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Abstract:

One of the most helpful and widely known concepts of socialist feminism is 'social reproduction.' Most often, theorists use 'social reproduction' to discuss a wide variety of unpaid and/or unrecognized labor that is necessary to reproduce the working class; cooking, cleaning, child-bearing, child-rearing, elder care and many other activities fall under this designation. It is common in contemporary anti-racist and anti-imperialist socialist feminism to link these practices to the specific position of racialized and immigrant women, who disproportionately provide these services and who are exposed to both exploitation and oppression in performing them. However, many social reproduction texts gesture toward another level at which social reproduction is racialized: immigration. While it was common in earlier waves of social reproduction to focus on the work of child-bearing and child-rearing as the paradigmatic form of working class generational replacement, many contemporary social reproduction texts -- like Lise Vogel's landmark (2014) work, Tithi Bhattacharya's (2016) edited collection on the subject, and Sara Farris' (2017) work on Muslim women migrants -- note that contemporary generational replacement of the working class is increasingly structured, at least in the Global North, through immigration. The working class is partially replaced in and through migration and immigration, not only through its own gestational reproduction. While this insight is present in many social reproduction texts, its significance is radically underdeveloped, amounting to no more than a mere mention in any of these texts and lacking any sustained treatment. This paper probes deeply into this question, arguing that, from a socialist feminist perspective, one should treat immigration *itself* as a form of socially reproductive labor. This paper proceeds in three sections. In the first section, I explain the significance of generational replacement in socialist feminist thought from the 1970s-present, drawing out how and why this question has been absolutely central to the marxist feminist tradition. The second section argues that, on the basis of the analyses of social reproduction in contemporary scholarship, immigration can and should be considered an important node of socially reproductive labor. The third section draws out some of the implications for reframing immigration as social reproduction, opening up new terrain to reconsider what we mean by social reproduction, and how to more effectively integrate an intersectional, anti-racist, and anti-imperialist lens into social reproduction theory.

Previous discussions of social reproduction and migration have nearly exclusively focused on women who migrate to perform socially reproductive labor, especially those who engage in domestic work, childcare, or elder care.¹ On these accounts, the intersection of migration and social reproduction emerges primarily through the racialized nature of paid social reproduction work: in an age where middle class and bourgeois women, who are disproportionately white, can often buy themselves out of these responsibilities, they most often do so by employing working class, racialized and immigrant women to fulfill these tasks.² This work, because it is broadly undervalued in society in general is often remunerated with meager wages, no benefits, long hours, and little legal protection.³ Moreover, because of the intersection of migration and gender, immigrant domestic workers face high levels of sexual violence and harassment, pressure by employers to use birth control or terminate pregnancies. For documented workers in these conditions, many arrive on visas that directly link them to a particular employer, meaning that they cannot leave their jobs and remain in the country; in such conditions, many migrant domestic workers find their passports confiscated upon their arrival. Unfamiliar with U.S. labor laws and lacking many networks of social support, migrant workers who engage in socially reproductive work are often unable to contest the conditions of racialized and gendered violence to which they

¹ Eleonore Kofman and Parvati Raghuram, “Gender and Global Labour Migrations: Incorporating Skilled Workers,” *Antipode* 38, no. 2 (March 2006): 282–303.

² Grace Kyungwon Hong, *The Ruptures of American Capital: Women of Color Feminism and the Immigrant Culture of Labor* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006); Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson, *Border as Method, or, the Multiplication of Labor* (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2013), chap. 4; Sara Farris, *In the Name of Women’s Rights: The Rise of Femonationalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017).

³ Grace Chang, *Disposable Domestics: Immigrant Women Workers in the Global Economy* (Boston: South End Press, 2000).

are subjected.⁴ For undocumented workers, the ability to contest these conditions is often combined with employers' threats to report recalcitrant workers to immigration authorities, forcing migrant women workers often to choose between suffering abuse on their jobs or facing deportation, a situation made incredibly complicated by the number of migrant women who have U.S. citizen children, and would thus likely be separated from them. Migrants who engage in the socially reproductive labor of sex work⁵ or other criminalized work face similar situations of vulnerability and precarity in the face of the law.⁶

The above literature is incredibly helpful at sketching the relationship between migration and social reproduction, but it does not exhaust this terrain. In the above accounts, social reproduction is a kind of labor that immigrants, mostly immigrant women, *engage in* once they arrive to their countries of destination. Immigration figures here mostly as a background condition of heightened poverty and/or heightened vulnerability to exploited conditions. It is in turn this precarity and vulnerability that significantly frame the high proportion of immigrant women who engage in paid social reproductive work, as this work is already socially devalued and badly compensated. While all of this true, I want to suggest that this perspective on the interaction between migration, social reproduction, gender, and race significantly misses one of the deepest and most central relations: that immigration itself is already socially reproductive work.

⁴ Genevieve Le Baron and Adrienne Roberts, "Toward a Feminist Political Economy of Capitalism and Carcerality," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture & Society* 36, no. 1 (2010): 1–27.

⁵ Sealing Cheng and Eunjung Kim, "The Paradoxes of Neoliberalism: Migrant Korean Sex Workers in the United States and 'Sex Trafficking,'" *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State, and Society* 21, no. 3 (2014): 355–81; Juno Mac and Molly Smith, *Revolting Prostitutes: The Fight for Sex Workers' Rights* (London: Verso, 2018); Fabian Luiz Fernandez, "Hands Up: A Systematized Review of Policing Sex Workers in the U.S." (Public Health Thesis, Yale University, 2016).

⁶ Barbara Ehrenreich and Arlie Hochschild, *Global Woman: Nannies, Maids, and Sex Workers in the New Economy* (New York: Henry Holt & co, 2002).

In Marxist discussions of immigration, this insight is already present *in nuce* if not in fact. It is a common position that immigration is, in the contemporary moment, the condition of the possibility of capital's reproduction. This is, in these conversations, most often linked to immigrations' effects on the labor market, especially in certain vital sectors of the economy like construction, agriculture, and domestic work. In these discussions, however, the status of immigration in the contemporary economy is most often cashed out in terms of a racial or ethnic division of labor, bypassing the question of social reproduction altogether.

This paper brings together these two Marxist literatures: one on social reproduction and one on migration, in order to argue that immigration is itself social reproduction.

Immigration and Social Reproduction

In order to highlight the complex intersections of migration and social reproduction, it is helpful to return to some of the common definitions of social reproduction. As discussed above, many of these definitions center on the realm of labor that is performed in the home, with or without a wage. Drawing on Marx's insight that, "flowing on with incessant renewal, every social process of production is, at the same time, a process of reproduction,"⁷ social reproduction theorists have traced the multi-faceted and proliferating ways in which capital reproduces itself on societal, social, material, and ideological ways. As a

⁷ Karl Marx, *Capital: Volume 1: A Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Ben Fowkes, Reprint edition (London ; New York, N.Y: Penguin Classics, 1992), chap. 23.

feminist tradition, social reproduction has specifically focused on and revealed the complicated nexus of ways that this process of reproductions is wholly suffused with politics of gender, sex, and sexuality.

Of particular interest to this tradition, at least historically, has been the concept of generational replacement. It is obvious why this would be the case; social reproduction, concerned with the reproduction of the conditions of the possibility of work, must focus on the social, political, and economic conditions under which new generations of workers replace those who can no longer work. As Sue Ferguson defines social reproduction, it “explores ... the daily and generational renewal of human life” as central to the reproduction of the capitalist system.⁸ Lise Vogel also centers generational replacement in her understanding of social reproduction and in her understanding of women’s oppression in capitalist society:

“Class struggle over conditions of production represents the central dynamic of social development in societies characterized by exploitation. In these societies, surplus labor is appropriated by a dominant class, and an essential condition for production is the...renewal of a subordinated class of direct producers committed to the labor process. *Ordinarily, generational replacement provides most of the new workers needed to replenish this class, and women's capacity to bear children therefore plays a critical role in class society....*In propertied classes...women's oppression flows from their role in the maintenance and inheritance of property...In subordinate classes...female oppression...derives from women's involvement in processes that renew direct producers, as well as their involvement in production.”⁹

In Vogel’s account then, generational replacement is synonymous with childbirth and its role in the reproduction of the capitalist system provides the key for unlocking capitalism’s tenacious structural sexism. Tithi Bhattacharya also includes generational replacement as a

⁸ Sue Ferguson, “Social Reproduction: What’s the Big Idea?,” *Pluto Press Blog* (blog), accessed February 1, 2019, <https://www.plutobooks.com/blog/social-reproduction-theory-ferguson/>.

⁹ Lise Vogel, *Marxism and the Oppression of Women: Toward a Unitary Theory*, ed. Susan Ferguson and David McNally, Reprint edition (Historical Materialism, 2014), 129. Emphasis mine.

central concern of social reproduction: in addition to regenerating and maintaining workers and future or past workers, the reproduction of labor power hinges significantly on “reproducing *fresh workers*, meaning childbirth.”¹⁰ Similar accounts can be found in a variety of social reproduction theorists, across many disciplines and discourses, which center generational replacement in definitions of social reproduction as one of its most central manifestations.¹¹

Often, however, in the history of social reproduction feminism, generational replacement has been figured almost exclusively as the work of sexual reproduction: gestating, bearing, and rearing working class children, along with all of the physical and emotional labor this process requires. From a feminist perspective, it is certainly not surprising that feminist approaches to social reproduction should be so concerned with sexual reproduction; this realm is historically and continues to be one of the most under-recognized and unequal terrains of invisibilized second-shift labor for child-bearing parents (who, we must recognize, may not always be women¹²).

¹⁰ Tithi Bhattacharya, “What Is Social Reproduction Theory?,” *Socialist Worker*, September 10, 2013, <https://socialistworker.org/2013/09/10/what-is-social-reproduction-theory>. In more recent work Bhattacharya has begun to mention that generational replacement takes place not only through childbirth. As she writes in a 2017 piece: “generational replacement through childbirth in the kin-based family unit, although predominant, is not the only way a labor force may be replaced. Slavery and immigration are two of the most common ways capital has replaced labor in a bounded society.” Tithi Bhattacharya, ed., *Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentering Oppression* (London: Pluto Press, 2017).

¹¹ Olga Sanmiguel-Valderrama, “Social Reproduction,” in *Encyclopedia of Motherhood, Volume 3*, ed. Andrea O’Reilly (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, Inc, 2010), 1135; Kate Bezanson and Meg Luxton, *Social Reproduction: Feminist Political Economy Challenges Neoliberalism* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2006).

¹² On the need to move beyond biological reductionism in Marxist social reproduction theory see: Sophie Lewis, “Gestators of All Genders Unite,” March 6, 2018, *Verso Blog* (blog), n.d., <https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/3654-gestators-of-all-genders-unite>; Sophie Lewis, “Cyborg Uterine Geography: Complicating ‘Care’ and Social Reproduction,” *Dialogues in Human Geography* 8, no. 3 (2018): 300–316; Jules Joanne Gleeson, “An Aviary of Queer Social Reproduction,” *Hypocrite Reader*, no. 94 (February 2019), <http://hypocritereader.com/94/eggs-queer-social-reproduction/>; Jules Joanne Gleeson, “Transition and Abolition: Notes on Marxism and Trans Politics,” *Viewpoint Magazine*, July 19, 2017; Kate Doyle Griffiths, “The Only Way Out Is Through: A Reply to Melina Cooper,” *Verso Blog* (blog), March 26, 2018, <https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/3709-the-only-way-out-is->

However, in the contemporary landscape, at least within the Global North, childbearing is an increasingly less common mode of generational replacement in the large-scale macro sense. Over the last 30-40 years, migration has become a significant source of generational replacement, a trend that is only set to continue in coming decades. Immigration constitutes such a force of generational replacement that the U.S. Chamber of Commerce recently released a report confirming the “*replacement need*” that immigration fills in the U.S. workforce as millions of the Baby Boomer generation retire.¹³ This account is confirmed by an even more recent demography projection by the Pew Center: “Immigrants also play a large role in future U.S. population growth. Assuming current trends continue, future immigrants and their U.S.-born children will account for 88% of the nation’s population growth between 2015 and 2065.”¹⁴

through-a-reply-to-melinda-cooper. Rosemary Hennessy, “Returning to Reproduction Queerly: Sex, Labor, Need,” *Rethinking Marxism* 18, no. 3 (2006): 387–95. Holly Lewis, *The Politics of Everybody: Feminism, Queer Theory and Marxism at the Intersection* (Zed Books, 2016).

¹³ “Immigrants will replenish the U.S. labor force as millions of Baby Boomers retire. The U.S. economy is facing a demographic crisis. Roughly 76 million Baby Boomers (nearly one-quarter of the U.S. population) are now starting to reach retirement age. This wave of aging over the next two decades will have a profound economic impact. Social Security and Medicare are projected to experience shortfalls. 10,000 baby boomers turn 65 each day. As a smaller number of workers and taxpayers will support a growing number of retirees, immigrants will play a critical role in replenishing the labor force and, therefore, the tax base. As the native-born population grows older and the Baby Boomers retire, immigration will prove invaluable in sustaining the U.S. labor force. Projections by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) indicate that, between 2014 and 2024, the U.S. population age 55 and older will increase by 18.2 million—reaching 102.9 million, or 38.2 percent of all people in the country. As a result, “replacement needs”—primarily retirements—will generate 35.3 million job openings between 2014 and 2024. On top of that, economic growth is expected to create 9.8 million additional job openings. In other words, demand for workers will increase. Yet as more and more older Americans retire, labor-force growth will actually slow, averaging only 0.5 percent between 2014 and 2024 (even when calculated with current rates of immigration). The rate of labor-force growth would be even lower over the coming decade if not for the influx of new immigrants into the labor market.” U.S. Chamber of Commerce, “Immigration: Myths and Facts,” April 14, 2016,

https://www.uschamber.com/sites/default/files/documents/files/022851_mythsfacts_2016_report_final.pdf.

¹⁴ Jeffrey S. Passel and D’Vera Cohn, “Immigration Projected to Drive Growth in U.S. Working-Age Population through at Least 2035,” Fact Tank: News in the Numbers (Pew Research Center, March 8, 2017), <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/03/08/immigration-projected-to-drive-growth-in-u-s-working-age-population-through-at-least-2035/>.

If, as social reproduction theorists insist, generational replacement is a central facet of the ability of capital to reproduce itself, and if, as immigration scholars contend, that generational replacement currently occurs as much through immigration as through reproduction, then social reproduction theory must develop a theory of immigration in order to make good on its own insights. A theory of immigration as social reproduction can helpfully rectify this omission.

Immigration as Social Reproduction

While numerous studies of immigrant labor under capitalism exist, accounts tend to miss the central nature of immigration as social reproduction.

Immigration as Labor:

The processes involved with the circuits of immigration are numerous, and all of them require the expenditure of vast amounts of human effort, whether or not that immigration happens through documented means. Immigration processes require the labor of saving money for visa applications and all of its relevant documentation, the payment of *coyotes* or other handlers of the process, the fabrication or purchase of documents like bank account information and social security cards, the often harrowing journeys of migration through land, sea, and air, preparation for interviews with immigration officials, planning for the provisioning for separated families, including the care of minor children left behind and the sending of remittances, the transmission of community-accumulated knowledge about routes and dangers of various crossings, payments to lawyers. Crossings for undocumented

AFAB¹⁵ people often include finding ways to access birth control in order to prevent the possibility of pregnancy during crossing, given the reality of rampant sexual violence along many routes of migration. Once the process of crossing has been completed, a whole new realm of labor presents itself: the work of learning new languages, new laws, new norms, new modes of institutional navigation, building new communities and networks of knowledge and care, evading detection and capture – all of these, at least in some cases, present life-long processes of deploying effort associated with the processes of immigration.

All of these aspects, and many more, can be helpfully discussed *as labor*. In Marx’s understanding of the term, labor encompasses a field that is much more rich and diverse than that which is compensated. For Marx, labor is synonymous with “life activity” in all of its many forms; it is the process of “life engendering life.”¹⁶ Labor, for Marx, refers to all of the discharge of human energy that directs itself to the material world in a way that changes the person who performs it: “By thus acting on the external world and changing it, he at the same time changes his own nature... He not only effects a change of form in the material on which he works, but he also realises a purpose of his own... In the labour-process, therefore, man's activity, with the help of the instruments of labour, effects an alteration, designed from the commencement, in the material worked upon.”¹⁷ Distilling this definition further, Tilly and Tilly argue that from a Marxist perspective, labor is “any human effort adding use value to goods and services” whether or not they are remunerated.¹⁸

¹⁵ AFAB stands for ‘assigned female at birth,’ and refers to all those who were assigned this sex at birth, whether or not this accords with their gender identity.

¹⁶ Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, trans. Martin Milligan and Dirk J. Struik (Moscow: Progress Publishers, n.d.), 31.

¹⁷ Marx, *Capital*, chaps. 7, Section 1.

¹⁸ Charles Tilly and Chris Tilly, *Work Under Capitalism* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998), 22.

That immigration involves extraordinary human effort is hardly debateable. The question is whether immigration adds ‘use value to goods or services.’ A close look at the operations of multi-national corporations’ investment in immigrant labor suggests that the experience of migration itself is constructed as adding use value to the services they offer, that is, that corporations are invested in both authorized and unauthorized migrants as a particular source of value.

A variety of petty bourgeois intermediaries who promote and facilitate immigration, though both legal and extra-legal channels directly profit off of the unrecognized labor that the process of immigrating creates for those who do so. In his study of the global industry of so-called “body shops,” Jeffrey Kay explains that “human export centers” constitute significant links in the global migration chain: “on the spectrum of respectability and legality, recruitment and transportation networks range from publicly traded global companies on the one end to clandestine smuggling organizations on the other. But whether they are licensed ‘headhunters’, recruiters, staffing agencies, placement services, or illegal ‘snakeheads’ and *coyotes* (human smugglers), the business is essentially the same: to procure and deliver migrants. With as many as fifteen thousand [legal] firms, global recruitment enterprises comprise a multibillion-dollar-a-year-industry.”¹⁹ While it may be tempting to conceive of the relationship between recruiters and immigrants under the aegis of service provision, these groups function more as facilitators of exploitation than merely as service providers.

¹⁹ Jeffrey Kaye, *Moving Millions: How Coyote Capitalism Fuels Global Immigration* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2010), 79.

In this sense, the process of immigration is *the source of use value* of the service that these body shops provide.

But there are other ways in which the very status of being an immigrant is seen as an exploitable asset in the age of multi-national corporations. In recent years, multi-national corporations have made particular use of those who have been deported from the United States in order to increase their profits; deportees are seen as culturally and linguistically competent to deal with American consumers, so they are sought-after employees in overseas call centers and other customer-facing operations that have moved across borders in search of a more highly exploitable workforce.²⁰ As corporations and capital hopscotch over borders, looking for favorable conditions (like low wages and tax breaks), they often ask immigrant employees to return to their countries of origin to help them set up new, outsourced operations, “rely[ing] on migrants to overcome cultural, linguistic, and legal barriers at the same time they stimulate migration.”²¹ In this sense, immigration, whether or not it has been through legally authorized channels, is taken as relevant job experience by multi-national corporations, a set of skills and competencies that can be exploited by companies to accumulate capital under the globalized conditions of the contemporary world.

All of this stands in addition, of course, to the fact that in many sectors of the economy, immigrant workers are sought after *because* their experience of immigration is assumed to have produced them as more highly exploitable; in this instance, the condition of

²⁰ Tanya Golash-Boza, *Deported: Immigrant Policing, Disposable Labor, and Global Capitalism* (New York & London: New York University Press, 2015).

²¹ Kaye, *Moving Millions: How Coyote Capitalism Fuels Global Immigration*, 52.

immigration is a condition of the possibility of what Claudia Jones has referred to as “superexploitation.”²²

Drawing on Marx’s definition of labor in this broader sense, social reproduction theory has been a particularly helpful mechanism for redefining and expanding the concept of labor under capitalism to include unwaged expenditures of human capacity. In many ways, one of the enduring insights of socialist feminism from this tradition has been to expose the multiple ways in which forms of labor, especially those primarily undertaken by marginalized people under capitalism, tend to be unrecognized *as labor* even in Marxist and other leftist circles. While one should not *analogize* the work of immigration to the work of women’s unpaid labor in the home,²³ the theoretical move of social reproduction has been to expand the notion of labor operative in political economies of capitalism to understand the complex operations of uncompensated and unrecognized work and the effects that this oversight has on analysis, social movements, and social conditions. Mobilizing this key insight of social reproduction theory allows us to see the labor that is involved in the process of immigration and to demand that this labor be recognized.

Immigration, Social Reproduction, and the Family

If immigration constitutes one of the main forms of generational replacement in the contemporary world, and if that generational replacement can be helpfully conceived of as work, then immigration can be helpfully rethought as an element of social reproduction. Not

²² Claudia Jones, “An End to the Neglect of the Problems of the Negro Woman! (1949),” in *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African-American Feminist Thought*, ed. Beverly Guy-Sheftall (New York: The New Press, 1995), 107–23.

²³ Especially because this analogy would have the effect of obscuring the unpaid work that immigrants do in their own homes.

only does this bring social reproduction theory more closely in line with the changed constituted of empirical reality (by recognizing the contemporary organization of generational replacement), but it also expands the scope of social reproduction theory to consider immigration in a new and prescient way, as a central aspect of its terrain rather than a footnote. Taking immigration as a significant and central feature of contemporary social reproduction requires revising some of the key assumptions that have permeated social reproduction theory from its outset, especially surrounding the status of the family and women's oppression.

As we saw above, many definitions of social reproduction root women's oppression in the dictates of generational replacement. As the feminist literature on social reproduction expanded, the question not only of biological reproduction but of the nuclear family itself, became a central question to understanding the conditions for the reproduction of capital and capitalism. In many of these accounts, capitalism is seen to be a system that is committed to the patriarchal nuclear family as the most compatible organization of private life.²⁴ Under these accounts, capitalism's constitution as a fundamentally patriarchal system is significantly rooted in the nuclear family's organization of generational replacement. However, many contemporary social reproduction theorists have pointed to the limitations of this analysis in these earlier accounts' read of the monolithic understanding of the family under capitalism. Vogel in particular pointed to this limitation by arguing that, following

²⁴ Friedrich Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, Reissue edition (London; New York: Penguin Classics, 2010); Giovanna Franca Dalla Costa, *The Work of Love: Unpaid Housework, Poverty & Sexual Violence at the Dawn of the 21st Century*, ed. Mariarosa Dalla Costa, trans. Enda Brophy (Autonomedia, 2008); Maria Mies, *Patriarchy and Accumulation On A World Scale: Women in the International Division of Labour*, 2nd edition (London; Atlantic Highlands, N.J., USA; Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Zed Books, 1999).

Clara Zetkin, the family functions differently in the working class and in the bourgeoisie, drawing on Marx's own insight that 'one cannot speak of the family *as such*' because "families have widely varying places within the social structure."²⁵ Holly Lewis points to this limitation in recognizing that capitalism is able to rely on multiple forms of domestic arrangements as the basis for the extraction of surplus value. She points specifically to the resurgence of sex-segregated dormitories that prevent the formation of nuclear families.²⁶ And, it is important to recognize, this invention is not new: there is a whole history of capitalist profit predicated on the break-up and prevention of nuclear families. While Lewis does not explicitly refer to this long history, there are multiple historical examples we could point to here: the prevention of enslaved people entering into marriages at all, as well as the systematic break up of nuclear families through selling members of families to various plantations, often over great distances; the sex-segregation of early modern work-houses and mental health facilities that forcibly split up working class and impoverished families; the forced sterilization campaigns of women of color and disabled people, often without even the illusion of informed medical consent; a rampantly growing prison industrial complex that not only places some family members in physical cages, but also takes children away from their non-incarcerated parents or caregivers; a social order that penalizes homelessness by taking children away from parents rather than furnishing precarious families with safe and stable housing and an often-sex segregated shelter system that prevents families from staying together, even if they want to; the restrictions, until rather recently, on queer couples' ability

²⁵ Vogel, *Marxism and the Oppression of Women*, 135.

²⁶ Lewis, *The Politics of Everybody*.

to adopt or raise their own children, with queerness and gender non-conformity being cited in custody battles to attest to the ‘unfit’ status of people to be parents at all; the long-standing history of non-related live-in workers like cleaners, nannies, cooks, and groundskeepers to perform social reproduction tasks (often to ‘free’ upper class women from the burden of performing such labor themselves), to name just a few examples. Lewis is only one of a whole new generation of social reproduction theorists who have challenged the paradigm of social reproduction to stretch itself toward accounting for the diversity of real lived experience and locations of its arrangement under capitalism.²⁷

Under this understanding of capitalism and the family, immigration takes on another important valence in re-evaluating social reproduction in the contemporary situation. Immigration often entails the break-up of nuclear family units, as it is often impossible for low-income families to be able to afford the costs of immigrating together. This means that dependent children in particular are often left in the care of other family members or communities of kin in the country of origin while parents immigrate for greater economic stability. The criminalization of many forms of immigration often break-up nuclear families in destination countries across international borders, as deportees frequently leave spouses, partners, and children behind when they are forcibly removed. [insert stat about how many deportees leave citizen children behind]. The gendered implications of deportations are

²⁷ Bhattacharya, *Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentering Oppression*; Sue Ferguson, “Intersectionality and Social-Reproduction Feminisms: Toward an Integrative Ontology,” *Historical Materialism* 24, no. 2 (2016): 38–60; Kathi Weeks, *The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics, and Postwork Imaginaries* (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2011); J.K. Gibson-Graham, *The End Of Capitalism (As We Knew It): A Feminist Critique of Political Economy*, 1st University of Minnesota Press Ed., 2006 edition (Minneapolis: Univ Of Minnesota Press, 2006); Bezanson and Luxton, *Social Reproduction: Feminist Political Economy Challenges Neoliberalism*.

particularly important because, “nearly 90% of deportees are men, although about half of all noncitizens are women”²⁸; under these conditions, women are disproportionately left in destination countries as the sole provider for their families, which has its own consequences for social reproduction.²⁹ As noted above, immigration often comes with pressures to prevent contraception, especially when the threat of sexual violence is particularly high or when employers may (illegally) require it. All of these instances demonstrate that far from a univocal support of child-producing nuclear families, social reproduction under capitalism is rather organized in a diverse multitude of ways.

Immigration also intersects with social reproduction in countries of origin. According to the World Bank, wage remittances constitute a significant modality of social reproduction; in 2017, 613 billion dollars of remittances were sent around the globe.³⁰ Remittances constitute more than 10% of GDP in over 30 countries, and in some places, remittances make up over a third of GDP. In human terms, this means that millions of people worldwide rely on money sent home by emigrant relatives in order to reproduce themselves. In this sense, remittances constitute the condition for the possibility of social and familial reproduction in a significant way around the world. In many of these cases, remittances have been the only way families have been able to avoid starvation and death amid neocolonial pushes for greater austerity and the erosion of social safety nets. Immigration is hence, globally, a significant component to the reproduction of the global working class; it is

²⁸ Tanya Golash-Boza and Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo, “Latino Immigrant Men and the Deportation Crisis: A Gendered Racial Removal Program,” *Latino Studies* 11, no. 3 (2013): 271–92.

²⁹ Golash-Boza and Hondagneu-Sotelo.

³⁰ Dilip Ratha et al., “Migration and Remittances: Recent Developments and Outlook,” Migration and Development (World Bank Group Knomad, April 2018).

precisely through the separation of families that those very same families can continue to live.

The impact of centering immigration in discussions of social reproduction thus provides one important corrective site to earlier analyses of capitalism and the family. Through focusing on the material organization of the family from the perspective of immigration, we can see that in many cases, capitalism embraces and fosters non-nuclear arrangements of the family as part of its logic; far from a singular commitment to the nuclear family, capitalism maintains a significant commitment to systems and structures inimical to the development of a cohabitating, heterosexist, nuclear family.

But moreover, the lens of immigration allows us to take social reproduction feminism beyond its articulation as centered on ‘women’s issues.’ It is of course true, as we have seen above, that there are many features of immigration that have specifically gendered aspects and those should not be neglected. But immigration is not wholly reducible to gender, involving the operations of racialization, colonization, and imperialism in important ways. As many generations of feminists have argued, discussions of gender must always take place in light of these central features of contemporary life under capitalism. Thinking about immigration as a primary site of social reproduction helps Marxist-feminism interrogate the intermeshed operations of gender, race, class, colonialism, and imperialism in ways that might significantly respond to critiques of earlier articulations that lacked a sustained analysis of these phenomena. Thus, by thinking about immigration and social reproduction, socialist feminism can evolve deeper in its commitment to digesting and analyzing the multiple constitution of oppression and exploitation under contemporary capitalism.

Conclusion: Wages for Immigration

When social reproduction theory became prominent in Marxist-feminist circles of the 1970s, the Wages for Housework campaign began to demand payment for the unrecognized and uncompensated services performed in the domestic sphere. Far from an uncritical embrace of capitalism's wage system, however, the Wages for Housework campaign demanded payment because, they argued, if social reproduction were remunerated at its value, the entire capitalist system would collapse. The call for Wages for Housework thus turned capitalism's own logic against itself, using the demand for wages as a demand for the abolition of waged exploitation, not only for social reproductive work, but for all work.

In a time of increasing militarization of the border, of the refusal of refugees, of heightened xenophobia, racism, and natalism, a socialist feminist perspective on immigration must go beyond a mere denunciation of this accelerated regime of vulnerability. In order to develop a truly socialist, feminist response to a world of borders, we must not only mobilize for a borderless world, but we must demand the just remuneration of the work of migration. A socialist vision has always imagined a world, not only of just compensation and recognition, but a world in which all work is seen, compensated for its true value, and is conferred with social and political value. Socialist-feminism has, for over fifty years, committed itself to uncovering the places in which work happens outside the formal workplace, demanding the inclusion of this labor into our analysis and into our vision for emancipation. A socialist feminist analysis of migration must thus demand, not only wages

for housework, but wages for immigration, which is to say: the abolition of capitalism in all its forms.

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