


RESEARCH ARTICLE

# (Re)Claiming gender: A case for feminist decolonial social reproduction theory

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## Abstract

This article argues that the tokenistic appropriation of categories such as gender and race have deprived them of their radical and transformative political and practical roots while facilitating their commodification as a luxury product that is consumed by the depoliticized and privileged. Such (ab)use of gender, as an analytical tool, similar to race and class, has been on the rise within progressive circles. However, with the rise of alt-right populism claiming to know and fight ‘feminism’, as well as the commodification of feminism by progressives, now more than ever a decolonial social reproductive theory is needed to help understand and delineate how women are oppressed in a plethora of intersectional ways based on race, class and ability among other traits, while engaging the specific material historical-constitutive structures, judicial-political and socio-economic dimensions of the world order, as well as the emergence of right-wing populism as white heteronormative backlash. This article argues for a feminist decolonial social reproductive theory that sees gender and racial hierarchy as part of capital’s dynamism (a product), which transforms the natural, social and material world, restructuring and evolving for the ordered extraction of surplus. Although this process may differ temporally and geographically, it nonetheless results in a constellation of class exploitation, governance and struggle that facilitates right-wing backlash and undermines the left’s response, thus obviating the need for decolonial social reproductive theory.

**Keywords:** decolonial social reproduction theory; feminist theory; gender and sexuality; intersectionality

## 1. Introduction

This article is being written from a place of love. It is an act of reorientation, articulating not simply how I am thinking but also how I am feeling. It is intended to assert a higher expectation of the community to which I feel belonged (to some extent with the acknowledgement of the limitation of the ideas of home and belonging). It is also written with deep love accompanying a militant hope for the freedom and equality of femme and female members of my community. It aims to move beyond the over-romanticization of what we all consider home and belonging, acknowledging that not all communities are safe, not all belonging is unconditional and no, not everyone is welcomed home.

As a Muslim woman who was raised in Iran and who is currently living in Canada, I do tend to romanticize many aspects of my past life, community and back-home. So, home to me often sounds like my grandfather's *Zhekr* of Azhan in the sunrise and it smells like my grandmother's *Sajjadeh* [prayer rug], soaked in *Golab* [rosewater]. These and many other memories constitute me and who I am, and I proudly cherish and carry these memories with me.

This article has been writing itself for a long time now, but last year when the news of the terrorist attacks in New Zealand and Canada broke and the videos of bleeding bodies scattered on the floor of mosques in Christchurch and Quebec City circulated in the media, I was once again left speechless and heartbroken. I told myself 'again' that I definitely could not write this article, that I needed to silence these thoughts and be quiet, knowing that Islamophobia is real, it takes lives and it disciplines them. It certainly disciplines me, as it sets the agenda and the tone for what I can or cannot say. Islamophobia is real. I live it, feel it and grieve about it. When I grieve about Islamophobia, however, I definitely feel supported by many of my friends and colleagues in academia. But unfortunately I am lonelier when I grieve about sexism and I am lonelier in my anger about misogyny.

White liberal feminists want my pain, I figure. They want my #metoo stories and they want to hear how oppressed I am as a Muslim woman. Leftist progressive scholars want my anger of racism and Islamophobia, and they want me to narrate how oppressed I am by the White patriarchy. However, in both cases, my voice, my story and my gender analyses are being trained for the Western (as well as White, but often diaspora, communities in the West who also perpetuate some of these problems) audience and consciousness. Liberal feminists tell me what to say so the Western audience loves my story; and progressive circles tell me what 'not to say' because the White audience might misconstrue it, abuse it or misuse it. Sadly, this has made me realize that the Western audience and its consciousness has become my sole audience in academia.

The first part of this article is written to raise grievances about the progressive and critical circles in academia. It is written in the format of a letter addressing many gatekeeping exercises and practices that I have envisaged over the past few years regarding who can speak, who cannot and who is an authentic 'self'. It also articulates my frustration with how 'the fetishization of identity politics and the universalizing Western notions of identity and race in Feminist consciousness has been utilized by the neoliberal capitalist university in ways that dangerously reproduce an oppressive racial order rather than in ways that overturn its logic' (Jibrin and Salem 2015: 18). Therefore, instead of undertaking a contextual and historical analysis of gender oppression and seeing it as a function of a broader socio-political structural system and its deep connection to social production and reproduction, and labour value, the analysis of gender oppression has been reduced to 'liberally myopic visions of victimization' (2015: 18).

The second part of the article will offer suggestions for how one can move beyond this oversimplified analysis of gender, race and class to a location where one can reclaim the radical foundation of such categories. I will argue that gender as refusal means revolting against an identity politics that can easily be coopted by neoliberalism and its power structures, such as universities. Instead of being reduced to tokenized commodities in a capitalist market economy, where our voices and experiences turn into marketable categories of suffering, we need to both broaden and deepen our analysis to include the global systems of oppression and structural violence against oppressed people. We need to refuse to fit in the small boxes made available to us, which will only include a version of us that the system which tokenized us sees fit.

Finally, the last part of the article strongly argues for an 'other thought' (Walsh 2012) to move beyond the trap of putting everything in oversimplified categories, regardless of

how these categories have historically been co-constituted. In Western academia, where the spaces are already being patrolled and guarded by gatekeepers making sure that ‘other thoughts’ do not cross the borders, more than ever we need entangled theories that can account for both the historical structures and affective objects that remain based on structure. I will therefore introduce a decolonial social reproductive theory, a theoretical framework that aims to bridge the gap between the ahistorical focus of liberalized version of intersectional feminism and oversimplified economic-determinist focus of structuralist Marxism towards a more diverse ontological and epistemological research framework that directly confronts the labour question and global governance while engaging with the trans-disciplinary meta-theoretical ontological and epistemological constitutions.

## II. Dear progressive critical academics: A letter

Dear progressive critical academics, those who have crowded the space and even the margins in the progressive places and made it impossible to have a genuine and caring conversation; if your analysis of Islamophobia and racism is lacking an in-depth gendered lens, your analysis is insufficient. Islamophobia and racism are not ahistorical and non-material forms of oppression but are ongoing systems that have historically been interlinked and co-constituted with gendered forms of domination. You cannot analyse race without gender or gender without race. If you do that, your analysis is simply not sufficient: these two are fundamentally interlinked and co-constituted.

Dear Middle Eastern authenticity gatekeepers – for example, the likes of people who disinvited me from a panel on Woman and Islam because apparently I am not Muslim enough. The ones who tell my fellow Middle Eastern colleagues with different religious backgrounds that they are not Middle Eastern enough to have an authentic opinion, and so on; being a good ally doesn’t mean gatekeeping and shutting down diverse opinions. If you want to be a good ally in our struggle, please learn to tone your self-righteousness, decentre yourself and humbly listen; we are people with different backgrounds, histories, cultures, languages, traditions, sets of beliefs and ideologies. No, we don’t all look the same, wear the same clothes and practise our religion the same, or even practise the same religion. Our views are as complex as our beautiful, living and ongoing cultures. And yes, sometimes our views clash, and no, we don’t always see eye to eye on every issue, but this only means that our cultures, histories and traditions are living, bending, moulding, taking different shapes and forms, and we are quite capable of self-reflecting and correcting, and if given space we can openly talk. We do not always have to agree on everything to belong together anyway.

Dear progressive critical academics, the ones who walk around doing and saying everything right, please stop romanticizing developing world countries’ theocracies and their religious policies. I am tired of your ahistorical, non-structural, depoliticized and liberalized intersectional, aka a very problematic diversity politics.<sup>1</sup> Those analyses throw around choice and agency without analysing how these concepts are wedded with the historical, material, economic, political and social structures in different regions of the world.

I can’t help but wonder what happened to feminisms these days? What happened to our solidarity with women and LGBTQI+ communities around the world? Let me take a

<sup>1</sup>See Ahmed (2007) for her poignant critique of diversity politics within institutional settings. She argues that the new politics of diversity and inclusion within institutions is nothing but ‘an institutional performance’.

guess; the neoliberal language of inclusion and diversity happened (Ahmed 2007). Hence, instead of doing an in-depth analysis of structural and historical violence that gave birth to gender and sexual inequalities, and instead of providing a feminist state and social reproduction theory that looks at the structural and historical creation of hierarchies of gender oppression, now we are running around chasing over-simplified versions of important categories such as race, gender and class. It is trendy to use intersectionality these days – albeit not the kind that is imbedded in a historical and structural analysis of power and its multilayered entanglements that have been thought by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), Richa Nagar (2014) and Gloria Anzaldúa (2012), but rather a tenuous repetition of depoliticized categories.<sup>2</sup> This kind of claim to intersectionality, as Sara Salem and Rekia Jibrin (2015: 7) state, ‘is often only a performance of both something new and something critical that has increasingly reproduced older approaches to gender research, most notably liberal approaches’.

Dear fellow feminists, please historicize. Please do not sacrifice some women’s voices for the sake of generalization. Gender makes the world go around (Enloe 2014), yes, but its construction foundationally depends on historical material, non-material, multi-material, societal and contextual economic realizations such as land–body relationality that has been central to Indigenous feminisms (Dhillon 2017). Patriarchy is not an isolated category in time and space; it is shaped in a historical *longue durée*. Religion is a choice – it should be. What you wear and don’t wear is a choice – it should be. We already know that; we should know it. Let’s now move beyond it. Let’s move beyond these simple analyses and look at the complexities: socio-political-historical-economic complexities in different regions in the world that shaped and created different forms of patriarchy and gendered-based oppression. Therefore, we need to theorize and understand ‘how women are simultaneously and differently racialized and sexualized (and classed) depends upon cultural and material legacies and contemporary cultural and material forces’ (Runyan 2018). We need feminist theories that construct gendered capitalist social relations by considering why the social and political processes that shape our society are the way they are and seek to explore the mechanisms for their transformation and explanation ‘from the South’ rather than centralizing the West, Europe and whiteness as was done previously by structural Marxist theories.

Dear fellow progressive critical feminists, please do not pick and choose some voices in our communities over others. Our communities are fundamentally heterogeneous. They are complex, and you do not get to over-simplify our stories and voices for the sake of your agendas, then present all of us as homogenous by the silencing and sacrificing of other struggles in our communities. If you want to listen, you need to listen to all our voices. You don’t have time for that? Then don’t talk about us. Don’t write about us unless, as the brilliant Lila Abu-Lughod says, you’re writing ‘against the culture’ (Abu-Lughod 2013). Unless you’re acknowledging the fundamental disagreements and differences in our communities, do not romanticize some voices over others by silencing us in panels and conversation, so that we choke in our anger and frustration in the bathroom stalls and

<sup>2</sup>It is important to mention that Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) introduced intersectionality to address the invisibility of Black women in law and social movement discourses. She argued that when categories of race and gender are considered separately, they invisibilize the experiences of those who belong in both categories. For instance, the category of ‘woman’ dwells on the experiences of White women and the category ‘Black’ centres the experiences of Black men. Hence, the initial aim of intersectionality was to point towards the absences of experiences of Black women from both categories of ‘women’ and ‘Black’ when these categories were viewed as separate.

after panel coffee breaks, hiding our anger, tears and frustrations in the arms and on the shoulders of other sisters.

Dear esteemed gatekeepers of Middle Eastern authenticity, forgive me if I am not Muslim enough to talk on a panel on Women and Islam, or if I am not left enough for the progressive leftists to listen, and definitely not White enough for White liberal feminists to take me seriously. Patricia Hill Collins, I love you, but where is this *home* that you are talking about when you're saying some conversations are saved for *home* (Hill Collins 2000)? Who is my family in academia anymore? I really am lonelier in my anger about sexism and misogyny.

Most of us know how to be victims, most of us see ourselves holding that place. What is harder is seeing our role as perpetrators of the same troubles that we accuse others of doing. It is hard to complicate our location as both victims and perpetrators, as both wrongdoers and being wronged. I wish there was a hashtag that captured how many times 'we' have participated in oppressing other women and femmes, how many times we have silenced them, backhanded their stories or remained silent when they were suffering because it was too *sensitive* to talk about it – 'Oh we just didn't know how to approach it', 'it just wasn't our place to mention it' – because it would offend an important person in the process. But if you're hesitant about how to approach a topic or you do not know how to be an ally, just ask – or, even better, create a space where other people can talk about it.

Without historical, material, intersectional and grounding experiences, gender is not a sufficient category – but nor is any other analysis without gender. Gender is historical, gender is material and gender is a radical category of refusal.

### III. Gender as refusal

Gender as refusal means our objective is not simply to 'add women and stir' (Harding 1995) or have a more 'inclusive' capitalist society, but to identify how gender as a signifying code (both masculinity and femininity) co-constitute – intersecting with race/ethnicity, class, ability, nation – subjectivities, knowledge productions, activities, institutional practices, modes of governance, and asymmetrical reproductive, productive, virtual labour and cultural/information in neoliberal globalization.

MacKinnon (1991) and hooks (1991) argue that in the era of neoliberalism and white supremacist patriarchy, feminism has become the 'new vogue' among some academics in ivory towers that are disconnected from everyday experiences. Within 'white supremacist capitalist patriarchy' (hooks 1991: 9), the commodification of feminism and marketplace empowerments, such as using feminist ideology in Cover Girl and Dove advertisements, is on the rise as if one can drop the name feminism without understanding what profoundly radical and 'transformative politics and practice' feminism is supposed to offer (hooks 1991: 9–10). The Liberal discourse of inclusivity and diversity is part of 'a broader discursive shift that ... is depoliticizing antiracist, women of color and transnational feminist intellectual projects' (Méndez 2018: 10). Gender as a refusal therefore means refusing to become a part of capitalism's desiring machine and not buying into and using the neoliberal language of diversity that sacrifices radical transformations to a colonial project of desire and inclusion, such as assuming that a woman with hijab on the cover of *Vogue* magazine or a woman of colour modelling for Victoria's Secret is considered transformative – which reduces 'the critical potential of intersectionality' (Jibrin and Salem 2015: 8) to another liberal non-transformative diversity politics. This dismissal of a systematic analysis for

the sake of neoliberal inclusivity and depoliticized multiplicity is, according to Mohanty (2013: 968), ‘a hallmark of neoliberal intellectual landscapes’.

Ankica Čakardić (2017) further argues that the language of diversity and depoliticized intersectionality has been used as a ploy in the neoliberalist era to once again further the profits of the rich through the facade of diversity and inclusivity, thus lulling placating feminists into a false sense of security by leading them to believe that true social change and amelioration are on the horizon. Čakardić (2017: 44) argues that whenever capitalism is in crisis or needs ‘allies’ for its restoration or the further accumulation of capital, it integrates marginalized ‘Others’ into its legal liberal political form, be they women, children, non-white races, or LGBTQI+ people – whoever is disposable or potentially useful for further commodification.

It is only by utilizing the language of diversity and inclusivity in depoliticized calls for alliance building and unity that someone like former US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, infamous for her imperialist foreign policy agenda, and Berta Cáceres, a Lenca woman leader from Honduras who died in defence of sacred Indigenous rivers, can appear in the same platform at the Women’s March of 2017 in Washington without any acknowledgement of what the former had done to the latter (Méndez 2018). It was the regime changes supported by Clinton in Honduras that led to the murder of Cáceres, yet both their names appeared on the list of honorees and heroines celebrated in the march. In fact, while Hillary was everywhere in the march, Berta was hardly anywhere (Méndez 2018). Méndez writes that it is ‘the historical amnesia that characterizes contemporary calls for intersectionality’, a flattened account of what solidarity is and what should it look like, an intersectionality that dismisses ‘the imperial histories and geographies’ (2018: 11), an ‘intersectionality that kills’ (2018: 8).

Dealing with the depoliticized unity in feminist movements among upper-class women who essentially reaffirm patriarchy and misogyny through the exclusion of other women with different sociocultural backgrounds, Luxemburg explains that

the role of the women’s suffrage movement is reactionary not only because of the simple failure of bourgeois women to support the struggle for workers’ rights and the social rights of proletarian women but also because of their active participation in affirming the oppression of women which arises from social relations based on the reproductive work of women within the household sphere (Čakardić 2017: 47).

Hence,

on the one hand, Western upper-class women have attained “emancipation” and have thus outsourced their domestic work to migrant women; but on the other, by outsourcing that labour they treat migrant women, whose labour they buy, as they might any commodity on the market (Čakardić 2017: 57).

The outsourcing of domestic labour to migrant women signifies the ongoing ‘coloniality of labour’ (Quijano 2000), which suggests that feminized labour and co-constitutively racialized labour are inherently devalued commodities that either should come free or at a very low cost. Hence, according to Gutiérrez-Rodríguez (2010), in the process of this outsourcing, households that hire domestic labour – which mostly consists of racialized migrant women – become the main sites of ‘governmentality and mark zones of contact’ that are marked by the cultural codification of commodified social relations (Spivak 2010). Consequently, Gutiérrez-Rodríguez (2010) calls for a decolonial politics of

liberation and an ethics of care to speak on the affective value and sensorial corporeality of social reproduction and feminized labour within a globalized neoliberal economy, while simultaneously taking ‘coloniality of labour’ (Quijano 2000: 538–539) and ‘the neoliberal afterlives of colonialism’ (Salem 2020) seriously.

Robert Young (1995: 19) refers to colonial projects as ‘desiring machines’ deployed to control the bodies of women of colour, as well as natural resources. Through a reading of nineteenth-century scientific texts on miscegenation, race and identity, Young demonstrates how the underlying desire for interracial sex was one of the motivators for Victorian colonialism and capitalist expansion. Young argues that English identity was contradictory, fixed by a desire for hybridity, defined as intraracial fertility (polygenism and monogenism) between races, rationalized for both the accumulation and exploitation of indigenous ‘foreign’ bodies. While simultaneously exhibiting revulsion toward this ‘mixing’ of races, ‘theories of race were thus also covert theories of desire’ (Young 1995: 9). Homoerotic and passionate sexual desires for wealth, power, the bodies of women of colour and resources were manifested through discourses of race and racial mixing. For Young, this problem of interracial sexuality at the core of race and culture is fundamental to conceptions of Englishness during this period and was in constant tension with hierarchical racism and the disgust for perceived ‘inferior races’. Within this context, Young (1995: 181) redefines colonialism as a ‘desiring machine’, one that centres on both ‘capitalism’s desire for control of wealth, bodies, and resources’, and the resultant creolization – mixing of race and culture – that provide the ‘hybrid’ foundations for the globalizing practice of European colonization. This desire machine defined by Young is capable of adopting and integrating new desires/stories into its performance and devouring any forms of resistance that do not radically undermine its operation into part of its project. Capitalism is inherently inclusive of a multiplicity of desires/stories, but it is important to bear in mind that inclusivity doesn’t mean equality, it doesn’t mean liberation and it definitely doesn’t mean transformation.

### *Feminism as transformation*

What types of feminist theories and writings are transformative, then? First, theories that do not universalize ‘women’. Sara Salem reminds us that

the theorization of ‘women’ as an unproblematic category of analysis that assumes women have homogenous or similar experiences and needs, which serves to construct a ‘universal’ womanhood that erases power relations between women; the subsequent use of academic research to prove the universality of women’s experiences; and the construction of third world women as the opposite of Western women: in other words, constrained, victimized, poor, ignorant as opposed to Western women who are educated, modern, and free to make their own choices (2013: 3).

In addition, feminist theories need to capture the interconnections between gender, race, sexuality, ableism, colonialism and capitalism, rather than focusing on depoliticized categories. According to bell hooks, ‘any theory that cannot be shared in everyday conversation cannot be used to educate the public’ (1991: 5). hooks argues that Therefore, a feminist theory should be deeply politicized and radical in order to be liberating, and this



can only happen when we acknowledge the different histories and geographies of our struggles rather than offering a flattened account of unity (hooks 1991). What makes feminist radical transformation possible is integrating feminist thinking and practices into our daily lives. But unfortunately the pain of hypocrisy and a wide gap between what we write/preach and what we practise lingers in academia like a salted wound.

Transformative feminism also requires an honest look at and reflection on how critical feminists of colour in academia replicate depoliticized and essentialized recognition politics that rest on individualized narratives of victimhood and oppression. As Jibrin and Salem note:

This co-optation insidiously occurs within a university milieu where race is over-talked about almost to the point of meaning nothing, and where racial discourse embedded in identity politics that are in line with market sensibilities become so commodified and de-contextualized from historical particularities and material realities ... in this reality the privileged, material benefits of careerism in activism and careerism in academia produce the mutual but not exclusive class domination politics of the neoliberal university in a way that promotes 'identity politics' within a moral economy of oppression-based, intersectional politics that can be easily manipulated by the state ... we must begin the dismantling of practices and systems of apartheid and genocide that prey on the wholesale annihilation of people's livelihood. This inevitably also means the destruction of imperial exploitation at the level of political organization and at the level of theoretical production (2015: 19).

Now, more than ever, we need a deeply historicized category of gender to analyse the *longue durée* (origin, evolution and direction) while simultaneously accounting for the non-Eurocentric gendered embodied/performative production of uneven political/economic governance, the hybridity of 'capital'/interests, economic knowledge networks, culture and identity at the 'everyday' individual-international level. Because if we don't, or if we assume gender as an independent category that can give our research a proper object, we are almost bypassing the power and history to suggest that there is a concept out there independent of historical processes of its creation that can be observed solely based on its own merits. Instead, we need to be contemplating the points through which power relations meet. A body can be a meeting point, but we also need to acknowledge that the same body can experience different things in different contexts. Therefore, this concern with the body as a meeting point requires that we attend to the experiential, that the way we experience one category depends on how we inhabit others.

According to Brenner and Laslett, some 'feminist scholars argue that, like class, gender constitutes one of the basic dimensions of all social organization. Gender refers to socially constructed and historically variable relationships, cultural meanings and identities through which biological sex differences become socially significant. Gender is seen not as structurally determined, but as the outcome of women's and men's actions under historically specific conditions' (Brenner and Laslett 1991: 382). It is also necessary to take into account how gender relations and oppression shaped and were shaped by the organization of social reproduction. Hence, going back to the statement raised earlier on gender analysis as refusal, I'd like to ask: How do we write, think, perform, teach, practise and visualize refusal? Inspired by Tina Campt (2019), I believe the practice of refusal starts by refusing the status quo, investing in the negation of other sources to create an alternative space, asking difficult questions and refusing to look away when the answer to those hard questions is something one doesn't want to hear.



#### IV. Towards a decolonial social reproduction feminism

I share the sentiments of all those who want to see a world in which women do not suffer as much as they do now – whether from hunger, poverty, domestic abuse, sexual exploitation, or practices that compromised their health or dignity. Anyone concerned with women’s well-being must pursue moral and political ideals, however utopian. Yet, as a scholar and someone who have lived with the kinds of women most often held up as prime and even exceptional examples of the grossly oppressed, I insist that we must analyse carefully the nature and causes of women’s suffering (Abu-Lughod 2013: 11).

This part of the article argues that in order to ‘analyze carefully the nature and causes of women’s suffering’ (Abu-Lughod 2013: 11), we need to theorize the construction of gendered capitalist social–property–land relations. Additionally, we need to focus our attention on the dynamic between social production and social reproduction. Most importantly, I argue that a critical mediation by social-reproduction feminism would allow us to negate the commercialized versions of feminisms that fit within the parameters of market economy and their ahistorical conceptualization of patriarchy, as well as the structural dogmatism of political Marxism that obfuscate gender relations. However, to do that, social reproduction theory should first acknowledge its limited Eurocentric ‘subjectivity and knowledge’ (Quijano 2000).

Popularized after the domestic labour debates of the 1960 and 1970s, social reproduction feminism, similar to Marxism (Leach 2016), emerged as a liberating theory dwelling in the local history of Europe. According to Leach,

far from being a homogenous group, social-reproduction feminism operates across Marxist-feminism and feminist political-economy fields. What unites this school of thought is a central focus on social-reproduction theory through its commitment to developing a unitary theory of capitalist social relations (2016: 122).

In fact, Leach states that:

social reproductionists suggest that if Marx’s interrogation of capitalism is understood as being a discussion of social relations and process, as opposed to a static thing – the economy – then the social ‘production of people’ must be included within these social processes and not assumed (2016: 122).

However, both knowledge and subjectivity of social reproduction feminism have stayed mostly within the parameters of the West, relying on class oppression, gendered social relations and exploitation of labour without a clear reference to what remains onto-epistemologically beyond the borders of what does constitute ‘the West’.

Addressing such shortcoming, decolonial social reproduction feminism expands its boundaries to both epistemologies developed beyond the borders of the West and also to those that dwell on its borders/La Frontera (Anzaldúa 1999); the knowledges and subjectivities that might be anchored within the parameters of the West but are rarely included, accepted or considered as belonging – the *mestiza* consciousness (both racial and sexual). Therefore, decolonial social reproduction feminism is de-linked from the West to colonial subaltern epistemology and concretely embedded within the multilayered affective material implications of 500 years of settler/colonialism, transatlantic slavery and the colonial wound they have inflicted for their imperial global and neoliberal

expansion of Western capitalism (Mignolo 2007). Consequently, part of the move for decolonial reproductive theory is being able to move beyond a Eurocentric understanding of the value labour, acknowledging ‘the coloniality of labour’ (Quijano 2000: 534) and that the meaning we do attribute to the affective value of reproductive work and labour in our current conversation – even in critical theories – still lies within the parameters of coloniality/modernity, which distinctively gatekeeps and dis-cludes other affective relationalities that fall beyond a Eurocentric understanding of commodity, labour and value. Moreover, decolonial reproductive feminism considers the already existing devalored racialized labour, understanding the co-constitutive formation of these trans-historical categories.

As argued in previous sections, it is not only enough to portray how race, gender, class, ability and other notable differences affect the lived experiences of women in society without theorizing the construction of racialized and gendered capitalist social property–land relations. Such an approach both runs the risk of being co-opted into the broader neoliberal narrative of inclusivity and fails to fully elucidate how patriarchy, colonialism, classism, gender and sex-based discrimination, as well as other forms of oppression, are all inextricably linked and work together to support the continued oppression of women and other bodies in a capitalist society. A decolonial social reproduction feminist approach, on the other hand, delineates how the various forms of oppression work together to create a system of oppression that is perpetuated and nourished by capitalism. Being conducive to the oppression of women, capitalism claims reproduction as privatized and envisages it as non-productive work that supports obtaining capital but in and of itself does not produce capital, hence ‘while capitalism did not “create” women’s oppression, it certainly provides the socio-material conditions and rationale for sustaining it (albeit in historically distinct and changing forms)’ (Ferguson 2016: 54).

A decolonial feminist social reproduction theory centres partly on the ongoing reproduction of the ‘commodity labor power ... [which] involves institutions, processes and everyday social relations associated with the creation and maintenance of communities ... upon which, ultimately, all production and exchange rests’ (Bakker and Gill 2003: 18). In addition, ‘social reproduction has also been used to signal the social nature of procreation and/or population processes in general; one of its meanings, therefore, is demographic. Feminists would agree that procreation is a social, not merely a biological, event; however, they argue that while procreation is a key component of it, the work of social reproduction includes much more than procreation’ (Brenner and Laslett 1991). Social reproduction therefore has a crucial role, as it involves institution/states whose ethos is directly linked to neoliberal policies, contemporary globalization and global governance disciplinaries, offering us insights into the dialectic/agency between labour and world systems change.

### *Gender and race in capitalism*

Gender and racial hierarchy are thus a part of capital’s dynamism (a product), which transforms the natural, social and material world – restructuring and evolving for the ordered extraction of surplus. This process may differ temporally and geographically, but it nonetheless has a resultant constellation of class exploitation, governance and struggle. A decolonial feminist social reproduction theory would engage the specific historical constitutive structures (the new constitutionalism, disciplinary neoliberalism) and

judicial-political and socio-economic dimensions (social reproduction, shifting gender orders, the erosion of the family wage and the feminization of survival) of the capitalist world order. Therefore,

by distinguishing capitalism as primarily a set of social-property relations there exists an opening for acknowledging how gendered hierarchies are present and foundational to the way in which capitalist social relations are enacted, resisted, and reproduced. This recognition is as important to analysing the oppression of women under capitalism as it is to defining social-property relations (Leach 2016: 128).

Ontologically, this dialectic of etatization and the constitutive role of labour's governance and resistance to evolving processes are presupposed – but not without archives of historical and contemporary evidence. In fact, 'capitalism as a simple abstraction does not actually exist. There is only concretely racialized, patriarchal, colonial capitalism, wherein class is conceived as a unity of the diverse relations that produce not simply profit or capital, but capitalism' (Ferguson 2016: 47). Sara Salem (2013) also delineates the importance of a decolonial approach towards intersectionality and social reproduction theory to avoid its continued manipulation by the neoliberalist regime to promote its own agenda. Salem notes that when combined with a decolonial approach, intersectionality will account for feminist movements globally as it approaches feminism based on the norms, values and culture of a particular society rather than imposing Western ideas of feminism on other societies (2013). Hence, a decolonial approach to intersectional feminism takes into account not only race, gender and class, and how these intersections all work together to create different experiences, but also looks at those intersections in specific contexts beyond the West ontologically and epistemologically.

Drawing on Anibal Quijano (2000), Walter Mignolo explains that 'capitalism operates in four interrelated domains: control of economy (land appropriation, exploitation of labor, control of natural resources); control of authority (institution, army); control of gender and sexuality (family, education); and control of subjectivity and knowledge (epistemology, education and formation of subjectivity)' (Mignolo 2007: 156). Hence, 'the colonial matrix of power' (Quijano 2007: 534) shows us how modernity, capitalism and coloniality historically intertwined with one another, where the logic of coloniality is to have control over the economy and control of authority, which is inherently linked to both gender/sexuality and racial aspect of the triangle of power, coloniality and economy. Thus, one cannot separate gender, race or control of the economy from the colonial matrix of power and one cannot turn a blind eye to how both gender/sexuality and race constituted the social relations of power and therefore the social reproduction in society. Finally, as stated by Mignolo, 'de-colonial projects CANNOT be subsumed under Marxism ideology; Marxism should be subsumed under de-colonial projects' (2007: 164).

It is important to note that discourse does not create the political-social-economic order, nor does contingent negotiation (rather than agency) affect a plurality of political change (de Goede 2006), but the material conditions of resistance and governance by the labouring classes create reactive ameliorations and changes to the global-national order (including state formation, constitution/markets, international disciplinaries, and inter-state relations). However, one might criticize such an approach for missing the affective objects or fluidity of history. The answer to such criticism is that a decolonial feminist social reproductive theory does not negate culture, society, identity/subjectivities and what spills beyond the structure – the 'everyday'. Rather, it posits that in order to explain

global system transformations, and historical and structural processes, such sites of inquiry are co-constitutive and do not exist a priori. Social divisions, asymmetric results of gendered/racial coding, the culture-relations of mass consumption and labour divisions are formulated within democratic-agency class-relational terms, providing a framework for the incorporation of a multiplicity of identities which spills beyond structure. As Ferguson reminds us,

experience is the crucible, linking the (conscious) self and society. Transformative political theory needs to capture the dialectical interplay between the subjective and the social and thereby make clear the ways in which distinct experiences or subjectivities are part of the same, over-arching set of social relations (2016: 48).

Contemporary globalization and the neoliberal disciplinary have intensified etatization, transnational class governance, the suppression of social movements (democracy), inequality, exploitation, poverty and disintegration of national-regional sovereignties, impacting gendered/racialized bodies, education, health, economic and social-cultural institutions in complex and uneven ways. Rather than adopting the traditional liberal and rationalist approaches, a decolonial feminist social reproductive theory allows for a more encompassing ontological and epistemological research framework that directly confronts the labour question and global governance while engaging with the trans-disciplinary meta-theoretical ontological and epistemological constitutions. The asymmetric complexities, ongoing structural violence and inequalities of the global capitalist order demand that such a critical materialist research agenda be taken up by feminists. Ferguson reminds us that,

by explaining that oppressed subjects share more than just experiences of discrimination – that they collectively constitute (and thus can collectively challenge) an over-arching set of power relations – a robust theory of the social whole reveals a socio-material logic for political solidarity (2016: 43).

## V. Conclusion

Bannerji believes ‘we need to venture into a more complex reading of the social, where every aspect or moment of it can be shown to reflect others, where each little piece of it contains the macrocosm in the microcosm’ (2005: 146). Starting from the location of care for the community in which I feel I most ‘belong’, I wrote this article with a desire deeply seeded in love and frustration to reflect on all the gatekeeping and silencing activities going on within the progressive and critical circles of Western academia – including the diaspora academics – within which only certain voices and conversations are allowed. These well-gated spaces of (critical) conversations have also manipulated and depoliticized concepts such as ‘intersectionality’, which has initially emerged as ‘an intervention against white liberal feminism that sidelined “race” as an unimportant aspect of feminist research’ (Jibrin and Salem 2015: 10) and coopted it into the neoliberal regime to an extent where it perpetuates and reproduces justifications for such a system to exist. In addition, the radical roots of categories such as race and gender, which bore the possibility for radical transformation, have dissipated under the neoliberal system with a politics that has turned such categories into a commodity to be reproduced and profited from within the capitalist market economy. Therefore, the intersections of race, class, gender, sexuality

and other differences are manipulated under the neoliberal system, resulting in those oppressed under this system becoming complicit in their own oppression and the oppression of others (Jibrin and Salem 2015).

Centring on a politics that refuses to become part of the neoliberal system and decolonial thinking, in this article I explored the possibility of a decolonial social reproductive feminist theory that not only sees the categories of race, gender, class, ability and sexuality as interlinked and therefore historically co-constituted, but also posits such categories as ‘constitutive of capitalism, not an accidental by-product’ (Salem 2018: 8). In addition, a decolonial social reproductive feminist theory is able to locate the analysis of the hierarchy of human beings since the sixteenth century, which justified economic and political subordination of people of color within a value, reproduction and historical materialism *longue durée*. Rooted in historical materialism, politicized intersectional feminism and decolonial thinking, a decolonial social reproduction feminism allows for a critical exploration of class, gender and race and their positionality within a capitalist and neoliberal regime.

While Marxist feminism emphasizes the importance of understanding gender as it relates to class in a capitalist society, and that intersectionality raises the importance of considering all social identities, social reproduction feminism not only explores the varying social identities but also looks at how those identities function in the capitalist society and are simultaneously necessary for the production of capital (Ferguson 2008). Through social reproduction feminism, lived experiences play a crucial role in the production and reproduction of capitalist society as it is socially constructed and reinforced over time (2008). Through the division of labour, women are central to producing and reproducing the functioning of the capitalist system, at all levels. According to Leach:

gendered divisions of labour [provide a] a fundamental lens through which feminist theorizing does, and should, occur, and considering the fundamental role that labour, broadly defined, plays in a social-reproduction feminist ontology, a social-reproduction feminist account of the transition must speak to the various dynamics driving this division of labour (2016: 129).

I have argued that only intersectional feminism linked to decolonial social reproduction theory can understand and delineate how women are oppressed in a plethora of ways based on race, class and other intersections. When paired with historical materialism, intersectionality retains its critical approach as it explains the plethora of intersections that exist within feminism – namely how race, class and gender intersect – while Marxist feminism delineates why those intersections are inextricably linked. When combined, Marxist feminism and intersectionality elucidate how capitalism and now neoliberalism profit not just off oppression but the exploitation of humans based on race, class, gender and other intersections. Such theory would see class, race and gender as a reflection of the location of workers as colonial subjects of colour, and in the heart of the empire (Western Europe and the United States) workers are racialized. Such theory in fact creates a possibility of solidarity ‘by explaining that oppressed subjects share more than just experiences of discrimination – that they collectively constitute (and thus can collectively challenge) an over-arching set of power relations – a robust theory of the social whole reveals a socio-material logic for political solidarity’ (Ferguson 2016: 43). In addition, and this is important, imperialism must also be considered when talking about feminism: ‘there can be no feminism without anti-imperialism, anti-capitalism, and so on, because

patriarchy does not exist in isolation from imperialism, capitalism and other structures' (Salem 2013: 3).

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