



Imbrication of Oppressions: An Analytical Perspective on Work

Doi: <https://doi.org/10.59514/2954-7261.3190>

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Para citar este artículo / To reference this article / Para citar este artigo
Correa García, N. (2023). Imbrication Oppressions: An Analytical Perspective on Work. *Calarma Journal*, 2(3), 121–140. <https://doi.org/10.59514/2954-7261.3190>

Author Declaration

The author declares that she has participated in the entire scientific process of this research, including conceptualization, methodology, writing, and editing. She also declares that she has no potential conflicts of interest regarding the authorship and publication of this article.

Abstract

In this article, I critically examine work through the lens of imbrication oppressions. Initially, I undertake a genealogical approach to the theoretical-political contributions related to the imbrication of oppressions and then critically discuss work from this analytical perspective. I primarily draw upon conceptualizations from feminist thought and Latin American researchers who have addressed issues of work, the sexual division of labor, and the critiques thereof. Analyzing from the perspective of imbrication oppressions entails studying how oppressive structures are linked, resulting in a conjunction that manifests in specific life experiences and conditions. I identify as oppressive structures stemming from capitalism (class inequalities), coloniality (ethnic-racial inequalities), and patriarchy (gender inequalities and sexual dissidence). Moreover, each structure impacts the others; they are both products and producers of one another. Coloniality has been a component of capitalist expansion, while capitalism has shaped geopolitics that underpins coloniality. Similarly, capitalism and patriarchy intersect, as seen in the sexual division of labor. This perspective means that we cannot consider these structures in isolation, as each is inseparable from the others, and their intersection results in specific social, historical, political, and economic conditions that delineate ways of living in the world.¹

Keywords: Intersection of oppressions; labor; sexual division of labor; feminisms.

Imbricação de opressões: uma perspectiva de análise para pensar o trabalho

Resumo

Neste artigo, problematizo o trabalho a partir da perspectiva de análise da imbricação das opressões. Para isso, em primeiro lugar, faço uma abordagem genealógica sobre as contribuições teórico-políticas em relação à imbricação das opressões, para depois problematizar o trabalho sob esta perspectiva. Principalmente, recupero conceituações dos feminismos e de pesquisadoras latino-americanas que abordaram o tema do trabalho, a divisão sexual do trabalho, bem como a crítica que é feita a esta última. Analisar a partir da imbricação

¹ This article is part of my doctoral research work between 2016 and 2021 in the Graduate Program in Latin American Studies at the National Autonomous University of Mexico.

das opressões implica estudar como as estruturas de opressão se entrelaçam, gerando uma conjunção entre elas que se traduz em experiências e condições de vida concretas. Identifico como estruturas de opressão aquelas que derivam do capitalismo (desigualdades de classe), da colonialidade (desigualdades étnico-raciais) e do patriarcado (desigualdades de gênero e por dissidências sexuais). Além disso, cada estrutura impacta as outras, pois são produto e produtoras entre si. A colonialidade tem sido parte da expansão capitalista e, ao mesmo tempo, o capitalismo tem delineado uma geopolítica que sustenta a colonialidade, assim como o capitalismo e o patriarcado convergem, por exemplo, na divisão sexual do trabalho. Ou seja, não podemos pensar nessas estruturas de forma separada, pois cada uma é indissociável das outras, e sua conjunção produz condições sociais, históricas, políticas e econômicas que delineiam formas de viver no mundo. Palavras-chave: imbricação de opressões; trabalho; divisão sexual do trabalho; feminismos.

Imbrication of Oppressions

“When I realized I had crossed the border, I looked at my hands to see if I was still the same person. With its golden rays, the sun shone through the trees and fell upon the fields, and I felt like I was in heaven.” Harriet Tubman.

One of the essential antecedents to consider the imbrication of oppressions is traced back to the “Combahee River Collective Statement” of 1977. The collective, composed of African American feminists from Boston, chose this name to honor the African American abolitionist and suffragist Harriet Tubman². This historic event was in tribute to the “Combahee River” raid she led on June 2, 1863, in South Carolina, where she liberated more than seven hundred

² Tubman not only managed to escape slavery in 1849 but also became one of the most prominent fighters for the freedom of enslaved African Americans. She actively participated in the anti-slavery “Underground Railroad,” undertaking rescue and escape missions, guiding those she helped along various routes for over eleven years, and employing a myriad of strategies to remain undetected. The network was made up of free African Americans, white abolitionists, and Christian activists. With the onset of the Civil War in 1861, she quickly joined the efforts, recognizing the potential to abolish slavery with the North’s victory. Following the significant Combahee River operation, she continued working for the troops for another two years. She never received a regular salary and faced numerous bureaucratic hurdles to obtain compensation or a pension for her services. However, despite these economic hardships, she was widely recognized and celebrated during her lifetime. In her later years, she also championed the suffragist cause for women’s voting rights. When asked if she believed in the importance of women voting, she responded, “I have suffered enough to believe it” (Clinton, 2004:191).

enslaved individuals. It remains the only armed action planned and directed by a woman in American history (Clinton, 2004).

The manifesto articulated the political, theoretical, and methodological guidelines developed from social and academic perspectives. These guidelines would later form the foundation of what was theoretically presented as “intersectionality,” emphasizing that “the personal is political.” The manifesto stressed that issues could not be approached solely from the inequalities of the gender-sex category. Instead, it was essential to address gender-sex, class, and raciality jointly. The manifesto also revalued knowledge originating from and centered on the experiences of black women in dialogue with the developments of standpoint theory (Viveros, 2016), and what Patricia Hill Collins (2000) would later term the “black women’s standpoint.”

(...) The most general statement of our politics at this point would be that we are committed to fighting against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression, and our specific task is the development of an integrated analysis and practice because the major systems of oppression are interlinked. The synthesis of these oppressions creates the conditions of our lives. As Black women, we see Black feminism as the logical political movement to combat the multiple and simultaneous oppressions faced by all women of color (Combahee River Collective Statement, 1977).

This statement establishes the need to confront a set of oppressions simultaneously without hierarchizing any of them. Likewise, authors and researchers such as Angela Davis, Audre Lorde, bell hooks, Chela Sandoval, Gloria Anzaldúa, and María Lugones, among many others, challenged the generalizations of “white” feminism and denounced the shortcomings of not considering class and racialization in their approaches.

A few years before the publication of the “Combahee River Collective Statement,” Angela Davis recalls that while she was imprisoned in 1970, she was given a newspaper created by a group of radical anti-racist women. The group was named “Third World Women Alliance³,”

³ The precursor to the “Third World Women’s Alliance” was “The Black Women’s Alliance,” which operated from 1965 to 1970. It emerged after 1964, the year which saw the declaration of the Freedom Summer. Women were the main organizers of the action during this period, but they noticed they did not receive the same public recognition as men. They began to challenge the patriarchal structures of social organizations. However, two events motivated the name change: the Vietnam War and the development of the capitalist pharmaceutical industry in the US. In Puerto Rico, forced sterilization was carried out on many women of childbearing age while simultaneously, the pharmaceutical industry was conducting experiments on birth control pills (Davis, 2019).

and the newspaper was titled “Triple Jeopardy,” referring to racism and sexism, as well as the exploitation of capitalism and the domination of imperialism. One of the first campaigns undertaken by the group was against the forced sterilization implemented on women in Puerto Rico and Indigenous and African American women in the southern United States. This event happened while the capitalist American pharmaceutical industry tested birth control pills (Davis, 2019).

The challenge of problematizing from the imbrication of oppression is to think about all issues simultaneously as part of the same fabric. In that framework, “there is a vibrant history of black women’s activism behind the academic category of intersectionality, which many of us use today as a shorthand for the diverse features that black feminism has brought with it” (Davis, 2019, p. 44).

The Mexican anthropologist Mercedes Olivera published texts in the mid-seventies that pioneered in problematizing women’s oppressions from anthropology (Olivera, 1975, 1976, 1979). In each text, Olivera addresses exploitation and oppressions from the Marxist framework, emphasizing how they further impact women. The text “On the exploitation and oppression of indentured women in Chiapas” (Olivera, 1979)⁴ is very significant because, in addition to providing a historical overview shaped by colonialism, it accounts for the working and living conditions of the indigenous population and of the indentured indigenous women. There, she evidences oppression by gender, class, and ethnicity-race (Castañeda, 2012). Furthermore, she studies the paternalistic and sexist ideology that lingered from the colonial era and the *compadrazgo* pacts between laborers and bosses. She also states that these forms of indentured labor are not solely a colonial historical remnant but, at the same time, a product of capitalism that has repurposed previous labor forms (Olivera, 1979 and 2019).

Olivera documents the types of domestic and productive work carried out by women for landowners. She also denounces the sexual abuses these women suffered at their hands, abuses which included the so-called “droit de seigneur⁵” or “right of the first night.”

⁴ Indentured labor is characterized by working and living on an estate or plantation in exchange for the use of a piece of land. Therefore, it can have some similarities with the forms and labor relationships of the feudal system in rural areas.

⁵ The ‘right of first night’ is a medieval practice wherein the feudal lord held the right to spend the first night with a subordinate bride within his fiefdom before she consummated her marriage with her husband.

Many women denounced the conditions in which indigenous women lived. Among them were prominent social fighters. The “Revolutionary Women’s Law,” crafted by Zapatista women in 1993, unanimously approved and published on December 1st, 1993, marked an unprecedented historical milestone for Zapatista women, indigenous women, and all women. When one collective progresses on the path of emancipation, we all advance.

Mercedes Olivera dedicated several decades to deepening⁶ the analysis of the triple subordination of indigenous women due to class, gender, and ethnicity-racial factors, as well as the historical subjectivities contributing to its perpetuation. Based on her research and field experiences, she would agree with what Marcela Lagarde (2005) termed the “triple oppression” of indigenous women, a concept aligned with what later began to be recognized as the intersection of multiple categories (Lugones, 2008).

Marcela Lagarde completed her writing of “The Captivities of Women: Motherswives, Nuns, Prostitutes, Prisoners, and Madwomen” in 1988 and defended her doctoral thesis in 1989. The thesis was later published as a book, with many reprints and wide international distribution. In the chapter dedicated to patriarchal and classist oppressions, Lagarde develops the notion of patriarchy and conceptualizes the oppression of women following the theoretical contributions of socialist feminists like Flora Tristán and Alexandra Kollontai, among others. The double oppression of women lies in the gender oppression within the framework of patriarchy and by capital, with the latter being mainly the case for working women.

In social life, this double oppression does not occur separately nor in different spheres. It is the dialectical synthesis of generic oppression and class; it is how patriarchal capital exploits and oppresses female workers, peasants, and wage earners (Lagarde, 1990 and 2005, p. 103).

Women’s position in production relationships and reproduction, that is, the control of their bodies, their sexuality, their lives, and domestic times, will determine the specifics of this double oppression (Lagarde, 1990 and 2005). She also proposes the triple oppression of indigenous women defined by the combination of oppressions by gender, class, and ethnicity. Following Lagarde, it is generic oppression because, within the framework of patriarchy, all women share gender oppression; it is classist because most indigenous women are among

⁶ In articles such as ‘A Long History of Discriminations and Racisms’ from 2004 and ‘Ethnic and Gender Discrimination of Indigenous Women in the 19th Century’ from 2005, among others, Olivera continues her analysis of the triple subordination faced by indigenous women due to class, gender, and ethnic-racial reasons, as well as the historical subjectivities that contribute to their perpetuation.

the exploited; and it is ethnic because they are part of the populations considered “ethnic minorities” harassed by racism.

African American lawyer Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term “intersectionality” in 1989 in a discussion about the legal case of Emma DeGraffenreid⁷ and four other women against the American company General Motors for racial and gender discrimination. She intended to create concrete legal categories for practical use to highlight omissions and combat violence and discrimination for reasons of gender and race. Categories that would allow her to refute the court’s argument that had dismissed the claim. The court’s rationale for dismissing the claim was that the employer (General Motors) had hired African Americans and women. However, the issue was that the hired African Americans were men, mainly for industrial plant jobs, and the hired women, usually for secretarial jobs or visible office positions, were white (Crenshaw, 2016).

Except for the janitor, African American women were primarily hired for upholstery or cleaning jobs, which were the most vulnerable in terms of labor rights in the company due to the seniority system and the “last hired first out” layoff policy, a regulation generated by collective bargaining agreement between General Motors and the union. The court dismissed the claim, indicating that it was not viable to treat both discriminations together as they considered the “cause of action as discrimination by race, sexual discrimination, but not a combination of both” (DeGraffenreid et al., vs. General Motors Assembly Division, St. Louis, No. 76-1599. United States Court of Appeals, 1977). They also argued that if the two discriminations were considered, it could place the plaintiffs in a “privileged” position regarding the rights of white women and African American men. However, neither white women nor African American men would find themselves in situations of racial and sexual discrimination jointly.

Crenshaw (2016) used the intersection analogy to get the judges to see the legal invisibility of the multiple oppressions experienced by African American female workers. The concept aimed to reveal how legal structures present these oppressions in a fragmented way, leaving legal gaps that further increase inequalities. However, Crenshaw herself has made it clear that her use of intersectionality is contextual and practical, not aiming to generate a theory

⁷ Emma DeGraffenreid was an African American woman who, along with Brenda Hines, Alberta Chapman, Brenda Hollis, and Patricia Bell, sued General Motors for discrimination on two grounds: racial and gender discrimination. All had been employees of the plant located in St. Louis.

of oppressions, but to have a practical conceptual tool for analyzing inequalities and legal omissions (Viveros, 2016).

Subsequently, intersectionality has undergone various theoretical, analytical, and phenomenological evolutions, with outcomes that vary based on geographical location and the approach framework. Hill Collins (2000) theoretically developed intersectionality as a paradigm, while Ange Marie Hancock (2007) formalized the paradigm from structural aspects, identifying basic premises for understanding intersectionality.

In the United States, theoretical elaborations around intersectionality are deeply influenced by Black feminism, whereas in Europe, some of its subsequent developments are more related to postmodern thought. In Latin America, it is recently (at the beginning of the 21st century) that the concept began to be more extensively explored in academic circles (Viveros, 2016). According to the analysis of Martha Zapata Galindo (2011), the arrival of the concept in these regions is not particularly novel, as “the social experiences of a vast majority of Latin American women have compelled them to acknowledge and confront, both theoretically, practically, and politically, various forms of oppression that are simultaneous and intersected” (Viveros, 2016, p. 9). One critique from Latin American feminisms emphasizes, both theoretically and politically, that the characteristics of gender and racial inequalities are not universal, introducing into the debate aspects like compulsory heterosexuality, racial mixing, the creation of nation-states, and coloniality as an ongoing process up to the present, and how it continues to exert power in knowledge production practices, among other topics (Espinosa, 2007; Mendoza, 2010; Curiel, 2013).

María Lugones (2005) revisits the notion of intersectionality crafted by Crenshaw and, in turn, critically proposes the need to transition from the logic of intersectionality to the logic of fusion and weaving, where the latter “defends the logical inseparability of race, class, sexuality, and gender. While the logic of interconnection leaves the logic of the categories intact, the logic of fusion destroys it” (2005, p. 66). Lugones emphasizes the importance of observing the intersection of these categories since, once the intersection is discerned, it unveils violence, an action she considers radical. However, her critique points out that merely observing violence does not imply an act of resistance, as it requires an opposing force.

The logic of domination imposes a categorical conception of what is a fusion or web of oppressions. The place of oppression can be understood as an overlap of intersecting or intertwined oppressions that weave or merge. Gender and race, for instance, do not intersect as separate and separable oppression categories. Instead, gender and racial oppression affect individuals without any possibility of separation (Lugones, 2005, p. 69).

Moreover, it is essential to recognize the relational character of differences and oppressions. That is, one must acknowledge that certain people live the lives they do because others live different types of lives. For instance, Elsa Barkley Brown clarifies this by stating, “It is important to recognize that these middle-class women live the lives they do precisely because working-class women live the lives they do” (1991, p. 86).

Lugones revisits Audre Lorde’s idea of “non-dominant differences” (1984 and 2003), which presents another analysis route distinct from Crenshaw’s starting point. The goal is to demonstrate, through lived experience, the inseparable fabric formed by class, raciality, gender, and other social factors. Hence, Lugones proposes moving to the fusion logic to overcome individual and collective fragmentations. On the other hand, within the social weave, differences are manifold. In this context, she revisits Lorde, who celebrates the differences and the interdependence of these non-dominant differences. She is “celebrating what we create within those different, yet non-dominant, resistant circles within which ‘we create our faces,’ to quote Gloria Anzaldúa’s phrase” (Lugones, 2005, p. 70).

In Brazil, Lélia Gonzalez developed the concept of “amefricanity” to address the rejection of Latin identity as a form of Eurocentrism that conceals the Indigenous and Black contributions to American construction (Curiel, 2009). “Amefricanity” is a category to name the colonial wound from the Afro perspective, which also seeks to reclaim historical memory and cultural and political resistance. Lélia Gonzalez was one of the first in South America to problematize, from a feminist viewpoint, the interrelation between classism, sexism, and racism (Bairros, 2000a; Curiel, 2009). Sueli Carneiro (2005) analyzes the sexual division of labor to highlight the situation of racialized women, which is far removed from the demands of white feminism. She also questions the myth of female fragility that has been perpetuated to justify a specific form of male protection.

We—the Black women—are part of a group of women, likely the majority, who never recognized this myth in themselves because they were never treated as fragile. We are part of a group of women who worked for centuries as enslaved people, tilling the land or on the streets as vendors or prostitutes. Women were baffled when feminists said that women should take to the streets and work (Carneiro, 2005, p. 22).

Aura Cumes (2014) addresses the ongoing and historical social imposition of “domestic servitude” on indigenous women in Guatemala from the colonial period to the present—with its various manifestations. In a similar vein, Sueli Carneiro describes the situation for

Black women in Brazil, stating, “We are part of a group of women with objectified identities. Yesterday, at the service of fragile ladies and debilitated noble lords. Today, housemaids of liberated women” (2005, p. 22). Carneiro proposes to blacken feminism and feminize the anti-racist struggle, as it is impossible to separate oppressions by gender and race.

Luiza Bairros, in her article “Our Revisited Feminisms” (2000b), revisits and describes a scene from a TV show where a racialized domestic worker stands marginalized and silent, highlighting the condition of marginalization in Brazil. The author will articulate her analysis from the standpoint of feminist theory to understand different feminisms, to think in terms of anti-racist movements, and to give voice to lived experiences.

This arises from the need to give voice to the various ways of experiencing being Black (lived “through” gender) and being a woman (lived “through” race). This makes discussions about the priorities of the Black women’s movement—whether the fight is against sexism or racism—redundant since the two dimensions cannot be separated. From the perspective of reflection and political action, one does not exist without the other (Bairros, 2000b, p. 146).

The contributions and reflections from the imbrication of oppressions understand the fabric of unequal relations. Next, from this analytical perspective, I will address the notion of work, the sexual division of labor, and the critique made of the latter from Black and decolonial feminisms.

Work and the Sexual Division of Labor

Work represents the human capacity to transform nature—which we are a part of—enabling our survival in a dialectic bond in which we also transform ourselves (Marx, 1890 & 2007). For every human life, work is a primary condition. It is a process of action and exchange with nature that progressively became a historical, social relationship and interaction process. Work is a human activity that involves reflection and anticipation, and it can develop individually or collectively, possessing a social, complex, and dynamic nature (Blanch, 2003). Additionally, work is not merely about applying knowledge and skills to meet needs; work primarily involves self-transformation by changing reality as a fundamental action.

Work is not arbitrary. Without it, human life would be impossible, leading to death. Thus, work is one of the essential tenets of human existence. It is through work that humans exist. In this regard, human life is not a natural occurrence: it emerges from the execution of creative energy and the social will of humans—both women and men (Lagarde, 1990 & 2005, p. 112).

The capacity for transformation became paradoxical. On the one hand, there is the potential for emancipatory action; on the other, there are logics of domination, exploitation, and discipline. Transforming nature does not necessarily mean exploiting it, but it has been brutally executed with the advance of capitalism. Work, as we know it, spans a minimal period in human history, which relates to the development of the capitalist system and its production and social reproduction logic (Federici, 2011). When conditions for original accumulation were created, capitalist deployment led to industrial development and, subsequently, the configuration of national and international markets (Rieznik, 2001). Colonialist and patriarchal ambitions facilitated this meshing, forming a typical scene with capitalist advancement.

Regarding the sexual division of labor, it is worth mentioning that it is not the division that produces sexist inequalities between men and women. The division of labor doesn't create social relations. Instead, these social relations project onto how labor is organized and how tasks and activities are divided. Society constructs forms and representations about task distribution among genders based on socially developed and determined skills (Comas, 1998).

Historically, due to the patriarchal system, there has been a dominance of the “white heterosexual man”, which results in women undertaking occupations with less added value. In comparison, activities with higher social value are deemed masculine, relegating women to reproductive tasks laden with social devaluation (Federici, 2011). Reproductive labor encompasses all actions ensuring the continuity of life, from caregiving domestic tasks to bringing children into the world and all daily tasks that enable us to keep living. Reproduction, then, has a dual nature: it reproduces our lives but also reproduces labor.

Various studies have been conducted to understand when and why sexist discrimination arose in different spheres, including work. Generalizations do not aid these analyses, as it is crucial to consider each society's historical moment and how it organizes its social relations. However, there is a pivotal point to understanding the unfolding of capitalism and, in tandem, the different roles and activities divided by sex-gender; this critical point is the process of primitive accumulation (Olivera, 1976 and 2019; Federici, 2011).

As architects of production, the sexual division of labor positions many women within the private realm, responsible for reproduction, and men in the public sphere (Federici, 2011). Franca Basaglia (1985) argues that viewing women as bodies for others (for men or reproduction) has hindered their recognition as social historical subjects. Their subjectivity has been constrained and imprisoned within a sexuality for others. Marcela Lagarde suggests

that by conditioning women to a “sexuality-for-others and specializing them in it, they are stripped of the practical and philosophical possibility of life choice” (Lagarde, 1990/2005, p. 16).

Thus, many women found themselves confined to the private realm, tasked with reproduction, caregiving, and generating values within the family. These roles are intrinsic to the development of capitalism, which upholds relationships of exploitation and unequal appropriation of life-sustaining resources. Patriarchy elevates the power position of the heterosexual male, also legitimizing capitalist control (Butler, 1999 and 2007; Federici, 2013).

Women’s oppression largely occurs within the institutional framework of the family. The capitalist system has inevitably and almost exclusively allocated her to the production and maintenance of the workforce capitalism requires for its reproduction and expansion. Thus, women’s primary and inescapable roles in our system are “domestic chores” (Olivera, 1973 and 2019, p. 195).

Silvia Federici’s (2011) critique of the concept of primitive accumulation introduces various aspects absent or underexplored in the Marxist perspective. One such aspect is that, during the transition from feudalism to capitalism in Europe, a new sexual division of labor emerged, subjecting women to become reproducers of the workforce. The establishment of this new patriarchal order, intertwined with the development of capitalism in Europe, imposed norms and behavioral patterns. Women were persecuted and labeled as witches if they did not conform to these standards (Federici, 2011).

Concurrently with commodity production arose the separation between production and reproduction. Many women’s bodies were mechanized to be used as machines for producing new workers, but this reproductive labor needs to be recognized and paid. That is, “On the one hand, the labor women employ in producing and maintaining the workforce is unpaid, and it is unpaid because it is not seen as a commodity, even though it produces an essential commodity for capitalism” (Olivera, 1973 and 2019, p. 196). Generally, wages offset the vast majority of productive labor, which generates value. However, in most cases, reproductive labor is not compensated with a wage since, from a capitalist perspective, it does not generate value and, consequently, does not produce surplus value. Given that surplus value is “the value of goods produced during the extra (unpaid) working hours provided by workers” (Bartra, 1973, p. 119), reproductive labor still constitutes working time and is essential for capitalism’s operation.

In this framework, by excluding women from salaried employment and relegating them to a state of subordination to men under a hegemonic heterosexual and capitalist perspective, their “invisible” reproductive labor – such as cooking, caring for the family, giving birth, cleaning, and managing the home – not only directly benefits the male household member, but also the owner or employer for whom this man works. This indirect benefit arises because, thanks to the woman’s reproductive effort, the man is in optimal conditions to perform his work responsibilities. Mercedes Olivera already discussed 1976 “female oppression” (1976 and 2019) to describe this indirect, yet essential exploitation performed by the capitalist system within the family institution and sexist ideology, in which the male household member is directly implicated. Indirectly, the owners or proprietors of the means of production also benefit, as they do not have to make any investment or payment for this labor, which facilitates having a workforce at their disposal. Therefore, Olivera argues that the exploitation of domestic labor is indirect because the man and children mediate it, direct beneficiaries of the woman’s reproductive work.

We say that the exploitation of domestic work is indirect because its valorization is mediated by the children and husband, who are the immediate recipients of the domestic work she performs; the woman does not receive the economic benefits of her labor, but it is largely expropriated for the benefit of family members and a third party: the capitalist. We have termed this kind of indirect exploitation as “oppression” to distinguish it from the direct exploitation that implies the extraction of surplus value, surplus product, or surplus labor through salaried work (...) (Olivera, 1976 and 2019, p. 218).

The wage, therefore, plays a vital role in understanding the separation between productive and reproductive labor within the sexual division of labor, which Silvia Federici has termed “the patriarchy of the wage” (2018). In the 1960s and 1970s, there was a push to recognize the reproductive work of the housewife as that of a working woman, and campaigns for domestic wages were initiated. A section of feminism emphasizes the invisibility of female labor, associated with its unpaid status in wage terms, belittling it as subsidiary to paid male labor and ignoring the intrinsic connection between the two (Dalla Costa and James, 1975; Federici, 2011; Gago, 2014).

While this line of analysis covers the historical realities of a large portion of the population, not all realities have been framed in the same way. Black feminism has been highlighting, for decades, other lines of analysis with different starting points due to the conditions of slavery experienced by the African American population. From Latin American and decolonial feminism, other analyses have been developed, highlighting the interweaving of class, gender,

and race in coloniality. The notion of the “sexual division of labor” as a universal concept has been challenged by both black feminism and decolonial feminism.

African American feminists have made significant contributions to discussions on labor. The genealogy can be traced back to the words of Sojourner Truth in 1851 at the Women’s Rights Convention in Akron, Ohio. In her memorable and historic speech “Ain’t I a Woman?” she challenged the audience full of upper-middle-class white women advocating for the right to work for all women, overlooking the many who had been working for a long time.

Sojourner Truth was enslaved for thirty years; her children were also born into slavery. She escaped with her daughter, leaving her other two children behind temporarily. She became the first woman to sue a white man when he, in violation of the existing law at the time, sold one of her sons. After several months of trials, she became the first African American woman to win a case against a white man. She joined the fight for the abolition of slavery, civil rights, and women’s rights. In 1872, within the context of the American suffragist movement, she attempted to vote but was denied due to her gender and being African American. Even then, she advocated for prison reform and the abolition of the death penalty, issues that remain debated in the United States.

In her book “Women, Race, & Class” (1981 and 2004), while still emphasizing sexist inequalities, Angela Davis analyzes how enslaved men did not possess the same historical conditions or privileges that are typically seen in the domination by white men. They did not own property, were not the sole providers in the family context, conjugal matters were not under their control. In many cases, they performed duties like cleaning or cooking, traditionally associated with female labor. Thus, Davis argues that “there is no evidence that this division of domestic labor was hierarchical, as the tasks of men were neither superior nor necessarily inferior to the work carried out by women” (Davis, 1981 & 2004, p. 25). Given that any member of the enslaved families could not challenge the authority of slave-owners, any dominant attitude by enslaved men might disrupt a chain of command that was utterly non-negotiable.

In the text “From Margin to Center” (1984), Bell Hooks posits that in American history, African American women have perceived work within the family as a humanizing task. It is a place for reaffirmation in their womanhood and as human beings providing care and affection – gestures of humanity denied to them by white supremacy (Hooks, 1984; Viveros, 2016). In 1984, she also penned “Black Women: Shaping Feminist Theory” (Hooks, 2004), in which she critiques Betty Friedan for the core ideas in her book “The Feminine Mystique” (1963

and 2016), which won Friedan the Pulitzer Prize in 1964. While Friedan's book has become a feminist benchmark, Hooks underscores that its ideas are not universal to all women. The central subjects of the work appear to be upper-middle-class white women with opportunities for higher education.

In Friedan's book, there is no discussion on who would take care of children and maintain the household if more women like her were freed from domestic duties and gained access to professions similar to white men. She does not speak to the needs of women without a man, children, or home. The existence of non-white women, as well as poor white women, is overlooked. She does not tell her readers if, for self-realization, it is better to be a maid, nanny, laborer, shop assistant, or prostitute rather than a leisurely housewife. She made her situation, and the situation of white women like her, synonymous with the condition of all American women (Bell Hooks, 2004, p. 34).

Betty Friedan graduated in social psychology and won a research fellowship, later renouncing to work and start a family. While five months pregnant with her second child, she was fired from the union newspaper where she worked. She recalls: "I was furious. It was not fair. Nevertheless, Jule, our editor-in-chief, told me, 'It is your fault for getting pregnant again.' Back then, there was no term to denote gender discrimination, no law against it" (Friedan, 2003, p. 103). Regardless of their educational background and skills at that time, the post-war American context placed upper-middle-class white women as homemakers and dependents of the male breadwinner, with seemingly no aspirations beyond caring for their family and home⁸. In addition to the prevailing ideology and advertisements promoting this view, many academic works asserted that a woman's only fulfillment came from attending to her husband and children.

Furthermore, if anything was amiss in the family home, it was solely the woman's responsibility (Friedan, 2003). Given her disagreement, one of the texts that struck her was "Modern Women: The Lost Sex" by Marynia Farnham and Ferdinand Lundberg. These Freudian psychoanalysts argued that highly educated American women were ill-suited to their roles as women.

⁸In the movie "The Hours," this situation faced by women with these characteristics is depicted, particularly in the role of an unhappy wife played by Julianne Moore. Set in 1951, she reads Virginia Woolf's "Mrs. Dalloway" as she grapples with what to do next and how to reclaim her life from the depths of anguish and on the brink of dangerous situations.

Of course, I had uncritically accepted all that Freudian rhetoric about the role of women. After all, had not I also given up my career to fulfill my role as a wife and mother? However, the notion that educating women had adverse consequences for them and their families was beyond the pale (Friedan, 2003, p. 129).

Beyond Friedan's contributions (1963 and 2016) to her specific context, as pointed out by Bell Hooks (2004) and other feminists, her portrayal of women is limited. There are barely any references to the diverse situations many women face outside of the domesticity issue. She scarcely touches upon pressing issues such as racism, job exploitation, and the double shift, among other oppressive situations.

Final Reflections

Oppressions are not mere sums or touchpoints at any given moment; they permeate the singular and collective experience in an inseparable fabric. Aside from being unequal in wealth and means of production distribution – or social class – the prevailing social organization is also unequal in terms of race, sex, sexual orientation, or gender identity. Incorporating individuals into various jobs is tied to the historical, material, and symbolic conditions of the social context in which they live. Therefore, job inclusion has been and continues to be influenced by class, race, and sex-gender factors inextricably. It is conditioned by inequalities produced by capitalism, colonialism, and patriarchy.

In this article, I approached work from the perspective of analyzing the imbrication of oppressions. This text contributes to avoiding processes that homogenize singular and collective life experiences, which are diverse and conditioned by different oppressive structures. Conditioned does not mean the same as determined because there are always forms of resistance and collective organization that can transgress specific imposed parameters.

As I wrote, I primarily engaged in dialogue with Latin American and Caribbean authors and researchers and with contributions from feminisms – Black feminism, decolonial feminism, and other Latin American critical perspectives. This dialogue served a dual purpose. On the one hand, it sought to problematize both productive and reproductive work in a situated manner. On the other hand, and in line with the previous point, I intended to address this issue following certain analytical frameworks that are part of the vast theoretical and conceptual production developed over the years in our regions. These frameworks are essential when considering alternative horizons for a dignified life.

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