



# Vagabond Capitalism and the Necessity of Social Reproduction

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A vagabond, as is well known, moves from place to place without a fixed home. However, vagabondage insinuates a little dissolution—an unsettled, irresponsible, and disreputable life, which indeed can be said of the globalization of capitalist production. This paper reframes the discussion on globalization through a materialist focus on social reproduction. By looking at the material social practices through which people reproduce themselves on a daily and generational basis and through which the social relations and material bases of capitalism are renewed—and the havoc wreaked on them by a putatively placeless capitalism—we can better expose both the costs of globalization and the connections between vastly different sites of production. Focusing on social reproduction allows us to address questions of the making, maintenance, and exploitation of a fluidly differentiated labor force, the productions (and destructions) of nature, and the means to create alternative geographies of opposition to globalized capitalism. I will draw on examples from the “First” and “Third Worlds” to argue that any politics that effectively counters capitalism’s global imperative must confront the shifts in social reproduction that have accompanied and enabled it. Looking at the political-economic, political-ecological, and cultural aspects of social reproduction, I argue that there has been a rescaling of childhood and suggest a practical response that focuses on specific geographies of social reproduction. Reconnecting these geographies with those of production, both translocally and across geographic scale, begins to redress the losses suffered in the realm of social reproduction as a result of globalized capitalist production.

The paper develops the notion of “topography” as a means of examining the intersecting effects and material consequences of globalized capitalist production. “Topography” offers a political logic that both recognizes the materiality of cultural and social difference and can help mobilize transnational and internationalist solidarities to counter the imperatives of globalization.

The phrase *vagabond capitalism* puts the vagrancy and dereliction where it belongs—on capitalism, that unsettled, dissolute, irresponsible stalker of the world. It also suggests a threat at the heart of capitalism’s vagrancy: that an increasingly global capitalist production can shuck many of its particular commitments to place, most centrally those associated with social reproduction, which is almost always less

mobile than production. At worst, this disengagement hurls certain people into forms of vagabondage; at best, it leaves people in all parts of the world struggling to secure the material goods and social practices associated with social reproduction. Insisting on the necessity of social reproduction provides a critical arena, as yet undertheorized, within which many of the problems associated with the globalization of capitalist production can be confronted.

In this essay, I hope to systematically delineate what is entailed in the accomplishment of social reproduction and what is at stake when social reproduction gets unhinged from production, as is now the case in many parts of the world. These concerns will be illustrated with a brief discussion of what might be conceptualized as a “rescaling of childhood.” The final part of the essay develops the notion of “topography” as a critical methodology that can be drawn on to produce “countertopographies” that provide means of imagining and developing a translocal politics opposed to globalized capitalism and other forms of oppression, especially around issues of social reproduction.

Globalized capitalism has changed the face of social reproduction worldwide over the past three decades, enabling intensification of capital accumulation and exacerbating differences in wealth and poverty. The demise of the social contract as a result of neoliberalism, privatization, and the fraying of the welfare state is a crucial aspect of this shift. Children, among others, suffer from these changes, as all manner of public disinvestments take place—including in education, social welfare, housing, health care, and public environments—as part of and in concert with a relative lack of corporate commitment to particular places. The flip side of the withdrawal of public and corporate support for the social wage is a reliance on private means of securing and sustaining social reproduction—not just the uncompensated caring work of families, most commonly women, but also a shunting of responsibility, often geographically, that has clear class, race, and national components. For instance, the social reproduction of a migrant workforce is carried out in its members’ countries of origin. When they are employed elsewhere, this represents a direct transfer of wealth from generally poorer to richer countries. Variable capital produced in one site and tapped in another is no less a capital transfer than the extraction of raw materials, debt servicing, and the like. Yet this transfer seems to be of no moment to most theorists of globalization. Social reproduction is the missing figure in current globalization debates. This is a serious omission. Globalization cannot be understood without addressing the restructuring of social reproduction.

## Social Reproduction

Social reproduction is the fleshy, messy, and indeterminate stuff of everyday life. It is also a set of structured practices that unfold in dialectical relation with production, with which it is mutually constitutive and in tension. Social reproduction encompasses daily and long term reproduction, both of the means of production and the labor power to make them work. At its most basic, it hinges upon the biological reproduction of the labor force, both generationally and on a daily basis, through the acquisition and distribution of the means of existence, including food, shelter, clothing, and health care. According to Marxist theory, social reproduction is much more than this; it also encompasses the reproduction of the labor force at a certain (and fluid) level of differentiation and expertise. This differentiated and skilled labor force is socially constituted. Not only are the material social practices associated with its production historically and geographically specific, but its contours and requirements are the outcome of ongoing struggle. Apart from the need to secure the means of existence, the production and reproduction of the labor force calls forth a range of cultural forms and practices that are also geographically and historically specific, including those associated with knowledge and learning, social justice and its apparatus, and the media.

Many struggles over wages are inflected with and driven by the redefinition of what constitutes an “adequately prepared” labor force. Under Fordism, such struggles led to advances for a large fraction of the working class, advances that were not simply economic. These advances were measured in increases in educational opportunity and steadily increasing levels of educational attainment, a broader span of benefits available to workers, and an expanded spectrum of social and cultural services and opportunities of which working people might avail themselves. Procuring such gains progressively redefined the contours of social reproduction and its contents, and each gain for labor increased the relative costs of labor for capitalists.

However, workplace struggles were not the only source of change in defining the compass of social reproduction or the means of its attainment. Social reproduction is secured through a shifting constellation of sources encompassed within the broad categories of the state, the household, capital, and civil society. The balance among these varies historically, geographically, and across class. In the US, union struggles during the mid-20th century forced capitalist firms to shoulder an increasing proportion of the responsibility for social reproduction *and* simultaneously expanded what was considered socially necessary social reproduction (through such things as increased social benefits

packages, expanded workplace training programs, and the like). Earlier reformist activists associated with the Progressive era in the US forced the state to shoulder an increasing share of the costs of social reproduction and to provide an expanded array of practices associated with it (Marston forthcoming). These reformer-propelled shifts were witnessed in such things as social housing, expanded public health services, playground and park development, public education, and the institution of social welfare programs. Of course, the picture is more complicated than this; there were clear class interests riddling the progressive movement to reconfigure a polyglot immigrant and working class society in a white middle class image, and the state got on board because such new arenas of practice also served capitalist interests. Nevertheless, these broad processes—the expanded role of the state and capital in securing social reproduction—altered the nature and extent of household-based practices of social reproduction as much as it did those associated with civil society, such as church-based orphanages or almshouses, private charities and settlement houses, or immigrant and working men's and women's circles. Neither arena was put out of business, of course, but the ways households secured their reproduction was altered tremendously, albeit without substantially affecting the gender division of labor within the household, and the role of private charities shifted to other realms (still often associated with social reproduction broadly conceived), such as the support of cultural institutions and activities.

Like globalization, social reproduction has political-economic, cultural, and environmental aspects. Each of these three aspects has bearing on the geographies of social reproduction, and, by extension, children's geographies. For example, the political-economic aspect of social reproduction encompasses the reproduction of work knowledge and skills, the practices that maintain and reinforce class and other categories of difference, and the learning that inculcates what Bourdieu refers to as the *habitus*, which is a set of cultural forms and practices that works to reinforce and naturalize the dominant social relations of production and reproduction (eg Bourdieu and Passeron 1977). It also includes the reproduction and maintenance of the forces and means of production. If the former are reproduced through some amalgam of the household, civil society, and the state, largely through schools, the latter are primarily the purview of capital and the state.

The gender division of labor within the household, which is itself historically and geographically contingent, commonly presumes women's responsibility for most of the work of reproduction, including child-rearing, food provisioning and preparation, cleaning,

laundering, and other tasks of homemaking. With wealth and “development,” an increasing number of these tasks are provided through the market or can be purchased, depending upon household circumstances and other socioeconomic factors. Prepared foods, domestic assistance, childcare services, and the like may lessen household work for some, and “free” some women’s time for participation in the paid labor force or other activities. However, these things do not alter gendered divisions of labor or the social relations of production and reproduction that undergird and are sustained by the marketing of some of the means of social reproduction. For example, as feminist geographers who have studied the questions of social reproduction associated with childcare have made clear, the transnational migration of childcare workers of various types represents a subsidy of wealthier “first world” women (and by extension those who employ them) by either young women from other parts of the “first world” or, more commonly, women from the global south, whose own children are often left behind with relatives. These transnational exchanges enable the migrant women, not only to work longer hours, but also to receive less compensation in the process (Pulsipher 1993; Rose 1993; cf Hochschild 2000).

The state, of course, has its own hand in this process. In the US and Canada, for example, this is seen in immigration policies that simultaneously admit lone women workers from certain poorer nations (most often in the global south) and prevent their families from joining them. Various visa programs in both countries ensure a continuous supply of cheap domestic labor, including nannies and other child-minders. The state is involved in other political-economic aspects of social reproduction as well. From state subsidies for electrification, water supplies, and sewage treatment to schools and health care services and the provision of a variety of goods and services associated with the welfare state, the state has long been implicated in social reproduction. The varying role of the state across history and geography also affects the balance between the various constituencies in how social reproduction gets carried out. For example, recent trends towards privatization have created sharp distinctions between rich and poor households in how the work of social reproduction is accomplished and by whom. In many places, these shifts have had a particularly chilling effect on women, who for the most part continue to fill the gap between state and market in ensuring their households’ reproduction and well-being.

The boundary between these practices, which I have associated with the political-economic aspect of social reproduction, and those

associated with its cultural aspect is blurred. Here I include the cultural forms and practices associated with knowledge acquisition, broadly understood not just in relation to work or the workplace, but also with the learning associated with becoming a member of particular social groups. Of course, all people are members of multiple and overlapping social groups; social reproduction entails acquiring and assimilating the shared knowledge, values, and practices of the groups to which one belongs by birth or choice. Through these material social practices, social actors become members of a culture they simultaneously help to create and construct their identities within and against. In the course of these activities, young people and others are both objects and agents; acquiring cultural knowledge and reworking it through the practices—intentional and otherwise—of their everyday lives. Here again, household forms and their fluid gendered and generational divisions of labor have as much bearing on how cultural reproduction is enacted as on its contours and what it is socially understood to encompass. These relations are both the medium and the message of social reproduction, and their particular form is thus of important political-economic and sociocultural consequence.

Other primarily cultural arenas of social reproduction include that broad category of cultural production categorized as the media, along with mass culture and those institutions associated with religious affiliation and practice. Within these broad arenas, culture is both produced and reproduced. In the interchange, the social relations of production and reproduction that characterize a particular social formation at a given historical moment and geographical location are encountered, reproduced, altered, and resisted.

Finally, apart from the cultural and political-economic aspects of social reproduction, there are the material grounds of reproduction—its environmental aspect. All modes of production produce and are enabled by particular political-ecologies. This fact is so obvious that it often goes unremarked, but the environmental toll of centuries of capitalist production, and its increasingly global nature, has been enormous. The widespread and serious environmental problems symptomatic of capitalist relations of production have received plenty of public attention, but generally not as problems of social reproduction. In some cases, environmental problems have been displaced from one region to another. Environmental racism and environmental forms of imperialism—whereby there is a geographical fix to political-ecological problems, such as the siting of toxic waste repositories or the location of noxious industries (often regulated out of wealthier or more privileged locales)—have implications in common with the

social relations that encourage production in one place tapping a migrant workforce reproduced elsewhere. In both cases, there is a rejigging of the geography of social reproduction so that the costs of social reproduction—in one case environmental and in the other political-economic—are borne away from where most of the benefits accrue.

In other instances, environmental problems or the political responses to them have impeded continued production, and manufacturers and others have had to develop alternate means of producing that are sensitive to fostering a more “sustainable” environment. Such environmental protection is often keyed to sustaining production—a capitalist rendition of “sustainable development.” These concerns and practices suggest the important role of the environment in social reproduction. If nothing else, environmental degradation undermines sustained productivity. In this regard, the particular toll of environmental degradation on children’s bodies should be noted. Because of their size and rapidly developing constitutions, children are particularly susceptible to environmental pollutants, whether these be airborne, in the food chain, or in the water supply (cf, eg, Satterthwaite et al 1996).

There are other environmental aspects of social reproduction. Those affecting children’s everyday lives are of particular concern to me here. Social reproduction always takes place somewhere, and the environments for its enactment are integral to its outcomes. Disregard for the concerns of social reproduction is visible in the landscapes of neglect common in urban areas of both industrialized and underdeveloped countries. These neglected and undersupported landscapes include schools, playgrounds, parks, and public spaces, as well as underfunded or disinvested sites of housing, infrastructure, and service provision. The settings in which children grow up speak volumes about their value as present and future members of particular societies. For instance, the increase in prison construction in the US over the past two decades at the expense of schools and playgrounds suggests a particular (and horrifying) valuation of certain classed, raced, and gendered young people there, since less skilled manufacturing jobs dried up in so many places during the 1970s. Less extreme are the material manifestations of disregard witnessed in the physical settings mentioned above in which children spend so much of their time, like schools, parks, and playgrounds. These geographies of children and childhood have suffered under the relations of production and reproduction associated with globalization (cf Katz 1998a, 1998b).

## **Globalization and the Rescaling of Childhood**

If these arenas and practices constitute the basics of social reproduction, how have they been restructured in the wake of globalization? Perhaps more to the point, how can globalized capitalism be recognized and reckoned with through addressing questions of social reproduction?

As many analysts of contemporary globalization have suggested, technological, financial, and regulatory changes have altered the intensity and parameters of globalization, so that there are now major financial markets and trade agreements outside of the traditional centers of capital investment and exchange. What drives the current round of globalization is that, starting in the 1970s, production capital began to cross national borders with greater intensity, as the now-familiar combination of disinvestment in traditional industrial centers and foreign direct investment in areas of lower labor and other production costs was set in motion. At the same time, there has been a transnationalization of production, so that all manner of products are produced globally in a literal sense (cf Smith 1997). While capital was certainly fluid in earlier periods (capitalists have long shifted their sites of production from places of higher production costs to places of lower [labor and other] costs), capitalism has become even less dependent on any one place, as goods are produced in a cyborgian fashion across national boundaries that are increasingly meaningless—except if you live someplace, and everybody does.

When reproduction is highly mobile but social reproduction necessarily remains largely place-bound, all sorts of disjunctures occur across space, across boundaries, and across scale, which are as likely to draw upon sedimented inequalities in social relations as to provoke new ones. For children coming of age, the results are profound. By examining shifts in the geographies and social relations of social reproduction in each of the realms I have delineated—the political-economic, the cultural, and the political-ecologic—I want to try and conceptualize what might be thought of as a “rescaling of childhood”. This discussion will necessarily be schematic, and will draw in general ways upon my work in New York City on children and public space and on the privatization of public space associated with the neoliberal city. I will also be drawing on others’ work concerning children and the media and on my readings of the environmental literature.

In the political-economic realm of social reproduction, disinvestments in public space have left children in poor and underserved neighborhoods with few opportunities for safe, autonomous, outdoor play. At the same time, the cultural realm of social reproduction has expanded its reach to many children, both those hounded indoors by



the lack of play opportunities in their neighborhood environs and those previously outside the reach of the cultural productions of capital. In both of these realms—the public spaces of children’s everyday lives and the cultural spaces afforded by mass media and the Internet—adults often exercise astonishing vigilance over children’s activities and potential engagements, as if microlocal individualist practices of parenting might be enough to protect children from both the predations associated with public disinvestment and the bounty offered by the wild expansion of electronic technologies that has paralleled it (cf Katz 2001b; Kinder 1999).

Meanwhile, within the political ecological realm of social reproduction, there are well-known problems at global and smaller scales for which even herculean parental acts at the household scale are inadequate answers. For instance, it is well documented that environmental pollutants that accumulate over time in adult bodies may be conveyed to children in mothers’ milk, all efforts to control infants’ and children’s exposure to environmental toxins notwithstanding. I do not raise this to provide yet another arena for nurturing what I call “terror talk” concerning children, or the hypervigilance that both undergirds it and is its outcome. Instead, I suggest—albeit schematically—that both the intertwining of the different aspects of social reproduction (the political-economic, the cultural, and the political-ecological) and the ways these impinge on the everyday lives of children in the global north (and elsewhere) under contemporary conditions require a similarly interconnected and “scale-jumping” response. Crudely put, regulating children’s exposure to television while living in a toxic environment or blithely assuming global warming away and in a political economy that offers few prospects to so many children coming of age may provide some solace in the daily mayhem of “parenting,” but it avoids the larger questions at stake and sublimates, if not completely ignores the broader politics of social reproduction.

The questions of social reproduction are vexed and slippery, but the arena of social reproduction is where much of the toll of globalized capitalist production can be witnessed, and so it is fertile grounds for launching responses to it. The issues are vexed and slippery for several reasons. I will highlight three here. First, almost by definition, social reproduction (at a minimal level at least) *must* be accomplished, and it is in the interests of people themselves to ensure this no matter what the circumstances in which they find themselves. Thus, the withdrawal of support for social reproduction on the part of the state, capital, and even civil society will be countered to whatever extent possible by

household, familial, and individual efforts. One thing that has been both astonishing and heartbreaking to me in my work in both the Sudan and the US has been the myriad ways in which capitalist production and its entailments have pushed people to drastic limits of their own resilience, and how willing capitalists have been to draw on that resilience for their own ends. Second, social reproduction is vexed because, again almost by definition, it is focused on reproducing the very social relations and material forms that *are* so problematic. Social reproduction is precisely not “revolutionary,” and yet so much rests on its accomplishment, including—perhaps paradoxically—oppositional politics.

Third, the politics around social reproduction has a mushy constituency and an almost infinite number of locations, and these make for some powerful contradictions. Because virtually everyone is caught up in the material social practices and necessity of social reproduction, it is paradoxically hard to organize around. “Everyone” can be no one in particular. Likewise, its piecemeal and sprawling geography offers no particular site at which to organize. As fraught as workplace organizing is, there is a *there* there. And yet it is precisely social reproduction’s ubiquity that makes it so important to redress in the wake of the past twenty years of assault on its forms and practices. In other words, a politics focused around social reproduction reconnects culture, environment, and political economy in opposition to capitalist globalization across a wide and differentiated terrain. History demonstrates that struggles over the accomplishment of social reproduction and who bears responsibility for it ebb and flow. The contest over which arena among the state, household, capital, and civil society bears responsibility for what under what circumstances has proven, not only durable, but vastly variable, depending upon historical circumstances and geography. And so the struggle continues and provides ripe grounds for expansion.

For instance, labor’s gains of social benefits and an expanded social wage under Fordist capitalism in the industrialized economies during the mid-20th century have been under assault. At the same time, the victories of US progressive middle-class white women in getting the capitalist state to take responsibility for a host of programs associated broadly with social reproduction have been eroded by the “lean mean” hollowing out of the capitalist state under neoliberalism. These shifts, associated with the globalization of capitalist production, can be seen at all scales as well as transnationally. For example, there are common threads in so-called welfare reform in the global north (especially in the US) and structural adjustment programs in the

global south, or in the incarceration of two million people (three-quarters of whom are black men and boys) in the US and the militarization in so many parts of the world where similarly “excessed” groups of people have no secure work future

Frances Fox Piven (1999) has suggested that capitalists and the capitalist state have retreated from commitments to the social wage because “they could.” Obviously true. There has been little effective—or even ineffective—resistance to the mobility of capitalist production and the neoliberal practices it fosters. Labor militancy was way down in the latter part of the twentieth century, while in other arenas—for example, white feminist middle-class politics—the focus was elsewhere, on issues such as women’s equality in the workplace and the public sphere. This marked a major shift from Progressive-era women’s demands that linked domestic concerns with the broader arena of local, regional, and national government.

Clearly, the early 21st century requires a new form of organizing, a new political agenda, and a new and more nuanced scale of practice. Seattle, Prague, Pôrto Alegre, and other internationalist demonstrations against the institutions associated with globalizing capitalist production make clear that there is plenty of organized focused opposition targeting some of its key institutions and corporations, and that many groups are working on these issues in sustained ways between the demonstrations. I want to suggest that, while the concerns of social reproduction are at the heart of much of this opposition, they are almost never addressed as such—and that they should be. Redistributing responsibility for social reproduction back to capitalists and the state, transnationally and at all scales, would begin to recalibrate the costs and benefits of globalization in ways that would pinpoint its widely distributed costs and promulgate increased social justice and equality across classes, nations, localities and gender. Making such a move would help revitalize a truly internationalist politics.

## **Topographies and Countertopographies<sup>1</sup>**

By way of conclusion, I want to discuss the notion of producing topographies as a means to move this politics forward. I have developed this idea at length in another paper (Katz 2001a). I sketch it out here because producing “topographies” and “countertopographies” (Katz 2001a:1228ff) can be a way, not only to reimagine a politics that redresses the toll of globalization, but also to actually begin to build a practical response that is at once translocal and strategically focused. In other words, I am trying to imagine a political response that has the

fluidity and breadth to cope with the vexing issues I raised earlier concerning organizing around social reproduction. I understand this is a tall order, and my idea is a modest one.

I offer topographies, then, as a research strategy that might contribute to building a political response “that works the grounds of and between multiply situated social actors in a range of geographical locations who are at once bound and rent by the diverse forces of globalization” (Katz 2001a:1214). Such connections might be made around the fallout for social reproduction of the increasingly global nature of capitalist production. Topography is both the detailed description of a particular location and the totality of the features that comprise the place itself. Both are produced, and an examination of how this is done can reveal the interested nature of both topographies and topographical knowledge. Topographies provide deliberate, purposeful, and systematic—albeit partial—information at all geographic scales to the military, the state, and business. Topographical knowledge provides the grist for Global Information Systems (GIS) and related spatialized data bases that guide and inform resource extraction, public and private surveillance, military movements, and various forms of governance and domination. This list of practices only hints at the integral importance of gathering and mapping topographical data, both to the endurance and expansion of imperialist globalization and to enactments of domination and exploitation closer to home. The place-based knowledge produced as topographies sustains and enables the exercise of power at various geographic scales and can transcend the specificities of the locality in which it was gathered. Topographical knowledge is integral to maintaining and advancing uneven development. Given its importance to capitalists and those in power, topographical knowledge should be of interest to those who would counter such power.

Topographies produced to counter these impulses will provide thick descriptions of particular places that can get at the ways in which a process associated with—for example—the globalization of capitalist production, the prosecution of war, or the imposition of structural adjustment programs affects a particular place. Topographies allow us to look, not only at particular processes in place, but at the effects of their encounters with sedimented social relations of production and reproduction there.

In other words, topographies are thoroughly material. They encompass the processes that produce landscapes as much as they do the landscapes themselves, making clear the social nature of nature and the material grounds of social life. Their production also simultaneously

turns on, reveals, and specifies the intricate relations among discrete places. Thus, topography offers a methodology for critically scrutinizing the material effects produced in multiple locations by the processes associated with such abstractions as globalization, global economic restructuring, and uneven development. They can provide literal and figurative grounds for developing a critique of the social and political-economic relations sedimented into space and for examining the range of material social practices through which place is produced.

I have underscored the materiality of topographies, but they offer productive metaphoric entailments as well, and these, too, are central to why I think doing topographies of globalization or social reproduction may be useful. Making conventional topographies involves the detailed description of place, but also requires measurements of elevation, distance, and those physical or structural attributes that allow the observation of relationships across space and among places. In a similar way, topographies could be made to work in examining abstract but thoroughly material processes, such as globalization or social reproduction. For instance, they could be used to take stock of the movements of capital, labor, or cultural products among places, and also to look at the common and iterative effects of capitalism's globalizing imperative as they are experienced across quite different locales. Finding, demonstrating, and understanding these connections and what they give rise to are crucial to challenging them effectively.

If we can produce critical topographies that show selected traces of globalization on particular grounds, such as those associated with social reproduction, how can we connect what is discerned to other locations affected by global and other systemic processes in analogous ways? Drawing such connections enables the production of what might be thought of as countertopographies. The notion of countertopographies picks up on and fleshes out one of the key metaphoric associations of topography: the contour line. Contour lines connect places at a uniform altitude to reveal the three-dimensional form of the terrain. My intent in invoking them is to imagine a politics that simultaneously retains the distinctness of the characteristics of a particular place and builds on its analytic connections to other places along "contour lines" marking, not elevation, but rather a particular relation to a process—for example, the deskilling of workers or the retreat from social welfare. In this way, it is possible to theorize "the connectedness of vastly different places made artifactually discrete by virtue of history and geography but which also reproduce themselves differently amidst the common political-economic and sociocultural processes they experience" (Katz 2001a:1229). Countertopographies

involve precise analyses of particular processes that not only connect disparate places, but also in doing so enable us to begin to infer connections in unexamined places in between. In topographic maps, of course, it is the measurement of elevation at selected sites that enables contour lines to be drawn without measuring every inch of the terrain. The connections reflect precise analytic relationships, not homogenizations. Not every place affected by globalizing capitalist production or consumption is altered in the same way, and the issues that arise from place to place can vary and play out differently depending upon the constellation of social relations encountered in various locations.

Topographical analysis provides the wherewithal to critically assess these processes through scrutiny of the abrasions and solidarities they simultaneously make and alter between the material social practices through which place is produced and the social and political-economic relations embedded in space. Constructing detailed topographies at a range of geographic scales, it is possible to analyze a particular issue—such as the disinvestment in some aspect of social reproduction or the “warehousing” of those excluded from the possibility of employment—in and across place, with the issue defining a particular contour line. One can imagine mapping places connected along a multitude of different contour lines, each marking a potential terrain of translocal politics.

In other words, the political, theoretical, and methodological project I want to advance is one that constructs countertopographies linking different places analytically in order to both develop the contours of common struggles and imagine a different kind of practical response to problems confronting them. It is the geographical imagination of topographies and countertopographies that I find particularly compelling. If topography is predicated upon the inseparability between the description and the landscape itself, countertopography works by drawing analytic contours between places typically encountered as discrete. Together they offer a means of building a vigorous and geographically imaginative practical response to the contemporary processes of globalization, which not only take such distinctions for granted but are predatory because they succeed in keeping apart places with common problems and shared interests.

Apart from its geographical imagination, the production of topographies and countertopographies also draws on the insights and works the grounds of multiply situated knowledges. In this way, the project builds upon the Marxist and feminist insistence that those who are dominated, oppressed, and exploited have a privileged perspective

on these processes and the workings of power and inequality that enable them (cf, eg, Haraway 1988; Hartsock 1984; Marx and Engels 1976; Mohanty 1988). Situated knowledge is premised in and draws on a particular and identifiable location vis-à-vis the relations of production and reproduction. The mobilization of such knowledges across space and scale offers the possibility of making political connections lithe enough to counter capital's maneuvers under conditions of globalization. However, situated knowledge alone is not enough, and the notion may even have begun to hobble our political imaginations.

Situated knowledge, like standpoint theory,

assumes knowledge at a single point, the knowing subject, and the particularity of that subject's vision is both its strength and its downfall. If the brilliance of the idea of situated knowledge was in making clear that all-seeing, all-knowing was from somewhere, and that that somewhere was socially constituted, allowing for and occluding particular insights, the implications of sites underlying knowledge has produced other problems. (Katz 2001a:1230)

First, while situatedness implies location, it is one built upon the Marxist-feminist notion of standpoint, and thus resides in a knowing subject. This idea has parallels with the abstraction "subject position" (cf Hartsock 1984; Henriques et al 1984; Katz 2001a). However, in topographic maps, a "subject's position in the landscape is a point, and therefore a space of zero dimension" (Katz 2001a:1240). Dimensionality is evacuated by the language of position, site, and situation. Not coincidentally, this has led to a politics that either founders on "difference" or negotiates it so finely that it becomes more an end than a beginning. Even at that, the dizzying resolutions to the problems position raises for identity politics—such as intersectionality, mobile subjectivity, and multiple identities—tellingly continue to reside in the individual subject, who must move, split, or multiply to be made sensible and sufficiently complex (cf, eg, Crenshaw 1995; Fuss 1991; Trinh 1989).

Second, there is an implicit (and fashionable) spatiality to situated knowledge, but, while "situated" suggests somewhere, it is nowhere in particular. Its location is relational and abstract; lacking the grit (and problems) of a specific geography. While the discourse of "sites" and "spaces" has been productive for making new political alliances or thinking about novel strategies of engagement (I have participated in such endeavors myself), these political responses are weakened because they fail to grapple with how specific historical geographies

embody, reproduce, and fortify social relations of power and production (cf, eg, Anzaldúa 1987; Bondi 1993; Katz 1992; Trinh 1990). “Finally, situatedness is simultaneously universal—everything is situated—and specific—to the point of being zero-dimensional” (Katz 2001a: 1230–1231). The language of situatedness tends to assume an unproblematic extension from the site or subject to the global, when in fact working out this translation is a highly political project.

Topography, on the other hand, is by definition an historical examination of social process in three-dimensional space. Critical topographies assume that space carries and reinforces uneven social relations. Changing social relations requires and propels changing their material grounds. Topographies can illuminate these spatialized processes and draw out their connections across various geographies, potentially informing the imaginative politics of “jumping scale” and impelling a kind of rooted translocalism (cf Marston 2000; Smith 1992). Working against the ways globalizing capitalism extends and draws on the uneven power relations of gender, race, class, and nation in different historical geographies, it is a politics that at once makes clear and works off of the contours that connect different social formations and their disparate geographies. It asks what connections there might be among sweatshop Bangladesh, *maquiladora* Mexico, and the prison work camps of the US, or among structurally adjusted Sudan, welfare-reformed Britain, and neoliberal Brazil. Doing topographies not only provokes such questions; it may also provide the means for answering them in ways as grounded and abstract as the ties that bind such seemingly different places and circumstances. A broadly topographical project might also develop analyses and solidarities at the nodal points between contour lines.

I have attempted to trace such a contour line between two of the places where I have done field research among young people—a village in central Sudan that I call Howa and Harlem in northern Manhattan (eg Katz 1998a). My research sought to examine and connect the sorts of displacements experienced by young people in both places in the face of broad-based disinvestments in their communities. In New York, I looked at the effects on working-class children and teens of economic restructuring witnessed largely in the decline of manufacturing, paying particular attention to the retreats from the social wage seen in such things as funding cuts for public housing, public open space, and health and social welfare and the lopsided provision of education, each of which became serious enough to spur calls for privatization from many quarters. This work was a counterpoint to my earlier and ongoing work in Howa, where I looked at economic



restructuring in the form of a “development” project that undermined long-established means of reproducing local relations and means of production without providing compensatory or new investments in social reproduction to replace them. In both places, large fractions of those coming of age were butting up against the limitations produced by these broad-scale political-economic shifts and their local fallout. For growing numbers in both places, all bets for the future were off, leaving few guarantees for stable—let alone meaningful—employment in their adulthoods. Moreover, there were indications in both places (as elsewhere) that certain segments of the “excessed” population had been “warehoused” as a matter of state policy, in prisons (along with the army and even universities) in the US and in the army or quasigovernmental “people’s militias” in Sudan. Yet, at the same time, people in Harlem and Howa have organized to rework a number of the conditions confronting them, and in some instances to resist them outright. Their conscious efforts at change have been complemented and sustained by everyday practices that demonstrate often stunning resilience among members of each community (cf Katz 2001a).

At first, I thought of the comparison between Howa and Harlem sequentially, as a way of studying the displacements and other shifts children experience in the transition from what I somewhat crudely conceptualized as “an agricultural to an industrial economy and from an industrial to a postindustrial economy” (Katz 2001a:1232). However, a topographical analysis forces a spatialized understanding of these issues as simultaneous and intertwined. In revealing the simultaneity of different kinds of disruptions, topographies respond to John Berger’s extraordinary observation that now it is “space, not time, that hides consequences from us” (Berger 1974:40; cf Soja 1989). What I am arguing, then, is that, if the disruptions in social reproduction in Howa and Harlem are localized effects of a common set of processes, among them the globalization of capitalist production, then the political mobilization to challenge such processes must have similar global sensitivities, even if its grounds are local. The interests raised here transcend the specificities of any particular local, even if they have varying local forms, and thus differ from place-based politics. Neither is this project a matter of building coalitions among different locales, crucial as that is.

Because globalization as such is an abstraction that has multiple forms, struggles to counter it have to mobilize equivalent abstractions. However, just as a capital-inspired globalization reworks the material grounds of social life, so must any response be resolutely material.

Doing local topographies can provide just such a grounding. Building on their juxtaposition, countertopographies can offer the sorts of abstractions needed to reimagine and rework globalization and its effects. Interwoven with thick descriptions of local specificities, an analysis that follows abstract connections among disparate places, and a spark of insurgence, countertopographies can inform a new geographically invigorated praxis. Perhaps such efforts can inspire and mobilize new kinds of internationalist solidarities at once specific and fluid enough to contain and counter the vagabond in all of the various locales it wants to call home.

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> This section draws heavily on my article "On the Grounds of Globalization: A Topography for Feminist Political Engagement" (Katz 2001a), which develops a "topography" of globalization and discusses in greater detail the ideas on topographies and countertopographies presented more schematically here.

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