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Social Reproduction of Post-Soviet Migrant Labour: Braiding the International Political Economy

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Abstract: In this article, we analyse the social reproduction of post-Soviet migrant labour. Our inquiry builds on artwork by Olga Jitlina and Anna Tereshkina and by Mahpora Kiromova dealing with the effects of migration on family relations in Central Asia and the South Caucasus. We have braided the artwork with strands of social reproduction theory to examine the transnational household as a set of relationships that enables post-Soviet and global capitalism to draw value out of unwaged work and to reproduce the differentiated (i.e. gendered and racialised) labour force. Our focus is on the tropes of family, weddings, love, and violence. The analysis of these tropes draws attention to

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the intersecting effects of globalised capitalism, local structures of value, the state, and patriarchy in post-Soviet political economy. Through them we detail the fundamental co-constitution of production and social reproduction, but also show that practices of social reproduction can be reservoirs of resistance and potential change.

Keywords: migration, social reproduction, post-Soviet, migrant labour, aesthetic international political economy

Introduction

> I am Sayfullaeva Zulfiya, mother of two children. My husband is in Russia. He calls but not as often as he used … If he has such an opportunity, he sends us money, but if not, then I have to look for a way to make money here … I work as a day labourer. I do everything, like I can plough the land and mow the grass.

Sayfullaeva Zulfiya is one of the women in Mahpora Kiromova's *Mardikor* ("Day Labourer") which details the lives of female day labourers in the city of Bokhtar, Tajikistan. Most of the women are wives of migrant workers labouring in Russia's big cities. Their husbands may have left their families, do not return for years, or do not send money to support their families. Kiromova's documentary film plays an important role in our analysis of the social reproduction of post-Soviet migrant labour. Besides Kiromova's film, we have also worked with Olga Jitlina and Anna Tereshkina's art and braided these materials with the academic literature on social reproduction and migration. We have put artwork in dialogue with the feminist political economy literature that questions the divide between production and social reproduction and centres "life's work" that is often neglected as "non-work" (Mitchell et al. 2003:417). We have observed the simultaneous codependence of paid migrant labour and the unpaid work that goes into the reproduction of bodies, communities, and societies (Strauss and Meehan 2015). This means illuminating an often invisibilised aspect of migrant labour—its everyday reproduction within and beyond migration-dependent locales—as well as the connections of this everyday reproduction to the structural aspects of capitalism, such as its need for a differentiated labour force (Ferguson and McNally 2014). It is through such linkages that capitalism can sustain itself as a socioeconomic system (Mitchell et al. 2003). As geographers have highlighted, these material social practices occur across temporal and geographical scales: from the daily to the generational, from the intimate to the global (Norton and Katz 2017).

The authors of this article are academics, migrant activists, and citizen journalists, as well as artists, which means that the analysis process has moved in and out of spatially bounded locations of academic work: from university offices to activists' homes, artists' studios, field trips, citizen journalists' desks, and back to academia. Methodologically, the metaphor of braiding offers an idea of a set of strands that are distinct but intertwined in a way which impacts not just other strands but also the overall shape of the braid (Watson 2019). Braiding has revealed for us a certain coherency between academic

and non-academic understandings of labour migration.[1] We have also been able to place the contextually specific migration experiences in relation to the systemic organisation of production and reproduction under post-Soviet capitalism, and beyond. Moreover, braiding artwork into a piece of academic research forms part of the effort to disrupt the dominant aesthetics through which the economy is made intelligible, also on the pages of academic journals. As scholars of aesthetic international political economy argue, alternative aesthetics are needed to rupture the stultified economic imagination, to denaturalise the imaginaries through which capitalism has become natural and legitimate to its variously positioned participants (Belfrage and Gammon 2017:231). However, we also recognise that writing for an academic audience in the context of academic journal publishing also sets some limits and shapes the form that the braid takes.

Post-Soviet Migrant Labour

Russia has long been the main country of destination for temporary labour migrants from Central Asia and the South Caucasus. Migrant workers from the former Soviet republics have played an important role fuelling the Russian economy, especially in sectors such as construction, manufacturing, services, and agriculture (e.g. Ryazantsev 2016). Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 and the economic sanctions that followed impact the situation of labour migrants in Russia as well as the economic stability of remittance-dependent Central Asian states (World Bank Data 2020a). The worsening of the economic situation and devaluation of Russian currency is expected to affect migrants' income and transfers to families in Central Asia, as already happened during the Covid-19 pandemic (e.g. Gabdulhakov 2022). There is also growing evidence that migrants from Central Asia have been recruited, even pressured, to sign up for contract service in the Russian army after the invasion. Signing up for contract service has been presented as a way to earn money, to expedite the process of receiving Russian citizenship, or to avoid losing an already gained citizenship status (e.g. IWPR 2022).

Before Russia's war against Ukraine, the migratory movement mostly from the countries of the former Soviet Union has been among the most stable and extensive in the world, putting Russia into the global top-five of migrant receiving states globally (UN 2019). Moscow and Saint Petersburg are the cities with the largest number of migrant workers. Migrant workers typically travel back and forth between home countries and Russia, "filling the Russian labour market's need for seasonal, temporary, and low-paid labour" (Bahovadinova and Scarborough 2018:8). Working in construction, street retail, public transport, and cleaning, migrant labourers provide a reserve army of labour for spatially fixed production and services (cf. Withers 2019:24). Besides the demand for labour, various forces orient Central Asians toward Russia as a place of work. These multiscalar forces have to do with processes of uneven development on global and local scales, specific histories of colonialism, intergovernmental frameworks, and informal migration networks, and they are tempered by cultural and institutional

factors (Withers 2019:24). In 2020, the GDP per capita in Russia was more than two times higher than in Armenia and 6–10 times higher than in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, or Uzbekistan (World Bank Data 2020a). In 2020, remittances were equivalent to 27% of the GDP in Tajikistan and about 11% in Uzbekistan and Armenia (World Bank Data 2020b). These figures can be considered regional manifestations of uneven development. Moreover, the reforms that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union turned Central Asian states into "debtfare states" (Sanghera and Satybaldieva 2021:32). As a legacy of colonialism, previous integration efforts and intergovernmental frameworks, Russian is spoken widely throughout the post-Soviet space and there is a visa-free regime between the states. While this makes it relatively easy for Central Asians or South Caucasus people to enter Russia, complicated bureaucratic requirements (e.g. the system of patents) make it difficult to regularise one's migrant status. Together with widespread racism, this further intensifies the position of migrants as disposable labour force (see also Ferguson and McNally 2014:6).

Post-Soviet migration is also gendered, and research has typically approached it from the perspective of a male migrant worker. Indeed, 80% of Central Asian migrants in Russia (Uzbeks and Tajiks) are male (Urinboyev 2020). But the focus on male migrant workers and the productive economy in Russia leaves invisible the processes that enable this migration, such as practices of social reproduction extending to the households of the "sending" countries. The artwork of Jitlina and Tereshkina, and Kiromova's documentary film, deal with this issue. They show how myriad social relations extend from families through the wider social whole—not only in and between families, workplaces, homes, schools, and kindergartens, but also across the post-Soviet space and beyond it. This helps recognise the transnational family as well as other institutions as "sets of relations structured to draw value out of unwaged work, to build consent around these structured relations, and/or to contain and manage the contradictions of production and reproduction" (Norton and Katz 2017:5). Moreover, if social reproduction as "life's work" is fundamentally about how we live, then, artwork discloses how the costs of production are "dropped" onto daily life in gendered, racialised, and classed ways. This, in turn, reproduces not only differentiated labouring subjects but also the differentiated labour force that sustains capitalist accumulation (Mitchell et al. 2003, Strauss and Meehan 2015).

Olga Jitlina and Anna Tereshkina's artwork forms part of a contemporary art project called *Nasreddin in Russia*. This is a joint project by a collective of activists, artists, migrants, and scholars based in Saint Petersburg and Moscow. It started in 2014, and the project has so far produced five issues of a printed magazine and several audio-visual exhibitions and performances. In this article, we draw especially on the fourth issue of the *Nasreddin in Russia* magazine which focuses on the transnational family and in the production of which we were involved through a joint research project. The issue draws connections between weddings taking place in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan and the functioning of the productive economy in Russia's big cities—its supermarkets and construction sites—where migrant labourers work in precarious conditions enabling the accumulation of

wealth for some. Through Tereshkina's visual and verbal portraits of women, we are also taken to an Armenian "village where all men have left in order to work abroad" and women are waiting for their spouses to return home.

Kiromova's documentary film *Mardikor* has been produced with financial support from USAID as a part of its Central Asia Media Program. This film detailing the lives of Tajik women who have been "left behind" by migrant labourers has attracted large audiences. Due to its popularity, the film prompted a fundraising campaign and new NGO or public organisation activities in the area. We first encountered Kiromova's documentary film on social media. Unlike with Jitlina and Tereshkina, we have not collaborated with her more extensively. Yet, Kiromova's film has considerably thickened our braid. It has focused attention on life's work differently from Jitlina and Tereshkina's artwork. The film details the role of social reproduction beyond a bounded location of the nation-state by inquiring into what happens when the breadwinner model of transnational families is broken. The women in Kiromova's film are left to take care of themselves and their children on their own. By describing their lives, the film tells a powerful story about the impact of the post-Soviet economic restructuring, the associated labour migration on their families and lives, and the "feminisation of survival" (Sassen 2000). Such descriptions make it harder for capitalism to continue to hide how its promise of prosperity is built on the basis of widespread exploitation of women and the colonised. Interestingly, one of the immediate outcomes of the attention that Kiromova's film gained was a large canopy constructed by the authorities to protect the handywomen from the sun (Farazh 2020).

Making visible the everyday work that enables and maintains production has been a longstanding concern both in feminist art and in research. Here, we understand the artists and participants in the art projects as co-producers of knowledge. We are members of a research team, and for us, working with the artists and migration activists is an attempt to acknowledge what Sumi Madhok (2020) refers to as the feminist debt. On the one hand, the notion of feminist debt is a recognition of the work that is formally placed outside academic institutions but without which much of research would not be possible. The pandemic conditions highlighted this as we were forced to cancel research trips and rely extensively on the materials produced or collected by others. On the other hand, the notion of feminist debt also prompts reflection on the political economies of knowledge, on how our own research practices reproduce hegemonic entanglements of power. One among these is the status hierarchy between the (academic) expert and the amateur. As Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui (2012) has suggested, this hierarchy enables the extraction and commodification of knowledge while inverting it would pave the way toward scientific pluralism and intellectual commons (see also Tilley 2017).

This piece has been co-authored by academic and non-academic companions. Resonating with Katherine McKittrick's (2021) recent discussion on the "aesthetics of black miscellanea" and the associated engagement with overlapping and conflicting verbal and visual texts, our aim has been to shift our thinking away from a "linear model that moves from data collection to data analysis" (McKittrick 2021:3). Our writing derives from collaboration between academic

researchers, artists, activists, and citizen journalists who have worked together over the past years. The research process which we report in this article was organised around the idea of braiding academic work on social reproduction with artists' and activists' interpretations and comments. The artists, particularly Jitlina and Tereshkina, have collaborated with academics and activists in their creative practice, and academics and activists have commented on their artwork in writing. Due to our different backgrounds, the interpretations were often slightly different: for example, someone began analysing a drawing in terms of bride kidnapping whereas for someone else it was about the strain that migration puts on romantic relationships. In other words, each of us has produced written or visual threads. These threads have then been braided into an integrated verbal-visual text by the academic authors. As this text has been intended for publication in an academic journal, an academic voice dominates. Yet, the text would not be possible without the work of artists and activists that has preceded and continued alongside academic writing. These "circulations of communication" are different from treating some contributors as "research participants" whom "we"—based in academic institutions in Northern Europe—would interpret or quote under pseudonyms (Sinha and Back 2014; see also Pratt 2012). While we have not been able to "invert" the roles of academics, artists, and amateurs to the extent that Cusicanqui (2012) might suggest, we still perceive this text as a decentred braid of the contributions of variously positioned co-authors.

Post-Soviet Social Reproduction

With most research on post-Soviet labour migration being focused on male workers, in this article we foreground the social reproduction of migrant labour. This enables a better understanding of the processes that prompt and enable a migrant worker to arrive at a construction site or a grocery store or to clean the streets of Moscow or Saint Petersburg. In other words, we are interested in what makes migrant workers—the differentiated labour force that sustains post-Soviet capitalism—prepared, equipped, and disposed to partake in the dynamics that produce wealth for Russian society and global capitalism.

Sometimes analyses of social reproduction operate within local, national, or comparative frameworks, taking a locality or nation-state as the site of reproduction of workers. Here, we examine the dynamics of social reproduction transnationally, across the post-Soviet space—a term which we use to refer to not only to the geographic areas that were part of the Soviet Union but also to the complex relations that derive from the legacies of the Russo-Soviet imperial project (Kassymbekova and Chokobaeva 2021; Koplatadze 2019). We probe how expectations and models related to marriages and family life lubricate the migratory movement from Central Asia or the South Caucasus to Russia. Or how the work of waiting sustains migration by maintaining emotional bonds across distance. While this shows how the costs of social reproduction are externalised from the place of production within the post-Soviet space, our braiding also demonstrates a coherency with struggles that may seem geographically distant (e.g. Gago 2020; Shah and Lerche 2020).

Braiding the artwork with social reproduction literature, we show what happens to families, relationships amongst the loved ones and roles of women and men when someone enters the circulation of capital as a post-Soviet labour migrant. Yet, by posing such questions about "first-order social reproduction", we peer into the social reproduction of global labour reserves (Ferguson and McNally 2014:12). This complexly racialised, gendered and classed terrain is "capitalism's shadow underside"—the often hidden, invisible, or unvalued work which allows waged labour to be possible (Bhattacharyya 2018:41). The various verbal-visual threads that constitute our analysis prompt attention to the ways in which migrant labourers in Russia's big cities—street cleaners, construction workers, or shop assistants—are produced outside the formal economy, in sites of social reproduction that stretch across the post-Soviet space. Simultaneously, we are made to see how the transnational family constitutes "a central mechanism in perpetuating the cheap social reproduction of the current and future working class" (Ferguson and McNally 2014:13–14).

Attention to transnational practices of social reproduction highlights the central role of not only the invisibilisation of women's work but also of colonialism and racism in the constitution of differentiated labouring subjects. "Capitalism", Ferguson and McNally (2014:16) put it, "does not simply need labour power to function, it needs exploitable labour power". The artwork by Tereshkina and Kiromova has enabled us to see how the availability of cheap labour reproduces gendered and racialised histories of dispossession that are specific to this postcolonial/postsocialist space where the legacies of Russo-Soviet imperial projects interact with local structures of value, and the dynamics of globalised capitalism. As Norton and Katz (2017:1) remind us, "production and social reproduction are historically as well as geographically contingent". The post-Soviet space is no exception to the fact that invisibilisation of women's work and control over women's and feminised bodies has been a facet of colonial exploitation (e.g. Mies 1986). However, the rich literature debating the applicability of postcolonial theory in the post-Soviet context (e.g. Behzadi and Direnberger 2020; Koplatadze 2019) highlights the need to consider such historical dynamics also in relation to the Soviet modernisation project and its glorification of motherhood and its specific interpretations in the Soviet Republics (e.g. Kamp 2006; Mies 1986:180–181; Peshkova 2013).

In the context of 20th century Central Asia, the rapid growth of cotton production, settler colonisation, and extraction of resources was started by the Imperial Russian and completed by the Soviet governments (Kassymbekova and Chokobaeva 2021:489). In the Soviet Union, these areas functioned as primary sites of cotton production ensuring that the Soviet textile industry in the European parts of the country would not need to rely on imports (Kalinovsky 2020). Moreover, cotton production was organised around racialised hierarchies: managers of the factories relied mostly on imported Russian-speaking labour. As a result, the settler European elite dominated the cities and the industry, while the locals remained employed in manual labour in the countryside. Shrinking opportunities in the periphery pushed people from both Central Asia and the South Caucasus to seek employment in the Russian parts of the Soviet empire.

Sahadeo (2007) argues that the Soviet policies in the name of the "friendship of peoples" may have spared migrants from similar ethnic violence encountered by labour migrants in Western industrial capitals. Yet, nationalist and racist ideas also underpinned the Soviet project: people from Central Asia and the South Caucasus were designated as "Blacks" and constituted a source of cheap and exploitable labour in the European parts of the Soviet Union (Abashin 2014; Sahadeo 2019). After the collapse of the USSR, racist practices became more visible. Racial profiling and discrimination are widespread in present day Russia (e.g. Aitkhozina 2019), and researchers have detailed the continuing day-to-day racialisation of migrants (e.g. Jitlina et al. 2020; Reeves 2012; Round and Kuznetsova 2016). Having unfolded into capitalist relations, ideas of racial domination enable the continuing extraction of labour power. At the same time, they illuminate a contradiction at the heart of "global" capitalism: "foreign labour is desired but the persons in whom it is embodied are not desired" (Kearney 1998:125). Racialisation works exactly to differentiate the migrant workforce from the citizen workforce, i.e. to create and sustain a workforce perceived as disposable (Ferguson and McNally 2014:15). For neo-capitalist employers, a disposable workforce is cheap and exploitable. For the state, it presents an opportunity to offload social responsibility. The costs of the social reproduction of labour become externalised from the place of production.

In what follows, we analyse the tropes of weddings, family, waiting, love, and violence which emerge as key sites of social reproduction in the artwork of Jitlina and Tereshkina and of Kiromova. Braiding the threads of artwork, migrant activism, and academic writing, we delve into everyday practices of social reproduction. Our aim is to detail the complicity of local structures of value, the state, patriarchy, and globalised capitalist production in the reproduction of post-Soviet migrant labour, and more broadly, in the reproduction of "unequal distribution of conditions of flourishing" (Strauss and Meehan 2015:2).

Weddings

Weddings are among the most important reported uses of remittances besides housing, food, debt servicing, education, and health (Seitz 2019:9). They are also a site that conveniently illustrates the interplay of gender norms and patriarchy with the materialities of uneven development in the social reproduction of migrant labour. A circular visual format in Anna Tereshkina's drawing foregrounds the fact that migrants often work in Russia to collect money for weddings. While he labours in Russia, the family is trying to find a suitable match. And once a suitable young woman has been found, it is time for a "bride reservation". Money is needed: gold to the bride, gifts to her parents, a lot of *plov* to treat the guests.

The political economies of weddings revolve around cycles of gift giving, transfers of money, status maintenance, and consumption of goods. By foregrounding them, the drawing makes us reflect on the unruly components of global capitalist processes, as well as realms that mainstream economics may sometimes brush off as "unproductive" (cf. Bhattacharya 2017:19). The extravagance of weddings has been picked up by political reformers and state authorities across the years (e.g.

Figure 1: "The price of a wedding" by Anna Tereshkina (reproduced here with permission)

Kamp 2006). Their "wastefulness" has been criticised by Muslim modernisers, Bolshevik reformers, and by contemporary authorities who have introduced legislative measures to curtail ritual expenditures (e.g. Gazeta 2019; Pikir 2019). However, as Matt Withers (2019), who has analysed Sri Lanka's remittance economies, points out, conspicuous remittance use should not be interpreted as "wasteful" or "unproductive". Rather, it is "an earnest response to the systemic deprivation of material and moral worth within a market-society that devalues labour but reveres consumerism" (Withers 2019:118).

Tereshkina's drawing entitled "The price of a wedding: A wedding in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan costs at least 400,000 rubles" (about €4,700) seems to highlight the wastefulness of this ritual practice (Figure 1). As the average monthly wage of a labour migrant in Russia is about €300–€400, a wedding may take up almost a year's income (see also Cleuziou 2019; Roche and Hohmann 2011:121). The drawing details some of the more complex dynamics that contribute to the availability of the precarious migrant labour in Russia. It foregrounds the dreams and priorities of a person who is engaged in hard, low-paid work. In this work they may be oppressed and humiliated. Yet, migrant labourers may be ready to tolerate this work because it enables earning money for their own weddings, or for the weddings of their sons or daughters. This resonates with Withers' (2019,115) suggestion that wedding-related consumption enables "constructing a material edifice of wealth that connotes social and economic standing" under conditions where opportunities for decent work have eroded and the macroeconomic conditions make it difficult to translate remittances into sustainable investment. Indeed,

there are hardly any satisfied faces in the picture. A migrant may feel happy for one day, it seems to suggest: it is thanks to him that everyone is happy. This makes him feel needed and capable.

New clothes, shoes, jewellery, perfume, furniture, vacuum cleaner, refrigerator, washing machine…; Tereshkina's drawing details, item by item, how the new household also becomes not only a site for the reproduction of labour but also a site of consumption of capitalist goods. As consumption forces the labourer to return to the labour market, there is no exit from the circle: "New family, new expenses" states one of the characters in Tereshkina's drawing boarding an airplane to Russia after the wedding celebrations.

Besides highlighting the continuity of migratory movement, the circular format also foregrounds how social reproduction is loaded back onto the "sending" states, communities, families, and women. Here, the drawing is also able to call to mind the rescaling—not only the externalisation and ex-territorialisation but also the re-territorialisation—of the social reproduction costs related to a structural undervaluation of women's labour: women's labour is treated as a natural resource, "freely available like air and water" (Mies 1986:110; see also Arruzza et al. 2019:20). Tereshkina's wedding drawing and Kiromova's *Mardikor* foreground the parasitic relationship between the transnationalised patriarchal household and contemporary forms of wealth accumulation. We are made to see something that feminist political economists have highlighted for decades: that the urban prosperity of cities such as Moscow or Saint Petersburg is not only enabled by migrating waged labour but remains dependent on racialised subordination of non-waged female labour and the relatively cheap reproduction of labour power through such re-scaled mechanisms as transnational families (Ferguson and McNally 2014:15; see also Pratt 2012).

Tereshkina's drawing recounts the transnational political economies that depend on the "housewifisation" of women. The term refers to Maria Mies' research that shows how, across the world economy, patriarchal processes of housewifisation have blurred the sources of value. On that basis, Mies contests the analytical separation between production and reproduction (Mies 1982, 1986; see also Mezzadri 2019:35). According to Mies (1982:180, emphasis added), the social definition of women as housewives is the "counterpart of the social definition of men as breadwinners, *irrespective of their actual contribution to their family's subsistence*". Kiromova's *Mardikor* explores the role of gender mythologies in enabling capitalist exploitation by showing what happens when the breadwinner model is broken: "He was a womaniser in Moscow. I tried not to pay attention just because I did not want to destroy my family. I wanted him to take care of me and my baby, nothing more", one of the film's characters tells the camera. No longer a housewife to whom a husband labouring in Russia would send money, she now tries to enter the informal labour market of her home village as a day labourer. *Mardikor* also brings forth that besides women's labour, accounts of capitalist development have often erased informal and informalised employment. By contrast to European and North American trajectories, from which much of social reproduction theory also draws, most of the world's labouring population works in the informal economy

(Mezzadri 2019:37; see also Bhattacharyya 2018:13). Labour relations are to a large extent informalised also in Tajikistan (e.g. ILO 2021). By showing how unpaid reproductive labour and hours that are spent trying to find some work in the precarious, informalised labour market intertwine in the daily lives of Khatlon's women, Kiromova's film troubles and blurs neat theoretical categorisations between life and work, unpaid and paid work, or production and social reproduction.

Family

When the gaze of the artwork turns from wedding celebrations to everyday scenes in Central Asia and the South Caucasus, we meet exhausted women, ravaged families, and social energies stretched to the breaking point. As one of the women of *Mardikor* whose husband has gone to Russia and does not keep in touch says:

> I manage to make up to 150 somoni [14.5 dollars] a month. 100 somoni goes to the housing costs, but you still need to pay for electricity, water, and garbage collection. The landlord is often angry at me, that I don't pay on time, same with electricity and garbage. It is difficult.

At issue here is a crisis of care. Such crises ensue when capital does not take responsibility for the replenishment of reproductive labour while it seeks to commandeer as much labour as possible (Arruzza et al. 2019:104–105). Feminist political economists have highlighted the role of capitalism in the destruction of previously existing family groups and communities (Dalla Costa and James 1975:79). But transforming the family was also a part of the Bolsheviks' effort to build the new socialist order. Forcefully expropriated into the Soviet farming system, kinship groups lost their status as basic economic units (Giehler 2021:98). The family has also been picked up by authorities or reformists after the collapse of the USSR. The newly formed Central Asian states seek control of the population via the nuclear family model, which is a more manageable entity than larger kinship structures (Roche 2021:22). In Central Asia, Islamic reform movements have also played a role in the patriarchalising and nuclearising process of families (Roche 2021:18).

Reflecting on the question of family, an Armenian woman featured in one of Anna Tereshkina's drawings (Figure 2) responds, "What is a family? Our village is one big family that ran out of money". This sarcastic comment de-centres hegemonic conceptions of the nuclear family and re-locates "life's work", the labour of social reproduction, to the communities and collectives where efforts to sustain life are organised. The comment, as well as the associated portraits of women of various ages engaged in a range of chores, also reminds us of the heteronormativity of standard accounts of reproductive labour which assume a clear-cut distinction between "working daddies and caring mummies" (Bhattacharyya 2018:51). Yet, as Tereshkina's drawings show, support structures that make life possible can often be found within wider communities beyond the family unit. One of the women says that she never gets bored while her husband is in Russia: "We have

Figure 2: "In a village from which all men have left for work" by Anna Tereshkina (reproduced here with permission); see note for translated speech bubbles[2] [Color figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

our women's things here: we have taken care of the heating in the school and built a playground for children to play. Neighbours are needed a lot. And we helped them get a cow."

In both Tereshkina's drawing and Kiromova's film we encounter women conversing and joking among themselves. Such "idle women's talk" may seem a waste of time from the perspective of production, but sociability and sharing knowledge can also be examined from the perspective of social reproductive labour (cf. Federici 2018:41–42). The artwork shows how organising the labour of care beyond the heteronormative nuclear family persists, and also plays a role in the social reproduction of labour migration. While the men are far away, women who were previously mostly engaged with their families participate in public life. They solve various rural problems (for example, providing heating to the school, raising money to buy a cow for a poor family) and trying to make life meaningful for themselves. They make trouble for the local authorities, scold the established order, miss their husbands, get tired of work, and carry out heavy duty tasks around the house. But at the same time, they enjoy the independence, the new significance of their activities, and they have new dreams and goals: "If there was a job for me, I would also go to Russia!", one of the women says in Tereshkina's drawing (Figure 2).

The artwork underscores not just the role of the transnational family as a mechanism of the reproduction of the labour force (e.g. Ferguson and McNally 2014)

but also the persistence of collective activities in the post-Soviet peripheries, villages from which "all men have left". The solidary relationships between women in Kiromova's film also prompt a consideration of how women repair the commons and organise collective care. In the face of the transformation of the model of male breadwinner, social reproduction and the maintenance of life "spill over onto a broader social terrain and achieve new social 'prestige' that is embodied in feminised leadership" (Gago 2020:127). Indeed, the village and the street where the women in Kiromova's film socialise also remind us of various "workplaces" at which the reproduction of migrant labour takes place (Gago 2020).

Waiting

Political economies of migration are often discussed in terms of movement and mobility. Here, *Mardikor* and *Nasreddin in Russia* echo previous research showing that migration is also constituted by various forms of immobile waiting. There is a rich body of literature on waiting as a technique of migration control and governmentality (e.g. Turnbull 2016). Zharkevich (2021) connects migrant waiting specifically to political economic considerations by detailing how "unscrupulous brokers" in Nepal make migrants vulnerable by forcing them to wait while keeping hopes alive. Jitlina and Tereshkina's and Kiromova's artwork resonates in particular with research that has examined the role of waiting in the lives of "left-behind women"—women married to men who have migrated but who are not migrants themselves (e.g. Elliot 2016). Moreover, they make us recognise that waiting is also social reproductive work in the sense of generating specific emotional bonds and kinship. Waiting, as Ibañez Tirado (2019,316) suggests on the basis of her fieldwork in a migrant sending village in southern Tajikistan, "allows disjointed families … to keep a sense of co-presence". Facilitating future return, these emotional bonds also function as a safety net for those who have left. This forcefully challenges the economic imaginaries that mostly acknowledge productive labour for the market as "work" and forces attention on the rescaling of emotional bonds in the relatively cheap reproduction of migrant labour power (cf. Ferguson and McNally 2014:15).

In Jitlina and Tereshkina's artwork, we encounter women waiting for their spouses to return from Russia. June Hee Kwon has shown how spousal waiting at home forms part of the dynamics of labour migration: "with no waiting there is no intimate bond and, in turn, no monetary circulation" (2015:495). Waiting establishes an affective connection between the women and the migrant metropolis and also inscribes those who stay into the migrant system of labour (ibid.). In one of Anna Tereshkina's drawings we see a woman baking: "In an Armenian TV series called *Theory of Gastarbeiters* there is a joke that goes like this:—When do they return?—Apparently, when they stop laying asphalt.—Oh! Then it's useless to wait. Russia is boundless." This cynical-appearing joke foregrounds that the abundance of unstructured waiting time and uncertainties related to it also constitute a form of precarity which is based on the labour of maintaining a common future—a promise which is often breakable and fragile (Kwon 2015:494).

Mardikor details what happens when the image of a common future that sustains the work of waiting is shattered:

> My husband was from Garm. He was in Russia when we met. I was also there to earn money. He insisted that he wants to marry me. We did a *nikah* ceremony. Then he sent me home to Tajikistan. Then I gave birth to my son. My husband called me when the son was three months old. He said, I give you *talaq* [divorce by repudiation]. He was a womaniser in Moscow. I tried not to pay attention just because I did not want to destroy my family. I wanted him to take care of me and my baby, nothing more. He sent us 1,000 somoni, and that's it. Never sent anything again. I sent him my son's photos several times: "OK, you forgot about your son but at least help him." But he did not. It was very difficult for me to find food, so I went to work as a day labourer.

By sitting on the road waiting, the women whose husbands do not return from Russia or rarely send money are trying to enter the waged "labour market". "I can plough the land, carry bricks, and build garden beds, I do heavy jobs usually done by men", one of the women says. She continues: "You know, sometimes I work until late evening, and I barely make 10 somoni." In another scene, we see a group of women standing on the side of the road waiting for day job offers. While only a few women are lucky enough to be hired for a small task, and there may be days when no one is hired, the daily lives of the women are taken up by the work of waiting not for their husbands but for a small job: "Every day we come here searching for work so that our children do not stay hungry", one of the women tells the camera.

The scene explains the differentiating reach of global capitalism, as seen in Khatlon's women's efforts to enter waged labour. In contrast to most of the research on post-Soviet labour migration which is focused on the waged (male) migrant worker, it reminds us about the easily overlooked populations which have very little opportunity to enter the workforce. According to the Tajik Ministry of Labour, Migration and Employment, 17,000 of Tajikistan's 50,000 unemployed people were registered in the Khatlon province, and over half of them were women. They have become the "surplus" or redundant population that faces a hard time making their labour valuable (Bhattacharyya 2018). Male workers manage to escape this by migrating and becoming waged workers. As precarious and unstable as this relationship is, the permanent feature of unemployment and underemployment is borne by women.

In *Mardikor*, one of the women tells the camera that she has applied for state support but has not received much of anything. In another scene, we see one of Khatlon's handywomen leaving, again, to look for work. "Once you finish eating breakfast, watch TV. I must go to work", she tells her small daughters. "I made you lunch. On the way back, I will buy you ice cream, okay?" She tells the viewers how fortunate she is to have such well-behaved children: "I go to work while they stay at home alone. I just lock the doors and leave. Thank God they don't touch electricity, they don't play with fire or gas." It is now the turn of the children to wait for their mother to return home from work (Figure 3). Here, the role of a husband who originally generated such forms of waiting has faded away (cf.

Figure 3: Screenshot from Mahpora Kiromova's film *Mardikor* (reproduced here with permission) [Color figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

Elliot 2016). The work of waiting reaches beyond the migrant husband, and new kinds of political economic relationships begin to develop between the left-behind families and the surrounding society.

The scene of a woman locking her children behind closed doors makes sense in the context of the social experiment of post-Soviet restructuring. In the course of it, "state welfare institutions became delegitimised and defunded … The Soviet welfare states became post-Soviet debtfare states" (Sanghera and Satybaldieva 2021:34; see also Tutumlu 2019)—and with deeply gendered consequences. A rapid feminisation of poverty is one of the more vivid consequences of this "transition" to new capitalist "normality" (Satybaldieva 2021; see also Cookson 2016). This is seen in the hardship of remittance-dependent "migrant sending societies" in fulfilling their reproductive duties. One of the consequences of this is the non-existent option of taking one's children to kindergarten. Because of the lack of access to childcare centres and household poverty, the enrolment rate in early childhood education is very low in Tajikistan (12.4% in 2016) (Bazarova et al. 2019).

Love and Violence

On the cover of an issue of the *Nasreddin in Russia* newspaper, the trickster figure Hodja Nasreddin and his horse are travelling on a truck driven by a female figure in a wedding gown. The drawing prompts a reflection on emotional aspects of reproductive labour. The plot of love and passion is brought into play through the idea of "stealing someone's heart". The male figure saying "I stole her" may be referring to his irresistible charisma. He is evoking the passionate years of their youth, recalling the feelings between them. The woman, however, responds that, actually, it was she who stole him (Figure 4).

Насреддин в России
Nasreddin in Russia
4 выпуск issue
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թողարկում՝ հայերեն և ուզբեկերեն | арман ва ўзбек тилларидаги нашр
Совместный проект мигрантов и художников Санкт-Петербурга Jointly produced by Saint-Petersburg migrants and artists

Айриликда бирга

Мана анча йиллардан буён Насриддин пул топиш учун Россияга боради. У оиласидан узокда қандай қилиб яшамокда? Оиласи эса усиз қандай яшаб келаяпти? Умуман айтганда, интернет ривожланиб, оммавий мухожирлик авж олган вактда оила ўзи нима? Уйдан узокда мехнат қилиш якинларинг ўртасидаги муносабатга кучли таъсир ўтказиши мумкин. Эркак ва аёлнинг ўз ўрни мавжудлигидек анъанага нима бўлади? Биз айнан турмуш ўртоқлари узокда бўлгани учун нафакат ўз оиласига, балки жамоатчилик учун бўлган масъулиятни ҳам бўйнига олган аёлларни учратдик.

Ўзга юртда янги муносабатлар қандай шаклланади? Нима учун баъзилар ўз тўйига пул топиш учун ишлашга келса, бошқалар шу ерда никоҳ тузиб, муким колишга интилишади? Шаҳарликларнинг оилага бўлган қараши таъсири остида мухожирларнинг қариндош-уругчиликдек тушунчалари қай даражада сакланиб қолаяпти? Муҳаббатчи? Бугунги кунда у қерда ва қандай шаклларда мавжуд бўлиши мумкин? Ушбу саволларга жавоб излаш учун биз Петербург шаҳридаги Тожикистон ва Ўзбекистонлик мухожирлар билан суҳбатлашдик, шунингдек, ахолиси кулгу-ҳазиллар билан айрилик азобини енгиллаштиришга интиладиган мамлакат – Арманистонга саёҳат килдик.

Тўртинчи сонимиз рус, ўзбек ва арман тилларида чоп этилди. Биз газетамизнинг бунданда кўп тилларда нашр этилишини истар эдик. Келажакда нашрларимиз Россияга келиб, мехнат киладиган барча мухожирларнинг тилида – тожик, киргиз, молдав, озорбайжон, украин ва бошка тилларда чоп этилишини истар эдик.

ТЕМА НОМЕРА:

Вместе порознь

Вот уже много лет ездит Насреддин на заработки в Россию. Как ему живется в разлуке с семьей? Как живет без него семья? Что вообще такое семья в эпоху массовой рабочей миграции? Наемный труд вдали от дома может сильно изменить отношения между близкими. Что происходит с традиционными ролями мужчины и женщины? Мы встречали жен, которых именно разлука с мужьями побудила взять ответственность не только за свою семью, но и за дела общины.

Как в новой стране складываются новые отношения? Почему одни приезжают для того, чтобы заработать на свадьбу, в то время как другие стремятся заключить брак, чтобы остаться? Как сосуществуют свойственное горожанам представление о семье как о союзе мужа, жены и детей с пониманием семьи как большой общины родственников? А любовь? Где и в каких формах она возможна сегодня?

В поисках ответов мы общались с мигрантами из Таджикистана и Узбекистана в Петербурге, а также совершили путешествие в Армению – страну, где юмор помогает людям справляться с тяготами разлуки.

Четвертый выпуск выходит на русском, узбекском и армянском языках. Нам хотелось бы, чтобы языков было еще больше. В будущем мы хотели бы перевести нашу газету также на таджикский, киргизский, молдавский, азербайджанский, украинский и другие языки, на которых читают приезжающие в Россию люди.

– Кай тарзда турмуш кургансизлар?
– Мен уни ўғирлаб кеттанман.
– Ў эмас, мен уни ўғирлаганман!

– Ինչպե՞ս ամուսնացաք։
– Ես նրան փախցրել եմ։
– Էդ ես եմ դրան փախցրել։

Together Apart

Nasreddin has been traveling to Russia for many years to earn money. How does he live apart from his family? How does his family handle his absences? What is a family in an age of large-scale labor migration? Wage labor far from home can have a huge effect on relationships amongst loved ones. What happens to the traditional roles of men and women? We have met women who were moved by the long absences of their husbands not only to take charge running their families but also running their communities.

What kind of new relationships take shape in countries of immigration? Why do some migrant workers arrive to earn money to get married back at home, while others plan to get married in the new country and stay? How do different conceptions of family—the modern urban notion of family as a pact amongst husband, wife, and children, versus the largely rural understanding of family as a large community of relatives—coexist? And what about love? Where is it possible nowadays? What shapes does it take?

Looking for answers to these questions, we spoke with migrant workers from Tajikistan and Uzbekistan in Petersburg. And we took a trip to Armenia, a country whose famous sense of humor has helped people cope with the hardships of separation.

The fourth issue of our newspaper has been published in Russian, Uzbek, and Armenian. In future, we would like to translate the newspaper into Tajik, Kyrgyz, Moldovan (Romanian), Azeri, Ukrainian, and the other languages spoken by the people who come to Russia to work and live.

Տարանջատված միասին

Նապրեղիներ տարիներ շարունակ Ռուսաստան են գնում՝ գնում։ Ընտանիքից հեռու ինչպե՞ս է ապրում։ Ինչպե՞ս է ընտանիքն ապրում առանց նրա։ Ցանգվածային աշխատանքային միգրացիայի ժամանակներում ի՞նչ է ընտանիքն առհասարակ։ Տանից հեռու վարձու աշխատանքը կարող է այլափոխել մտերիմների հարաբերությունները։ Ի՞նչ է կատարվում տղամարդու և կնոջ ավանդական դերերի հետ։ Մենք կտեսանք էինք հանդիպում, որոնց հենց ամուսինների հետ բաժանումն էր դրդում պատասխանատվություն վերցնել ոչ միայն ընտանեկան հարցերի, այլև համայնքի գործերի համար։

Ինչպե՞ս են նոր երկրում ձևավորվում նոր հարաբերությունները։ Ինչո՞ւ են ոմանք գալիս հարանիքի համար փող աշխատելու, իսկ մյուսները ձգտում են պսակվել և մնալ։ Ինչպե՞ս են համագոյակցում քաղաքաբնակներին գնդոդող ընտանիքի՝ որպես տղամարդու, կնոջ և երեխաների միության մասին պատկերացումները և ընտանիքի որպես բարեկամական մեծ համայնքի ընկալումները։ Իսկ սե՞ր։ Որտե՞ղ և ի՞նչ ձևաչափերով է այն հնարավոր այսօր։

Պատասխաններ փնտրելիս Պետերբուրգում շփվում էինք Տաջիկստանից և Ուզբեկստանից միգրանտների հետ, ինչպես նաև ճամփորդեցինք Հայաստան երկիր, որտեղ հումորն է օգնում հարթահարել բաժանման դժվարությունները։

Չորրորդ թողարկումը լույս է տեսնում ռուսերեն, ուզբեկերեն և հայերեն լեզուներով։ Կցանկանայինք, որպեսզի լեզուներն ավելի շատ լինեին։ Ապագայում կուզեինք թարգմանել թերթը տաջիկերեն, ղրղզերեն, մոլդավերեն, ադրբեջաներեն, ուկրաիներեն և այլ Ռուսաստան եկող մարդկանց համար հարազատ լեզուներով։

Figure 4: Cover of *Nasreddin in Russia*, Issue 4, by Olga Jitlina and Anna Tereshkina (reproduced here with permission) [Color figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

However, the drawing also exposes the limits of the plot of love, disclosing its contradictions; what first appears as a love story develops into a tale of unequal responsibilities between the partners. On a closer inspection, the female figure

looks serious. She is now busy in unpaid care work while her husband has become a wage slave in Russia—"completely 'free' for *direct* exploitation" (Dalla Costa and James 1975:34). In the drawing, the woman is behind the wheel. The truck represents everyday life, the load that the woman needs to carry all on her own. All the responsibility is with the woman as a mother, wife, housewife, daughter-in-law. The drawing prompts consideration of the structural features of post-Soviet capitalism and its convergence with patriarchy: the return to "tradition" went hand-in-hand with the rollback of social security provision. This had specific effects on women (Beyer and Finke 2019; see also Gago 2020). Women have had to carry a disproportionate burden of sustaining life, dragging men and (transnational) families behind "like a load".

The juxtaposition of the terms labour and love is intentionally jarring, both in Tereshkina's drawing as well as in social reproduction literature. Love is articulated as a site of contradiction. Love has potential to transcend the self and produce new forms of political communities, as Black feminists have highlighted (e.g. Hooks 1990, 2000; Nash 2011). In one of the scenes in *Mardikor*, we see a woman called Orzugul walking with her six-year-old child to the food market after a workday. She asks the child: "What do you want me to buy in a food store for you? Just bananas? No, tell me what else do you want? Today we earned 30 somoni." In the next scene, we see the kid running towards the food market. The woman shouts to the sellers of the shop: "Give him bananas, give him ice-cream! Give him anything he wants!" This joyous scene in an otherwise quite sorrowful documentary film also functions as a powerful reminder that replenishment is not always aimed at preparing workers for further exploitation.

By emphasising the affectionate relationship between the mother and the child, the scene also reminds us that loving and caring also take place "for the far more usual reasons of love, race, community, survival" (Bhattacharyya 2018:44). However, as we braid the thread of the drawing with other threads from the writings of feminist political economists (e.g. Federici 1975) and analyses of the social reproduction of a global working class (e.g. Ferguson and McNally 2014), we are reminded that in the context of the capitalist, patriarchal family, love easily becomes a work relation. The transnational household emerges as an element in the mechanisms perpetuating the low costs of social reproduction of the current and future working class (Ferguson and McNally 2014:13).

The plot of stealing also connects the drawing to the violent practice of "bride kidnapping" or marriage by abduction (Beyer and Finke 2019; Werner 2004). In some parts of Central Asia and the South Caucasus strangers kidnap girls with the intention of marrying them. Sometimes girls who resist are raped, and a kidnapped girl's parents may also try to persuade her to stay in order not to disgrace the family. In April 2021, while we were preparing the manuscript for submission, demonstrations broke out in Kyrgyzstan after the bodies of a young woman and her suspected kidnapper were found. The demonstrators, civil society activists, bloggers, and regular Kyrgyz people, demanded that the authorities take firm action against marriages by abduction criminalised since 2013 (Kaktus Media 2021).

The drawing also invites a more general reflection of the role of violence in the constitution of gendered bodies as disposable (Elias and Rai 2019; Wright 2006). In the Soviet modernisation project, the criticism of the patriarchal family went hand-in-hand with the glorification of motherhood as a biological destiny as female bodies were harnessed for the production of Soviet citizens (e.g. Peshkova 2013). In *Caliban and the Witch*, Silvia Federici (2009) details how the historical development of capitalism entailed a transformation of the body into a work-machine. This coincided with the often-violent policing of women's bodies and their subjection to the reproduction of the workforce. The power of women and a "world of female subjects" had to be destroyed: "the heretic, the healer, the disobedient wife, the woman who dared to live alone, the obeha woman who poisoned the master's food and inspired the slaves to revolt" or the "rebel woman who argued back, swore, and did not cry under torture" (Federici 2009:11, 184). Federici suggests that one among the female subjects to be destroyed in the war against women is the active woman posing a challenge to male authority. Tereshkina's drawing is based on an actual conversation with an Armenian transnational family. The husband worked in Moscow, laying paving slabs. During that time his wife had become an active woman who even started to assume a public role in the life of the community. When he came back, their roles had changed. The wife no longer hid her active nature behind the image of an obedient wife. When asked how they met and got married, they jokingly replied: "I stole her—no, it was I who stole him."

There are continuities between the war against women waged to cement new sexual divisions of labour and the one that is waged to constitute gendered and racialised bodies as expendable. The concept of necropolitics has been mobilised in research to bring attention to how the threat of violence—even death—functions as a governmental technique turning racialised bodies into exploitable labour power in Russia's big cities (Round and Kuznetsova 2016). Forcing attention on the connections through and across the scales of the body, national, regional, and global, the artwork invites a recognition of what Gago (2020:94) refers to as "the pluralisation of violence", and Chattopadhyay (2018:1295) provides a reminder that violence is not only social or cultural but also political and economic. What we learn from Tereshkina's and Kiromova's artwork is the violent complicity of capitalism and patriarchy in keeping the work of women as well as other gendered, racialised, and classed groups socially discredited and in securing the regime of cheap labour.

Conclusions

Our analysis of reproductive labour performed mostly by women in Central Asia and the South Caucasus has disclosed how post-Soviet capitalist relations are maintained and managed through a division of labour that is gendered and racialised: we have highlighted the central role of unwaged work mostly performed by women as well as the colonial legacies and racism in the constitution of a differentiated labour force. Working and thinking with artwork has enabled us to see the intersecting effects of local structures of value, the state, patriarchy,

colonialism, and globalised capitalist production in the reproduction of post-Soviet migrant labour (cf. Chattopadhyay 2018). Our analysis has detailed some ways through which the transnational family and related institutions function as an arena for the management of crises and contradictions of capitalism and thus enable the production of value for capitalism, while appearing to be outside production. But, as our discussion of themes such as love and caring suggests, practices of social reproduction are not only sites of replenishment but also contain transformative potential. "This dialectical relationship", as Norton and Katz (2017:7) remind us, "adds to the potency of social reproduction, but also its perils".

The idea of transformative potential has also informed our method. Braiding artwork with academic and other materials we have tried to tap into the capacity of aesthetic work to transform normalised perceptions of where value is produced in global economy. Before us, aesthetic international political economy scholars have underscored art's power to counter the hegemonic economic imaginaries through which the capitalist looting of value produced in the sphere of everyday life is naturalised and legitimated (cf. Belfrage and Gammon 2017:223). The work of numerous feminist political economy scholars has shown how the costs of social reproduction become erased from standard accounts of capitalist development and accompanying economic aesthetics. As recognising the value of social reproduction would have systemic implications, more work needs to be done about how and through what kinds of aesthetic interventions such normalised economic relations can be effectively troubled.

The chosen approach has also been inspired by previous projects elaborating "a vigorous materialist transnational feminism" (Pratt 2004:3) by mobilising theory to connect struggles across diverse locations while, at the same time, being attentive to how differentiated the terrain against which such struggles unfold is (see also Katz 2004). We have used the term "post-Soviet" here as a shorthand that is able to capture some of that differentiation but recognise its inadequacy in fully addressing the diversity that results from the interplay of the local with imperial, colonial, and patriarchal dynamics. Simultaneously, writing in English for academic audiences and aiming at publication in an established academic journal, we remain mindful of Tlostanova et al.'s (2019) critique of (post-socialist or post-Soviet) feminists' failure to interrogate their involvement in the reproduction of modernity's racialised hierarchies. This critique can be extended to inquiries that, while challenging established practices of knowledge production, may also reproduce the conditions that enable the extraction of value from them. Feminist work has recently analysed the racialisation of post-socialist women by the North/West (Krivonos and Diatlova 2020), but more work needs to be done on colonial and racialised hierarchies among women in the post-Soviet context and beyond. Fora of academic capitalism such as journal publishing are no exception to this.

Moreover, while this piece is a collaboration of authors brought up and based in Northern Europe and Central Asia, much of the research literature that we have relied on in this article continues to be drawn from European or Western experience. The shape of this work—its aesthetics—does not excessively trouble or challenge the conventions expected in Western-centric academic publishing and its

"implicit division of labour between *the* language of 'theory'/'synthesis' and those of empirics, or between *the* language of global communication and those of 'contextual practices'" (Alhojärvi and Hyvärinen 2020:469). Given this, an aspect that needs to be further explored is how academic writing and publishing can still better acknowledge its "feminist debt" (Madhok 2020). While this debt cannot be repaid, there is a need to continuously engage with the critical politics of location of academic work on social reproduction—including its aesthetics, we would add.

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Endnotes

[1] We are grateful to one of our reviewers for helping us better articulate these methodological points that relate to the idea of braiding.

[2] "I used to be interested in history before. Now, with this life, let alone that you forget history, you forget yourself!" "I am a housewife. I do not go out a lot. But I often go on the internet. Especially if there's a problem in the village. The regional authorities know me very well!" "In an Armenian TV series called *Theory of Gastarbeiters* there is a joke that goes like this:—When do they return?—Apparently, when they stop laying asphalt.—Oh! Then it's useless to wait. Russia is boundless." "—Do you feel bored (also 'miss'; translator's note) when your husband is in Russia?—I do not have time to be bored. We all have women's stuff to do: we made sure that the school has central heating and a playground. Our neighbours were in need—so we helped them get a cow. There is no time to be bored!"

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