs on both a 'good day' and a 'difficult day', and to reflect on how these had changed during the pandemic.[69] Across both cases, interviews covered common themes: the organisation of everyday social reproductive work (what they did and when, and how they felt about it), available and missing forms of support within households, communities, and the state, and perceived changes and continuities over time.

[62]Leah Bassel and Akwugo Emejulu, *Minority Women and Austerity* (Policy Press, 2017); Nadya Ali and Ben Whitham 'Racial Capitalism, Islamophobia, and Austerity', *International Political Sociology*, 15:2 (2021), pp. 190–211.

[63]The research in Sri Lanka was part of a study on conflict and social reproduction, with fieldwork undertaken from January to March 2020 with 19 women participants in Sri Lanka and Myanmar (see Johnston and Lingham, *Inclusive Economies*, and Lingham and Johnston, 'Running on empty'). The research in the UK was a study on COVID-19 and care/social reproduction, with fieldwork undertaken from 2020–2022, with 57 participants in England and Wales (see Akhter et al., 'Being cared for'; Jayanthi T. Lingham, Shirin M. Rai, and Shahnaz Akhter (2025) 'Race, Gender and Class Under COVID-19: Narratives of Care, caring and carers', *European Journal of Politics and Gender*, [early view]).

[64]Stephen Walcott and Alba Kapoor. *Runnymede responds: The 2023 Autumn Budget and its impact on people of colour*, available at: {https://www.runnymedetrust.org/publications/runnymede-responds-the-2023-autumn-budget-and-its-impact-on-people-of-colour}, accessed 6 August 2026.

[65]Lingham and Johnston, 'Running on empty', p. 499, emphasis added.

[66]See also Maria Tanyag, 'Depleting fragile bodies: The political economy of sexual and reproductive health in crisis situations', *Review of International Studies*, 44:4(2018), pp. 654–71.

[67]Dowling, *Care Crisis*.

[68]Johnston and Lingham, *Inclusive Economies*.

[69]Lingham et al., 'Race, gender and class'.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210526102216

As noted above, this article is also methodologically grounded in a reflexive *reanalysis* of interviews across both cases. This involved, firstly, drawing upon Elias and Rai's STV framework to identify key themes from the interviews relating to spatial reorganisation, temporality, violence, and the mobilisation of agency to resist and negotiate the lived experiences of violence, injustice, and depletion in times of crisis. We then conducted a second phase of analysis by tracing convergences and divergences in relation to social reproduction, asking what broader dynamics became visible across sites and what we were able to see through this comparison that we might not have paid attention to otherwise.

(Transnational) households as spaces of social reproduction in crisis

In this section, we examine household spaces as sites of depletion, adaptation, survival, and negotiation, with particular attention to the forms of spatial reorganisation centred on the household that are co-constituted by crisis. This focus aligns with analyses from feminist geography that highlight the plurality and transformation of household forms, showing how household space is produced through social reproduction and shaped by the interplay of multiscalar processes of capitalist and state restructuring alongside the everyday micro-practices of social reproduction.[70] Examining crisis from below and situating it in specific spaces and places exposes the depletive effects of neoliberal economic and social instability, the everyday strategies people use to cope, and the differentiated vulnerabilities that mark crises of everyday life. Of course, feminist political economy has long complicated what we mean by the household – examining the importance of bringing into view forms of intra-household bargaining alongside the diversity of household forms and their abilities to cope with crises.[71] This unpacking of the 'black box' of the household matters, since differentially positioned households experience economic crises in distinct ways. While wealthier households have responded to the retrenchment or absence of welfare states through mitigation, or 'privatised solutions' (taking on debt, employing household labour),[72] in many contexts, poor households seek to manage crisis via migration and associated remittance income as coping strategies.[73]

Placing the Sri Lankan and the UK cases alongside one another brought into sharper focus the extent to which household space was increasingly stretched across national borders, as families organised survival through transnational networks of care and remittances. Underlining our commitment to a decentred social reproduction approach, it is important to consider how these practices of transnational (or global) householding[74] emerged in our research not as a niche phenomenon but as central to contemporary survival strategies and the crisis of social reproduction. Transnational householding constitutes a set of household organisational and survival practices that need to be situated within broader structures of state restructuring under neoliberal capitalism, including the growth of global remittance economies and the ongoing effects of neoliberal restructuring and austerity, which adversely impact household income and well-being.[75] In the following two cases of Azrina (Sri Lanka) and Faiza (UK), we draw attention to forms of transnational householding that are located within different scales and practices of capital accumulation

[70] Sallie A. Marston and Neil Smith. 'States, scales and households: Limits to scale Thinking? A response to Brenner', *Progress in Human Geography,* 25:4 (2001), pp. 615–19.

[71] Juanita Elias and Samanthi Gunawardana (eds), *The Global Political Economy of the Household in Asia* (Palgrave, 2013).

[72] Genevieve LeBaron, 'The political economy of the household: Neoliberal restructuring, enclosures, and daily life', *Review of International Political Economy*, 17:5 (2010), pp. 889–912.

[73] Katherine Brickell and Ayona Datta (eds), *Translocal Geographies* (Ashgate, 2011); Maliha Safri and Julie Graham, 'The global household: Toward a feminist postcapitalist international political economy', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society,* 36:1 (2010), pp. 99–125.

[74] Mike Douglass, 'Afterword: Global householding and social reproduction in Asia', *Geoforum,* 51 (2014), pp. 313–16.

[75] Kalpana Khanal and Zdravka Todorova, 'Remittances and households in an age of neoliberal uncertainty', *Journal of Economic Issues,* 53:2 (2019), pp. 515–22.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210526102216

and how the continual absorption of crisis effects was experienced – often in highly embodied ways – as depletion.

Azrina was part of a transnational household in Sri Lanka's Eastern Province. Her husband had migrated to Qatar to work as a driver nine years earlier, and they were now a seemingly successful, high-income household who owned their own home and land. Migration to the Middle East brings in a significant proportion of Sri Lanka's foreign exchange, and transnational householding practices serve as a key safety net in the absence of wider social protections. But even with the security of household income from remittances, Azrina faced everyday sexual harassment and insecurity in the community in which she was stigmatised as a single mother. Moreover, she remained traumatised by the economic insecurities and political violence that had made everyday life almost intolerable during the war, when she had to care for her severely injured (tortured) husband and young son, while pregnant with her daughter.

> Women like me in the whole of society do the same kinds of work, but no one sees that as work. […] We are the ones who are always taking care of the men at the cost of our mental and physical health. We don't even take care of ourselves.[76]

Reflecting on this time, she commented, 'I had a baby in hand and another one in the belly; my husband was also like a baby. I was so depressed. I struggled a lot.' Azrina's account highlights the impacts of ethno-nationalist state expansion and capital accumulation on gendered bodies. Outward labour migration from Sri Lanka to Gulf states has integrated the country into global capital circuits. While remittances help offset domestic unemployment and meet debt obligations, for Azrina, the personal costs of transnational householding were significant as she endured deep-rooted trauma, heightened gendered violence, and the increased social reproductive burden of acting as both mother and father to her children.[77] Her circumstances reflect an enduring crisis – less visible than acute wartime or economic collapse but rooted in past traumas, leaving her in a state of crisis-shaped limbo.

The transnational household and women's labour within it serving as a shock absorber, with detrimental consequences for those who undertake care labour, also came through in our UK interviews. Some of our UK research took place in the city of Leicester, which experienced some of the country's longest lockdown restrictions. Racialised households and communities were blamed by state and media for living and working in proximity, a framing shaped by systemic discrimination and migration policies.[78] Racially minoritised groups were also disproportionately represented in the low-paid care workforce,[79] frequently experienced everyday racism and microaggressions, and faced the marginalising effects of the UK government's 'hostile environment' immigration policies. As the following example from our interview with Faiza illustrates, they remained unable to adequately sustain and socially reproduce their own households.

Now in her mid-30s, Faiza had fled Somalia due to war. She worked as a paid carer for older people in Leicester, UK. During the first year of the pandemic, she was the sole unpaid carer for her two young children; her husband left for Somalia just before the lockdowns started and got stranded there. To continue her paid work, she had to rely on *ad hoc* childcare support from friends within the local community. As a transnational household, she and her family were more precariously positioned in the UK and compelled to absorb disproportionate financial and social reproductive burdens. Her interview reflected this: 'I've got a family back home. I've got my mum and my dad that I want to go and visit and I would do everything in my power still to be able to do that still.'

[76] Azrina, Interview 4 February 2020, Eastern Province, Sri Lanka.

[77] Matt Withers, 'Temporary labour migration and underdevelopment in Sri Lanka: The limits of remittance capital', *Migration and Development,* 8:3 (2019), pp. 418–36.

[78] Amy Clarke, 'Leicester lockdown: Blame on minority communities needs to be challenged', *The Conversation* (13 July 2020).

[79] Shereen Hussein, *Low-paid Ethnic Minority Workers in Health and Social Care During COVID-19* (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2022).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210526102216

Working as a carer without a strong network of family support during lockdown had generated anxieties for Faiza. She recalled media reports and government announcements that BAME (Black Asian and Minority Ethnic) groups were more at risk, and the associated stigmatisation as 'spreaders' of the virus, which contrasted with her understanding of the reality – that BAME groups were more at risk because they were keeping the economy and society functioning: 'we were out there working; we were out there being exposed […] more of us [BAME populations] were in these kinds of positions'. She commented on how the crisis could/should have been addressed by the government: 'I was still on the frontline. If you're protecting me, why didn't you say [to me, as a BAME person at higher risk]: "stay at home, *you're* at risk"?'.[80]

The interview thus highlighted how political–economic and geopolitical pressures associated with war, conflict, and migration intersected with the racially stratified UK labour market, particularly in low-paid care work, to shape how transnational households experienced the pandemic. This social reproductive crisis not only depleted individual household members like Faiza but also compounded the already significant challenges faced by the household as a whole.

In both Sri Lanka and the UK, our research revealed how the household functioned as a dynamic site where broader structural forces, such as state power and global capital, intersect with the lives of individuals. In both cases, transnational householding functioned as a spatial response to crisis. Echoing the work of Sarah Marie Hall on social reproduction under conditions of austerity, we observed how the coping strategies employed by individuals resonate physically and in embodied ways. This process of 'carrying'[81] relates to the burden – both emotional and physical – of negotiating these spatial transformations and plays out in both Azrina's and Faiza's accounts of trauma, deteriorating health, depression and exposure to harms, which can also be understood as depletion (a theme we return to in the discussion of crisis temporalities below).

While our analysis is grounded in everyday experience, it nonetheless highlights the centrality of transnational householding practices as constitutive, rather than exceptional features of contemporary social reproduction. Moreover, we reveal how transnational householding itself is far from straightforward, since the ongoing labour required to sustain households across borders generates significant forms of depletion, undermining the very capacities upon which care and social reproduction depend. Although we centre the transnational household in this section, we could, of course, also point to other examples from our research concerning how crisis plays out within the household (for example, in terms of the impact of state repression on households in Sri Lanka, or the impact of neoliberal welfare reforms on the lives of older racially minoritised people in the UK – themes that we have explored in our research elsewhere[82]). Together, these findings underscore the importance of space and place, illustrating how the household is shaped by transnational connections and varying practices of capital accumulation.[83]

Temporalities, social reproduction, and everyday crisis

Scholarship on discourses of crises often frames 'crisis' as a moment of change or disruption, the point at which events 'tip' into emergency.[84] However, when crisis is examined through a social reproduction lens that foregrounds the experiences of those most affected, this temporal certainty becomes blurred and complex. Capitalism privileges 'clock time', and in this framework, the rhythms of social reproduction are treated as unproductive time.[85] By contrast, focusing on the temporalities of social reproduction, with timelines that are non-linear and experienced as both

[80] Faiza, Interview 8 December 2021, Leicester, UK.

[81] Sarah Marie Hall, 'Social Reproduction, Labour and Austerity: Carrying the future', *Sociological Review,* 71:1(2023), 27–46.

[82] Akhter et al., 'Being cared for'; Melissa Johnston and Jayanthi T. Lingham, 'War on two fronts: Gender regimes and the ethnonationalist state in Myanmar and Sri Lanka', *Political Geography,* 120 (2025).

[83] Safri and Graham, 'The global household'; Mezzadri et al., 'Pluralising'.

[84] Amin Samman, 'Crisis theory and the historical imagination', *Review of International Political Economy*, 22:5 (2015), pp. 966–95.

[85] Valerie Bryson, *Gender and the Politics of Time* (Policy Press, 2007).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210526102216

accelerating and decelerating, provides an understanding of crises as lived and ongoing, as often never-ending processes. A focus on the temporalities of crisis across both sites revealed striking similarities; how, layered with the slow violence of daily depletion, crisis is as much an everyday phenomenon as it is a moment of rupture.

Thus, an explosive moment such as an active war, a global pandemic, or a financial crash may register as a crisis, but how crisis is experienced – how it is made ordinary and part of everyday life – is something that takes shape via the terrain of social reproduction.[86] In the previous section, we looked at the *spatial* stretching of the household as a response to the crisis of social reproduction under conditions of neoliberal capitalism alongside regimes of bordering and migration that enable some individuals and not others to migrate. Here, we turn to focus on forms of *temporal stretching* that capture how crisis was experienced by many of our research participants as an almost routine part of everyday life, further troubling the idea that crises can be understood as discrete moments in time. Rather, what comes through is an understanding of crisis from below, as embodied, ordinary, and unfolding in everyday life. Our findings share something of Katherine Brickell's invocation of Berlant's notion of 'crisis ordinary', capturing conditions that are 'saturated with violence', yet are viewed 'in ordinary and anticipatory terms'.[87] This focus on crisis as *ordinary* resonated deeply with our research findings and our conceptualisation of the everyday. Brickell's work on Cambodia examines specific 'expulsions' or ruptures (in her cases, of domestic violence and eviction) that throw households into crisis. However, she also observes this as the 'incorporation of disruption into "business as usual"'.[88] In our cases, we saw similar dynamics at work as participants made little distinction between one specific moment of crisis (war, pandemic) and the long-term and everyday struggles for survival (what we identify as the everyday crisis of social reproduction). Across both the Sri Lankan and UK cases, we observe similarities in terms of how a crisis of social reproduction unfolds as an ongoing temporal process, experienced through embodied and everyday practices of care and depletion. The similarities in these temporalities highlight the shared structures of vulnerability, even as forms of state intervention, social norms, and racialised inequities differentiated their everyday expression.

Returning to the interview with Azrina, we can pick out themes of temporal stretching impacting the very perception of time and crisis ordinary. In her interview, she reflected on the profound hardships she endured during the war in Sri Lanka. Pregnant with their second child, she cared tirelessly for her injured husband and young child while bearing sole responsibility for the household's survival: 'I didn't even know mornings and night; life just went by.' Thirteen years later, she was still hypervigilant to the possibility that she might at any time be thrust into such suffering and isolation again: 'I don't think about the thing [the better situation] I have now, but I think about how I once didn't have it. People look at me and think I'm doing great, but I'm not.'[89]

In our UK research, we saw how efforts to cope during the COVID-19 pandemic impacted people's very perception of time, with older people in particular struggling emotionally with a perceived slowing in the passage of time.[90] For others, especially those with caring roles and responsibilities, it was often difficult to distinguish between the period of COVID-19, which was politically framed as one of 'crisis', and their own perception of lives lived in a state of continual crisis. For many of the carers we interviewed, they simply continued to care, albeit in different circumstances, 'carrying'[91] new pressures in often highly embodied ways. As Neha, an unpaid carer, stated:

[86] Rai and Dannreuther, *All the World's*.

[87] Katherine Brickell, *Home SOS*, p. 7; see also Nancy Scheper-Hughes, *Death Without Weeping: The Violence of Everyday Life in Brazil* (University of California Press, 1992).

[88] Brickell, *Home SOS*, p. 198.

[89] Azrina, Interview 4 February 2020, Eastern Province, Sri Lanka.

[90] Akhter et al. 'Being cared for', pp. 14–15.

[91] Hall 'Social reproduction'.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210526102216

> Initially, it [care] just carried on. Yeah, it all just carried on. [..] You don't get time to think because you're constantly firefighting all the time. I just think, 'Wow, I was spinning lots of plates all at once,' and, like you said, [multiple deaths in the extended family were] the straw that broke the camel's back. It just knocked all the plates over, they all smashed and that's when I crash landed. [..] I could not get out of bed. [..] In bed I felt like a body but actually didn't even feel like the body was there.[92]

What emerged most clearly across both settings was the sense that crises were ongoing and overlapping, with no stark distinction between times of crisis and times of supposed normalcy.

By analysing these cases together, we are also able to draw attention to how an uneven deployment of social infrastructures, including welfare provision (which is invariably marked by racial and class divisions), and gendered social norms around who provides social reproductive labour contribute to this temporal stretching. In Sri Lanka, the uneven deployment of state social protections left marginalised households in the war-affected North and East absorbing crisis shocks during and after the war. In the UK, by contrast, the presence of welfare systems intervened in some ways – but legacies of austerity and systemic forms of racism also served to stretch the experience of crisis temporally. The temporal effects of crisis are thus shaped by specific institutional and political contexts, yet they generate comparable experiences of depletion and endurance across the Global South and Global North.

Our interviews in Sri Lanka revealed how low-income and racialised households and communities from the former war territory of the Northern Province had been driven into economic crisis many years earlier, since the end of the war in 2009. In the post-war period, the war territories were occupied by the state military and opened up, abruptly, to national and international capital.[93] Research participant Benita described how economic conditions had worsened since then, leaving her household struggling to meet everyday social reproductive needs: 'no matter how much we work, we aren't fulfilling all our needs.'[94] She contrasted these everyday struggles with the supposed crisis time of the war. During that time, the Sri Lankan state had imposed an economic embargo on the war territories, but the de facto LTTE state had provided some economic protections.

Our research in both the UK and Sri Lanka showed how households had been sites for the absorption of social reproductive crisis for years. In the Sri Lankan study, Chellakumary, a female head of household, reflected on the differences between times of conflict and the experience of peace. Echoing Veena Das' work on the blurred boundaries between ordinary and spectacular violence,[95] she emphasised continuities rather than a break with the past; continuities that were manifested in the affective labour of worrying and seeking to protect the safety of household members.

> There is no war, that is it, but everything else is upside down. There is a huge difference between life before and life now. Before, there was always war; now there are a lot more issues. No matter whether [your children are] boys or girls, as parents you are always worried whether they will come home safe.[96]

A theme across many of our interviews, then, was that crisis was nothing new. As one care worker with young children commented from our UK study: 'People were suffering way before Covid happened, and Covid was just the end of it'.[97] Another UK research participant, Sara, stated:

[92] Neha, Interview 9 August 2021, Leicester, UK.

[93] Jayanthi T. Lingham, 'The gendered political economy of work in post-war Sri Lanka', in Kanchana N. Ruwanpura and Ayesha M. Saleem (eds), *Routledge Handbook of Contemporary Sri Lanka* (Routledge, 2024), pp. 242–52.

[94] Benita, Interview 18 January 2020, Northern Province, Sri Lanka.

[95] Veena Das, *Life and Words: Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary* (University of California Press, 2006). See also the discussion of violence below.

[96] Chellakumary, Interview 22 January 2020, Northern Province, Sri Lanka.

[97] Faiza, Interview 8 December 2021, Leicester, UK.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210526102216

> A couple of years before the pandemic, [I was caring for] my mum who lived across the city from me and then I had a houseful, two other stepchildren and my partner and my daughter and son. I would literally be here 24/7 with them, dealing with all sorts of physical issues, from somebody collapsing on the floor having seizures, to mental health psychotic episodes and then also, rushing across town several times a day, to also - in between childcare and looking after the kids at school - looking after my mum who was bedbound by that point and just making sure she was catered for in between. […] It was a crazy time.[98]

Our interviewees thus consistently troubled the idea that crisis could be understood as a specific point/period in time, and revealed the depletion that individuals experienced over the life course, dislocating their experience of linear time – caring and coping under conditions of crisis were central themes in our interviewees' everyday narratives of social reproduction. Many of the narratives from both Sri Lanka and the UK resonated strongly with Cortvriend et al.'s work on embodied trauma,[99] which identifies how 'traumatic memory is stored in the body and has a habit of returning later'. Such a perspective brings into question the idea that crises can be understood as simply unexpected one-off events that are followed by a straightforward return to 'normality'.

Agency in the context of everyday violence

Our final thematic overview examines everyday violence alongside efforts to resist and exert agency amid the crisis of social reproduction. Recognising everyday agency is central to writings on the 'everyday' turn in IPE.[100] In line with the argument that we have been making about crisis as ongoing, everyday, and depleting at different scales, our approach to agency and resistance is attentive to social and historical contexts in ways that suture the fabric of everyday life under conditions of violence. This approach requires us to see agency as taking shape within, and in response to, everyday pressures and circumstances, often involving adaptation to crisis conditions as well as negotiating systems for survival but also working to change them in order to support social reproduction. As Kreft and Schultz assert, 'agency and victimhood are not mutually exclusive but rather sit alongside each other'; they are 'co-constitutive' and 'intersect relationally'.[101] Agency, then, as Kandiyoti has famously argued, takes the form of bargaining in the context of the 'rules of the game', 'with varying potential for active or passive resistance in the face of oppression'.[102] This encapsulates not only acts of resistance but also the reflective, ethical, and relational practices through which people navigate conditions of constraint,[103] bringing into view not only what people do but also the social and historical conditions that shape the possibility of action itself within the sphere of the everyday.

Feminist scholarship bridging political economy and security studies has shown how violence is embedded in regimes of labour, law, and policy, structuring boundaries between public and private space and policing divisions of race, ethnicity, and sexuality.[104] Crises intensify this violence over time and space, making the exercise of agency, as our case studies reveal, complex, negotiated, and less visible. One of our cases (Sri Lanka) points to the ongoing impacts of this intensification of multiple crises through the intersections of ethnonationalism, debt, and depletion of social reproduction. The violence of civil war revealed how legacies of conflict (re)shaped gender relations, how post-war peacebuilding unfolded in gendered ways, and how conflict itself was (re)produced

[98] Sara, Interview 20 August 2021, Leicester, UK.

[99] Amy Cortvriend et al., 'Memory politics after disaster: Recovery, embodied trauma and the Covid-19 pandemic', *Millennium,* 53:3(2025), pp. 575–602.

[100] Elias and Rai, 'Feminist everyday political economy'; John M. Hobson and Leonard Seabrooke (eds), *Everyday Politics of the World Economy* (Cambridge University Press, 2006).

[101] Anne-Kathrin Kreft and Philipp Schulz, 'Political agency, victimhood, and gender in contexts of armed conflict: Moving beyond dichotomies', *International Studies Quarterly,* 66:2 (2022).

[102] Deniz Kandiyoti, 'Bargaining with patriarchy', *Gender & Society,* 2:3 (1988), p. 274.

[103] Sumi Madhok, 'Action, Agency coercion: reformatting agency for oppressive contexts', in Sumi Madhok, Anne Phillips, and Kanchana Wilson (eds), *Gender, Agency and Coercion* (Palgrave Macmillan 2013), p. 106.

[104] Elias and Rai, 'Feminist everyday political economy', pp. 214–17; True, 'Atale of two feminisms'.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210526102216

through an ethnonationalist gender order. In this respect, focusing on violence highlights clear divergences between our cases: where the context, dynamics, and experience of violence as war and violence as austerity were very different. Yet across both cases, narratives emerge from our interviews about how crises engender violences of everyday life, connecting this to broader macrosocial dynamics of capitalism and to feminist understandings of violence as ongoing, structural, and slow.

For example, our research illuminated how prolonged exposure to social and economic precarity becomes intensified during a crisis, amplifying vulnerability, resulting in a cascade of harm that often remains invisible in policy and public discourse yet has profound consequences for those most affected. The concept of depletion, which underlines the structural violence of capitalist exploitation, draws attention to the continual costs of providing the often-invisible labour of maintaining life itself, particularly in marginalised communities, and to the harms that result from them. Themes that ran through all of our narrative interviews concerned how poor, racialised, or ethnically marginalised communities disproportionately experience prolonged harm, revealing the links between everyday violence and broader social structures of inequality. As with our previous discussion of temporalities, our two cases also revealed how crises unfold slowly and through everyday experiences marked by classed, gendered, and racialised violence. Feminist geographers have sought to capture these dynamics through their use of the concept of slow violence which also captures the wider forms of environmental degradation that impact daily life in significant ways (an issue that extends beyond the scope of this article).[105] Seeing violence as slow (as well as structural) certainly resonates strongly with the concept of depletion that we draw on to develop our understanding of the everyday as a site of violence.

Depletion-induced gendered harms too are mediated through inequalities of class, race, and ethnicity. In the UK case, for example, paid care workers recounted their everyday encounters with racism during the pandemic, with an upsurge in racial stigmatisation which, for some, tipped into direct acts of racialised violence:

> I was waiting for my taxi in town and I was just sat, on my phone, with my air pods on, just minding my own business. And a lady's come and she's hit a street cone on my forehead. And […] she's gone, "you're horrible, you're horrible", […] "you're a Paki" and […] "if it weren't for you, Covid wouldn't be here."[106]

While recognising the inherent violence of everyday life,[107] across both our research projects, we saw that such violence did not go unchallenged. Spatial reconfigurations, temporal stretching and violence – slow and fast, of structural inequalities and the violence of a pandemic and war – brought communities together to combat racial injustice, combining care and 'radical friendship' with practical interventions to improve working lives.

Feminist scholarship often frames moments of crisis as opportunities for transformative change – we do not wish to dismiss the importance of such radical thinking, and we acknowledge that crises can offer strategic openings for feminists to advocate for much-needed institutional and policy reform.[108] Moments of rupture linked to economic crisis and/or war can also generate unintended consequences that serve to refashion gender relations and create new opportunities for women.[109] However, we should acknowledge the limitations of feminist thinking that sees crises

[105] Rachel Pain and Caitlin Cahill. 'Critical political geographies of slow violence and resistance', *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space,* 40:2 (2022), pp. 359–72.

[106] Ayesha, Interview 26 October 2021, Leicester, UK.

[107] A phrase we borrow from Schepper-Hughes, *Death Without Weeping.*

[108] For examples of the focus on crisis as (feminist) opportunity, see Nahid Aslanbeigui and Gale Summerfield, 'The Asian crisis, gender, and the international financial architecture', *Feminist Economics,* 6:3 (2000), pp. 81–103; Durbin et al., 'Gender equality and "Austerity"; WILPF, Feminist Principles for an international Post-COVID settlement (2020), available at: {https://www.wilpf.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Feminist-principles-for-a-post-covid-19-settlement-web.pdf} (accessed 6 August 2026).

[109] Punam Yadav, 'Can women benefit from war?: Womens agency in conflict and post conflict societies', *Journal of Peace Research,* 58:3 (2022), pp. 449–61.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210526102216

as some sort of feminist opportunity. For example, as Roberts' feminist interrogation of UK fiscal policy during the COVID-19 pandemic shows, even moments that appear transformative may mask continuity, as the institutional, ideological, and political foundations of (in this case) fiscal 'common sense' acted as a powerful brake on demands for greater acknowledgement of social reproduction.[110]

In Sri Lanka, the social reproductive labour of the community differed in activity and impact for differently conflict-affected populations, reminding us of the importance of a decentred analytical lens. In relatively stable sites with majority ethnic (Sinhalese) populations, research participants were replenished by community-level work such as volunteering at village Sunday schools and village welfare societies, labour that they saw as contributing to the reproduction of the Sri Lankan nation. For the ethnically marginalised Tamil population in the most conflict-affected sites, the labour undertaken by families of those who had disappeared during the war is an example of social reproduction as a collective struggle,[111] albeit one driven by the pain of loss and often exacerbating gendered harms/depletion.[112] It consisted of searching for missing relatives (which has a long history in women's movements against state violence), trying to recover occupied land, and challenging the military and government. We understand these practices not only as demonstrating collective agency but also as resisting the state itself by a population whose very social reproduction is under threat:

> Even if I feel very tired, I just think about God and just do it. What else is there to think about? Where else does the strength come from? […] Our only focus is to successfully finish the protest and demand the return of our children. […] We are protesting not expecting any help from the government. We are only asking for our children.[113]

Global media attention in 2022 largely focused on the Aragalaya protests in the south of Sri Lanka, which challenged the *government's* failure to address social reproductive needs. However, the less well-documented, longer-standing struggles for post-war justice in the north continue to resist the *state's* long-standing assault on social reproduction – a persistent feature of violent ethno-religious nationalism embedded in the post-colonial Sri Lankan state.[114]

In the UK case, we observed the role that collective and activist initiatives played in the everyday lives of communities. This included initiatives to support the social reproductive needs of households during and beyond the COVID-19 crisis. Community organisations stepped in to fill the yawning gaps left by over a decade of austerity, providing financial and mental health support during lockdowns, and challenged the UK government on its failure to address the ongoing crisis.[115] Black care workers discussed with us how they had defended one another against increased workplace racism. Care workers shopped for one another when self-isolating and lent one another money to cope with debt caused by zero-hours contracts. As Ayesha, a domiciliary care worker on a zero-hours contract, recounted:

---

[110] Adrienne Roberts, '"Protecting people's lives and livelihoods": Gender, social reproduction and fiscal policy during the UK Covid-19 crisis', *Global Political Economy*, 4:2 (2025), p. 17.

[111] Dharsha Jegatheeswaran,'Heeding victims' voices: The struggle of Tamil families of the disappeared in Sri Lanka', *Just Security,* 3 March 2021, available at: {https://www.justsecurity.org/75095/heeding-victims-voices-the-struggle-of-tamil-families-of-the-disappeared-in-sri-lanka/}, accessed 6 August 2026.

[112] On the ongoing harms of disappearances/family separation in Sri Lanka (and elsewhere), see Rebekka Friedman and Hanna Ketola, 'Violations of the heart: Parental harm in war and oppression', *Review of International Studies,* 50:2 (2024), pp. 393–412.

[113] Benita, Interview 18 January 2020, Northern Province, Sri Lanka.

[114] Ambika Satkunanathan, 'The aragalaya versus struggles: A story of inclusions and exclusions', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 57:52 (2022).

[115] Bal Sokhi-Bulley 'Resistance in Leicester's Garment District', *Red Pepper* (28 November 2022), available at: {https://www.redpepper.org.uk/resistance-in-leicesters-garment-district/}, accessed 6 August 2026.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210526102216

> [My care worker colleagues] were very supportive. When I had Covid, my friend did come round once, and she just brought an envelope of money to say, "you know what, you've paid for it, if you need it"… Foodwise, and when it came to even just checking up on my grandma… If my grandma needed something, they'd get it and put it on the doorstep for her.[116]

State failures to address the crisis of social reproduction that the pandemic exposed were challenged more broadly through Nurses' strikes across the UK in the immediate aftermath of COVID-19. These struggles built on the increasing awareness of the importance of caring– valorising– but not backing it up by *valuing* this labour.[117]

Conclusion

In this article, we contribute to feminist IPE scholarship on crisis, using a social reproduction lens to examine two crisis contexts – the COVID-19 pandemic in the UK and conflict-affected Sri Lanka – and developing a socially emplaced understanding of crisis as it unfolds in everyday life under capitalism. We highlight how state policies, alongside global capitalist reordering, geopolitics, colonial legacies, and migration shape and are shaped by these crises, and how households and individuals negotiate them, revealing processes that are embodied as well as deeply gendered, racialised, and class-based. In doing so, we advance a more capacious approach to crisis and its everyday manifestations and effects.

Across both cases, what is shared is not simply exposure to crisis but a crisis of social reproduction lived through the spatial, temporal, and violent reorganisation of everyday life. Attending to these dynamics of STV provides an entry point for understanding crisis in a way that connects macro-level processes – including global political economy and geopolitical dynamics – with meso-level institutional arrangements and the micro-level experiences of everyday life within households. This perspective also foregrounds the role of the state in shaping regimes of social reproduction and the conditions under which crises are lived and managed.

In both the UK and Sri Lanka, households were compelled to absorb shocks generated elsewhere – whether through pandemic governance or the afterlives of war – and to do so through intensified, gendered, and racialised labour that depleted lives. We see in each context the reorientation of household space and relations, including stretched kin networks that redistribute care, income generation and social protection across borders. Yet important distinctions remain. The UK case unfolds within, and in tension with, a welfare state that mediates crisis unevenly and racialises access to protection, whereas the Sri Lankan case reflects crisis management in a context marked by war, post-conflict restructuring, far more limited state capacity, and the unevenness of the post-war settlement within an ethnonationalist state. The forms of crisis also differ (public health emergency as against protracted conflict and its aftermath) and are shaped by distinct historical trajectories of colonialism, racism, and state formation. These differences matter for theorising crisis. First, they underline that a crisis of social reproduction is entangled with other crises (health, conflict, economic restructuring) and that its effects are embodied as depletion and other harms enacted on households and individuals. Second, they reinforce the need to move beyond treating crisis as a singular, episodic rupture and instead to understand it as long-term and unfolding in everyday spaces and temporalities. Finally, placing these cases together pushes social reproduction crisis theorising beyond a narrow focus on the Western welfare state and austerity policies, while also revealing striking similarities in how crisis is both governed and lived across the Global North and Global South. In doing so, we argue for an *intersecting* and pluralised approach to a global crisis of social reproduction that is historically attuned and grounded in the everyday labour through which life is sustained under conditions of profound inequality.

[116] Ayesha, Interview 26 October 2021, Leicester, UK.

[117] Charley Adams and Nick Triggle, 'Nurses out on strike in half of England's NHS' *BBC News* 1 May 2023, available at: {https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-65443943}, accessed 6 August 2026.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210526102216

As a final point of reflection, both cases raise important questions about the nature of resistance and how/why, despite protests and labour mobilisations, transformational change does not take place. Our concern is with the dynamic relationship between crisis and agency; crises not as moments of change, but as moments where new forms of agency can flourish – while demonstrating how the ongoing crisis of social reproduction undermines genuine possibilities for transformative change (i.e. agency as a mechanism through which structural crises are mediated, absorbed, and occasionally contested). By examining the examples of crises in Sri Lanka and the UK within the same frame, we have attempted to decentre an approach to crisis that often foregrounds only social reproduction in the 'core' capitalist landscapes. We have shown how these omissions do not just leave empirical gaps; they limit our conceptual understanding of crises, including how they might affect subsequent politics and polities. For example, in Sri Lanka in 2022, the protests that gathered pace during the economic crisis were about citizens' basic social reproductive rights (to food, medicine, fuel). Meanwhile, years-long conflict-related political struggles for post-war justice by citizens in the North of Sri Lanka continued in parallel; yet the two struggles did not connect substantively, and the impetus generated from the 2022 protests remained limited for the most war-affected populations. In the UK, the gendered and racialised effects of COVID-19 and pandemic-era policies fuelled a nurses' strike for better pay in response to the governmental neglect of their working conditions, even as it valourised the work of the NHS frontline staff during the pandemic. Both these examples show how crises of social reproduction, economy, and society are always entangled and reflected in the everyday, as are the struggles to challenge and reverse these crises.

Juxtaposing the two cases from the UK and Sri Lanka helps us think about change, resistance, and agency as issues that crisis-affected communities address in different ways – moving beyond the calls for macro-level political–economic transformation, and instead seeing resistance as rooted in the everyday and grassroots struggles of local communities. This is not to idealise these small acts (after all, they emerge out of difficult, dangerous, and precarious realities, marked by the social inequalities that frame their struggles), but to recognise the work that everyday actors – women, community groups, etc. – take on to ensure that their social reproductive labours are supported and, in doing so, that they demonstrate the value of their labour. In the words of Lucille Clifton:

> here on this bridge between
> starshine and clay,
> my one hand holding tight
> my other hand; come celebrate
> with me that everyday
> something has tried to kill me
> and has failed.[118]

Acknowledgements. Funding for this research came from the University of Warwick, the ESRC: 'Co-POWeR: Consortium on Practices of Wellbeing and Resilience in Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Families and Communities', 2023 (ESRC Grant Number ES/W000881/1), and a Monash–Warwick Alliance Accelerator Grant. All research was conducted in accordance with the requirements of ethical review committees at the University of Warwick, University of Leeds, and Monash University. We thank all research participants and others who supported the fieldwork. Previous versions of this paper were presented at the International Studies Association Convention (2023), the British International Studies Association conferences (2023; 2025), and SOAS (2025). We are grateful to the many colleagues who offered thoughtful questions and suggestions at these presentations. We especially thank Adrienne Roberts, Stefanie Wöhl, Mat Watson, Rianne Mahon and Anushani Alagarajah for their generous feedback on earlier drafts, as well as the three anonymous reviewers whose constructive engagement helped us sharpen our arguments.

[118]Clifton, Lucille 'won't you celebrate with me' from *The Book of Light* (Copper Canyon Press, 1993).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210526102216

Juanita Elias is Professor of International Political Economy (IPE) at the University of Warwick, where her research focuses on feminist IPE, social reproduction, gender and development, and the politics of work, migration, care, and housing.

Jayanthi T. Lingham is a Research Associate in the Centre for Care, School of Sociological Studies, Politics and International Relations, at the University of Sheffield. She researches the International Political Economy of development, gender regimes, and violence and conflict; care and social reproduction; and the intersection of crisis and development.

Shirin M. Rai is Distinguished Research Professor in the Department of Politics and International Studies at SOAS, University of London, where her research focuses on feminist IPE, specifically social reproduction and depletion; global development, as well as political institutions, particularly parliaments; and politics and performance.

Cite this article: Juanita Elias, Jayanthi T. Lingham and Shirin Rai, 'Everyday crisis, everyday care: A feminist political economy from below', *Review of International Studies* (2026), pp. 1–20. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210526102216

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210526102216