



LINESOFLIFE

Cartographies of Reproduction

Dear Workshop Participant

Thank you for accepting our invitation to the workshop – *Lines of Life: Cartographies of Reproduction*. In this letter, we want to explain the idea behind the workshop and its purpose, while acknowledging that much of what the workshop is and will be is shaped by you, the participants.

The idea for the workshop was sparked by a desire to bring together scholars across the African continent who work on reproduction (broadly defined) to reflect collectively on our work. Specifically, we wanted to explore whether and how scholars are challenging dominant narratives of reproduction as a simple, linear process, and whether these challenges are opening new ways to rethink and reimagine reproduction in Africa.

For the first workshop, we decided to focus on reproduction in South Africa. We have invited a small group of carefully selected scholars at various stages of their careers to spend three days together. These scholars come from anthropology, architecture, English literature, history, gender and sexuality studies, sociology, political studies, performance arts and psychology. Acknowledging that reproduction, and scholarship on reproduction, unfold in uneven and unpredictable ways – shaped by issues of care, obligation, responsibility, desire and refusal – we intend to create an environment in which participants can share, think, connect, and develop ideas, projects, and proposals. We're inviting participants to bring along their existing work, ideas, archives, methods, and projects to help us collaboratively map the landscape of reproduction scholarship in South Africa. We also hope they will bring their questions, hesitations and frustrations.

We are shaping the workshop around the idea of "cartography", not only because we think it is fun (or because we want to draw), but because we intend to map the scholarship: to recognise and name those who came before us, those who work alongside us, and the projects we hope to speak into being. We acknowledge that a substantial and diverse body of reproductive scholarship already exists– of which each of you knows and has been a part in shaping in different ways– by mapping this body of work and its various strands and paths, the workshop really seeks to bring to the surface existing connections, points of divergence, and productive tensions.

The workshop is organised around three guiding questions:

1. What does it mean to map reproduction ethnographically, historically, and with an orientation to future possibilities?
2. How might we represent this scholarship and non-linear reproductive lives?
3. What issues, hesitations and considerations arise in mapping reproduction?

We are using the idea of mapping to also reflect on excavating: looking at what is hidden or only known by a few. Our task then is not to consolidate the scholarship on reproduction into a single map, but rather to trace its multiple lines – to notice where they intersect, where they run in parallel or converge, where they knot together, and where gaps or absences invite further thought. By scratching the surface, we are at once excavating and creating different terrains. Some terrains will be smooth, while others will be uneven and jagged. Some may contain holes and gaps that go beneath the surface, or they may be overfilled, resulting in prominent surface protrusions.

For the workshop, we have chosen four intersecting terrains intended as an orientation for collective thinking and conversation, and not meant to limit it. Within each terrain, we invite you to trace the multiple lines through which reproductive life is made, governed, inhabited, and reimagined.

Terrain 1: Lines Through Time – Histories of Reproduction and Reproductive Knowledge

This terrain examines how reproductive ideas, practices, and regimes are shaped through historical continuities, ruptures, and layered temporalities, and how past formations continue to structure present reproductive worlds. Particular attention is given to biomedical technologies, medical expertise, and classificatory regimes, and how these sediment over time to shape contemporary reproductive possibilities and limits.

Terrain 2: Lines of Care – Reproductive Labour and Relationality

This terrain focuses on care as a reproductive practice. It brings together work on caregiving, reproductive labour, obligation, interdependence, and the social and material arrangements that sustain reproductive life, while remaining attentive to the uneven ways in which gender continues to organise reproductive responsibility and recognition.

Terrain 3: Plural Lines – Childfree Lives and Reproductive Possibility

This terrain centres childfree lives not as absence or deviation, but as generative sites for rethinking reproductive norms, belonging, and imagined futures. It also opens space to consider reproductive loss, infertility, and non-realised reproduction as central, rather than marginal, to how reproductive life is understood and lived.

Terrain 4: Lines of Desire – Sexualities, Pornography, and Reproductive Imaginaries

This terrain explores how sexuality, fantasy, mediation, and representation shape reproductive meanings and possibilities, including how desire may exceed, disrupt, or be folded back into reproductive logics.

The workshop structure and the individual contributions:

The workshop will alternate between plenary sessions and smaller group work. The terrain structure is designed to enable sustained, in-depth engagement within smaller groups while also allowing people to come together in plenary sessions for broader discussions.

The workshop will be held at the Drostdy Hotel in Graaff Reinet. The activities will begin with a dinner on Sunday evening, 12 April 2026. It will conclude on Thursday, 16th April 2026 (departure day). The organisers of this workshop – Deevia Bhana (University of KwaZulu-Natal), Nolwazi Mkhwanazi, Charlotte Visagie and Leo Wamwanduka (University of Pretoria) – are all part of the *Re-imagining, Reproduction, Making Babies, Making Kin and Citizens in Africa* project, and this workshop is part of the larger project.

In bringing you all together over the 3 full days, we hope that the workshop will not only generate deep and sustained intellectual exchange – across generations and disciplines – but also leave us with shared reference points, new connections, and future collaborations that travel beyond this moment.

We look forward to building connections, collective mapping and great conversations.

Regards,

Nolwazi

on behalf of the Lines of Life team – Charlotte, Deevia and Leo