

A Value Theory of Inclusion: Informal Labour, The Homeworker and the Social Reproduction of Value

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Abstract

Critically engaging with Marxist-Feminist debates, this article argues that only interpretations of social reproduction as value-producing capture the features of contemporary informalised labour relations. Building on early social reproduction analyses and informed by debates in political economy of development and feminist geography, the article sketches a 'value theory of inclusion' premised on the centrality of all labour to value-generation; accounting for different forms of exploitation; and stressing the dynamic interpenetration of production and reproduction in processes of labour-surplus extraction. By re-centering the geographical focus on the Global South, the article illustrates this interpenetration by identifying three reproductive mechanisms of value-generation, based on: industrial housing arrangements; spatial processes of externalisation of reproductive costs across urban-rural divides; and processes of formal subsumption of labour, analysed with special reference to women homeworkers in India. An inclusive theorisation of value-generation is crucial for the development of inclusive politics, recognizing exploitation in its varied manifestations.

Introduction

A number of recent studies have brought renewed attention to social reproduction, its role in capitalism and reorganisation in the Global North during neoliberalism (Ferguson et al, 2016; Bhattacharya, 2017; Fraser, 2014, 2017; Ferguson, 2019). Aspiring to build bridges between Marxism and different strands of Feminism, many of these studies - organised under the name of Social Reproduction Theory (SRT) - also aim at theorising class and social oppression within a unitary theory of capitalism, avoiding dual theories conceiving patriarchy and capitalism as separate systems (Vogel, 1983; Arruzza, 2016). This aim is pursued through a traditional Marxist analytical lens, understanding social reproduction as composed of circuits lying outside processes of value generation. Notably, here SRT breaks with Early Social Reproduction Analyses (ESRA), which instead theorised social reproduction as central to value generation (Dalla Costa and James, 1972; Fortunati, 1982; Mies, 1982, 1986; Reddock, 1994; Picchio, 1996; Federici, 2004).

SRT intervention could not be timelier given the expansion of feminist movements across the globe, the strain on social reproduction accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, and the rise of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement. However, notwithstanding its important contributions, this article argues that its take on value is problematic. Theoretically, its exclusion of reproductive realms and activities from processes of value generation is based on an overtly rigid schema separating value-producing and non-value-producing circuits, reifying the use-value/exchange value distinction and based on productivist, wage-centric understandings of exploitation. Politically, such exclusionary takes on value may undermine efforts to build solidarities across labouring classes and political movements, as the identification of 'hierarchies' of contributions to capitalism may weaken the redistributive claims of some classes and communities (Federici, 2019). The development of inclusive theorisations of value, instead, may not only boost solidarities but also broaden our horizon

in relation to possible leading political subjects of struggles, who have always varied concretely across time and space.

By reviewing social reproduction debates with insights from political economy of development and feminist geography, and re-centering the analysis analytically and geographically on labour relations and processes in the Global South, this article argues that only more radical understandings of social reproduction realms and activities as value-generating capture the ways in which the majority labours under contemporary capitalism. This argument is pursued by sketching the contours of a 'value theory of inclusion', which builds on Diane Elson's (1979) seminal essay on Marx's value theory of labour; Jairus' Banaji's (2010) theorisation of 'forms of exploitation'; and insights from ESRA, political economy of development and feminist geography on the dynamic interpenetration between production and social reproduction. This last point is illustrated concretely by exploring the functioning mechanisms of labour informalisation in the Global South - where two thirds of the World's total working population toil. The analysis identifies three ways in which reproductive activities and realms contribute to the extraction of labour-surplus; namely through i) the strengthening of labour control across industrial housing arrangements ii) the externalisation of social reproductive costs across the urban-rural divide iii) processes of formal subsumption of labour.¹ The last processes are further analysed with reference to India's women's employment in home-based work. In conclusion, the analysis discusses the relevance of the value-theory of inclusion sketched here for the development of a politics of inclusion, able to capture the multiple ways in which people experience exploitation under capitalism. Recuperating a common history of value and exploitation – in its differential forms – is crucial to re-imagine common political struggles.

Social reproduction and value in the early debates

In their seminal 1972 essay *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community*, Maria Rosa Dalla Costa and Selma James started posing key questions over the nature of what they defined as capitalism's 'most precious commodity' - namely, labour-power - and its relation to value. This commodity, as widely discussed by Marx (1990) in Volume One of *Das Kapital*, is the only commodity that generates surplus value upon its 'productive consumption' by those who purchase it rather than generate it. Against understandings of capitalism drawing the socio-economic perimeters of value generation around production, Dalla Costa and James argued that reproductive activities - women's unpaid domestic and care labour *in primis* – are value-generating as they maintain the current generation of (male) industrial workers and reproduce the next. The wageless housewife is pivotal to the reproduction of capitalism and production of value, because her unpaid labour subsidizes the overall (male waged) system.

The centrality of housework – and sex work - to value generation under capitalism was also the main object of enquiry in Leopoldina Fortunati's book *The Arcane of Reproduction*, in

which she understands the disjuncture between production and reproduction as a capitalist fiction. Under capitalism production both *is* and *appears* value-generating. Reproduction is naturalised as the realm of 'non-value'. This fiction expands (male) productivity, as many activities on which it is based remain unremunerated (Fortunati, 1981: 10). As 'free' workers under capitalism, individuals are stripped of all value except that of labour-power, that is both the commodity 'contained' in the worker and the measure of value of all 'things' produced. The conflicting presence of both value and non-value starts from each individual, but only waged production workers see their value recognised. Reproduction workers – women and subaltern groups - are denied recognition and their labour-time is conceived as a personal service 'offered' (or paid when commercialised) in a social relation of private exchange. However, under capitalism individuals can only exist as non-value - or use-value, following Marx - insofar they are value. Their reproduction only takes place by selling their labour-power, which, in turn, must be *regenerated*. Hence, this process of regeneration – through housework and sex work – must necessarily also be conceived as value generating.

Reflecting on the many mischaracterizations of reproductive work in her book *Social Reproduction* (1992), Antonella Picchio identifies the problems of classical political economy analyses in their confusion between the 'natural cost' of labour, given by social reproduction, and its production cost, given by the wage. These analyses 'reify' the wage (Rioux, 2015) as the real value of labour and by doing so they fall into the trap of commodity fetishism by misguidedly considering labour as any other commodity or production input. One of these mischaracterizations of reproductive work had already been deconstructed by Rohini Hensman (1978; 2011), who, writing on India, noted that reproductive activities should not be theorised as individual consumption, but rather as *productive* consumption, given their role in the making of the essential means of production 'labour-power'.

Also focusing on India, in *The Lacemakers of Narsapur* (1982), Maria Mies illustrates how patriarchal ideologies devalue and cheapen the cost of labour of the women making lace products for global markets from their homes in Narsapur, Andhra Pradesh. These ideologies relegate women to the home and the role of housewives, whilst crafting a sexual division of labour expanding labour-surplus rates. In Mies' analysis, housework is not only a key subsidy to (male) wage labour but also as a dispositive to devalue women's paid labour, ensuring higher rates of exploitation. Becoming a housewife – *housewifisation* – is a complex process entailing both the subordination of women's unpaid labour to male paid labour and the cheapening of women's paid contributions beyond the household. In *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a Global Scale*, Mies maps forms of housewifisation across classes, geographical areas and conditions of freedom/unfreedom, showing that it always involves generating/capturing value. The housewifisation of upper class women in core economies in early capitalism aimed at their exclusion from property ownership. For working class women, housewifisation aimed at subsidizing the male wage by internalizing the social costs of reproduction of factory work. The housewifisation of female slaves and indentured labourers, instead, aimed at containing rising costs of death or sexually

transmitted diseases for slaves and plantation labourers and remained partial and embedded in violence (Reddock, 1994). Gaiutra Bahadur's (2014) gendered account of indenture illustrates the brutal ways in which women were assigned to male indentured labourers in plantations to form 'families'. Colonial labour regimes brutally subordinated living conditions to racial capitalism's needs (O'Laughlin, 2013; Bhattacharyya, 2018).

Finally, concerns of value generation are also central to Silvia Federici's work on witchhunts in Europe, described in *Caliban and the Witch* (2004), but which also draws from earlier work (in Italian) with Fortunati (1984). Here, feminizing the concept of dispossession and primitive accumulation, Federici highlights how accumulation is first and foremost a process of accumulation of differences across working and subaltern classes. As such, it starts from the body, the 'first ever' machine invented by capitalism. The process of witchhunt – like the enclosures – guaranteed large-scale dispossession and the concentration of land and capital in Europe, while colonialism and imperialism precipitated dispossession worldwide. The witch-hunt dispossessed women across the class spectrum of their roles in society and economy. Also for Federici, the housewife is the (violent) product of capitalist development. Housework conceals the value-generation mechanisms of capital's 'social factory', which starts from kitchens and bedrooms. Its role in replenishing labour-power daily and inter-generationally maintains capitalism's key machine; the labouring body, the container of labour power (Federici, 2012). Its devaluation is a subsidy to paid labour, through a process of formal subsumption into capitalist circuits at zero cost (Federici, 2018).

Overall, while Marx-inspired, ESRA analyses also showed the limits of Marx in dealing with the reproduction of labour-power and in placing the source of value only in production. These feminist contributions rejected understandings of capitalism naturalizing and fetishizing housework and wagelessness more broadly, relegating them to the outside of processes of value-generation and deploying labour dichotomies like 'productive/unproductive' and 'paid/unpaid' as synonyms. Within productivist schemas, women's exploitation and contributions to value, and those of many other subaltern groups, cannot but disappear from the start of the analysis. Whilst second wave feminism has been criticised for mainly focusing on gender and not on race, many ESRA analyses, embedded in transnational anti-sexist and anti-racist networks, articulated the relation between women's oppression, colonialism and imperialism and were inspired by anti-racist politics (James, 1975; Bracke, 2013). Indeed, ESRA subversive take on value is compatible with key insights from black feminist analyses. Angela Y. Davis' (1983) analysis in *Women Race and Class* in the United States highlights how black women were both producers in plantations and reproducers of future slaves. Their exploitation exceeded productivist takes on value. More recently, again on compatible lines, also black feminist scholarly work on land, private property and housing highlights the racialised and gendered processes of 'predatory inclusion' at the basis of value generation and appropriation (Taylor, 2019; Bhandar, 2018).

Social reproduction 2.0: neoliberalism and reproductive governance

Debates on social reproduction produced a number of key developments in feminist thinking across disciplines, including the rise of eco-feminism and world ecology (Salleh 1990; Mies and Shiva, 1993; Moore, 2015). In North America by the 1980s feminist scholars were particularly concerned with the 'crisis of care' (Folbre, 1992) instigated by the rise of neoliberalism and conceived it as a broader crisis of the social reproduction of capitalism (Lasslett and Brenner, 1989; Bakker, 2007; Bakker and Silvey, 2008; LeBaron, 2010; Fraser, 2014). In the field of feminist geography, work by Katharyne Mitchell, Sallie Marston and Cindi Katz (in *Antipode*, 2003) has shown how a focus on social reproduction allows for a radical broadening of the concept of labour, turned into 'life's work'. On compatible lines, collapsing distinctions between work and labour, Marxist feminist autonomist Kathi Weeks (2011) has theorised the 'refusal to work', a trope already inspiring Dalla Costa and James and aimed at defetishising wage-centrism (Denning, 2010; Rioux, 2015) by reaffirming the gendered wageless subject as a political subject of struggle.

More recently the social reproduction debate has also been revived in relation to the ambitious agenda to reassess its connection with Marxism, social oppression, and processes of value generation, in an attempt to finally overcome the 'unhappy marriage' of Marxism and Feminism (Hartmann, 1981). The publication of *Social Reproduction Theory* (Bhattacharya, 2017) aims at setting the broad contours of this agenda, with contributions by Nancy Fraser, Susan Ferguson, David McNally, and Cinzia Arruzza, among others. One can identify key tropes within the Social Reproduction Theory (SRT) project. Firstly, SRT engages strongly with the transformations triggered by neoliberalism and its progressive attack, restructuring, and financialisation of social reproduction and life (Fraser, 2017, 2014; Ferguson et al, 2016). Neoliberalism has restructured domestic work via migration (Teeples-Hopkins, 2017); turned childhood into consumption and work (Ferguson, 2017); and reinforced heteronormativity (Sears, 2017). These arguments show continuities with existing feminist work on austerity (Elson, 2010; Seguino, 2010; Perrons and Plomien, 2013); global care chains (Ehrenreich and Hochschild, 2002; Silvey and Parreñas, 2019), and capitalist childhood (Beneria and Sen, 1981; Katz; 2004). Within this line of contribution, Fraser's (2017) sketch of changing regimes of social reproduction shows that feminist analyses can redefine, not simply contribute to, political economy.

Secondly, in its attempt to re-map oppression, the book aims at illustrating the benefits of exploring links between class and social oppression through a Marxian lens. McNally's (2017) critique of intersectionality and Bhattacharya's (2017) call 'not to skip class' explore the co-constitution of class and social oppression based on gender or race, whilst reaffirming the former as the key analytical category to study capitalism. Elsewhere, building on Lisa Vogel's work (1983), Cinzia Arruzza (2016) stress how SRT unveils the relation between capitalism and patriarchy whilst rejecting unhelpful questions of whether class comes before gender (and race) or viceversa, central to feminist materialist dual or triple systems theories. This

emphasis on the co-constitutive relation between gender and social oppression sets a second key contribution of SRT to the literature and another line of connection between SRT and ESRA exploring the articulation between gender oppression, colonialism and imperialism (e.g. James, 1975; Federici, 2004; Mies, 1986).

Where SRT and ESRA part is in their conceptualisation of value and who/what produces it. More aligned with classic Marxism, SRT separates value-producing circuits rooted in commodity production from circuits of social reproduction apt at the creation, replenishment and regeneration of the worker and life in capitalism (when not directly producing commodities). For instance, while Bhattacharya (2017) recognises Marx's silence on the ways in which the worker is reproduced, she proposes to adopt Marx's distinction between use-value and exchange value – a device first deployed by Paul Smith (1978) - to explain the differences between productive and reproductive work and circuits. In this schema, unpaid housework or care-work cannot qualify as value-producing as they merely reproduce the worker - a use-value. Despite the recognition of labour-power as the unique commodity under capitalism, this approach treats its container - the worker - as any other commodity, subject to the use/exchange value dichotomy. The approach may also exclude paid domestic/care services from value generation as (re)generating use-values like children and elderly (e.g. Teeple-Hopkins, 2017).

Ultimately, SRT conceives social reproduction as not producing value, yet enabling its creation. In this conceptualisation, social reproduction seems to coincide with *the institutions and practices* of domestic activities and care, a methodological terrain SRT may share with neoclassical analyses and liberal feminist frameworks, which understand domestic and care work as 'special' activities distinct from labour. As noted by the feminist economist Nancy Folbre (1986: 245), many neoclassical and classical Marxist theories may have 'diametrically opposed theories of the firm, but remarkably similar theories of the household'. SRT does not merely look at households, but at the far more complex architecture of care and domestic work characterising our present. Still, it does so in ways that reproduce the invisibility of unpaid contributions to value, even once these have left the home as primary centre of organization. The separation between 'societal' and 'social' reproduction, originally elaborated by Brenner and Lasslett (1989) - the former entailing the reproduction of capitalist relations, the latter concerned with the reproduction of life outside labour and the institutions involved in the process – is deployed in SRT to exclude social reproduction from value-creation in a tautological way. The adoption of more complex definitions, like those elaborated by feminist geographers, may help avoiding tautologies. For Cindi Katz (2001: 710) for instance,

'Social reproduction is the fleshy, messy, and indeterminate stuff of everyday life. It is also a set of structured practices that unfold in dialectical relation with production, with which it is mutually constitutive and in tension. Social reproduction encompasses daily and long term reproduction, both of the means of production and the labor power to make them work'.

In a similar vein, for Isabella Bakker and Rachel Silvey (2008: 2)

‘Social reproduction refers to both biological reproduction of the species (including its ecological framework) and on-going reproduction of the commodity labour power. In addition social reproduction involves institutions, processes and social relations associated with the creation and maintenance of communities – and upon which, ultimately, all production and exchange rests’.

In these definitions, social reproduction includes the institutions and activities entangled in domestic and care work - the focus of SRT - but also the labour relations and practices central to the reproduction of capitalism overall, as the two are inseparable. Within this more complex schema, solving the problem of the role of social reproduction in processes of value generation is far less simple, and remains an area *to be investigated*, analytically, empirically and spatially (see also Bakker and Gill, 2019). In fact, as argued by Winders and Smith (2018), geography greatly informs distinct ‘imaginaries’ of the relation of production and social reproduction, as the social location of theorising is always imbued with spatial connections. Moreover, feminist geography has also illustrated how the spread of precarious work and livelihoods has blurred distinctions between production and social reproduction in general (Meehan and Strauss, 2015), both subsumed into ‘life’s work’ (Mitchell et al, 2003). Together with ESRA insights, these more complex definitions provide a useful basis to interrogate processes of value generation based on the dynamic entanglement of production and reproduction, leading to more inclusive conceptualisations of value and exploitation.

From the Value Theory of Labour to a Value Theory of Inclusion

While extremely erudite and complex, Paul Smith’s (1978) critique of ESRA can be crudely summarised as follows: domestic work/housework is not value producing as it cannot become social labour. And this is hardly a problem created by Marxian categories or Marxist analyses, but rather it is the essence of capitalism, as capitalism – not Marx - has established the fictitious separation between production and social reproduction (Smith, 1978). However, first, Marx’s enquiry *stopped* at commodity production. This is not quite the same thing as demonstrating that it is all there is. As noted by Sebastian Rioux (2015: 197), Marx relied on a ‘self-reproducing sphere of production’. He conflated the social character of production with that of commodity production, *de facto* confining the reproduction of labour and labour-power to elements lying outside the remit of the labour theory of value. This would simply place Marx *on par* with other classic political economists, whom also set the ‘natural’ cost of labour as exogenous to capitalist production (Picchio, 1991).

This point has two implications. First, as Marx himself relegated some processes as lying outside the remit of the labour theory of value, monumental efforts to expand its remit are unnecessary. These include efforts to apply the distinction use-value/exchange-value to

labour/labour-power. Secondly, one can acknowledge the greatness of Marx in explaining exploitation *within* commodity production – his focus – whilst extending our inquiry beyond it, building on his insights. In particular, in order to account for the experiences of both waged and wageless workers across the history of capitalism, we need to develop what can be called a ‘value theory of inclusion’, whose key features are briefly sketched below.

In a seminal chapter in her collection *Value*, the feminist economist Diane Elson (1979) notes that, in Marx, one finds the development of a value theory of labour, rather than a labour theory of value. With this provocation, Elson means that the objective of Marx was not the sphere of circulation or exchange; he was not trying to develop a theory explaining the formation of natural prices, like Ricardo. Instead, the object of Marx’s theorisation was – as also stressed by E.P. Thompson - labour in its *becoming* a social form at the basis of all value (see also Werner, 2016: 82). Crucially, the distinctions deployed by Marx in relation to labour, such as abstract and concrete labour, or social and private labour, are not to be seen as discrete units of analysis separate from each other but rather as aspects or *potentia* of the same category. Similarly, Elson notes, the distinction between use-value and exchange-value, introduced by Marx directly in the introductory chapter to *Capital Volume One*, dedicated to the commodity, was never meant to imply that use-value does not play any role in exchange. Marx was simply rejecting the idea that commodities may be equated based on use-values, as this would imply they were wanted for their ‘utility’, a concept that will become central to neoclassical economics. A similar point on use-value is raised by Fernando Coronil (2001) to reaffirm the relevance of the physical materiality of production. Moreover, as in the case of the different aspects of the category labour, also the double nature of commodities as use-value and exchange-value is not separable. Hence, attempts to distinguish between exchange-value and use-value producing circuits – in production and reproduction, as operated by Smith - cannot hold. As noted previously, such schemas treat labour as any other commodity and fall into neoclassical representations.

Elson’s insights set the initial basis of a value theory of inclusion, by de-centering the object of an analysis of value away from prices – and wages – and towards the complex features and relations that set labour at the very centre of all value under capitalism. Recently, the COVID-19 pandemic has brutally reaffirmed this truth, as the sudden withdrawal of labour and conflation between productive and reproductive time have triggered an unprecedented dual crisis of production and social reproduction (Stevano et al, 2020). After this process of de-centering, a second feature of a ‘value theory of inclusion’ rests on the recognition of how exploitation can manifest in multiple forms. Value should not be merely linked to wages as exploitation should not be merely linked to wage-labour. As argued by Jairus Banaji (2010), capitalism is not defined by the presence/absence of wage-labour. It is a mode of production based on the extraction of labour-surplus through a variety of ‘forms of exploitation’ of which wage-labour represents one possibility. This point is central, as it allows us to recuperate not only a capitalist history of unpaid women’s contributions, but also a broader capitalist history of the wageless across the colonial and postcolonial world,

where petty commodity production, non-wage and disguised-wage labour, including forms of slave, indentured, unfree and bonded labour are the norm (e.g. Rioux et al, 2020). The recognition of the many forms in which exploitation may take place allows us to illustrate how social oppression, in its distinct racialised and gendered features worldwide and across times, always co-constitutes processes of class formation which, as also stressed by SRT, should increasingly lead any effective class analysis (see Bannerji, 2005).

Finally, a third feature of a value theory of inclusion is the recognition of the interpenetration between production and reproduction in processes of value-generation. This interpenetration is not only due to the fact that domestic, care and sex work reproduces the commodity labour-power, as argued by ESRA. It also manifests itself in dynamic interplays concretely shaping labour surplus and exploitation rates in labour processes with complex spatialities and high rates of precarisation. As illustrated by Sharad Chari in his remarkable ethnography of Tiruppur, India, the value theory of labour can only be historically and culturally grounded (2004: 275), and reproduction is always central to the ways in which work is organised and experienced (Werner, 2016). If the (neoliberal) spread of precarious work has precipitated processes of interpenetration between productive and reproductive work worldwide (Mitchell et al, 2003; Meehan and Strauss, 2015), this process is particularly significant in the Global South, where labour has always been organised in informal relations. By shifting the geographical focus and analytical lens on the Global South and on the labour process, the next section analyses processes of labour informalisation and identifies three channels through which social reproduction contributes to value generation. This completes the theorisation of our 'value theory of inclusion'.

The informalisation of labour and the reproductive mechanisms of value generation

Debates on the informal nature of economic and labour relations in developing regions are extremely rich and by now five decades old. 'Discovered' by development scholars only by the 1970s, they were initially clubbed by the International Labour Organization (ILO) in a residually-defined informal *sector* (Hart, 1973) supposedly reproducing at the margins of 'late' capitalist development. However, informality performed broader structural reproductive functions in postcolonial development, by ensuring the cheapening of labour and commodities *within* and *beyond* waged circuits of formal production. Dominated by petty entrepreneurs, the informal *economy* was inhabited by armies of disguised wagedworkers (Bernstein, 2007) engaged in multiple circulatory movements across urban-rural spaces (e.g. Hart, 2002; Breman, 2013).

Over the last half-century, informal economic activities have further risen, reorganised and converged into a global process of labour informalisation (Breman and Van der Linden, 2014). Today, the majority on this planet labour informally, particularly in the Global South, where informal labour is set at 69 percent of the total workforce: 85.8 percent in Africa, 71.4 percent in Asia and the Pacific, 68.6 percent in the Arab States and 53.8 percent in the

Americas. Worldwide, informal labour is set at 61.2 percent (ILO, 2018). It is increasingly hitting the Global North, entailing processes of multiplication of labour based on social bordering and mobility (Mezzadra and Nielsen, 2010). Informalisation comprises the casualization of factory work; the adoption of social mechanisms of labour control proper of the informal economy, based on feminisations and racialization of workforces across the global assembly line (Mills, 1962; Ong, 1987; Salzinger, 2003; Bair, 2010; Werner, 2016); and the blurring of divides between formal/informal, urban/rural, waged/unwaged. Informal workers are organised in 'classes of labour' (Bernstein, 2007) with different relations to means of production and survival, arguably corresponding to Banaji's varied forms of exploitation.

Within the process of labour informalisation, the relation between productive and reproductive activities and realms with regard to value generation is one of co-constitution. In the absence of state provisions and lack of internalization of social costs by employers, it is impossible to separate productive and reproductive circuits when it comes to value and exploitation. Evidence from political economy of development and feminist geography suggests that daily and inter-generational reproductive realms contribute directly to surplus extraction and exploitation through three channels linked to, respectively, industrial housing arrangements; urban-rural mobility; and processes of formal subsumption of labour. Notably, in identifying these reproductive mechanisms of value generation, the analysis does not aim at dismissing the multiple spatial trajectories of capitalist development characterising the Global South (Hart, 2002). Regions are greatly diverse and dynamically reproduced in relation to complex, spatially and socially changing value hierarchies of production and reproduction (Werner, 2016: 14). Yet, notwithstanding this diversity of productive and reproductive arrangements, this analysis argues that the relation between such arrangements is generative of value and exploitation in (at least) three ways.

The first way in which social reproduction directly contributes to value is through its role in strengthening labour control across realms of daily social reproduction of the workforce. In China, workers' hostels shape the contours of a 'dormitory labour regime', which imposes high degrees of surveillance on the workforce during and after work, escalating labour intensity (Pun and Smith, 2007). This overwhelming commodification of workers' time has caused waves of workers' suicides (Chan, Seldman and Pun, 2013). Different forms of dormitory-based control are spreading, if unevenly, across Asia and Eastern Europe, also as a result of Chinese companies' rising outsourcing practices worldwide (e.g. Cerimele, 2016; Andrejesevic and Sacchetto, 2014; Schling, 2014). However, arguably, labour regimes are always 'dormitory', even when not involving infrastructures like employers- or state-run workers' hostels. Workers' reproductive arrangements are always central to the organisation of industrial processes (Burawoy, 1976). In India, for instance, the processes at work in informal industrial housing conglomerates like Kapashera, are organically linked to the highly casualised industrial employment dominating the Delhi's metropolitan area, and regenerate 'rooted flexibility' (Cowan, 2018). Different housing reproductive solutions are

also strongly connected to the colonial and postcolonial origins of labour regimes. In Kapashera, housing is managed by contractors like in the *Sardar* system (Mezzadri, 2017), and resembles the structure of the colonial plantation lines². By guarantying labour control during and beyond labour time, and manufacturing a workforce compliant with industrial needs, these reproductive arrangements expand exploitation rates, directly contributing to labour surplus extraction and value generation.

The second way in which reproductive realms and activities participate to value generation is through their role in absorbing the externalization of costs for the social reproduction of labour. Across the Global South, circulatory labour movements sustain processes of externalisation of reproductive costs – hence accumulation - since colonial times. In Southern Africa, (black) labour mobility was central to the colonial strategy of cost minimisation. Employers externalised all costs for the regeneration of the labourforce, sent back home once production was over or halted; a strategy whose huge human toll also involved the spread of various diseases and the production ‘of affliction’ (O’Laughlin, 2013). In countries like South Africa, colonial forms of racialised dispossession involving rural-urban mobility have remained central to the condition of reproduction of labour, also mediating the impact of contemporary local socio-spatial trajectories of industrialisation (Hart, 2002). Ethnographies of labour-intensive industrialisation in South East Asia, Latin America and the Caribbeans have also amply illustrated the key role rural-urban reproductive linkages play in labour regimes (e.g. Mills, 1962; Ong, 1987; Monteiro-Bressan and Arcos, 2017; Werner, 2016). In India and China, where we find huge floating populations – estimated at almost 300 and 100 millions respectively (e.g. Shah and Lerche, 2020) – labour circulation also clearly responds to a logic of externalisation of reproductive costs. In China, this is mediated – and some argue economically mitigated – through processes of partial dispossession based on the institutional combination of collective rural land ownership and the *hukou* (household village registration) system that, notwithstanding its transformations, remains a key regulator of labour mobility between rural and urban areas. If Chinese workers’ return to the countryside can be conceived as providing a ‘social wage’ (Hart, 2002), it also works as a subsidy to Chinese capital. In India, partial dispossession is also at work, as many workers are not fully dispossessed of land or means of production. Here, labour circulation is a survival device organised by fleets of labour contractors (Bremner, 2013; Srivastava, 2012; Guerin et al, 2013). The intergenerational reproduction of the industrial workforce is ensured by the ‘informal economies of care’ at work in rural areas (Lerche and Shah, 2020). By providing much needed safety nets, these also ensure the cheapening of labour below its reproduction cost; a process also enabled by patriarchy, racism and casteism (Fernandez, 1997). The degrading of labour escalated by this ‘conjugated oppression’ (Shah et al, 2017) would require the elaboration of a ‘labour theory of stigma’ (John, 2013). If daily reproduction arrangements contribute to value-generation via the expansion of exploitation rates based on their integration with labour processes, intergenerational reproduction realms and spaces – households, families, villages and communities of origin for workers – sustain value generation as they constantly reabsorb, regenerate and sustain labour when

retrenched by capital. By doing so, they provide a subsidy to capital, performing the same role – albeit considerably scaled up - played by housework in ESRA analyses.

The third way in which social reproduction participates to value generation is through processes of formal subsumption of labour incorporating the lower rungs of the informal economy and homework in capitalist circuits *tout court*. Often erroneously conceived as a pre-capitalist residue or ‘exception’ destined to disappear, the homeworker is pivotal to the very functioning of contemporary global supply chains and production circuits, and remains one of the most fascinating, complex and ever-remodernising figures of capitalism. She also plays a subversive role in relation to productivist conceptualisation of value generation and reaffirms the compelling relevance of our value theory of inclusion.

The Subversive Resilience of the Woman Homeworker

The COVID-19 induced Global Lockdown has recently collapsed the separation between paid and unpaid, productive and reproductive labour time and space for a large number of workers worldwide. Overnight, many of us turned into homeworkers. The neoliberal phase has already generated new forms of global ‘householding’, involving varied entangled configurations of production and social reproduction. Some are connected to global domestic and care networks; others linked to migrant precarious labour (Meehan and Strauss, 2015; Bricknell and Avers, 2015; Winders and Smith, 2018) in the rising gig-economy and beyond. COVID-19 has further multiplied novel global and local configurations of homework. In doing so, the pandemic has abruptly unveiled the limitations of linear narratives of capitalism, identifying it with specific forms of work rather than modes of appropriation of value. In effect, even before the COVID-19 crisis unmade these narratives so effectively, the homeworker managed to resist the test of time, particularly across labour-intensive labour regimes. Central to the global development of labour-intensive industries like garment (e.g. Boris, 2004; Toffanin, 2016), homeworkers still dominate across main export hubs (Delaney et al, 2018), including novel production pockets in Europe, like Prato (Lan, 2014; Ceccagno, 2017) or Leicester (Hammer et al, 2015).

If the centrality of homework is rising exponentially in the Global North, in the Global South it has remained a key form of organisation of work and life, particularly, albeit not only, for women. Across the majority world, ‘life’s work’ has always entailed the economic, social and spatial interpenetration of production and social reproduction, well before neoliberalism arrived. The rise of global commodity chains, with their decomposed and decentralised labour regimes, has provided homework with new channels of survival across many sectors, ranging from garment and footwear to electronics or automotive. In global chains, homework – in either its individualised or complex forms involving the whole household - is formally subsumed as a unit of labour (Mezzadri and Lulu, 2018). Production and social reproduction are entirely intertwined; exploitation immersed in life’s rhythms, and value generated in ways entirely entangled with reproductive activities, realms and spaces. First, it

is impossible to separate productive and reproductive activities, or productive and reproductive labour time. The two interpenetrate, shaping the incessant rhythm of women workers' endless working day. Secondly, within a home that is at once unit of production and consumption, domestic and care chores always serve the twofold purpose of reproducing life, daily and intergenerationally, whilst also working as a production credit allowing economic survival. Housework, in such informal settings, could be understood as going through a process of double formal subsumption (Federici, 2018). It is telling that, in household surveys targeting home-based workers, production and consumption costs cannot be separated. In fact, in many contexts this entanglement between production and social reproduction produce exclusion from official statistics, a trend further confirming the socially constructed nature of wage-centric definitions of employment (see Denning, 2010).

In India, where a staggering 88,2 percent of the total workforce is employed informally, homeworking is widespread. Situated on a continuum from self-employed/independent to salaried/dependent forms of work (Srivastava, 2016), whose meaning is greatly disputed (e.g. Basole and Basu, 2011, Kesar, 2019), it involves work performed individually by women at home, household labour and (mostly male) labour performed in home-based like establishments (Raju, 2013). Despite its relevance, homeworking may be greatly under-represented in official estimates. By 2010, the number of home-based workers including both self-employed and homeworkers was set at 88 million. Homeworkers were estimated at 11 million, of whom only 5.5 were women, roughly 30 percent of the total female workforce (Srivastava, 2016). Women's invisibility in official statistics reveals the ideological nature of what is included or excluded from sources of value. Indeed, this invisibility is linked to women's deployment as unpaid family labour in household units (Raju, 2013). However, and more fundamentally, it is socially constructed in statistics systematically excluding all tasks performed by women from employment. Code 92 of India's National Statistical Sample Survey (NSSO) excludes from employment estimates all those engaged in domestic and care unpaid activities. Then, code 93 further excludes all those engaged in unpaid work for the household, like the free collection of water, firewood, cattle feed and any unpaid work related to sewing, weaving, or any other chore resulting in goods or services for 'household use' (Ghosh, 2016; Naidu and Osome, 2016). In India, the relation between domestic work, homework and wagelessness is so tightly intertwined as to erase most of women's contributions from employment (Mazumdar and Neetha, 2011) and from value generation. While some analysts, taking data at face value, argue that India is on an exceptional path to de-feminisation (Abraham, 2013), others more accurately describe women's labour as mediated – and invisibilised - by regimes of 'stratified familialism' (Pariwala and Neetha, 2011). Ultimately, in India, it is the astonishing expansion of the category of housework – including both domestic work and unpaid homework – that excludes women from labour, and from circuits of value-generation.

Writing about Narsapur's lacemakers, Maria Mies (1982) highlighted how housewifisation conceals sources of value both within the household and the global economy. Mies' insights

are still powerful today, to understand the resilience of homework and the key role it plays in processes of value-generation in the world economy. Processes similar to those described by Mies are still at work. In the Bareilly district of Uttar Pradesh, for instance, where garments for global markets are embroidered, millions of Indian workers labour in homes or home-like establishments. The contribution of women is concealed in manifold ways. They are excluded from work in contractors-run micro-units, where wages are higher. They are only counted as helpers in household units. Their labour as individual homeworkers is systematically devalued through discourses constructing them as less skilled (Mezzadri, 2017). Across all the categories of home-based work in contemporary outposts of the global economy, housewifisation continues pushing million women to the margins of value.

If the processes through which social reproduction co-generates value clearly emerge from the analysis of workers' industrial daily arrangements and urban-rural circulatory mobility, the study of homework – and of its formal subsumption within production – reveals the complete interpenetration between production and reproduction, fully revealing the fiction of productivist narratives of value. Across large swathes of the Global South, the woman homeworker epitomises the need for the 'value theory of inclusion' developed here. She experiences some of the most ruthless forms of surplus extraction, including the *tout-court* appropriation of her labour-time at zero cost, a process hiding her exploitation through her exclusion from the wage relation. Her endless labouring can only be captured if we overcome wage-centric conceptualisations of labour; account for many forms of exploitation; and stress the dynamic interpenetration of production and reproduction in processes of extraction of labour-surplus. Across time and phases of capitalism, the woman homeworker continues reminding us of the socially constructed traits of categories like waged/unwaged, paid/unpaid, productive/unproductive, and forces us to investigate, rather than assume, the logics of value generation and exploitation.

Conclusions

Social reproduction analyses have greatly contributed to our understanding of capitalism, and continue doing so also during the current COVID-19 crisis (Stevano et al, 2020). The recent rise of SRT has significantly contributed to our understandings of the political economy of reproduction under neoliberalism and of the relation between class and social oppression from a Marxist perspective. However, SRT productivist take on value risks reproducing the invisibilisation of women, subaltern and wageless groups across past and present histories of capitalism. This limitation is due to SRT vantage point - the contemporary institutions and reorganisations of domestic and care work - and their geographical focus - mainly North America.

Drawing instead from ESRA debates on housework and wagelessness and insights from political economy of development and feminist geography, and focusing on informal labour and the Global South, this article has deconstructed productivist understandings of value

generation and surplus extraction that relegate women and other subaltern groups to circuits of non-value, hence reinforcing dominant capitalist representational narratives. Against such narratives, this analysis has sketched instead the broad contours of a 'value theory of inclusion', premised on the centrality of all labour to value generation. Inspired by earlier work by Diane Elson on the 'value theory of labour', this 'value theory of inclusion' aims at accounting for the different 'forms of exploitation' theorised by Jairus Banaji and stressing the interpenetration of production and reproduction in the extraction of labour-surplus. This interpenetration is mapped concretely, with the identification of three channels through which social reproduction contributes to processes of value generation. These are linked to daily reproductive arrangements; inter-generational reproductive dynamics involving labour circulation; and processes of formal subsumption of labour involving different forms of home-based work. If through the first two channels of contributions to value social reproduction structures exploitation rates and regenerate a systematic subsidy to capital, through the third it is fully subsumed into the capital relation through an amplified, 'double' process of subsumption. The analysis has further illustrated this last point by placing the figure of the woman homemaker under the analytical microscope, making specific reference to India and also reflecting on the statistical processes reinforcing the invisibilisation of women's work there.

The recognition of the value of social reproduction is important analytically, to capture the socio-economic and spatial workings of global capitalism. It is also compelling politically, in order to cultivate a politics of solidarity and overcome productivist positions stressing a hierarchy of exploitation, which may marginalise the experiences of many living at the margins of the wage relation. As argued by Werner et al (2017: 3), feminist interventions cannot stop at the recognition of oppression and difference; they also need to continue challenging, re-appropriating, and redesigning theory, as knowledge production is 'deeply implicated in the social world it seeks to understand'. Across large swathes of the world, the wageless, marginal, informal worker – often a woman or member of a subaltern group – is still fighting a struggle over class (Harriss-White and Gooptu, 2001); namely, a struggle over recognition in their lived experience of exploitation. The development of the 'value theory of inclusion' sketched here can hopefully provide theoretical support to this struggle, by promoting the de-invisibilisation of people's varied trajectories and experiences of subordination under past and present capitalist designs.

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¹ I originally discuss these three ways in Mezzadri (2019).

² The labour contracting system managing indentured labour.