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## Race, embodiment and later life: Re-animating aging bodies of color

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## ABSTRACT

This theoretical essay examines the intersections between race, ethnicity and old age from an inter-disciplinary lens. Drawing on cultural gerontology (especially embodied aging studies) and post-colonial perspectives on aging, it explores how an emphasis on the *body and embodiment* can serve as a conceptual lens for understanding racialized aging bodies. A tentative framework for analysis is proposed. The concept of *exile* explores how bodies of color and older bodies are denigrated through the hegemonic (white, youth-centered, masculinist) gaze. Re-animation can take place by transcending double-consciousness: 'seeing beyond' the dominant gaze. *Othering and otherness* are explored in relation to both raced and aging bodies. The limits of ethnic aging are scrutinized at an epistemic level, simultaneously informing, and obscuring the understanding of lived experiences of racialized ethnic minorities in old age. *Visible and invisible difference* provide a way of unpacking the simultaneous hypervisibility of older (female) bodies of color, and their invisibility in institutional and policy discourses. *De-coloniality* is considered, by exploring ways to resist hegemonic power through embodied ways of knowing. This article concludes by exploring how recent methodological innovations – especially the visual and sensory turn – can offer new ways of understanding the lived experiences of aging bodies of color.

## Introduction

The intersections between race, ethnicity and old age have received increasing scholarly interest in recent years (Bajekal, Blane, Grewal, Karlsen, & Nazroo, 2004; Burholt, 2004; de Jong Gierveld, Van der Pas, & Keating, 2015; Gardner, 2002; Karlsen & Nazroo, 2002; Lievesley, 2010; Phillipson, 2015; Zubair & Norris, 2015). Despite this, it has been noted that *theorization* around race, ethnicity and later life has remained sparse, both in aging studies and in race and ethnicity studies (Gilleard & Higgs, 2014; McDonald, 2011; Phillipson, 2015; Torres, 2015). This has been in part due to the peripheral treatment of the life-course in race and ethnicity studies, and the treatment of 'ethnic' or 'minority aging' as a sub-category of mainstream aging – a process which can perpetuate othering and marginalization. However, two important theoretical developments in the late 20th century have offered fresh ground to explore these intersections: the emergence of cultural gerontology and embodied aging studies, and the application of post-colonial theory to later life (Van Dyk, 2016; Zimmermann, 2016). This paper is a theoretical essay which seeks to bring these two traditions together, by using an embodied approach towards understanding race, ethnicity and later life.

The 'cultural turn' in gerontology has reshaped aging studies beyond all recognition (Twigg & Martin, 2015a, 2015b). Drawing on influences from post-structuralism, feminism and queer theory, as well as inter-disciplinary approaches from the arts and humanities; the study of

aging has shifted firmly away from physical decline to an embodied study of aging in terms of subjectivities and biographical narratives. For the purpose of this paper, two aspects of cultural gerontology are particularly relevant for advancing theories of race ethnicity and later life. Firstly, in the last twenty years or so, there has been increasing research on embodied understanding of old age, aging and later life (Cole, Ray, & Kastenbaum, 2010; Gilleard & Higgs, 2014; Hurd Clarke & Korotchenko, 2011; Twigg, 2000). This tradition has been slow in gaining purchase within aging studies; an unease caused perhaps by the fear that focusing on the physical body could be a retrogressive turn which could undermine other social and political gains in understanding aging (Twigg & Martin, 2015a, 2015b). The 'absent present body' long invisible in social gerontology (and sociology more broadly) (Leder, 1990; Öberg, 1996), has been made visible by exploring what it *feels like* to grow older, within and through our bodies (Hurd Clarke & Korotchenko, 2011). Bodies can serve as a multi-dimensional field where the visceral and fleshy body intersects with representation in the social and material world (Shilling, 2012; Williams & Bendelow, 1998). This has especially been true with the contribution of humanities gerontology more generally (Cole et al., 2010), and bringing together perspectives from social sciences and the arts and humanities. Empirical investigations for instance, have produced rich and varied research that explore the intimate and bodily in aging such as bathing practices and caring for older bodies (Twigg, 2000), sexuality and sex among older people (Marshall & Katz, 2006); body image and ableism (Kaminski &

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Hayslip, 2006), as well as sensuality, spatiality and imagining bodies in relation to material culture (Buse, Nettelton, Martin, & Twigg, 2016; Milton, 2017). Within performative arts and drama, these articulations take on new meaning, transcending language and discourse. Spatz, Ercin, and Mendel's (2017) *Judaic* project, provide new embodied methodologies by which the diasporic Jewish 'voice' can be reanimated through songwork and conceptual fragments (Spatz et al., 2017). There is a rich tapestry to draw from here, and yet, cultural gerontology appears to have stopped short of a full and embracing engagement with race, ethnicity and the aging body.

Along with embodied aging, the cultural turn has also highlighted diversity in relation to old age. As Gullette (2004:111) states "age is a different difference". Growing older, especially into deep old age, involves much more than physical transformation, it is often defined in terms of abjection, as "the ultimate defeat of aliveness, the ultimate failure" (Van Dyk, 2016:110). Representations of old age in consumption culture, are often defined through 'othering'; and it is through an embodied analysis of materiality and aging bodies, that the fault lines of differently aging bodies become visible. Clothing for instance, can be understood as an inexact semiotic 'code' with contradictory and ambiguous messages around how aged, raced and classed bodies present themselves, and are interpreted by others (Twigg, 2009). "The centrality of appearance to age relations and to older women's subjugation and ... the embodied nature of ageism" (Hurd Clarke, 2010: 3) are implicitly and explicitly reproduced through consumption culture. Similar analysis has been drawn around the representation of ageism and racism as essentialist responses which objectify and render invisible people of color in later life (Zimmermann, 2016). While there has been considerable research on differential aging in relation to the intersections between age and gender (Calasanti, 2005; Calasanti & Slevin, 2006; Hurd Clarke, 2010; Krekula, 2006) and lesbian and gay aging (Jones & Pugh, 2005; Slevin, 2006); *difference* in relation to race, ethnicity and the aging body remains under-explored.

The second notable development has been the application of post-colonial theory to the study of aging. In a recent special issue in Journal of Aging Studies, Van Dyk and Küpper (2016) and colleagues make an important intervention by considering how post-colonial concepts can be applied to later life. Zimmermann (2016) notes that post-colonial studies and aging studies have similar theoretical origins within existentialism and politics of the 'other'. This is a promising vein of enquiry. In this special issue, key concepts such as alterity and alienation (Zimmermann, 2016); othering (Kunow, 2016; Van Dyk, 2016); exile and de-coloniality (Hartung, 2016) and colonial mimicry and its extensions to age mimicry (Küpper, 2016) are used to explore the representation of old age from a post-colonial lens. These papers provide important spaces to challenge essentialism and culturalism in the construction of old age. However, the special issue has a specific remit - the application of postcolonial concepts to aging, and old age and later life remain relatively static in this analysis. There is a rich analysis of post-colonial theory and its application, but its translation into the lived, the everyday, the visceral and fleshy embodied experiences of what it *feels like* to negotiate the world as an aging body of color remains just outside of its remit.

This paper starts where cultural gerontology has left off- the embodied studied of aging - and bridges the gap between where post-colonial analysis of aging begins -exploring othering within later life- and asks what new insights can an embodied analysis of race, ethnicity and later life bring to a post-colonial aging studies? A tentative framework for analysis is provided and is discussed in six distinct sections. First, the concept of *exile* explores how bodies of color and older bodies are denigrated through the hegemonic (white, youth-centered, masculinist) gaze. Re-animation can take place through an exploration of double-consciousness: of 'seeing beyond' the dominant gaze. Second, *othering and otherness* are explored in relation to both raced and aging bodies. The limits of ethnic aging is scrutinized at an epistemic level, simultaneously informing and obscuring the understanding of lived

experiences of racialized ethnic minorities in old age. Third, *visible and invisible difference* provide a way of unpacking the simultaneous hypervisibility of older (especially female) bodies of color, and their invisibility in institutional and policy discourses. The intersections between gender and aging are particularly relevant (see Calasanti & Slevin, 2006) and I will be focusing on older female bodies in this paper. Fourth, *de-coloniality* is considered, by exploring ways of producing contra-narratives to hegemonic discourse. I conclude with some thoughts about the emergence of creative methodologies and embodied ways of knowing which can extend current understanding of race ethnicity and later life. Zimmermann (2016) drawing on Spivak's (1999) "can the subaltern speak?" asks "can older people speak?" In this paper, I extend his analysis by asking "can bodies speak?" and if so, what would we learn about aging bodies of color?

### Essentialism and exile

The role of the body and bodily as governing principles of a biopolitical understanding of race, ethnicity and old age has had different genealogies. In terms of 'race' the body was weaponized by using certain corporeal features, skin pigment, hair texture and phenotype to create hierarchies of difference; and an arbitrary criteria to justify the colonial project (Aschcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 2006). As Gates (1986, in Aschcroft et al., 2006:216) observes "race has become a trope of ultimate, irreducible difference between cultures, linguistic groups, or adherence to specific belief systems which more often than not also have fundamentally opposed economic interests". The irreducible and fundamental nature of racial classification, places the Caucasoid as racially superior, and through its definitive opposite, the Negroid, is cast into a state of permanent alienation and exile. Zimmermann (2016) describes alienation as a form of epistemic violence "which renders abject and invisible ... all those who are 'othered' by a dominant gaze (racism, ageism, othering). Essentialism and binarism are fundamental to the concept of exile, through a bifurcation of worth into human and non-human, white/black, male/female, young/old. "The Black man is overdetermined as "object", the White man is overdetermined as "subject" (Zimmermann, 2016:85). This creates a permanent state of non-being, of exile from humanity, of lacking futurity. The loss of the existential body is described eloquently by Frantz Fanon (1986:109-110).

"In the white world the black man encounters difficulty in the development of his bodily schema. Consciousness of the body is solely a negating activity. It is a third-person consciousness. The body is surrounded by an atmosphere of certain uncertainty...."

Blackness then becomes an imposed, alien subjectivity, its future uncertain, always on the edge of nothingness. Fanon's description of blackness suggests a 'triple consciousness'; the Negritude bestowed through the white man's gaze ("All that whiteness that burns me"), its annihilation of the black man's being, and the third consciousness of witnessing this self-negation. Fanon's description of being an 'object among other objects' also resonates with the concept of 'bare life'. Weheliye (2014:33) suggests that racialized bodies "by being barred from the category of human, are relegated to bare or naked life, being both literally and symbolically stripped of all accoutrements associated with the liberalist subject". In order to resist this form of exile, the white gaze needs to be reframed by a process of "reanimation" - of seeing *beyond* the dominant gaze, by en fleshing the 'bare life' with its lost stories, its cultural heritage, its history, as part of, and separate from, one of colonialism and slavery.

This process of reanimation requires the objectified black other to come to terms with double consciousness: "this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (William Du Bois (1999:10-11). This exercise is fraught with tension, as the very existence of a racialized subject is determined by its binary opposition

to the dominant gaze (white object). The fixity of race thinking, so damaging to entire communities and nations, cannot be contested from within the subaltern position (see Spivak, 1999). When Bhabha (2004) asks “what is this ‘now’ of modernity?” and “who are the ‘we’ in the telling of these histories; he makes an important observation. To reject ‘race’ as a defunct concept, cannot erase histories of colonial oppression. However, to determine futurity of a racialized people based on an essentialist premise can reinforce their otherness. Several possibilities exist on how reanimation can take place. Spivak (1999) a key proponent of subaltern studies,<sup>1</sup> suggests that a ‘strategic essentialism’ may be needed. This involves a provisional acceptance of the essentialist approaches to identity formation, towards a political end of collective resistance. Zimmermann (2016) proposes that an ‘open gaze’ based on a ‘doubting mind’ and a responsibility structure that flows both ways (between the object and the subject), is needed to contest dominant gaze of the white subject. This is a progressive option which challenges the dominant subject to engage with their own white privilege as well as allowing the black gaze to enfold its embodied identity beyond bare existence. Bhabha (2004: 338–367) warns however, that the intervention of a post-colonial critique should be “aimed at transforming the conditions of enunciation at the level of sign - where the inter-subjectivities realm is constituted - not simply setting up new symbols of identity”. Language and discourse, formed and controlled by the dominant gaze, must not then be co-opted in the reanimation process.

When it comes to exile and old age, the bio-politics of aging is a principal concern. Öberg (1996) notes that the social and agentic body becomes an ‘absent-present’ in gerontological research, elided by the emphasis on biological aging, frailty, dying and death. Indeed the preoccupation with biological aging and disease, and through extension, that of sick and dying bodies casts aging bodies into exile from the domains of life, health and vitality. The phenomenological tradition explains this bodily disappearance in relation to Cartesian mind–body dualism. Leder (1990:69) suggests that it is “*the body's own tendency towards self-concealment* that allows for the possibility of neglect and deprecation”. If the thinking body has its seat in the mind, its corporeal existence fades away from its own gaze. This bodily ‘dys-appearance’ recedes through sharp and overwhelming processes such as pain, disease and dysfunction where the body asserts itself into consciousness, but in a very specific way. “The painful body emerges as an *alien presence* that asserts on us a *telic demand*” (Leder, 1990: 73). In doing so, pleasure and happiness which are often linked to the expansive or *ecstatic* body, are replaced by a *recessive* body characterized primordially by pain, disease and death. “Physical suffering constricts not only the spatial but the temporal sphere...it pulls us back to the *here*, so severe pain summons us back to the *now*” (Leder, 1990, 75). Unlike ecstatic bodies, whose pleasure is an extension of their expansive self, the recessive body is overwhelmingly characterized by this spatial–temporal restriction; *pain, illness and disease then become the very thing that is the body*. Emphasis on biological aging then, exiles the aging body by defining it primarily through physical decline.

Exile in old age can be understood in terms of the unsettled position of the aging ‘object’ who is over-identified or ‘fixed’ by the dominant gaze (Zimmermann, 2016). As Katz (2011:187) notes, “behind the

dispassionate objectivity of the scientific enterprise lies a broader cultural background of contradictory images that marginalize, denigrate, and desexualize older people, yet obligates them ... to resist their own aging”. As with dialogs on racialization and the ‘white gaze’, within aging, the hegemonic gaze that reifies youth, vitality and beauty denigrates the older, frail aging body as a site of contempt and ridicule. In terms of fixity however, there is some variation: the white gaze creates an irreducible, fixed categorization of the raced other as non-human; while the hegemonic gaze around aging may be less absolute, but exile the aging body nonetheless into a benign existence, of pain, frailty and dependence; neither needing nor seeking any of the pleasures of a (youthful) ecstatic body. Marshall and Katz (2006) for instance, examine how aging bodies, especially in deep old age, are framed as androgynous, pleasure-less, un-sexed bodies. Even when convivial activities such as salsa dancing are endeavored by older bodies, they are considered as ‘safe forms of sensuality’; of performing and ‘acting’ in glamorous outfits, without offending the age-appropriate norms expected of women in mid-life (Milton, 2017). Age-ordering of dress and policing of older women’s bodies is another example of exile, where “the erotic evaporates, to be replaced by the untidy and the derelict” (Twigg, 2007). A particular commonality between exile in old age, and the colonizers relationship with the colonized, can be noted in the infantilization of the aged/raced other. Zimmermann (2016) notes the ways in which the benevolent colonizing ‘father’ often used “baby talk” to infantilize the raced other, and deny the existence of their native language. In the context of institutional care for older people, similar patterns of infantilization can be seen, in making frail old women, more used to silk dresses and pearls, dress in track suits and polyester bibs; to assist feeding, toileting and changing (Buse & Twigg, 2015).

While significant differences remain in the extent to which the dominant gaze leads to an irrefutable denial of humanity (in terms of racism), or some variations in terms of less human or a benign subject (in terms of ageism); bodily exile can be one way of understanding the intersections between race, ethnicity and old age. As Hartung (2016:99) drawing on Edward Said’s theories on Orientalism, notes ‘late style can be seen as a form of exile’, of being a body ‘out of place’, ‘a life led outside habitual order’. Despite this, multiple layers of difference must also be considered. A white middle class person, who has in post-colonial terms, been a ‘white subject’ through their life-course, but maybe ‘othered’ when they reach deep old age. These experiences may not be readily comparable to those of a racialized black person, who at any stage of their life cycle may have only been treated as an object/other. An obvious other area of difference is the interlinkages with class, race and age. Where aging is a universal phenomenon, and those with material resources may experience ‘bourgeois aging’ (Said as cited in Hartung, 2016: 99); those who are racialized aging bodies from low-income backgrounds may entail multiple layers of exile and invisibility. This is discussed in the next section on othering and otherness.

### Othering

Othering is another common thread in post-colonial thinking around race and old age. It can be witnessed in the post-colonial writings around the ‘barbaric other’ (Bhabha, 2004); ‘the Orient’ (Said, 1978), ‘the subaltern’ (Spivak, 1999) and de Beauvoir’s (1972) reference to the ‘other within’ in relation to old age. The concept of the other is fundamental to, and predicated on, essentialism and binarism. Drawing on Gramsci’s (1971) analysis, power could be seen as *hegemony*, or the situated prominence of dominant groups who establish their dominance by manufacturing ‘spontaneous consent’ of dominated classes, through a process of coercive and consensual control. Dominant discourse then imbues the human subjects with characteristics of ‘purity’- aligned with Aryan races, masculinity and everlasting youth. The ‘other’ is constructed through the dominant gaze; as its *diametric opposite*- the impure, non-white, female, old and decrepit body, that is distal in all its manifestations from the pure being. Such concepts of

<sup>1</sup> Subaltern studies emerged in 1982 through a series of publications by Indian scholars such as Ravindra Guha, Gyanendra Pandey and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. The Subaltern Studies Collective sought to challenge the ways in which post-colonial histories were reported. History writing and history telling from the voice of the margins became an important part of this discourse, and subaltern studies has now expanded far beyond India. The term ‘subaltern’ originally coined by Antonio Gramsci in Prison Notebooks, was adopted by the SSC to represent class-based marginalized collective that was rendered voiceless not only due to economic deprivation but also due to the intersecting factors of race and gender, of colonialism and patriarchy. Spivak’s work (“Can the Subaltern Speak?”) uses post-colonial and decolonial approaches to explore the status of women in India. She uses the term ‘sub-altern’ to refer to one without social mobility. Her research is a particularly useful application of subaltern studies to the study of gendered and raced subjectivities.

'purity' and pollution are embedded in primitivist understandings of race - "no single item is dirty apart from a particular system of classification in which it does not fit" (Douglas, 2002, xvii). As Zimmermann (2016:86) notes, "the image of the black inferiority is constructed against which the White man can repeatedly confirm his superiority (*othering*): by "primitivizing" the Black man, he constructs a counter-figure...to which he attributes all manner of negative characteristics". The look, the gaze from which the Oriental is distinguished from the Occidental (Said, 1978) is based on power and ways of knowing. The other is 'known', not just through its difference (*otherness*) but through the weaponization of said difference (*othering*) in relation to the self as a pure human subject. The other is perceived as 'dangerous' to the 'us' (Douglas, 2002). The alien is dangerous because it is unknown (or unknowable beyond hegemonic essentialism); "we recuperate all that is dangerous about the unknown into the singularity of the alien form: danger is not only projected onto the outside, *but the outside is contained within a figure we imagine we have already faced*" (Ahmed, 2000:2). The other, according to Ahmed, takes on the form of an eroticized stranger, at once familiar and over-represented in its fiction, and objectified through its difference. Othering can then be understood as a process of 'stranger fetishism' which "*invests the figure of the stranger with a life of its own insofar as it cuts 'the stranger' off from the histories of its own determination*" (Ahmed, 2000, 5). Due to the very limitations of how the other is 'known' within dominant discourse, the other cannot 'know' themselves, or have the ability to speak. Spivak's (1999) work is particularly relevant on this point. The 'subaltern' who are constructed as a representative opposite, cannot speak, as if they do so, they speak from a position of abjection and alterity - through othering.

Racism(s) and ageism(s) are key forms of institutional othering (Back & Solomos, 2000; Mac an Ghail, 1999). Indeed, even the terms 'Black Asian Minority and Ethnic' (BAME) or the sub-group of aging studies dedicated to examining their experiences (ethnic aging/minority aging) suffers from this very conundrum of perpetuating difference. By assuming the study of aging bodies of color to be 'ethnic minority experiences', their experiences are homogenized in counterpart to, 'mainstream/white aging' which is far from homogenous anyway. In this regard, ageism (like racism) can be viewed as forms of hegemonic cultural representation (Gullette, 2017), reinforced by language and discourse. Despite this, there is a growing sensitivity to positionality in aging research with ethnic minority groups. Zubair, Martin, and Victor (2012) for example provides an insightful account of the use of dress and self-presentation in constructing insider/outsider status while researching Pakistani elders. Old age itself, is not a homogenous entity, and Van Dyk (2016) delineates, for example, between the 'young old' who are praised for their sameness in relation to mid-life capabilities and norms, and 'radical othering' of those in deep old age who are defined through abjection. Such nuanced analysis is required for us to engage with the multiplicities embedded within the understandings of old age and difference.

Ageism like racism, can be mediated by affect and socialized responses. Sontag (2004) for instance suggests that compassion is an unstable feeling that needs to be converted into action if it is not wither away. The habituated responses of acceptance, of passivity and compliance, can be viewed as part of Gramsci's "manufactured consent", coerced from the 'other' through the process of political hegemony. In this sense, age-coded responses of 'wisdom' and patience in old age, are countered by Woodward (2003) who suggests, that resistance can take the form of anger in resisting ageism. In her analysis of two key literary texts on aging, *Senescence: the Last Half of Life* (Hall, 1992) and the *Fountain of Age* (Freidan, 1993), Woodward illustrates the importance of the social politics of anger in resisting ageism in old age. Quoting Friedan, she writes "Knowing all the reasons we have to be angry, lonesome or afraid, one can only suspect that an awful lot of older people are suppressing an awful lot of rage" (Woodward (2003), 56). If this is so, then affect, through a rage response against the social injustice of othering in old age, requires collective engagement. Gullette

(2004, 2017) as a cultural critic of old age extends this argument around ageism in her "declaration of grievance" (Gullette (2017)).

"We declare our causes to cast off our patient subjugation ... Through shameless age-shaming, they silence us. They destroy confidence in our own powers, lessen our autonomy, and make many accept ... an unnecessarily dependent or abject life ... Through depiction in the arts, they often distort our longings and desires and express fantasies noxious to our well-being".

This impassioned plea against ageism could speak as easily to the dehumanizing experiences of the racialized other who has been excluded from participating in social and cultural life. The linkages between othering, racism and ageism do not end here. In recent years, the category of the 'other' has been rapidly expanding to include 'new' forms of racisms which go beyond color-coded binaries. Fekete (2001) describes xenoracism as "racism that is not just directed at those with darker skins, from the former colonial territories, but at the newer categories of the displaced, the dispossessed and the uprooted, who are beating at Western Europe's doors". This is another area of commonality between ageism and racism. The recent Syrian refugee crises has been responded to, in similar ways to the 'aging crises' in the UK, with increasing concern about welfare burden, rather than concern for the human rights of older people of color. In the recent context of the Brexit referendum in the United Kingdom and Trump's nationalist politics in the United States, we are witnessing a rise in hate crime against older people, women, Muslims and people of color (Rajan-Rankin, 2017). The intersections between age, gender, race and class create a certain type of hyper-visibility in terms of difference/othering, and an invisibility in terms of policy response and state protection. The next section explores these interlinkages in terms of visible and invisible difference.

### Visible and invisible difference

Exile and othering, linked with hegemonic narratives of difference bring with them specific visibility and invisibility concerns. At one level, the dominant 'white gaze'/'ageist gaze' renders invisible the aging bodies of color through their construction as the 'other' as 'anti' human, devoid of the characteristics associated with the pure being (Douglas, 2002). This level of invisibility is determined by poverty of thought and action - the other has no characteristics of their own, except to highlight the position of the subject through alterity. At another level, the dominant gaze itself, entrenched through hegemonic authority, has no cause to 'look in upon itself'. Whiteness is an example of such a curious absence, simultaneously everywhere, and nowhere within scrutiny and analysis (Garner, 2007). This lack of critical awareness and refusal to render the dominant gaze to an 'open stance' (Zimmermann, 2016) means that it is rarely challenged or reflected upon; except in its extremist form (such as terrorism and white extremism). The 'other' then remains 'othered' through the fixity and irrefutability of the closed gaze, that relies on arbitrary bio-political reasoning to justify its existence (Zimmermann, 2016). We have already seen the dilemmas associated with the closed gaze, in that the 'other' defined through its alterity, remains unable to transcend the double consciousness - of how the dominant subject views them, and by extension, how the other views himself/herself (Spivak, 1999). However, an embodied understanding of visible and invisible difference can highlight hybrid and unexpected ways in which bodies of color can find spaces to resist and transcend this invisibility. Tarlo (2010) for instance, in her study of British Muslim women, found considerable variation in the hybrid representation of Muslim identity through fashion and self-styled dress. She observes,

"The colourful and eclectic clothing combinations worn by young visibly Muslim women in Britain bear witness to the diversity of ways Islamic clothing prescriptions are interpreted ... their wearers are not alien or other but rather ordinary people scouring British

high streets ... selecting clothes and composing outfits which correspond to their personal and social lives” (Tarlo, 2010:105).

This emphasis on embodied forms of dress in the patterning of *everyday life*, can challenge the exoticization and alien representation of the other. However, hybridity itself can bring border-crossing challenges, when whiteness coincides with ethnoreligious marginality. In my study on social work students’ experiences of racism (Rajan-Rankin, 2015), a white Muslim female participant shared her experience of being ‘othered’ because of her skin color. She was considered to be following a ‘Mickey Mouse’ religion, a watered-down version of the true faith, which ‘belongs’ to the racialized Arab. This signifies a more nuanced reading of racialization and whiteness where “whiteness as a site of privilege is not absolute but rather cross-cut by a range of other axes of relative advantage and subordination; these do not erase or render irrelevant race privilege, but rather deflect or modify it” (Frankenberg, 2001:76). In *Visible Identities*, Alcoff (2006) provides an insightful account of how perceptions of whiteness among Latinos can bring a completely different experience to their worldview. Drawing on Rodriguez’s study of Latinos in the United States, she discusses how lighter Latinos can be taken to be white; and through this, find themselves able to “see” how they are treated, differently from others. However, when their Hispanicity (blackness/othering/difference) becomes known, they are quickly othered, even their accents are scrutinized for signs of difference. In my study on Indian call center workers (Rajan-Rankin, 2016), similar processes were observed, when American clients suspected that Indian call agents (pretending to be American) were ‘not who they seemed’. Difference and ‘other status’ is hence not only bestowed by the hegemonic ‘subject’; it is also an embodied performance that is kept up through the ‘managing of difference’, the ‘curating of identity’.

Visible and invisible differences are further complicated when multiple forms of difference are encountered. This is especially true when identity politics are concerned, and one form of (in)visible difference and marginalization is explored, without taking into accounts its intersections with other forms of difference. Kimberle Crenshaw (1994:93), a black feminist and key proponent of intersectionality theory observes this dilemma in *Mapping the Margins*:

“The problem with identity politics is not that it fails to transcend difference, as some critics charge, but rather the opposite- that it frequently conflates or ignores intra group differences...ignoring difference *within* groups frequently contributes to tensions *among* groups.”

This is an important observation about managing difference and the intersectional politics of age, race, gender and class. In her keynote address, Gullette (2017) alludes to a similar frustration when discussing the example of the American flight United Airline forcibly removing a Chinese doctor from the plane on the pre-text of their not being enough seats. Context matters here, and when this story was reported in the media, shortly after Donald J. Trump’s “Muslim ban” in the USA, not surprisingly, most reports focused on the racism underpinning this encounter. Gullette reminds us however, that the man forcibly removed from the United Airlines flight, was not only a highly educated Chinese doctor, he was also an *older person*. By focusing on racism as the key lens for understanding the social inequality underpinning this encounter, media reports made the implicit ageism in the encounter invisible. Visible and invisible difference are complicated by the interplay between age, gender, race, class and (dis)ability; and in most cases, these interplays are often over-simplified by focusing on some aspects of difference eliding others. Age and race are both worn on the skin. They are visible through skin color, hair texture, clothing and display, wrinkles, gait, graying of hair, manner of speech, use of certain material objects such as walking sticks or wheelchairs. Aging bodies of color embody social identities and in some ways can be hyper-visible in terms of difference, and in other ways completely invisible in terms of access

to dignity, human rights and freedom from abjection. Resistance to these processes of othering, of dehumanization, must take place in multiple ways.

### De-coloniality and resistance

If knowledge, language and power –ways of ‘seeing’ and ‘knowing’ the world, form the basis of hegemony (Gramsci, 1971); then de-colonizing the western canon requires us to not only questioning these knowledge claims, but also being mindful of not reproducing them. As Katrak (cited in Aschcroft et al., 2006:240–241) states “a new hegemony is being established in contemporary theory that can with impunity ignore or exclude post-colonial writers ... and other cultural productions while endlessly discussing concepts of the ‘Other’ ... obscurity is frequently mistaken for profundity”. Katrak is eluding to the theoretical project of post-colonialism which is being created and consumed by theorists who speak in the same privileged language and can be “unconsciously complicit in ... validating dominant power structure, even when they ideologically oppose such hegemonic power” (Aschcroft et al., 2006, 240). Language itself is power, and the dominance for example, of western scholarship on race, ethnicity and aging in the English language, is itself reflective of the neglect of other native languages and discourses on the subject. Most scholarship on ethnic aging has emerged from Western Europe and North America, and very few studies explore the meanings of old age and ‘aging in place’ within the Global South (but see Lamb, 2000, 2015).

A further area of concern is the elision of feminist scholarship within post-colonial writings: “the history of both the colonized and the colonizer have been written from the male point of view” Oyewumi (cited in Aschcroft et al, 2006:256). The decolonization project must engage with the tensions between ‘representation’ (allowing the ‘subaltern’ to speak) and re-presentation (retelling theories about the other in understandable ways) without conflating the two (Spivak, 1999). Engagement with representation and allowing invisible voices to be heard, is a more difficult task than it may first seem; because the location of those voices must be defined *outside* alterity. Exploring representation through the pursuit of ‘authenticity’, while powerful in its ability to energize collective action, resistance and empowerment of the subaltern, is limited by the trap of ‘binarism’ and essentialist politics. In order to unlock the radical potential of postcolonial approaches Bhabra (2014) suggests that we need to move towards ‘connected sociologies’, by bringing together postcolonial and decolonial traditions. While most postcolonial scholarship was influenced by middle-Eastern and South Asian scholars like Edward W. Said and Gayatri Spivak; the decolonial tradition stems from the scholarship of diasporic scholars in South America. The postcolonial tradition allows us to examine “the double displacement caused by removing the other *from* the production of an effective history of modernity” (Bhabra (2014), 116). The invisibility and marginality caused by such displacement is influenced not only by silencing the voices of the subaltern in the telling of their histories, but also “making invisible the colonial order that provides the context for their (European) ‘self-realization’”. Drawing on the work of decolonial scholars such as Quijano and Mignolo, Bhabra (2014) suggests that epistemic decolonization of knowledge needs us to consider both the damaging effects of modernity and coloniality, but also of viewing modernity/coloniality *as* modernity. Decolonization then requires us to not only challenge a historical narratives of knowledge production, but to also examine epistemologies which are “geographic in their historicity”. In other words, by considering how knowledge is constructed in the geographic South before the European incursion, it can be possible to reclaim older ways of knowing that pre-date and can form alternate discourses to western ways of knowing.

The concept of decoloniality can be applied to the concept of race, ethnicity and later life in a number of ways. In the main, it calls for a more expansive scholarship on the meaning and subjectivities associated with aging from the global South. Such examinations allow to

examine *different geographies of aging* and by doing so, unsettling dominant scholarship on the aging experiences of the ‘other’ (Bhabra’s reference to ‘epistemologies that are geographical in their historicity’). Decolonial thinking can also be applied through a process of *decentering* hegemonic ideas around aging. Heike Hartung’s (2016) work on ‘late style as exile’ invites us to explore aging as life led outside spatial and temporal order. By drawing on Said’s notions of temporality and seasonal metaphors of aging as life lived outside time, Hartung makes useful links between how a decolonial approach can help us to challenge the normative framing between a productive and active third age, and a decrepit fourth age. In this way a decolonial approach can help decenter dominant discourse around both race and age by unsettling and reconstituting what aging means in different contexts, time, space and place, but also at different points in the life course. A further approach to de-colonizing knowledge may involve a shift away from linguistic and discursive ways of knowing the world, to engaging with the visual, the sensorial and the embodied ways of ‘seeing’ the other, and allowing them to see and know themselves. Figueroa (2013) for instance, explores approaches to decentering beauty in her study of Mexican women. By exploring the affective experience of what beauty *does* to women of color, rather than what beauty *is*, she effectively challenges Eurocentric beauty ideals as a standard that all Mexican women aspire to (“not all black women want to be white”). Tarlo’s (2016) research on wig manufacturing and hair practices among Black and Jewish women similarly considers the relationship between hair, materiality and identity in specifically embodied ways. This methodological shift to affect and the visual, could be a powerful way of moving away from the Anthropocene (human-centric view of the world) to an appreciation of the relationship between bodies, spaces, places and materiality. In this sense, the “research assemblage”, a collection of “things, people, ideas, social collectivities and institutions” (Frost & Alldred, 2015:1) could provide a more expansive canvass by which to understand race, ethnicity and old age.

### Conclusions: future directions

This paper makes an important contribution to the Special Issue on Aging Body and Society by providing a focal point for examining theoretical hybridization between aging studies, cultural gerontology, body studies and post-colonial perspectives on aging. Never before have we had the wealth of research, debate and scholarship that has allowed us to explore aging as a corporeal experience and cultural phenomena. This paper makes a timely intervention by exploring aging in relation to wider socio-cultural contexts and social inequalities, particularly in relation to race, racialization and ethnic difference.

The key arguments made in this paper elaborate ways in which the body and embodiment can serve as a conceptual bridge between cultural gerontology and post-colonial approaches to aging studies. The lived and experiential body provides a physical and symbolic space within which the dehumanizing effects of racism and agism can be explored. A tentative framework has been proposed for exploring the embodied study of race, ethnicity and old age. *Essentialism and exile* allow us to examine the ways in which biopolitics of aging and race classification create a form of epistemic violence by which the old/raced body is rendered abject and invisible (Zimmermann, 2016). The genealogies of biopolitical classification differ in terms of complete abjection (the raced other as object) and partial abjection (the abjection of the aging body as experienced more acutely during fourth age). *Othering* provides another lens by which we can understand aging and racialization in terms of weaponization of embodied difference. The ‘other’ is constructed as the diametric opposite of the dominant (young/white/male/heterosexual) ‘subject’ and can only be known through alterity. Examples of othering have been explored both with reference to agism and racism. While cumulative disadvantage theories have sought to explain some of the processes by which multiple forms of difference can deepen social inequalities; in this paper I suggest that

*othering* rather than multiple disadvantage is the cause of this form of exile. I have explored ways in which *visible and invisible difference* are linked to the racialization of bodies in old age. As Alcoff (2006) notes, person(s) of color are paradoxically hyper-visible in their difference (through skin color, dress, hair style, accents) but through the process of racialization and othering can be rendered invisible, both in terms of participation in social and cultural life and in public policy discourse. Finally I have suggested that concepts of *decoloniality* and decentering of hegemonic discourses around old age and race can help to challenge the western canon and produce alternate epistemologies and ways of knowing that are not elided by the European incursion in the global South.

A further area of possible synergy is informed by the most recent developments in creative methodologies and the ‘visual’ and ‘sensory’ turn in sociological research. No longer limited to traditional research methods of heterodox research traditions, sensory methods (Elliot & Culhane, 2017) and ‘live methods’ (Back & Puwar, 2012) present a whole new way of researching the world through embodied ways of knowing. Creative approaches to research including mapping, scavenging, idiotic methods, walking, ethnographies using smell, sound, visual imaging; all combine to provide new ways of understanding the social world by transcending the literary and discursive traditions. Similarly methodological approaches that focus on movement (Ingold, 2011) and rhythm (Lyon, 2018) provide key insights into the interweaving of space, place, movement and human experience in ways that are non-linear and fluid. The shift in emphasis is small but highly significant. These methodological approaches indicate a move away from how human beings affect or behave in and on the world, to the rhythms and lived ways in which human beings are connected to the very fabric of their lives. As Ingold (2011:68) notes about ‘being alive in the world’ “animacy ... is the dynamic, transformational potential of the entire field of relations by which beings of all kinds, more or less person-like or thing-like, continually and reciprocally bring one another into existence”. Re-animating discourses on aging bodies of color may then involve changing the way we know and research the world. The role of the ‘visual’ has increasingly been explored in aging research (Martin, 2012; Reynolds, 2010), as has the emphasis on materiality, embodied and social identities in old age (Buse & Twigg, 2015). Visual anthropological approaches have also been used widely in studying representations of health and illness among Black communities (see Levine, 2007). Perhaps what is still needed is further research using embodied and live methods to explore the contours of how race, ethnicity and old age can be visualized and experienced. We are poised at the precipice of immense possibility, both theoretically and methodology in relation to how we understand race, ethnicity and old age. Indeed one can only ask, if bodies could speak what would they say about aging bodies of color?

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