
Book Review

Contested Social and Ecological Reproduction: Impacts of States, Social Movements and Civil Society in Times of Crisis

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This recently published anthology contributes significantly to our understanding of a systemic and multipronged crisis of the material conditions of life which threatens to envelop the whole globe, intersecting with historical forms of injustice and structural forms of violence. It will be of particular interest to scholars and students of social sciences and feminist and Marxist theory. It could also engage a non-academic audience hoping to interpret and articulate different experiences and perceptions of inequality and hardship. In fact, it constitutes a precious documentation of the ways in which this crisis is signified and contested in distinct localities. It is crafted through the weaving of different threads, which make up a layered and vivid tapestry. It incorporates ethnographic material grounded on the labour, livelihood struggles, community-making, and change- and life-fostering practices of women in places as diverse and distant as Costa Rica, India, Iran and Germany. The case studies included in the volume are read through a historical materialist and feminist lens. It is precisely within this theoretical framework that the variously experienced economic, political, ecological and health crises endangering the lives and the livelihoods of the vast majority of the world population can be connected and interpreted as different manifestations of a deeply rooted crisis of social reproduction.

The introductory chapter is written by Prof. Antonia Kupfer, who currently teaches Macrosociology at the Technical University of Dresden and by Constanze Stutz, who at the time of the publication of this volume was completing her doctoral studies at the Institute for Social Research of Frankfurt. They begin by considering the urgent and profound deterioration of the living conditions of most world inhabitants, and of women above all, and by acknowledging the global re-emergence and reconfiguration of a host of social movements and local struggles, waged around fundamental, life-inherent issues. *Change, crisis and livelihoods* are the concepts the editors use to frame and connect phenomena as diverse as ecological emergencies, armed conflicts, growing economic inequalities and political authoritarianism. Through a brief examination of the origins of the climate justice movement, which they see as rooted in the practices and initiatives of people of colour, the authors are able to contrast the indigenous grassroots approach to the ecological crisis, based on a different, more integrated, social relation to nature, with the technical fixes and the hegemonic 'green' projects offered as a solution by the current socio-economic order. Different political/collective subjects provide distinct, often irreconcilable, understandings of the crises of social reproduction which are investing the planet. The conflicts ignited by incompatible

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representations, narratives and injunctions and by the engineering of possible antidotes to the planetary poly-crisis constitute the other pivotal concern of the volume. It is also through this idea of contested framings and heterogeneous countermeasures that the editors attempt to connect the various case studies comprising the book. In the final part of the first chapter the editors provide an overview of the contributors' works, which include a poignant variety of livelihood crises and collective contestations.

In the second chapter, Gabriela Arguedas Ramirez, with insights, stories and data from her fieldwork in an impoverished town in Costa Rica, tackles the issue of food insecurity, showing that the technocratic and neoliberal approaches, far from providing a solution to food crises, famines and nutritional poverty, contribute to the production and perpetuation of hunger. The author sees hunger, which dramatically affects lives and livelihoods and predominantly hurts women and children, as a disciplinary mechanism. Hunger reinforces structural injustice and carries social trauma across the generations. It is therefore a perfect example of the deadly form of power that Achille Mbembe (2020) called 'necropolitics'. Arguedas Ramirez, elaborating on Scheper-Hughes' and Lock's (1987) model of the three bodies, constructs her idea of the 'hungry body' as an 'intersection of materialities'. The voices speaking to the researcher and, through the mediation of her carefully constructed texts, to the readers of the anthology, are a compelling evocation of the lived experience of the Costa Rican women she met. Interwoven with social theory and strengthened by a radically critical position, they propel us to move the issue of hunger back into the political realm and away from the purely 'technical' domain.

In the subsequent chapter, Low analyses and questions an Indian social welfare scheme launched by the national government in 2016, based on the distribution of LPG (liquefied petroleum gas) connections to women of households living below the poverty line. According to its proponents, this social programme would provide poor women with affordable and sustainable cooking fuel and liberate them from the time-consuming task of gathering firewood. According to governmental rhetoric, the women chosen for the project would thus have more time for education and other family or leisurely activities. Low carefully demonstrates that these promises have not been fulfilled and that, moreover, the digitalisation and financialisation of household activities connected to the welfare scheme has imposed extra burdens on women and subjected them to increased state control and to the risk of family conflicts and indebtedness. Furthermore, the PMUY (Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana) programme has criminalised domestic economies *vis-à-vis* large infrastructural projects and exacerbated the paternalistic and authoritarian tone of the relationship between women and the 'father of the state' (the current Indian president), represented as a saviour of marginalised and impoverished women. Finally, Low contrasts this kind of top-down welfare schemes with the popular, territorial and increasingly interconnected struggles of Dalit and Adivasi women and farmers and Muslim communities.

Tabea Latocha, in the fourth chapter of the anthology, writes about the experience of precariousness, existential uncertainty, displacement and exclusion of the German tenants living in the housing blocks owned and managed by large real estate companies. Through a 'feminist infrastructural perspective', and following David Harvey, she sees the current financialisation of housing as the last cycle of an accumulation process based on dispossession. She cogently interprets the geographies of gentrification and prevarication shaped by neoliberal housing policies as another example of the crisis of social reproduction.

In 'Social movement and bodily integrity', Kijan Mohammadi briefly recounts the history of Mahsa Amini Movement in Iran. Mahsa Amini, a Kurdish woman of 22, died in a Teheran hospital in 2022, after being held in custody by the Islamic religious police for allegedly refusing to wear her hijab in the 'customary' way. Her death sparked a huge wave of protests, led by women and young Iranians, and subsequently joined by other political subjects. Protestors faced imprisonment and harsh repression. Mohammadi uses the productive, thought-provoking idea of the right to 'bodily integrity', whose roots in the philosophical/ethical /legal/psychological domains she briefly sketches out, to give voice to the protestors and substance to their claims.

Ingrid Artus, in 'Women* in Movement: Female (Care) Strikes Between Unions and Feminism', encourages the readers to read the strikes of predominantly female medical and school workers in Germany as 'female care' protests and connects them with other, internationally renowned, and female led movements, like the Argentinian *Ni Una Menos*. She writes about strikes as moments of collective identity construction and sees them as 'hubs of utopia', thereby encouraging her readers to see utopias as paths to be constructed while in movement. Her optimistic outlook is accompanied by a more sober account of the tense but potentially fruitful relations between women's movements and unions in recent history.

The volume ends with an engaging and fluent conversation between its editors and the well-known feminist philosopher Nancy Fraser, who published *Cannibal Capitalism* in 2022. Throughout this brief but compelling interview, the readers can be introduced to or re-acquainted with some of Fraser's most recent contributions.

Fraser's idea that the current economic order accrues value through a mix of exploitation and expropriation is particularly apt to understand the experience of housing and food insecurity, in a period of renovated enclosures and reconfiguration of global capitalism. Fraser's acknowledgement that people's lives are affected differently by the systemic crises of our times is a cautionary reminder that the workers and women of the world perceive the

social and ecological contours of their existential emergencies through different filters. They tell different stories about the roots of the 'evil' which stunts and endangers their lives and poisons and haunts their communities. They also envision different solutions. Creating a vast counterhegemonic bloc, as she suggests, implies building bridges across different experiences, epistemologies and ontologies. Fraser proposes thus an 'expanded view of socialism', as a broad and fundamental political project, within which different groups can participate in the construction of a biophilic order, despite and through their differences.

I found the structure of the volume particularly significant. It is divided into sections, each one prefaced by a term ('Beginning', 'Eating', 'Cooking', 'Inhabiting', 'Surviving', 'Fighting', 'Sparking') which simultaneously captures the challenges and the possibilities of the context it refers to by constituting a distinct point of view over a planetary crisis which is experienced, given meaning and contrasted by women in culturally specific and /or increasingly global ways.

Each section is an ensemble of different voices, speaking with the same urgency but from different standpoints. Therefore, it is the whole anthology, not just the final chapter, which can be read as an ongoing conversation and interpreted through the overarching narrative of the systemic crisis, with each emergency and each history of existential precariousness, dispossession and suffering amplified by and deciphered through the others. 'Eating' is, for instance, inextricably related to food sovereignty, to political, ecological, energetic and infrastructural crises, to gender discrimination and socialisation, and to the historical injustice and trauma which operate within and through real body-selves. Moreover, 'eating' and 'cooking' are also about inhabiting and surviving within the territories alienated, wrecked or enclosed by a life-devouring system, and about 'beginning' to acknowledge the existence and the historical resilience of other spaces and modes of being and 'fighting' to construct alternative, more optimistic futures.

I felt particularly drawn to the chapters based on fieldwork in Costa Rica, India and Germany. My research interests and my own life experience have brought me to consider the paradoxes and contradictions of top-down, large-scale development projects and the social fissures and ecological wreckage brought about by neoliberal policies.

I grew up in southeastern Sicily, witnessing in part the transformation of a once celebrated coastal landscape, rich in hydric resources, archaeological remains and ingenious watermills, channels and cisterns into a poisoned wasteland. The economic benefits of such destruction were, for common people, scarce and short-lived. Nowadays, the few available jobs that survived (trans)national capitalist restructuring are distributed along carefully honed clientelist networks, further dispossessing people from their decision-making and change-envisioning capabilities.

While doing anthropological research (Basso, 2015), I looked at how an often-undecipherable enmeshment of state institutions and corporations slowly altered the relation that historically marginalised people entertained with their land, along the lines that Fraser's model accurately captures in *Cannibal Capitalism*. This was also accomplished, as it increasingly happens, through the deployment of narratives of progress, prosperity, inclusivity and ecological sustainability. It is through the widespread circulation and acceptance of such rhetoric that in the Caribbean Colombia of my fieldwork, the construction of a wooden pier or the reclaiming of land for sustenance by native inhabitants came to be stigmatised and criminalised while 5-stars floating hotels and water-consuming luxury resorts could be marketed as the epitome of sustainability.

As a teacher and a mother living in southern Europe, at last, I am trying to survive the syphoning off of public funds from education, healthcare and family services. These resources are increasingly re-directed towards the debt payment black hole and the re-armament race, while soaring living prices, unemployment, the work of local and transnational criminocracies and inequitable taxation disrupt families, communities and lives.

Therefore, I consider particularly valuable the contributors' attempts to elucidate the contextual ways in which the capitalistic socioeconomic order, especially in its neoliberal and developmental declinations, finds ways to catch up with and to leech off the resources and the narratives of other political domains, like the green movement or, as shown in the Indian case study, conservative, nationalistic or paternalistic projects. The book also provides much needed evidence on how the discourses of progress, empowerment and participation can mingle with local material and cultural conditions to reinforce dependence and to control people's behaviour and labour, disavowing popular knowledge and criminalising local sociality and small-scale economies. Moreover, we are now observing that variously calibrated compounds of *laissez-faire* and technocratic encroachment, far from being path-breaking solutions to our crises, dispossess women, families and communities and the chapters based on research in Costa Rica, India and Germany deftly describe these socio-political trends.

Furthermore, the concept of 'crisis of social reproduction', which is a central, unifying concept in the volume, is a crucial construct insofar it uncovers the political dimensions of individual and collective crises and highlights the linkages between different experiences of emergency and insecurity across the globe. The case studies also examine spontaneous moments of political resistance and new and resurgent forms of place-based struggles, whose meanings and premises differ from the stale monocausal narratives that Vandana Shiva (1993) calls 'monocultures

of the mind'. The juxtaposition of these experiences emphasises commonalities that could make a vast network of biophilic alliances possible.

I think that the book also prompts us to re-evaluate and re-interpret the works of the anthropologists and philosophers who have prioritised, from different perspectives, the 'state of exception' (Agamben, 2008) or the 'state of emergency' (Ong, 2006; Mattei, 2022) as the dominant paradigm of neoliberal governance and as spaces for devising and practising changes in and experiments with sovereignty and citizenship.

In fact, not only have political, ecological, and medical emergencies and constant warfare been catalysts for socio-ecological destruction, but they also have facilitated accumulation and dispossession and made them more 'sustainable' through specific legal provisions and spectacularized and hyper-trophic narratives. In my opinion these linkages deserve honest and serious-minded analysis which, perhaps, other works could attempt.

The broadening and simultaneous re-centring of feminist grassroots politics and feminist theorisation which the volume undertakes is perhaps its most visible accomplishment. Ecofeminism, radical feminism, historical materialism and indigenous and Afro-American thought and praxis have all, in their peculiar ways, shown that colonialist and capitalist oppression has always been primarily grounded in women's bodies. The history of capitalism can thus also be narrated as a history of the body-selves the system tried to capture and alienate, enclose, exploit or turn into machine-like organisms. Food and house insecurity, the worsening of labour and living conditions, the policing of dissenting bodies, political repression and the forced, top-down modification of our economic, social and spiritual relation with the ecosystems we inhabit, are all matters of life and death. Feminist research and feminist struggle must then look again at the corporeal dimensions of the current cycles of primitive accumulation, incorporating the analysis of the technical leaps that are reshaping the system's biopolitics. Such broadening and recentring efforts could uncover, as the feminist philosopher and theologian Mary Daly (1984) used to say, the 'oldspeak' concealed behind and reworked into corporatist and institutional 'newspeak' and help us to re-member the knowledge, the struggles and the eco-social relations which, in various historical moments, offered opportunities for individual and collective healing and agency. The concept of 'bodily integrity', which had a major significance in the history of philosophy, legal theory and psychology, as Mohammadi shows in her contribution to this volume, has then far-reaching implications, if the body is understood in its relational dimensions and in its layered historical, cultural, material consistency.

Finally, the volume contributes to the development of the idea of 'total extractivism' (Dunlap and Jakobsen, 2020), a concept which encapsulates the rapaciousness and the necrophagous spirit of our economic system. The life experiences, whether of suffering or resistance, shown throughout the book create a vivid account of how common people can be led to experience and perceive an often mysteriously destructive and hostile economic order. For this reason, they can also enter into productive conversations with the approaches that try to understand the system's most recent looting expeditions to expropriate, commodify and profit from, just to name a few examples, human experience turned into behavioural data (Zuboff, 2019), genetic commons (Shiva, 2016; Ho, 1998), body parts and reproductive capacities (Raymond, 1995; Ekman, 2017), natural disasters (Klein, 2008), health emergencies and the measures deployed to face them (Green and Fazi, 2023), or neurodivergent and disabled body-selves (Broderick, 2022). The monster, the ghost, the zombie, the vampire and other spectral and demonic figures have functioned, since the beginning of capitalism, as conceptual metaphors to express the all too common experiences of domination, violence and alienation of women and of the marginalised and dispossessed. The imperative of total extractivism has replenished and rearticulated this imaginary and experiential reservoir of spectres and monstrous machines. This, obviously, leads us to the ultimate world- and life-devouring megamachinery: war, whose monstrous jaws devour lives, ecosystems, histories and the commons that had survived centuries of appropriation. It is time for feminist research and theorising, some currents of which boast a venerable tradition in the critique of war, to engage again in a committed and in-depth critique of political-military violence in all its refurbished or re-assembled disguises and components.

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