

Sara Cantillon
Odile Mackett
Sara Stevano



Feminist Political Economy

A Global Perspective



Pluralist Economics
Certificate Project

Sara Cantillon
Odile Mackett
Sara Stevano



Chapter 3

Social Reproduction



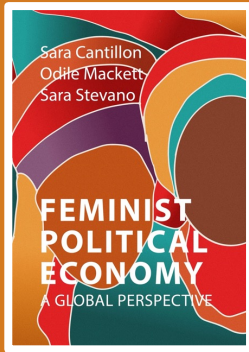
Pluralist Economics
Certificate Project



The Big Read **Healthcare** [+ Add to myFT](#)

Covid, burnout and low pay: the global crisis in nursing

Nurses were lauded as 'heroes' by governments when the pandemic hit, but dismal working conditions have led many to quit the profession



Pluralist Economics
Certificate Project

A crisis like no other: social reproduction and the regeneration of capitalist life during the COVID-19 pandemic

APRIL 20, 2020 ALEMEZZADRI 18 COMMENTS



Feminist Economics, 2021

Vol. 27, Nos. 1–2, 271–287, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13545701.2020.1854478>

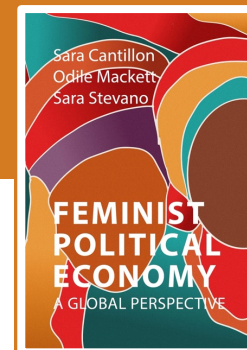


HIDDEN ABODES IN PLAIN SIGHT: THE SOCIAL REPRODUCTION OF HOUSEHOLDS AND LABOR IN THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

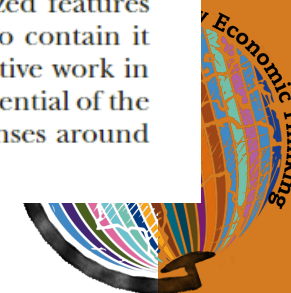
Sara Stevano, Alessandra Mezzadri, Lorena Lombardozzi, and Hannah Bargawi

ABSTRACT

This article deploys a feminist political economy approach centered on social reproduction to analyze the reconfiguration and regeneration of multiple inequalities in households and the labor markets during the COVID-19 pandemic. Based on this approach, the analysis unpacks the multiple trajectories of fragility the current crisis is intervening on and reshaping in the home and in the world of work, and their gendered and racialized features across the world. It shows how the pandemic and the measures to contain it have further deepened the centrality of households and reproductive work in the functioning of capitalism and argues that the transformative potential of the crisis can only be harnessed by framing policy and political responses around social reproduction and its essential contributions to work and life.

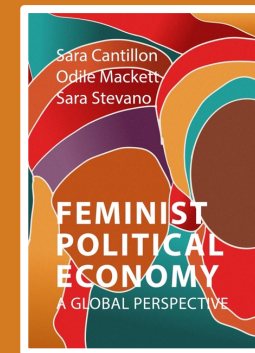


- Read section 3.6, pp. 62-64 at the end of the chapter



Outline

- PART I. Meanings of social reproduction
- PART II. Value: From the domestic labour debate to Social Reproduction Theory
- PART III. The squeeze of social reproduction: From privatization to endemic crises





Pluralist Economics
Certificate Project

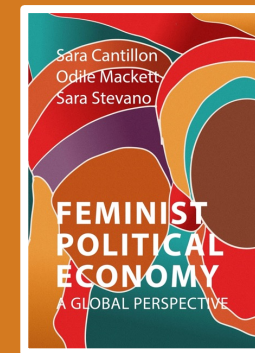
PART I

Meanings of social reproduction

Origins

- Concept originates at the beginning of the second-wave feminism, widely used by Marxist and socialist feminists in the 1970s-80s
- In Marx, (social) reproduction = reproduction of capitalist relations of production
- Feminist extensions (across disciplines):
 1. Recognition of the activities needed to reproduce life, on a daily and intergenerational basis, as work
 2. Centring social reproduction to understand gender inequality, in addition to or co-constituted with class inequality
 3. Contemporary social reproduction feminism concerned with multiple forms of intersecting/co-constituted oppression

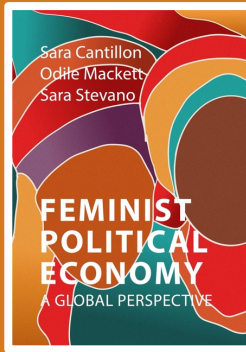
Sara Stevano, SOAS University of London, UK



Pluralist Economics
Certificate Project

Common dimensions in FPE

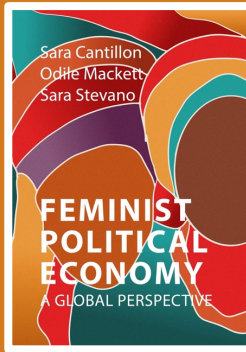
1. Biological reproduction of human life and social construction of motherhood/parenting
2. Reproduction of the labour force, entailing subsistence, education and training
3. Provision of care, which may be structured around family/kinship relations and/or state intervention

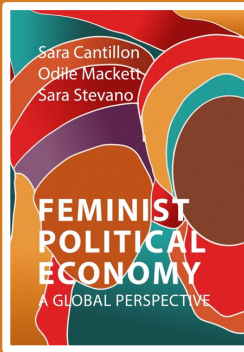


What does it mean to take a social reproduction approach?

- It entails a radical shift in perspective – from a focus on productive activities in the market to understand the economy, to the work, practices and processes that are necessary for market production to occur
- Watch this short video by Tithi Bhattacharya who explains what social reproduction is from the perspective of Social Reproduction Theory:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uur-pMk7XjY&t=1s>



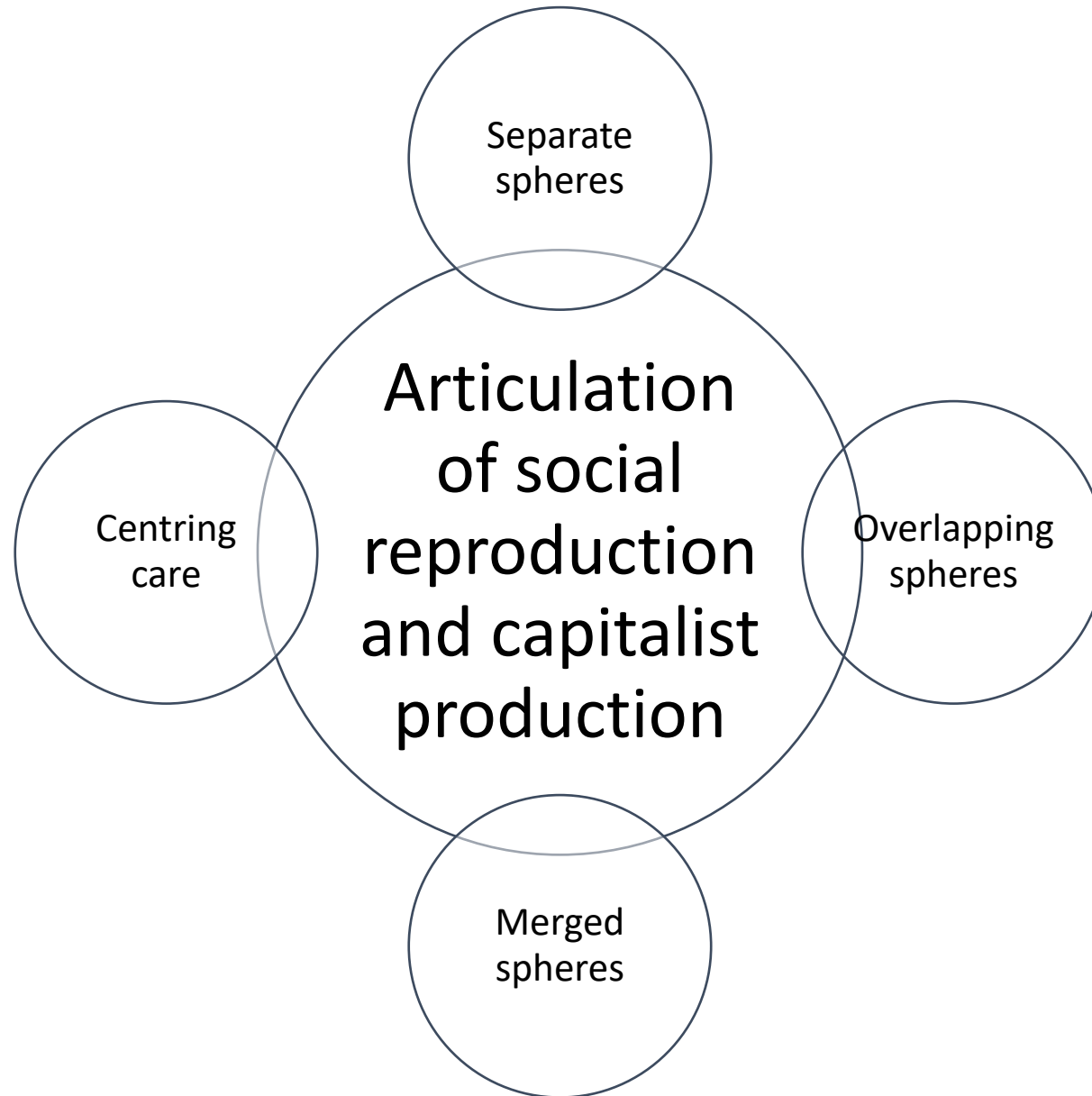


A useful definition of social reproduction

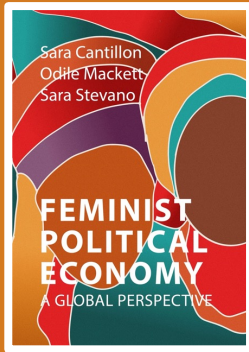
‘Social reproduction is the fleshy, messy, and indeterminate stuff of everyday life. It is also a set of structured practices that unfold in dialectical relation with production, with which it is mutually constitutive and in tension.’

Cindi Katz (2011, 711)





See Winders and Smith (2019)
Social reproduction and capitalist production: a genealogy of dominant imaginaries





Pluralist Economics
Certificate Project

PART II

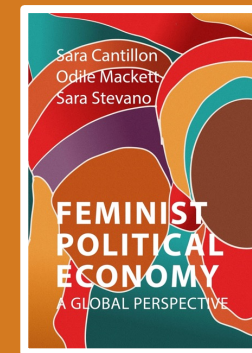
Value: From the domestic labour debate to Social Reproduction Theory

THE POWER OF WOMEN and the SUBVERSION of the COMMUNITY

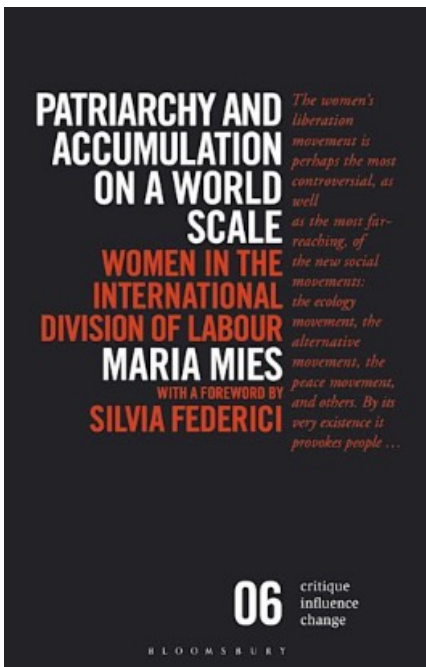
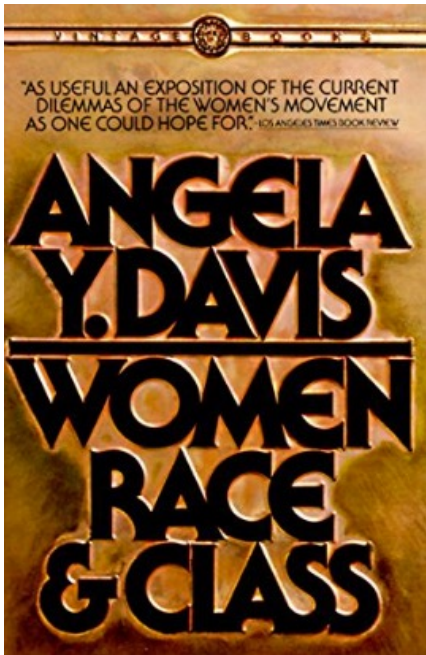
Mariarosa Dalla Costa
and Selma James

Domestic labour debate

- Naturalisation of women's domestic labour and role of housewives
- Housewives produce use-values for household consumption but also the special commodity labour-power
- Labour-power creates more value when it is productively consumed by the capitalists
- Hence housework is value-producing
- The wageless housewife becomes a political subject central to class struggle
- Wages for housework campaign as a way to expose the exploitation of women and de-naturalise domestic labour

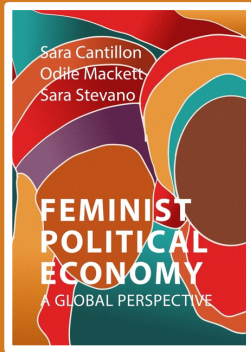


Pluralist Economics
Certificate Project



Criticism and other views of housework

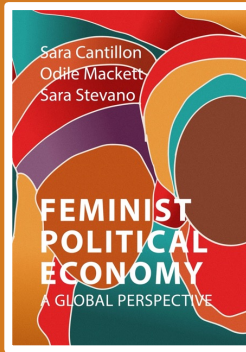
- In the US, working class, Black and white immigrant women were primarily wage earners in the labour market and in other people's households (Davis, 1981)
 - The concept of the housewife is not universal
 - The household is not only a site of unpaid labour
- Conflation of productive and reproductive work in the household (Mies, 1982; 1986) – overlapping articulations of capitalist production and social reproduction
 - Whereas colonisation underpinned the international division of labour, 'housewifization' structures the household division of labour
 - Capitalist production in the home (e.g. lace makers in India) becomes invisible and devalued



Social Reproduction Theory (SRT)

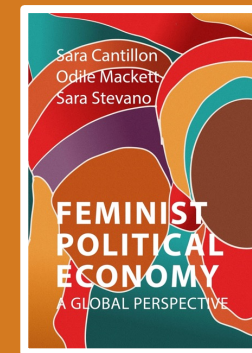
SRT takes up the imaginary of ‘overlapping spheres’ and seeks to develop an integrative theorization of labour in capitalist production and social reproduction, beyond the domestic space (Bhattacharya, 2017)

- Concerned with extending Marx’s labour theory of value by theorizing the reproduction of labour power – the circuit of the reproduction of labour power is necessary for the valorisation of capital
- Understanding how categories of oppression are coproduced in simultaneity with the production of surplus value
- Life-making activities of social reproduction influenced by capital but not entirely controlled by it
- SRT theorises the production of labour as the production of use-value, therefore as a non-capitalist, non-value-generating form of work



Criticism

- SRT's understanding of value suffers from a productivist bias that may hide the work of women, the poor and the wageless in the vast informal economies of the Global South (Mezzadri, 2021)
- Reproduction of labour-power is a reductionist understanding of social reproduction, which should encompass a theorization of the reproduction of social life as mediated by capital (Rey-Araujo, forthcoming)
- Given variation in capitalist production and social reproduction by location, social reproduction may not be a single theory but a collection of approaches (Rai et al., forthcoming)

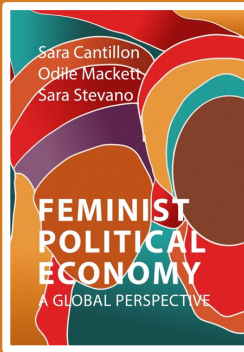




Pluralist Economics
Certificate Project

PART III

The squeeze of social reproduction: From privatization to endemic crises



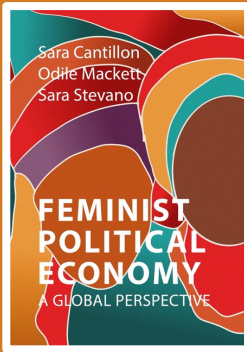
Crisis of social reproduction

‘The capitalist economy relies on – one might say, free-rides on – activities of provisioning, caregiving, and interaction that produce and maintain social bonds, although it accords them no monetized value and treats them as if they were free.’

Fraser, 2017 (22-23)

Intrinsic social-reproductive **crisis tendency or contradiction**
in the capitalist system





Re-privatization of social reproduction

Deepening exploitative processes in the era of neoliberal globalization, based on four key shifts (Bakker and Gill, 2003):

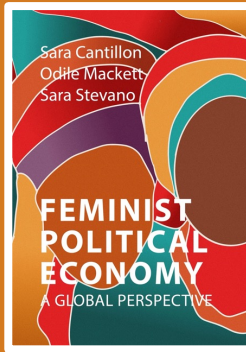
1. Households' responsibilities for social reproduction intensify and, at the same time, components of social reproduction work become increasingly commodified;
2. Societies are increasingly atomised and devoid of a sense of the collective;
3. Capital penetration moves away from formal employment relations to everyday life through the erosion of social provisioning;
4. Survival and social reproduction are increasingly determined by market forces



Global South lenses (1)

Provision of social reproduction always largely 'private' in the majority world → focus on changing conditions of social reproduction, rather than shift from public to private provisioning

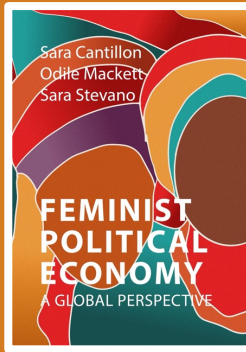
- Importance of remittances for social reproduction in Mexico but, in parallel, spatial dislocation has eroded social networks (Kunz, 2010)
- Fragmentation of the kinship or extended family complicates the temporal and spatial dynamics of family-centred social reproduction in Mozambique (Stevano, 2021)



Global South lenses (2)

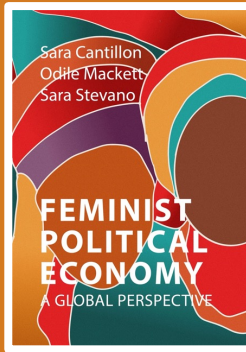
Centrality of land

- Agricultural production and unpaid gendered labour are essential for the social reproduction of the rural poor in India (Naidu and Ossome, 2016)
- Socio-cultural relations related to land central to the ceremonial economy (initiation rites, weddings, funerals) that requires economic contributions to ensure membership to a social group in southern Africa (Cousins et al., 2018)



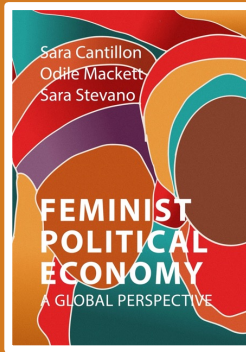
In sum

- The squeeze of social reproduction is a central feature of capitalism but its manifestations are historically and geographically contingent, reflecting core-periphery relations in the global economy
- In the Global North: shift to private provisioning (retreat of the state), and penetration of finance into everyday life
- In the South: transformations in access to land and natural resources, the role of the ceremonial economy, changes in family-centred social reproduction



In your own time

- Contemporary social reproduction approaches used to improve our understanding of work, labour process and commodification – read section 3.5 (pp. 58-62) or RIPE special issue on [‘Global feminist political economies of work and social reproduction’](#)



Sara Cantillon
Odile Mackett
Sara Stevano



Feminist Political Economy
A Global Perspective
Thanks for watching! 😊



Pluralist Economics
Certificate Project