

Racial Capitalism, Political Reproduction, and the Commons: Insights from Migrant Solidarity Politics in Glasgow

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Abstract: This paper foregrounds the centrality of reproductive politics in constituting the spaces of migrant activism. Addressing social reproductive issues as racial issues, it exposes how “premature death” and questions of survival shape migrants’ lives throughout the uneven geographies of racial capitalism. Drawing on the political experiences of the “No Evictions Network”—a migrant and activist-led group campaigning for asylum seekers’ rights in Glasgow (Scotland)—the paper suggests the concept of “political reproduction”, grasping the interchange between care, trust, empowerment, political subjectivation, and the overcoming of barriers towards political action that take place within spaces of migrant activism. Building upon migrant voices and Black and Brown histories of organising, the paper explores the racialised, gendered, and classed character of reproductive activist labour in these spaces, evidencing the ways the notion of “political reproduction” breaks racialised and gendered constructions of political work.

Keywords: political reproduction, racial capitalism, Black geographies, migrant politics, solidarity, care

Introduction

In August 2018, the outsourcing giant Serco announced the eviction of 300 asylum seekers in Glasgow (UK), arguing that they were “overstaying” in the country in an implicit exercise of coercive powers. Serco is a multinational company which between 2012 and 2019 held a billion-pound contract from the Home Office to accommodate asylum seekers in Scotland and the North of England. The multinational’s move triggered a massive campaign that brought together a heterogeneity of grassroots groups standing in solidarity with asylum seekers. While a humanitarian “Stop Lock Change Evictions” coalition pushed forward a legal challenge to the evictions, the “No Evictions Network” emerged as the activist-led side of the campaign uniting migrant groups, grassroots activists, and neighbours organising resistance on the ground. Rather than emerging from a vacuum, the Network’s struggles built upon longer histories and memories of migrant and working-class community solidarities in Glasgow. The biggest dispersal city in the UK, Glasgow has stood as a space of resistance to exclusionary British immigration

policing, witnessing umpteen examples of migrant struggles, dawn raids being stopped by neighbours, powerful anti-detention campaigning, and massive demonstrations against the Home Office that have crystallised in different forms of community organising and everyday struggle. By the end of 2019, the “No Evictions” campaign not only achieved the ending of most of the evictions but also contributed to Serco’s loss of the public contract in Scotland. In the long term, the Network became a space of convergence of migrant-led groups and local activists advocating for asylum seekers’ rights beyond the temporal and thematic confines of the evictions. With the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Home Office’s new asylum accommodation contractor Mears became the target of a new campaign to “Stop Hotel Detention”, which sought to challenge the removal of hundreds of asylum seekers from their private housing to cheaper hotel-based accommodation without right to self-isolate. Today, the Network is actively standing against immigration raids in Glasgow and challenging the Home Secretary Priti Patel’s policy of offshore detention of asylum seekers in Rwanda.

Overall, beyond the protests, actions, and campaigns, throughout these years the Network became a migrant “infrastructure of care” (Kapsali 2020) where solidarities fostered collective empowerment, mutual aid, and different forms of direct support and community building. In a conjuncture where asylum seekers’ everyday spaces of inhabitation were being harmfully threatened by the political economies of the border and forms of racial capitalism, questions of social reproduction, everyday life, and well-being have been of central importance. Practices of direct aid, care, and emotional support triggered processes of political subjectivation and migrant engagement in the political spaces of the Network. Such practices led to the main findings of my research and constitute the main focus of this paper, shedding light to the centrality of social reproductive and care politics in the construction of the spaces of migrant activism, and their deeply racialised, gendered, and classed dimensions. Building upon my research findings, this paper suggests the concept of “political reproduction”, capturing the constitutive character of the political implicit in reproductive activist work. This notion of “political reproduction” underscores how in hostile landscapes and situations of extreme precarity, reproductive politics not only allow collective survival at the edges of racial capitalism but also foster the development of a collective political consciousness and a way of being together in struggle. Bounding survival and political subjectivation, “political reproduction” refers to how social reproductive politics enable people’s capacity to struggle in contexts of racialised, gendered, and classed exclusion. Overall, the discussion of “political reproduction” developed throughout the paper fills an important gap in critical literature on migration, where questions of social reproduction and care have been widely unexplored from a focus on race and migrant agency. Inspired by Black and feminist theory and organising, it challenges paternalists and patriarchal divides between political campaigning and direct support work, bringing important contributions to the theory and practice of migrant solidarities.

Drawing on the experiences of the Network, this paper outlines a dialogue between Black politics, racial capitalism, social reproduction, and migrant solidarity activism. Using insights from Black geographical work, it engages with migrant

political struggles making a strong input to ongoing conversations in *Antipode*. In a global conjuncture of political enclosure, neoliberalisation, crisis of social reproduction, and exclusionary nationalist discourses on the rise, these contributions are of utmost importance to critical political geography. Indeed, voices in this journal have shown increasing interest on questions of migrant activism and solidarity (Swerts and Nicholls 2021), racial capitalism (Goffe 2023), social reproduction (Kallianos and Fumanti 2021), the tensions between commoning and neoliberalisation (Leap et al. 2022), or the racialised dimension of the Covid-19 pandemic (Ye 2021). Yet, while these topics are intrinsically related, there is little conversation happening between all these contributions. One of the reasons hindering potential dialogues is that most of the extensive literature on migrant struggles misses a direct engagement with questions of race and tends to detach migrant politics from race politics. This disengagement is particularly serious in a discipline with a strong trajectory of Black geographical and critical decolonial scholarship (Gilmore 2007; McKittrick 2011; Pulido 2008). Addressing this gap, this intervention situates struggles against the neoliberalised border in relation to wider Black and Brown genealogies of struggle. Tackling “premature death” as the defining element shaping the uneven geographies of racial capitalism (Gilmore 2007), it positions questions of social reproduction, care, and survival as constitutive of Black and Brown geographies of struggle and “senses of place” (McKittrick 2011; Robinson 1983). This brings important insights to emerging debates in *Antipode* on the relationships between spaces of migrant solidarity and processes of political subjectivation (see Karaliotas and Kapsali 2021; Nicholls 2021; Swyngedouw 2021) or on the tensions between disruption and reproduction shaping migrants’ political agencies (see Blank 2021; Swerts 2021; Swerts and Nicholls 2021). Hereupon, the concept of “political reproduction” tackles how these processes of political subjectivation and strategy are strongly shaped by struggles over reproduction and the “conditions of living” in contexts of deadly racist structural exclusion (Federici 2019).

The findings and ideas of this paper draw on 15 months of scholar-activist fieldwork developed between October 2019 and December 2020, and more than a year of prior political commitment with the “No Evictions Network” in Glasgow. During this time, I actively participated in the Network’s meetings, actions, and political spaces. A total of 24 in-depth semi-structured interviews were also conducted with key participants, ten of them with people “with lived experiences of the asylum system”. This data was finally complemented with materials and digital content gathered through archival, document, and media research. Overall, my methodological approach brings key contributions to current work on “scholar-activism” in human geography and “militant research on migration”, suggesting “political reproduction” as an integral research ethics. A caring political research framework entailed a focus on “learning with political struggles”, de-centring my academic role and underscoring the knowledge produced by struggling communities and migrant agencies and voices (Choudry 2020). Challenging divisions between intellectual and material labour in my approach towards scholar-activism, I got involved in social reproductive matters. This had a prefigurative effect contributing to the sustainment of the social and material spaces of

the Network, to the creation of horizontal relationships with participants and to the practice of a politics of “mutual give” (Pulido 2008).

The argument unfolds as follows. The first section develops the theoretical foundations of the concept of “political reproduction”, bringing Black geographical work on racial capitalism to the analysis of migrant agencies and spaces of struggle. Addressing “premature death” as the outcome of racial capitalist structures (Gilmore 2007), I explore how neoliberal actors such as Serco or Mears are involved in the production of the institutional contexts that hinder migrants’ social reproduction. From this framework, I address how struggles for survival and reproduction—both physical and epistemological—have been central to Black and Brown political agencies resisting forms of colonial and postcolonial oppression (Robinson 1983). Drawing on the Black radical experience, these include different forms of community building, mutual aid, mental health support, and well-being as social reproductive questions that are at the core of the struggles against racism (Fanon 2008; hooks 2013). The concept of “political reproduction” sheds light on how these practices are the basis for migrants’ resistance and political subjectivation. Thereafter, the discussion grounds these ideas in the experiences of the No Evictions Network in Glasgow. It firstly examines how migrant agencies in the Network understood reproductive politics as constitutive of migrants’ “political capacity”, overcoming patriarchal and racialised divisions between direct support and campaigning. Capturing this, I explore migrants’ “political reproduction” during the Covid-19 pandemic. Overall, considering the social and political heterogeneity of the Network, findings demonstrate the racialised, gendered, and classed dimensions reproductive work and its constitutive character of the migrant political.

Living at the Edges of Racial Capitalism: Social Reproduction, Black Politics, and Migrant Organising

This theoretical intervention centres reproductive issues in the constitution of migrant spaces of struggle and solidarity, positioning these in relation to wider trajectories of Black and Brown politics countering the deadly impacts of racial capitalism. It suggests the concept of “political reproduction”, discussing the intertwining between reproduction and political struggle within forms of anticolonial resistance. Questions of social reproduction have been central to Black and Brown political thought and organising (hooks 2013). Social reproduction refers to the means by which society reproduces itself, materially and socially; to the diverse practices towards creating “the conditions of living” (Federici 2019). It encompasses “the broad material and social practices associated with sustaining production and social life” (Katz 2008:18). Entangled in the racialised, gendered, and classed geographies of border violence, migrant struggles constitute, above all, a struggle for creating these “conditions for living”, and hence a political struggle for reproduction. Notwithstanding, despite life—and death—appearing as cornerstones in the constitution of the spaces of colonial and postcolonial resistance, reproductive issues remain unexplored within existing literature on migrant politics, particularly from a focus on race and migrant agency. Likewise, although

there is a rich and insightful literature in geography on gender and social reproduction (England 2010; Lawson 2007), questions of race have been less explored (Raghuram 2019). This paper tackles these gaps, arguing that a Black geographical reading of migrant struggles demands centring reproductive politics as constitutive of Black and Brown counter-cartographies of struggle (Mullings 2021). The concept of “political reproduction” precisely develops from this foundational character. Against the generalised tendency to detach migrant politics from race politics, I situate migrant struggles in relation to wider Black and Brown trajectories of organising and geographies of struggle, where fights over reproduction have been at the core of colonial and postcolonial political agencies.

Feminist critical work on social reproduction has traced the links between social reproduction and the political is through a focus on commoning, offering a good starting point for my discussion of “political reproduction”. The notion of “commons” refers to the multiple practices of commoning of the everyday life and the processes of building solidarity networks and collective identities (Federici 2019). It draws on an ethics of care that assumes interdependence and mutuality as constitutive elements of social spaces, breaking the individual neoliberal logics based on the autonomous, self-contained, rational individual (England 2010; Lawson 2007). Commoning is hence the collective process of producing the conditions of community living against a systemic “ongoing attack on the commons” by racial capitalist systems (Harney and Moten 2013). Looking at Indigenous and Black experiences and epistemologies, Silvia Federici addresses how practices of commoning amongst these communities can create forms of relating that potentially transcend the logics of the market and the state. Indeed, these key feminist contributions have been taken up by literature on migrant solidarities, which has often addressed migrant struggles as forms of commoning (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013; Papadopoulos and Tsianos 2013). Importantly, this literature has unpacked how these relations are not only productive of the conditions of living, but also construct relationships of trust, mutual care, and the “crafting of collective intentionality” within communities (Swerts 2015). In this line of argument, Karaliotas and Kapsali (2021:399) have addressed how “infrastructures of care” within migrant solidarity politics trigger processes of political subjectivation through building “solidarities across differences”. Nevertheless, commoning approaches in this line of work miss a particular engagement with questions of race, and they do not tackle the particular role that reproductive matters have played in Black and Brown experiences of commoning and organising. Hereupon, looking at the processes of commoning through a focus on race demands positioning what Beverley Mullings (2021:152) calls “life work”—as “work involved in producing people, communities, and economies”—as constitutive of political solidarities and political existence. Indeed, allowing life in the edges of racial capitalism, “life work” appears as the necessary condition for the political struggle of those historically dispossessed. It is hence the element allowing migrants’ “political reproduction”, in terms of radical existence and enactment of forms of marginalised difference. Hence, drawing on Black and Brown feminist theory and practice, the notion of “political reproduction” grasps the relationships between racialisation, dispossession, and the collective practices of solidarity, mutual

support, and politicisation. It moves beyond survival to draw attention to the ways in which within migrant contexts, reproductive politics, and practices of commoning radically enable capacity to struggle, foster processes of political subjection, and shape political solidarities. This perspective radically dismantles patriarchal and racialised dichotomies that marginalise reproductive labour—as private and not political—from political action and campaigning. It foregrounds how political disruption and solidarity can sometimes be explicit—through protests and the articulation of political demands—but most of the time might be implicit—through the construction of alternative relationships that subvert sovereign powers and their deadly logics. Bringing work on racial capitalism and Black radical organising to the analysis of the processes of commoning in the struggles against borders allows unpacking these arguments. It likewise provides a sense of the scope of the notion of “political reproduction”, encompassing both its material and epistemological dimensions.

Hence, the question of “living at the edges of racial capitalism” refers to the means to build the conditions for living in a system that is constructed upon post-colonial populations’ oppression, exploitation, and deprivation. This entails thinking social reproductive matters spatially, unpacking the ways social reproductive politics are “effects of the stretching of social, political, and economic relations over space” (Hall 2020:245). While the existing approaches on social reproduction within migrant solidarity literature have mostly focused on everyday political spaces (Kapsali 2020), the broader political geographies of reproduction—shaped by the working of racial capitalism—have barely been considered. Here, through engaging with literature on racial capitalism, this intervention makes key contributions to current work on migration and borders. Work on racial capitalism unpacks how racism is intrinsic to capitalist development and accumulation processes, meaning that capitalism is itself racial (Robinson 1983). Ruth W. Gilmore (2007:8) builds upon these ideas to trace the intersections between neoliberalism, race, and reproduction, offering a conceptualisation of racism as the “state-sanctioned or extralegal production and exploitation of group-based vulnerability to premature death”. This provides a theoretical lens to think about the role of borders in producing the spaces of “premature death” and exploitation of migrant populations across postcolonial geographies. Hereupon, the rise of the “migration business” represents a central way in which neoliberalism and racism converge enabling processes of capitalist accumulation on the basis of racist oppression in contemporary articulations of racial capitalism (Bhattacharyya 2018). In their profitable role, multinational companies like Serco and the other Home Office contractors, are directly involved in the production of the institutional contexts of migrants’ social (un)reproduction, bolstering the “premature death” of asylum-seeking populations as an outcome of their entrepreneurial activities.

This lens demands tracing the continuities between the racialised geographies of the border regime and Black histories of struggle, having important implications for the understanding of migrant politics. Raghuram (2019) has explored how race and social reproduction are deeply shaped by past and ongoing histories of mobility, meaning that care is performed differently in strongly racialised

settings, intersecting in different ways with gendered and classed identities. Likewise, Goffe (2023) has underscored the role of incomplete dispossession in racialised social reproduction and the spatial practices through which Black subjects “make life” in the shadows of premature death. Addressing the “liberatory effect” of social reproductive work in the colonial histories of slavery and primitive accumulation, Mullings (2021) has traced some continuities between past community modes of survival of Black and Brown unwaged workers and today’s efforts of the poorest to maintain communities and economies under the most hostile conditions. For Caroline Shenaz Hossein (2019), these practices are constitutive of a “Black political economy” which creates a “safe space” when the state fails Black people. The Black political economy, she claims, “corrects the fixation on the marginalization of Black people to also move the discourse towards one of activism” (Hossein 2019:219). These are forms of commoning that emerge from historically racialised geographies of oppression, where Black and Brown precarious lives often rely on subsistence economies and networks of mutual support and interdependence in their material and emotional survival across exclusionary racist geographies.

From the analyses above, it unfolds that political resistances are, first and foremost, those articulations and forms of agency that face, challenge, and contest in various ways the racist structures shaping Black and Brown overexposure to death. Tackling “premature death” as the defining element of structural racism, Harney and Moten (2013) address Black and Brown reproductive politics as forms of “self-defense” and “self-preservation”. This positions social reproduction as foundational to racial and migrant justice struggles, opening up a way to rethink the political dimension of social reproduction within anticolonial experiences of struggle. This inseparability between existence and resistance is the grounding foundation of the concept of “political reproduction”. Indeed, the intertwining between race, class, and reproduction deeply shapes the praxis and political experiences of Black and Brown organising and migrant struggle. For example, the strong ties between reproductive politics and political organisation were a central aspect in the agenda of Black Power movements, which linked questions of everyday reproduction of the Black community to revolutionary politics at other scales. Struggles over social reproduction served as a catalyst and first step for the Black Panther Party’s organising strategies in the US. Their mutual-aid and direct-action programmes were aimed at sustaining the social reproduction of the Black community to build the political base to resist US racism and imperialism (Heynen 2009). These commoning practices effectively link reproduction to politicisation, positioning the former as a constitutive element and the necessary condition for the latter. They strongly inspired the development of the concept of “political reproduction”, underscoring how matters of survival are intrinsically political and are the grounds for the formation of political solidarities in strongly racialised, classed, and gendered contexts.

Furthermore, social life and existence is not just a mere material question, but it rather encompasses important epistemological, cultural, and psychological aspects which have important effects on the well-being of racialised populations in Western countries. In the words of bell hooks (2013:25), “if we are truly to address

issues of race and racism” then we must make “the creation of the conditions for well-being a central aspect of antiracist struggle”. In this regard, while there is a rich literature on migration, asylum, and mental health (Ryan et al. 2009) and practices of emotional support within solidarity activism (León-Pinilla et al. 2020), none of this work looks at these issues through a focus on race. On the other hand, work engaging with storytelling and other practices fostering migrant voices has raised important discussions on migrant agencies (Swerts 2015); nevertheless, it fails drawing linkages to wider Black and Brown political trajectories. Going into these debates, a focus on racial capitalism underscores how Black and Brown commoning practices and the notion of “political reproduction” encompass forms of agency that go way beyond the strict physical survival of their communities. Breaking away of what would be a merely defensive stand towards the hostility of racial capitalism, they are concerned with the preservation of Black cultures, worldviews, and the epistemological impacts of racism (Robinson 1983). Indeed, Black Power movements have largely been attentive to the psychological health of their communities living in a culture of white supremacy. For Black radicalism, the principal struggle was the emancipation of the mind, something that Malcom X referred to as “changing our minds and hearts” (hooks 2013). In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon (2008) addresses how white supremacy is interiorised by Black subjects, affecting their self-esteem and mental health. For Fanon, those with histories of colonisation should challenge “internal racism”, meaning the subjection of Black minds to the “mystifications of the very racist ideology which imprison and define them” (Hall 1986:26), and which assigns them to a particular place in relation to the political. From this perspective, a first battle for Black and Brown people is hence the end of the epistemological standpoint from which colonialism makes sense (Harney and Moten 2013). Overall, these ideas point to two key elements comprised in the notion of “political reproduction”. On the one hand, questions of mental health and self-esteem are key issues to tackle throughout Black and Brown political organising. Here, racism is the central element to fight against, differing from hegemonic approaches that focus on trauma and divert attention from race politics (Sangalang et al. 2019). On the other hand, the previous ideas assess the process of breaking with the epistemological logics that keep Black people politically subordinated and “trapped in blackness” (Fanon 2008) as a first and necessary step towards emancipation. They show how caring is one of the main activities contributing not only to social reproduction but also to the construction of the Black political subject.

Overall, the previous lines have situated migrant struggles in relation to broader trajectories challenging the geographies of racial capitalism, bringing key contributions to the theory and practice of migrant solidarity politics. Centring life politics and looking at practices of commoning from a perspective on Black and Brown radical organising, this theoretical intervention has underscored the multiple dimensions of the concept of “political reproduction”. Within strongly racialised, classed, and gendered settings, “political reproduction” encompasses the collective activities allowing existence and resistance at the edges of racial capitalism, fostering well-being and solidarity amongst marginalised communities. Tackling the intertwining between practices of mutual support, politicisation, and

resistance, “political reproduction” involves matters of material, epistemological, and emotional survival as constitutive of colonial and postcolonial agencies (Mullings 2021). The discussion that follows grounds these ideas engaging with the politics of the No Evictions Network in Glasgow.

Migrant Agencies and “Political Reproduction” in the No Evictions Network in Glasgow

Building on the political experiences of the No Evictions Network, this discussion expands some of the previous points raising important questions regarding the theory and practice of migrant political movements. Through the following empirical sections, I make key transversal claims that serve as groundworks of the concept of “political reproduction”: (i) within migrant solidarity spaces, reproductive politics are deeply racialised, gendered, and classed; (ii) they have a constitutive character of the political; and (iii) the agency of migrants is shaped through contesting forms of whiteness in political spaces. Backing these arguments, the first part of the discussion traces some of the ways in which, through linking social reproductive politics to capacity building and processes of healing, migrant agencies in the Network achieved to contest patriarchal and paternalist divisions between direct support and political campaigning. This unity between reproduction and struggle is signalled as a cornerstone of the concept of “political reproduction”. Thereafter, I situate the Covid-19 crisis in relation to the uneven geographies of racial capitalism, drawing attention to how experiences of mutual support and care amongst migrant groups were essential for the survival, resistance, and politicisation of migrant communities in Glasgow. The discussion concludes addressing the relationship between “political reproduction” and the temporalities of migrant solidarity activism, and its racialised, gendered, and classed dimension.

Overcoming Dichotomies between Direct Support and Campaigning within Migrant Solidarity Politics

In one of my interviews, Musa, an activist from the Unity Centre—a migrant activist space in Glasgow with over 20 years of history—told me that “we need to remove all the barriers; ‘no borders’ is not only physical but also mental and emotional” (Interview, 9 December 2020). Today, he said, he is fortunate to have settled status. He arrived in Glasgow from Nigeria ten years ago, after which he faced detention twice and was threatened with deportation on several occasions. Recalling this experience, he tells how the hardest thing for him was not only directly facing the violence of the border, but rather keeping himself “mentally and emotionally strong”. At that time, he found a home in the Unity Centre’s community, a place from where now he supports people in detention all across the British state whilst he studies to become an immigration solicitor. The support he found in Unity when he first arrived in Glasgow not only helped him to navigate the material and mental hardships of the asylum system but also motivated his active political engagement in this space, supporting the concept of “political

reproduction". Indeed, Musa's experience is very close to those of many asylum seekers in the "No Evictions Network", for whom finding a space of mutuality and support in the Network triggered strong processes of political struggle. Engaging with migrants' voices and testimonies, the following lines demonstrate how care and social reproductive politics in the spaces of the Network were at the core of the processes of "political reproduction", fostering migrants' resistances and political subjectivation. Linking care to processes of collective healing and "capacity building"—a term used by migrant activists themselves referring to the creation of the conditions for migrants' political struggle—I demonstrate that migrant agencies challenged patriarchal and paternalist divisions between reproductive labour and campaigning in political movements, fostering their mutually constitutive character. This unity between political struggle and reproduction is hence a defining element of the concept of "political reproduction".

Conversing with Delyse—a middle-age Jamaican refugee and inspiring member in the Network and other migrant activist spaces in Glasgow—she told me that "empowerment is collective because a chain is as strong as its weakest link". When I asked what she meant by empowerment, she answered: "empowerment is self-care, it is about rehumanising our communities" (Interview, 4 September 2020). Here, "self" refers to a collective notion of the community, in contrast with the connotation that this word adopts in Western individualist neoliberal societies, denoting a different standpoint of thinking politically. Indeed, across my interviews with people with migrant and refugee background, empowerment was often linked to ideas such as collective self-care, healing, community, or capacity building; all of them aspects that point to different dimensions of reproductive labour and forms of commoning. They evidence the claim that "if we cannot reproduce ourselves and each other, we cannot produce the conditions of possibility for emancipation" (Jeffries 2018:589). Yet, critical of the term "empowerment", Delyse argued that we should better speak about "re-empowerment", since people's journeys to Britain and the trajectories of struggle behind their mobilities were the clearest evidence of people's actual power. For her, re-empowerment and the creation of community spaces and bonds are crucial to counter the effects that racist exclusionary spaces have on people's self-esteem. This resonates with John La Rose's arguments in his essay "We did not come alive in Britain" (1976), where he alludes to how Caribbean people were shaped by the trajectories of struggle waged against colonialism and racism prior to arriving to Britain. Healing, hence, appears as a first and necessary step in the processes of becoming political:

When we come to a space where we are not treated like human beings ... Space does everything ... the narrative, the structure, the socialisation, the consciousness ... for me, the crucial part of empowerment is reminding people "yes, you are strong, and this is what you have been through". The moment you get that, you don't need to be chasing people to say "come, we are going to campaign" because that's already in people's spirit. (Delyse, Interview, 4 September 2020)

This position links empowerment to the processes of challenging the material and psychological impacts of exclusionary racist structures, inserted in wider

geographies of migrant struggle. Fanon (2008) tackled the dehumanisation of blackness present in Delyse's approach. He unpacked the sense of humanity created and modelled by white people, where blackness was produced as not-being, ascribing the Black subject to a role and a place. Challenging racism entails the refusal to remain "trapped in blackness", through the affirmation of Black life as life, as being, as having a take on the world, as embodying political agency. Affirming life against a deadly immigration system, Aisha—a Pakistani asylum seeker mother in the Network—points that mutual support and unity were crucial:

This system is forcing you to kill yourself. I feel that as human beings, we need to support each other, at least not to die. We can, maybe, have some differences. Maybe we are having difficult times. Maybe we are not able to wear good clothes. Maybe we are not able to eat well. But if we are together, we will not be that mentally dragged that we would die. (Aisha, Interview, 27 August 2020)

Both Aisha's and Delyse's accounts above evidence some of the ways racial capitalism, precariousness, and exposition to premature death underlie the heterogeneous experiences of migrant struggle. The ways these structural conditions were affecting people's mental health and capacity for political struggle were a central concern shared by interviewees with migrant backgrounds, intrinsically linked to questions of care and social reproduction. Not accidentally, questions around the lived experience of the Black subject (Fanon 2008) and the psychological impacts of racism have been of great importance in the theory and practice of Black organising (hooks 2013). Addressing these psychological impacts as main barriers that asylum seekers and refugees face to keep fighting, Delyse notes that:

It is difficult to say "you have to be strong" because people have lost their lives because of a system that makes it impossible to live. Therefore, the main question is not "how do we challenge the system?" but "how do we make sure we have a space where people can heal and get revived?". It is like being in a battlefield where somebody is unwell, a soldier got injured. They need a place to recuperate, and then you come back with ten times force or ten times power. (Delyse, Interview, 4 September 2020)

In this analogy, where border struggles are portrayed as a war where soldiers are already injured by the effects of racism, Delyse makes a crucial point. She suggests the creation of spaces for healing as the primary and preceding form of political action against the structural impacts of racial capitalism. In these racialised contexts, political reproduction unfolds through the creation of "restorative spaces" (Mullings 2021). These thoughts bring me back to August 2020, when the Network was holding an internal debate where activists were discussing whether they wanted to direct their energies and resources into "direct support tasks", or rather focus on "political campaigning". This distinction, which operates as a structuring logic of most of the experiences and literature of activist movements in solidarity with migrants in the West, became thoroughly challenged by one of the Black voices in the debate: "if people are unwell, they won't be ready to campaign, and we don't want to do a campaign without those experiencing border

violence, or do we?" (Migrant activist in a No Evictions Zoom meeting, August 2020). This claim was strongly deconstructing dichotomic divisions between campaigning and direct support work within spaces of solidarity. Demonstrating how reproductive politics are generative of migrant capacity to struggle, it was deeply challenging gendered and racialised constructions of activist work. It showed a political stance in which reproduction was inseparable from resistance, constituting a key form of migrant political agency (Mullings 2021).

Likewise, through performing reproductive politics as a central aspect of the political, I could observe how migrants contested forms of whiteness within the Network's political spaces. Samir, a 32-year-old political activist who fought Bashar Al-Assad's regime in Syria and is a key referent in the "Stop Hotel Detention" campaign, not only led many of the protests and actions of the campaign but also used to spend a good part of his days in the McLays hotel, where he was housed, knocking on other people's doors aware that mental health and isolation were major issues to confront collectively. In our interview, he also recounted the several times when he had gone to schools to deal with teachers on behalf of parents who did not speak English. For him, everything was part of the same struggle. Samir's case is one amongst many examples where migrant practices of care exceeded theorisations of social reproduction according to Western constructions of gender and activist roles, relying instead on a shared experience of migration, struggle, and commoning. While gender was still a very important marker shaping the ways care was practised, these experiences evidence some of the ways the Network's social spaces became sites where hegemonic white masculinities were challenged, showing how care is performed differently in strongly racialised settings (Raghuram 2019). On the contrary, roles across the "political campaigning" and "direct support" divide continued to shape most of European agencies in the Network, following heavily gendered and classed patterns. To give an example, while middle-class British cis men developed a key role in the "Comms Group"—the public face of the Network's campaigns, in touch with media and decision makers—those involved in direct support tasks were mostly women and non-binary people. These experiences demand pushing forward approaches that capture the complex and convoluted articulations of race, gender, and class shaping migrant solidarity politics.

Racial Capitalism, the Covid-19 Crisis, and Migrant Political Reproduction

During the Covid-19 pandemic, migrant reproductive politics became central to tackle the deadly impacts of the crisis in their communities, fostering processes of politicisation and forms of commoning. Intersections between race, class, gender, and mobility make migration a very complex terrain, where a heterogeneity of precarious situations converge—homelessness, access to health systems, racism, institutional violence, legal status, financial struggle, etc.—reaching unprecedented levels during the pandemic. In such a critical conjuncture, reproductive politics became a matter of survival. Recalling Gilmore's definition of racism as the structural conditions producing the "premature death" of racialised populations,

the Covid-19 pandemic unfolded as a racial crisis. 29 asylum seekers lost their lives in asylum accommodation in the UK during 2020 (Taylor 2020), three asylum seekers died in Glasgow during the lockdown that year, and several reports have addressed the deadly global impact of the management of the crisis on racialised populations and people with migrant backgrounds across uneven geographies (Milan and Treré 2020).

These deaths were not isolated. Rather, they expose the underlying logics of racial capitalism accentuating a conjuncture of extreme poverty and mental health hardship for migrant communities in Glasgow and beyond. On the one hand, with their revenues affected by Glasgow's housing crisis, the Home Office's contractor Mears saw in the pandemic an opportunity to remove hundreds of asylum seekers from their private accommodations, relocating them in hotels without right to self-isolate nor access to any cash. Alongside "hotel detention", the lockdown meant that physical spaces of community and support shut down, leading to an exacerbation of material hardship and isolation where access to essentials became a matter of survival. The inaccessibility of these resources and the inability of third sector organisations to give a response to the crisis, shaped unprecedented geographies of migrant poverty in the city. Umar, a Nigerian asylum seeker in their 40s (and activist supporting migrant communities during the pandemic), noted how "people are struggling in different ways; the impact can be overwhelming for some people and a lot of people have attempted suicide; things are becoming so difficult that they can't keep going, they want to go, to take their lives" (Interview, 13 October 2020).

Umar's testimony above denotes the centrality of self-care, direct support, and mental health issues amidst a crisis of social reproduction and extreme marginalisation of migrant and asylum-seeking communities. In this conjuncture, the self-organised solidarities of migrant groups and networks were key in building the means for collective survival and resistance in Glasgow. For Lucy, a British activist in the Network in her 30s, what "MORE and other groups did during the lockdown was an incredible act of solidarity, empowerment, and organising". She said that she doesn't know "what people would have done without MORE supporting them through that period" (Interview, 1 October 2020).

Indeed, most of the reproductive activist work during this time was developed by migrant-led groups like MORE ("Migrants Organising for Rights and Empowerment"), the Unity Centre, or Zagros (a Kurdish-Scottish association). While those "without lived experiences of the asylum system"—as people with status were referred to—were mainly focused on media and formal political engagement, migrant-led organisations pushed forward several initiatives to address the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic upon their communities. Migrant groups in the Network worked together to reinvent forms to break isolation, food poverty, emotional hardship, and lack of access to health, building a strong structure of support at the edges of racial capitalism. Tackling isolation as a main concern, MORE launched a "phone top-up" initiative to ensure "everyone in the immigration system had access to internet data and could keep in touch with their families, friends, lawyers, and GPs during the pandemic" (Umar, Interview, 13 October 2020). This initiative also allowed political connections and participation

insofar as it opened the door to the online spaces of activism and encounter for those initially excluded from the pandemic's virtual worlds, enabling "political reproduction". Migrant-led initiatives sought to resist food poverty amongst the community too. MORE started a "dignified access to food" initiative aimed at "supporting people to buy culturally-based food ... to buy their countries' food themselves and access the food they want to eat, not what charities want to offer them" (Umar, Interview, 13 October 2020); Zagros delivered food packs to people held in hotel detention; and the Unity Centre's "Direct Support Group" delivered food across the city. Moreover, volunteers of MORE, Zagros, and Unity often accompanied people to the hospital, dentist, or GP appointments, and raised formal complaints to the public authorities denouncing the failure of Scottish institutions to meet asylum seekers' rights during the pandemic (Refugees for Justice 2020). Umar noted how emotional support was central to all the previous experiences, with volunteers of MORE and Unity keeping in touch weekly with over 2,000 people across Glasgow, sharing conversations over the phone and resourcing mental health support when needed. He told me how since these groups achieved to involve people receiving support as new volunteers, mutual support became practised in many different languages, including Arabic, French, Farsi, Urdu, Hindi, Spanish, and Kurdish. Throughout this process, emotional transactions turned into strong links amongst the people in the community, often developing into friendships and forms of commoning. An example of this community building outcome was the creation of a "cycling club" amongst people involved in MORE's support team, asylum-seeking families, and people staying in the hotels which organised fortnightly cycling routes once restrictions eased. The groups behind these initiatives were the same ones who were actively campaigning against the detention of asylum seekers in hotel-based accommodation. In our interviews, voices from these groups assessed direct support tasks as a preceding form of political resistance, since the hardships of the pandemic were deeply affecting people's capacity to struggle (Delyse, Interview, 4 September 2020). Here, dynamics of mutual support nurtured the involvement of people staying in the hotels in the campaign and in the articulation of further solidarities, showing how reproductive labour operated as the cornerstone of political resistances.

Indeed, across all the previous experiences, direct support meant way more than delivering food packages, accompanying people to appointments, or providing clothes or phone top-ups to people. Rather, these strategies shared a focus on the relationships with people and they were aimed at ensuring community reproduction and political capacity building through establishing the basis for further links and bonds amongst communities. With the exception of the Unity Centre—whose politics have historically been shaped by longstanding debates on how to centre migrant experiences in their actions—a core characteristic of these solidarities was that they were both organised and provided by migrants. Insofar as they achieved to involve the people receiving support in their organisation, migrant reproductive politics not only built the means for collective survival but also constructed communities of struggle that may become seeds of future transformative politics and political change. Through the politicisation of direct support, migrant agencies also challenged the paternalistic humanitarian logics of

assistance that attempt to commodify the precariousness produced by the politics of the border (Dadusc and Mudu 2022) and the “politics of compassion” (Sirriyeh 2018). Overall, they staged a new example of politics of care that fostered mutual aid, empowerment, and community building where the practice of direct support was constitutive of broader campaigning frames.

Nevertheless, operating with the backdrop of the neoliberalisation of social reproduction, the success of these experiences was partial and raises some dilemmas and contradictions. The fact that institutions and charities were not being responsive to the challenges posed by the pandemic led to a situation in which the gap left by their inactivity became filled by political activism. Umar notes how “people were supposed to get support from charities and organisations but that was not happening” and that they were “covering this vacuum” (Interview, 13 October 2020). Consequently, migrant activism often adopted a strong focus on service provision, adopting case-working humanitarian dynamics covering such absence in a very critical conjuncture (Fieldwork Diary). At stake here is the way feminist scholars have signalled the “double character of social reproduction” within capitalist societies, and how it is inscribed in a dialectical relation where domination and refusal are indivisible (Jeffries 2018). This leads to a situation where migrant reproductive work was at the same time filling the institutional gap and building the means for community survival (Katz 2008). While it contested state logics at times, it was also deeply shaped by them. Tensions between disruption and reproduction of the status quo have indeed been a key focus in critical literature on migrant politics (Swerts and Nicholls 2021; Swyngedouw 2021). The contradictory character of civil society responses to institutional gaps in the pandemic has also been signalled in current debates (Leap et al. 2022). Nevertheless, despite contradictions between neoliberalisation and commoning which shaped migrants’ engagement with the uneven geographies of the pandemic, these experiences shed light on the ways reproductive work opens up the possibility to construct political communities of solidarity in neoliberal settings (Leap et al. 2022). Furthermore, they evidence the indissociable character that existence and resistance plays within migrant contexts, as well as the inherent political dimension of reproductive labour.

Political Reproduction and the Uneven Temporalities of Solidarity Activism

Supporting over 2,000 people across the city, the previous section has explored how MORE, Zagros, and the Unity Centre support group represented the most salient activist efforts to navigate the racial crisis of social reproduction triggered by the pandemic. While MORE and Zagros were entirely led by people “with lived experiences of the asylum system”, Unity’s support group was coordinated by six European professional women. The latter had to stop its activity with the end of the lockdown in September 2020 due to the exhaustion of their volunteers, who also recovered their usual jobs. Yet, MORE and Zagros never stopped their direct support work, which today is still ongoing. This example raises important questions on the relationship between political reproduction and the temporalities of

solidarity struggles, and how this varies upon different positionalities of race, gender, and class.

A focus on “political reproduction” demands drawing attention to the temporalities of care work in spaces of migrant solidarity. If we address political reproduction in relation to sustainment of the social and political spaces of the Network, engagement and disengagement constitute central aspects showing who leaves and who stays in solidarity spaces after public mediatic moments. In the context of the Network, I could observe how “mobilisation cycles” (Tarrow 2012) strongly conditioned the moments of active involvement and disengagement, and the kind of activities being prioritised at each stage. My analysis reveals that shifts upon cycles were deeply racialised and gendered: while political campaigning conjunctures were shaped by stronger British male leadership and public protests, quieter periods in between campaigns were characterised by female and non-binary leadership, a greater participation of migrant voices, and a stronger focus on care and collective empowerment (Fieldwork Diary, 2019 and 2020). This work was essential for the “political reproduction” of the Network as a space of activism. For Lucy, a British activist in the Network in her 30s, a main challenge was indeed to “keep the Network going” as “many people come on board when something big or dramatic happens” and a big question was “how we keep pushing that on when there’s not a big event going on” (Interview, 1 October 2020). When discussing who was doing this work in my interviews, participants often acknowledged the racialised dynamics shaping processes of engagement and disengagement across cycles of mobilisation; however, gender dynamics often went unnoticed. Furthermore, in those moments when the Network was more focused on its specific campaigns, most of the reproductive labour was developed by migrants and other allied groups, as shown by experiences during the pandemic. Katy, a young British woman in the Network, reckons with this failure when she claims that “during the ‘Stop Hotel Detention’ campaign we [white allies] failed in taking care of the relationships; people were just focused on writing letters to Mears” (Interview, 7 October 2020). Delyse also accounts how during campaigning moments “when it comes onto strategic planning, it’s people without lived experience. The people with lived experience ... we seem to be the ones doing direct support” (Interview, 4 September 2020).

These dynamics evidence how articulations of race, gender, and class shaped different temporal framings and understandings of the struggles. For people “with lived experiences of the asylum system”, the struggles against Serco’s evictions or Mears’ hotel detention were part of a longer-term fight linked to their experience of migration. Hence, disengagement operated differently for them: they never stopped coming to the meetings after intense moments of campaigning, showing a strong sense of care about the social spaces of the Network. Hamza, a Pakistani asylum seeker in his 40s, manifested his concerns about the continuity of the Network in our interview. He and his family told me how after participating in the campaign they also got involved in the Unity Centre because “the No Evictions campaign will end but the Unity Centre will remain there” (Interview, 13 October 2019). Furthermore, migrant communities always kept a focus on direct support as the movement’s priority since it was the basic means to sustain their own

long-term struggle within the asylum system. Migrant reproductive work was indeed intensified during campaigning moments. Since evictions, hotel detention, or the pandemic were critical conjunctures of racial capitalist offensive, struggles over social reproduction became then more necessary than ever.

Nevertheless, the fact that migrant activism is very tied to the struggles to win papers, added to the intensity of these struggles—comprising all aspects of one person's life—also poses important problems in terms of the temporalities of migrant activism. Graham Campbell—Jamaican SNP Councillor for Springburn with a long trajectory of involvement in refugee activism—claims that:

the problem that we have is that when people win their cases, you nearly always lose them from activism. You can understand why, because if you have spent five or ten years of your life fighting for the right to have a life, once you get it, first of all you have to relax, and then think how your normal life is going to be. Then once you have your normal life, you might not be in the same area where you fought and won your case, you might be living somewhere else now. So very quickly the refugee communities have had problems in building permanent organisations, because they keep losing their leaders, either to success or failure. (Graham Campbell, 26 February 2020)

Overall, the previous notes expose how a focus on “political reproduction” demands drawing attention to the temporalities of migrant solidarity activism, foregrounding how questions of engagement, disengagement, and leadership within these movements relate to people's status and positionality.

Conclusion

This paper has introduced the notion of “political reproduction”, demonstrating how struggles over reproduction are constitutive of migrant political agencies. The concept of “political reproduction” is used to shed light on how in contexts of racialised, classed, and gendered exclusion, reproductive politics not only allow life at the edges of racial capitalism but also foster ways of commoning and processes of becoming political which enable migrants' capacity to struggle. Drawing parallels between migrant struggles in the No Evictions Network in Glasgow and wider Black and Brown geographies of struggle, a focus on “political reproduction” brings key contributions to the theory and practice of migrant solidarity movements. On the one hand, this perspective situates border struggles in relation to other colonial and postcolonial counter-cartographies of struggle, bringing a Black geographies lens to literature on migrant politics. Here, reproductive work has been “foundational to the agency of racialised, unfree, and disposable workers” (Mullings 2021:156). Emerging as “forms of self-defense” (Harney and Moten 2013) against the deadly effects of racial capitalist systems (Gilmore 2007), reproductive politics are constitutive of the political: they operate removing the material and psychological barriers towards political action that migrants experience, as well as forging the necessary social bonds enabling processes of political subjectivation. The centrality of reproduction as a form of agency against conditions of structural exclusion sheds light on the racialised, classed, and gendered dimension of these struggles. In this direction, my fieldwork evidenced how direct

support and mutual care practices were mostly pushed forward by people with migrant background in the Network. Furthermore, I demonstrated how through linking reproductive politics to processes of “capacity building”, migrant agencies in the Network strongly challenged patriarchal and paternalist splits between “direct support” and “political campaigning”. Finally, the argument explored how “political reproduction” in the spaces of the Network not only encompassed matters of strict physical survival but also tackling the epistemological consequences of racial capitalism and the effects of “living in a culture of white supremacy” (hooks 2013). In this regard, findings suggest that questions of mental health, emotional healing, and well-being are central to migrant experiences of political organising and agency, linking to key concerns in Black and feminist politics, where the “emancipation of the mind” precedes other forms of political struggle. Overall, the previous are provocative claims that aim to invite scholars and activists to reflect on the contributions that migrant agencies and Black politics can bring to the understanding of solidarities and processes of organising. In a conjuncture where precarity has become a way of life for increasing communities and populations worldwide, the question of the “political reproduction” of the commons stands as a major political challenge.

Acknowledgements

Huge thanks to David Featherstone and Lazaros Karaliotas for reading and discussing with me earlier drafts. Likewise, I would like to express my gratitude and profound admiration to all those who participated in this research and who inspired many of the ideas that I developed in the paper. This paper is part of my PhD research funded by the Urban Studies Foundation.

Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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