

Call for Papers for a Special Issue in *Sociétés*

"Reproductive Futures: Cultural Logics of Parenthood in Crisis"

Guest Editors

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Across the globe, fertility rates are falling to historically low levels, igniting urgent debates about demographic sustainability, gender equity, and the future of care. While economic and policy-centered approaches—emphasizing opportunity costs, welfare regimes, and caregiving infrastructures—have dominated scholarly and policy discourse (Folbre 2001; Vignoli et al. 2022), these frameworks have done little to stem the tide of declining birthrates. This special issue seeks to shift the focus by inviting sociologists and interdisciplinary scholars to interrogate the *cultural logics* that shape reproductive behavior, intimacy, and familial aspirations in an age marked by precarity, individualism, and evolving kinship norms.

We contend that a profound cultural crisis underlies the demographic one. In many low-fertility societies—especially in East Asia (e.g., Japan, South Korea, and China)—a widening gender divide has begun to reshape the terrain of intimacy, reproduction, and relational life. Rising misogyny, antifeminist backlash, and gender-based resentment, especially among young men, mirror similar trends in North America and parts of Europe (Franklin & McNeil 1993; Anneli et al. 2015). These tensions are not merely ideological but are embedded in everyday practices of withdrawal from romantic relationships and sexual activity. In Japan, for instance, a substantial proportion of men in their twenties report being single and sexually inactive, while in South Korea, young women are increasingly opting out of heterosexual dating and marriage (Ghaznavi et al. 2019; Lee & Jeong 2021).

These gendered disengagements are mirrored in—and perhaps sustained by—powerful cultural imaginaries. Media genres such as *shōjo manga* and Boys' Love (BL) offer young women emotionally rich, homoerotic alternatives to heteronormative romance (Saito 2014; McLelland et al. 2015). Meanwhile, *kawaii* and *lolicon* aesthetics offer affective consumer refuges for men through moe cultures and character-driven intimacy (Kinsella

2006; Shamoon 2012). These symbolic economies suggest a retreat from real-world intimacy into curated affective worlds that render traditional forms of partnership less appealing, or even obsolete.

This special issue asks: What cultural narratives and symbolic structures normalize reproductive withdrawal and the devaluation of heterosexual intimacy? Are we witnessing the emergence of new scripts that legitimize non-reproduction as a form of empowerment—or is reproductive retreat symptomatic of deeper structural exclusions that render heterosexual coupling increasingly unsustainable? If culture plays a decisive role in shaping reproductive imaginaries, how might alternative aesthetic and discursive forms enable more inclusive and imaginative relational futures?

We welcome contributions that explore how cultural formations—narratives, media, aesthetics, and affective economies—mediate reproductive decision-making and relational possibility. What does it mean to become—or refuse to become—a parent in contexts where the costs of caregiving are escalating, both materially and emotionally? How are institutions, media, and everyday practices reconfiguring parenthood as a “capstone” rather than a “cornerstone” of adult life (Anneli et al. 2015)? And how might we re-theorize reproductive justice in ways that move beyond population-centric or pronatalist logics (Federici 1975; Ginsburg & Rapp 1995; Cooper 2017; Inhorn & Birenbaum-Carmeli 2008; Tan 2024)?

We invite theoretical, empirical, and methodological contributions that engage with themes including (but not limited to):

- Cultural narratives of fertility, childlessness, and reproductive delay
- Gendered and racialized dynamics of reproductive and care labor
- Affective economies of parenting in neoliberal and post-welfare contexts
- Queer kinship, chosen families, and non-normative reproductive futures
- Media representations of demographic crisis, caregiving, and reproductive ideologies
- Misogyny, gender polarization, and fertility decline in divisive cultural contexts
- Symbolic and practical pathways to reimagining cross-gender social integration
- The role of state policy, religion, and nationalism in shaping reproductive discourses

Submission Guidelines

- Abstracts of 300–500 words due by **August 31, 2025**

- Accepted proposals will be invited to a paper development workshop at **Jeonbuk National University**, Oct. 31 – Nov. 1, 2025
- Please send queries and submissions to the guest editors
- Early-career scholars, and those working across sociology, gender studies, media studies, and cultural anthropology, are especially encouraged to submit

This issue aims to reframe the conversation on reproduction by foregrounding the cultural infrastructures of intimacy, gender, and care that shape the very conditions of demographic possibility.

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