

## **Towards a Feminist Political Economy of Time**

### **Labour Circulation, Social Reproduction & the ‘Afterlife’ of Cheap**

#### **Labour**

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#### **Abstract**

*This article explores ‘time’ as a crucial category of analysis shaping and shaped by the dynamics of exploitation and social reproduction across the global assembly line. Focusing on the Indian garment industry, the article develops a feminist political economy of time stressing the productive and reproductive temporalities of exploitation, which give rise to multiple forms of labour circulation, including early exit from industrial work. Second, the study places this early exit under the microscope, and analyses the ‘afterlife’ available to women workers outside the factory, which often involves a transition back to informal occupations. The narrative draws both on extensive knowledge of India’s garment sweatshops, and on the detailed analysis of twenty life histories of women former factory workers in Bangalore. The investigation of the feminist political economy of time of the global assembly line developed here suggests the presence of a revolving door between industrial and informal work in the lives of the working classes. It disproves linear global industrial development narratives constructing industrial work as ‘better work’ and contributes to feminist IPE debates by illustrating how social reproduction - its rhythms, temporalities, and everyday necessities – concretely co-constitutes the world of work across the global economy.*

#### **1. Introduction**

Feminist analyses of labour across the global assembly line have significantly contributed to our understanding of how contemporary capitalism unfolds (Bair, 2010). They have questioned the ‘underlying economism’ permeating much of the IPE literature (Ling, 2000). They have highlighted the relevance of gender inequalities for the functioning of the global economy (Griffin, 2007), and analysed

the global sphere as a site for the production of gender identity (Elias, 2004). Moreover, a rising number of feminist IPE studies framed around social reproduction have also powerfully engaged with many processes of restructuring of the social institutions and governance of contemporary capitalism and ‘everyday life’ (Bakker, 2007; Steans and Tepe, 2010; Elias and Rai, 2019). In doing so, they have shown how feminist methods are not only relevant to make women ‘visible’ in the study of global processes –already a worthy project, given their invisibility - but how they also contribute far more significantly to the study of the development of global capitalism.

In this article, we aim to contribute to these exciting debates by showing the relevance of a *feminist political economy of time*, informed by debates on social reproduction, for the study of global industrial development and work. We are particularly concerned with notions of time as we believe that many studies of global industrial development, like already mainstream IPE studies, are not only characterised by ‘economism’, but also by stagist, linear notions of progress. This linearity, based on a conspicuous disregard for time as a category of analysis, hampers our understandings of working poverty and, particularly, its gendered character and co-constitution through processes of production and reproduction. Indeed, as argued by Elias and Rai (2019), time *is* a feminist issue. Arguably, the unfolding of the contemporary COVID-19 crisis, with its unprecedented conflation of productive and reproductive times, has further confirmed this truth (Mezzadri, 2020).

Notably, while many global industrial development narratives based on stagism systematically dismiss time as analytical category, they are embedded in *discursive* notions of time. For example, they appeal to the supposed temporariness of some undesirable traits of contemporary industrial work – like the harsh labour conditions many experience in global factories worldwide. However, they hardly discuss ‘how

temporary' this temporariness should be. They represent work in the global assembly line as 'better work' compared to alternatives, say, in the informal economy, and they conceptualise it as a point of arrival in the life of the labouring classes. Instead, studies suggest that informal jobs may in fact provide better working conditions compared to inflexible and depleting factory rhythms (Blattman and Dercon, 2018). And even more importantly for the scope of this article, analyses of the global assembly line show that for the majority of workers the cheap labour model is not temporary. It is all they will ever know during their time in the factory. Many will leave the factory still young, and the factory will only be a transitory moment in their complex working life. Building on these insights, feminist analyses have also illustrated the interplays of gender and disposability (Wright, 2010; Bair, 2010).

Notably, the development of a feminist political economy of time for the global assembly line cannot be circumscribed to the walls of the factory or workshop. It must also take into consideration the rhythms and pace of social reproduction. In fact, the complex temporalities of industrial work are co-determined by productive and reproductive needs. If the temporalities of production impact on the ways in which workers experience the shopfloor, and how they organize their reproductive time both daily and more broadly, by the same token also social reproduction shapes the rhythms of industrial work. This is particularly true in contexts where capital externalises costs of social reproduction to workers, families, communities. Here, the temporalities of social reproduction get inextricably interwoven with the pace of industrial production (Bear, 2015). Thus, while attention should be given to how global processes reconfigure social reproduction (Bakker, 2007; Steans and Tepe, 2010), we should also map how social reproduction is co-constitutive of those processes (see also Stevano, this issue).

This analysis explores how different temporalities of production and social reproduction shape the labouring experience across India's garment industry, and their gendered features. The Indian case unveils the complexities of these temporalities, which may be competing and conflicting but also mutually reinforcing. It shows how they shape distinct forms of labour circulation, including the final exit of workers from the global factory. Insights on circulation build on the work of Jan Breman (2013), while insights on social reproduction and time are inspired by the work of Maria Mies (1982; 1986), Silvia Federici (2004), Bridget O'Laughlin (2013), and Laura Bear (2015, 2016). Both the evidence on labour circulation and the analysis of post-industrial work dynamics debunks modernising industrial development narratives. They show that there is a revolving door between industrial and reproductive realms and industrial and informal work. Labouring classes, and particularly women workers, enter and exit multiple times through this door, due to productive and reproductive pressures until they cross the factory gates one last time.

The evidence on labour circulation presented here relies on extensive knowledge of India's garment industry and its sweatshops, built over years of fieldwork, in line with what Michael Burawoy (1998) has called the extended case method. Evidence on post-industrial work dynamics, instead, is specifically based on twenty life histories of women former garment workers in Bangalore, who provided their own accounts of industrial work and life after they left the garment factory. Life histories crucially contribute to our understanding of everyday labour geographies and highlight their complex social life (Dutta, 2016). This round of fieldwork was conducted in the summer of 2016. The labour NGO Civic Initiatives for Development and Peace (CIVIDEP) and the Garment Labour Union (GLU) facilitated the interviews with women former garment in Bangalore. In fact, one of the authors, in charge of

conducting interviews, was affiliated to CIVIDEP at the time, and engaged in various projects with women workers. The other author engaged with the work of CIVIDEP in previous rounds of research. At times, a local translator, also affiliated with the union, was deployed. While these institutional networks hardly attenuate the considerable gap between the two researchers and ‘the researched’ – given the combined differences in nationality and ethnicity, or caste, class and geographical provenance of the two authors – they at least clearly speak to the attempt by the team to talk to workers through their own representative ‘gateways’, hopefully placing them more at ease in answering questions and share stories – including sensitive ones - over their work and life experiences. Women were either interviewed in homes or in union spaces, based on preference and availability.

Women’s narratives clearly illustrate how labour ‘circulations’ are shaped by productive and reproductive temporalities and pressures based on individual/collective caring responsibilities and debt. Continuous labour circulation turns women into eternal newcomers to the sector, leaving the factory for good without savings, with debt, to find occupations in informal activities like paid domestic or home-based work, unable to move up the employment ladder or turn to profitable self-employment. When it comes to working poverty, gendered processes of exploitation and their link to social reproduction, it is time we talk about time.

## **2. ‘Timeless’ globalisation as a feminist issue**

Back in 1961, writing about Rostow’s *Stages of Economic Growth*, Paul Baran and Eric Hobsbawm defined the framework as a mix of ‘coffee house sociology and political speculation’. At the time, Rostow’s work epitomised the economic model

behind modernisation theory, the grand narrative that invented the process of development as a linear journey written into the history of all countries. The invention of development as both immanent and ‘intentional’ project (Cowen and Shenton, 1996) constructed a ‘teleology of progress’ (Li, 2017: 1248). All countries had to go through key stages to graduate to developed regions and this was only possible via embracing industrialisation. If broadly a western invention, this ahistorical and linear understanding of socio-economic change was also embraced by the government of many developing nations (Preston, 1996).

Despite the poor record of the trickle-down economics modernisation theory preached, its key tenets have survived surprisingly well the test of time. The neoliberal credo also proposed a vision of development based on a stagist view of social change, albeit one rejecting state industrial dirigisme in favour of trade and ‘good governance’. Institutional and developmental states approaches opposing the neoliberal hegemony reasserted the possibilities for modernisation through a return to industrial policy (Chang, 2003). Ultimately, modernising ideas are not linked to a specific framework; they are co-constitutive of the very idea of development (Li 2017) and of many globalisation theories (Kiely, 2000), including contemporary narratives of the Anthropocene (Barca, 2020).

Linearity in studies of global industrial development is a real problem when it comes to addressing issues of labour. It neutralises labour concerns by systematically dismissing them as mere temporary evil. This assumption is at the basis of analyses ‘in praise’ of cheap labour (Cawthorne and Kitching, 2002), which theorise this model as the only viable option for countries engaged in early stages of industrialisation to gain foreign exchange and sustain employment generation. Some of these analyses directly refer to classic models of international trade based on

Ricardo's theory of comparative advantage or their neoclassic *avatar* based on natural endowment theories like the Heckscher-Ohlin model (Schumacher, 2013). The most recent (neo)liberal 'praise' of cheap labour is by Benjamin Powell (2014), who uncompromisingly sees global sweatshops as a way 'out of poverty'. His book came out 10 months after the Rana Plaza disaster killed 1,134 workers in Bangladesh.

Heterodox accounts, instead, challenge the free market-based assumptions behind neoliberal, free market frameworks. For instance, they attack the 'naturalisation' of comparative advantages (Chang, 2007). However, within a framework accounting for state-led development and infant-industry arguments, often advocating for some protectionism, they essentially propose a similar recipe for labour; that is simply supposed to endure harsh working conditions at the initial yet temporary stages of the development cycle. The most 'radical' reinvention of the stagist argument can be attributed to Marxian analyses inspired by the work of Bill Warren, whose main credo can be summarised by economist Joan Robinson's famous remark that 'The misery of being exploited by capitalists is nothing compared to the misery of not being exploited at all'. As argued by Ray Kiely (2005), in some IPE analyses of global production this argument is repackaged into a model of 'poverty through insufficient globalisation'. Finally, even many analyses breaking away from state-centric understandings of industrial development, like studies of global commodity/value chains or production networks (GCCs/GVCs/GPNs), often remain inspired by linear understandings of socio-economic change epitomised by processes of 'industrial upgrading' within the global economy, supposedly allowing countries to move up the value ladder eventually leading to social upgrading (Selwyn, 2013).

Embracing the linearity of industrial modernisation and globalisation, the analyses described above are clearly inspired by a specific image of industrial work, as either

the only work available or the best possible work ‘the poor’ can aspire to in developing settings. None of these assumptions are in fact true. First, the labour-intensive manufacturing jobs provided by many global industries worldwide cannot be conceived as the only jobs available in developing settings. Where welfare provisions are absent unemployment is an unaffordable luxury. Secondly, many studies of global industries, labour or industrial relations have revealed the harshness of contemporary industrial jobs (Taylor and Rioux, 2017; Newsome et al, 2015) deconstructing their reification as ‘good’ or ‘better’ jobs for the working classes.

The feminist literature, in particular, have generated analyses of the global assembly line concerned with processes of labour flexibilisation and/or feminisation (Elson and Pearson 1981; Mies, 1982; 1986; Kabeer, 2000; Elias, 2004; Mazumdar, 2006) and with the complex gendered features of labour control and disposability (Wright, 2006; Siddiqui, 2009; Bair, 2010; Werner, 2014; Krishnan, 2018). All these analyses, directly or indirectly, not only question understandings of work in global industries as ‘better work’; they also show its interplays with patriarchal oppression, the gendered and racialised features of exploitation and of the intensification of work, and the constant regeneration of this work as precarious, poorly paid, and depleting. Women can be located in different echelons of the global assembly line, in either factories or homes. However, their gendered disadvantage and its commodification always mediate and co-constitute their experience of exploitation in *any* space of work. In this sense, what Maria Mies (1982; 1986) defined as *housewifisation* – the devaluation of women’s labour due to their reproductive unpaid and unvalued contribution in the home – works against women inside and outside, within and beyond the walls of the household. It systematically reconstitutes women’s labour, even when paid outside the home, as precarious, secondary, temporary. In regions like

South Asia, this process is mediated by the workings of the ‘familial’ political economy (Palriwala and Neetha, 2011; Krishnan, 2018,) and shifting gendered and racialised regimes of stigma associated with working in factories (Kabeer, 2000; Siddiqui, 2009), which further magnify the gendered devaluation of work.

Hence, feminist studies of the global assembly line already indirectly unsettle the weak premises and hypotheses of linear, stagist accounts of industrial development, based on discursive notions of temporariness that are in effect timeless, static, and not reflecting the complex rhythms characterising industrial work. They illustrates how ‘temporariness’ is intrinsic to the very functioning of the global assembly line, highly gendered and continuously socially reconstructed through pay-gaps and discourses of work turning the factory into a ‘patriarchal enterprise’ (Kabeer, 2000).

Building further on these key insights, the sections below develop *a feminist political economy of time of the global assembly line*, and illustrate the specific, gendered mechanisms shaping time and its experience by workers on the global shopfloor. Unsurprisingly, the analysis shows that capturing the chaotic rhythms of contemporary industrial work as experienced by workers cannot only be circumscribed to the narrow borders of production. It must necessarily also engage with the gendered features and rhythms of social reproduction, and how labouring classes negotiate their life before, within, around, and beyond industrial work.

### **3. The productive & reproductive temporalities of labour circulation**

Time is undoubtedly a fundamental aspect of production. At a very basic level of analysis, commodities must go through a number of stages to be produced. Each of these stages requires a specific time; a deadline must be set and respected for delivery.

Classic political economists recognised the role of labour in shaping this production time. Labour-time was already measure of value for Adam Smith, and became source of value for Ricardo (Alessandrini, 2017). However, it is Karl Marx who revealed how this value was in turn linked to labour exploitation. Time, in Marx, appears as a crucial category of social domination (Postone, 1980), as mediated by the production of commodities. It is ‘both a social relation and a measure of social relations’ (Arruzza, 2015: 38). At a broad level of analysis, time takes the form of multiple distinct but articulated temporalities, crossing the production, circulation and reproduction of capital (Tombazos, 1994, Bensaid, 2002; Tomba, 2012). These are hardly harmonious but rather clashing and conflicting. Arguably, also limiting the analysis to the moment of production, time emerges as socially constructed in multiple ways, giving rise to coexisting temporalities. This is particularly the case if our analysis of time of/in production takes into consideration the vantage point of both capital and labour.

As noted by Marx in Volume I of *Capital* (1961), the basic unit of the commodity cycle, and of the labour process, is the working day. This unit of time naturally sets the maximum length of industrial work within a day; namely the maximum *quantity* of time employers can appropriate daily. Under the (absurd) assumption that workers could toil for 24 hours, the working day would coincide with the natural day. This is never the case; otherwise the worker would be worked to death. However, employers would still do their best to push workers to work as much and hard as they can. When Marx was writing *Capital*, the working-day in England was reduced by law to 10 hours; however employers found ways around the law. In many industries, conditions of work were abysmal, and entailed the systematic depletion and exhaustion of workers’ bodies, including children’s. Non-working time was virtually inexistent. The

abuse of this fictional unit of time represented by the working day perpetrated by employers manifested in a reduction of the natural time of the life-cycle. The life expectancy of the proletariat was extremely short; that of the reserve army of labour and ‘lumpenproletariat’ that kept industrial wages down even shorter. As Marx (1961: 376) noted:

‘Capital asks no questions about the length of life of labour-power. What interest it is purely and simply the maximum of labour-power than can be set in motion in a working day. It attains this objective by shortening the life of labour-power, in the same way as a greedy farmer snatches more produce from the soil by robbing it of its fertility’.

This still rings partially true in 21<sup>st</sup> century Asia. For instance, in the current ‘workshop of the world’, work intensity is so high as to push workers in some industries to suicide (Chan, Selden and Pun, 2020).

For employers, this time of active ‘legal (ab)use’ of workers – the working day - is crucial to ‘crystallise’ workers’ labour-power into commodities. Hence, the value of commodities could also be expressed in time terms, as the labour-time *socially necessary* for the process of production. The more employers can reduce this time, the more production swells in volumes. This happens when labour productivity or intensity increase. While through the lengthening of the working-day employers engage in processes of *absolute* surplus-value extraction, through rises in productivity or intensity of work they promote processes of relative surplus-value extraction (Marx, 1961, chapters 10-12). Also these processes can be formulated in relation to time; not in terms of its quantity anymore, but in terms of its quality, like *velocity, speed or acceleration*. Ultimately, exploitation takes place within distinct time boundaries, and functions in relation to multiple temporalities (Hope, 2016).

While time is crucial for employers, who try to appropriate it to realise production goals, it is also crucial for the worker, the seller of the commodity ‘labour-power’. This is the most *precious* commodity (Federici, 2017; Bhattacharya, 2017), whose peculiar property is that of becoming source of value once consumed (Marx, 1961: 270). While giving up their labour-time by selling it to the employer, the worker must ensure it will be remunerated enough to guarantee the reproduction of the means of subsistence necessary for survival. In this light, as argued by E.P. Thompson (1967), the process of exploitation appears as a struggle over time, or between distinct temporalities *within* the abode of production (Hope, 2016). It is a struggle between the time employers aim to devote to production and the realization of surplus and the time workers need to reproduce their value as labour-power, replenishing their means of subsistence and bodies to continue selling their labour.

Crucially, while this struggle over time appears within the abode of production, it does not only unravel in production. In order to understand the multiple temporalities shaping workers’ exploitation we need to look behind/beyond production and analyse what Leopoldina Fortunati (1981) defined as the ‘arcane of reproduction’ (see also Fraser, 2014). As argued by Silvia Federici (2004) and Maria Mies (1982), capitalism does not start at the factory gates but from *the home*. It is a *social factory*, with its bedroom and kitchen. Within this social factory, the lion share of reproductive, unpaid time is unevenly allocated, as amply demonstrated by feminist economists, who have deployed time-use surveys to illustrate women’s reproductive burden (Esquivel et al, 2008; Hirway and Jose, 2011; Floro and Komatsu, 2011). While often descriptive (Stevano et al, 2018), these studies confirm the need to interpret time as a crucial category of analysis to map the gendered division of labour within and beyond the household, to trace processes of (re)production of life.

In the introduction to a recent edited collection, Tithi Bhattacharya (2017) stresses the relevance of studying social reproduction to address a fundamental question often avoided by political economy: ‘who produces the worker?’ Indeed, an analysis of social reproduction can address this question by engaging with all the necessary activities of care and domestic work carried out within the household and at societal level (Bakker, 2007). However, the study of social reproduction is also crucial to understand the *process of production*, and exploitation itself. While exploitation takes place within the abode of production, its pre-conditions are moulded far before and beyond. Labouring bodies are ‘tagged’ with differential prices before entering the factory gates, based on gender, race, caste, age, mobility, provenance. Their differential *commodification* - before the act of selling their labour - sets the basis for differentials in *exploitation* - within the process of selling their labour. It follows that social reproduction cannot be reduced to definitions either only including care and domestic activities, or their institutions/governance. Its relation to production is dialectical and co-constitutive. As put by Cindi Katz (2001: 711)

‘Indeed, social reproduction is a 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’.

As such, the role of social reproduction in processes of value creation remains a pretty open question for analysis. Moreover, in developing regions – the ‘majority world’, both demographically and in terms of global industrial production – the endemic presence of informal labour challenges rigid dichotomies between the productive and the reproductive when it comes to surplus-value creation and extraction (Mezzadri, 2019). Maria Mies’ superb study of the lacemakers of Narsapur (1982) brings this point home. In Narsapur, as in thousand Indian villages forming the backbone of our

global economy, the home is a factory, and the factory is the home. The two cannot be disentangled.

Looking at the relation between production and reproduction through a feminist political economy of time is a useful exercise to further elucidate this point. As noted by Hannah Schling (2014: 42-43), capital imposes a number of temporalities onto workers, both on the shopfloor and beyond, within the sphere of reproduction. Workers are always disciplined through a 'larger timetable' than that imposed on the assembly line. Moreover, while production reproduces a number of temporalities and imposes them on social reproduction, so does social reproduction. On the one hand, by selling their labour, workers need to dedicate a fixed time of the day to producing for others – or for markets - in order to live. Hence, social reproductive activities tend to club around the boundaries of labouring. On the other hand, at a bare minimum, workers need to sleep, rest, eat and drink in order to function as productive living labour. They need shelter and clothing. Then, reproductive needs are not only centred on the individual; they involve the care of others, collective duties and rituals, familial or communal social obligations and socio-economic activities. Also the rhythms and pace of these needs shape the temporality of production; they may disrupt it, slow it, and/or transform it. This is particularly the case in instances where capital does not internalise the costs of social reproduction - individual and collective – dumping it onto the shoulders of workers themselves (see O'Laughlin, 2013, Mezzadri, 2017). When this is the case or when the time spent labouring does not ensure survival, workers engage in multiple livelihood strategies, which in turn affect industrial times. As summarised by Laura Bear (2015: 642), 'forms of social reproduction within kin-groups, household and community introduce other lifecycle rhythms into the use of capital'. In fact, recent work on the financialisation of social reproduction sketches

novel entangled rhythms and temporalities of production and reproduction also in the management of household debt. Indeed, ‘caring for one’s debts’ (Montgomerie and Tepe-Belfrage, 2017) subtracts time to social reproduction and creates clear temporal traps, whilst also being shaped by the reproductive necessities of economic survival (Karagaac, 2020).

This intertwining of multiple temporalities of labour and social reproduction is evident in descriptions of labour circulation. Evidence from labour surplus economies in developing regions suggests the presence of huge floating populations, drawing a circular motion between rural and urban or peri-urban areas. While this motion can be defined in terms of space, it also insists on a specific *time*. In China and India, two of the countries hosting the largest industrial floating populations – estimates suggest the presence of 277 and 100 million circular migrants respectively (Breman, 2013; Pun et al, 2015; Shah and Lerche, 2020). These migrants often go back home to their villages on a yearly basis, to be reunited with families or look after harvesting activities, as many are not ‘divorced’ from their land, although they cannot live off it. In many cases, this reproductive disruption coincides with the times of the industrial cycle; particularly with off-season rhythms. Trying to determine which of these temporalities shapes the other is a misleading approach. They are co-constitutive, and both shape and set the rhythms of industrial work and its boundaries. As argued by Andrew Herod (2003), specific regional geographies of production are not only drawn by capital, but also by labour (Coe, 2013; Carswell and De Neve, 2013; Ruwanpura, 2016). In fact, an analysis of labour circulation accounting for both production and social reproduction also challenges sharp distinctions between ‘the employed’ and (segments of) the so-called ‘surplus-population’ (Li, 2017). While both these categories are crucial to the functioning of capital, their analytical representation as

separate ‘blocs’ is problematic. Underemployment, endemic to contemporary capitalism, entails a constant movement between the two.

Crucially, the rhythmic motion of circulation does not only have a yearly repetitive pace. It also has a strong speeding ‘spin’ linked to the precariousness of daily industrial life under neoliberal capitalism. In many cases, workers enter and exit factories and workshops quickly and, without returning to villages, they continue circulating across industrial units. Also this ‘industrial circulation’ (Mezzadri, 2017) is co-shaped by temporalities of production and reproduction. Certainly, many employers reduce employment time to further eschew responsibilities towards the labourforce. However, workers may need to often exit and re-join industrial work to engage with reproductive needs, crises and duties and deal with financial and debt obligations. Whilst shaped by interplays between production and social reproduction, the temporalities of processes of circulation are always influenced by gender. They dictate different type of working and life rhythms for men and women workers on the global assembly line, who respond to distinct time demands.

Gender affects the temporalities of industrial work and of social reproduction not only in relation to yearly, circular and industrial circulation, but also in respect to the final exit from the world of industrial work. This final exit shapes yet a third type of circulation; a ‘life-cycle’ circulation signalling the end of workers’ industrial experience. The study of this third type of circulation and of post-industrial work dynamics is crucial to disprove linear notions of industrial development. It challenges rigid distinctions between industrial and informal work, and the reification of industrial work as a point of arrival in labouring classes’ lives. For women, this exit is often the final act in a string of countless ‘reproductive crises’, which they must internalise, socialise, resolve.

The following sections apply the theoretical reflections developed so far to the case of the Indian export-oriented garment industry. They analyse the complex temporalities of production and reproduction shaping the rhythms of garment work; illustrate their relation to distinct forms of labour circulation, and discuss their gendered nature. Moreover, they reflect on how these complex temporalities are experienced and recalled by garment workers themselves, particularly those who have finally exited factories and now face the challenges of life post-industrial work.

#### **4. Time & the Sweatshop in India: labour circulation, social reproduction**

There is hardly a better industry to test the analytical reflections developed so far than the Indian export-oriented garment industry. Garment production occupies a special place in linear, modernising histories of global industrial development. This is even truer for India, due to its status as ‘labour-surplus’ economy and the special role narratives of employment generation play in the Subcontinent. Indeed, the political economy of time in the sector is complex and constitutive of multiple patterns of exploitation linking productive and reproductive spheres and temporalities.

Traditionally, the garment industry have always been considered by models of industrial development – either centred on the state or trade, or chains/networks – as the first port of entry of developing countries into the industrialization ladder. Even recent accounts depicting global garment production as the site of ‘modern slavery’ do not necessarily change substantially stagist and linear visions of the garment industry as a window into future economic progress. They simply ‘exceptionalize’ labour abuse as something lying outside the ‘normal’ pace of the otherwise benign capitalist progress (LeBaron and Ayers, 2013).

In India, sweatshop scandals have been numerous, and during the years involved the naming and shaming of many renown international buyers (Chamberlain, 2010). The country's sad primacy in precarious labour is hardly an anti-sweatshop recipe. Over 90 percent of India's labour is informal or informalised, and comprises varied combinations of casual work and highly impoverished self-employment (NCEUS, 2007; ILO, 2018), including multiple forms of home-based work (Raju, 2013). Much of this labour is managed by labour contractors (Srivastava, 2016). India's informality gets systematically reproduced by the garment industry and projected onto global markets. It is manufactured into a complex *Sweatshop Regime* managed by multiple poverty 'lords' and comprising factories, workshops, micro-enterprises, and even entire villages where armies of home-based labourers work on ancillary tasks (Mezzadri, 2017). Despite its poor record on labour standards, the industry has always found its legitimacy in its labour-intensity. Employment generation is still used by the Apparel Export Promotion Council (AEPC) as a weapon against potential pro-labour government regulations, like rises in minimum wages (The Economic Times, 2017).

Across India's sweatshops, the political economy of time is greatly complex. Specific temporalities are imposed onto workers by the fast fashion model. This model, which increasingly governs the whole sector, has massively compressed production time and exponentially multiplied changes in clothing styles on the assembly-line. Garment workers need to quickly produce garments whose features change continuously, hence holding back timesaving economies of scale based on 'learning by doing'. In India, the accelerated times imposed by this model are further exacerbated by buyers' strategies (Anner, 2019). Suppliers report that buyers pitch them against each other based on time-delivery and only honour obligations towards fastest producers. This time-based cutthroat strategy is replicated down the chain, imposed by suppliers onto

subcontractors and vendors. In turn, workers are ‘governed’ on the shopfloor through time-based targets, which escalate labour intensity and often push ‘idle time’ outside the remit of the wage.

Admittedly, the features of India’s sweatshops vary massively across the Subcontinent, particularly based on different physical materialities of production. Simply put, different areas in India produce different garments through the deployment of distinct labouring classes (Mezzadri and Fan, 2018). The north and east specialise in garments for niche markets. Here the labour process is more fragmented. Work is generally performed by male migrant workers circulating across factories and workshops and by complex combinations of male and female (and, often, child) home-based peripheral labour either located at the periphery of industrial areas, or in peri-urban and rural outposts, like Bareilly (Unni and Scaria, 2009; Mezzadri, 2017). The south of the subcontinent specialises in the mass production of basic garments. Here the labour process is less complex, and more standardised, although there are stark differences between the urban export-oriented areas around Bangalore and Chennai, and Tiruppur’s small town, cluster-based industrial development (Carswell and De Neve, 2013). However, generally, the south is characterised by a significantly feminised factory population (Kumar, 2014; Jenkins 2013). While originally this population was mainly made of commuters or migrants from nearby districts, in the last decade a steady inflow of young female migrants circulating from northern and eastern India or the hinterland of Tamil Nadu, has found its way into factories (Jenkins, 2016). Exploitation in the industry is the outcome of competing, conflicting, reinforcing temporalities.

The distinct forms of labour circulation emerging across regional differences are the result of these varied temporalities, shaped by both productive and reproductive

pressures and greatly gendered. The first type of labour circulation involves the yearly circulation of male migrant workers from rural areas to urban industrial areas, where they take on garment work in factories, workshops and micro-units. Until the end of the multi-fibre agreement in 2005, this type of labour circulation was endemic to north industrial areas - Delhi, Jaipur, and Ludhiana - producing garments for niche markets, like embellished ladieswear or woollen products. In the last decade, while still relevant, this type of circulation has shrunk due to reductions in industrial seasonality and lean season. A survey carried out in 2013 indicates that this type of labour circulation is set at 30% of the garment workforce in factories and larger workshops (Mezzadri and Srivastava, 2015).

Male migrants circulating yearly do so as a result of both productive and reproductive pressure. Many migrate to repay local debts, as wage rates are higher in urban industrial hubs than the peri-urban and rural areas they are from. Employers benefit from keeping this floating population temporary, and subject to a yearly deadline. The presence of these circulatory migrant workers in factories is guaranteed and managed by labour contractors who often have linkages to workers' place of origin. These contractors manage both recruitment and dismissals. At times, workers are indebted to them, after receiving advance payments (Mezzadri, 2017). The capital-led temporality of this form of circulation has clear reproductive aspects. As temporary guests in urban areas, migrants are often greatly dependent on contractors to find a place to stay. In micro-units and/or in units engaged in ancillary tasks like embroidery, workers simply sleep in the workshop. In this case, the line dividing productive and reproductive time is completely blurred. On the other hand, all yearly circulatory migrants, also those working in factories or larger workshops, aim at maximising their cash inflow from industrial work each year. They will systematically send remittances

home (Mezzadri and Srivastava, 2015). From their own perspective as migrant workers, the temporality of circulation is functional to the broader needs of their households back home, and their frugal daily reproductive strategies in urban industrial hamlets also aim at maximising yearly income from industrial work. Evidence from Bareilly - a key sweatshop outpost for hand-embroidery and important migrants-exporting hub - suggests that family members left behind in villages may either work the land for subsistence or engage in non-farm employment often also loosely connected to garment activities. The masculine traits of the migrant labourforce is paralleled by the feminisation of those left behind, generally women, children and the elderly (Mezzadri, 2016).

Often, these yearly migratory flows are organised as ‘moving’ neighbourhoods or villages, with labour gangs from the same peri-urban/rural enclaves moving in blocs to the city and back. This type of labour circulation, combined with various forms of commuting, is also common to Tiruppur. Also here, it is shaped by productive and reproductive temporalities and needs. If employers-led strategies benefit from the reservoir of flexibility it creates, workers deploy this temporary engagement with industrial work to complement rural incomes (Carswell and De Neve, 2013).

The second type of labour circulation at work in the *Sweatshop Regime* is ‘industrial circulation’. This has become more widespread than yearly circulation in north India’s garment industrial areas in the last decade. It is also significant in southern garment-making areas like Chennai and Bangalore, despite the apparent higher presence of regular employment. Here, however, its temporal rhythms may differ from those observed in northern areas. This is because gender differences in the composition of labour impact considerably interplays between productive and reproductive temporalities of work and how these shape exploitation. In the north, one

observes high degrees of casualisation of labour across factories, workshops and micro-enterprises. The same 2013 garment workers survey setting circular migration at around 30% of the total workforce, also suggests the endemic presence of short-term ‘contracts’. It reveals that over 60 percent of the workforce is employed for less than one year in the same industrial unit. This suggests that the temporality of circulation remains based on short employment spells. However, this may manifest in workers returning home on a yearly basis, or simply getting by in the industrial area to find new jobs. In Delhi, this constant, spinning movement in and out of industrial units may be the outcome of capital-led strategies or labour coping mechanisms. Employers may move workers around their units continuously, to minimise wages and production costs. Even larger units technically paying social contributions may engage in this strategy. The lack of portability of social contributions guarantees that the starting time to mature entitlements will endlessly be reset (Mezzadri and Srivastava, 2015).

From the employers’ perspective, industrial circulation is a great device, as it keeps the workforce circulatory while reproducing a reserve army that is always relatively nearby, a key requirement for an industry moving out of seasonality. From the workers’ point of view, this flexible and short-term temporality of labour is not necessarily a big issue. An analysis of urban wages in the sector reveals that, quite surprisingly, there are no huge discrepancies between wages in large units and across informal workshop segments. Only women individual homeworkers or workers located in the peri-urban and rural echelons of the industry – those more prone to migrate to increase their wages and/or repay debts – may earn significantly less than other sectoral ‘classes of labour’ (Mezzadri and Fan, 2018). This being the case, workers do not oppose industrial circulation; it may even enable them to cope with

the reproductive crises they encounter. Daily reproduction in industrial hamlets – often filthy, unhealthy and unsafe, often managed by slumlords connected to factories and workshops - is a harsh and violent business (Cowan, 2020), and workers may need some time out of work to take a break from it all.

In the south of India the rhythms and pace of industrial circulation is partially hidden by the higher level of regularization of the workforce. Here, due to the type of product specialization, seasonality has never been high, and employers have always opted for a more regular labourforce mostly employed in factories, rather than scattered across units of variable size and typologies. The workforce is feminised since the 1980s, although feminization went through multiple different qualitative phases in a progressive quest to find ever more ‘disposable’ women workers (Mezzadri, 2016). In Bangalore, today, the industry mainly employs very young women workers. The majority either commutes from nearby areas, or settles in the city from other districts in Karnataka. However, a considerable percentage now also migrates from rural northern and eastern India particularly through the help of recruitment companies or contractors. A documentary screened by the BBC in 2016 illustrates this new movement of young women from north to south, unveiling their hopes and dreams in getting an industrial job. Many of these dreams will be shattered as they are faced with the harsh reality of garment work and with the asphyxiating conditions of daily social reproduction in the new female hostels emerging around southern industrial areas. According to activists, the strict control imposed on these young women in hostels outside hours of work borders bonded labour. This would place India on a similar industrial trajectory to China’s, where the ‘dormitory labour regime’ is an industrial reality for over a decade (Pun, 2007).

Interviews with former women workers in Bangalore reveal that here ‘industrial circulation’ is greatly shaped by reproductive crises, and by the role women play as carers, unpaid domestic workers within their own extended family, and as ‘absorbers’ of external reproductive shocks. Their permanence in the industry, generally based on a jigsaw of short employment spells, is primarily determined by the competing and conflicting temporalities of social reproduction, and places downward pressures on wages. Reproduction crises are often linked to the precariousness of employment and further exacerbate it, in a vicious spiral.

The third, and final type of labour circulation is given by the final exit from the world of industrial work; the ‘march out’ of the sweatshop. This final act is often not accounted for, as lying outside workers’ industrial experience. However, many of the features of this ‘life-cycle’ based circulation are crucial to debunk the mythology of industrial jobs as being a point of arrival in informalised working classes’ lives. The majority of the workers, instead, toil in the sweatshop only for a limited period of time. By the age of 35-40, they leave this type of work for good. In some cases, employers impose this temporality of exit, as they want new, younger recruits on the shopfloor. In other cases, however, workers simply decide their labour time is up, on the basis of exhaustion or body depletion, or due to broader family reproductive needs. Beyond a certain age, many workers are unable to cope with the extenuating rhythms and the unforgiving time-demands of the garment industry; on their bodies, during work; on their life, due to long-working hours; on their families, due to the weight of reproductive responsibilities. This is the case across India’s *Sweatshop Regime* (Mezzadri, 2017). In the last section of this paper, the article further reflects on this last type of labour circulation and engages with workers’ own narratives of their time in industrial work and post-industrial work dynamics.

## 5. Industrial time, reproductive time and the ‘Afterlife’ of cheap labour

The feminist political economy of time developed above has illustrated the multiple productive and reproductive temporalities shaping exploitation in the sweatshop, as epitomised by distinct – and gendered - forms of labour circulation. An analysis of what workers do when they leave the sweatshop is also crucial. It addresses key questions over the ‘afterlife’ the garment industry grants to its former labourers and, once again, its gendered traits. Moreover, the analysis of post-industrial work livelihoods further develops the theoretical project of a feminist political economy of time of the global assembly line attentive to and able to capture both structural processes as well as everyday experiences. By combining the analysis of how productive and reproductive temporalities shape the labour process and co-constitute labour circulation with an analysis of how circulation is recalled and experienced concretely by labouring subjects, we can illustrate both the *ways in which time is constructed and experienced* across the productive/reproductive divide.

The analysis of twenty life histories collected in and around Bangalore provides valuable insights on post-industrial work dynamics, as experienced by a cohort of women former workers in garment factories. Three tropes emerging from women former workers’ narratives are particularly relevant: namely, the lack of savings and the accumulation of debt during the time spent in industrial work; the type of work available to women after they left the garment factory; and women’s own description of the distinct time-demands – again, in terms of interplays of productive and reproductive temporalities - experienced in different occupations.

The average age of the group of women interviewed was 40. They left the industry at different points in their life; roughly between the age of 30 and 40. Respondents came from Bangalore and other districts in Karnataka, like Chamrajnagar, Mandya,

Mysore, or Yeddyur. One respondent's family originally came from the Tiruvannamalai district in Tamil Nadu. All respondents continued living in and around Bangalore after leaving factories. In terms of social profile, all women except one were Hindus (one respondent was Christian), and belonged to either 'General' or 'Other Backward Castes' (GCs; OBCs). As already in the industrial areas in and around Delhi, there are no specific castes garment workers seem to belong to. Rather, one may say they come from the many 'caste of poverty' hidden within the huge general/backwards caste bloc in India.<sup>1</sup>

Recalling childhood and early life, the majority of women indicated farming or related activities as the main source of income of their family of origin. A few recalled their parents engaging in various informal sector work. Given their age, most women were married (except for one) or had been married, and the majority had children. In many cases, their children had already grown up and were either finishing school or worked in different occupations. The majority of women had to raise their children during their time in factory work, either combining labour and care work, or decentralising care activities to family members, at times in the village. Arrangements over the caring of young children, whichever they were, involved the unpaid work of the female section of the household or community (see also Arslan, 2019).

All women had stories of incredible hardship to share; a childhood spent in poverty, and years of struggle after moving to the big city. Some stories included reference to terrible episodes of physical violence. In their narratives, considerable emphasis is given to negative experiences of marriage. Many respondents merely recall marriage as a burden to carry, involving absent husbands deserting caring, financial or moral

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<sup>1</sup> Muslim workers are over-represented in northern India and in embroidery, which now is also performed by Dalit workers in some locations (Mezzadri and Fan, 2018).

responsibilities. Many stories collected depict husbands as enduring long spells of unemployment; spending money drinking; abandoning their families; or engaging in physical violence and abuse. Only few respondents were still married to husbands who contributed to the socio-economic reproduction of the household. Obviously, they endured less hardship.

A striking common line to all narratives women shared is the constant presence of financial debt in their life. Notably, debt is a far less central trope in analyses of factory work than informal economic activities. In India, numerous accounts of working poverty focus on the indebtedness of informal workers and illustrate their links to old forms of labour bondage or ‘neobondage’ (Breman, 2013; Guerin et al, 2013). Undoubtedly, relations of neobondage based on advanced payments and debt towards labour contractors are endemic to the functioning of the lowest rungs of the garment industry in northern India (Mezzadri, 2017).

Within the upper rungs, in factories and larger workshops, instead, neobondage practices are generally discussed in relation to payment retention and the lack of physical freedom garment workers may endure in dormitories. These two issues are greatly gendered. The infamous Sumangali scheme, widespread in Tamil Nadu, is a case in point. Within this scheme, young women are recruited from rural areas thanks to the promise of a lump sum payment at the end of a work period. During this period their salaries are minimal, but the final lump sum is appealing to the many who aim to accumulate for their dowry. However, often this final payment does not materialise. Rapacious employers and contractors exploit these young women for years, before sending them home to be replaced with a new batch to cheat (Rahul, 2017).

However, debt also structures the working lives of female garment factory workers far more systemically, based on the inner functioning of the temporalities of the

shopfloor. First, as garment wages are not sufficient for the broader reproduction of workers' families during times of hardship, women continuously access their Provident Fund (PF) contributions, effectively used as a sort of bank deposit (Mezzadri, 2017). This also explains the reasons why the 2016 government attempt to deny access to PF until retirement triggered an immediate wave of labour unrest and mobilisation (Yadav, 2016). Secondly, a number of novel managerial practices on the shopfloor seem to have further internalised debt as a key time-based functioning mechanism of labour discipline. Jean Jenkins and Paul Blyton's (2017) study of the 'comp-off' system in Bangalore factories supports this last observation. Similar to a system known as 'working dead horse' in Britain, this system registers the hours of time workers owe the factory against payments. Within this system, time is turned into 'workplace currency'; a debt that unlike advanced payments is 'managerially constructed' and owed to the factory, which becomes a 'time-bank' (Jenkins and Paul Blyton, 2017: 91). In this case, exploitation is not only shaped by the time already spent on the assembly line; it is also further reinforced by the commitment of future labour-time. Notably, the temporalities of production and reproduction PF access strategies and 'comp-off' practices entail are competing and conflicting. While comp-off practices push workers to renew their time in the factory, arguably as a proper form of neobondage, the need to access PF contributions push workers towards industrial circulation. Final outcomes depend on the reproductive needs of workers at given periods of time. In any case, via these measures, debt always remains a constant in garment workers' lives.

Only three of the respondents did not report leaving the industry with debt. One is the only unmarried woman in the group. The other two avoided debt thanks to the wages of other household members. All the others left with an average debt level ranging

from 50,000-500,000 INR (1,100- 5,550 GBP circa). None of the respondents reported leaving the industry with significant savings. In Mangala's case, the debt she had by the time she left the industry was merely linked to routine reproductive needs:

'I had debt, which was taken for my children's education, and even to take care of some basic monthly household expense'.

In other cases, debt was linked to medical expenses, extended family loans, or village-related necessities. These trends, and the relatively young age in which women garment workers leave the industry, disprove representations of garment work as taxing industrial work that is only 'temporary evil'. It is only temporary in the lives of garment workers. It does not allow workers to escape debt traps similar to those observed in the informal economy. It does not allow them to save either, so that their early exit cannot be compensated by the possibility of starting off small businesses. This differs from the Sri Lankan case, where Hewamanne (2017; 2019) shows how women former garment workers invest savings to become local micro-entrepreneurs.

The issue of exit leads us to the second important trope emerging from women's narratives; namely why women exit and what they do after they leave factories. Overall, half of the respondents agreed they were expelled from the factories for various reasons, while the other half argued they left of their own volition due to the incompatibility of work with social reproductive needs. As already argued above, also exit, as the final act of labour circulation, is the outcome of productive and reproductive temporalities. Specifically, the women interviewed report different reasons to leave garment work. Some stopped working after factories closed down. Others stopped following spats with managers or supervisors. Labour discipline on the shopfloor was recalled by every respondent as asphyxiating and leading to high levels of stress, due to the imposition of high targets. Those connected with union

activities, mostly engaged with GLU, were made to leave. At first, employers would move them to separate ‘union sections’, where militant workers were marginalised from core work on assembly lines so that they would not unionise others. Then, by either imposing unreasonable targets or findings supposed flaws in their work employers would dismiss these workers altogether. Several women instead quit the factories due to a number of reproductive crises/needs. One quit to organise her sister’s wedding; others to look after elder relatives, or due to chronic health issues, related to long sitting hours, posture and mental stress at work. In fact, all recall garment work as greatly depleting for the body and mind. Many still feel they suffer the long-term effects of harsh labour intensity.

Moreover, women’s narratives indicate the tight inter-linkages between the temporalities of industrial and lifecycle labour circulation. All women interviewed experienced multiple exits from the industry, until the very last one. Even those working for the same factories or companies for many years experienced ‘break in service’ several times. These were either imposed by employers or decided by workers. In the latter case, it always corresponded to periods when women’s labour was needed within the household for collective reproductive purposes, like bearing or raising children, looking after the elderly, or dealing with family reproductive duties. These exits always entailed access to PF contributions to pay off debt, so that in terms of contributions and entitlements, women always re-joined the industry as eternal newcomers; their industrial clock-time reset, again and again. Rukhmini recalls:

‘The reason I quit [the factory] was that in the village my father in law was not keeping well. So I quit the job and went to the village to take care of him. After 3 months I came back and re-joined the factory.... it was a new appointment’.

This uneven temporality speaks more broadly about women employment in India; considered secondary employment to be withdrawn based on reproductive needs and seconded to 'household use'. This also explains the systematic invisibilisation of women's labour in statistics (Ghosh, 2016; Naidu and Osome, 2016).

After leaving Bangalore's garment factories, quite a few of the women interviewed took up domestic work, in private households, apartment blocs or offices. Others started stitching at home, or engaged in informal labour, in some cases connected to what they or their family members did before women joined the factory. Women's narratives indicate a great continuity between their industrial past and their informal present. While roughly half the women interviewed reported to be earning less than in the garment industry, quite a few reported earning more. All reported working less now than in garment factories. When asked about time-management during their period of industrial work, women discussed their never-ending working day, and the clubbing of reproductive chores in the early hours of the morning before leaving for their long stint on the shopfloor. This is also because for women, the factory time-span coincided with their biologically reproductive one, and many raised children whilst employed as garment workers. Due to productive and reproductive responsibilities combined, women recall their working day as starting at 5.00am and ending by 11.00pm or midnight. In the words of Suma:

'When I was working in the garment industry I was supposed to be there at the factory by 9.00am so I would wake up at 5.30am and finish all my household chores before I leave home. But now I only have to cook in the morning before I leave, and once I get back from work I complete the rest of my household chores like washing the vessels and cleaning'.

Those housed by relatives in Bangalore had to also do domestic work for the hosting household as a way of repaying hospitality. These women moved out as soon as they could, preferring frugal arrangements to exploitative familial terms of lodging.

Overall, women seemed to recall their period working in garment factories as characterized by higher degrees of ‘time poverty’ than their present informal occupations. For half of the respondents there seemed to be trade-offs between time-poverty and income-poverty, in line with early observations by Vickery (1977) and more recent work on India by Hirway and Jose (2011) and Ghosh (2016). For the other half, however, the two seemed to reinforce each other during the period of factory employment. For most, the main regret of leaving the factory had to do with lost friendships and the comradeship that came with sharing a place in front of a stitching machine with other co-workers. While leaving the factory they seemed to have regained some degree of control over reproductive time, this came at a dear price of losing this experience of collective labour. Based on women’s life histories, factory work did not emerge as a point of arrival, nor as the best job they could aspire to. It was not a long-term way out of working poverty. It was a moment in their lives when they were young and coping with the taxing rhythms of the factory could guarantee few years of more predictable income. Ultimately, factory labour always emerged as temporary in women’s accounts. However, this was a fairly distinct ‘temporariness’ than that depicted by modernising narratives of industrial work.

## **5. Conclusions**

Combining Marxian and feminist insights, this article has developed a feminist political economy of time of the global assembly line to explore both the complex

structural ways in which time shapes the pace and rhythms of industrial work and it is embedded in everyday, gendered experiences of exploitation. The adoption of this approach illustrates how social reproduction is central to the workings of global industrial development. It deconstructs linear, stagist narrative of global industrial development still strongly influenced by modernisation theory and productivism, and it contributes to IPE debates in a number of ways.

First, in open dialogue with other contributions published in RIPE (e.g. Stearns and Tepe, 2010; LeBaron, 2010), it reaffirms the relevance of social reproduction as a key interpretative and methodological lens to study and gender the workings of contemporary capitalism. This lens can contribute tremendously to both our understanding of the institutions and governance of capitalism (Bakker, 2007; Fraser, 2014; Bhattacharya, 2017) and of processes of exploitation shaped and regenerated within and beyond production (Fortunati, 1981; Mies, 1986; Federici, 2004). The present contribution is clearly aligned with the latter aspect of this worthy feminist agenda. In particular, whilst showing the ways in which contemporary capitalism restructures social reproduction in the world of work, this analysis also suggests that social reproduction - its necessities, rhythms and temporalities - should be seen as co-constitutive of many of the global processes IPE analysis focuses on. Secondly, the feminist political of time developed here also reasserts how the study of the everyday – as epitomised by social reproduction - contributes to our understanding of global and transnational phenomena (Elias and Rai, 2019). In short, the lens of social reproduction emerges here as a key theoretical and methodological trope unveiling the gendered workings of global capitalism at a structural level, whilst also illustrating some of its grounded experiences.

Exploring the case of India's garment industry, the article shows the ways in which multiple productive and reproductive temporalities co-constitute industrial rhythms across the global assembly line, setting the pace of industrial development. These temporalities shape distinct forms of labour circulation that always regenerate the Indian garment workforce as mobile, precarious, vulnerable and transient, and the labour experience as temporary, exhausting and depleting. All distinct forms of circulation – yearly, industrial and life-cycle based circulations – can only be understood as given by the interplays between productive and reproductive temporalities, in contexts where both employers and the state decentralise all costs for the regeneration of the labourforce to workers, families and communities (Mezzadri, 2019). Whilst reproductive pressures co-constitute processes of labour circulation for all workers, they impact upon men and women differently. Women's labour is unsurprisingly more often withdrawn from the shopfloor and returned to it when reproductive activities, duties and responsibilities are fulfilled. Hence, women remain eternal newcomers to the global assembly line and their condition of 'disposability' is continuously remanufactured, until their final exit from factory gates.

Complementing the development of this feminist political economy of time exploring labour circulation, the gendered analysis study of the 'afterlife' of cheap labour illustrates how productive and reproductive time is concretely experienced by women within and beyond their time of employment in factories. Women's narratives reveal how debt structures their lives and choices across the entire time period spent in factories; how it shapes exploitation and control over their labour; and how it sets the limits to their post-industrial future. They also reveal the presence of a revolving door between industrial and informal work, which women return to upon leaving the factory. Through women's stories, industrial work appears as one temporary moment

in their working life trajectory. Overall, through the lens of social reproduction and its influence on the structures and everyday experience of labouring processes, the global process of industrial development appears in all its complicated, precarious, gendered, and tangled aspects, characterised by porous and ensnarled social perimeters; hardly the linear phenomenon described by modernising development and globalisation accounts, and hardly a point of arrival in the lives of the labouring class.

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