Labour *Control* Regimes and Social Reproduction: Some Reflections on the Strengths and Weaknesses of an Evolving Framework

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Introduction

Labour control regime (LCR) analysis includes a diverse range of frameworks that have developed since the 1980s, most evidently within labour process theory (LPT) and economic geography but which have also more recently been deployed within development studies (e.g. Pattenden, 2016) and global labour studies (e.g. Anner, 2015). The variety of frameworks and angles within this broad spectrum reflect different disciplinary epistemologies and different takes on labour relations and control, including the different institutions, processes and scales that the notion encapsulates, and not least its mode of critical enquiry.

This short chapter aims at briefly sketching the historical and theoretical origins and key features of the concept of LCR, in order to pinpoint some of its strengths and weaknesses. Indeed, after this initial analysis, we suggest that the concept of the labour regime is likely to better capture the inherent multidimensional and contradictory nature of the capital–labour relationship, as well as its multiple interrelations with reproductive processes. This chapter revisits and further develops some of the reflections made within a symposium on LCRs included in the 2018 International Labour Process Conference on 'Class and the Labour Process' held in Buenos Aires,[1] and draws from ongoing conversations developed within a research

[1] The Symposium on Labour Control Regimes consisted of a panel that included contributions from Elena Baglioni (Queen Mary University of London), Alessandra Mezzadri (SOAS), Jonathan Pattenden (University of East Anglia) and Paul Thompson (University of Stirling).

group of friends and colleagues that since 2016 have worked on labour regimes in the Global South.[2] In particular, here we highlight the need for labour control regime analysis to incorporate more substantially the sphere of social reproduction, not as an add-on or appendix of production but as a co-constitutive element shaping labour relations and outcomes. In building this argument, we deploy insights from the ground-breaking feminist political economy debate on housework (and wagelessness), which has its origins in the 1970s but which can also count on many interesting more recent contributions (e.g. Dalla Costa and James, 1972; Fortunati, 1981; Mies, 1986; Federici, 2004; Weeks, 2011).

In what follows, we propose some reflections on LCR analysis around three main concerns. First, we consider some of the major contributions of LCR analysis to understanding labour relations, practices and struggles in contemporary industrial settings. It is in relation to these contributions that LCR has been most promising and can still evolve to overcome some of its gaps. Second, we highlight some of the core limitations of LCR analysis that have generally precluded a nuanced integration of the sphere of social reproduction. These are most evident in the assumptions around patterns of labour control and on the reification of social reproduction as the realm of relations of 'reciprocity'. Third, we make some suggestions on the possibility for a broader analysis of labour regimes as this applies to the study of the industrial and agrarian settings of India and Senegal.

LCR: Origins and Strengths

The development of concepts should always be assessed against the historical and theoretical debates of their time. In fact, the rise and development of the concept of LCR seems to have responded to a deep dissatisfaction with the analytical

[2] The group includes Elena Baglioni (Queen Mary University of London), Liam Campling (Queen Mary University of London), Alessandra Mezzadri (SOAS), Satoshi Miyamura (SOAS), Jonathan Pattenden (University of East Anglia) and Ben Selwyn (University of Essex).

instruments and approaches dominant across the 1990s. Arguably, the concept had a number of aims; here, we will emphasise three in particular.

The first aim of the LCR framework was the attempt to develop a 'locally embedded' version of Regulation Theory (e.g. Lipietz, 1986; Boyer and Saillard, 2002), aimed at capturing the ensemble of local social institutions forming 'the socio-spatial fix of labour control in specific locales' (Jonas, 1996). Quite tellingly, LCR analysis emerged in the 1990s, when the post-Fordist debate was raging, exploring the shift from old Fordist models of production to what Piore and Sabel (1986) would call the 'second industrial divide'. Whereas Regulation Theory (and many other Post-Fordist approaches) was extremely insightful for the process of mapping the set of institutions that formed and sustained the mode of regulation of capitalism in given accumulation periods, it remained essentially framed around a rather 'unpacked' national economy (see Amin, 1994). Instead, the LCR approach moved to consider the national as one of multiple interplaying scales (and ranges of institutions) shaping production at the local level. This was also a notable contribution to labour process theory, hitherto overtly framed on the microcosm of the factory and missing social and geographical contextualisation. In relation to LPT, in fact, LCR placed itself as a sort of intermediate analytical device, which worked as an alternative to Burawoy's famous 'factory regime' (Burawoy, 1985). Arguably, while the latter already signalled a productive criticism of classic LPT and pushed it beyond the narrow walls of the factory gate, to analyse both relations *in* production and *of* production at different scales (Burawoy, 1985), the LCR framework further stressed the need to 'localise' labour control in specific social relations of production, labour and power. In this light, the framework shares some points of contact with the literature on colonial labour regimes in development studies (e.g. Bernstein, 1988), which stresses the relevance of historical (and colonial) relations in moulding specific labour outcomes in developing contexts.

Once set against the features of Burawoy's 'factory regime' framework, we can identify a second interesting contribution of LCR theory to LPT. For Burawoy, factory regimes were defined as a set of political and ideological 'apparati of production', regulating the employment relation and emerging from the daily struggle between

workers and employers or their representatives (Burawoy, 1985). However, these struggles, and the patterns of labour control they shaped and were shaped by, were not only the result of the 'politics of production'. They resulted from processes that were socially embedded in the local political economy of different regions. The LCR approach aimed at addressing this particular shortcoming of Burawoy's framework and stresses the greatly uneven development of labour control practices in specific locales, their social embeddedness in production, consumption and reproduction. Moreover, through the lens of Jonas's early theorisation of LCRs, one can sense how Burawoy's 'factory regime approach' is considered as overly embedded in Fordist understandings of industrial production.

By the early 1990s, as the post-Fordist debate gained momentum, frameworks overemphasising 'the factory' as primary lens were criticised as unable to grasp the new pressures and dynamics of flexible specialisation. In this light, the LCR approach itself can be conceived as a post-Fordist framework, embedded in localism and based on the worthy attempt of 'placing' labour control. Indeed, the process of embedding labour control in the broader context of the local political economy is still a strong contribution of LCR analysis to the literature. Once again, also on the basis of this second strength, one could draw parallels between LCR theory and studies in the political economy of development, many of which have been concerned with the embeddedness of social and power relations in postcolonial settings and how they shaped the world of labour. For instance, the work of Barbara Harriss-White highlighted how space and labour control were part of a broader matrix of 'social structures' delineating patterns of accumulation in India. Harriss-White (2003) deploys a 'localised' version of the Social Structure of Accumulation framework (Kotz et al., 1984), which has numerous points of contact with Regulation Theory, and was yet another key theory developed in the context of the post-Fordist debate.

A third contribution of LCR analysis to the literature is based on its intuition that there is more to labour control than labour control *in production*. In this sense, LCR analysis provides the opportunity to restore an understanding of production that connects with other spheres and actors that are usually not immediately associated

with it. In particular, LCR analysis places emphasis on relationships outside workplaces, which include the spheres of social reproduction, consumption, exchange and circulation. As such, it provides a way to unveil how the process of exploitation requires a far wider control matrix than that contained within the walls of the workplace. By significantly broadening the lens through which we look at production, LCR allows us to depart from productivist notions of capitalism as a purely economic system, and instead shows the relevance of social reproductive realms and relations in moulding control in specific locales. These become a fundamental component of labour control regimes, as they can 'resolve' problems of control for capital without – and this is a crucial point – necessarily relying on those despotic means Burawoy analysed in its theorisation of factory regimes.

Notably, Jonas (1996, p. 335) depicts these reproductive relations primarily as local 'relations of reciprocity', developing 'around relatively autonomous sites of consumption and labour reproduction'. While they are represented as yet another alternative mechanism to realise labour control, they are at the same time seen as mechanisms that can perhaps deliver this control in ways that can be less dehumanising. Notably, while this reflection by the LCR approach on the relevance of reproductive relations is welcome, it betrays a partial, 'idealised' understanding of social reproduction. Perhaps in this view 'capitalism' equates pretty much to 'capitalist production'. Instead, a more nuanced understanding of social reproduction is needed, one stressing its multiple linkages and interconnections with both the regeneration of capitalist relations as well as life, daily and intergenerationally (Katz, 2001). It is precisely within this tension internal to social reproduction that the analysis of labour regimes can significantly further our understanding.

Limitations and Ways Forward

The above strengths of the LCR framework represent fertile terrain to further develop labour regime analysis and overcome some of its most important original limitations. Indeed, there are a number of areas that studies focused on LCR have

assumed, overlooked or only narrowly included. For example, while the sphere of social reproduction has been acknowledged – even if perhaps unevenly addressed – the ecological dimension has been largely ignored; and this reflects a general 'nature gap' within LPT (Baglioni and Campling, 2017). Moreover, the sphere of circulation has also been analysed only in a few contributions drawing on labour regimes and expressly concerned with processes of surplus extraction (e.g. Mezzadri, 2017). While we seek to redress some of these gaps elsewhere (Baglioni et al., 2018), here we focus or reflections on the sphere of social reproduction, which in current LCR analysis tends to be narrowly defined in its role for labour control. Drawing from a radical Marxian feminist viewpoint, we reflect on some of the biases that often characterise the attempt to subsume reproduction under labour control.

The Co-constitution of Production and Reproduction

A crucial insight of Marxist feminism is that the sphere of reproduction is *not* defined and 'made' by the sphere of production. The latter position, in fact, would be a narrow and economistic understanding of their relation. Rather, specific forms of production and reproduction are in a co-constitutive relation. This is specified most effectively by Cindi Katz (2001, p. 711), for whom

> Social reproduction is the fleshy, messy, and indeterminate stuff of everyday life. It is also a set of structured practises 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 labour power to make them work. At its most basic, it hinges upon the biological reproduction of the labour 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 labour force at a certain (and fluid) level of differentiation and expertise.

As Katz (2001) goes on to argue, the labour force is internally differentiated and, crucially, socially constituted. As such, the 'construction' of the working class is rooted in a set of material and social practices that vary across time and space and are further mediated by contestation and struggle. This broad definition emphasises the deep, indeed 'messy', intertwining of social reproduction and production, where the latter is merely a moment within a broader set of processes that reproduce life under capitalism. Yet the regulatory power, and plain visibility, of this moment has generally cast a long shadow on all the rest. This had been earlier elaborated by Maria Mies's useful metaphor in *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale* (1986) where labour exploitation can be seen as the tip of an iceberg that operates within the *visible* circuit of commodity production but actually requires a whole set of far less visible circuits and relations primarily but not exclusively with genders and nature.[3] Following from this, labour regimes should be thought of as those complex institutional edifices that articulate both the visible and the invisible part of the iceberg while constantly working to nurture this division between what is in plain sight and what is not. In other words, while capital has historically divorced and gendered the spheres of production and social reproduction (Federici, 2004), labour regime analysis needs to grasp these separations as historical and intentional rather than natural and residual and therefore subject to their own contradictory dynamics.

Thus, social reproduction analysis de-fetishises workers' life outside work and its structural and contradictory linkages with work by emphasising the co-constitution and contradiction between capital accumulation and social reproduction. Indeed, capital requires 'time both to "consume" labor power and to produce (or reproduce) it, and the time devoted to one is sometimes lost to the other' (Weeks, 2011, p. 27). This central contradiction dominating workers' lives – as their reproduction is dependent from surplus value production for capital – is at the heart of labour regimes and deserves closer attention. Moreover, in many instances reproductive realms are also crucial to re-embed and impose the capitalist logic onto workers'

[3] Jason Moore (2015) draws on Mies to elaborate his distinction between relations of exploitation and relations of appropriation, for instance.

lives before they actually sell their labour power. Generations of feminist scholars have underlined the ways in which reproductive realms and activities, set around the home and the community – or indeed the locality – should not be conceived as disconnected from capitalist relations (Dalla Costa and James, 1972; Federici, 2004) nor be romanticised, as often crossed by patriarchal or other social relations of oppression (Mezzadri, 2016a).[4]

Feminist insights, old and new, are a useful corrective to the ways in which reproduction as well as 'the local' is conceived in the original LCR approach. Reproductive realms, as well as community or kinship-based networks (see also Meagher, 2010, on this), are hardly characterised by relations of 'reciprocity', as mentioned by Jonas in his original contribution. This view suffers from the same romanticism that pervades much of the literature on local industrial development. Local and reproductive relations are in many instances hugely despotic, and loyalties are demanded and constructed by dominant parties to their own advantage. In short, it is not about reciprocity but power. A case in point illustrating this comes from India's sweatshop regime (Mezzadri, 2017). The study of labour contracting networks at the bottom of this regime reveals how labour contractors systematically pay advances to given groups of home-based workers, who therefore constantly work under debt. Contractors deploy the rhetoric of 'trust building' to explain the reason behind advance payments. Obviously, their aim is instead to tie a specific segment of the labour force – mainly male skilled workers – to their networks until repayment is made, so that these (now unfree) workers must accept lower rates and continue working for the same contractors (Mezzadri, 2016b). Notably, women homeworkers instead do not receive advances, as they already experience forms of social attachment and ties, shaped by patriarchal norms rather than credit relations. Somewhat paradoxically, they can remain 'free' workers due to their socially unfree status. This example also shows how control over labouring classes not only takes

[4] Although contributions by Black feminists have highlighted the need to acknowledge how processes of 'domestication' always differed substantially on the basis of specific gendered and racialised experiences of capitalism. See, for instance, Angela Davis's (1986) magisterial *Women, Race and Class*.

place across labour markets and classic channels of labour control but results from far wider forms of social domination which interlock the exploitation of the labouring poor across multiple markets or realms of social life. Ultimately, in many settings characterised by harsh forms of social domination, it is labour control that seems a specificity of wider forms of reproductive control, not vice versa.

Analysis of how social reproduction shapes the very architecture and experience of labouring remains a real missing point in much of the LPT. It was a gap in Burawoy's 'factory regime' framework, and remains one of the most pressing elements that a wider literature on labour regimes – not simply the more specific one on LCR – needs to address. In relation to processes of *daily* reproduction across industrial areas, the work by Pun Ngai and Chris Smith (2007) on China's 'dormitory labour regime' stands out as one of the most fruitful contributions aimed at addressing the 'reproductive gap' in LPT. Pun and Smith build on Burawoy's work by developing a concept that disrupts narrow and productivist understandings of the social perimeters of the labour process. In their analysis, the dormitory emerges not only as a key site for labour control but also as a critical space to engender compliance and discipline (Schling, 2014). However, arguably, there are also other key elements of the interplay between production and reproduction that need addressing, and which can turn into fruitful avenues of LPT research in the future:

(a) The wider living conditions and social profile of the workforce and how this mediates the mechanisms of industrial work;

(b) The ways in which work is experienced by labourers, including their daily and not necessarily organised reproductive struggles;

(c) The effects of labour regimes on the body – to return bodily depletion to the centre of the analysis, as it was in Marx's *Capital* (volume I).

While some recent contributions partially address some of these issues (e.g. Mezzadri and Srivastava, 2015; Mezzadri, 2017; Pattenden, 2016; Baglioni, 2019), more work is needed in the future. In fact, accounting for the different ways in which reproductive and productive dynamics interplay and co-constitute each other is crucial to develop a take on labour regimes equally centred on labour, rather than merely on capital. This is a worthy intellectual project considering that the social

sciences are already rich in 'literatures of capital', in the sense that many literatures – for instance chain analysis or clusters studies – analyse the labour process and labour control *through the lens* of capital.

What's in Labour Control?

Somewhat paradoxically, for a literature that can be criticised (as we have done above) on the basis of its over-emphasis on labour control, another potential criticism of the original LCR framework lies in its limited understanding of what is meant by 'control'. In fact, the same energy deployed on broadening the analysis of LCRs has not yet substantially gone into the notion of control, which remains mostly confined within the terms of the analysis of LPT and the workplace. By limiting the notion of control to control *in* and *for* the labour process, LCR analysis risks missing capital's struggle for deeper labour subsumption beyond workplaces, as well as workers agency and resistance in this process. As Kathi Weeks (2011, p. 142) puts it, today 'the time of production continues well beyond the formal working day, the space of production reaches beyond the discrete workplace, and the relations of production extend beyond the specific employment relations.' As such, a nuanced integration of social reproduction requires a parallel and critical investigation of the meaning and boundaries of control.

The control at play in labour regimes is at least twofold (Baglioni et al., 2018). Labour control entails both the multifaced forms of control of workers that characterise the workplace, and that have been the chief object of enquiry of LPT, as well as workers inability within capitalism to reproduce themselves without directly or indirectly simultaneously reproducing capital. This chief compulsion to work, or to be in Jairus Banaji's terms 'capital-posing labour' (Banaji, 2011), is a constitutive element of labour regimes that necessarily straddles the sphere of production and social reproduction, where it often sits in multiform disguised, privatised and extra-economic forms. The family, the prison, schooling and welfare provision are among the starkest examples (Federici, 2012; Davis, 1981; Ferguson, 2017). Thus, a broader and more nuanced understanding of what control entails in labour regimes allows the drawing of linkages between otherwise seemingly distinctive and separate

phenomena and social relations, including those between production and reproduction and the making of gender and race, which have to be seen as co-constitutive of processes of class formation.

As Taylor and Rioux (2018) make clear, labour regimes serve to produce workers. So, at an abstract level, labour regimes serve a double purpose: on the one hand to produce value and on the other to constantly reinstate capitalist relations of production that serve to produce value. As Marx (1990) observes, capitalist relations of production *are* simultaneously the reproduction of those capitalist relations. In other words, the extraction of value from the labouring of the workers necessitates a pervasive and comprehensive system of labour management and control – a set of relations, processes and practices that: (1) make workers unable to reproduce themselves independently (directly and indirectly) from the reproduction of capital, and (2) divide workers across different tasks, spaces and spheres; namely, across technical divisions of labour, but also across spatial and social divisions – including the fundamental and fictitious one between the workers who directly reproduce capital and those who directly reproduce workers.

In rural Senegal, this broad understanding of labour control was investigated through the interplay between labour *exploitation* and labour *disciplining*. While the former classically refers to the extraction of value from the labour process, the latter corresponds to different and complex power dynamics that *make workers*, and thus serve exploitation (Baglioni, 2018). Since the 1970s, labour regimes underpinning Senegalese export horticulture manifested in different articulations between labour exploitation and diverse, related instances of labour disciplining (economic, spatial, social, ideological) by capital and the state within and beyond workplaces. Among the latter, gender disciplining within the household (through patriarchy, religion and polygyny) and the state's discursive and material disciplining of rural masses as the 'peasantry' have prevented the total separation between production and social reproduction (through the development of large-scale farming and masses of wage workers) while nurturing a strong differentiation and subordination of work within households. This enduring labour regime has supplied cheap female workers

sourcing food for European diets for decades, and its boundaries cut across firms, households and the state.

Crucially, as the Senegalese case shows, while capital's requirements to control labour are visible at the concrete level, they neither exhaust the capital labour dynamic nor their interaction with other social relations. Put differently, labour regime analysis holds a fundamental tension between the regulative force of the capital labour relation (i.e. exploitation) *and* its absorption in a functionalist way, where the control of labour by capital obscures and flattens all other relations around its interests. As we caution elsewhere, 'there is a crucial difference between thinking that whatever exists in the world of capitalism does so because it serves the "interests of capital" (in general), and thinking that what exists manifests the always contradictory dynamics of capitalist social relations' (Bernstein, 2007, p. 7). This can be seen spectacularly when integrating social reproduction into labour regimes.

Ultimately, while labour control impinges on reproduction, the extent to which it shapes it is *necessarily* variable and uneven, in other words a matter of concrete investigation. This leads to essential consideration that labour control shapes and *is necessarily shaped* by the social reproduction of workers. On the one hand, in many cases, forms of labour control directly emerge based on social domination over reproduction. On the other hand, especially in contexts where capital externalises all costs related to the social reproduction of labour, obviously labour control cannot *fully* include reproduction; rather, reproductive rhythms start crucially shaping labour control and industrial rhythms (Mezzadri, 2019). Drawing again on evidence from India's sweatshop regime, processes of internal labour migration involving the circulation of millions of migrants between urban industrial areas and rural villages and enclaves must be understood in this light. They are a reproductive device absorbing the externalisation of social costs by capital (and the state); in short, they are a subsidy to capital. In this case, it is this broader reproductive regime setting the limits to labour control, and in ways that are conducive to accumulation (Mezzadri, 2017).

Losing 'Control': Representation and the Need for a Wider Labour Regime Analysis

One could argue that, ultimately, the fatal weakness of the LCR approach lies in its orienting concept of representation. Indeed, framing the analysis around the main trope of labour control – as the LCR framework does – runs the risk of deploying a representational dispositive that cannot be but capital-centric, as on the other hand the literature on localism and industrial clusters is widely recognised to be (for a critique, see Murray, 1987). Within a schema framed around labour control narrowly defined, labour remains *that which is impacted by capital*, rather than an agent shaping its own geography – as is rather the case, as stressed by a number of useful studies based on economic geography inspired by the work of Andrew Herod (2003).

Ultimately, the aim of the LCR approach is to go beyond narrow understandings of the labour process and labour control, a key contribution in itself. However, its attempt to do so while deploying a position narrowly centred on labour control is a fundamental limitation. A broader focus on labour regimes could help. While this may sound like a semantic distinction, it is hardly the case. In fact, representational devices should never be seen as secondary in developing analytical frameworks. By losing its initial reference to mere 'control', labour regime analysis can gain a wider theoretical terrain. It can explore both the distinct ways in which social reproduction co-constitutes the capital–labour relation as well as map the ways in which class struggle defines and redefines how control over workers is continuously produced, transgressed and redefined. Neither of these aspects should be assumed to take theoretical priority. Rather, the exploration of their articulation should be based on concrete experiences of labouring. This indeterminacy, in our view, provides the basis of an exciting agenda for future research.

Concluding Remarks

The LCR approach has greatly contributed to an investigation of the material conditions of labour beyond narrow analyses of labour process or space of work. It is

a useful theoretical vehicle as it reminds us of the relevance of local social relations in shaping labour relations and the experience of labouring. One could say that labour regime analysis, while still focused on production, has actively tried to escape the productivist framework to explore the local embeddedness of the labour process. In this sense, it represents a crucial open door to investigate the world of work in its manifold manifestations and compulsions. However, at the same time, the analytical toolkit of LCR analysis has not entirely avoided the risks and perils of capital-centrism, and has only partially succeeded in integrating social reproduction in ways that are not reductionist or greatly romanticised. Overall, its main analytical frame seems still centred on narrow conceptualisation of labour control and a relatively limited conceptualisation of social reproduction. As discussed in the chapter, these shortcomings derive from a number of inbuilt limitations, also related to the historical development of the concept as a critique of dominant theoretical and analytical frameworks during the late Fordist and early post-Fordist era.

However, looking at the features of labour relations in contemporary capitalist settings and at the forms of social struggle currently emerging, it certainly seems that a lens more heavily based on social reproduction rather than mere labour control may contribute far more interesting insights into the ways in which the labouring poor fights its daily, more or less organised battle against capital. Across large swathes of the developing world, from the dormitories of China to the industrial hamlets of India or Cambodia, realms of social reproduction are becoming cradles of resistance (Pun and Smith, 2007; Mezzadri, 2017). Although programmatically more sophisticated than other forms of LPT, LCR analysis cannot cater for all dimensions necessary to capture the multiple ways in which social reproduction, control, resistance and struggle may interplay in the contemporary world of work. A more fruitful intellectual agenda seems instead one more broadly focused on labour regimes, rejecting narrower, productivist understandings of labour control, and placing social reproduction and struggles centre stage. While within such framework control over the labour process would remain a central node of investigation, it will not necessarily be the primary lens of the analysis a priori. On the other hand, a key aim of studying labour and labouring must be restoring a vision

of the working class that is complex, variegated, internally diverse and constantly engaged in multiple forms of productive and reproductive struggles taking manifold forms and epitomising distinct yet interconnected aspects of subordination of work and life to the same capitalist relation.

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