

Roundtable discussion: World-culture and social reproduction feminism

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October 2023

[Pre-print draft developed from a series of plenary dialogues that first took place at the conference 'Women in World(-)Literature', held at Warwick University in June 2022, that will appear in *Feminist Theory* Vol. 25 in spring 2024.]

Abstract

This dialogic roundtable discussion elaborates the possibilities opened up by the use of social reproduction theory in intersection with world-literary, materialist feminist, queer Marxist and world-systems approaches to literature and culture. In particular, contributors consider how the analysis of social reproduction might illuminate the politics of everyday life, the representational challenges accompanying the banality or ubiquity of women's work, the potential gaps of social reproduction feminism, and the aesthetic challenges accompanying or following from an interest in social reproduction. Topics covered include digital media as foundational operating mode of Hindu nationalism, the sexuality- and race-based exclusions of employment in higher education, Philippine literature as 'reproductive fiction', the Latin American novel vis-à-vis its registration of domestic service, the short story as bellwether for global issues surrounding women's labour, and questions of complicity in the kinds of labour some women and sexual minorities enact for larger authoritarian, patriarchal projects. If women do much of the work of producing the everyday then we must also ask how women might re-make the everyday along more radical, and radically egalitarian lines.

This roundtable develops further a series of plenary dialogues that first took place at the conference 'Women in World(-)Literature', held at Warwick University in June 2022, and organised by Roxanne Douglas and Fiona Farnsworth. Extending that earlier conversation, which raised a number of key questions that we sought to explore as a group, we here asked each of our participants to elaborate on both the possibilities and limits of using social

reproduction theory in intersection with world-literary, Marxist feminist, queer materialist and world-systems approaches to literature and culture. Discussants include Sharae Deckard (UCD), Kate Houlden (Brunel University), Amy Rushton (Nottingham Trent University), Alden Sajor Marte-Wood (Rice University), Daniella Sánchez Russo (Universidad del Norte) and Rashmi Varma (University of Warwick).

Sharae Deckard (SD) and Kate Houlden (KH): Something we've been discussing frequently as a group is how analysis of social reproduction might illuminate the politics of everyday life and the ways cultural forms play a role both in mediating these and in 'congealing' certain kinds of social formations or political realities. Rashmi, can you open the conversation by outlining what you see as gaps within the intersection of approaches to social reproduction feminism and world-literary studies as they currently stand, particularly in relation to the role of social reproduction in the constitution of political ideologies and subjectivity?

Rashmi Varma (RV): In thinking about world-literary and cultural studies, I have been drawn to a category that I think hasn't been used adequately enough to think through the relationship between ideology and social reproduction. And that is the category of the everyday that, in an important sense, constitutes the spatio-temporal location or matrix of social reproduction, but is also produced through it.

Historically, one of the crucial insights of materialist feminism has been precisely the de-naturalising of the everyday as an inert matrix and its designation as a feminised sphere. Following on from this, I would suggest that, in fact, yes, women do the disproportionate work of producing the everyday which is the instrument of hegemony in an important sense.

SD and KH: That's interesting because one of the questions we posed to the group in advance was whether there are any representational challenges accompanying the banality or ubiquity of women's work or of social reproduction, in terms of how these might be mediated in cultural forms – and how readily they might or might not be analysed by critics. Do you think less emphasis has been given by cultural critics to this linkage of the everyday with political subjectivity?

RV: Well, within materialist feminist theory, the everyday that had previously been linked inextricably to domesticity and to the private sphere (and thus seen as outside history itself) was re-conceptualised by scholars such as Mies (1986) and Mohanty (1996) as the site of production of the spatio-temporal structure of gendered experiences in capitalism, and within a distinctively international division of labour in which third world women did ‘housework’ (that exemplary category of the everyday) for the consumption of first world housewives/consumers. Thus lace-making for the women of Narsapur, in Mies's research, was an everyday activity that shaped their subjectivity as both producers and homemakers but also limited their agency within the capitalist economy, precisely because their work was embedded in the everyday and placed out of wage relations proper.

But there has also been less interest in the ways in which social reproduction, capitalism and political domination (especially in terms of state or religious power) are deeply imbricated. While social reproduction theory has been largely preoccupied with questions of labour and work in challenging the political economy of the capitalist, patriarchal and racialised division of labour, the everyday as a potent site for understanding the fine-grained texture of reproducing dominant ideologies and of the affective labour that is required to keep them dominant has been largely overlooked.

SD and KH: Can you give us an example of this in relation to your current work?

RV: At the moment I am particularly interested in the ground of the everyday as a site and product of social reproduction in the politics of Hindu nationalist resurgence and dominance in India today. I am particularly concerned with Hindu nationalism's gendering of the everyday and would go as far as to argue that it is on the terrain of the reproduced everyday that Hindu nationalism has established its hegemony.

One of the cornerstones of this resurgence that has led some commentators to label it as neo-Hindutva, or a new movement for Hindu majoritarianism, has been its use of digital platforms and social media to do its political/ideological work (see: Anderson and Longkumer, 2018). These are now an integral part of the social reproduction of the everyday of Hindu nationalist dominance. Thus, in addition to literature, popular culture and theory, etc., we have to look seriously at social media and digital platforms to explore and understand how a particular version of the self, of work and play, of the nation and of the good life within it, is constituted through the purportedly apolitical means of the everyday and reproduced there.

This is because the politics of Hindu nationalism is a total politics and the everyday is its project, control of it, its goal. While many studies of Hindu nationalism focus on its mechanisms of staging spectacular events and mobilising potent symbols, it is in the everyday that it is reproduced, through routinised motions that order and constitute the ordinary day. Social media now is insinuated as part of the everyday, producing participation in it as an activity that connects the self to the family, the community, the nation and ultimately to the leader. WhatsApp, we are told, is end-to-end encrypted, but by virtue of enabling different groupings of private individuals to express and encode their political subjectivity, it straddles the two spheres of public and private. Specifically, it is now the site, or 'a place in itself' (Matassi et al., 2019: 2193), where the everyday is not only produced, but shared intersubjectively and affectively across time (individuals inhabiting different time zones) and space (home and work) and across generations.

As Chakrabarti (2018) points out, many Indians consider 'forwarding' public announcements and political messages on WhatsApp to be their civic and moral duty. Williams, Kamra et al. suggest that WhatsApp and Facebook constitute what could be now considered 'the inner domain of Indian nationalism in which political messaging and "political talk" are increasingly prolific and shaped by digitised party-political intimacies' (2022: 315). Thus, while feminist studies of 'right-wing Hindu women', slated as a new phenomenon, emerged in the aftermath of the rising power of the Hindu right in politics from the 1990s onwards, one has to now address the ways in which digital spaces have not only added yet another dimension to the work of social reproduction, but in fact could potentially make us rethink the project of social reproduction theory in terms of emancipatory feminist politics and the work of producing the everyday.

In my ongoing study of middle-class women in India (basically my group of school friends), I have been fascinated by how friendships have been digitised, and social media use has become integral to everyday routine. Williams and Kamra have pointed out that the spatial metaphor of the 'digital living room' evokes the idea of a digital home as 'a space of security, trust and familiarity in and through which people can come together, share news and information, and nurture feelings of belonging' (2022: 307). Accordingly, messages on my school WhatsApp group include the ritual good morning and good night messages, greetings for festivals, photographs of religious pilgrimage, religious ceremonies, family get-togethers and vacations abroad. News shared pertains to births and deaths in the family, promotions of

spouses and children's achievements. Photographs of food prepared, and particularly of gardens maintained by these middle-class women, are regularly circulated.

But even when the messaging is ostensibly aimed at sharing memories and belonging, the overt and intensifying religiosity among women whose childhood occurred in the 1970s in a still-secular India points to the growing reach of the Hindu right, its total politics.

Interspersed every now and then are stories praising the Indian prime minister Modi and his Hindu nationalist party. At the same time, there is little acknowledgement of caste and religious difference in the group, and how certain posts may alienate some members.

Venkatraman (2017) foregrounds the role of 'good morning' messages that typically draw upon religious codes that Williams and Kamra argue 'not only maintained everyday group sociality, but became part of the daily routine of doing good to achieve favourable outcomes in the afterlife' (2022: 316). I think this aspect is really important as it points to the ways in which the material and the purportedly non-material dimensions are woven together to produce the everyday in a Hindu nation.

What we see on WhatsApp is that through these seemingly innocuous posts, the idea of the good life in globalised India is relentlessly reproduced as articulated in the Hindu nation, leaving little space for the minority. As WhatsApp is becoming embedded in everyday political life in India, Williams and Kamra have pointed out, its 'affordances' are also being used 'to discipline or act on certain bodies and behaviours to reconfigure relations and relationships' (2022: 310). The WhatsApp group, as an everyday 'private' space, is therefore, Williams and Kamra argue, functioning to shape a majoritarian public sphere and to bolster state power from within. My women-only WhatsApp group of course is only one example of the ways in which the politics of the nation are translated as the everyday.

SD and KH: That's fascinating, particularly in terms of thinking about the everyday as a source of complicity as well as resistance. Could you elaborate further on that tension?

RV: There is, of course, a long Left tradition that has recuperated the everyday against hegemonic understandings of it as outside history. This left-wing stream led by theorists such as Henri Lefebvre ([1947] 2014) and Michel de Certeau (1988) sought to invigorate the everyday's revolutionary potential and to analyse it as a site of resistance and transformation.

At the same time, there is scope to look at the ways in which feminist theory's turn towards looking at women's agency, especially in the context of authoritarian projects, has I think foreclosed certain types of questions being asked. I am thinking in particular of the work of

Saba Mahmood's *Politics of Piety: the Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (2004) which seems to valorise women's everyday lives within structures of religious authoritarianism as practices of 'piety', and of Sara Farris's *In the Name of Women's Rights: the Rise of Femonationalism* (2017) which overlooks the role of religious fundamentalism as taking over the everyday spaces evacuated by the neo-liberal state and insinuating women into the project not only of the neo-liberal state (which is what Farris is interested in) but also of the religious right.

Two feminist projects that demonstrate the importance of social reproduction theory and the everyday are the scholarship of the feminist Kamla Bhasin (1993), who made the everyday life of patriarchy in India legible in really powerful ways through songs, nursery rhymes and street theatre, and the *Why Loiter* movement (Phadke et al., 2009) which encourages women to occupy everyday physical spaces to rethink and reimagine the relationship between social reproduction, leisure and work, and political domination.

SD and KH: You're referring to the hegemonic (and historical) gendered models of masculinity, femininity and sexuality threaded through ideas of nationhood, as they play out in, and across, everyday digital (semi-private) spaces. And how we might think about this labour in terms of the way it is gendered as so-called 'women's' work. Amy, we know that your interest in bringing together social reproduction theory with queer approaches has led you to think about similar issues in relation to neoliberal higher education in the UK, and the institutionality of forms of academic labour, particularly about how specific economic and social pressures intersect with the labour of sexual 'minorities' in the digital realm. Can you expand on your current concerns for us?

Amy Rushton (AR): As many of us in this conversation are well aware, higher education globally is being squeezed under the combined pressures of neoliberalisation, marketisation, student fees/debt and the accompanying ideological concepts of 'value', 'worth', etc. I've been thinking about these socio-economic trends in relation to workload, and how LGBT + communities within academia operate, are constructed and mobilised.

Recently, those of us who are members of the UK union the UCU received an email notifying us that the UCU workload survey 2021 had been finalised and circulated. The following really struck a chord: staff are working multiple unpaid days per week; part-time and/or casualised staff are particularly impacted, working well beyond contracted hours; while HE staff in general (both full time and part time) are working more than two full days unpaid per

week. Obviously this is all less than ideal. But one of the things I keep flagging up time and again is that we don't think about the material realities of LGBT + staff in terms of workloads, and with regard to the types of work available, encouraged or pushed back against.

SD and KH: Yes, of course, we can't talk about supposed 'women's work' without immediately questioning what that gendered category means, and how notions of 'feminisation' or 'masculinisation' play out in both sexual categories, and in how individuals navigate the workplace. What are the particular ways you think we need to interrogate the gendering of the labour demands faced by LGBT + staff?

AR: As an example, my employer, Nottingham Trent University, decided to put in place an ED&I committee, a university shadow executive team if you will, comprised of people with lived experience of being in marginalised communities or holding marginalised identities. Our role is to inform and give our perspective on university workings.

In my letter to apply for this position in December 2020, I quoted a number of statistics. For example, LGBT + staff, particularly lesbian or femme-presenting, trans and non-binary individuals, are more likely to be in precarious employment or in part-time contracts in HE (as I am). A Nancy/Morning Consult survey in 2019 reported that '52 percent of people who identify as queer say they have anxiety around finances' and '25 percent of people who identify as queer say that their sexuality or their gender identity has had an impact on their finances' (and from personal experience I can attest to this). In 2018, Stonewall UK reported that 'LGBT staff in category C2DE (low income households) are less likely to say that senior managers demonstrate commitment than LGBT staff in category ABC1 (higher income households)' (that is, 37 per cent compared to 46 per cent). Although I'm white British, and was recently promoted to Senior Lecturer, I remain classed as within the 'persistent low income' bracket according to the UK Government (Gov.uk, 2022).

So this raises the really interesting and frustrating question of to what extent are LGBT + people populating part-time, casual and fractional roles in HE, a realm that, going back to your earlier question, Sharae and Kate, is exactly where we might hope to think about political ideologies and subjectivity being constituted through everyday practice. Across the sector – and particularly, I might add, with femme-presenting individuals – there does seem to be a troubling anecdotal intersection between gendered presentation, presumptions of 'appropriate' labour and the specific socio-economic pressures of neoliberalisation in the

present moment. More research needs to be done on this, not just within HE but across various sectors.

Any such work would also need to take account of mental health – an unsurprising emphasis from me given my current research project is on mental distress in world-literary contexts. But I'm thinking not just about the reality that LGBT + people are more likely to be in precarious roles; we also need to consider the psychological vulnerability attached to under/un-employment and precarity, as well as gendered demands to conduct 'care' work like pastoral care or engage with diversity initiatives and dialogue. So, how do the mental health pressures experienced by specifically LGBT + people – I'm thinking, for example, about the societal attention (we could even say moral panic) faced by trans individuals at the moment, the constant media bombardment and the well-documented risks of suicide and self-harm amongst trans young people – play out in those forms of workplace labour demanded and expected of colleagues? To what extent, for both practical and more affective reasons, are LGBT + people co-opted into what we might think of in social reproductive terms as traditionally gendered 'female' roles, or 'women's work'? Putting together financial precarity, feeling unsafe both physically and emotionally and also the pressures around taking on certain kinds of work, how does all of this contribute to a particular form of LGBT + vulnerability within the capitalist world-system?

SD and KH: This is so fascinating, Amy. We note that you've mentioned the media attention being paid to trans issues. Given Rashmi's emphasis on the everyday political complicity of certain kinds of digital media within the context of Hindu nationalism, how would you conceive of the digital realm in relation to the concerns that you've raised above? Is it a site of possibility and contestation, or merely a further avenue by which gendered labour is extracted from high-profile LGBT + thinkers and writers?

AR: I have been thinking about this, especially in light of the antagonism of current online and social media discussion, simplified to the overly binarised framing of terf vs. trans. It's a question effectively about what kinds of literary labour are accessible to, and demanded of, women and LGBT + communities, in the context of time and economic constraints, so avenues like formal and informal journalism, podcasting, zines, social media. The challenge is how we think about these forms in terms of literary analytical frameworks and as part of global circulation – so much of these more transient, sometimes commissioned forms of writing are very much regionally or communally specific (newspapers columns, podcasts,

memes etc). Does that offer opportunities for solidarity? Resistance? Or are these modes simply further evidence for the pressures to separate 'feminised' work into its own, less 'valued' silos?

SD: Kate, I know you've also been thinking a little about higher education and forms of labour, albeit from a slightly different angle. Do you have anything to add?

KH: Well, rather than just myself, these are conversations we've had amongst us all at various points, and which came up again as we were writing the proposal for this special issue: in particular, the question of where racialised forms of labour, and the co-optation or dismissal of that labour, fit in. For example, activities around 'decolonising the curriculum', in their worst forms, can be extremely performative or tokenistic. With regard to both world-literary antecedents and social reproduction feminism, various colleagues participating in this roundtable flagged the importance of bearing in mind early thinkers like Sylvia Wynter (1971), Angela Davis (1983) or Chandra Talpade Mohanty (2002) – making sure that our own work doesn't reflexively continue the reification of core cultural forms, as Pascale Casanova (2007) and others have cautioned against. Whilst in a HE context, it's about asking similar kinds of questions to those posted by Amy: Who is doing certain kinds of work? What agency was available to choose that work? How is that work gendered? How is that work valued? What kinds of affective sharing of vulnerability are considered part and parcel of 'diversity' work?

As many theorists have pointed out, we can't consider gendered hierarchies – in whatever area of society – without also assessing critically how notions of 'femininity' and 'masculinity' have, in different ways at different times, been attached to constructions of race, and have been deployed with regard to the capitalist need for cheap labour. Angela Davis (1983) paved the way in discussions of American slavery by making clear the necessity of understanding the role of black women's labour. Iris Young extrapolates from this in relation to the economic system as a whole, spelling out how the capitalist dependence on maintaining 'a fluctuation in the proportion of the population employed' means that criteria (whether gendered, racialised or both) must be found 'to distinguish the core of primary workers from marginal or secondary workers' (1981: 58). This facilitates wage control and social reproductive needs alike; a sentiment we see echoed and reconfigured in Wallerstein's (2002) discussion of the role of racism and sexism in capitalist organisation.

Amy's discussion has also reminded me of certain claims by Holly Lewis (2016) which I've found productive lately. Lewis makes clear how '[e]conomics is the origin of the "normativity" in heteronormativity [...] Social gender and the management of sexuality under capitalism are shaped according to the struggle over who pays for what is necessary to socially produce the working class' (2016: 182–183). Specifically, she spells out how lesbians can be viewed as 'the people who most flagrantly rebel against women's assigned task of caring for men' in refusing to 'provide free household and affective labor' (Lewis, 2016: 155). A similar logic perhaps explains some of the overt violence directed towards trans or non-binary individuals: a refusal to accept one's assigned gendered labour, one's expected function in social reproduction, precipitates significant pushback as it is threatening to the viability of the system as a whole.

SD: Yes, that is productive, Kate. Does that suggest that social reproduction feminism hasn't fully taken sexuality, or sexual practices, into account, and that this constitutes one of the gaps we gestured towards earlier? And perhaps that sexuality has less static a role than might have been assumed?

KH: Yes, I would agree with that. Early social reproductive thinkers certainly gestured towards sexuality in their discussions. However, when Mariarosa Della Costa and Selma James describe homosexuality as an 'attempt to disengage sexuality and power' (1975: 32) by undercutting heterosexual relationships or Silva Federici asserts that, for women, 'sexual contact with [other] women is forbidden because, in bourgeois morality, anything that is unproductive is obscene, unnatural, perverted' (2012: 24), room is certainly left for temporalising the uneven ways in which sexuality is marshalled by different economic formations in different locales, to different ends.

The posthumously published work of Christopher Chitty (2020) investigates and historicises precisely this. Specifically, he maps Arrighi's eras of financialisation onto moments of increased policing of male homosexuality – as he puts it, he considers 'cultures of sex between men in light of the temporality of attempts to establish early modern republics – a cycle of revolution, interregnum, and restoration' so as to 'foreground the role of contingency in the history of cultures of sodomy' (Chitty, 2020: 25). Essentially, then, Chitty asks 'what pressures might be shaping social reproduction – and, through it, sexuality – in periods of political-economic crisis' (2020: 5). If we stay with the example of higher education, we might, therefore, ask how the post-war, Keynesian, social-democratic consensus, in tandem

with McCarthyist attacks on gay people as a threat within, might have combined to exclude (in some cases) or create (conditional) academic havens for queerness in others. In the present era of neoliberal marketisation, how does the more visible inclusion of LGBT + staff meet the sector's needs for certain kinds of appearance (inclusive, diverse, marketable) whilst also providing a greater pool of devalued, precarious and 'feminised' workers (in addition, one should point out, to cis and straight women in HE, who obviously also face certain kinds of peripheralisation).

SD: Does this take us back to the question of complicity raised by Rashmi? How possible is it, within the limitations you and Amy have spelt out, to conceive of sexuality in more resistant or less 'congealed' ways?

KH: This is a tricky one. Chitty himself is deeply suspicious of either the tragic narrative of queer victimhood or any liberatory belief in LGBT + progress as inevitable or utopian. Rosemary Hennessy (2018), however, is more attuned to questions of pleasure and communality. Like Chitty, she recognises the unevenness of sexual co-optation into, and resistance to, capitalist structures. Yet she also argues for the need to consider 'how sexuality features in the creation of alternative worlds' (Hennessy, 2018: xxvi), claiming that there is 'a powerful reserve in the meaning of love that a radical politics might tap and embrace as vital to organized movement for justice' (Hennessy, 2018: xxviii) – ideas riffing off Audre Lorde's (2007) injunction for black women to embrace the erotic as resistance and creativity.

KH: This question of resistance relates directly to your specific interests, right Sharae? If Rashmi is attentive to the ways that social reproductive labour can be co-opted into ideological control and right-wing political projects, your work is keen to stress the key insights generated by a focus on the terrain of social reproduction as a site of potential political struggle?

Sharae Deckard (SD): Yes, in some ways, my recent work sits on the inverse side to Rashmi here – who mentioned how social reproduction theory has often focused more on reproductive or domestic labour and its potential resistance to patriarchy. I think Rashmi's intervention – that we need to think more about the function of the everyday in the production of complicity with authoritarian regimes – is absolutely crucial, particularly in the moment of a rising tide of right-wing regimes. However, at the same time, without fetishising so-called 'women's work' or in any way wanting to assume that labour in the realm of social reproduction will somehow always be resistant or emancipatory, I remain centrally interested

in how social reproduction theory offers key insights into the ecology and politics of women's work, particularly the ways in which struggles can emerge from crises of social reproduction but also how waged and statist struggles themselves depend on the accompanying organisation of workers in reproductive and environment-making activities. Because women's work in social reproduction is often at the forefront of ecological crises produced by new capitalist enclosures and commodity frontiers, women are often the first to initiate grassroots organising, whether in movements to protect rivers and forests against hydro-projects, mining, and pipelines, or in struggles for food sovereignty, seed preservation, re-commoning and reforestation. Forms of reproductive labour and care work from food-getting, water-carrying, waste-picking, sex work, childcare, eldercare, and informal labour, usually unpaid or precarious, are everywhere inscribed in world-literary fiction, often explicitly linked to women-led struggles and resistance movements in proximity to commodity frontiers and zones of extraction. Many texts depicting anti-colonial liberation struggles or anti-capitalist strikes also emphasise that only through the organised solidarity of both women and men can struggles succeed, and further suggest that anti-capitalist resistance makes visible the living, concrete relations through which social reproduction is enacted in such ways that it becomes possible to challenge patriarchal inequalities as well as divisions of labour organised by class and race. As such, I think it is productive to examine the ecology of reproductive labour in order to examine how world-literary fictions imagine the terrain of social reproduction both as a site of appropriation, violence, and crisis – and possibly the formation of hegemonic ideologies of gender that benefit right-wing politics, such as those Rashmi describes – but also as the potential ground for organised resistance and resource insurgency.

KH: Alden, you've been thinking about these kinds of struggles in terms of representational challenges and an ethics of reading ... How do you conceptualise the aesthetic demands accompanying or following from this kind of interest in social reproduction?

Alden Sajor Marte-Wood (ASMW): Well, for a few years now, I've been attempting to develop and expand the critical term 'reproductive fiction'. At times, it signals a literary archive or sub-genre, while at other, admittedly more complicated moments, I've used it to refer to a mode of writing or even to a method of reading – as a socially reproductive act of care in attending to the text. Thus, much like socially reproductive labour itself, reproductive fiction can take on many different forms and can be hyper-visible (in the case of representations of literal reproductive labourers) or incredibly opaque as is the case of texts that register crises of social reproduction at the figural and allegorical levels. For my own

work, theorising 'reproductive fiction' generally has always been inseparable from theorising 'Philippine reproductive fiction' specifically, so for me, the term derives its critical purchase first and foremost from the paradigmatic specificity of the Philippine context.

SD and KH: It's such a central tenet of world-literary approaches (WReC, 2015) to consider the relationship between local particularities and the global horizon of the world-system. Like Rashmi, it seems that you're using the specific as entry point, or particular manifestation of, trends applicable more broadly across the capitalist world-system?

ASMW: Yes, I'd say that's right. Refusing the naïve separation between oppression and exploitation, social reproduction theory, according to Tithi Bhattacharya, 'treats questions of oppression (gender, race, sexuality) in distinctly nonfunctionalist ways precisely because oppression is theorised as structurally relational to, and hence shaped by, capitalist production rather than on the margins of analysis or as add-ons to a deeper and more vital economic process' (2017: 3). Interrogating the maintenance processes priming labour power for its subsequent exploitation by capital, critical social reproduction analyses operate at multiple scalar registers – from the micro level of the household to the macro level of the nation-state. And, similar to these myriad levels of reproductive labour, so too does reproductive fiction possess the expanded capacity to represent wider, even extradiegetic, frames of reference. Indeed, as Nancy Fraser points out, 'capitalist societies separate social reproduction from economic production, associating the first with women and obscuring its importance and value. Paradoxically, however, they make their official economies dependent on the very same processes of social reproduction whose value they disavow' (2017: 24).

SD and KH: And you see the case of the Philippines as singularly instructive in light of this simultaneous occlusion and dependence?

ASMW: Precisely. After the martial law-era decimation of what little social welfare the post-war Philippines had in place, and the concomitant increase of workers in the Filipino informal economy, unwaged reproductive labour became, to use Alessandra Mezzadri's language, 'a systematic subsidy to capital' (2019: 38) from the perspective of the domestic nation-state. Because the neoliberal Philippine state could exploit filial obligations within kinship relations precisely as a subsidy to capital, it was able to transfer the public labour of social reproduction onto private familial networks. Yet herein lies the terrible irony of Philippine reproductive labour's paradigmatic specificity: the millions of Filipino/a/x nurses, hospice workers, domestic workers, cooks, nannies, caregivers, teachers, cleaners, sex

workers and maids performing reproductive labour abroad often vitally depend on the reproductive labour of family, friends or less privileged internal migrants to socially reproduce their own dependants left behind in the Philippines.

This is not to suggest that overseas reproductive labour is somehow new; it has indeed reproduced labour power as an exchange value at the very outset of the creeping formal subsumption of social reproduction within global capital's singular modernity. I wish instead to call our attention to the historical specificity of the contemporary moment in which reproductive labour – waged and unwaged, national and transnational – is now so thoroughly central to the contemporary organisation of the capitalist world-system. The centrality of reproductive work to the global cultural imaginary demonstrates, in Susan Ferguson and David McNally's framing, precisely how 'the social reproduction of the global working class crucially entails processes of migration and racialization that are inseparable from its class and gender dimensions' (2014: 3; emphasis in original). As the societies of core recipients and peripheral senders of waged, overseas reproductive labour have both been so thoroughly reconfigured by the transnational logics of capital's global crises of social reproduction, so too has world-literature responded to the social contradictions emerging from this shift in labour composition.

SD and KH: And again, this raises questions as to the representational challenges of such shifts, as we all keep circling back to. Questions such as what specific kinds of genres, topics, themes, motifs, periodisations or comparative foci might we explore in a world-literary criticism informed by social reproduction theory? From your perspective, how do you understand the relationship between the insights of social reproduction feminism and world-literary study?

ASMW: Well, certainly I view us as being left with a series of definitional possibilities. Reproductive fiction indexes first the shifting aesthetic representations of socially reproductive labour, and second, it also mediates expansive reconfigurations in imperial formations, the capitalist world-system and postcolonial state formation. The crises of capital's reproduction are qualitatively experienced as concomitant crises of social reproduction, to paraphrase David McNally (2012), but its expression within the reductive frameworks of 'national literatures' often elides the structural unevenness of reproductive labour tethered across transnational boundaries and along global care chains. Reproductive fictions from the world-system's (semi-)periphery denaturalise the role of socially

reproductive labour at two distinct semantic registers of 'the domestic': first, at the literal level of individual-domestic spaces (domestic commorancy); and second, at the figurative level of the national-domestic space (domestic economy). Against poststructuralist or even so-called new materialist understandings of the instability of nationalist identity, I want to suggest that literary representations of the unstable experiential qualities of reproductive labour collectively challenge global capital's own fantasies of reproduction, here understood as limitless self-valorisation, by narrativising the unevenly feminised experiences of the world-system's decades-long crises of social reproduction. Just as social reproduction theory allows us to attend to the ways of life-making that fall away from perception within, but are nonetheless integral to, capital's valorisation process, reproductive fiction does not have to merely represent literal reproductive labour. More importantly, this writing can reveal how the contradictions of capital's combined and uneven development are always, at some fundamental level, experienced as crises of social reproduction that are then disproportionately carried by racialised and gendered workers through the complex global circuits of care.

SD and KH: Daniella, you're similarly interested in the occlusion and dependence to which Alden refers. But what are the implications of this for world-literary analysis in your view?

Daniella Sánchez Russo (DSR): I agree there's no escape from the 'messy, sensuous' processes that constitute social reproduction (Bhattacharya, 2017: 19). Everyday activities such as cooking, cleaning or childrearing allow for the reproduction of human life above the merely biological and create the social fabric upon which socialisation and subsequently production can emerge. Yet, contradictorily, the capitalist economy has historically undermined and/or manipulated processes of social reproduction, for example by suggesting a natural connection between care-work and women's bodies; by forcing an association between gratuitousness and so-called labours of love; by consciously forgetting that workers depend on the maintenance of their labour force, which happens before and after their working day, and usually outside of their workplaces. Early materialist feminists such as Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James (1975), Silvia Federici (1975) and Leopoldina Fortunati (1995) initiated the terms of this discussion, which has been expanded in the present moment by academics such as Nancy Fraser (2016), Cinzia Arruzza, Tithi Bhattacharya and Nancy Fraser (2019), to name but a few, who have used social reproduction theory 'to make visible labor and work that are analytically hidden by classical economists and politically denied by policy makers' (Bhattacharya, 2017: 2), and to ask how the

recreation of life has been geographically and historically secured in our global and unequal capitalist system.

But what does all this have to do with world-literature and global cultural production? For the past couple of years, across various conference interventions and various publications both together and separately, this group has been using social reproduction theory to develop literary and cultural criticism, as we believe that these fields can enrich each other by thinking dialectically. For example, we believe that the study of literary and cultural representations of reproductive work can help feminism better understand the ideological strategies through which the capitalist economy disciplines certain bodies into unpaid care work. It can also deepen feminism's comprehension of the subjectivities that arise depending on the capitalist phase which we are in and the forms of social reproduction that are expected. Most importantly, literary and cultural criticism might help us disentangle how feminism and the creative disciplines have proposed similar forms of social organisation outside of capitalism. On the other side of the coin, social reproduction feminism can help humanities scholars think about aesthetics, or, at least, about modes of writing or genres that seem dominant when literature registers processes of social reproduction. Finally, it can also help humanists pursue working comparatively, in search of differences and similarities within global literary and cultural production, in an era in which dialogue is much needed.

SD and KH: Yes, these questions of aesthetic strategies have been central to our conversations as a group. Questions such as does aesthetic representation of women's labour change over time (or in response to different phases of capitalist accumulation)? Are there delays or gaps in representation of existing political movements, and if so, why? What are the possibilities for comparative periodisation of the representation of women's work in different geographies? Can you give your thoughts on some of these questions, particularly the issues of periodisation and comparativisation?

DSR: Of course, I first got a hint of how social reproduction feminism can help periodise reproductive work when reading Nancy Fraser's (2016) essay 'Contradictions of Capital and Care'. In this, Fraser explains how each phase of capitalist development harbours its own crisis of care as there is always an imbalance between 'capitalism's orientation to unlimited accumulation' and 'the very processes of social reproduction on which it relies' (2016: 100). Fraser outlines three phases of capitalist development for the core economies, each with its own patterns of social reproduction. First, there is the liberal and competitive capitalism of

the nineteenth century, which pushes for an ideal of 'separate spheres' and puts the burden of social reproduction into women's bodies. Second, there is the state-managed capitalism of the twentieth century, which subsidised 'family wage' through social welfare while promoting domestic consumerism and postcolonial expropriation in the periphery. Third, there is a financialised capitalism that dismantles social welfare, endorses a two-earner family and privatises care work that takes place in schools, childcaring facilities, etc. This last phase squeezes at its maximum the social-reproductive capacities of labourers, creating a crisis of social reproduction that encompasses the economic, ecological and political. Fraser's text is a brilliant exposition on how capitalism adapts to political movements and historical shifts to secure cheap or free reproductive work, which traditionally falls upon the shoulders of women. If we take a close look at each phase, we can realise how certain ideological strategies help in this securing of reproductive work; for example, in the nineteenth-century, women were compared with angels (spiritual beings) that guarded the household, while nowadays women are pushed to delay decisions such as motherhood with procedures such as egg freezing, to assure that they can serve first as workers, then as biological producers of labour force.

In my work in the Latin American novel vis-à-vis its registration of domestic service, understanding how social reproduction theory periodises social reproduction has been helpful when trying to make sense of the history of the reproductive sphere in Latin America. Models such as the one presented by Fraser have helped me disentangle transitions in the patterns of social reproduction in Latin America, and have helped me comprehend, too, why certain forms of reproductive work that seem residual or archaic (such as domestic service) are more likely to survive in peripheral economies. For example, in novels by the Mexican author Rosario Castellanos such as *Balún Canán* (1957) and *Oficio de tinieblas* (1962), I have been able to trace how there is a continuation of domestic service after the dissolution of quasi-feudalistic forms of organisation such as the hacienda system, and how this continuation of domestic service goes hand to hand with the entering of middle-class women into Mexico's labour market in the 1950s and 1960s. This is completely different to what is shown by Fraser in the core economies, in which domestic service seems to be outdated by the twentieth century and in which the ideal of bourgeois feminism is mostly subsidised by the state and by new domestic technologies. This comparison can make us realise that social reproduction (at least in the twentieth century) is not only time-bound but also place-bound and can help us understand why global literature (specifically the novel) works differently

across time and space. For present-day literature, which is being produced in a globalised, interdependent world, conversations may emerge regarding similarities in the patterns of reproduction of core and peripheral economies. For example, a novel such as *They Have Fired Her Again* (2016), by Salvadoran author Claudia Hernández, reveals a replication of peripheral reproductive patterns within core economies, as workers that are shut down from the possibility of accessing public sites of reproduction come to rely on racialised and gendered cheap labour force migrating from the Global South.

As a way of closing, I want to quote Cindi Katz's essay 'Vagabond Capitalism and the Necessity of Social Reproduction' (2001), in which she pinpoints the necessity of searching for contemporary associations in the processes of social reproduction across the globe, and encourages the idea that we can search for such associations in literature. Katz says:

By looking at the material social practices through which people reproduce themselves on a daily and generational basis and through which the social relations and material bases of capitalism are renewed – and the havoc wreaked on them by a putatively placeless capitalism – we can better expose the costs of globalization and the connections between vastly different sites of production. Focusing on social reproduction allows us to address questions of the making, maintenance, and exploitation of a fluidly differentiated labor force, the productions (and destructions) of nature, and the means to create alternative geographies of opposition to globalized capitalism (2001: 709).

SD: It's interesting that you mention the Katz piece, and particularly its emphasis on creative and dialectical geographical comparison, which, of course, is one of the strengths of the Warwick School world-literary approach with which many of us are engaged, in that this mode of analysis breaks out of some of the silos instantiated by earlier approaches to global literature. You reference, in particular, the novel form – which has been such a mainstay of Marxist literary criticism. But I know, Kate, you've been increasingly interested in short-story fiction for its possibilities in registering and representing social reproductive labour. In closing, can you say a little more about that?

KH: This question of the utility and significance of shorter fiction seems to have been cropping up more of late – I know Treasa De Loughry, one of the contributors to this special issue, shares this interest, as did a number of the speakers at the Warwick conference that prompted this conversation, including Madeleine Sinclair (2023) at Warwick University.

Certainly, I would argue for a reconsideration of the importance of the short story and its significance to the analysis of feminised work. Clearly there are practical considerations surrounding the writing and dissemination of short stories that may have pertinence in relation to women's social reproductive burden and, arguably, shorter-form writing has greater capacity and political urgency in responding to world events, in keeping with the notion that 'the short story form is somehow specially amenable or adaptable to the representation of an increasingly fragmented social character under the conditions of technological, industrial modernity' (Hunter, 2007: 3). In fact, I would suggest that the short story serves as a bellwether for global issues surrounding women's labour, capturing capitalism's ambivalent dependence on social reproduction with some urgency, as well as revealing those peripheral sexual formations destabilising capitalism's gendered-sexual orthodoxy. This aligns with Mary Eagleton's view, for example, of the short story as holding 'a marginal and ambiguous position [...] peopled with characters who are in some way at odds with the dominant culture', meaning it is particularly well suited to investigating 'the position of women in a patriarchal society' (2014: 256).

Aesthetic considerations must also be part of this conversation, though. Not only might the mundanity and ubiquity of women's work be more overt across short fiction, but additionally, short story writers, to me, seem more attuned to, and resistant of, those distorting narratives of romantic love, which serve as 'compensation for and sublimation of [...] sexual and economic independence' (Mies, 1986: 104). Whereas novels 'cannot get on easily without love', the short story 'does not need a love-interest to hold its parts together, and the writer of short-stories has thus a greater freedom' (Matthews, 2018: 20–21). Irrealist and gothic elements are also frequently marshalled to evoke the distortions of neoliberal capital, and the bodily-emotional toll of unceasing, unseen, reproductive labour, as well as the monstrous realities of the capitalist world-system.

For me, this also loops us back to some of the crossover between queer materialist, social reproduction feminist and world-literary approaches, too. Short stories, I would speculate, are where emergent same-sex formations that refute, or stand aslant to, neoliberal individualism might be found; short stories often align to promote the communal, resistant and caring potentialities of non-normative sexual practices. Considering the narrative function of LGBT + characters, Judith Roof describes the 'shared structural relation' between the 'middle, minor and perverse' and 'the dominant, the normative and the important', being concerned specifically in those moments where 'the possibility of a different perspective

produces a threat to narrative and meaning' (2002: 8). This connects with some of the aesthetic tensions, and deviations, central to the Warwick School approach (WReC, 2015): both fields are concerned with the failings of normative order – whether that is the bourgeois, heteropatriarchal family or the capitalist system itself – while both relate such failure to narrative disjuncture and a literary politics of excess.

SD and KH: Rashmi, given you opened the discussion for us, would you like to add any concluding comments to the above? Perhaps relating your important point about the neglect or absence of the everyday and political consciousness to questions of cultural form, genre and possibility?

RV: This has been a wonderful conversation. It has not only highlighted the aspects of social reproduction theory that are yet to be properly accounted for but also pointed to the contradictory, albeit productive, politics generated by it. Thus, while attention to the disproportionate effect of climate catastrophe and a generalised crisis of capitalism as experienced at home and in the workplace on the everyday life of women can become the ground of resistance, many of us are also interested in questions of complicity in the kinds of labour some women and sexual minorities do for larger authoritarian projects of patriarchy, the nation/state and the corporation. That work is part of a gendered and racialised process, so cannot be reduced to a theory of false consciousness or even of feminist agency.

Also, perhaps in my earlier remarks I did not stress the role of corporate capital enough, and its imbrication in the everyday lives of middle-class aspirational women such as my school friends. After all, WhatsApp itself is part of Meta Corporation, which seems to cooperate with authoritarian regimes such as that of Modi in India. It is this nexus of nation, family/community and corporation that is shaping and producing the everyday as the site where the good Hindu woman is also a successful consuming woman who starts her morning earning good karma through good morning wishes with pictures of deities and ends her day by posting selfies from her foreign travels. I suppose it is what happens in between, in the interstices of the twenty-four hours that make the every day of the everyday, that is crucial for a proper understanding of social reproduction in world culture, as is the analysis of the ways in which this everyday bolsters the power of the Hindu nation and of other authoritarian regimes in power the world over.

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