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Postface

This is the final peer-reviewed author's accepted manuscript (postprint) of the following publication:

Published Version:

Mezzadra, S., Neilson, B. (2025). Postface. Cheltenham : Elgar publishing [10.4337/9781035356904].

Availability:

This version is available at: <https://hdl.handle.net/11585/1037404> since: 2026-01-15

Published:

DOI: <http://doi.org/10.4337/9781035356904>

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Postface

Sandro Mezzadra & Brett Neilson

Reading the contributions in this important volume, we are struck by the perception that studies of migration and borders and the critical analysis of social reproduction could ever be held apart. The authors whose work is collected in these pages offer a prismatic vision of how, in the most recent phases of uneven capitalist development, social reproduction has come to depend even more on migration and migration has posed new challenges for the reproduction not only of labor but also of the whole fabric of relations that make up society. As such, the book makes a vital intervention into the increasingly prominent field of social reproduction theory. Moving from an emphasis on the key although often obscured ways in which the reproduction of labor power enables the expanded reproduction of capital, feminist thinkers have shed light on the multiple dimensions of such processes. From our viewpoint, this has led to the forging of conceptual tools that allow an analysis of the general dynamics of capitalism, its embeddedness in social life as well as the tensions and conflicts that surround it well beyond the point of production. In these dynamics, tensions, and conflicts, borders have prominent roles to play while practices of mobility and migration increasingly intertwine the circulation of bodies and labor power with the domain of reproduction. Addressing this nexus of circulation and reproduction from the privileged analytical slant of migratory practices and movements, this book opens new horizons for research and critique.

We cannot fail to notice how the encounter with migration pushes the authors of *Migration and Social Reproduction* to move beyond the conceptual distinction of and clear-cut boundary between production and reproduction by arguing that the latter produces material, emotional, and intellectual qualities that contribute to the creation of value. Not only does the question of migration shift the debate on reproduction away from an exclusive focus on unpaid domestic labor, as important as this remains, but it also highlights the multifarious composition of reproductive work in an expanded sense. Migration provides a lens that sheds light on this heterogeneous make up, while the angle of social reproduction allows an analysis that encompasses the entire complex of society with regard to its continued duration and sustainability, including in an ecological sense. Importantly, this approach reveals the social dimensions of the conflicts and tensions that traverse capitalist societies, which, as the contributions to the volume make clear, cannot be reduced to class conflict in any restricted

sense but require a rethinking of social class with respect to gender, race, age, sexuality and other differences. The emphasis the book places on the pervasiveness of heteronormative models of the family in existing work on social reproduction is notable in this sense. That such a point arises in the context of an analysis of migration and social reproduction is also significant. For us, this is a good example of the book's method – the attention to alternative family structures materializes not because migrants compose a higher proportion of LGBTQI+ communities than other population sectors or even because they manage family relations at distance, increasingly through the use of digital technologies. Rather this emphasis emerges because the perspective that a focus on migration and social reproduction brings to the study of capitalism necessarily displaces an analysis that finds in the social institution of the heteronormative family a refuge from the exploitation and extraction that propels endless accumulation.

Migration and Social Reproduction performs vital work in questioning a Polanyian critique of capitalism that sees the capital relation as disembedded from social life and constantly involved in a cyclical process of reconciling itself to and abstracting itself from messy relations of flesh and earth. The flight of migration, and the expression of the migrant's mobility as a right to that flight, suggests quite a different situation, maybe even the exact opposite – the seemingly inextricable entrenchment of capital in social dynamics and the use of mobility as a means of negotiating the ensuing forms of privation, opportunity, and dispossession. That such flight often lands migratory subjects in exploitative labor conditions – a predicament especially clear in instances of gendered care work – has implications not only for the role of borders in making labor markets but also for the social positioning of migrants in modern polities, where their presence and often their very contributions to social reproduction provide an apparently compulsive source of racialized fear. It is a virtue of this volume that it illustrates how migrant labor is definitely subject to hard forms of exploitation and to the combined action of racism and sexism. Nonetheless, migrants in this analysis are far from being mere victims. The volume rather tallies with how migrants contribute to forms of social reproduction that are at once pervasive and socially necessary, spanning the world of work certainly but also inhering in everyday and institutional practices that generate a field of contestation. Again, the arc of analysis here returns to capitalism, as such a perspective shows how the work of social reproduction is never completely appropriated or discarded by capital but provides a front of struggle with relevance not only for migrants' pursuit of their own survival but for wider political strategy.

In making this point, the contributors to this volume make a subtle intervention in the mounting debate on social reproduction. Exploring such issues as platform work, housing, the dormitory system in Eastern Europe, and the fragile infrastructures of transnational social reproduction, they bring to the fore the precarization of regimes of social reproduction. Gone are the days in which the family wage organized in the West a stable regime, predicated on a gendered division of labor that was refused and contested by feminist movements long before it was disrupted by neoliberalism. While borders have always played prominent roles in the working and in the very constitution of the labor market, today they increasingly cross the divide between production and reproduction hierarchizing the labor force in both domains. Among other things, this book focuses the reader's attention on the blurring (which does not mean abolition) of the distinction of production and reproduction from the angle of labor market dynamics. It constructively challenges, therefore, any rigid understanding of the relation between exploitation and expropriation (or dispossession), according to which the former would target "free" workers in the sphere of production and the latter would apply to racialized and gendered subjects in the domain of reproduction.

Summarizing a wide debate, the book's editors write in their introduction: "Each phase of capitalist development corresponds with a specific regime of social reproduction to maintain it." The volume's emphasis on the precarization of social reproduction points to an engagement with neoliberalism, which is taken as a key notion to analyze the current disruptions and working of that regime. It is important to note that migration comes to the fore in a conjuncture that presents profound mutations and even deformations of neoliberalism, particularly as regards its entwinement with nationalism. These mutations and deformations are particularly evident in the European spaces that the contributors investigate. However, they are not restricted to this continental domain. Not only in Europe is migration even more weaponized by the far right and indeed also by political forces of the "center." Nor is the hardening of border and migration regimes, which in many ways has placed migrants under attack, a phenomenon linked only to Europe's grappling with connivances between neoliberalism's transformations and deepened nationalism. In many parts of the world, the role of migrants in sustaining precarized forms of social reproduction is crucial. While processes of individualization and privatization, as well as the shrinking of welfare provisions remain prominent amid the mutations of neoliberalism, there is a sense in which migration provides a kind of logistical solution that plugs the gaps introduced into

social life by these dynamics. Particularly in situations where socially reproductive functions such as housing, health, and education are heavily financialized and outsourced, there is a hollowing out of resources and of labor time that opens the space within which migrant domestic and care labor operates. Contributing to the working of a precarized social reproduction regime, migrants also play significant roles in stitching this regime with the more general and increasingly financialized reproduction of capital.

Nonetheless this stitching is far from stable. The contributors to this book work with the notion of a social reproduction crisis that threatens not only the provision of care but profoundly shakes the ground upon which capital has historically been able to maintain and reproduce itself. The affective, cooperative, and embodied aspects of social reproductive work are by definition in a position of externality and potential contradiction with the logics of capital, which nonetheless appropriates them for the sake of its own reproduction. This points to an essential field of struggle, that has been politicized by feminist movements and practices in many parts of the world. Where this politicization has been particularly strong and radical, as in Argentina, the crisis of social reproduction takes the form of a real war waged by the government against self-organization and autonomy in that domain. The reference to Argentina exceeds the scope of this book, which is dedicated for the most part to Europe. Nonetheless, the authors share an awareness of the global processes that cross and articulate regimes of social reproduction. Take for instance the elaboration of global care chains or the dynamics of financialization that have remade the world of pensions and other vital sectors of social provision. Or consider the real estate dynamics of planetary gentrification that have altered urban fabrics and conditions of life or the supply of medical and pharmaceutical products whose availability was so stressed by the Covid-19 pandemic. The violence of such global processes is evident across the whole sphere of social reproduction.

The presence in this book of a chapter on the internal migration of nurses in India provides an opening on these global dynamics that is important regarding both content and method. While the editors emphasize the possibility of a comparison with Europe, for us it is important to mention that Indian nurses are also mobile at the global level, supplementing for instance health labor shortages in regional Australia. This makes the intertwining of social reproduction regimes through migration even clearer, an important point whose development would require a further multiplication of national, regional, and continental perspectives. Think for instance of the changes facing social reproduction in China, where the end of the one

child policy and the reform of the household registration system have led many female rural-urban migrants of the 2000s back into provincial villages where they not only perform traditional tasks of child rearing but also often work in light manufacturing workshops. Or take the United States, where the ravages of Fentanyl have become an index of protracted blockages in the sphere of social reproduction, which mainstream politics seeks only to address by reinforcing borders and demonizing migrants rather than through expansive social policies. These are just two quite different examples, which should be enough to at least foreshadow the relevance of the questions at the center of this book, even beyond its important focus on Europe.

Migration and Social Reproduction offers a rich matrix of analysis that can be extended in many directions. At the present time of escalating wars and regimes of war, it is important to keep in mind the devastating and possibly irreversible effects of militarized violence not only in the territories directly affected (where the reproduction of life is made impossible, think of Gaza) but also within a variable geometry that cuts across diverse spaces and scales. The predicament of refugees in different parts of the world is one effect of that violence. More generally, we can identify a role for social reproduction in the conditions that spur war and make it a defining feature of the current conjuncture. What matters here is again the articulation between social reproduction and the reproduction of capital. The weakened ability of states to organize production and regulate capitalist competition is certainly manifest in its effects upon populations. But it is also apparent in the increased efforts of states to orchestrate global processes and coordinate supply chains (made evident in phenomena such as “friendshoring” and large scale infrastructural initiatives). The fractures and conflicts that cross global space also relate to these forms of state transformation, which importantly include social reproduction. There is a complicity between states’ attempts to resolve internal issues through various forms of war making and their continued push to narrow the margins of social reproduction by imposing a further entrenchment of privatization, individualization, and financialization. Putting up a tariff is hardly a means of resolving these contradictions, which are today more intensified than ever and threaten the articulation of social reproduction and the reproduction of capital. More promising is the path taken by the writers who explore the dynamics of social reproduction and migration in this volume. These authors are not alone in analyzing social reproduction as a field of struggle, but the insight and political commitment they demonstrate in bringing migration to the center of the debate offer a strategic thread with which to begin the work of undoing the always

racialized and gendered anxieties that continue to haunt precarized regimes of social reproduction.

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This is a draft chapter. The final version is available in Migration and Social Reproduction. Critical Junctions Between Labour, Border, and Reproductive Struggles edited by G. Alberti, L. Riedner, G. Lonergan, published in 2025, Edward Elgar Publishing Ltd

<https://doi.org/10.4337/9781035356904>

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