

DECOLONIAL FEMINISM

Charting a Path Towards a Just
and Liberatory Tomorrow

*Emerging as a transformative lens, it offers essential
tools to unpack complex ideas such as 'modernity' while
reimagining the agency of Global South women.*

by

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Introduction

Decolonial feminism is a powerful and evolving movement that seeks to challenge and dismantle oppressive systems by addressing the complex intersections of colonialism, patriarchy, racism, imperialism and other forms of systemic discrimination. Emerging as a response to the limitations of mainstream feminism (read as white feminism), which often overlooked the unique challenges faced by women living in post-colonial societies in the Global South, indigenous women, and women of colour in the Global North, decolonial feminism provides a critical lens through which to analyse the historical, cultural, and structural factors that perpetuate gender inequalities and colonial legacies.

Decolonial theory, including decolonial feminism, critiques Western representation of the 'other'. By integrating this theoretical lens, in the post-colonial world, we gain a better understanding of how knowledge produced in and by the West is layered with colonial power, thereby creating and sustaining a politics of Western dominance and rendering the 'other' as mere objects of study.¹ The process is not neutral, despite common claims to the contrary, but is fact embedded within a social, cultural, historical and political time and place, reflecting contextual features and lived experiences.²

This article delves into the multifaceted dimensions of decolonial feminism, a compelling ideology that challenges oppressive systems by addressing that intersections of colonialism, patriarchy, and various forms of systemic discrimination. Beginning with a contextualisation of the historical impact of colonialism, the article explores the complexities of gender relations within colonised societies, revealing a nuanced understanding that challenges traditional stereotypes. It highlights instances of knowledge appropriation and erasure during colonial processes, showcasing how the co-

tributions of the colonised women were often marginalised or made invisible. It posits that decolonial feminism offers a powerful and sophisticated lens through which to examine and reshape our understanding of history, society, and the ongoing struggle for justice and equality.

Shifting the World

The emergence of a post-Western world accentuated by the recent economic and diplomatic achievements of several key countries of the Global South, as well as the historically significant shift in production and manufacturing away from the Global North, has been altering the economic geography of the world. Fuelled by the vulnerabilities exposed by events from the 2008 financial crisis to the Covid-19 pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine, Israel-Palestine conflict and their ripple effects on developing countries, the importance of global interconnectedness has been underscored, leading to a resurgence in revitalising South-South cooperation and to it claiming a larger role in the global decision-making process. What these countries often have in common is a shared history of being colonised.

Without doubt, colonialism was a phenomenon that marked a major shift in human history. Bouda Etemad sees it as a period that spread for over 500 years – starting from 1415 when the Portuguese captured Ceuta (a Northern African town across the Gibraltar) to the 1930s when fascist tried to take control of Italy.³ Colonial empires spread over 70 per cent of the planet's 136 million square kilometres of dry land during its peak.⁴ The European, American and Japanese countries together cover less than 9 per cent of all dry land on earth and yet held sway over 60 per cent of the world.⁵ Colonialism, according to Stephen W. Silliman, is the process through which colonisers control foreign territories and dominate local people

¹ Mignolo W.D; April 2007, Globalisation and the De-colonial Option; Volume 21, Issue 2-3

² Haraway, DONNA; 1988, Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspectives.

³ Colonialism is considered a separate phenomenon compared to other invasions because it entails not only the initial conquest or occupation of a territory but also the establishment of enduring political, economic, and cultural dominance by the colonising power over the colonised people. Unlike some other invasions that might focus solely on territorial expansion or conquest without long-term governance, colonialism involves sustained control, economic & social exploitation, & often systematic alteration of the social fabric & institutions of the colonised society.

⁴ Etemad, Bouda Possessing the World: Taking the Measurements of Colonisation from the 18th to the 20th Century.. Translated by ANDRENE EVERSON. New York: Berghahn Books, 2007 p 1

⁵ Ibid

with the aim of controlling resources through dispossession, economic marginalisation, labour exploitation, racism, and oppression, thereby creating and perpetuating inequalities.⁶ The process of colonisation was violent and brutal, often with the purpose of completely alienating local populations, particularly in the Americas, the Caribbean, Australia, Tasmania, and east and southern Africa.⁷ These are genocides for which the colonising powers have not been held accountable to date. Colonialism exerted a profound impact on women in the colonies, disrupting traditional gender roles, introducing new forms of exploitation, and often marginalising them within oppressive socio-economic structures.

Deconstructing the Coloniser's Logic

Colonialism promoted what is called the conqueror's logic that not only allowed genocides, murders, government-triggered famines, rape of women, criminalisation of entire communities, and plundering of the wealth but also developed a discourse that justified these gross violations and violence on the belief that the colonised were not entirely 'human'.⁸ Colonialism was interpreted as a duty of the advanced nations to 'civilise' other countries. Without doubt there has been no other expansionist project so extensive and so intensive. It suggested that the coloniser's paradigm is a universal, scientific, advanced model of development (in contrast to the worldview of the colonised, which was dismissed as parochial, narrow and backward) and conceals its Eurocentric origins. It relies on binary and linear modes of thinking where concepts are categorised as opposing pairs and 'progress' as unidirectional and sequential, fostering a simplistic worldview with limited appreciation of complexity and diversity. The long imprint of this way of thinking led to a mapping "not only [of] the land and waters of the planet, but also the minds"⁹ This pervasive worldview is extremely damaging. Cohn, for example, shows how "the very Orientalist imagination that led to

brilliant antiquarian collections, archaeological finds, and photographic forays were in fact forms of constructing an India that could be better packaged, made inferior, and ruled".¹⁰

Catherine Walsh takes the analysis further and points out that the dominant Western construction of knowledge was not inflicted by elitist groups in the Global North, but it was also internalised and then reiterated by intellectuals across the spectrum (Right and Left) within the Global South, intensifying the process of sidelining other forms of knowledge that drew on cultures of the colonised, especially marginalised peoples¹¹ For example in India widow immolation was one of the first practices that social reformers and the colonial powers focused on when seeking to address the "women's question" but in essence it was not widespread as a practice and "women who were burned were marginal to the debate. The controversy was over definitions of Hindu tradition, the place of ritual in religious worship, the civilising missions of colonialism and evangelism, and the proper role of the colonial state."¹² Similarly, child marriage practices among Bengali men were cited as evidence of mistreatment towards Bengali women despite the fact that it was not a practice followed by most of the people. Nevertheless, it led to the perception that these men would also mistreat European women due to their perceived moral and physical weakness. This generalisation of all men as effeminate intensified the process of Indian male elites adopting hyper-masculinity as a way to safeguard their image and reputation.¹³

The knowledge system that the colonisers upheld worked to erase or devalue other knowledge systems, claiming in the process to be the only 'true' or 'objective' one. They created a hierarchy of knowledge (mainstream/ dominant knowledge versus popular knowledge, etc.) that has resulted in material and discursive harm to those marginalised, including women. The colonialists deployed multiple institutions such as mass media, education, religion and law, to build the idea of not only

⁶ Silliman, Stephen W. "Culture contact or colonialism? Challenges in the archaeology of native north America". *American Antiquity* 70, no. 1 (2005): 55–74. doi:10.2307/40035268. p. 59

⁷ <https://zen-catgirl.medium.com/is-decolonization-genocide-lets-see-de91184cb8af>

⁸ Lugones, Maria "Toward a Decolonial Feminism." *Hypatia*, vol. 25, no. 4, 2010, pp. 742–59. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40928654>. Accessed 18 Dec. 2023. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40928654> p 743

⁹ As quoted by Laís Rodrigues

¹⁰ <https://www.scielo.br/j/ref/a/xVcFGLjTtHYjbrKPgS3vFw/?format=pdf&lang=en>, <https://press.princeton.edu/books/paperback/9780691000435/colonialism-and-its-forms-of-knowledge>

¹¹ Walsh, Catherine. "Shifting the Geopolitics of Critical Knowledge," *Cultural Studies*, v. 21, n. 2-3, p. 224-239, 2007c. DOI: 10.1080/09502380601162530

¹² <https://www.ucpress.edu/book/9780520214071/contentious-traditions>

¹³ Datar, Neil (2017) "The Legacy of Imperialism on Gender Law in India," *Historical Perspectives: Santa Clara University Undergraduate Journal of History, Series II: Vol. 22, Article 9*. Available at: <https://scholarcommons.scu.edu/historical-perspectives/vol22/iss1/9>

white supremacy and inferiority of others, but also reinforce male supremacy and female inferiority.¹⁴ It also propagated these values and “the adoption of colonial values is coupled with the condemnation of the self”¹⁵ Besides this, the “internalised colonialism weakens collective self-esteem by distorting the importance of the local culture.”¹⁶

Within the multifaceted landscape of colonialism, the differential experiences were marked by disparities in access to resources, power dynamics, and socio-cultural location. Women, men, rulers, and subjects, along with dominant groups and minorities, encountered diverse consequences, reflecting the intricate interplay of colonial policies within specific historical and geographical contexts.

Contemporary Manifestations of Colonial Influence

Colonialism is not just a phenomenon of the past; its shadow and influence continue to this day. For example, the powerful bodies such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund were designed under colonialism and remain in key respects colonial in character. The voting allocations are skewed and “the countries that became rich during the colonial period now enjoy disproportionate power when it comes to determining the rules of the global economy. Inequality begets inequality”.¹⁷ Within the United Nations, the disproportionate power held by the five permanent members of the Security Council underscores a structural issue at the heart of the organisation. The absence of permanent representation from Africa or Latin America in the Security Council means that numerous initiatives from the Global South face obstacles and are often thwarted.¹⁸

Feminist Economic Justice for People and Planet Action Nexus, a feminist network, estimates out

that the Global South lost approximately US\$ 7.8 trillion during the 10-year-period from 2004 to 2013 due to illicit financial flows (which include corporate tax evasion, avoidance and abuse) and through these, and a range of other means, continues to perpetuate the flow of resources from the South to the North.¹⁹

The colonial extraction and commodification of labour power from the Global South for the benefit of markets in the Global North continues. Paid work is often made possible by the unpaid labour of women in the context of social reproduction, but the labour markets of the Global North are shaped significantly by race and gender.²⁰

Another example of the way coloniality continues to shape our current world lies in the relationship between the climate crisis and the irresponsibility of the North. “The Global South essentially subsidises – in an unwanted and imposed manner – the Global North at the expense of the wellbeing of its own population and the depletion of its ecosystems, and even at the cost of planetary survival at large, due to the historical responsibility of developed countries for the carbon emissions that have caused the climate crisis.”²¹

Voices from the South persistently challenge the North's hegemony, acknowledging the enduring impact of colonialism and alerting us to new forms of domination like digital colonialism. While speaking of colonialism leading feminist Sylvia Tamale says, “The machinery never sleeps but rather it is always in search of new ways of reinventing itself. Its main functions are twofold: To continue exploiting (neo)colonies; and to maintain the politico-economic enslavement necessary for its own existence.”²²

Colonialism, with its genocides and injustices, was not merely a historical period but a profound and extensive expansionist project that continues to shape contemporary global structures and worldviews.

¹⁴ Tamale, Sylvia. 2020. Decolonization and Afro-Feminism. Daraja Press, Wakefield, Canada p 7 <https://books.google.co.in/books?id=OxnAzQEACAAJ>

¹⁵ Utsey, S. O., Abrams, J. A., Opere-Henaku, A., Bolden, M. A., & Williams, O. (2015). Assessing the Psychological Consequences of Internalized Colonialism on the Psychological Well-Being of Young Adults in Ghana. *Journal of Black Psychology*, 41(3), 195-220. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0095798414537935>

¹⁶ *ibid*

¹⁷ <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2020/11/26/it-is-time-to-decolonise-the-world-bank-and-the-imf>

¹⁸ <https://www.e-ir.info/2023/12/02/postcolonialism-feminism-and-the-united-nations/>

¹⁹ https://wedo.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/FemEconClimate-ActionNexus_Brief_FemGND.pdf

²⁰ Diamond Ashiagbor, Race and Colonialism in the Construction of Labour Markets and Precarity, *Industrial Law Journal*, Volume 50, Issue 4, December 2021, Pages 506–531, <https://doi.org/10.1093/inclaw/dwab020>

²¹ https://eu.boell.org/sites/default/files/2021-05/Shaping%20the%20Future%20of%20Multilateralism%20-%20Emilia%20Reyes_FINAL_0.pdf

²² Tamale, Sylvia. 2020. Decolonization and Afro-Feminism. Ottawa: Daraja Press. p 7 <https://books.google.co.in/books?id=OxnAzQEACAAJ>

The emergence of a post-Western world, marked by economic and diplomatic strides in the Global South, has challenged the traditional power structures rooted in colonial-era institutions like the World Bank and the IMF. The powerful Group of Seven (G7) has been forced to concede some space with the emergence of the Group of Twenty (G20). The interconnectedness emphasised by recent events, such as the Covid-19 pandemic and geopolitical conflicts, has sparked a resurgence in South-South cooperation. However, the impact of coloniality persists, evident in the economic exploitation through illicit financial flows and the climate crisis, where the Global South continues to subsidise the Global North. Voices from the South persistently challenge the North's hegemony, and while highlighting the enduring effects of colonialism, also point to modern forms of domination like digital colonialism. The de-colonialism process faces the challenge of reclaiming knowledge systems and reconstructing institutions that had been severely eroded through the process of colonialism amidst ongoing threats posed by neocolonial forces.

Gender Dynamics in Colonised Societies

Gender relations within colonised nations were diverse and intricate, deviating from a uniform narrative of universal female subjugation under patriarchy. While patriarchy undeniably exerted and continues to exert a pervasive influence, the nuances of each context rendered a multifaceted and varied picture.

Recent research has challenged the predominant notion of uniform female subordination across all colonies. Focusing on indigenous African societies in Sub-Saharan Africa, Niara Sudarkasa says, "In precolonial times women were conspicuous in 'high places'. They were queen mothers; queen-sisters; princesses, chiefs, and holders of other offices in towns and villages; occasional warriors; and, in one well known case, that of the Lovedu, the supreme monarch [the Rain Queens]. Furthermore, it was almost invariably the case that African women were conspicuous in the economic life

of their societies, being involved in farming, trade, or craft production."²³ Besides this, there were many other communities in different countries within which a balance of relations between the genders existed, which, in fact, was not conceived in terms of superiority and subordination. Fluidity of gender roles and norms and sexuality as well as relations between same sex couples were not viewed as inferior in many cultures.²⁴

Colonialism often exacerbated existing inequalities and introduced new forms of oppression. In Canada and Australia, for instance, indigenous children were forcibly removed from their homes, under the pretext of inferior living conditions and deemed 'unfit' mothers, aiming to eradicate indigenous identity and enforce assimilation. This was often viewed as a benevolent or even charitable act due to the belief that the Western way of life was, indeed, superior, not just in material terms but also morally.

The colonisation processes, therefore, were inherently gendered and shaped on Eurocentric ideals of masculinity that portrayed white men as superior and fully male, while non-whites were perceived as savages and not entirely men.²⁵ Lugones states that the bodies of those considered less than ideal was central to the colonial "civilising mission". This perspective justified "the brutal access to people's bodies through exploitation, sexual violation, control of reproduction, and systematic terror, also using hierarchical gender dichotomy".²⁶ Paula Allen-Gunn explains that colonisation "(1) overthrew feminine 'gods' and 'spiritual' leaderships, imposing their own masculine god; (2) destroyed tribal institutions and philosophical principles; (3) expelled entire groups from their lands, thus removing them from not only their system, but also taking away their livelihoods; (4) substituted gynocentric systems (i.e., centred on women) with patriarchal systems, in which female leaders are replaced by male figures who are, in many cases, chosen by the colonisers themselves".²⁷ This led to women's material and social status being eroded as power moved into the hands of men and men began to be seen as the 'natural' leaders. The systematic devaluation

²³ Sudarkasa, Niara. "The status of women in indigenous African societies". *Feminist Studies* 12, no. 1, (1986): 91–103. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.2307/3177985>. pp. 91–103 ²⁴For an example of this read Vanita, R. and Kidwai, S. (2008) *Same-Sex Love in India: A Literary History*. Penguin Books India, New Delhi. Where the authors draw on writings on same-sex love from over 2000 years of Indian literature from Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim, and modern fictional traditions. These testify to the presence of same-sex love in various forms since ancient times, without overt persecution.

²⁴ TLOSTANOVA, Madina. *Gender Epistemologies and Eurasian Borderlands*. New York: Palgrave Mcmillan, 2010.

²⁵ TLOSTANOVA, Madina. *Gender Epistemologies and Eurasian Borderlands*. New York: Palgrave Mcmillan, 2010.

²⁶ <https://www.redalyc.org/journal/381/38170954030/html/#B46>

²⁷ <https://www.redalyc.org/journal/381/38170954030/html/>

of women's expertise in domains like agriculture, categorising their practices as unscientific, the labelling of women-dominated livelihood sectors as 'informal' (implying disorganisation and insignificance), and the gradual erosion of matrilineal family structures exemplify the deliberate undermining of women's presence, influence, and knowledge base under colonial mentalities. This is because the elite colonists came with a viewpoint that the ideal way of life was the one where women were tied to domesticity.²⁸

In summary, the intricate interplay between colonialism and gender relations defies a simplistic narrative of universal female subjugation. Diverse contexts reveal a multifaceted picture, challenging the notion of uniform female subordination across all colonies. However, colonialism often exacerbated existing inequalities. The inherently gendered nature of colonisation, shaped by Eurocentric ideals of masculinity, perpetuated hierarchies and subjected non-white bodies to exploitation and systematic terror. The imposition of new forms of patriarchy, destruction of indigenous institutions, and the devaluation of women's expertise highlight the deliberate undermining of women's presence and knowledge under colonial mentality. The colonial era not only transformed power dynamics but also marked a pivotal shift in societal attitudes towards sexuality, fostering the roots of homophobia and transphobia in colonised nations. Understanding these complexities is essential for dismantling the lasting impact of colonial gender ideologies.

Emergence and Evolution of Decolonial Feminism

In response to the growing recognition of diverse voices and the imperative for inclusivity, decolonial feminism emerges within the contemporary global discourse by offering a framework that not only acknowledges the unique experiences of marginalised women but also demands a radical re-examination of prevailing narratives, institutions, and power dynamics. It offers a way to upturn the way of thinking that privileges the coloniser's viewpoint and focuses on the discussions

centred on coloniality and colonial differences based on gender.

Decoloniality is a broad concept that encompasses a range of phenomena – “colonialisation, settler-colonialism, racial capitalism, modernity, and, most recently, neoliberalism, and the ways in which they have displaced an array of modes of living, thinking, being, and engaging with the natural environment. A decolonial framing views the global division of labour in terms of one part of the world exploiting, extracting from, and preying upon people and resources in the other part.”²⁹

Decolonial feminism encapsulates a nuanced and rich array of ideas. Historically it has its roots in the 1970s-1980s during the rise of feminist movements globally. There was an increased recognition of the ways in which colonial histories and structures intersected with gender-based oppression. Women from postcolonial countries started to articulate their struggles within both feminist and anti-colonial frameworks. In the 1980s-1990s, the works of scholars such as Chandra Talpade Mohanty, bell hooks, and Gloria Anzaldúa critiqued mainstream feminism for its Eurocentric perspective and highlighted the importance of recognising the diversity of women's experiences across different cultural and historical contexts. However, “decolonial feminism” has gained more explicit usage in the late 20th and early 21st centuries as scholars and activists began to articulate a more focused critique of colonial structures within feminist discourse. With its home turf in Latin America, it spread quickly to other continents.

Below is a sketch of some of them. While acknowledging that this may lead to generalisation and miss the depth of scholarship on these issues, the intent is to provide a brief overview and encourage further exploration.

A Critical Lens on Power, Race, and Gender in Contemporary Discourse

Decolonial feminists argue that colonial histories continue to shape gender relations and contribute to the marginalisation of certain groups, particu-

²⁸ <https://rowman.com/ISBN/9780742577350/Domesticity-in-Colonial-India-What-Women-Learned-When-Men-Gave-Them-Advice#:~:text=Domesticity%20in%20Colonial%20India%20deals.,middle%20class%20known%20as%20bhadralok>.

²⁹ https://eu.boell.org/sites/default/files/2021-05/Shaping%20the%20Future%20of%20Multilateralism%20-%20Emilia%20Reyes_FINAL_0.pdf

women of colour. This framework scrutinises the enduring impacts of historical colonialism on contemporary power structures, cultural narratives, and social norms. With strong Latin America origins, decolonial feminism branched into multiple directions – political activism in its more radical manifestation, academia, and as a valuable tool for practitioners. One of the foremost scholars on this issue is Maria Lugones who herself was an academic, and a revolutionary, feminist, and philosopher. Lugones says that while the coloniality of gender seeks to analyse racialised, capitalist, gender oppression, the possibility of overcoming this is what she calls decolonial feminism. As she explains, “As I move methodologically from women-of-colour feminisms to a decolonial feminism, I think about feminism from and at the grassroots, and from and at the colonial difference, with a strong emphasis on ground, on a historicised, incarnate intersubjectivity. ... I do mean to understand resistance to the coloniality of gender from the perspective of the colonial difference.”³⁰ In a radical departure from the norm, Lugones argues not for a “gendered reading and a racial reading to the already understood colonial relations” but rather “a rereading of modern capitalist colonial modernity itself”.³¹

The main difference here between decolonial feminists theorising on the power relations between race and gender and the theories of intersectional feminists is that decolonial feminists centre coloniality. Decolonial feminists have revealed that purportedly emancipatory or liberal endeavours often rely on colonial frameworks, sometimes inadvertently. As Lugones says, race and gender were impacted in inseparable colonial processes and, therefore, should be discussed within the Eurocentric patriarchy logic that views women of colour as inferior and lacking in fundamental capacities.³² Lugones draws on Quijano’s theory of coloniality or power, which outlines that “the coloniser imposes his idea of development and progress on the colonised, through ideological dichotomies that racially distinguish the coloniser (civilised, advanced) from the colonised (wil-

-d, backward)”. Lugones goes further as she believes that Quijano’s gender analysis was inadequate as it was “limited to the assumption that women are resources, and the exclusively male dispute for the control of sex”. She argues that the coloniality of power forges ideas around gender that draw from paradigms that articulate its limited ideas of sex, work, race, knowledge, among others.



Decolonial feminism emphasises the importance of recognising and understanding the intersectionality of various social categories such as race, gender, class, and sexuality. It acknowledges that individuals experience multiple forms of oppression simultaneously and that these intersecting identities shape unique and complex lived experiences. Decolonial feminism then demands that “feminists should no longer be accomplices of capitalism, racism, colonialism and imperialism: it is time to fight the system that created the boss, built the prisons and police women’s bodies”. And “free ourselves from the capitalist, imperialist forces that oppress us”.³⁵

Decolonial feminism focuses on women who were previously absent, oppressed and silenced. These women are not only victimised by the categories that were imposed on them by the Eurocentric project of ‘progress’ but also its inability to recognise the nature of gender roles in different contexts and also their inherent power, leadership, skills and knowledge which coloniality were rendered as ‘irrelevant’, or primitive.

It draws from a range of other work that feminists have been doing. “We have important works on gender, race, and colonisation that constitute the feminisms of women of colour in the United States, the feminisms of women in the Third World, and the feminist versions of the Lat Crit and Critical Race Theory schools of jurisprudence.

³⁰ Lugones, Maria “Toward a Decolonial Feminism.” *Hypatia*, vol. 25, no. 4, 2010, pp. 742–59. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40928654>. Accessed 18 Dec. 2023. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40928654> p 746

³¹ Ibid

³² LUGONES, María. “Methodological Notes toward a Decolonial Feminism,” In: ISASI-DIAZ, Ada Maria; MENDIETA, Eduardo (org.). *Decolonizing Epistemologies: Latina/o Theology and Philosophy*. Fordham University Press, 2011, p. 68-86.

³³ Rodrigues, Laís. “Decolonial Feminism: María Lugones’ Influences and Contributions.” *Estudios Feministas*, vol. 30, no. 1, 2022, pp. 1–14. JSTOR, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48663169>. Accessed 1 Jan. 2024.

³⁴ Ibid

³⁵ Verges, Françoise (2021). *A decolonial feminism*. London: Pluto Press. Edited by Ashley J. Bohrer.



These analytical frameworks emphasise the concept of intersectionality and demonstrate the historical and theoretical-practical exclusion of non-white women in the libertarian struggles waged in the name of women.”³⁶ The task of the decolonial feminist movement, therefore, as Lugones sees it, is to be freed from seeing the world through the so called separable categories of gender, race, sexual orientation, socio-economic and geopolitical issues, as the coloniality of gender cuts these across diverse issues, in all spheres of life – the economic, the political, the social, the religious, and in knowledge making. It is this commitment to that broader issue of liberatory struggles that Lugones reiterates this when she says, “I am interested in the intersection of race, class, gender and sexuality in a way that enables me to understand the indifference of men, [in general] but, more importantly to our struggles [that] have been racialised as inferior” and yet they are indifferent to “the systematic violences inflicted upon women of colour”. Understanding the cause of this indifference that is found at the everyday level and at the level of theorising is crucial.³⁷ Lugones argues that forcing them out of this indifference to become active allies is a necessary task for decolonial feminism as it is rooted in the liberation of all those who have been disenfranchised through the pugnacious process of colonialism.

This view is echoed by other feminists including Verges who states that decolonial feminism rises against any form of oppression, not sexism only and that it is an inclusive-struggle feminism that lasts a long period of time and is anchored in the continuity of past struggles. Verges picks the example of cleaning and care work, which is at the core of decolonial feminist struggles; it exemplifies the coming together of racist, capitalist and sexist oppressions that women of colour undergo (as the main workforce for cleaning companies) besides the invisibility of their work.³⁸ The cost of social reproduction are individualised and privatised and this system continuously views women’s labour through notions of femininity and the work is devalued as semi-skilled or unskilled that can be paid less on the one hand and on the other is centred primarily around unpaid and institutionally

mostly unsupported reproductive work that is to be conducted mainly in the isolation of one’s home.³⁹ Sylvia Tamale too strongly endorses the need for a coming together that centres the agency of women who are engaged in challenging all forms of neocolonialism. “At the end of the day, the uniting decolonial ideology for pan-Africanism must be anti-imperialist, anti-patriarchal and anti-militarist. It must jealously safeguard the interests of those who suffer from intersectional oppression on the basis of their gender, social status, ethnic and cultural origin, sexuality, disability, age, and other grounds.”⁴⁰ It, therefore, is not merely a seat at the table but rather rejecting the entire model and demanding an alternative mode of development. Hence the demand is not merely for inclusion or representation; rather it questions the very premises of the frameworks that are used to promote ‘development’ or even progress.

The historic DAWN document talks of the deep-seated unfairness and even cruelty of the current development model when it says, “a development process that shrinks and poisons the pie available to poor people, and then leaves women scrambling for a larger relative share, is not in women's interest”.⁴¹

Epistemic Injustice and the Agency of Marginalised Communities

Decolonial feminism aims to disrupt the hegemony of Eurocentric knowledge systems and highlights the need for diverse epistemologies that reflect the experiences and perspectives of individuals and communities that were disparaged by the powerful. It calls for the validation and inclusion of indigenous and non-Western ways of knowing. It challenges the narrative of the West as the exclusive originator of knowledge and scientific thought, valuing all knowledge and lived experiences as equal and refutes representation of the non-Western as the ‘other’ and rendering the ‘other’ mere objects of study. The subject too speaks with agency and seeks “to repudiate otherness, tokenism, stereotyping, exceptionalism, and the role of “native informant”⁴² that generally in-

³⁶ LUGONES, María. “Colonialidade e Gênero”. In: HOLLANDA, Heloísa Buarque de (Org.). *Pensamento Feminista hoje: perspectivas decoloniais*. Rio de Janeiro: Bazar do Tempo, 2020a. p. 55

³⁷ LUGONES, María. “The Coloniality of Gender”. *Worlds & Knowledges Otherwise*, p. 1-17, 2008 p1

³⁸ Vergès, Françoise, et al. *A Decolonial Feminism*. Pluto Press, 2021. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv1k531j6>. Accessed 1 Jan. 2024.

³⁹ Lilijana Burcar, “The ‘Woman Question’ and Western Neo-Imperialism in Harold Pinter’s *The New World Order* December 2016 *Gender Studies* 15(1) DOI: 10.1515/genst-2017-0013

⁴⁰ Tamale, Sylvia. 2020. *Decolonization and Afro-Feminism*. Ottawa: Daraja Press. 382

⁴¹ Sen, G., & Grown, C. (1987). *Development Crises and Alternative Visions: Third World Women's Perspectives* (1st ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315070179>

⁴² Mishra, Raj Kumar *Postcolonial feminism: Looking into within-beyond-to difference* Vol. 4(4), pp. 129-134, June, 2013 DOI: 10.5897/IJEL12.165 *International Journal of English and Literature*



-forms much of Eurocentric research. Rather it proposes that “first, feminist analyses of Third World women’s oppression and resistance should be historically situated; and second, Third World women’s agency and voices should be respected”.⁴³ It helps to understand and assimilate indigenous knowledge systems into ways of life, some times by consciously rejecting Western inheritance and at other times by confidently asserting multiple and often contradictory identities. Women in the Global South understand inclusivity and intersectionality intrinsically and as a lived experience. Discussing the concept of intersectionality, Nivedita Menon says that this has now become a buzzword but “has obscured the fact that different feminist perspectives, from feminists-of-colour to poststructuralist, have long held the notion”.⁴⁴ This, she argues, is an example of how “universal frameworks generally flow from the North to the South, that the direction of this flow is not simply coincidental.”⁴⁵ Rather it is a product of continued hegemony of the West, which was established through colonial forces.

The notion of global sisterhood is also scrutinised and feminists such as Vargas refuse any pitiful stand, where the Southern ‘sister’ is only seen as inferior to the Northern feminists and must be helped, or even saved by the more enlightened Northern sisters. Vargas demonstrates how the demonisation of Islam has often gone unquestioned by the “civilisational feminists’ discourse” where they erected themselves as saviours of their Muslims counterparts, and of the South and the struggle is posited as “a universal fight of good versus evil”,⁴⁶ where ‘good’ and ‘evil’ are defined by the West. This echoes previous such attempts, be it in the use of the supposed concern for the plight of Afghan women by the USA under the Taliban as a ruse in geopolitical considerations that led to the “War on Terror,” whereby the interests of the women were disregarded.⁴⁷ Such acts also provide power and position for the women from the West as the moral authority and hence superior.

Decolonial feminists from the Global South and women of colour are not seeking the benevolence

of white feminists to merely incorporate them into discussions or analyses. Following years of advocating for a rightful position within policy forums and discourses, these feminists reject the notion of granting such authority to white feminists and their entrenched institutional structures. The issue extends beyond allowing others to determine representation or inclusion; rather, it demands a dismantling of spaces and platforms that inherently embody colonial ideologies. Thus, there is a categorical rejection of colonial mental frameworks.



Decolonial feminism provides a framework for engaging with traditions without being boxed within the confines of the tenets of Western feminist ideologies, acknowledging the divergence that sometimes exists without adopting revisionist positions. Refraining from endorsing a revisionist portrayal of history that idealises the past, decolonial feminism does not seek to conceal the egregious atrocities inflicted upon women in colonised nations. It does not act as an apologist for deeply ingrained patriarchal institutions or age-old discriminations such as South Asia's caste structures, which predate colonialism. Rather decolonial feminism critically scrutinises power dynamics, cautioning against what Vargas terms “civilisational feminism” or mainstream, white bourgeois feminism. This critique rejects the version of feminism that is “recuperated softened and integrated to the dominant class ideology”⁴⁸ revealing how the mainstream fears the radical message of decolonial feminism. Vargas illustrates some of the ways in which the co-option happens by pointing to the “heroisation of female activists”, which obscures the deep structural oppressions against which they battled or more perniciously to institutions like the World Bank, which, despite adopting the language of women’s empowerment, in truth seek to control women’s bodies and labour including their reproductive rights.⁴⁹

An imperative within decolonial feminism,

⁴³ Herr, Ranjoo Seodu. "Reclaiming third world feminism: Or why transnational feminism needs third world feminism." *Meridians* 12.1 (2014): 1-30.

⁴⁴ <https://internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article4038>

⁴⁵ *ibid*

⁴⁶ As quoted in <https://igg-geo.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Traduction-FL-decolonial-feminism.pdf>

⁴⁷ Berry, Kim. "The Symbolic Use Of Afghan Women in the War on Terror." *Humboldt Journal of Social Relations*, vol. 27, no. 2, 2003, pp. 137–60. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23524156>. Accessed 12 Jan. 2024.

⁴⁸ <https://igg-geo.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Traduction-FL-decolonial-feminism.pdf>

⁴⁹ *ibid*



articulated by Lugones, involves sustaining painful confrontations and acknowledging complicity with the very oppressions the aspiring decolonial feminist may have believed herself to oppose entirely. It presents a radical proposition to “un-patriarchalise revolutionary struggles”⁵¹ i.e., there is a necessity for individuals, including decolonial feminists, to introspect on their thoughts and behaviours, acknowledging potential roots in colonial or patriarchal practices, even if such influences are not consciously recognised.

However, it is crucial to recognise that decolonial feminism is not a rigid set of dogmas; instead, it is an experimental, risky, and unfinished project, transcending fixed locations. As part of this ongoing process, advocates are encouraged to “learn from other resisters,” emphasising the dynamic and evolving nature of the decolonial feminist framework.⁵² Therefore it cannot descend into nationalism, nativism, and civilisationalism or romanticising all forms of local belief systems (including those that are patriarchal); rather it calls for more nuanced understanding of various practices and more importantly, belief systems. Decolonial processes play a crucial role in enabling the collective rejection of the intergenerational and historical sense of inferiority and humiliation inflicted by colonialism, thereby reclaiming collective self-worth and confidence beyond individual levels.

Alternative Worldview

This radical ideology offers an alternative worldview that has relevance for discussions on ecology, economics, government, spirituality, and knowledge. It offers a worldview that is anchored in ways of being and doing that the West did not have the capacity to understand or appreciate – for example, the idea of plurality, of fluidity and interconnectedness. It is a framework that is “not as an abstraction from lived experience, but a lens that enables us to see what is hidden from our understandings of both race and gender and the re-

relation of each to normative heterosexuality”⁵³ Besides uncovering what is hidden it also boldly proposes the co-creation of knowledge and pathways to move forward. The need, Lélia Gonzalez says, is of the construction of a decolonial knowledge, in order to resist dominant paradigms and to forge new ones, that reflect the realities of women of colour. It calls for greater self-reflexivity, for example, the racial hierarchies that are maintained in Latin America by a ‘masked’ or ‘disguised’ racism, which prevents an objective awareness of racism itself.⁵⁴

For Tamale decolonial feminism offers a way not only to adopt an intersectional approach to challenge the processes of global capital, othering, and discrimination but also calls “for an Afro-feminist praxis that is built transnationally and collectively, and that considers how the lived experiences of inter alia gender, race, class, disability, religious, sexuality, and age discrimination can effectively be challenged”.⁵⁵ She goes on to assert, “The best visionaries are non-academics [...] Africa sits at the tip of the geopolitical margins, which means that its worldview is like no other; marginalised groups within Africa such as women have an even more unique worldview.”⁵⁶

Foregrounding indigenous feminism requires that the feminist model of intersectionality centres issues around land and sovereignty and “the dimensions of secularity/ spirituality/ religiosity”. She argues that it also forces us to challenge binaries of “essentialism/ anti essentialism, secular/ religious and even coloniser/ colonised”.⁵⁷

The conceptual framework that informs decolonial feminism resonates with feminists, academics, thinkers and practitioners the world over because it provides this powerful and at the same time nuanced, realistic and sophisticated lens to look at ‘other’ ways of life and living, especially in the Global South.

Tamale points to the significance of alternative justice systems that is dismissed as backward, but

⁵⁰ As quoted by Laís Rodrigues <https://www.scielo.br/j/ref/a/xVcFGLjTtHYyJbrKPgS3vFw/?format=pdf&lang=en>

⁵¹ <https://igg-geo.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Traduction-FL-decolonial-feminism.pdf>

⁵² Paramaditha, I. (2022). Radicalising ‘Learning From Other Resisters’ in Decolonial Feminism. *Feminist Review*, 131(1), 33-49. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01417789221102509>

⁵³ Lugones M. Toward a Decolonial Feminism. *Hypatia*. 2010;25(4):742-759. doi:10.1111/j.1527-2001.2010.01137.x

⁵⁴ As quoted by Laís Rodrigues <https://www.scielo.br/j/ref/a/xVcFGLjTtHYyJbrKPgS3vFw/?format=pdf&lang=en>

⁵⁵ <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/international-re-view-of-social-history/article/sylvia-tamale-decolonization-and-afrofeminism-daraja-press-ottawa-2020-xv-411-pp-ill-cad-4000-ebook-cad-1000/D7DDF731B0CDEA2829F3815E>

⁵⁶ <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/international-re-view-of-social-history/article/sylvia-tamale-decolonization-and-afrofeminism-daraja-press-ottawa-2020-xv-411-pp-ill-cad-4000-ebook-cad-1000/D7DDF731B0CDEA2829F3815E>

⁵⁷ *ibid*

⁵⁷ Decolonializing Feminist Freedoms Indigenous Relationalities Chapter 10 <https://shorturl.at/fkHR8>

says the reality is that the public or *wananchi* “devise their own systems of navigating social disputes and conflict, collectively referred to as community justice”.⁵⁸

She also warns against the false dichotomies where formal is equated with justice and the informal with patriarchal repression. She also dwells on the significance of Ubuntu, which is a philosophical concept that can be found in many African contexts and can be broadly interpreted as “I am because we are”, which can be understood in many ways that departs from the individualist standpoint that is the mark of capitalism to one where the individual is considered a unique person, yet significantly dependent and an important constitutive of the community. This echoes a concept that is popular in Indian subcontinent – *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*, a Sanskrit phrase found in the Maha Upanishad that at its core is about non-dualism, unity and oneness, and as a core moral philosophy, loosely translates into “the world is one family”.

These concepts have the power to underline interconnectedness and offer a route towards greater mutuality and trust.⁵⁹ They upturn the leading Sustainable Development Goal theme into “life is mutual aid” rather than the hierarchical “leave no one behind”⁶⁰

In essence, decolonial feminism emerges as a dynamic and vital force within the contemporary global discourse, challenging and reshaping established narratives, institutions, and power dynamics. Through a critical examination of colonial histories, decolonial feminism reveals the enduring impacts on gender relations and the marginalisation of certain groups, particularly women of colour. It provides a nuanced and diverse framework that goes beyond a uniform depiction of female subjugation, acknowledging the unique experiences of marginalised women.

It rejects Western theories rooted in colonial paradigms, instead positioning itself within local context to reclaim marginalised or suppressed knowledge resulting from colonial and neocolonial endeavours. Furthermore, it advocates for a pragmatic approach, acknowledging existing imperfections and committing to constructing upon available resources, flaws notwithstanding.

As an alternative worldview, decolonial feminism holds relevance for discussions on ecology, economics, government, spirituality, and knowledge, offering a powerful lens to examine and understand 'other' ways of life, particularly in the Global South. It is a call for collective and transnational action, urging the construction of a decolonial knowledge that reflects the realities of women of colour and promotes justice systems rooted in interconnectedness and mutual trust.

In its essence, decolonial feminism stands not as a revisionist idealisation of the past but as a radical and inclusive movement that seeks to “un-patriarchalise” revolutionary struggles and foster a more just and equitable world.

⁵⁸ Sylvia. 2020. Decolonization and Afro-Feminism. Ottawa: Daraja Press.

⁵⁹ Ibid

⁶⁰ Van Norren, Dorine E., African Ubuntu and Sustainable Development Goals: seeking human mutual relations and service in development, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01436597.2022.2109458>

01

THE UPROOTING OF KNOWLEDGE IN BRAZIL

Jessica O’Leary illustrates a case where the knowledge of indigenous women was appropriated and their contribution erased due to colonial processes. She says that women taught the colonisers the process through which a variety of tubers, a staple in many parts of the country, were to be cultivated and prepared for consumption. The coming of the Jesuits resulted in a sidelining of women’s knowledge as they were seen as ‘immoral’. Over time their role in helping the settlers was completely invisibilized.

“In line with recent scholarship on the history of science and medicine in colonial contexts, a close reading of the sources reflects the importance of indigenous knowledge to imperial expansion, on the one hand, and the interactive nature of cross-cultural knowledge sharing that became hidden by early modern European epistemological practices.” Worse still, the “European representations of the cultivation of mandioca identified, exploited, assimilated, suppressed and, finally, alienated Indigenous women’s knowledge from their original holders between 1500 and 1650.”⁶¹

02

BODIES OF KNOWLEDGE, KNOWLEDGE OF BODIES IN INDIA

In India, like in many other countries, knowledge of traditional remedies has been the domain of women. The Portuguese while introducing the ‘scientific credo’ in every sphere of life, including health, “for reasons of ideological supremacy, moral justification, and social legitimacy”⁶² also alienated women from their own bodies and discounted women’s knowledge. Using the case of a community in Goa, India Sheila D’Souza argues that the traditional practices that are dismissed as quaint are in fact more friendly to women. She also makes a larger point that certain remedies that are invaluable to biomedical treatment are “not the discovery of scientific research, but are unique to the traditional healthcare system”. She goes on to say since there are often no formal assessments of the quality of care provided by traditional medicine they are devalued.

⁶¹ Jessica O’Leary, *The Uprooting of Indigenous Women’s Horticultural Practices in Brazil, 1500–1650, Past & Present*, 2023;, gtac047, <https://doi.org/10.1093/pastj/gtac047>

⁶² Shaila Desouza (2003) *Tradition, Colonialism and Modernity: Women’s Health in Goa, India*, *Gender, Technology and Development*, 7:2, 189-208, DOI10.1080/09718524.2003.11910081



03

ERODING LIVELIHOODS AND LIVES

Emmanuel Akyeampong and Hippolyte Fofack discuss how multiple forces around production and reproduction resulted in millions of women being enslaved, and how the cultivation of cash crops coupled with the “European missionary constructions of the individual, marriage, and family from the early decades of the 19th century sequestered female labour and made it invisible in the realm of domestic production”.⁶³ Further colonial policies from the late 19th century reinforced “the ‘capture’ of female labour and the codification of patriarchy through the nature and operation of the colonial economy and the instrumentality of customary law.” Changes in land tenure, labour patterns, and the broader colonial economic system adversely impacted women. While women were actively involved in agriculture, particularly in subsistence farming, and in some communities livestock rearing, the expansion of colonial rule and land dispossession resulted in many indigenous communities losing access to fertile lands and women losing their livelihood and also finding it difficult to be absorbed into the factories and mines that opened up. Women were also craft producers and they traded these in the local markets, the disruption of the local markets and increased commercialisation of craftwork resulted in poorer women who had been entrepreneurs now becoming laborers. Colonialism disrupted established gender roles and economic structures, ultimately impacting the status and livelihoods of women in the region.

04

FINDING GENDER

Oyéronké Oyewù mí argues that Yoruba society had no gender system prior to colonisation by the West. Gender has “become important in Yoruba studies not as an artifact of Yoruba life but because Yoruba life, past and present, has been translated into English to fit the Western pattern of body-reasoning.”⁶⁴ Researchers, therefore, found “find gender when they look for it”.⁶⁵ The men who were appointed as chiefs by the colonisers had gained more power over the people than was traditionally conferred upon them and this, therefore, produced new gender hierarchies.

⁶³ Emmanuel Akyeampong and Hippolyte Fofack The contribution of African women to economic growth and development in the pre-colonial and colonial periods : historical perspectives and policy implications Affiliations Published Online:1 Jan 2014 <https://hdl.handle.net/10520/EJC155593>

⁶⁴ As quoted by Lugones https://globalstudies.trinity.duke.edu/sites/globalstudies.trinity.duke.edu/files/file-attachments/v2d2_Lugones.pdf

⁶⁵ *ibid*

Decolonial feminists have also underscored the importance of understanding heterosexuality as a modern-colonial normative framework as well as a pervasive part of the violence imposed by the colonial modern gender system.

According to Lugones, while sexual dimorphism (i.e. the idea that there are uncontested and clear-cut differences between male and female of the same species) is part of the visible side of modern-colonial gender system, intersex individuals are located on the dark side of this system, even though intersex individuals were recognised in many tribal societies prior to colonisation.⁶⁶ This is a thought that Sylvia Tamale also expands on when she looks at the case of Caster Semenya who has an intersex condition whereby her body allegedly produces testosterone at a higher level than most women and the Court of Arbitration for Sport held that if she wanted to continue to compete, she would be required to take medications to lower it. At the same time, Micheal Phelps, regarded as the greatest swimmer ever, having some genetic differences that seem to give him a huge advantage was celebrated (and rightly so).⁶⁷

This is an injustice where matters of race, gender and sexuality intersect but also betrays the imposition of a way of understanding the world. “African indigenous gendered approaches have been erased or marginalised when, in fact, they could enable inclusive and African-based ways of acknowledging non-binary people and assuring their integrity.”⁶⁸

Scholars have also pointed out a range of other examples to demonstrate how the colonial apparatus criminalised people who were not considered “straight, though previously they had held positions of power or respect. For example, in Andean ceremonies people who were regarded as third-gender figures played an important role in religious ceremonies, but the Spanish colonisers and scholars thought them to be as “diabolical and deviant”.

Decolonial feminists critique heterosexuality as a modern-colonial norm that perpetuates violence within the gender system. They highlight the unfair treatment of intersex individuals, using examples like Caster Semenya's case to reveal the intersectional injustice where race, gender and sexuality intersect. Additionally, the erasure of African indigenous gendered approaches and the historical criminalisation of non-straight identities, as seen in Andean ceremonies, exemplify the colonial imposition on diverse expressions of human sexuality and gender.

⁶⁶ As quoted by Laís Rodrigues <https://www.scielo.br/j/ref/a/xVcFGLjTtHYYjbrKpgS3vFw/?format=pdf&lang=en>

⁶⁷ Tamale, Sylvia. 2020. Decolonization and Afro-Feminism. Ottawa: Daraja Press.

⁶⁸ Tamale, Sylvia. 2020. Decolonization and Afro-Feminism. Ottawa: Daraja Press.

UNPACKING IDEAS

It is a radical break from views that use the West as a point of reference or benchmark and regards all else as inferior, less and those that must catch up to the West.

It challenges us to move away from the fixation of the West as a reference point for our understanding of all developments and offers us tools to unpack ideas and concepts such as 'modernity' and allows scholars, activists and managers to rethink the work and agency of Global South women.

It allows for the formulation of new language to define "not only the local manifestations of historical colonialisms but also global modern/ colonial intersections, correlations and deep coalitions between different experiences of coloniality."⁶⁹

POLITICS OF POSITIONALITY

Taking an unapologetic and distinct South position it encourages researchers to engage with "the politics of power and positionality in the research process to create space for the voices and lived experiences of 'others'. It challenges researchers to decentre their position as the default or norm, especially if they are of white coloniser or settler background.

This approach to research encourages researchers to strive toward being ethically and reflexively engaged throughout the research process, whereby the participants are agents in the knowledge being produced".⁷⁰

Beyond people, it serves to draw the attention to the link between "the conquering of nature and the transference of exploitation from the (European) man to nature and the essentially colonising invention of gender.

It directly resulted in dehumanising as a manifestation of coloniality of being".

And thereby offers us the contours to sketch a new paradigm that does not see humans as apart from nature, but rather a part of it.

FORGING TRANSNATIONAL SOLIDARITY

Women have forged bonds based not only a shared history of colonisation, but also the continued struggles against unjust international economic and political systems.

Chandra Mohanty has called "an imagined community of third world oppositional struggles" where women "with divergent histories and social locations woven together by political threads of opposition to forms of domination that is not only pervasive but also systematic."

Decolonial feminism underlines the need for formerly colonised women to create an alternative political and organisational space to the Western dominated, imperial international women's movement – even while engaging with the international movement.

This includes coming together of organisations such as the World Social Forum, as well as networks such as DAWN, Women Living Under Muslim Law, BRICS Feminist Watch, and South Feminist Futures, etc.

Decolonial feminism helps promote solidarities and dialogues to bring insight into theory and practice from different experiences, perspectives, worldviews and ways of working and organising from those who are overlooked, often ignored, and have to fight to be heard.

PLURIVERSALITY

Decolonial feminist theory encourages a move toward embracing a pluriversity of knowledges, ideas and experiences and to create a plurality of knowledge whereby all cultures, all nations remain equal, and as such all people and all communities have the right to be different precisely because everyone is considered equal.

This calls for openness to learn from others even while negotiating the potential tensions within fraught coalitions.

⁶⁹ Tlostanova, M., Thapar-Björkert, S., & Knoblock, I. (2019). Do We Need Decolonial Feminism in Sweden? *NORA - Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research*, 27(4), 290–295. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08038740.2019.1641552>

⁷⁰ <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/gwao.12673>

⁷¹ Ibid p 150

CRITICAL ENGAGEMENT

This is as that feminists “may unintentionally support the structures of settler colonial states through intellectual and political projects that ignore or even negate indigenous ways of knowing, nationhood, and land-based identities.”⁷²

In conclusion, decolonial feminism emerges as a transformative lens, offering essential tools for unpacking complex ideas such as ‘modernity’ and reimagining the agency of Global South women.

It emphasises the politics of positionality in research, advocating for ethical and reflexive engagement to amplify the voices and experiences of marginalised groups. Beyond individual perspectives, decolonial feminism directs attention to the interconnectedness of conquering nature, colonial inventions and invasions of gender and bodies, and the dehumanising manifestations of coloniality.

By fostering solidarities among women with diverse histories and social locations, it challenges the dominance of Western-centric international women's movements, promoting alternative spaces for dialogue and action. Decolonial feminism calls for pluriversality, acknowledging the equality of all cultures and nations.

Lastly, it urges critical engagement, emphasising the need to avoid inadvertently supporting settler colonial structures and “The ultimate goal is to formulate and advance the positive models of re-existence rather than mere resistance.”⁷³

⁷² Madina Tlostanova, Suruchi Thapar-Björkert & Ina Knoblock (2019) Do We Need Decolonial Feminism in Sweden?, *NORA - Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research*, 27:4, 290-295, DOI: 10.1080/08038740.2019.1641552

⁷³ Ibid

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As a Global South feminist alliance, BRICS Feminist Watch (BFW) has always been interested in unpacking colonial narrative to examine how colonial histories have shaped contemporary gender norms, power structures and identities in different parts of the world. Through intersectionality, it has explored how different forms of oppression intersect and compound, affecting individuals' experiences based on their gender, race, class, ethnicity, and sexual orientation. In its commitment to empower and amplify reality and voices of the Global South, it also engages in reclaiming indigenous knowledge systems and putting the spotlight on innovative approaches in fields such as agriculture, health, sustainable resource management, etc. that flow from these systems.

In September 2023, BFW in partnership with Solidarity Foundation, UBINING and its members Gen Dev Centre, PWESCR, Inequality Movement and Espasco Feminista hosted an online seminar on Decolonial Feminism and BRICS: Challenging Power Structures. The event brought diverse experts and shed light on the ways in which inequalities, discrimination and economic injustices were manifested and perpetuated through colonial agendas and its implications for the Global South. It also examined how a decolonial feminist framework could provide freedom, and empowerment to women in the Global South. BFW has followed a decolonial approach and the online seminar further helped us in our own understanding of our feminist politics as an alliance from the Global South.

I am grateful to all our presenters from the online event including Patricia Chaves, Brazil; Sunil Babu Pant; Nepal; Mariama Williams, Jamaica/ US; Farida Akhtar, Bangladesh; Bhumika Muchhala, India/ US, and Nancy Kachingwe from Zimbabwe as a discussant. These experts came from different parts of the world and were willing to be challenged by each other in order to develop new ideas and new strategies. I am also appreciative of the generosity with which they shared their experiences, and learnings. Their commitment made the online seminar, and now this research paper, productive. I am equally appreciative of all those who joined us for the event and contributed to the discussion.

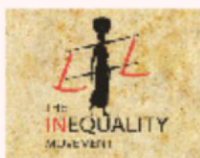
To capture the nuances of a rich conversation is a challenging task, and I am grateful to Shubha for her in-depth research that was key to this paper. Her energy brought creative thinking and made sure the conversation was not just a cerebral one. Shubha was ably assisted by Bulan Lahiri in the research. Nitika Singh and Aubrey Firaekayoga were the research and communication interns on this project and provided all the logistical and communication support. Ayo Shanti and Priya Ranjan Sahu edited the article, and Modified Digital team anchored all digital market for the events. I am also grateful to Sheikh Wasim for designing this report.

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PWESCR and BFW's ongoing explorations on BRICS and gender equality continue to contribute towards increasing the knowledge base and scholarship to explore new ways of thinking about these areas and to develop strategies that can be used in diverse situations. We decided to publish this paper in the hope that it will stimulate further inquiry and work amongst a wide range of audiences.

Priti Darooka
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Founder, Global Coordinator, BRICS Feminist Watch

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