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# Feminist global political economies of work and social reproduction

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## ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic has confirmed the relevance of social reproduction as a key analytical lens to interrogate contemporary capitalist processes. Building on insights from distinct theoretical traditions, in this introductory contribution to the special issue in *Feminist Global Political Economies of Work* we propose social reproduction as a prism to examine labour and work in the Global South from a feminist standpoint. We develop a social reproduction-centred methodology to the study of labour processes and relations, based on combined insights from Feminist IPE (FIPE), Feminist Economics (FE), and Feminist Political Economy of Development (FPED). Insights from these three disciplinary frontiers of feminist work are well-equipped to analyse the complexities of labouring in the Global South and how reproductive dynamics co-constitute the 'everyday' in the global economy in manifold ways. These include relations with the state and ('crisis' of) care provisions; the blending of productive and reproductive temporalities of work across labour processes; the continuum of paid/unpaid work within and beyond the household; and novel global processes of commodification of life and the everyday. In setting the contours of this ambitious agenda, we reflect on the complexity of feminist research methods; on positionality and ethics.

## KEYWORDS

Global political economy; social reproduction; work; feminist IPE; everyday; gender; Global South

## Introduction

The unravelling of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 has forcefully remarked the relevance of social reproduction as a key analytical lens through which we can interrogate and analyse contemporary capitalist processes, their features, outcomes and crises (Mezzadri, 2020a; Prugl, 2020; Rao, 2021; Stevano et al., 2021). It is becoming a compelling prism in IPE studies, providing a fruitful avenue to gender the discipline whilst producing novel theoretical insights. Whilst many of the articles in this special issue were written prior to the COVID-19 crisis, and do not

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deal directly with the specific experiences over the past year, they develop important conceptual and methodological tools that can be deployed in the analysis of the complex entanglements of global capitalism and social reproduction, also to explain the current pandemic. Indeed, in a recent article published in *Feminist Economics*, a number of authors from this special issue deployed a feminist social reproduction approach to reveal the COVID-19 crisis as a complex gendered crisis of work, unravelling across multiple domains and realms (Stevano et al., 2021). On the other hand, the crisis of social reproduction unleashed by the pandemic should hardly be seen as a exogenous shock; it is far better understood as the culmination of the long-term attack waged against ‘forces of social reproduction’ across our planet (Barca, 2020). For instance, the lethal impact of the pandemic has been amplified by the systematic erosion of healthcare budgets since the 1980s (Gianella et al., 2020). By the same token, the rampant processes of labour informalisation sustained throughout the neoliberal period have neutralised many states’ effort to provide rescue packages to the most vulnerable communities (Ossome, 2020). Seen from the Global South, the COVID-19 pandemic unleashed a crisis of social reproduction for both capital and labour (Rao, 2021).

Moved by these considerations, and inspired by and building on a number of previous IPE contributions (in RIPE, see Steans & Tepe, 2010), in this special issue we explore social reproduction as a key analytical yet concrete lens to examine the complex and contested features of the global political economy of work from a feminist standpoint. We note that while the fortunes of social reproduction analyses have gained considerable momentum in recent times, with the exponential rise of numerous worthy studies and contributions, these mainly focus on the Global North and do not necessarily reflect the different ways in which reproductive sectors, institutions and realms may work across the Global South, nor the ways in which productive and reproductive work may interplay and co-constitute in economies largely characterised by agrarian and/or informal labour relations (Naidu & Ossome, 2016; Mezzadri, 2020b).

Moreover, the majority of recent studies framed around Social Reproduction Theory (SRT) are arguably more concerned on ‘societal reproduction’ (Laslett & Brenner, 1989) and/or governance – particularly with the withdrawal of state support in the Global North under neoliberalism (e.g. Fraser, 2017) – rather than on work, labour processes and relations. Furthermore, despite the complex features of social reproduction processes as well as their contested definitions, different disciplinary approaches engaging with or relevant to social reproduction debates are not always placed in conversation with one another. Based on these gaps, this special issue aims at contributing to on-going debates on social reproduction in feminist political economy through a specific agenda.

The issue aims at exploring the world of work – including labour processes and relations – through the lens of social reproduction, by combining insights from Feminist IPE, Feminist Economics, and Feminist Political Economy of Development (respectively, FIPE, FE, and FPED henceforth). Whilst FIPE provides key analytical lessons on the relation between social reproduction and systematic capitalist regeneration – including the relation between social reproduction and ‘everyday’ political economy (Elias & Rai, 2019) – the other two sets of literature have always been more concerned with employment, processes of work and labour, and their interrelations. The combined insights from these three disciplinary

frontiers of feminist work on social reproduction, we argue, appear as particularly well equipped to capture complex regimes of work characterising the Global South. Here, patterns of governance and reproductive regimes may be impacted by violent colonial or neo-colonial legacies, state authoritarianism or contemporary forms of socio-political occupation. Processes of labour informalisation may have long histories of embeddedness in unorganized, popular economies, with complex effects on the relation between paid and unpaid work. Furthermore, gendered patterns of work may be implicated in the contemporary logics of international and national development projects. Indeed, multiple approaches are necessary to unpack these complicated trajectories and their gendered features. Hence, analyses of the Global South provide an excellent terrain to reveal the compounded explicatory power of combinations of diverse feminist analyses, such as FIPE, FE, and FPED. In turn, an engagement with the complex histories of/in the Global South, and a dialogue with other analytical traditions, can only further push each of these approaches to overcome the social, political and economic perimeters of their traditional comfort zone.

Notably, through a social reproduction lens exploring processes of work and labour, this special issue contributes to both FIPE and social reproduction debates in manifold ways. A focus on the interplays and co-constituting dynamics between social reproduction, labour and work unveils the many ways in which people's daily lives and toil are not merely impacted by global processes, but are a key structuring factor behind the shaping of such processes. This point builds on and expands the scope for an IPE of the 'everyday' (Elias & Rai, 2019), directly contributing to FIPE agendas. It reinforces our ability to illustrate the interdependencies between macro and micro-processes and inequalities, and challenge economic accounts (Eschle, 2004; Peterson, 2005) that may instead compartmentalise them. Moreover, it pushes IPE analyses beyond their classic spatial comfort zone, by de-centering and re-centering the focus towards the Global South. The contributions of this collection to the development of a IPE of the everyday in the Global South include: the analysis of the relation between the state and the everyday; the exploration of the intertwined temporal dimensions of exploitation and life; the study of the embodied mechanisms and signs of exploitation and agency in the lives of women and other subaltern communities involving, if not resistance, at the very least resilience and endurance.

As noted above, our focus on the Global South also sets the tone of our contribution to contemporary social reproduction debates that are more centred on the Global North (e.g. Bhattacharya, 2017; Ferguson, 2019). We contribute to these debates by exploring the purchase and/or limitations of arguments pointing at a 'crisis of social reproduction' (Fraser, 2014; 2017) in the Global South; through an engagement with the debate on the role of reproductive activities and realms for value-generation (Mies, 1986; Federici, 2004; Mezzadri, 2020b); through an analysis of the nature and features of the actors involved in shaping regimes of labour and work across production and social reproduction in the Global South (Kunz, 2010). Moreover, the issue also contributes to debates on the relations between exploitation and commodification, through its exploration of novel processes of commodification of reproduction and life, shaping new circuits of labour and survival in the context of the rising mercification of the (female) body and its 'fruits'. In this way, the analysis contained in this special issue attends to ways that

interrelations between social and biological processes are imbued by the logics of capitalist accumulation that resonate with, and might inform, contemporary debates on social-ecological reproduction and the political economy of commodity frontiers (Bakker & Gill, 2019; Foley, 2019; Barca, 2020).

Crucially, in practice, this ambitious feminist agenda can only be achieved through the deployment of many, distinct, multiple and articulated methods – a point confirming the relevance of building analytical and methodological bridges across varied feminist disciplinary traditions across the social sciences, such as FIPE, FE, and FPED. We reflect on these issues, and on their links to positionality and ethics, by presenting the variety of tools that the contributions to this volume have deployed. The next section reviews the contributions and achievements of FIPE; it places them in conversation with insights from FE and FPED, and explains the potential of social reproduction to illuminate processes cutting across the world of work. The third section illustrates in detail the benefits of our feminist multidisciplinary social reproduction-centred analysis of work for debates in IPE and social reproduction. The fourth section explores issues of method, and the fifth presents all the contributions to this special issue. The sixth section concludes this editorial introduction.

### **Complicating and de-centering feminist international political economy**

Feminist and gendered analyses have been increasingly incorporated into both mainstream and critical approaches to international political economy (IPE) over the last decade. While in some cases their contributions still remain relatively marginal to the broader intellectual concerns of IPE (Peterson, 2005; Griffin, 2007; Steans & Tepe, 2010), this process of integration is a promising one. Feminist IPE (FIPE, henceforth) analyses of global governance and international financial institutions (Griffin, 2009, 2015), and of neoliberalisation and social reproduction (Kunz, 2010; LeBaron, 2010) have contributed significantly to our ability to challenge the supposed gender-neutrality of the international development architecture and processes of economic restructuring, including the policies of austerity rolled over since the onset of the last financial crisis (Seguino, 2010; Bargawi et al., 2017).

The role and features of social reproduction under capitalism is the object of an exciting debate cutting across social sciences and shaped by multiple distinct ‘imaginaries’ (Winders & Smith, 2019). In its early inception, this debate originally focused on the role of housework, the household and patriarchy in capitalism (Dalla Costa & James, 1972; Mies, 1986; Federici, 2004; Arruzza, 2016). Then, it evolved to also include changes in capitalist governance and broader transformations in the institutions of social reproduction, particularly in the phase of the rise of neoliberalism (Bakker, 2007; Bakker & Gill, 2019; Fraser, 2014). Certainly, it has always also addressed the relation between class and social oppression (Vogel, 1983; Bhattacharya, 2017; Ferguson, 2019). A number of studies cut across these distinct, yet articulated concerns (e.g. LeBaron, 2010; LeBaron & Gore, 2020; Bohrer, 2019).

Indeed, this shift in perspective from production to social reproduction has the potential to re-focus narratives of class formation and capitalist development on a broader set of issues not only facing women and men, but also workers racialised in different ways, waged and/or unwaged, migrants and citizens (Mohandesi &

Teitelman, 2017). In doing so, it embraces a feminist politics by emphasising the interdependence and co-constitution of different power relations and the role of gender within this process (Bannerji, 2011). Moreover, it leads to the possibility to challenge traditional understandings of labour and labouring subject to what can be called a ‘productivist bias’.

In fact, the adoption of a social reproduction lens loosens the sharp distinction between labour and work, which has been the object of much feminist analysis (e.g. Weeks, 2011; Denning, 2010). In particular, definitions of social reproduction stressing the interconnected nature of the regeneration of both capitalist relations and life move beyond this distinction, often premised on problematic dichotomies such as paid/unpaid or productive/unproductive labour. Cindi Katz provides a complex yet comprehensive and clearly articulated definition of social reproduction, which also serves the purpose to clearly distinguish it from the more bounded concept of care. According to Katz (2001, p. 710):

‘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 essence, it includes all activities aimed at producing both labour power as well as the worker (Fortunati, 1981; Federici, 2004; Bhattacharya, 2017). Social reproduction becomes the bridge between producing and reproducing, labouring and working, capitalism and life. As this viewpoint implies novel approaches to theorise capitalism (e.g. Bakker & Gill, 2003, 2019), it also leads to new exciting ways to conceive and study political economy. In particular, it contributes tremendously to the study of IPE by challenging rigid structuralist views of globalisation as homogenizing force, and it helps unveiling the limitations of ‘economistic’ visions of ‘the global’ as primarily shaped by macroeconomic forces alone (Peterson, 2005).

In fact, the rhythms and pace shaping these forces are always co-constituted by the compulsions and contradictions of social reproduction, showing its interconnections with both the ‘productive’ (read paid) and ‘virtual’ (read finance) economy (see Peterson, 2004), a point also recently stressed by a rising literature on the financialisation of life and debt and its gendered and racialised features (e.g. Hossein, 2016; Taylor, 2019; Natile, 2020; Cavallero & Gago, 2021). A lens framed on social reproduction can shift the attention from the macro-processes of global capitalism to the power relations and people both shaping and experiencing those processes (Steans & Tepe, 2010) within the complex and chaotic dynamics of their daily practices and experiences. As powerfully argued by Elias and Rai (2019), feminist readings of IPE framed around social reproduction help developing an *IPE of the everyday*. Moreover, it can lead FIPE to engage with exciting debates on the social construction of workforces across an increasingly complex international division of labour (Taylor, 2009), an issue widely addressed by feminist interventions across other disciplines, and hence potentially leading to constructive feminist interdisciplinary dialogue.

Notably, in fact, the findings and lessons provided by FIPE analyses informed by social reproduction – aimed at challenging productivism and economism – share many points of contact with those emerging from feminist political economy of

development (FPED) and feminist economics (FE). The latter have been more explicitly framed around employment, care and households. Earlier FPED and FE analyses have mainly focused on how shifts in the global organisation of production and in the provision of care have shaped the nature of work and employment relations. By understanding labour markets as ‘gendered institutions’ (Elson, 1999; Rai & Waylen, 2013), these analyses explored how employment relations and working conditions have become informalised through processes of neoliberalisation (Elson & Pearson, 1981); how the latter entailed the feminisation of labour (Standing, 1999; Bair, 2010) and reproduced gender inequality at work (Seguino, 1997; Salzinger, 2003; Wright, 2006). Moreover, they have also highlighted how the commercialisation of care under neoliberalism has hardly solved the care-gap (Folbre, 1994; 1986; Braunstein & Folbre, 2001); rather, it has further intensified women’s work eroding distinctions between work and non-work (Himmelweit, 1995; Beneria, 2008).

Whilst this early work was mainly concerned with gender inequality in employment in relation to care as two distinct spheres of intervention – for instance, representing women’s ‘double burden’ as wage-work added to care work, without a full exploration of the possible articulations of production and reproduction – more recent FPED and FE contributions underline the centrality of domestic labour and/or social reproduction to the very structuring of labour processes, inequality and exploitation across the global economy and in specific locales (e.g. O’Laughlin, 2013; Mezzadri, 2016, 2017; Stevano, 2019; Folbre, 2020). By stressing the interdependence between production and social reproduction, these novel FPED and FE analyses embrace a similar agenda to that of FIPE analyses, aimed at challenging ‘the productivist bias of work in the field of political economy’ (Steans & Tepe, 2010, p. 809).

In this collection, we draw on combined insights from FPED, FE and FIPE and explore the world of work, its processes and relations through the lens of social reproduction across the world economy. Notably, we explore both the ways in which social reproduction is co-constitutive of the world of work, and how it is increasingly the theatre of novel forms of commodified labour, exposing the social construction of the boundaries between work and non-work. This lens, and the combined multidisciplinary feminist insights it builds on, we argue, contributes significantly to the further advancement of the FIPE agenda. In particular, this approach can concretely guide us to explore how social reproduction co-shapes the organisation of inequality *across* the global economy, in both households *and* in the world of work, at once (see also Stevano et al., 2021). Moreover, it further illustrates the limitations of ‘productivism’ in capturing the contours and rhythms of *productive work itself* – hence drawing on but also expanding the intellectual reach of previous RIPE collections on IPE and social reproduction (e.g. Steans & Tepe, 2010) and reveals how we need to understand these against the broader canvas of social reproduction and its implications for workers’ – particularly women workers’ – lives.

The exploration of labour processes and relations through the lens of social reproduction we propose here has a broad reach, geographically and analytically. It contributes to the existing literature in three other ways. First, as already mentioned above, it pushes the de-centering of debates on social reproduction away from the Global North, which a significant number of recent contributions to

social reproduction theories and approaches primarily focus on (e.g. Bhattacharya, 2017; Bakker & Gill, 2019). The articles in this collection are entirely focused on an exploration of the various interplays between work and social reproduction in the Global South. Second, our exploration is committed to bridging levels of analysis – global, national, regional and household/intra-household – in an attempt to overcome divisions between macro and micro studies. In fact, the contributions to this volume concretely reveal the fictitious nature of the separation between macro processes and micro realities, whilst also showing the interconnections between global and local relations and the gendered, class and racialised nature of the labour processes and practices they shape.

Third, our multidisciplinary feminist exploration of labour processes and relations through the lens of social reproduction illuminates the multiple ways in which work and life pressures co-constitute each other in the everyday lives of workers, families and communities in various parts of the Global South. It unveils the fictitious nature of the separation between work and social reproduction, by illustrating their co-dependence in regenerating capitalist relations. It shows how the social constructed nature of this separation serves to cheapen labour across both commodity production and reproductive sectors and activities, in ways which are greatly gendered and racialised, and reflected in the low (or lack of) wages women workers command across the production-reproduction spectrum. Below, we clarify the specific ways in which we believe that our analysis of labour processes and relations through a social reproduction lens contributes to IPE and to contemporary social reproduction debates.

### **Contributions to IPE of the everyday and social reproduction debates**

In their ambitious theorisation of interplays between social reproduction and the everyday, Elias and Rai (2019, p. 205) note how ‘IPE work on the everyday is characterised by either a focus on the agency of non-elite actors or the mechanisms through which everyday life is governed and disciplined’. While these are both valuable axes of analyses in their own right, one would also need to develop a nuanced understanding of how the experiential and structural aspects of the everyday interplay and co-constitute each other. According to the authors, the lens of social reproduction is a way to bridge these two different approaches to the study of the everyday in IPE (see also Steans & Tepe, 2010; Elias & Roberts, 2016). In our analysis of the world of work *through* social reproduction, we develop this insight further, and show how the political economy of work is structured around the co-constitutive relation between capitalist processes and people’s everyday experiences, including their struggles and resilience (see also Katz, 2001). In doing so we also unveil how these processes and everyday experiences are greatly gendered and racialised, based on the workings of global capitalism and mediated by multiple institutions and actors. Moreover, our case studies also shed light on how, through the everyday, we can identify transnational interdependencies linking together places geographically set apart, an issue which is also explored by studies of global ‘householding’ (see Winders & Smith, 2019).

In this collection, we extend the feminist IPE literature of the everyday in three main ways. First, we explore changing possible relationships between the state and the everyday, showing how government policies and rhetoric shape gender

inequalities and dynamics of social reproduction that have differential effects on 'the everyday' of different communities. If many states in the Global South pursue a double objective of flexibilisation of labour and control over women's bodies, at the same time their practices may change based on nationalist agendas. These may exclude certain groups and place others as the main 'reproducers' of the nation, hence cementing a greatly complex gendered and racialised division of labour in the everyday. On the other hand, in other national settings, it may be the state's absence to shape the everyday requiring communities to engage in material and cultural practices that underpin the allocation of gendered responsibilities with the aim to fill that void. Regardless, the State always mediates the ways in which social reproduction is imbricated with women's work, its features and possibilities.

Second, we analyse the temporal and spatial dimensions of the organisation of productive and reproductive work and their tight interrelations. The many 'spaces' of the everyday are defined by complex temporal dimensions, which co-constitute work dynamics, co-shape labour processes, and hence co-produce industrial time. Whether in global factories or local farms, the times and temporalities of social reproduction always impact profoundly on productive arrangements and their spatialities, co-determining work rhythms, mobility, wages and rewards, health outcomes and final exit from the world of work.

Third, the study of the world of work in the Global South through the lens of social reproduction reveals, in different ways, the importance of everyday experiences, views and perceptions, in illustrating the embodied mechanisms of gendered exploitation - including the new forms in which they may manifest through global processes of commodification of life - as well as important expressions of women's practices of resistance or resilience. In fact, these everyday experiences, we argue, are a crucial aspect of class formation.

While building on and contributing to debates around the IPE of the everyday, this collective work also contributes significantly to recent debates on social reproduction. Again, it does so in at least three ways. First, it confirms the feminist thesis that the crisis of care, in many contexts, really is embedded in a broader crisis of social reproduction (Fraser, 2017), and not only in the Global North, where this argument has been developed considerably (see also Himmelweit, 2006), but also in parts of the Global South, where the state may have been systematically 'missing' for some classes and communities, or where it may have a long history in practicing the externalisation of all activities supporting the regeneration and sustenance of life beyond work. Arguably, some regions of the Global South are going through a perennial crisis of social reproduction, which is not simply shaped by neoliberalism but crafted by multiple complex geopolitical and capitalist pressures, including past and present histories of colonialism, neo-colonialism, occupation and, today, the COVID-19 pandemic (on this, see Ossome, 2020).

Second, and quite straightforwardly, this collection contributes to social reproduction debates by focusing its entire gaze on the Global South. In fact, the articles in this special issue highlight the complexity of the global geographies where social reproduction structures the political economy of work at different global, national and local levels. At the same time, they complicate, problematize, overcome or collapse overly rigid distinctions between these levels of analysis, either by focusing on processes of reconstitution and commodification of social reproduction *cutting across* the world economy; or by focusing on how social reproduction deepens

and/or co-structures exploitative processes in labour regimes; or again by illustrating how social reproduction realms and activities fill the gaps left by shrinking/missing states or institutions.

Third, many of the contributions presented here also show the central role played by social reproduction in paving processes of value generation (e.g. Mezzadri, 2020b); based on the way it structures industrial rhythms and times or externalise reproductive costs; on how it devalues women's work within and beyond the household with the complicity of the state or in its absence; or due to novel processes of commodification and commercialisation of reproductive work and its arrangements.

Finally, this collection speaks loudly to the feminist debate on the relations between commodification and exploitation. It illustrates both the ways in which social reproduction is mobilised and 'put to work' within varied labour regimes, *de-facto* working as a subsidy to capital, and how it is the object of processes of commodification generating new markets from what Mitchell et al. (2004) have called 'life's work'. As highlighted by Fraser (2014), '[e]xpropriation is an ongoing, albeit unofficial mechanism of accumulation, which continues alongside the official mechanisms of exploitation'. This can appear as the expropriation of value from unpaid reproductive labour and thus act as a 'subsidy' to capital for the purpose of exploitation, or it can take place through the commodification of the 'fruits' of reproductive work, those typically associated with nurture, like human milk for example. These processes of expropriation often rely upon the maintenance of zones of non-commodification typically residing in realms of social reproduction.

The contributions to everyday political economy, social reproduction approaches, and debates on exploitation and commodification advanced here are based on a variety of methods of analysis, proper of FIPE, PED and FE. The section below clearly maps some of the useful methods deployed by authors in this collection, showing their continuities and differences as well as their relevance for the concrete development of a feminist methodological toolkit for the study of social reproduction in the context of the international political economy of work.

### **Work and social reproduction through feminist methods of enquiry**

Given their multidisciplinary, the varied approaches to investigate the political economy of work and social reproduction featured in this issue make use of varied distinct sets of concrete tools of enquiry and methods. Hence, some reflections over their deployment, meaning and implications are paramount. In fact, while often underdeveloped, discussions over methods can add significantly to our understanding of 'doing' political economy across the world system (e.g. Marcus, 1995; Gagnon, 2019), thorough a critical feminist lens. Arguably, all the methods deployed here by the authors in this collection aim – if in different ways – at debunking, demystifying and challenging homogenising political economy accounts of the global economy and, in doing so, they hopefully also provide FIPE with a useful and diverse research toolkit to study the many geographies and counter geographies of globalisation and the circuits of survival (Sassen, 2002; 2010) women engage in. Below, we identify what we feel are the three main methodological contributions of this issue.

First, all the analyses presented in this special issue are based on either multi-sited or long-term fieldwork unveiling the complex political economy of work and its relation to social reproduction across the world economy. Some make use and 'feminise' the 'extended case method' (Burawoy, 1998), either to capture the complex structural features of gendered exploitation, or to interrogate women workers and their agency, voices and aspirations. Notably, this approach may differ in the practical combination of data collection used – ranging from interviews and life histories to an engagement with ethnographic tools including participant observation – length of field research, and number and location of fieldwork spells. Still, despite their differences, studies framed on an extended case method targeting the complex continuum between work and life show the benefits of long-term, repeated field research mapping the complex entanglements of labour and reproductive relations, duties and responsibilities. Also explorations of novel global patterns of commodification in the world economy break new ground in terms of multi-sited fieldwork, given their focus on transnational geographies of reproductive work crossing multiple borders.

Second, as one of the ways of 'doing' FIPE should imply re-centring the study of political economy around everyday practices and people's experiences, several articles in this collection make productive use of life histories. Life histories capture temporal dynamics, changes over time as well as the interrelations between the economic, the social and the political. Where work is highly precarious and exploitative and reproductive obligations overwhelmingly shouldered by communities while being unfairly distributed among them, working lives are subject to continuous and sudden changes, which can be understood only by taking a long-term view of life trajectories.

Finally, third, as this collection aims at contributing to feminist IPE by showing productive linkages and dialogue with other areas for feminist intervention, a final note should be dedicated to the deployment of mixed quantitative and qualitative methods, with a focus on the combination of surveys – time-use and household surveys – and qualitative techniques, including ethnographic research, to explore the relationship between work and reproduction. In fact, the use of survey data and qualitative methods, can provide a comprehensive understanding of (intra)-household practices and social differentiation central to the analysis of the co-constitution of production and reproduction, or enable the collection of statistical evidence on forms of work that are generally not captured by other surveys regularly carried out. Crucially, when juxtaposing survey and qualitative data, some limitations deriving from the definitions employed become apparent. We understand the unveiling of such tensions as an outcome of feminist practice in itself. In fact, 'doing' feminism in ways that reveal the complexities of social reproduction does not merely mean exploring processes and categories through a gendered and/or feminist lens. It must also imply reworking our very understanding of such processes and categories, and challenging, transgressing and remapping the social contours of the methods we deploy, in ways that, may finally account for social reproduction.

The methodological richness embodied in this collection contributes to debates on the features and contours of feminist enquiry, confirming the importance of primary research and mixed methods in FE and FPED (Berik, 1997), and centring methodological reflection and the use of cross-disciplinary methodological

approaches in FIPE. Crucially, the multiple entry points and methods needed to understand the political economy of work through a feminist lens must be inspired by a feminist approach to research and practice. This is a complex issue indeed, analytically, politically and ethically, especially when it comes to exploring the work and lives of communities exposed to high degrees of exploitation, oppression, plunder or everyday violence. We do not and cannot claim to have resolved this tension here. Academic and research practice is deeply implicated in the world inequalities it seeks to understand (Okech, 2020). However, there are ways to at least mitigate extreme gaps in power relations between ‘researchers’ and ‘the researched’, including productive collaborations; co-producing research; using participatory methods; deploying ‘gateways’ to research reflecting the priorities of the communities we aim at representing; including people’s own voices in our analyses; and avoiding approaching research as a ‘minefield’ for merely extractive purposes (Marchais et al., 2020). If none of the above strategies erase the privileges of doing research, it hopefully at least pushes research to constantly confront its ethical and political dilemmas. The contributions discuss some of these issues with reference to the particular cases they explore, which are summarised below.

### **Contributions to a global feminist journey through work and social reproduction**

The articles focus on an extremely varied set of regions and countries in the Global South – namely India, Turkey, Mozambique, Georgia, Uzbekistan, Occupied Palestine, as well as transnational geographies centred around new forms of ‘global reproductive work’. While being geographically embedded, all papers analyse how the interrelations between production and reproduction manifest between and across scales and units of analyses. Each contribution employs a social reproduction lens to interrogate specific labour processes and definitions of work, with some articles exploring how social reproduction co-constitutes exploitation, and others emphasising instead processes of commodification of reproductive labour.

In concrete terms, the articles in this collection explore a rich number of themes, and hence contribute to FIPE and social reproduction debates in different ways. Some theorise and illustrate the interplays between work and social reproduction through the lens of time and temporalities, or migration and health outcomes, and how these shape and are shaped by exploitation in global production circuits (Mezzadri and Majumder, on India; O’Laughlin, on Mozambique). Others conceptualise and analyse the dynamics of co-constitution and tension between productive and reproductive work in the everyday lives of workers who are seemingly not integrated in the circuits of global production (Stevano, on Mozambique); through the role of the state in processes of market transition (Lombardozi, on Uzbekistan); by observing the strategies women develop to reconcile productive and reproductive work under harsh regimes of political domination (Bargawi, Alami and Ziada on Occupied Palestine); and/or explore the impact of such processes on class formation (Arslan on Turkey). A third set of contributions also map and illustrate the implications of different forms of global commodification of social reproduction for women and capitalism, and the new regimes of work these shape across the world economy (Nahman and Newman on the global production/distribution of breast milk; Barbagallo and Vertommen on global surrogacy).

Below, we carefully unpack the ways in which the contributions speak to the main themes of the special issue highlighted in the previous sections.

Exploring the workings and gendered features of the Indian garment industry, Mezzadri and Majumder illustrate the feminist political economy of time at work in global sweatshops. They show how, indeed, everyday practices co-constitute global processes (Elias & Rai, 2019); in this particular case, global exploitation. Their contribution highlights how workers' industrial time shapes but also is shaped by reproductive times and rhythms (see Bear, 2016). The analysis of the distinct forms of labour circulation at work in the industry – seasonal, industrial, and life-cycle-based – illustrates how each single process can only be understood as given by the interplay between temporalities of both production and social reproduction. Moreover, looking at the life histories of women workers formerly employed in the industry in Bangalore – those who have already marched out of the global assembly line – these authors also question simplistic narratives of global development reifying the transition to industrial work as a linear and progressive journey; a point of arrival for the working poor. In fact, women's narratives reveal a working life shaped, interrupted, halted and restructured by the many needs and rhythms of social reproduction. They also reveal that women leave the factory when still young to re-join informal occupations, often accompanied by debt accumulated while working. The Indian case explored here does not simply make the case for accounting for social reproduction in studies of the global economy. It rather suggests how social reproduction is co-constitutive of 'productive' labour relations in globalised industries, hence structuring exploitation.

On a similar vein, exploring the nexus between labour and health outcomes in Southern Africa, O'Laughlin illustrates how the production and reproduction of 'living labour' should be analytically conceived as the result of intertwined processes, rather than as taking place within analytically separate spheres. Critical of dualist approaches to patriarchy and capitalism, including those framing social reproduction as distinct from production, O'Laughlin illustrates the concrete impossibility to disentangle productive and reproductive processes when it comes to the study of labour regimes, their relation to mobility, and broader health implications. Labour relations, O'Laughlin shows, cannot be understood as delinked from broader reproductive arrangements (re)generating labour and their highly gendered nature. In particular, by focusing on sugarcane production in Mozambique, O'Laughlin analyses the gendered outcomes of the working day within as well as beyond the cane-fields. She maps gender differences in employment and migratory status, their link to distinct health problems, and the ways in which such differences are reinforced outside the cane-fields where workers live 'gendered socially separate lives'. Men are more likely to be long-distant migrants, and live in hostels and more segregated spaces where they share rooms with fellow workers coming from similar regions. Women, more likely to be commuters, spend all their reproductive time with children and engaging in household duties. Hence, the different sets of labourers experience labour differently and reproduce, challenge or transgress traditional gendered roles in different ways, both based on the features of their labouring activities and living arrangements. Notably, this case contributes both to contemporary gendered analyses of housework as well as to the development of a feminist IPE of the everyday (Elias & Rai, 2019) framed on the Global South.

Also focusing on Mozambique, but seeking to address a gap in the literature on the conceptualisation of gendered labour markets not directly integrated in global production networks, Stevano explores the co-constitutive relations between the daily organisation of productive and reproductive work in Mozambique. This paper asks whether the organisation of work in localised markets is shaped by the dynamics of global capitalism. To address this question, Stevano argues that it is necessary to consider how women's work is embedded in processes of social differentiation as well as shaped by the imperatives of social reproduction. By looking at *classes of working women*, the paper develops an integrated framework to conceptualise working lives that draws on three bodies of literature: post-colonial capitalist development in southern Africa (O'Laughlin, 2013), social reproduction (Katz, 2001; Bakker, 2007; LeBaron, 2010) and the feminist political economy of globalisation and women's participation in the labour force (Elson, 1999). A historical analysis of processes of livelihood diversification driven by colonial labour regimes and the commodification of life reveals that the fragmentation of labour and the means of social reproduction determined by global capitalist dynamics erodes the viability of social reproduction through household production and pushes people into remunerated work. The necessity to engage in multiple and precarious occupations in localised labour markets is itself part and parcel of global capitalism. Furthermore, detailed qualitative primary data shows that women's working lives are shaped by gender relations and social material practices that are foundational to the reproduction of the economic and the social. The imperatives of social reproduction are mutually constitutive and in tension with productive work, as they determine gendered constraints to mobility and migration, work interruptions and obligations towards social rituals underpinning the reproduction of social groups in a context with minimal or absent public provisioning.

Based on an examination of the social relations of production and reproduction characterizing agrarian settings in Uzbekistan, Lombardozzi analyses how interplays between 'public' and 'private' patriarchy (see Kandiyoti, 1998, 2003) shape access to and control over assets and income. Her article maps the ways in which the post-Soviet market transition restructured both productive and reproductive relations and the gendered implications of such restructuring. By focusing on food provision, the analysis expands both on the interpenetration of productive and reproductive work in relation to value-generation, as well as on the role of the state in mediating processes of marketization. On the one hand, the analysis illustrates the difficulty in sharply separating commodified and non-commodified household food production in Uzbekistan, underlining the fluid nature of marketized and non-marketized relations, which are better understood as sitting on a continuum. On the other hand, the article also explores how state-led practices have provided new avenues for women's work outside the home, whilst re-creating new gender hierarchies in employment. The article concludes that marketization often leads to regressive and contradictory outcomes for women, not only by reshaping the gendered division of labour, but also in relation to the re-organisation and re-distribution of means of production and subsistence. It also stresses the need to consider reproductive activities as key to processes of value generation in contexts dominated by household production.

Combining the Thompsonian definition of class and the Marxist-feminist analysis of reproduction (e.g. Federici, 2004; Mies, 1986), Arslan makes both a

theoretical contribution to the IPE of the everyday and to the feminist political economy of work in Turkey. She argues that a Thompsonian perspective on class centres everyday experiences by seeing the interconnections of economic and social relations and the importance of agency, thus moving away from deterministic approaches to class analysis and providing a theorisation of class suitable to integration with Marxist-feminist analyses of reproductive work and gendered exploitation. On the other hand, the Marxist-feminist body of work shows that any form of class analysis confined to production fails to account for the centrality of women's reproductive work to the sustenance of capitalism. By applying this framework to the garment sector in Turkey, Arslan sheds light on the power of the state in shaping gender roles and controlling women's bodies and lives through both discourses and policies that portray women as mothers and praise them, if only in rhetoric, for their reproductive roles. The state seeks to simultaneously achieve the neoliberal imperative to flexibilise (women's) paid labour and the patriarchal imperative to appropriate women's unpaid reproductive labour. The rich empirical analysis of the everyday lives of women working in the garment sector, based on Arslan's participant observation, illustrates the multiple tensions and forms of interdependence between productive and reproductive work and, in particular, how women continue to shoulder the burden of reproductive work. The analysis also explores women's experiences and views on their work and everyday lives in ways that expose the importance of everyday experience to the development of feminist political economies of work.

Bargawi, Alami and Ziada analyse the responses and coping mechanisms women develop to combine productive and reproductive roles in Occupied Palestine, a context marked by conditions of economic, political and institutional settler-colonial oppression (e.g. Turner & Shweiki, 2014) and conflict that compound the crisis of social reproduction. Their contribution engages with the debates on the crisis of social reproduction versus the crisis of care (Fraser, 2017), exploring the gendered implications of these crises. Bargawi, Alami and Ziada note that the crisis of social reproduction is studied in contexts where the previously established state apparatus is in retreat, but this approach is notably absent in studies of the Middle East and North Africa. In this region, attention has been mostly paid to supply- and demand-side factors that have kept women out of the formal labour market (Al-Botmeh, 2013) while insufficient consideration has been given to the interplay as well as the tensions between women's paid and unpaid work. The analysis presented here reveals a more complex picture where social relations of marriage shape patterns of entrance or permanence in the labour force as well as forms of renegotiation of domestic and care responsibilities. Married women enter or stay in the labour force to a greater extent than unmarried women and more now than in the past. By juxtaposing primary qualitative data and quantitative data from two time-use surveys conducted in 2000 and 2012, Bargawi, Alami and Ziada show that different patterns emerge. While time-use survey data does not delineate significant shifts in the gendered allocations of paid and unpaid work, qualitative data suggests that processes of renegotiation of domestic work between women and men do occur, with middle-class men taking on larger shares of housework. This an important methodological intervention, highlighting some of the limitations of time-use surveys and the importance of analysing the temporal dimensions of the organisation of

everyday life through different methodological approaches. The absence of state support for social reproduction as well as the nuclearization of the family led to an increase in the overall work burden of married women whose perceptions of responsibility for social reproduction have become increasingly individualised and resulted in fewer claims placed on male partners and the state.

Vertommen and Barbagallo explore the commodification of biological reproduction itself in their study of the global surrogacy industry, whose many sites and mechanisms have recently been subject to close feminist scrutiny (e.g. Pande, 2014; Vora, 2015; Vertommen, 2017; Lewis, 2017). Their contribution differs from recent studies in the feminist literature, which has framed the issue in moralising and dualistic terms - 'greedy' money-making vs. the altruistic motives and the delivery of a 'gift' in non-marketized surrogacy. By contrast, they apply the dialectics of waged and unwaged labour to the case of the (re)production of people in order to move beyond the dualisms of family vs. market, reproduction vs. production, gift vs. commodity that Mies (1986) has characterised as the material-discursive infrastructure of capitalist production that obscures the labour of 'women, nature and colonised peoples' so that the value produced can be systematically appropriated. In doing so, Vertommen and Barbagallo expose the fictitious boundaries between work and non-work in the case of women providing surrogacy services in Georgia as part of a global industry. They show that by framing gestational labour as non-work, contracting firms are able to keep costs down. It also absolves them of responsibility to provide workers' benefits, such as of health care beyond/or in between pregnancies, and work based insurance or compensation for physical injury. At the same time, narratives based upon the binary of worker-mother with an emphasis on 'being a good mother' support the disciplining and control over women's bodies and the conditions of work by surrogacy agencies. The institutional separation between social and economic reproduction has subordinated the former in the capitalist apparatus of valuation and produced the structural devaluation of motherhood as unwaged reproductive work that serves to devalorise the labour of commercial surrogates.

The final paper in this special issue follows on from Vertommen and Barbagallo to examine a different arena in which the commodification of social reproduction and the rise of the 'global bioeconomy' (see Nahman, 2013; Cooper & Waldby, 2014) has taken place across national boundaries. Newman and Nahman's study focuses on the human milk supply chain of the Indian firm NeoLacta Lifesciences. Here, class, culture and gender intersect in the production of narratives of gift giving and morality, which play complex roles in the procurement of 'donor milk' for commercial ends based on differences in the socioeconomic backgrounds of the women who supply milk. On the other hand, the medicalization of infant nutrition promoted by Nestle in the 1970s and 1980s have been harnessed by commercial human milk processors who, like Nestle in a previous era, work closely with neonatologists in the marketing of their products. The authors trace the process of commodification and valuation of human milk in NeoLacta supply chains by deploying a critical commodity chain approach informed by STS and political economy. They show how the historically rooted and intertwined processes of moral and monetary valuation are harnessed by commercial human milk processors in order to devalue the labour of poorer donors in rural areas whilst elevating the monetary value of

commercial human milk products and the centrality to which the non-commodity quality of nurture is deployed in the commodification of human milk.

## Conclusions

The rise of social reproduction analyses in the study of IPE provide a crucial opportunity to develop a feminist theory of global capitalism exploring the gendered features of governance, power, and state practice (Elias & Rai, 2019). It also provides key opportunities to understand the world of work from a feminist viewpoint aimed at challenging the limits of 'productivism' (Steans & Tepe, 2010). Building on past and more recent contributions (e.g. LeBaron, 2010; Mezzadri, 2017; Prugl, 2020), in this introduction we have analysed the ways in which we can approach the study of work – its processes, relations and tensions – through the lens of social reproduction, and in ways which harness the insights of feminist analyses within and beyond IPE; particularly insights from FE and FPED. The latter have in fact a long history in studying concretely the world of work, analysing the complex interrelations between productive and reproductive activities and realms.

In particular, building on synergies from FIPE, FE, and FPED, we propose an exploration of the world of work through social reproduction that focuses on the Global South; aims at connecting macro and micro processes and relations; explores how the everyday co-structures labour regimes, exploitation, and women workers' experiences in a great variety of capitalist circuits across the world economy, and how it is shaped through women's complex relation with the state; and that captures the voices, daily rhythms, and complex work arrangements characterising women's lives under global capitalism. This analysis, we argue, contributes both to further developing an IPE of the everyday (Elias & Rai, 2019) and to contemporary social reproduction analyses (Bhattacharya, 2017; Fraser, 2017), through its engagement with their concepts of 'reproductive crises', approach to capitalist governance, and debates on value. Crucially, stressing interplays between exploitation and commodification, the special issue explores both how social reproduction co-constitutes the everyday, and how the everyday itself may be increasingly commodified in novel ways, targeting forms of reproductive work previously lying outside the perimeters of mercification processes. We embark in this journey across the global economy with a rich and diverse theoretical and methodological toolkit, to explore the many processes that structure women's experiences of work and social reproduction, whilst capturing their voices. In doing so, we hope to contribute to the development of more inclusive theories and analyses, that may finally place gendered oppression at the very centre of the architecture of global capitalism and its diverse forms of exploitation, and exclusion. As the terrible effects of the COVID-19 pandemic continue raging against our planet and now hit the Global South with particular harshness, exposing millions to different compounded crises of social reproduction, we feel that feminist analyses must continue responding to the analytical and political call of developing inclusive theories and methodologies, aimed at re-embedding analyses of global capitalism into the study of the miryad social relations of work and life that ultimately sustain it.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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