

Ben Trott; The Editorial Collective

## Editorial

2020

<https://doi.org/10.25969/mediarep/13845>

Veröffentlichungsversion / published version  
Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

### Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Trott, Ben; The Editorial Collective: Editorial. In: *spheres: Journal for Digital Cultures*. #6 Politics of Reproduction (2020), Nr. 6, S. 1–10. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25969/mediarep/13845>.

### Erstmalig hier erschienen / Initial publication here:

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BEN TROTT AND THE EDITORIAL COLLECTIVE

## #6 POLITICS OF REPRODUCTION

The last decade has seen an enormous production of scholarly works and a good deal of debate around the question of *social reproduction*.<sup>1</sup> This is a term that has been deployed in a number of ways, with one influential definition of its use among feminists working on the gender division of labour having been provided in the late-1980s by Barbara Laslett and Johanna Brenner. They described it as referring “to the activities and attitudes, behaviors and emotions, responsibilities and relationships directly involved in the maintenance of life on a daily basis, and intergenerationally”.<sup>2</sup> Social reproduction could “thus be seen to include various kinds of work – mental, manual, and emotional – aimed at providing the historically and socially, as well as biologically, defined care necessary to maintain existing life and to reproduce the next generation.”<sup>3</sup>

Today, as Carmen Teeple Hopkins has recently observed, the term is variously used to describe: the unwaged activities of “cooking, caring and cleaning” involved in “the reproduction of the labor force”; certain waged activities carried out by “individuals and institutions” including the labour of “personal home care assistants, maids” and other “paid domestic workers”; as well as tasks entailed in “the biological

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<sup>1</sup> The following special issues and edited volumes provide an introduction to just some of the recent engagements with social reproduction: Max Andrucki et al. (eds.), “Beyond Binaries and Boundaries in ‘Social Reproduction’”, a Forum published by *Space + Society*, 2017. Available at: <https://www.societyandspace.org/forums/beyond-binaries-and-boundaries-in-social-reproduction> [accessed January 20, 2020]; Isabella Bakker and Stephen Gill (eds.), “Toward Variegated Social Reproduction”, a special issue of *Capital & Class*, 43 (4), 2019; Tithi Bhattacharya (ed.), *Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Reworking Oppression*, London, Pluto, 2017; Susan Ferguson et al. (eds.), a special issue on social reproduction in *Historical Materialism: Research in Critical Marxist Theory*, 24 (2), 2016. See also the special “Social Reproduction” issue of *Viewpoint*, 5, 2015. Available at: <https://www.viewpointmag.com/2015/11/02/issue-5-social-reproduction/> [accessed January 20, 2020].

<sup>2</sup> Barbara Laslett and Johanna Brenner, “Gender and Social Reproduction: Historical Perspectives”, *Annual Review of Sociology*, 15, 1989, pp. 381-404, here: pp. 382-383.

<sup>3</sup> Laslett and Brenner, “Gender and Social Reproduction”, p. 383.

reproduction of people”, including “breastfeeding, commercial surrogacy, pregnancy”.<sup>4</sup> Each of these activities are today shaped, albeit in different ways and to different extents, by the rise of digital cultures.

Many contemporary engagements with social reproduction, including some contributions to this special issue, are informed by the ‘domestic labour debates’ within (particularly socialist, Marxist and materialist) feminist traditions of the 1960s, 70s and 80s.<sup>5</sup> For many, of particularly lasting influence are the contributions by those associated with the international Wages for Housework (WfH) campaign, including Silvia Federici, Mariarosa Dalla Costa, Selma James and Leopoldina Fortunati. Federici has been among those to emphasise the importance of Dalla Costa and James’ writing within WfH, and in 1972 they famously insisted that “housework as work is *productive* in the Marxian sense, that is, is producing surplus value.”<sup>6</sup>

As Sara Farris, Kathi Weeks and others have observed, however, there are significant differences among those whose work has addressed social reproduction – including in terms of whether domestic (reproductive) labour is actually best understood as productive (or unproductive) in this regard.<sup>7</sup> Lise Vogel, whose 1983 book *Marxism and the Oppression of Women* also remains influential among some social reproduction theorists, insisted for instance that “domestic labour produces use-values for direct consumption” and suggested that while “women are *not* exploited as domestic labourers” in the Marxian sense, “domestic labour *is* indispensable for the reproduction of capitalist social relations.”<sup>8</sup>

To a certain extent, debates – many of them fruitful – around these questions persist in contemporary work on social reproduction, often

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<sup>4</sup> Carmen Teeple Hopkins, “Mostly Work, Little Play: Social Reproduction, Migration, and Paid Domestic Work in Montreal”, in Bhattacharya (ed.), *Social Reproduction Theory*, pp. 131-147, here: pp. 131-132.

<sup>5</sup> For an overview of these debates, see: Angela Y. Davis, “The Approaching Obsolescence of Housework: A Working-Class Perspective”, in *Women, Race & Class*, New York, Random House, 1983, pp. 222-244; Ellen Malos (ed.) *The Politics of Housework*, London, Allison & Busby, 1980.

<sup>6</sup> Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James, “Women and the Subversion of Community”, in *The Power of Women and the Subversion of Community* (Third Edition), Bristol, Falling Wall Press, 1975, pp. 21-56, here: p. 53; Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation*, New York, Autonomedia, 2004, p. 7.

<sup>7</sup> Farris provides a helpful summary of the differences between the approaches of WfH, Lise Vogel, and Christine Delphy. Sara Farris, “Social Reproduction, Surplus Populations and the Role of Migrant Women”, *Viewpoint Magazine*, 5, November, 2015. Available at: <https://www.viewpointmag.com/2015/11/01/social-reproduction-and-surplus-populations/> [accessed October 19, 2019]. Kathi Weeks, “Life Within and Against Work: Affective Labor, Feminist Critique, and Post-Fordist Politics”, *ephemera: theory & politics in organization*, 7 (1), 2007, pp. 233-249, here: pp. 235-236.

<sup>8</sup> Lise Vogel, *Marxism and the Oppression of Women: Toward a Unitary Theory*, Leiden, Brill, 2013 [1983], pp. 23-24 (emphasis added).

drawing on science and technology studies scholarship, on post-colonial, queer and critical race as well as on Marxian and feminist traditions.<sup>9</sup> And in doing so, they often build on earlier efforts – including by Black and women of colour feminisms – to analyse the ways in which production and reproduction, waged and unwaged labour, are all caught up with questions of coloniality, race, ethnicity, sexuality and other axes of social difference.<sup>10</sup>

In many ways, the recent increase in scholarly engagements with social reproduction can be understood as a response to the acute crises that have come to characterize many of the domains, practices, relations, structures (including structures of feeling), and institutions of social reproduction since the economic crisis that began in 2007-2008. Although for many of course, an economic crisis – a crisis in the capacity to meet needs and desires in the context of scarce resources – long predates this point.

## CRISIS

After years of stagnant wages in many places, 2007-2008 saw a significant global rise in unemployment and inequality, hitting women and young people the hardest.<sup>11</sup> In some parts of Europe, such as the UK and Greece, income inequality has risen dramatically as real wages declined by more than ten per cent (between 2007 and 2015).<sup>12</sup> Poverty rates have

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<sup>9</sup> For two contrasting contemporary positions, see Alessandra Mezzadri, “On the Value of Social Reproduction: Informal Labour, the Majority World and the Need for Inclusive Theories and Politics”, *Radical Philosophy*, 2 (04), Spring, 2019, pp. 33-41. Available online: [https://www.radicalphilosophy.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/radical\\_philosophy\\_2\\_04\\_mezzadri-on-the-value-of-social-reproduction.pdf](https://www.radicalphilosophy.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/radical_philosophy_2_04_mezzadri-on-the-value-of-social-reproduction.pdf); Teeple Hopkins, “Mostly Work, Little Play”.

<sup>10</sup> See for example: Hazel V. Carby, “White Woman Listen! Black Feminism and the Boundaries of Sisterhood”, in Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (ed.), *The Empire Strikes Back: Race and Racism in 70s Britain*, Abingdon, Routledge, 1982, pp. 212-235; Cherrie Moraga, “My Brother’s Sex Was White. Mine, Brown”, in *Loving in the War Years*, Boston, South End Press, 1983, pp. 82-86; Maria Mies, *Patriarchy & Accumulation on a World Scale: Women in the International Division of Labour*, New Edition, London, Zed Books, 1998; bell hooks, “Homeplace: A Site of Resistance”, in *Yearning: Race, Gender and Cultural Politics*, Boston, South End Press, 1999, pp. 41-50.

<sup>11</sup> International Labor Organisation, “World Employment Social Outlook – Trends 2019”, Geneva, International Labour Office, 2019, pp. 18-22. Available at: [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms\\_670542.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms_670542.pdf) [accessed August 6, 2019].

<sup>12</sup> Cardiff Garcia, “How Global Income Inequality Has Shifted Since the Crisis”, *Financial Times*, August 12, 2017. Available at: <https://www.ft.com/content/f301d0d4-7ea3-11e7-ab01-a13271d1ee9c> [accessed August 6, 2019]; Rory O Farrell, *Wages in the Crisis* (Working Paper 2010.03), European Trade Union Institute, Brussels, 2010, p. 8. Available at: <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/gurn/00381.pdf> [accessed October 8, 2019]; Trade Union Congress, “UK workers experienced sharpest wage fall of any leading economy, TUC analysis finds”, July 27, 2016. Available at: <https://www.tuc.org.uk/news/uk-workers-experienced-sharpest-wage-fall-any-leading-economy-tuc-analysis-finds> [accessed October 8, 2019].

risen in many places too, including the United States where they have taken nearly eleven years to return to any level significantly lower than they were pre-2007.<sup>13</sup> As elsewhere in the world, poverty in the U.S. is unevenly distributed, with the Census Bureau finding Black and Hispanic populations, women, the disabled, and those with lower levels of education disproportionately impacted.<sup>14</sup> LGBT people are more likely to live in poverty, too; and among LGBT people, trans people are the most likely.<sup>15</sup>

The economic crisis was precipitated in large part by the collapse of the U.S. housing market, where high household debt coupled with plummeting house prices, rising unemployment and falling incomes led to mortgage defaults and foreclosures. As Saskia Sassen has shown, evictions and foreclosures are up elsewhere too, including in the EU, as are homelessness rates, with young people and migrants especially affected.<sup>16</sup> In the years since 2006, there has also been an increase in the displacement of people and “a vast number of microexpulsions of small farmers and villages”, largely resulting from a “rapid increase” in land acquisition through foreign direct investment, primarily in Africa but also Latin America, Europe and Asia.<sup>17</sup> Further displacements have been created through environmental disasters, political and military conflicts (with 42.5 million people internationally recognized as displaced in 2011), and ‘reprimarization’ in Latin America – a resurgence in agriculture, mining and extraction, largely driven by a decade-long commodities boom in China from the mid-2000s.<sup>18</sup>

The economic crisis itself arrived in the wake of a global food crisis, beginning in 2006, and, in many countries, a simultaneous soaring of energy prices.<sup>19</sup> In 2017, the IMF reported a 45 per cent increase in food

<sup>13</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, *Current Survey Population*, 2018 and 2019 *Annual Social and Economic Supplements* (CPS ASEC). Available at: <https://www.census.gov/library/publications/2019/demo/p60-266.html> [accessed October 8, 2019].

<sup>14</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, *Current Survey Population*, 2018 and 2019.

<sup>15</sup> M. V. Lee Badgett et al., *LGBT Poverty in the United States: A Study of Differences Between Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Groups* (October 2019), UCLA School of Law, Williams Institute, 2019, pp. 7-8. Available at: <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/National-LGBT-Poverty-Oct-2019.pdf> [accessed October 27, 2019].

<sup>16</sup> Saskia Sassen, *Expulsions: Brutality and Complexity in the Global Economy*, Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press, 2014, p. 50; Nicole Fondeville and Terry Ward, *Homelessness During the Crisis* (Research Note 8/2011), European Commission, November 2011, p. 9.

<sup>17</sup> Sassen, *Expulsions*, pp. 80-81.

<sup>18</sup> Sassen, *Expulsions*, p. 56; Paul Cooney, “Reprimarization: Implications for the Environment and Development in Latin America: The Cases of Argentina and Brazil”, *Review of Radical Political Economics*, 48 (4), 2016, pp. 553-561.

<sup>19</sup> UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *The Global Social Crisis: Report on the World Situation 2011*, United Nations, New York, 2011, p. 62. Available at: <https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/rwss/docs/2011/chapter4.pdf> [accessed October 8, 2019].

prices in developing countries since 2006, with crude oil prices also reaching record highs.<sup>20</sup> By 2011, the UN were describing “the rapid and simultaneous rise in prices globally for all basic food crops” as having had “a devastating effect on poor people all over the world”.<sup>21</sup>

One response to the 2007-2008 financial crisis was to blame it on excessive public spending and public debt, and to address this through austerity programmes. Between 2009 and 2011, 113 countries cut their budgets, with 86 either continuing or implementing new austerity measures between 2012 and 2015.<sup>22</sup> In many countries, welfare cuts coincided with the promotion of labour market flexibility and policies designed to increase competitiveness by reducing labour costs, extending a long-standing neoliberal approach.<sup>23</sup> The result has been an acceleration of processes of ‘precaritisation’, enabling the rise of “lean platforms”, like Uber and Airbnb, as Nick Srnicek shows in his work, *Platform Capitalism*.<sup>24</sup>

While austerity policies were freely pursued by some governments, such as the UK’s, they were imposed on others in return for financial assistance in the form of ‘bailout’ programmes – Ireland, Greece, and Portugal all underwent austerity at the behest of the Troika of the IMF, the European Commission, and the European Central Bank. Between 2010 and 2019, in Britain, over £ 30 billion of cuts were announced “to welfare payments, housing subsidies and social services” with what the UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights has described as “tragic social consequences”.<sup>25</sup> In Greece, public hospital budgets were cut by 26 per cent between 2009 and 2011 and increasingly

<sup>20</sup> International Monetary Fund, “Impact of High Food and Fuel Prices on Developing Countries – Frequently Asked Questions”, July 28, 2017. Available at: <https://www.imf.org/external/np/exr/faq/ffpfaqs.htm> [accessed October 8, 2019].

<sup>21</sup> UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *The Global Social Crisis*, p. 63.

<sup>22</sup> Isabel Ortiz et al., *The Decade of Adjustment: A Review of Austerity Trends 2010-2020 in 187 Countries*, International Labour Office, ILO (Extension of Social Security Series No. 53), 2015, pp. 2-4. Available at: <https://www.social-protection.org/gimi/gess/RessourcePDF.action?ressource.ressourceId=53192> [accessed October 13, 2019].

<sup>23</sup> Peter Taylor-Gooby et al., “The Context: How European Welfare States Have Responded to Post-Industrialism, Ageing Populations, and Populist Nationalism”, in *After Austerity: Welfare State Transformation in Europe after the Great Recession*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2017, pp. 1-26, here: p. 10; Matteo Deleidi and Mariana Mazzucato, “Putting Austerity to Bed: Technical Progress, Aggregate Demand and the Supermultiplier” (Working Paper IIPP WP 2018-01), University College London Institute for Innovation and Public Purpose, 2018, p. 1. Available at: [https://www.ucl.ac.uk/bartlett/public-purpose/sites/public-purpose/files/iipp\\_wp2018-01\\_putting\\_austerity\\_to\\_bed\\_technical\\_progress\\_aggregate\\_demand\\_and\\_the\\_supermultiplier.pdf](https://www.ucl.ac.uk/bartlett/public-purpose/sites/public-purpose/files/iipp_wp2018-01_putting_austerity_to_bed_technical_progress_aggregate_demand_and_the_supermultiplier.pdf) [accessed October 13, 2019].

<sup>24</sup> Nick Srnicek, *Platform Capitalism*, Cambridge, Polity, 2017, pp. 81-82.

<sup>25</sup> Philip Alston, *Visit to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland: Report of the Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights*, United Nations, April 23, 2019, p. 1. Available at: <https://undocs.org/A/HRC/41/39/Add.1> [accessed November 7, 2019]; Benjamin Mueller, “What is Austerity and How Has It Affected British Society”, *The New York Times*, February 24, 2019. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/24/world/europe/britain-austerity-may-budget.html> [accessed November 7, 2019].

unbearable health costs were transferred to patients.<sup>26</sup>

Donnatella della Porta rightly points out that social movements in Latin America, Africa and elsewhere in the global South have been contesting IMF and World Bank mandated austerity since the debt crises of the 1970s and continued to do so “well into the 2000s”.<sup>27</sup> In other words, for some, an economic crisis and a crisis of social reproduction induced by austerity and neoliberal labour market reforms certainly long predates the Great Recession of the late-2000s. Moreover, the current experience of crisis in the global South is likely to be further compounded, as Diane Elson has noted, due to a “direct mechanism of transmission” whereby the downturn in the global North further impacts “the sphere of reproduction” in the South, including through a likely “fall in remittances sent home by international migrants”.<sup>28</sup>

In *Feminism for the 99 %*, Cinzia Arruzza et al. argue that dynamics which encourage gender violence “have sharply escalated during the present period of crisis” amidst cuts to public services and souring food and fuel prices.<sup>29</sup> The burden of care has been shunted back on to individual families “and especially the women within them”, while growing numbers of women are having to decide between remaining in abusive relationships or homelessness, and funding for domestic violence shelters is withdrawn.<sup>30</sup>

## MOVEMENTS

A huge number of sizeable and significant social movements and struggles have erupted in the context of these protracted, multi-dimensional crises of social reproduction – crises, in other words, in the practices, relationships, structures, and institutions that ensure the daily, as well as inter-generational, maintenance of life. The origins of this current cycle of movements can be traced back at least as far as the mass protests of 2007-2008, where demonstrations and riots broke out in response to food price rises in at least 30 countries, from Burkina Faso to Yemen.<sup>31</sup> It is a cycle that continued through the events of the Arab Spring, a wave of revolutions that famously brought down entire regimes, and that are widely understood as having been driven, at least in part, by

<sup>26</sup> Alexander Kentikelenis et al., “Greece’s Health Crisis: From Austerity to Denialism”, *The Lancet*, 383, February 22, 2014, p. 748.

<sup>27</sup> Donatella della Porta, *Social Movements in Times of Austerity*, Cambridge, Polity, 2015, p. 45.

<sup>28</sup> Diane Elson, “Gender and the Global Economic Crisis in Developing Countries: A Framework for Analysis”, *Gender & Development*, 18 (2), 2010, pp. 201-212, here: p. 207.

<sup>29</sup> Cinzia Arruzza et al., *Feminism for the 99 %: A Manifesto*, London, Verso, 2019, pp. 30-31.

<sup>30</sup> Arruzza et al., *Feminism for the 99 %*, p. 31.

<sup>31</sup> Walden Bello, *The Food Wars*, Verso, London, 2009, p. 2.

rising unemployment, food and living costs.

While there are certainly very substantial differences between these various movements, significant similarities have also often been noted. One is the important part played by digital and social media. Some have observed the role of these media in shifting the scale of localized food riots into national social movements – as in the case of Cameroon – although far more attention has been paid to their use during the Arab Spring.<sup>32</sup> Although, as Paolo Gerbaudo points out, “uses of social media among activists are almost as diverse as their venues.”<sup>33</sup>

A second similarity is that many of these movements have assumed a relatively decentralized, networked form – corresponding in some ways to the organizational form that has come to prominence within digital cultures more generally.<sup>34</sup> As Rodrigo Nunes notes in a previous issue of *spheres*, however, networked forms of protest rarely represent an ideal form of “horizontality” and instead entail the emergence of “*distributed network-systems*” with new hubs in which organizational power is concentrated; they are “leaderful” rather than “leaderless”, with the networked media movements relying on shaping the ways in which new forms of leadership emerge.<sup>35</sup>

A third trait has been the prominent role played by “a new sociological type: the graduate with no future” – indebted, under-employed, and precarious.<sup>36</sup> This was a prominent feature of the mass protests and occupations in the UK in the months prior to the Arab Spring, led by high school and university students protesting against dramatic cuts to education budgets and student grants, increases in tuition fees, and rising graduate indebtedness. Large student movements also emerged around the same time in Italy, Greece, Ireland and the United States, and later in Chile, Canada and beyond.

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<sup>32</sup> Naomi Hossain and Patta Scott-Villiers, “Purchasing and Protesting: Power from Below in the Global Food Crisis”, *IDS Bulletin: Transforming Development Knowledge*, 50 (2), July 2019, pp. 73-90, here: p. 82. On the use of social media in the Arab Spring, see for instance: Wael Ghonim, *Revolution 2.0: The Power of the People is Greater than the People in Power*, Fourth Estate, London, 2012; Paolo Gerbaudo, *Tweets and the Streets: Social Media and Contemporary Activism*, London, Pluto Press, 2012, esp. pp. 48-75.

<sup>33</sup> Gerbaudo, *Tweets and the Streets*, p. 3.

<sup>34</sup> On commonalities among the movements discussed below, see: Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Declaration*, Argo Navis, 2012, pp. 4-6; Rodrigo Nunes, *Organisation of the Organisationless: Collective Action After Networks*, Lüneburg, PML Books and Mute Books, 2014, p. 8; Della Porta, *Social Movements in Times of Austerity*, pp. 204-210; Zeynep Tufekci, *Twitter and Teargas: The Power and Fragility of Networked Protest*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2017.

<sup>35</sup> Rodrigo Nunes, “Organization of the Organizationless: Collective Action after Networks”, *spheres*, 1, 2014. Available at: <http://spheres-journal.org/organisation-of-the-organisationless-collective-action-after-networks/> [accessed December 18, 2019].

<sup>36</sup> Paul Mason, *Why It's Kicking Off Everywhere: The New Global Revolutions*, London, Verso, 2012, p. 66.



A fourth characteristic is the protest tactic of encampment: from the 18-day occupation of Cairo’s Tahrir Square, in January 2011, over the camps set up a few months later, in May – by those indignant at austerity, the power of finance, and the failures of political representation – in Madrid’s Puerta del Sol and Athens’ Syntagma Square, through to the summer tent protests in Israel, around rising housing and living costs. As autumn approached, the Occupy movement erupted, first in New York City, in September, before rapidly spreading around the world.<sup>37</sup> This tactic of encampment requires movements to confront the question of social reproduction directly. Camps of course “are at once protest spaces and homeplaces”.<sup>38</sup>

Widespread strikes and industrial action have also been part of what has marked the response to austerity, including strikes in those fields most clearly caught up with questions of social reproduction such as health, care and education. In the EU, between 2010 and May 2014, there were 38 general strikes – a frequency not seen since the 1970s – largely taking place in those countries most effected by the crisis.<sup>39</sup> Partly informed by women’s strikes the previous year in Poland, against a proposed law to ban abortion, and in Argentina, in protest at male violence, March 2017 saw a Women’s Strike in around 50 countries, with Global Women’s Strikes also held in 2018 and 2019. As Cinzia Arruzza explains, “[a]dopting the term *strike* was meant to emphasize the work that women perform not only in the workplace but outside it, in the sphere of social reproduction.”<sup>40</sup>

In 2019 and 2020, contentious forms of politics continue to mark the crisis of social reproduction. In Chile, there are mass protests around the rising price of public transport, health care, utilities and consumer goods, as well as low wages and pensions. Amidst rising unemployment and inequality, an uprising in Lebanon was initially sparked by proposals for a regressive tax on WhatsApp calls. Environmental degradation and resource extraction from Indigenous territories in Peru have led to mass protests, too, and mass strikes continue across France in response to proposed pension reforms.

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<sup>37</sup> By November 2011, *The Guardian* had documented 750 Occupy protests. Simon Rogers, “Occupy Protests Around the World: Full List Visualised”, *The Guardian*, November 14, 2011. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/news/datablog/2011/oct/17/occupy-protests-world-list-map> [accessed December 3, 2019].

<sup>38</sup> Gavin Brown et al. (eds.), *Protest Camps in International Context: Spaces, Infrastructures and Media of Resistance*, Bristol, Policy Press, 2017, p. 42.

<sup>39</sup> Jörg Nowak and Alexander Gallas, “Mass Strikes Against Austerity in Western Europe – A Strategic Assessment”, *Global Labour Journal*, 5 (3), 2014, p. 308.

<sup>40</sup> Cinzia Arruzza, “From Social Reproduction Feminism to the Women’s Strike”, in Bhattacharya (ed.), *Social Reproduction Theory*, p. 194.

## INTERVENTIONS

It is, then, these multiple crises of social reproduction – and the emergence of numerous sizeable and significant social movements and struggles from within them – that provides the context in which much recent scholarship on the politics of reproduction has been produced and has circulated. It is also what has given it much of its urgency. This special issue of *spheres* contributes to a critical engagement with the politics of reproduction, and as this relates to digital cultures in particular.

Liz Mason-Deese's paper addresses the reinvigorated feminist movement that has emerged in Argentina since 2014 around the hashtag, slogan, and collective cry "Not One Woman Less" (*Ni Una Menos*) in response to femicide and other forms of violence against women. Her paper explores how this movement has connected gendered violence to the devaluation of women's labour and the interplay between digital practices and face-to-face encounters in creating unexpected alliances. In her response, Cecilia Palmeiro analyses how the *Ni Una Menos* collective deploys strategies of online agitation and the dissemination of hashtags as part of a 'political translation', helping enable a global feminist tide that has fermented transversal, horizontal and intersectional forms of solidarity among feminized bodies.

Andreas Bernard examines the social, political, legal and cultural production of the nuclear family as a definitive normative model in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, and the anxieties that have long surrounded purported threats to this model – from the cultural figure of the 'wicked stepmother', over anxieties about the disruption of family genealogy (including by reproductive technologies), through to the extension of rights, like the right to adopt, to same-sex couples. Ben Trott's response discusses Bernard's claim that opening the family to same-sex couples has not threatened but instead confirmed its logic. Trott argues that, for many queers, the family nevertheless remains a site to be escaped; with spaces other than the home and alternative modes of kinship having to be constructed.

Neda Atanasoski and Kalindi Vora bring the category of 'reproductive labour' to bear upon fantasies of sex with robots (as well as non-sex robotic projects around robot reproduction) in order to examine the ways that robot technologies co-articulate labour, sex and reproduction in ways that maintain capitalist racial and colonial modes of acceleration and expansion. They argue that, rather than illustrating a queering of sex, attention to sex with robots serves as a key means of addressing robotics as a site of social reproduction, in both popular imaginaries and in engineering.

Bue Rübner Hansen and Manuela Zechner urge a turn towards the

study and inhabitation of social media in ecological rather than network terms. Asking how we might rethink and remake social media's embedding in our precarious modes of life and reproduction, they suggest that a return to the family and the welfare state cannot overcome the 'carelessness' of neoliberal networked society. Instead, they argue for the creation of networked interdependencies and more-than-human care ecologies.

Kate Miltner critically explores the application of 'agile' management techniques to the family – a technique with its origins in approaches to software development that rely on task-oriented, short-term, self-managed team-work. She argues that 'agile family management' constructs a very specific notion of what makes a 'happy family' – one that is narrow in scope and rooted in historical myths.

Elise Thoburn reviews *Wages for Housework – The New York Committee 1972-1977*, edited by Silvia Federici with Arlen Austin, a work that provides access to a valuable archive of writings, posters, photographs and other documents of the New York branch of the campaign. Thoburn argues that, in addition to providing a documentary history, the book entails an urgent reconsideration of the politics of social reproduction in the present moment.