

Contents lists available at [ScienceDirect](http://www.sciencedirect.com)

# Women's Studies International Forum

journal homepage: [www.elsevier.com/locate/wsif](http://www.elsevier.com/locate/wsif)

## Introduction: Feminist geographies of social reproduction and race



Carmen Teeple Hopkins

University of Toronto, Department of Geography and Program in Planning, 100 St. George Street, Room 5047, Toronto, ON M5S 3G3, Canada

### ARTICLE INFO

Available online 11 November 2014

### SYNOPSIS

This is a special issue of *Women's Studies International Forum* that aims to bring a spatial analysis to social reproduction processes. The introduction outlines in broad brushstrokes the contours of recent feminist literature on social reproduction. It does so firstly in relation to the tradition of feminist political economy (FPE), secondly in relation to anti-racist feminisms, and thirdly in relation to feminist geography. We locate our own work on social reproduction at the junction of these three conceptual lineages, drawing particular insight from the important 2004 text edited by feminist geographers Katharyne Mitchell, Sallie A. Marston, and Cindi Katz, *Life's Work: Geographies of Social Reproduction*. Our central goal is to extend the debates initiated in *Life's Work* by drawing attention to relevant scholarship that preceded the publication of that text and specifically to research that originated outside of the U.S.

Crown Copyright © 2014 Published by Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

This special issue of *Women's Studies International Forum* is the product of many discussions—both within and outside of the classroom—on feminist political economy (FPE), geographies of racialization, and the politics of positionality. The contributors of the articles in this collection are all feminist geographers, and as such, we aim to add a sustained focus on the *spatial* elements of social reproduction processes. I offer these introductory thoughts in my role as one of the organizers of our collective efforts, and as the author of one of the articles.

This introduction outlines in broad brushstrokes the contours of recent feminist literature on social reproduction. It does so firstly in relation to the tradition of FPE, secondly in relation to anti-racist feminisms, and thirdly in relation to feminist geography. We locate our own work on social reproduction at the junction of these three conceptual lineages, drawing particular insight from the important 2004 text edited by feminist geographers Katharyne Mitchell, Sallie A. Marston, and Cindi Katz, *Life's Work: Geographies of Social Reproduction*. Our central goal is to extend the debates initiated in *Life's Work* by drawing attention to relevant scholarship that preceded the

publication of that text and specifically to research that originated outside of the U.S.

While there is a vast social reproduction literature, one of the key arguments is that non-waged work is not only necessary for capitalist profit and waged work, but is indeed central to production processes (Dalla Costa & James, 1972; James, 2012; Federici, 1975; Federici, 2012; Hartmann, 1980; Delphy, 1984). Two main articles on social reproduction were published during the 1970s: Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James', "The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community" (1972), and Silvia Federici's "Wages Against Housework" (1975). Dalla Costa and James argued that the family was at the center of social reproduction (James, 2012, p. 50). While Marx focused on the wage relation as central to capitalism, one needed to discuss "women's work" to describe how wage labor is produced (emphasis in original, James, 2012, p. 51). This women's work was the unpaid caring labor necessary to reproduce the wage labor force.

Dalla Costa and James' article laid the foundation for the Wages for Housework Campaign (James, 2012, p. 44). This campaign challenged the societal expectations that women

perform unpaid labor in the home (Federici, 2012, pp. 18–19). At its core, the purpose was to “restructure social relations in terms more favorable to us [women]” (p. 19). By demanding wages for housework, the campaign aimed to create ways for women to ultimately refuse housework (p. 18). Dalla Costa, James and Federici were among important feminist theorists who were not only writing about women’s everyday work, but were also heavily involved in international feminist organizing to improve women’s daily lives and to recognize women’s unpaid work as work.<sup>1</sup> Since the 1970s, the definition of social reproduction has become generally accepted as: (1) biological reproduction; (2) the reproduction of the labor force, including subsistence and training; and (3) the provision of care by individuals and institutions (Bakker, 2007; Bezanson & Luxton, 2006; Brenner & Laslett, 1991; Eldholm, Harris, & Young, 1977; England & Folbre, 1999; Fortunati, 1995; Luxton, 2006; Picchio, 1992).<sup>2</sup>

There are important anti-racist feminists who have written on socially reproductive labor, some of who tend to be eclipsed from FPE literature. During U.S. slavery, there was a gendered division of enslaved labor where Black women performed field work with Black men but also domestic work that Black men would not do. Black women’s labor as field workers, i.e. harvesting crops in fields, and as domestic workers, was devalued by Black men because it was seen as feminine (Hooks, 1981, p. 23). Black women’s enslaved labor was thus devalued both within and outside of the home. During this time period enslaved labor was unwaged for both women and men, yet women’s labor often differed from that of men and was not considered as important. Black women’s enslaved labor was thus central to both production and socially productive processes. Furthermore, since Black women worked outside the home in unpaid labor during slavery, the traditional public/private sphere division has not applied to U.S. Black women (Hill Collins, 2002, p. 47). Yet for many decades post-slavery, research on Black women’s labor often focused on paid work instead of unpaid labor that was disproportionately gendered work within Black communities (Hill Collins, 2002, p. 46).

Black women and women of color have often done unpaid domestic work, paid caring work, or have been forced into workfare programs (Brewer, 1997, p. 245; see also Hill Collins, 2002, p. 47).<sup>3</sup> Black feminists have long understood the family and household as a form of oppression for women, but also as a site of resistance to racism (Carby, 1997, pp. 111–2).<sup>4</sup> Working class women of color and white women have also largely taken on commodified care, a term that refers to women’s *paid* reproductive work (Giles & Arat-Koc, 1994, p. 1; for analyses specifically on women of color, see Falquet, 2009; Nakano Glen, 1992; Silvera, 1989).

To some extent, Selma James’ work discussed Black women’s unpaid labor and political organizing during the 1980s on this issue. For instance, during a twelve-day church occupation by the English Collective of Prostitutes in London in 1982 (2012, p. 110), James mentions additional participating groups, one of which was Black Women for Wages for Housework (p. 120). In another article, James highlights that the social reproduction of Black women “remains largely invisible and unrecognized” (p. 178) through the organizing of meetings, committees, prison support work, etc., all after a full day of paid work (pp. 178–9).<sup>5</sup> Given that women of color have long performed socially reproductive labor that was

unpaid during transatlantic slavery and then waged in sectors of care and cleaning work, the scholarship of prominent feminists of color and white feminist theorists illustrates a *social reproduction of women of color*. This statement is not meant to homogenize women of color generally, but to methodologically center race in analyses of women’s unpaid labor.

Feminist geographers have developed a spatial lens to refine the definition of social reproduction (see, for instance, Atkinson, Lawson, & Wiles, 2011; England, 2010; Lawson, 2009; Marston, 2000; Massey, 1984; Peake, 1995; McDowell, 2004). Cindi Katz’s “fleshy, messy, and indeterminate stuff of everyday life” (2001, p. 711) is now commonly associated with social reproduction in feminist geography, and rightly so. Her definition concretizes and visualizes the tasks of caring labor that are often de-valued and seen as undesirable. Katz adds: “[a]part from the need to secure the means of existence, the production and reproduction of the labor force calls forth a range of cultural forms and practices that are also *geographically and historically specific*” (emphasis added, 2001, p. 711). Attention to the historical and geographic specificities of social reproduction expands FPE to allow for a combined theorization of gendered *social and spatial* dynamics.<sup>6</sup> Mitchell, Marston, and Katz (2004) emphasize that historically marginalized groups, such as women, enslaved peoples, their descendants, colonial and post-colonial subjects, and children have performed the majority of the world’s reproductive work (2004, p. 11). This journal collection addresses the historical and geographical specificity of women’s labor issues in a transnational context, particularly in the period of neoliberalization following 1989, and especially the reverberations after 9/11.

*Life’s Work* is one of only a few texts in feminist geography that deals with the question of social reproduction. It focuses on the level of everyday life, culture, and discourse. Importantly, it concentrates on how “we live in space” (Mitchell et al., 2004, p. 4). The spatial analyses of the authors in Mitchell, Marston and Katz’s collection take many forms, including but not limited to: “imagined geographies” in textbooks, port wine enclaves, hospitals, cities, households, suburbs, and the state. The introduction captures Marx’s capitalist/wage-labor dialectic, the role of class struggle, and the expropriation of labor-power in capitalist reproduction (2004, pp. 5–7). Like others in the antiracist feminist political economic tradition, the editors are centrally concerned with the ways that women, racialized and non-status people often perform highly exploitative socially reproductive labor (p. 6). The central argument of *Life’s Work* troubles the categories of work/non-work, or production/reproduction, which the editors see as a false separation that should be deconstructed or blurred (p. 2). They hold that many aspects of “life’s work” are considered non-work, and accordingly propose to examine life and work “in an entirely different register” (p. 14). Of course, many critical scholars would agree that numerous forms of labor remain unrecognized or undervalued as such. Nevertheless, the analytical contributions of *Life’s Work* can be enriched through further engagement with some core ideas in contemporary FPE and anti-racist feminist geography.

The goal of breaking down the work/non-work binary in *Life’s Work* represents a significant departure from some of the main social reproduction scholars. Antonella Picchio’s (1992)

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/375930>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/375930>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)