

# Intersectionality and Marxism: A Critical Historiography

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## Abstract

In recent years, there has been renewed interest in conceptualising the relationship between oppression and capitalism as well as intense debate over the precise nature of this relationship. No doubt spurred on by the financial crisis, it has become increasingly clear that capitalism, both historically and in the twenty-first century, has had particularly devastating effects for women and people of colour. Intersectionality, which emerged in the late twentieth century as a way of addressing the relationship between race, gender, sexuality and class, has submitted orthodox Marxism to critique for its inattention to the complex dynamics of various social locations; in turn Marxist thinkers in the twenty-first century have engaged with intersectionality, calling attention to the impoverished notion of class and capitalism on which it relies. As intersectionality constitutes perhaps the most common way that contemporary activists and theorists on the left conceive of identity politics, an analysis of intersectionality's relationship to Marxism is absolutely crucial for historical materialists to understand and consider. This paper looks at the history of intersectionality's and Marxism's critiques of one another in order to ground a synthesis of the two frameworks. It argues that in the twenty-first century, we need a robust, Marxist analysis of capitalism, and that the only robust account of capitalism is one articulated intersectionally, one which treats class, race, gender and sexuality as fundamental to capitalist accumulation.

## Keywords

Marxism – Marxist feminism – intersectionality – decolonisation – identity politics

In recent years, intersectionality has been discussed more than ever before. These discussions have been so frequent that some have even called it 'hegemonic'.<sup>1</sup> Since the 2008 financial crisis, there has also been a renewed interest in Marxism – 'socialism' and 'capitalism' were the two most-googled words in 2009. As these two frameworks have been increasingly analysed and considered over the past decade, they have also come into contact with one another. Marxists have criticised intersectionality scholars and vice versa. But there has also been a series of interesting and important attempts to synthesise these frameworks, forging a productive and nuanced theory that is able to respond dynamically to the complexities of oppression in the twenty-first century. In particular, these debates have significantly coalesced around questions of identity politics, or the ways in which identity can, is, and should be related to the structural conditions of capitalism. In the context of debates around identity politics, having a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the history and relationship between Marxism and intersectionality, which in some ways is the contemporary paradigm for understanding identity, is absolutely crucial for contemporary activists and academics alike.

This paper proceeds in three sections. The first section describes the key tenets of intersectionality and its critiques of Marxism. While there is a vast literature of intersectionality theorists' critiques of Marxism, I focus on two charges in particular. The first is the claim that Marxism relies on binary structures to explain the world. The second is that Marxism reduces analyses of oppression to class oppression, only or primarily, and considers all other forms of domination (like sexism, racism and heteronormativity) to be merely epiphenomenal to primary class-relations. While these charges are certainly true of many traditional Marxist theorists, I argue that the vibrant and rapidly transforming tradition of Marxist feminisms<sup>2</sup> has developed quite substantially and has proven

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1 Mann 2013, p. 55.

2 I use the term 'Marxist feminisms' in a slightly different way than some other theorists. I use it to signify the many strains of and frameworks within feminist theory and activism that locate themselves in direct reference to a Marxist diagnosis of the structure of capitalism. In this way, I group what others have called 'socialist feminisms', 'communist feminisms', 'Marxist feminisms', 'anti-capitalist feminisms' and 'Marxist-anarcha feminisms' together under this heading. I do so for a few reasons: (1) The borders and boundaries between these categories are often extremely fuzzy. While Susan Archer Mann (Mann 2012), for instance, argues that there exist sharp theoretical differences between these strains, I have found that these theoretical distinctions are not always consistent, that theorists identify themselves with 'socialist feminism', for example, when historians of the feminist movement would call them 'Marxist feminists' and vice versa. Thus, while the thinkers inside each category hold very different positions, it is not clear to me that the names of these various traditions neatly delineate conceptual frameworks in any easy and unproblematic sense. (2) All of the traditions

able to incorporate these very criticisms into its theories. The second section explains the Marxist-feminist criticisms of intersectionality, which often revolve around the idea that many intersectional theories have underdeveloped analyses of class. While many intersectional theories discuss class or name it as one of the axes of oppression in the contemporary world, few delve into the specificities of structural class relations or engage in a holistic critique of capitalism. I argue that a nuanced and specific critique of capitalism as a structure is vitally necessary to theories of domination. I also address the criticisms of certain Marxist scholars that, because certain strains of intersectionality embrace 'identity politics', they are therefore, in their terms, 'bourgeois'. I argue that this criticism is misplaced, can much more accurately be levied against poststructuralist feminism, and that while intersectionality and poststructuralism certainly share common elements, their frameworks are fundamentally different. Thus, this criticism seems to be a failure on the part of Marxist feminists to actually engage with intersectionality. Since the claim that intersectionality and hence identity politics are essentially poststructuralist notions is a constant feature of the debate around identity politics, understanding this argument is essential to grounding a clearer understanding of how identity politics is constructed than is often present in the Marxist literature on the subject. The last section attempts to develop an intersectional Marxism or a Marxist theory of intersectionality, one that uses key insights from both frameworks. In doing so, I argue that Marxism needs intersectionality, and in its best and most-thoughtful iterations has been intersectional, even if it has not used this term. I argue further that intersectionality can benefit from a robust theory of capitalism. In highlighting the mutual insufficiency of these two theories on their own, I hope to move toward the development of a theoretical framework that can adequately account for relations of domination and exploitation organised around race, class, gender and sexuality.

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named above are in a similar position, trying to negotiate a relationship with intersectionality, and hence, for the scope of this paper, they can be considered together. The criticism that intersectionality makes of 'Marxism' could be levied equally against those in many of the above camps. (3) While at a certain point in feminist theory, most notably during the so-called 'second wave', differences between these theories were quite pronounced, it seems as though in contemporary feminist scholarship and activism, the terms 'socialist', 'Marxist' and 'anticapitalist' are often used interchangeably, sometimes by the same theorist in one piece. Moreover, these distinctions were even more porous in the early twentieth century, when Marxism, socialism, communism, and anti-capitalism were often considered synonyms. In grouping these traditions together, I do not mean to erase the distinctions between them nor to de-legitimise the various authors' nomenclatures, but rather intend to be able to speak more broadly about theoretical trends without encumbering my writing with the list of five frameworks each time a Marxist-oriented kind of feminism is mentioned.

## 1 Intersectionality Critiques Marxism

Developed by women-of-colour feminists, intersectionality sought to theorise the specific problems experienced by women of colour, problems that often involved racism, sexism, classism and heterosexism, and that were often overlooked by single-axis theories. While the term ‘intersectionality’ was coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, many intersectionality theorists root their framework in the nineteenth-century writings of black women like Sojourner Truth, Anna Julia Cooper, and others, who sought to describe the exclusions and oppressions faced by black women on account of their gender and race. Intersectionality continued to be developed throughout the twentieth century by theorists who variously identified themselves as black womanists, black feminists, Chicana feminists, hispanas, xicanistas, and sister/outsideers. In her landmark work, *Black Feminist Thought*, Patricia Hill Collins describes intersectionality theory as an ‘analysis claiming that systems of race, social class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation, and age form mutually constructing features of a social organisation, which shape Black women’s experiences and, in turn, are shaped by Black Women.’<sup>3</sup> As Barbara Smith explains this key insight, ‘the major “isms” ... are intimately intertwined’;<sup>4</sup> they simply cannot be separated. Patricia Hill Collins and others frequently use the term ‘matrix of domination’ instead of ‘intersecting oppressions’. Others use ‘interlocking oppressions’ or ‘mutually-reinforcing oppressions’ to describe the same phenomena. In its most basic form, then, intersectionality is the theory that both structurally and experientially, social systems of domination are linked to one another and that, in order both to understand and to change these systems, they must be considered together. Intersectionality thus submits to critique theories that treat forms of oppression separately, as well as attempts to locate one axis of oppression as primary.

It is from this perspective that the most frequent criticisms of Marxism are made.

In the first place, intersectionality theorists allege that Marxists reduce all social, political, cultural and economic antagonisms to class.<sup>5</sup> Some Marxist theorists do in fact omit any significant discussions of race, gender or sexuality

<sup>3</sup> Collins 2000, p. 299.

<sup>4</sup> Smith 1998, p. 112.

<sup>5</sup> For example, take the following claim by Beverly Smith (Smith and Smith 1983, p. 122) of the Combahee River Collective: there are ‘people who are Marxists who say “Well, when class oppression and racism end, definitely the oppression of women and lesbians will end.” Smith was herself a Marxist and an intersectional thinker who repeatedly submitted to critique a class-reductionist trend in Marxist organising. See also Gedalof 2013 and Alcoff 2011.

from their work (as, for example, Marx's *Capital* did), explaining the processes of capital accumulation, crises and dispossession in gender- and race-blind terms (or discuss axes of oppression but only as epiphenomena of class).<sup>6</sup> This erasure of race, gender and sexuality as relevant terms in the discussion of oppression is one tendency that intersectionality theorists, as well as feminists generally, have identified as a serious limitation of the tradition of Marxism.<sup>7</sup> In fact, it was due to the long history of the occlusion of women's work, lives and experiences of violence and exploitation that Marxist feminists submitted to critique more mainstream discussions of capitalist economy and culture. In this sense, the criticism of mainstream or hegemonic Marxism as race and gender-blind is a criticism shared by both intersectionality theorists and feminists who locate themselves in the Marxist tradition.<sup>8</sup>

While there were and continue to be many attempts by Marxist feminists (as well as critical race scholars and postcolonial theorists) to correct this gross omission, many of these attempts proposed inadequate solutions. Some proposed a 'dual-system theory' wherein capitalism and patriarchy were distinct systems that coincided in the preindustrial era to create the system of class and gender exploitation that characterises the contemporary world.<sup>9</sup> These accounts, offered by theorists like Sylvia Walby,<sup>10</sup> while attempting a nascent proto-intersectional account of class and gender, generally said nothing of race, sexuality or colonisation, repeating the very theoretical marginalisation they accused mainstream theorists of perpetrating.

Others developed a 'single-system theory' in which sexism or patriarchy and capitalism were one and the same system.<sup>11</sup> This insight took multiple forms: some argued that patriarchy and class-based exploitation were mutually

6 For example, Benn Michaels 2006.

7 While this criticism is certainly valid of many Marxist theorists, it would be misleading to erase the long history of Marxists who spoke extensively of gender, race and colonialism. Some of the major theorists of the Marxist tradition, among them Karl Marx himself as well as Friedrich Engels (cf. Engels 1942), discussed imperialism, colonialism and slavery, and in Engels's case, patriarchy. It is true that Marx's discussions of slavery and imperialism do not themselves constitute a theory of race, or at all reference the gendered dimensions of these structures. Indeed, it may be particularly problematic to give an account of colonisation and slavery that does not centre race and gender. It is true that many who wrote in the tradition of Marx and Engels ignored these dimensions in their analysis. For an analysis of Marx's stances on slavery, imperialism, and colonialism, see Anderson 2010. For more on Marx and Engels's theorisation of the oppression of women, see Brown 2012.

8 See: Hartmann 1981; Barrett 1988; Cox and Federici 1976; Dalla Costa 2008; James and Dalla Costa 1973.

9 For example, Hartmann 1981.

10 Walby 1988.

11 For example, Vogel 1983 and Young 1981.

constructing and equiprimordial features of capitalism in both its history and its logic (Federici, etc.). Others argued that patriarchy and class-based exploitation were indeed historically mutually constructing and, because they have empirically shaped and continue to shape the world around us, an analysis of both is necessary, but also that the logic of capitalism is itself gender-blind (Meiksins Wood). Gender, in these accounts, emerges as a technique of social control in the service of capitalist accumulation. In other words, this kind of theory had the benefit of being able to discuss the ways in which gender and class emerged together as forms of social control that mutually reinforced one another. However in the Meiksins Wood iteration, it also had the effect of treating gender as a kind of epi-phenomenon of the more-primary social cleavage of class; class relations were the true logical core of capitalism, while gender relations were mere empirical fact – incredibly important to analyse as *empirical fact*, but ultimately of a different analytic order and existential weight. While the logical is never in these accounts expressly predicated as superior to or more fundamental than the empirical, this implication is clear.<sup>12</sup> In this sense, certain forms of single-system theory tended to hierarchise oppressions, placing class as the most important and primary social antagonism.

While other forms of single-systems theory did not mark this distinction between the logical and the empirical in this way, intersectional theorists have still subjected Marxist-feminist single systems theory to critique in two distinct ways. In the first place, often (though not exclusively) Marxist-feminist unitary theory focused only on two aspects of life – gender and class – in ways that implicitly or by omission seem to suggest that race, sexuality, ability and nationality are of secondary or incidental importance. At the very least, they tended not to mention or treat with a sustained analysis the multiple ways in which gender as a structure and as a concept was raced and sexualised, as well as deeply embedded in histories of colonialism and imperialism. In another way, intersectional theorists subjected unitary theorists to critique for their focus on the housewife as the primary locus for understanding the relationship between gender and capitalism. Much of single-system theory accounts of domestic labour, especially in the first wave of Marxist feminism from the 1960s to the 1980s, presumed a heterosexual, single-income married couple, often with children, in ways that did not explain or incorporate analyses of queer

12 This implicit denigration of the empirical in favour of the logical is itself deeply ironic, given Marx's own description of the relationship between abstract and concrete in the *Grundrisse*, where he argues (Marx 1993, p. 101) that one must 'ris[e] from the abstract to the concrete', suggesting that the abstract or 'logical' level of the analysis is itself a heuristic tool to effectively understand the concrete, the empirical, the world.

couples, dual-income households, or of single-parent households. It was especially the latter two of these exclusions that led some prominent black feminists including Angela Davis to argue that the model of the dominant trend of Marxist Feminism of those years implicitly assumed a white, heterosexual, middle-class frame of analysis.<sup>13</sup>

One of the central contentions of intersectionality as a framework is the necessity of embracing ‘the working hypothesis of the equivalency between oppressions’.<sup>14</sup> As intersectionality historiographer Vivian May writes, ‘In gender-first or class-first critiques, intersectionality’s censure of hierarchy of oppressions mindsets cannot be taken up – single-axis, hierarchical models of identity and oppression remain as measures of political/theoretical adequacy’.<sup>15</sup> In other words, one of the central insights of intersectionality theory is precisely that hierarchising oppressions itself perpetuates the marginalisation of those who are often invested with the least social power. In this way, single-system theories that discuss gender (and occasionally race) only as secondary after-effects of capital relations, cannot adequately account for the specific forms of oppression faced by women of colour, working-class queers, or gender non-conforming people. These theories seem still to take white, employed, married, heterosexual men (and their wives) as the only subjects of inquiry.

Both dual-system and single-system (white) Marxist feminisms of the 1970s and 1980s tended to essentialise and homogenise the women they were discussing. This tendency, which Elizabeth Spelman calls ‘the Trojan horse of feminist ethnocentrism’,<sup>16</sup> was most visible in the largest Marxist feminist theoretico-activist group of the 1970s, the Wages for Housework Campaign, who took housewifery as the universal position of women. These accounts nearly always assume that women are in heterosexual couplings with a male breadwinner. They equate the ability to become pregnant with womanhood itself. They assume that the experiences of middle-class white women are definitive and universal determinants of womanhood itself. Audre Lorde critiques the supposed homogeneity of experience in *Sister/Outsider*:

There is a pretense to the homogeneity of experience covered by the word sisterhood that does not in fact exist.... Certainly there are very real differences between us of race, age, and sex. But it is not those differences

13 Davis 1981, pp. 222–44.

14 Collins 1997, p. 74.

15 May 2014, p. 102.

16 Spelman 1988, p. x.



between us that are separating us. It is rather our refusal to recognize those differences.<sup>17</sup>

Rather than cover over the differences between women under the guise of a 'universal sisterhood', intersectionality theorists argue that differences in experiences are caused by differential structural relations to forms of institutionalised power, and thus need to be analysed, described and explained, as key components of feminist theorising.

## 2 Marxism Critiques Intersectionality

Marxist feminists have responded to the above-articulated critiques in a variety of ways. Some have simply dismissed intersectionality;<sup>18</sup> others have attempted to nuance their positions and adopt more-sophisticated understandings of the structures of domination. As I have argued elsewhere,<sup>19</sup> Marxist feminism underwent a radical shift in its assumptions after the dissolution of the Wages for Housework campaign in North America and the disbanding of central Marxist-feminist organisations like Lotta Femminista in Italy, which were producing the most developed Marxist-feminist theories in the 1970s. In particular, responding to the above-explained critiques from women of colour around the world, many Marxist-feminists shifted their perspectives radically to account for race as a primary structure of oppression, neither secondary to nor epiphenomenal of class. They began also to develop situated accounts of the role of women in the global geo-political economy that recognised the simultaneity of oppressions based on race, gender, class and country of origin.<sup>20</sup>

Marxist-feminist theorists have not only engaged in the two above-named strategies – they have also offered critiques of intersectionality theory. Perhaps unsurprisingly, many of these criticisms allege that intersectionality has an underdeveloped analysis of class as a fundamental axis of oppression. Jean Ait Belkhir argues that: 'Despite its place in the now familiar list – race, gender, and class – class is often the last addressed of these issues' in contemporary

17 Lorde 1984, p. 115.

18 For example, Aguilar 2012.

19 See Bohrer 2015.

20 It is on the basis of this turn that Chandra Talpade Mohanty names Maria Mies, one of the most widely-read Marxist feminist theorists even today, as a prime example of a white, Western scholar engaging in thoughtful work that considers race, gender, class and national origin in a nuanced, situated and sensitive manner (Mohanty 1988).



feminist theory.<sup>21</sup> As Susan Archer Mann explains,<sup>22</sup> the relatively little attention paid to class is a frequent trope in criticisms of intersectionality: ‘Other scholars have criticized the “theoretically impoverished concepts of class” employed by authors who claim to do race, gender, and class analyses.’<sup>23</sup> As Martha Gimenez explains, fear of class reductionism has led intersectional analyses to overcorrect, nearly leaving out class entirely:

the flattening or erasure of the qualitative difference between class, race and gender in the RGC [Race, Gender and Class] perspective is the foundation for the recognition that it is important to deal with ‘basic relations of domination and subordination’ which now appear disembodied, outside class relations. In the effort to reject ‘class reductionism,’ by postulating the equivalence between class and other forms of oppression, the RGC perspective both negates the fundamental importance of class [and] is forced to acknowledge its importance by postulating some other ‘basic’ structures of domination.<sup>24</sup>

Gimenez’s critique goes farther than the underdevelopment of class; rather, Gimenez argues, intersectional analyses often have the effect of misapprehending the nature of class itself, postulating a qualitative equivalence between it and other forms of oppression where none exists. Gimenez argues that there is something distinctive about the organisation of class oppression that makes it different in kind from either race or gender. We should note that ‘different in kind’ does not mean more fundamental or primary; rather it means that class oppression is distinctive and necessitates a different kind of treatment, politically and theoretically, than race and gender. This differential treatment requires a wholesale analysis of capitalism as a system and a structure of material relations of production and reproduction, accumulation and dispossession, which has its roots in political economy and effects in the multifaceted realms of culture, ideology and politics. I will return to this ‘different kind of treatment’ in the third section.

The lack of focused and sustained analysis of political economy has led some Marxists to accuse intersectionality of reinforcing certain tenets of bourgeois liberalism. In a widely read and distributed pamphlet, Eve Mitchell alleges that the focus of intersectionality on identity politics constitutes a reinforcement

21 Belkhir 2001, p. 160.

22 Mann 2012, p. 112.

23 Kandal 1995, p. 143.

24 Gimenez 2001.

of specifically capitalist ideas of individuality. Responding specifically to bell hooks's iteration of the critique of the homogeneity of experience so frequent in non-intersectional analyses, Mitchell writes,

hooks is correct to say that basing an entire politics on one particular experience, or a set of particular differences, under capitalism is problematic. However, intersectionality theory replicates this problem by simply adding particular moments, or determinant points; hooks goes on to argue for race and class inclusion in a feminist analysis. Similarly, theories of an 'interlocking matrix of oppressions,' simply create a list of naturalized identities, abstracted from their material and historical context. This methodology is just as ahistorical and antisocial as Betty Friedan's.<sup>25</sup>

This selection highlights two related but slightly different criticisms. In the first place, Mitchell's critique is representative of a frequent criticism of what we might call 'mathematical' intersectionality theory;<sup>26</sup> these are the theories that conceive of the multiple axes of oppression as additive or multiplicative, using concepts like 'triple jeopardy' to explain the position of working-class women of colour who experience class, gender, and race-based oppressions.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Mitchell 2013.

<sup>26</sup> The descriptor 'mathematical' comes from Deborah King's analysis of intersectionality. She writes, 'most applications of the concepts of triple jeopardy have been overly simplistic in assuming that the relationships among the various discriminations are merely additive. These relationships are interpreted as equivalent to the mathematical equation, racism plus sexism plus classism equals triple jeopardy. In this instance, each discrimination has a single, direct, and independent effect on status, wherein the relative contribution of each is readily apparent.' Commenting on these mathematical notions of intersecting oppressions, Martha Gimenez (Gimenez 2001, pp. 25ff.) explains the variety of intersectionality theories that resist this kind of analysis. Her historiography is so helpful that I quote it at length: 'Authors vary in the metaphors they use to describe the nature of these intersections: e.g., triple oppression, interplay, interrelation, cumulative effects, interconnections [Belkhir 1994]; interactive, triadic relation, overlapping, interactive systems [Belkhir 1993, p. 4]; multiple jeopardy, meaning "not only several, simultaneous oppressions but also the multiplicative relations among them" [King, cited in Barnett, Brewer and Kuumba 1999, p. 14]; multiplicative, simultaneous, inter-connected systems of a whole [Barnett, Brewer and Kuumba 1999, p. 15]. Collins, however, appears to disagree with mathematical interpretations of these relationships, for she states that they (meaning race, gender and class) cannot be "added together to produce one so-called grand oppression" [Collins, cited in Barnett, Brewer and Kuumba 1999, p. 15]; it follows they cannot be multiplied either.'

<sup>27</sup> It is important to note here that while Mitchell does not simultaneously criticise the tradition of Marxist feminism, the mathematical model of oppression has also been frequently used in this tradition. Many Marxist feminists used the language of 'double jeopardy'

While there are certainly some intersectional theorists who deploy this framework, many intersectional theorists themselves have argued against additive and multiplicative models for their failure to highlight the mutual constitution of the structures of domination. In one example of an intersectional critique of this language, Deborah King's 'Multiple Jeopardy: The Context of Black Feminist Ideology' decries what she terms the 'pop-bead approach' where oppressions are considered separate and then added together, arguing that by considering these systems as wholly distinct, these frameworks revive the tendency to hierarchise oppressions.<sup>28</sup> As this same intervention is made by many other intersectionality theorists, Mitchell's (and others') identification of intersectionality with these mathematical models constitutes a straw-man argument, one that refuses to seriously engage with the vast intersectional literature critiquing the very position Mitchell attributes to this framework.

The second but related criticism that Mitchell levies concerns the nature of identity as it is discussed by intersectionality. Mitchell worries that identities are conceived as 'natural', 'ahistorical', and later in this essay, 'idealistic' and 'bourgeois'. While ultimately, I think this is an unhelpful criticism, I would like to reconstruct Mitchell's argument in depth, as it does point to some more-nuanced and interesting questions about the nature of feminist theory, even if these questions remained undeveloped in Mitchell's piece.

Mitchell's worry about identity politics is rooted in a long history of Marxist criticism. Marxism, as a perspective grounded in historical materialism, generally views identities as effects of structural, material and historical processes. Hence, accounts of identity that are only descriptive and do not speak about the structures enframing, creating, policing and maintaining these identities lack, from a Marxist perspective, the crucial and necessary explanatory element of theory that would be grounded in a historical perspective of the power of structures and institutions. Politics of identity that stay only at the level of claiming a social location are seen as overly self-congratulatory and, in some ways, as reaffirming the social cleavages created by dominating structures without necessarily giving an account of the genesis, logic, organisation,

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to describe the duality of class and gender oppressions. The refusal to recognise the roots of this mathematical model in the very tradition that Mitchell defends is itself a form of epistemic domination, one in which the voices and theories of women of colour are the only voices criticised for a more general tendency in theory. While I agree with Mitchell that mathematical models of oppression are not the most helpful metaphors for explaining the relationships between various instantiations of social domination, we should be wary of the power dynamics at play in accusing only intersectionality and not other frameworks of this problem.

28 King 1988.

history or power of those structures. In this way, certain iterations of identity politics ground themselves in purely individual terms and reduce politics solely to an issue of claiming a position within a social totality. And when one claims this position, when, for example, I claim my social location as that of a white queer working-class American Jew, Marxists worry that without an analysis of the structures of whiteness, queerness, etc., I am treating each of these identities as natural facts, pre-existing moulds into which I simply fit my individual body and history without critiquing the historical contingency of each of them. Critics of identity politics, especially those who are engaged not only in theory but also in movement-based activist work, also worry that grounding a politics in identity can have the effect of limiting the possibilities for cross-group coalition-building and solidarity.

It is this history of critiquing identity politics, first formulated, we should note, by mainstream Marxists against Marxist feminisms, that is present in the background of Mitchell's analysis of intersectionality's identity politics. Because of the above-enumerated worries, Mitchell accuses intersectionality of reconfirming a certain kind of bourgeois politics: 'Since identity politics, and therefore intersectionality theory, are a bourgeois politics, the possibilities for struggle are also bourgeois. Identity politics reproduces the appearance of an alienated individual under capitalism and so struggle takes the form of equality among groups at best, or individualized forms of struggle at worst.'<sup>29</sup>

While I think the Marxist critiques offered above constitute incredibly important criticisms of the effects of certain strands of identity politics, I think they are submitting to critique a fundamentally different understanding of 'identity politics' than that taken in the majority of developed intersectionality theories. Take, for example, the explanation of identity politics offered by the Combahee River Collective: 'this focusing upon our own oppression is embodied in the concept of identity politics. We believe that the most profound and potentially most radical politics come directly out of our own identity, as opposed to working to end someone else's oppression.'<sup>30</sup> But what exactly do these theorists mean by the term 'identity politics'? Do they use it to signify an endless, congratulatory string of individual identifications, disconnected from structures and histories?

Quite simply, they do not. Rather, intersectionality theorists frequently critique this tendency in poststructuralist feminisms. In her article on the relationship between intersectionality and postmodernism, Susan Archer Mann<sup>31</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Mitchell 2013.

<sup>30</sup> The Combahee River Collective 1977.

<sup>31</sup> Mann 2013, pp. 64–5.

mobilises Patricia Hill Collins's grounding of intersectionality inside a group-based standpoint epistemology against the postmodern position of the irreducible difference and uniqueness of each individual and hence the absolute untranslatability of an experience to any another. She writes,

Here [in postmodern accounts of difference and identity] differences are infinite and each individual is potentially unique. In contrast, for Collins, the notion of standpoint refers to groups who have shared histories because of their shared location in relations of unequal power and privilege. They are neither groups based simply on identities chosen by individuals nor groups analytically created by demographers, bureaucrats or scholars. For her, to call for the deconstruction of all group categories in the name of critiquing essentialism is simply to move to a 'language game of politics'.<sup>32</sup>

It is not only Patricia Hill Collins who argues against this version of identity politics. Nikol Alexander-Floyd explains that 'women of color feminists generally support identity politics centred on complex, negotiated understandings of group interests' rather than on individual identities.<sup>33</sup> These 'negotiated' conceptions of group-based identity politics signify the shifting, historically-situated nature of oppressions, precisely the opposite of the ahistoricism and naturalisation of which intersectionality theorists are accused. As Vivian May argues, this gross misreading of intersectionality is itself embroiled in a politics of knowledge production, one that ignores the theoretical sensitivity and nuance that these theories elaborate:

Pitting context versus identity ignores how intersectionality posits identity as located within, navigating across, and shaped by social structures. A more thorough reading of the literature, in any period of intersectionality's genealogy, substantiates that a 'both/and' approach to (multiple) identities contextualized within myriad social structures and cognizant of relational power dynamics within and between groups is a basic premise of intersectionality.<sup>34</sup>

What, then, does 'identity politics' mean in the context of intersectionality theories? 'The most general statement of our politics', they say, 'at the present time

32 The reference here is to Collins 2004, pp. 248 and 252–3.

33 Alexander-Floyd 2012, p. 11.

34 May 2014, p. 103.

would be that we are actively committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression, and see as our particular task the development of integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that major systems of oppression are interlocking. The synthesis of these oppressions creates the conditions of our lives.’<sup>35</sup> Mitchell’s accusation can only seem ludicrous in this context. The Combahee River Collective and many other intersectionality theorists mobilise their experiences of the simultaneity of oppressions rather as a starting place – not the end goal – of theory and praxis, as a window into the structures of domination from which to speak, interrogate, analyse and explain. And while it may be true that eliminating the structures of oppression is not *per se* about any one person’s experience of these oppressions, ultimately, is not the goal of radical political transformation the elimination of oppression precisely *because* of its maleffects on the lives and experiences of really-existing human beings?<sup>36</sup>

It is from this position that intersectionality theorists rehabilitate the notion of identity politics in the service of radically transformative politics. Kimberlé Crenshaw argues that defending group rather than individual identity-politics constitutes an important political tactic: ‘At this point in history, a strong case can be made that the most critical resistance strategy for disempowered groups is to occupy and defend a politics of social location rather than to vacate and destroy it.’<sup>37</sup> Crenshaw here points to the distinction between theory as a political strategy and theory as a supposedly value-free inquiry aimed at establishing a form of everlasting or universal truth. The argument is not that group-based identity politics forms a political truth *tout court*, but rather that

35 The Combahee River Collective 1977.

36 It might be helpful to return to Marx at this point, who argues that historical materialism contains precisely this theoretical move – to ground philosophy in real, historical individuals and their experiences. To do otherwise is to fall back into the idealist trap of German metaphysics. He writes in *The German Ideology*: ‘In direct contrast to German philosophy which descends from heaven to earth, here we ascend from earth to heaven. That is to say, we do not set out from what men say, imagine, conceive, nor from men as narrated, thought of, imagined, conceived, in order to arrive at men in the flesh. We set out from real, active men, and on the basis of their real life-process we demonstrate the development of the ideological reflexes and echoes of this life-process... Thinking and the products of their thinking. Life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life. In the first method of approach the starting-point is consciousness taken as the living individual; in the second method, which conforms to real life, it is the real living individuals themselves, and consciousness is considered solely as their consciousness.’ (Marx and Engels 2004, p. 47.)

37 Crenshaw 1995, p. 539.

*inside the particular historical context* of the exclusion and marginalisation of women of colour from both mainstream theory and political practice, recentring our analyses on these groups itself constitutes an intervention into sedimented structures of domination.

This regrounding of theory, when considered from the perspective of class relations, has been a hallmark of Marxist theories in political economy, history and cultural criticism. Marxist theories recognise very well that truth is partial, produced, and situated inside historical relations of force and power. This is a patently uncontroversial claim, even for mainstream, orthodox Marxisms. Much of Marxist theorising in the twentieth century took the form of rehabilitating disciplines from bourgeois ideology by grounding enquiry in a concern for the experiences, histories and phenomena most relevant to the working class. In this sense, what intersectionality theorists call ‘subjugated knowledges’ enumerated from a ‘situated’ standpoint is quite crucial to Marxism; the difference between these perspectives is that many of the orthodox Marxist accounts recognise only class as a situated perspective, whereas intersectionality theorists have reclaimed race, gender, sexuality and ability as positions embedded with historical perspectives that produce sites of knowledge and terrains of struggle.

### 3 Integrating Marxism and Intersectionality

As I have argued above, many of the mutual criticisms of intersectionality and Marxism are the result of multiple failures in communication. Intersectionality’s criticisms of many Marxist positions are themselves also held by Marxist feminists and have been incorporated into contemporary scholarship. Marxist feminists’ worries about identity politics would seem rather better directed toward other traditions of feminist scholarship, which, while they might discuss multiple kinds of oppression, do not share a framework with the majority of the hallmark texts of intersectionality theories. Other contentions, however, remain to be worked through. I share with many Marxist theorists dissatisfaction with the treatment of capitalism in many intersectional theories and believe that capitalism forms one of the root causes of a network of oppressive social, political, economic and cultural relations in the contemporary world that necessitates the kind of detailed analysis that Marxism has long sought to advance. I agree also with intersectionality theorists that many treatments of capitalism have amounted at worst to vulgar class reductionism and at best to simple under-theorisation of the complex racial, gendered and sexual dynamics of power operative in the world in which we live.



I would thus like to treat the rest of this paper as a prolegomenon to developing an intersectional theory of capitalism. As prolegomenon, I consider this account to be provisional, a gesture toward a long and complicated project that I could not hope to exhaust here. This section proceeds in two ways. First, I argue that in order to ground an intersectional theory of capitalism, it is necessary first to contest some of the reigning historiographies of both traditions that have contributed to the divergent development of these frameworks. Revisiting the work, both academic and activist, of many key figures in both traditions, I foreground the vitally important but under-discussed traditions of anti-capitalist women of colour that have straddled the divide between Marxism and intersectionality. These analyses provide a foothold in the project of bridging these modes of analysis. Second, I turn critically to a consideration of capitalism as a structure, arguing that capitalism is the overarching system that gave rise<sup>38</sup> to patriarchy, racism, colonisation and imperialism, as well as to the formation of more frequently-discussed proletarian exploitation. In framing these systems as all *equally* part of capitalism, I hope to place capitalism at the centre of an intersectional theory, but one that would not take class as the privileged or primordial antagonism to be considered.

### 3.1 *Towards a New Historiography*

While Marxist feminism and intersectionality theories are frequently discussed separately, some of the hallmark works of women-of-colour feminisms in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have been both intersectional and Marxist, a fact that is all too frequently downplayed in the historiography of both traditions.

38 This claim needs further explanation. By arguing that capitalism 'gave rise' to patriarchy or racism, I do not mean that there were not, or indeed are not, forms of what we would call gender-based or race-based inequality, prejudice or subjugation before the rise of capitalism in the fifteenth century. Rather, I mean that the current forms of patriarchy and racism are coterminous with capitalism, that the very expressions and constructions of race and gender operative in our world are inseparable from capitalism. What we mean when we say 'race' is a phenomenon that is inseparable from, for example, the systems of slavery, colonialism and imperialism that formed necessary, structural elements of capitalism. The same is true of gender. Insofar as race, gender and sexuality are really-existing categories involved in systems of exploitation and oppression that structure the contemporary world, these categories were decisively constructed, changed and metamorphosed – indeed, created – through capitalism and for its ends. This does not mean that feudalism did not entail certain kinds of gender-based hierarchy, but rather that the referent of the contemporary term 'patriarchy' and all of its determinants corresponds to a series of expectations, relations, rules, stereotypes and dynamics that cannot be separated from their development through and with capitalism.

Consider the following extended excerpt from the Combahee River Collective Statement, one of the fundamental framing texts of intersectionality:

We realize that the liberation of all oppressed peoples necessitates the destruction of the political-economic systems of capitalism and imperialism as well as patriarchy. We are socialists because we believe that work must be organized for the collective benefit of those who do the work and create the products, not for the profit of the bosses. Material resources must be equally distributed among those who create the resources ... We need to articulate the real class situation of persons who are not merely raceless, sexless workers, but for whom racial and sexual oppression are significant determinants in their working/economic lives. Although we are essentially in agreement with Marx's theory as it applied to the very specific economic relationships he analyzed, we know that his analysis must be extended further in order for us to understand our specific economic situation as Black women.<sup>39</sup>

The Combahee River Collective locate themselves squarely within the tradition of Marx and Marxism and consider his diagnosis of capitalism to be fundamental. Their call to *extend* Marx's analysis beyond its original scope is precisely the project that all Marxism since the nineteenth century has taken up. To be a Marxist is precisely to engage in this kind of analysis, of 'stretching' Marx's analysis, to borrow an expression from the anti-colonial thinker Frantz Fanon, to account for the material relations of domination better than could be expected of any one thinker. Though the Combahee River Collective recognise limitations to Marx's corpus, they locate their project in the extension rather than in the rejection of his fundamental problematic – a sustained critique of capitalism.<sup>40</sup>

39 The Combahee River Collective 1977.

40 In Susan Archer Mann's *Doing Feminist Theory*, an exhaustive account of the history of feminist scholarship, Marxist feminism and intersectionality theories are treated as completely distinct, with separate chapters for each. Mann in a certain sense contributes to the false separation between intersectionality and Marxist/materialist/socialist feminisms by treating them separately. Though she mentions briefly at the end of her history of Marxist feminisms that all the founders of the Combahee River Collective identified as socialists, this insight appears as an afterthought, buried in the conclusion of a 40-page chapter that completely occludes the vibrant history of women-of-colour Marxist feminisms. In the same conclusion, she also mentions Angela Davis, but rather than discuss her work as a Marxist, the only sustained treatment of Davis's work comes in the chapter on intersectionality theory. I do not mean to embark on an extended critique of this one text in particular, but I do think it is necessary to make the point explicitly that

Many other women-of-colour feminists who engage race, class, gender and sexuality simultaneously also position their politics as fundamentally Marxist in character. Angela Davis, Assata Shakur, Claudia Jones, Lucy Parsons and many other black women of this tradition identified capitalism as one of the primary causes of the global system of dispossession and domination. Many of the black women active in organisations like the United States Communist Party, the Black Panthers and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee identified themselves as Marxists, socialists, or anticapitalist anarchists. Many Latina, hispana, chicana and xicana feminists themselves also mobilised Marxism in the definitions of their struggles both in the mid-century and in contemporary liberation struggles like the EZLN. Martha Gimenez, cited above, and Maria Lugones have contributed incomparably to both Marxist theories of capitalism and intersectional theories of oppression. Looking back to the early twentieth century, Mother Jones, an Irish immigrant, and Emma Goldman, a Jewish theorist and activist, advocated both feminism and anti-racism at a time when the Irish and Jews were not considered white.<sup>41</sup> Transnational feminisms have long used Marxist analyses of capitalism to explain the racialised and gendered systems of disempowerment that characterised imperialism and colonialism in the global South.

White Marxists, too, have had considerable things to say about the relationships between capitalism, race and gender that are often forgotten or under-thematized in contemporary histories. Rosa Luxemburg's landmark text *The Accumulation of Capital* argues that imperialism and colonisation were both logically and historically necessary for the system of capitalism to function. V.I. Lenin also posited white Euro-imperialism as an inextricable part of capitalism. Even Marx himself wrote about the plight of slavery in the United States, as well as the colonisation of North America, China, India and Ireland. While none of these authors had an explicit theory of race in all of its complexities and multiplicities, they did clearly have an analysis of global exploitation, dispossession and power relations that recognised the co-constitution of racialised systems of violence and capitalism. Other white Marxist theorists have

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intersectionality was a Marxist project, one that utilised the insights of Marxist feminism to create a new and incredibly important perspective on oppression and domination. I stress this point only to highlight that although it is a commonplace in the literature to counterpose intersectionality and Marxism, the founding texts of intersectionality reject this kind of dichotomy.

- 41 Though in the contemporary regime of racialisation neither Jones nor Goldman would be considered women of colour, it is important to read them in their historical context, refusing to white-wash women who faced considerable obstacles as racialised bodies in their time.

proposed detailed theories of race specifically; Theodore Allen's two volume *The Invention of the White Race*, David Roediger and Elizabeth Esch's *The Production of Difference* and Jodi Melamed's *Represent and Destroy* are exemplary in this regard.

This is not to say that Marxism and intersectionality have only one shared history, or that each of these figures and texts offered exhaustive and definitive analyses of the structures in question. Rather, this alternative historiography shows that analyses of capitalism are not alien to intersectionality, and nor have extended considerations of race, gender, colonialism and imperialism been wholly absent from Marxism. Rather, I return to these figures to emphasise that there is already a significant history, both activist and academic, of common ground and common work between these frameworks, a history that could form the basis for a more integrated theory of intersectional capitalism.

### 3.2 *Colonial Heterosexualism and the Invention of Capitalism*

By foregrounding the shared theoretical and political ground between Marxism and intersectionality, we begin to see a path for an intersectional theory of capitalism emerge, one that would offer a sustained, nuanced critique of the logic and structure of capitalism *through* an analysis of race, gender, class, sexuality, imperialism and colonisation. The reading I propose in this section is that capitalism *is just* the conjunction of these structures of dispossession. Following the important work of Silvia Federici, Anne McClintock, Maria Lugones and others, I argue that capitalism cannot be adequately rendered by class-only or class-primary accounts, but that economic class structure is merely one part of a complex and multifaceted system of domination in which patriarchy, white supremacy, colonisation (both direct and indirect) and heterosexualism are fundamental, constitutively ineradicable, equiprimordial elements. This approach does not de-emphasise more traditional class analysis but follows the key insights of intersectionality in arguing that class, race, gender, sexuality, colonisation and imperialism are constituted in and through one another in such a way that class cannot be considered the master-term of capitalist accumulation and antagonism. A truly adequate analysis of capitalism, both theoretically and historically, I argue, treats capitalism as the original synthesis of these systems of dispossession.

The wage relation has often been taken as the starting-point for the analysis of capitalism. Much of Marx's account in *Capital* unpacks the historically specific emergence of the organisation of labour under the wage as the major factor differentiating capitalism from the feudal economy which preceded it. As Marx and others have remarked, the invention of wage labour as a mechanism of market compulsion is one of the most historically salient changes in

the modes of production. So it is no surprise that, since the late nineteenth century, most analyses of capitalism have begun with an analysis of waged labour or have considered only wage labour.

But more recently, theorists have come to understand that the wage relation, while definitive for white European men, is only one part of the story of capitalism. As Marxist feminists have argued since the mid-twentieth century, unwaged labour forms a constitutive element of capitalism as well. Many Marxist feminists focused on what they called 'social reproduction' – the unwaged labour of cooking, cleaning, subsistence farming, bearing and rearing children, and multiple modes of affective and care work that are structurally necessary for the continuation of capitalist society, but which remain unwaged. Social-reproduction theorists have argued that the fact that this labour, undertaken primarily by women, is unwaged, forms a structural necessity under capitalism, for it allows the capitalist to glean the benefits of reproductive labour necessary for the waged worker to enter the formal economy without paying for it; they argue that if all of this labour were paid, it would make the capitalist system itself insolvent.<sup>42</sup> This structural dependence on the unwaged labour of women leads Maria Mies to deem social reproduction a position of 'structurally necessary super-exploitation' to which women are generally subjected and which affects women of colour and women from the global South in particularly violent ways.<sup>43</sup>

But women's work in the home was not the only form of unwaged labour on which capitalism depends. As Domenico Losurdo,<sup>44</sup> Sidney Mintz<sup>45</sup> and Eric Williams<sup>46</sup> have all convincingly argued, capitalism would not have been possible without the invention of the distinctive brand of transatlantic chattel slavery that formed the basis of European economies through the nineteenth century. Dorothy Roberts,<sup>47</sup> Jennifer Morgan,<sup>48</sup> Amy Dru Stanley<sup>49</sup> and bell hooks<sup>50</sup> have further clarified the specific role of enslaved women in the accumulative regime of capitalism, as their bodies were violently used as a means to

42 Elements of this argument have been made by a wide variety of feminist theorists, including Silvia Federici, Maria Mies, Giovanna Franca Dalla Costa (Dalla Costa 2008), Selma James and Mariarosa Dalla Costa (James and Dalla Costa 1973), Kathi Weeks (Weeks 2011), Nancy Fraser (Fraser 2013), Lise Vogel (Vogel 1983) and innumerable others.

43 See Mies 1986.

44 Losurdo 2011.

45 Mintz 1985.

46 Williams 1994.

47 Roberts 1997.

48 Morgan 2004.

49 Stanley 1998.

50 hooks 1981.

birth new slaves and perpetuate the regime of slavery-based capitalism. Many enduring racialising and gendered stereotypes that still hold power in the contemporary world were generated in order to secure this means of reproducing the institution of slavery; the hypersexualisation of racialised bodies served to legitimate the mass rape of enslaved women, and later to enforce the terror of lynching when slavery was no longer a viable social form. All of these theorists have contextualised the emergence of race in the eighteenth century and the persistence of anti-black racism as direct consequences of slavery.

Capitalism also would not have been possible or successful without a sustained regime of colonisation. Andrea Smith,<sup>51</sup> Anne McClintock<sup>52</sup> and Domenico Losurdo<sup>53</sup> argue that the dispossession of indigenous peoples from their lands in North America formed a necessary historical condition for the concretion of capitalism. As Quijano explains, 'The vast genocide of the Indians in the first decades of colonization was not caused principally by the violence of the conquest nor by the plagues the conquistadors brought, but took place because so many American Indians were used as disposable manual labor and forced to work until death.'<sup>54</sup>

Marx himself gestures toward the unwaged aspects of capitalism as being structurally necessary. In Chapter 26 of *Capital, Volume I*, Marx submits to critique Adam Smith's notion of primitive accumulation to argue that the proximate cause of capitalism was not the thrifty ingenuity of rich Europeans, but rather sustained campaigns of slaughter, enslavement, genocide and dispossession. Contemporary theorists have expanded Marx's quite succinct analysis of primitive accumulation, placing it at the centre of the historical and theoretical structures of capitalism.<sup>55</sup>

Attempting to synthesise these different spheres of unwaged labour under capitalism, Quijano develops an analysis of what he calls the 'coloniality of power'. Maria Lugones reconstructs this concept:

In Quijano's model of global capitalist Eurocentered power, 'capitalism' refers to the structural articulation of all historically known forms of control of labor or exploitation, slavery, servitude, small independent mercantile production, wage labor, and reciprocity under the hegemony of the capital-wage labor relation. In this sense, the structuring of the

51 Smith 2005.

52 McClintock 1995.

53 Losurdo 2011.

54 Quijano 2000, p. 538.

55 Mies 1986; Perelman 2000; Federici 2004.

disputes over control of labor are discontinuous: not all labor relations under global, Eurocentered capitalism fall under the capital/wage relation model, though this is the hegemonic model. It is important in beginning to see the reach of the coloniality of power that wage labor has been reserved almost exclusively for white Europeans. The division of labor is thoroughly 'racialized' as well as geographically differentiated. Here we see the coloniality of labor as a thorough meshing of labor and 'race'.<sup>56</sup>

While the coloniality of power provides an immensely powerful analytic for the phenomena under discussion, Lugones submits Quijano's model to critique for its erasure of the gendered and sexual dynamics of colonial capital. She complicates and expands the coloniality of power to include what she calls 'heterosexualism' as a founding and constitutive element in the ruling colonial capitalist order:

Considering critically both biological dimorphism and the position that gender socially constructs biological sex is pivotal to understand the scope, depth, and characteristics of the colonial/modern gender system. The sense is that the reduction of gender to the private, to control over sex and its resources and products is a matter of ideology, of the cognitive production of modernity that understood race as gendered and gender as raced in particularly differential ways for Europeans/'whites' and colonized/'non-white' peoples. Race is no more mythical and fictional than gender, both powerful fictions.<sup>57</sup>

Lugones's analysis of the creation of the modern regimes of race, gender and heterosexuality through the regime of colonial capital provides one of the most nuanced accounts of the inextricably interwoven regimes of domination. Her analysis, which focuses on the ways in which white colonisers imposed regimes of rationality, race, gender, sex and sexuality becomes even more powerful when conjoined with Anne McClintock's, who argues that the power relations entailed in colonisation were not simply unidirectional, but rather contained incredibly important consequences for the construction of race, gender, sex and sexuality inside white Euro-society. In her landmark text *Imperial Leather*, McClintock explains that in the nineteenth century, 'sexual purity emerged as a controlling metaphor for racial, economic and political power', a metaphor that while it was deployed differently for men and women,

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<sup>56</sup> Lugones 2007, p. 20.

<sup>57</sup> Lugones 2007, p. 12.



for whites and for blacks, had deep effects on social relations even inside colonial societies.<sup>58</sup> One of the lasting effects of the heterosexualist coloniality of power, McClintock argues, is a kind of hierarchical inventory of human beings, one that justified not only the subjugation of non-white and colonised people, but that of women and workers generally. In this regime, 'the English middle-class male was placed at the pinnacle of evolutionary hierarchy. White English middle class women followed. Domestic workers, female miners and working class prostitutes were stationed on the threshold between the white and black races'.<sup>59</sup> What is crucial about McClintock's analysis is the recognition that the kind of domination enacted in the colonies contained significant effects on individuals located on all sides of these power relations. This is not to say that these effects were the same; not at all. The discourse of purity, for example, has never had the same effect on white women as black women, though it was used as a technique of domination on both. The central insight, however, is that techniques and discourses of power are *relational*; they contain reverberating effects for the construction of subjectivity for both the oppressed and the oppressor, as well as for those who benefit materially from oppression but have little direct control over the processes of its concretion and maintenance (for example, white women who benefitted materially from systems of white supremacy, but had little political, economic or social clout in the direct organisation of the institutions which created it).

The analysis of the relationality of power is the central insight of an intersectional critique of capitalism. The above analyses show that capitalism *required* colonisation and its attendant systems of racial, gender and sexual control. But what this last piece offered by McClintock is able to thematise is the way in which the central wage-relation at the heart of the European bourgeoisie/proletarian split is itself simultaneously the cause and the effect of the regime of colonial heterosexualism. Or, to put this another way, the European class system developed in and through the regimes of racial, gendered and sexual power of capitalist colonialism. Again, this does not mean that racialisation, sexualisation or gendering happened in the same way in the alleys of Paris as on the plantations of Haiti, but rather that the fate of the European working class and colonised populations cannot be considered separately from the perspective of capitalism. The profit-logic of capitalism, with its necessarily consequent ideas about reason, labour, race, gender and sexuality created both the metropole and the colonies simultaneously, and subjects on both sides of this divide were constructed, through systems of domination and exploitation,

58 McClintock 1995, p. 47.

59 McClintock 1995, p. 56.

in the image of what capitalism needed to survive. That capitalism requires multiple kinds of exploitation, multiple forms of dispossession, and multiple kinds of subjects in order to gain global hegemony is corroborative evidence for Marx's fundamental diagnosis of the system's simultaneous resilience and its ultimate fragility.

#### 4 Conclusion: Toward an Intersectional Critique of Capitalism

The intersectional critique of capitalism that I have been trying to develop departs radically from prevailing Marxist arguments about the nature of class. I argue that to claim that capitalism is the root of the modern class, gender, sexuality and race systems of oppression is not to say that class is the primary or privileged axis of oppression. Rather, Marxist analyses gives the clearest analysis of certain aspects of class and also, more so than other theories, have devoted much time, effort and energy to detailing the historical and contemporary workings of capitalism. So while I do, in this analysis, privilege capitalism as the name of the system oppressing us all, I do not hold that class, as an isolatable economic or social determination, gives us a privileged understanding of capitalism, or at least, it does not do so any more than race, gender, or sexuality. Slavery, colonialism, patriarchy, white supremacy – all these were developed in and through capitalism, at least in their modern and contemporary forms. So when I call the 'matrix of domination' capitalism, this should not mean that economic determinations are privileged in this analysis.

I give one single name to this system because I believe it is a *coherent system*. What the very helpful, incredibly fruitful analyses of 'intersecting oppressions', the 'matrix of domination' and 'simultaneous oppressions' do not adequately render is the unity of these oppressions; to say that oppressions intersect, interact and mutually-reinforce one another is still to pose them as separate. The work of the intersectionality theorists who coined these terms themselves have argued convincingly that race, class, gender and sexuality in fact cannot be separated and were historically concreted in and through one another. In this respect, their insights go far beyond the language they use to describe the phenomena they explain. When intersectionality scholars argue for the centrality of identity politics, they are arguing for the fundamental truth that the oppressions which have been most explicitly theorised in relation to individual identities are precisely the oppressions that must be interrogated as the basis for any structural analysis of domination in the contemporary world. In this sense, the politics of identity espoused by intersectionality, as group-based, historically concreted oppressions goes far beyond the experience of

individual identity while also insisting that individuals and their experiences must be an ineliminable part of our theorising. Just as Marx once criticised Feuerbach for speaking of Man when he should have spoken of ‘real historical men’,<sup>60</sup> so too our analysis of capitalism must speak of real historical people – men, women, and gender non-conforming people – which means speaking of their real identities and the social locations those identities produce.

I return to Lugones once more to articulate this framework. She writes,

the image of interlocking [oppressions] is of two entirely discreet things, like two pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. I am not ready to give up the term because it is used by other women of color theorists who write in a liberatory vein about enmeshed oppressions. I think interwoven or intermeshed or enmeshed may provide better images.<sup>61</sup>

I want to follow Lugones here, in not jettisoning the term ‘intersectionality’, as it is this vein and tradition of thinking and writing from which this project comes and it is her to whom I want to explicitly acknowledge my intellectual debt. I agree with Lugones that interwoven oppressions are the best way to render racism, exploitation, white supremacy, colonialism, heterosexism, cissexism. What I want to suggest is that if these oppressions are interwoven, then the tapestry is capitalism.<sup>62</sup>

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62 I thank Gil Morejón for this incredibly insightful way of framing this intervention.

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