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Gendered organization theory

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Summary

Gendered organization theory refers to an understanding of organizations as sites that (re)produce gender dynamics and the gender order. Bringing the gender lens to discussions about organization

theory is useful to capture the filter through which relational dynamics operate in organizations and the way these (re)construct the psychological, cultural and social dimensions that shape the organization as a dynamic, relational and interdependent structure. Key ideas associated with gendered organization theory center around gender as a social category that continues to be the basis for inequality in working life. Gendered organization theory pays particular attention to how gender interacts with different dimensions of social, political, economic and technological life and how this is mobilised in organizations as well as how organizations foster and tackle new and reformulated gender(ed) inequalities. However, gender is not the only social category of difference that shapes inequality in organizations and would benefit from more explicit insight from feminist theories to unpack the complex dynamics in organizations and the impact they have on individuals. Focusing on intersectionality, decolonial feminism, ecofeminism, queering, and theorizing beyond the human provides a more integrated framework to understand the complex and fluid impact of gender in organizations.

Keywords: Gendered organization theory, intersectionality, decolonial feminism, ecofeminism, queering, beyond human

Introduction

There is a longstanding tradition that discusses the gendering of organizations and organization theory. The importance of gender has been shown in the ways it brings analytical nuance and a more critical prism under which to interrogate dynamics, processes and structures in organizations. There is recognition that, despite the implicit claim that organizations are gender-neutral, they are in fact sites that (re)produce gender and the gender order (Acker, 1990; Ely & Meyerson, 2000). West and Zimmerman (1987) have interrogated gender as “a routine accomplishment embedded in everyday interaction” (p. 125); this helps us to think about how the gendered person enters an organization and within it, engages in relational dynamics that (re)construct the psychological, cultural and social dimensions that articulate the organization as a dynamic, relational and interdependent structure.

Despite the extensive body of work developed in this area by feminist scholars, organization theory remains largely gender-neutral (Hearn & Parkin, 1992; Kelan, 2009) and the centrality of gender is often neglected in management and organization studies (MOS). Bell et al. (2020) argue that “feminist research remains marginal in the most prestigious management and organization studies journals” (p. 177). This suggests that the exploration and interrogation of gender in organizations, the form it takes and its implications, remains an open theoretical, conceptual, methodological, and empirical question. Identifying a way forward in this discussion, Calás et al. (2014) have noted that the persistence of sex/gender inequality in organizations and society must be understood by paying attention to the changing conditions that drive its reproduction. In effect, gender interacts with different

dimensions of social, political, economic and technological life and, as a result, there are broader questions about the role of organizations in fostering and tackling new and reformulated gender(ed) and intersectional inequalities.

A starting point in these discussions is reflecting on how we¹ theorize gender. When discussing a social theory of gender, Connell (1985) put forward the notion of ‘gender relations’ to refer to interconnected issues that shaped the gender order which included, among other things, the social subordination of women and the practices that sustain it, the sexual division of labour, and the role of the body in social relations (p. 261). We must interrogate not just the epistemological and intellectual underpinning of our conceptualisation of gender, but also how gender interacts in organizations, as well as the purpose it serves to maintain and perpetuate a particular organizational order. Considering changes to structures and forms of organization in contemporary society, many forces operate in intellectual and practical ways to question the purpose, relevance, and impact of gender in social and economic life. For instance, whilst locationally diverse, situated strands of feminist theory -- e.g., intersectional, decolonial, ecological-- push for shifts to our analytical frameworks to highlight the interlocked nature of the lived experience, social justice movements --e.g., #MeToo, #NiUnaMas, #NiUnaMenos, #BringBackOurGirls, #SayHerName, #BLM, #ClimateJustice-- continue to call organizations and society to account for their role in perpetuating inequalities. More importantly, these movements explicitly challenge organizations and society to be more action-driven in tackling inequalities.

We focus on gendered organization theory, elaborating on conceptual and empirical opportunities that allow for a more integrated exploration of gender, which considers issues that have been neglected in debates and discussions in this area. Our discussions draw on feminist, intersectional perspectives, which understand gender as a socially and causally constructed phenomenon that in its intersection with other socially constructed categories of social difference (such as “race”², class, sexuality, age, religion, among others), shapes dynamics that lead to privilege and inequality within organizations (Haslanger, 1995; Lorber & Martin, 2011; Lorber, 2019). We use diverse lenses to capture the multidimensionality of these dynamics and, in doing so, propose more inclusive re-formulations of discussions about gendered organization theory. The importance of drawing on feminist perspectives lies on the emancipatory intellectual potential of feminisms to be simultaneously inclusive, personal, political, intellectually disruptive and generative. Feminist thinking is distinct in the way it challenges dominant narratives; feminism speaks from a space of minoritisation and does not do subtleties in relation to how societal, organizational and relational structures reproduce social injustices. We see feminisms as both ways to recognise that inequalities are diverse in source and outcomes, and ways that move beyond interrogating this diversity but looking to generatively identify ways to tackle unequal outcomes. In this respect, feminisms are not descriptive or analytical but prioritize transformational action.

¹ Following the tradition of engaged feminist scholarship, in this article we speak in the first person. We acknowledge that the OUP ORE style is to avoid using first-person pronouns and appreciate Yvonne Benschop's support in recognising the importance of the first person in feminist writing to bring to the fore accountability and face the dangerous, personal, and political ethos of feminist thinking.

² We use inverted commas when alluding to “race” as a social category to highlight that “race” is a social construct strongly linked to racism and not an objective, scientifically based or neutral category. We thank Stella Nkomo for highlighting this point during her keynote address at the 12th International Critical Management Studies Conference (17 December 2021).

Some discussions recognise that gender, as a sole category of analysis, is insufficient to unpack the complex dynamics in organizations and the impact they have on individuals. Thus, more nuanced analyses are needed that make use of concepts and theoretical frameworks that complicate our understanding of lived experiences in organizations by engaging in more critical scrutiny of how inequalities emerge, are embedded and maintained in institutions, organizational structures and arrangements. In envisioning a theoretical future for gendered organization theory, we must move to a more critical appreciation that positions, examines and discusses gender within power processes where other social categories of difference intersect to shape the form inequalities take and examine systemic patterns of privilege and disadvantage in organizations.

We look at what could be seen as the next generation of gendered organization theory. Whilst we recognise that gender is a crucial departure point, we propose that it is essential to remember that gender is ingrained in organizations and organizational dynamics so it must be scrutinized as an element of the theoretical concept of the organization, and problematised in terms of its limits to explain inequalities. Our 'next generation approach' is to suggest that other theoretical approaches do more than gender yet do keep gender in the loop in different ways; in essence, we position gender within an integrated framework of intersections with other social categories of difference.

We see this as essential to be more intentional and meaningful in our understanding of how gender is useful but also reconfigured within organizations. As Bendl (2008) has put it: the subtext of organizations needs to be scrutinized. This means interrogating the relationships between gender and other terms of reference used to explain, analyze, understand, and interpret organizations. Our proposed broadening of the project to draw on feminisms is essential to address the ways in which inequalities continue to emerge and reconfigure beyond gender, which could be seen to leave the space for an open question in relation to the reconfiguration of the analytical scope of gendered organization theory. We would argue that decentering gender is the way forward in order to meaningfully re-center it because gender never operates in a singular manner to create inequalities. More specifically, in order to advance discussions about gendered organization theory, the centrality of gender needs to be challenged because it largely overlooks and ignores inequalities, promoting binary thinking and positions inequalities within a simplistic analytical axis.

We present avenues for the advancement of discussions related to gendered organization theory. We recognise the importance that gender, as a social category of analysis and as an analytical lens has accomplished in problematizing inequality in organizations and dynamics within them. However, our main proposition is that we need to move on from a single-category orientation in theorizing and instead utilize broader, integrated, nuanced frameworks that allow us to interrogate more comprehensively inequalities in organizations. We frame this proposition in relation to five diverse approaches: intersectionality, decolonial thinking, ecofeminism, queering, and theorizing beyond the human. In these five domains we recognise theoretical, empirical and methodological potential for the further development of gendered organization theory from and with feminist perspectives. To aid with the process of thinking differently and more inclusively that we propose, after each discussion we include questions to guide thinking and problematizations that adopt these diverse perspectives and support the overall aim of rethinking organization theory beyond gender. In this respect, whilst the questions are placed within each of the perspectives, they could inform an integrated framework of criticality in the study of organization theory and ultimately practice.

We start the discussion focusing on intersectionality, highlighting how it allows us to interrogate how racism and its intersections with sexism, classism and other forms of domination, shape organizations and the dynamics within them. We then focus on decolonial approaches, to call for challenges to the way knowledge is produced by subaltern, non-hegemonic voices. An important point in decolonial theorizing is that difference is not used to qualify Otherness but to understand ontological situatedness. In discussing ecofeminism, we elaborate on discussions about the role of environmental issues and sustainability, as well as the relationship between gender, sustainability, and climate change. Ecofeminists highlight the interplay of gender equality and environmental justice, through discussing the economic and political forces at work. This can help us to understand organizations and inequalities through the adoption of a lens that explores the role of organizations in access to resources, dynamics of extractivism and achieving sustainable development goals.

With a view of engaging with ideas about difference and identity fluidity, we discuss queering organizations and pose the main aim of queering as challenging heteronormativity, highlighting the need to deconstruct existing binaries at work in ways that go beyond including LGBTIQ+ perspectives but creating spaces that do not operate within the boundaries of binaries. Finally, we engage with discussions about organizations and technology, exploring how conceptualizations that go beyond the human, such as socio-material approaches to digital technology, real agentialism or posthumanism, can be used in organization theory to question the distinction between social/biological life and the machine. An important point in this discussion is how decentering the hu/man helps to grasp inequality in organizations in novel ways. In the final section, we conclude with reflections about running themes that highlight important tensions and set out potential principles to advance gendered organization theory.

Gender and Organization Theory: A theoretical development and an epistemological turn

The development of gendered organization theory can be framed as both a theoretical development and an epistemological turn. As a theoretical development, the importance of a gender lens to explore, interrogate and understand organizations and organization theory can be traced back to pieces like Acker and Van Houten's (1974) discussion of the sex structuring of organizations, which argued for its centrality alongside organizational factors to get more comprehensive explanations of organizational phenomena, and Kanter's (1977) empirical findings about the role of the social structure of organizations in (re)producing inequalities that disproportionately affected women in relation to men in the workplace. In line with the times, the discussion was framed around sex differences and recognised a sexual division of labour that was biased and stereotypical. In her groundbreaking work, Joan Acker (1990) elaborated on the different ways in which organizations are deeply gendered; in particular, how through norms, practices and regulations, stereotypical views about men and women persist, regardless of the composition of the workforce (Mastracci & Arreola, 2016). The strength of gender as an organizing principle in organizations then presents an interesting contradiction insofar as gender is also central to the symbolic and material asymmetrical and hierarchical structures in organizations, which are the ones that promote the view that organizations are gender-neutral spaces (Alvesson & Billing, 2009).

The gendering of organization theory had a primary moment in the arguments developed by feminist scholarship (see Acker, 1992; Ashcraft & Mumby, 2003), alluding to the role of inequalities resulting from patriarchy as produced, reproduced and perpetuated in

organizations. These arguments emerged from a critique of the way dichotomous subjectivities between men and women are socially created through organizational interactions (Alvesson, 1993), and how organizations whilst seemingly not engaging with gender, perpetuate a gendered division of labor (Acker and Van Houten, 1974). However, this is not a process that has happened rapidly and evenly; for instance, Wilson (1996) has noted that organization theory has been slow in adopting a gender perspective, compared to other disciplines. The inclusion of the gender perspective is further complicated by the normalization of gender blindness, with others (see Bishu et al., 2019) arguing that central to a gender perspective is the ability to “see gender”.

Bringing a gender lens is then seen as a corrective to the historical gender-blindness of organization theory (Bendl 2008), which has roots in discussions about the nature and structure of work that assumes a disembodied worker (Benschop & Doorewaard, 1998a). However, whilst some argue that organization theorists had historically done very little to engage with the nature of gendered relations at work (Wilson, 1996: 828), others (see Linstead, 2000) contend that this gender-blindness “is neither empirical nor accidental” (Linstead, 2000: 299) and has responded to exclusive epistemological projects which purposely chose to ignore it. For example, ideas about the division of labor during industrialization (see Smith, 1776), which proposed how scientific principles might fit the management of production (Taylor, 1911 [1996]), did so assuming a technologized worker of indeterminate identity (Bahnisch, 2000). Furthermore, we identify this gender-neutral approach in scholarship theorizing organizations and technology; for example, Woodward’s (1965) analysis of chemical factories capturing the need for different forms of organization, and Perrow’s (1967) discussion on technology as a key mediator in the relationship between organization and production. While these authors refer to different understandings of organization, they ignore gender as a crucial aspect of organizing.

Other reviews provide insights into the 50-year trajectory of research on gender in MOS (e.g., Broadbridge & Hearn, 2008; Alvesson & Billing, 2009; Broadbridge & Simpson, 2011; Calás et al., 2014; Ely & Padavic, 2007; Joshi et al., 2015; Paludi, Helms-Mills & Mills, 2014; Powell, 2014). These works highlight the important advances that theorisation on gender has brought to our understanding of management and organizations whilst also repeatedly recognising that discussions about gender evoke mixed feelings that range from calls to action all the way to hostility because it hits the nerve of the organizational status quo. More specifically, these works show that since the emergence of the study of gender in MOS, the field has experienced persistent tensions between individual/micro-level and structural/macro-level explanations for gender(ed) relations and inequalities in organizations. These inequalities are complex because they involve different structures and relational dynamics between diverse stakeholders that have different positions of power within organizational settings. For example, the mainstreaming of gender continues to be an important aspect of discussions of the structural/macro-level (see Verloo, 2006), and many people are on board with the general idea of gender equality. However, gender mainstreaming in organization is more challenging as discussions about gendered organization are often met with resistance so the level of compromise required to achieve change is more difficult to reach. This can potentially undermine the aim of eliminating gender bias in organizational processes and practices (Benschop & Verloo, 2006).

In the context of these discussions, feminism has become an important force that calls out organizations as gendered and looks to problematise its impact on social justice outcomes (see Benschop, 2021). There are different, yet interrelated, takes on how feminist theory has

influenced MOS. For example, whilst Calás and Smircich (2006) elaborate on radical feminist, liberal feminist, psychoanalytic feminist, post structural/postmodern as well as transnational/post-colonial approaches, Benschop and Verloo (2016) refer to liberal, socialist, social constructionist and poststructuralist feminisms as providing the foundational framework for looking at gendered organizations. These bodies of work speak to the centrality of feminist thinking to the way key questions about gender are embedded in the study and understanding of organizations.

These debates have signaled an epistemological turn, where the influence of feminist theory in the articulation of the connection between gender and organization theory has led to an interest in understanding organizations and their structures as well as the knowledge produced within them as gendered. These discussions have significantly advanced our understanding of the relationship between gender and organization. We build on these discussions by engaging with new developments in feminist theory that sit at the centre of critical analytical axis that challenge the centrality of gender as a single category of analysis and instead advocate for the integration of diverse understandings of difference (including gender) to expand what has been so far known as gendered organization theory. We focus on intersectionality, decolonial feminist thinking, ecofeminism, queering and post-humanist feminism as providing the avenues to develop a theoretical, methodological and empirical map that is inclusive of important shifts and transformations in the way categories of social difference are problematised and interrogated in organization theory. We first move to discuss intersectionality and organization theory.

Intersectionality and organization theory

Intersectionality builds on a long history of Black women and women of color highlighting how the nature of their experiences as a result of racialised dynamics is ignored. The articulation of intersectionality as an intellectual proposition has been traced back to the statement by The Combahee River Collective (1979), which highlighted the racism within the feminist movement and the sexism within the antiracist movement, emphasizing the multidimensionality of oppression experienced by Black women and women of colour. Their critique of white feminists' universalistic approach to gender inequality was then formally captured by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), who coined the term "intersectionality" to refer to the entangled, multidimensional forms that inequality takes. Using legal cases in the area of work disputes as well as domestic violence, Crenshaw (1989) discussed how judges failed to recognize that through the interplay of "race" and gender specific forms of discrimination can emerge. In discussing this, she introduced the term intersectionality, which has been subsequently used to highlight the inseparability of "race" and gender, alongside other categories of social difference, to explain inequalities. In effect, in placing "race" at the center of the axis of inequality, intersectionality challenges "gendered forms of "whiteness" as the normative subject of Western imagination" (Brah & Phoenix, 2004, p. 76).

However, the formal coining of intersectionality is part of a historical trend of women throughout the globe who have problematised the complexity of their identities and how these intersect with inequality in organizations and society. Some notable examples from the last three centuries include Sojourner Truth (1851) asking the question "Ain't I a woman?" where she reflects on her identity as a woman, mother and slave, Tarabai Shinde's (1882) reflection on gender and caste oppression in Indian society (see O'Hanlon, 1994), Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti's (1949) speech about gender equality and education, and Julieta Paredes' (2010) talk/performance/no-performance about communitarian feminism, focusing on

indigenous women's corporeality, colonial penetration, resistance and contestation. These women explicitly allude to "race"/racio-ethnicity, cast, socio-economic status, among other dimensions, as central to their experiences; this speaks to the recognition of the importance of the intersections between categories of social difference, and to some extent the need to decenter gender in discussions about inequality, adopting instead an intersectional approach.

The idea of decentering gender, however, has been a contentious point, with some arguing that it could lead to the dilution of gender as a category as it "disappears into a 'melting pot' of intersectional knowledge and meanings" (Broadbridge & Simpson, 2011, p. 476). Despite this critique, which seems to come to the defense of the discredited views of white feminism's "woman standpoint", there has been recognition that intersectionality has made one of the most significant contributions in history to the study of inequality, identity and power relations (McCall, 2005; Cho et al., 2013). In this sense, it could be argued that intersectionality has the potential to improve gendered organization theory because it allows both broader and more specific interrogation of inequalities and their nuances, which gender alone does not offer.

In addressing the centrality of "race" to understand inequalities and the privileges and disadvantages that sustain them, intersectionality has both opened important theoretical, methodological and analytical avenues for the study of organizations (Rodriguez et al., 2016). Important critiques on the theorisation of gender in organizations have been made about the inadequacy of gender as a single category that helps to explain inequalities in organizations. For example, Acker (2012) complicated the analysis of gendered organizations by identifying the need to adopt an intersectional approach that embeds racializing and class creating processes. She posits that in centering gender, discussions about gendered substructure, which others conceptualize as the gender subtext (see Benschop & Doorewaard, 1998ab, 2012; Bendl, 2008), only partially explain the inequalities that are reproduced by organizational logics. Acker (2012) also notes that her own proposed idea about the 'ideal worker' is racialised, yet this is not fully problematised in scholarship, missing out on the opportunity to interrogate why inequalities continue to emerge in ways that are not explained through the interrogation of gender alone.

Joan Acker's (2006) inequality regimes has been widely used as an important pathway to move beyond gender, with some scholars equating it to an intersectional approach. Acker (2006) conceptualizes inequality in organizations as "systematic disparities between participants in power and control over goals, resources, and outcomes" (p. 443), which she sees as influenced by society, history, politics and culture. Her argument is that classed, gendered and racialized inequalities show and affect different organizing processes through a variety of ways – e.g., the organizing of work requirements, such as general working time, the organizing of class hierarchies, recruitment and hiring, wage setting and supervisory practices, and informal interactions.

However, whilst Acker's (2006) work adopts a categorical flavor, it is not an intersectional approach, something that she has clarified (see Acker, 2012). When discussing different layers of inequalities, she predominantly separates class, gender and "race" and rarely looks at the entanglement of these categories and the power structures in which they are embedded. In doing so, it could be argued that she both decenters "race" and fails to engage with the central point of simultaneity of "race", class and gender (see Holvino, 2010), which makes it questionable whether the theorisation of inequality regimes is indeed an intersectional approach to understand organizations. Recognition of the impact of her work, nevertheless, is

essential as it has been seminal in drawing our attention to the complexity and multidimensionality of inequalities in organizations. Interestingly, the complexity of inequality regimes is the closest we get to a concrete starting point to allow us to look at how intersectional disadvantage is embedded in structures and processes in organizations.

In a piece that specifically discusses intersectionality in organization research, Allison and Banerjee (2014) trace the extent to which discussions about intersectionality have been translated into research and conceptualizing of organizations. Their review of how intersectionality was picked up in the literature in high-ranked US journals found that, up to 2009, there is little evidence of intersectional research. They point out the need to construct a relational approach and go beyond simplified conceptualisations of the hitherto neglected “Other”. This was echoed by Rodriguez et al. (2016), who identified two main approaches to intersectionality: a predominant approach that focuses on subjectivities and highlights the experiences of inequalities, and a second, more systemic approach, that focuses on power dynamics and makes them visible. They made three points: First, in order to advance intersectional understanding of organizations, scholars need to go beyond focusing mainly on oppression and instead interrogate both privilege and disadvantage inherent to power dynamics (see for example, Rodriguez & Ridgway, 2019). Second, intersectional research should put more emphasis on linking individual subjectivities to systemic inequalities. Third, intersectional scholars need to “move beyond the favored triumvirate of gender, “race” and class to build a more complex ontology of intersecting categories of social difference that may be more reflective of dynamics in work and organizations” (Rodriguez et al., 2016: 205).

Analytically, there are different ways in which scholars engage with intersectionality. McCall (2005) has distinguished three distinct approaches: anti-categorical, intra-categorical and inter-categorical. Anticategorical approaches deconstruct analytical categories and thereby interrogate the boundary-making of social categories. Intracategorical approaches also scrutinize the social construction of categories but also acknowledge that there are durable relationships which these categories reflect. Intercategorical presume that analytical categories exist and use them to document and scrutinize multiple dimensions of inequality. Both Bell and Nkomo (2001) and Choo and Ferree (2010) conducted similar exercises, examining the orientation and focus of scholarship on race and class, and intersectionality. Choo and Ferree (2010) identified different strands: The inclusion-centered interpretation of intersectionality, which gives voice to formerly invisible women of color; the process-centered models of intersectionality, which are relational and highlight “the material and cultural relations of power that structure societies” (p. 134), and the systemic approach, which examines the interplay of inequality from a macro-structure. Their work could be seen to build on Bell and Nkomo’s (2001) effort, which reflects a relational approach in their study of Black and White women, where they surface class (material differences) particularly in their early lives as well as the structural differences in how they experience inequality in their organizations and careers.

What kinds of questions should we ask?

In adopting an intersectional lens, it is important to note that there is multidimensional potential. Intersectionality is considered a theory, a method and an analytical tool (Rodriguez et al., 2016; Rodriguez, 2018). Questions aligned with intersectional forms of scrutiny include:

- How do "race", gender, class (and other categories of social difference such as age, religion, disability, sexual orientation, among others) intersect to create and sustain privilege and disadvantage in organizations?
- How do these categories interplay to maintain or change specific types of organizations?
- In what ways do the intertwined effects of racism, sexism, classism and other forms of domination affect organizational structure, processes and culture?
- How are organizational members related to each other based on the intersectional effects of "race", gender and class?
- In what ways do the simultaneity of intersectional privilege and disadvantage shape organizations?
- How do organizational structure, culture, and processes reify, conceal, or promote intersectional privileges and/or inequalities?

There are conceptual tensions between intersectionality and decolonial thinking, which are important to note. Some authors (see Allison & Banerjee, 2014) highlight the need for intersectional scholarship to become more postcolonial, arguing that "we simultaneously must ask whether this perspective is able to do justice to all forms of difference and diversity, and where its limitations lie" (Allison & Banerjee (2014: 84). We see this as a decolonial problem rather than as a post-colonial one; the intersectional problematization of difference is linked to the politics of categorization (e.g., the meaning of gender). Whilst post-colonial discussions focus on the legacy and consequences of colonialism and imperialism, in effect centering the colonizer as creator of a new world for the colonized, decolonial discussions look to fracture the dominance of the colonizer and amplify pluriversal worlds that challenge the hierarchies created by the colonality of power (see Mignolo, 2018). The idea of colonality of power refers to the practices and legacies of colonialism in the structure of the social, intellectual, epistemological, and cosmological order (Quijano, 1999, Mignolo, 2003, 2009), which decolonial thinking challenges in order to undo their inherent Eurocentric power projection (Mignolo 2009, 2013)

Patil (2013) argues that most approaches to intersectionality cannot live up to the potential of the concept and should be considered "domestic intersectionality" because they are "shaped by the geographies of colonial modernity" (p. 853). The author goes on to note that too little focus is given to the Eurocentricity of intersectional knowledge production, evident not only in the over-representation of US-based theory, but also in the failure of scholars in the Global North "to situate the object of their research in geopolitical space." (p. 853). Moreover, there is not much consideration of how intersectionality travels (see Rodriguez et al., 2016) and, at best, there is scarce attention to cross-border dynamics and instead a reification of State borders, while at the same time the 'borders' of categories such as gender, "race", culture or sexuality have been deconstructed (p. 853). In order to re-map intersectionality, it is therefore not only important to consider the historicity of the concept but also the spatiality. Consequently, Patil (2013) calls for an approach that recenters the local and "approach[es] the production of various patriarchies as intersectionalities emergent from multiple histories of local-global processes, or as emergent from layers of multiple locals and globals that exist relative to and in relation to each other" (p. 862). Building on these ideas, in the next section we delve into the potential of decolonial feminist thinking and praxis to interrogate and advance discussions in gendered organization theory.

Decolonial feminist thinking and praxis, and gendered organization theory

Ongoing critiques about the exclusive nature of dominant feminist discussions has led to diverse feminist debates gaining prominence, particularly feminisms from the margins that look to theorize the epistemic and material invisibility of women and minoritized groups (Bastian Duarte, 2012; Navarro, 2016). These feminisms are considered revolutionary, rebellious and challenging due to their focus on rupturing linearity in traditional (white) feminist thinking. Many of these feminisms can be understood as part of the decolonial tradition of epistemic disobedience that looks to fracture dominant knowledge production by focusing on histories, locations and geopolitical (re)configurations to understand the world (see Mignolo, 2009).

Decolonial Feminism can be traced back to the critical analyses developed by women of colour focusing on the ways in which hegemonic feminism ignores the intersectionality of "race", class, sexuality and gender, as well as the ways in which complex identity experiences intersect with the histories linked to the political economy of globalization (Lugones, 2008; Icaza, 2017; Paludi et al., 2019). Decolonial thinking is underpinned by a recognition that the production of knowledge reproduces forms of colonialism that undermine, invisibilise and exclude knowledges that exist outside of the dominant groups. At the heart of decolonial thinking is the aim of tackling the colonization of minds and bodies through the (re)constitution of the cosmology of the Other (Oyěwùmí, 1997). This is seen as a way to re-dress the dominance of particular forms of knowledge, which reproduce prejudices that assume their superiority over the Other and which, as a result, do not give intellectual personhood to subaltern knowledges, invisibilizing and erasing them from dominant narratives (Mignolo, 2003). Using this idea as the starting point, any efforts to embed decolonial thinking in discussions about gender in organizations and gendered organization theory should transcend problematizing how constructs like gender are mobilized in exclusionary ways in gendered organization theory. Instead, decolonial organizational theory makes theoretically possible and accessible other worlds that emerge from dimensions of existence articulated by those who are excluded.

Gender as a socially constructed category has been used to show multiple experiences but the category of gender has been subject to criticism given the ways in which it has historically been presented in binary terms. Decolonizing feminism takes a broader stance; Mendez (2015) highlights the need to interrogate “the ways in which gender has historically been reconstituted and racialized through [...] colonial relations of power”, as well as the ways in which it “has been and continues to be deployed in (neo)colonizing ways” (p. 41). This task is central to the principles of decolonial feminism, which develops ideas of “knowing and being otherwise” from a perspective that considers diversity in experiences and is articulated through lived and ancestral knowledges (see Espinosa-Miñoso, 2014). Espinosa-Miñoso (2014) highlights the linearity in the ‘woman standpoint’ approach, which is binary, heteronormative and racialised and as a result, essentialises both women from dominant groups and women who are intersectionally othered. This sits at the heart of scrutiny of decolonial feminism, which looks to radicalize these ideas to counter their impact on the universalism/universalisation of theory production.

Going back to the framing of gender in organization theory, an important aspect of gendered organization theory is the theoretical underpinning of “doing gender”. Understanding gender as a routine accomplishment embedded in the organizational everyday through interactions (see West & Zimmerman, 1987, 2009) frames the definitional dimensions of gender as a set of patterns for which there are identifiable categorizations. Whilst there are arguments in MOS about the need to undo and redo gender, as well as understand how it is done differently

(see Kelan, 2010; Mavin & Grandy, 2012), and these have unsettled the binary positioning of gender (see section 5), they have not led to meaningful re-conceptualisations of gender that interrogate histories of conquest and power. Some discussions (see for example, Mavin & Grandy, 2012) present us with the analytical possibilities of multiple enactments of femininity and masculinity. This could serve as the starting point to understand diversity, yet the undoing proposed by decolonial feminism requires self-reflexivity and explicit recognition of the ways in which colonial violence is reconstituted “in unassuming, yet disempowering, forms” (Presley, 2020).

A decolonial feminist epistemology goes beyond challenging the exclusionary dominant knowledge around which the intellectual order of Western modernity has been constituted. Decolonial feminism advocates disruption through amplifying knowledge production that emerges from an epistemology of the Other. This epistemology is characterized by locating Otherness within a socio-cultural, political and historical context where histories of coloniality and understandings of “being” merge to explain life, knowledge and existence. In this respect, the aim is to interrogate the relationship between diverse and intersecting identity positions with discussions about the coloniality of power to understand where gender, and its articulations and dynamics sit within it, as well as how they are used and mobilized in organizations.

In decolonial feminist terms, a dialogue that does not deform Otherness is essential. Lugones (2012) notes that it is fundamental to politicize racio-ethnic and class differences in order to bring to the fore how slave subjectivity, the coloniality of gender, marginality and multiple oppressions shape the ways in which we think about, make sense of, theorize and analyze the social world. Consequently, a concrete way to embed decolonial feminism in the study of gendered organization theory begins with questioning not just the principles of knowledge production, but also the purposes that gendered organization theory serves to promote particular intellectual projects, such as binary understandings of the world or implicit power structures reproduced by categorizations. The reproduction of dichotomous positioning such as developed/underdeveloped, objective/subjective or rational/emotional reinforce Otherness and create hierarchies of legitimacy in relation to how constructs are articulated (what is included and what is excluded), how they operate (what is the scope of the construct before it becomes “something else”), and how they are used to qualify phenomena in organizations.

In adopting a decolonial feminist approach, we focus on subaltern non-hegemonic voices and interrogate hierarchies of legitimacy in knowledge production in/about gendered organization theory. This requires going beyond the particularizing gaze that utilizes specificity as a means to single out difference; in decolonial theorizing, difference is not used to qualify Otherness but to understand ontological situatedness. Espinosa Miñoso (2014) refers to communitarian, indigenous, afros and popular urban knowledges as having the potential to achieve the necessary epistemic ruptures to counter the efforts of imposition by the Western gaze. This speaks to the adoption of a pluriversal approach (see Mignolo, 2018) that recognises that there are forms of thought that articulate the world from a position of historical oppression that uses gender, among other categories, as the basis for perpetuating colonial violence. Epistemologically, these forms of thought are not exclusive to the feminist project or even the decolonial feminist project; they emerge from lived experiences for which there would not necessarily be theorising in the ways we identify in dominant knowledge production.

What kinds of questions should we ask?

Thinking about concrete ways in which we could adopt a decolonial feminist approach to gendered organization theory involves problematising theorisation at the point of thought and articulation. In thinking about these questions, the aim is to engage with the possibility of a constructed space where contradicting and opposing elements converge (see Garzón Martínez, 2018).

- What assumptions about power are being made in the way gendered organization theory is articulated?
- Whose articulations are amplified and to what effect?
- How is knowledge hierarchized?
- Who is seen as a legitimate producer of knowledge about gendered organization theory and who is seen as a consumer of this knowledge?
- How are bodies of knowledge distorted in the way they are theorized, methodologically framed or empirically investigated?
- What are the specific geopolitical coordinates from which knowledge is presented and what are the implications of that location for what and how knowledge is articulated?

As part of what could be classed as epistemic rupture feminisms, many social movements have emerged that address histories and situatedness. In the next section, we focus on ecofeminism, which is a movement central to one of the most important challenges facing humanity around survival, sustainability and multiple subjectivities that emerge from our relationship with the natural world.

Ecofeminist problematization of gendered organization theory

Many feminist discussions have developed as part of discussions that criticize the ways in which (white) feminism has erased “the histories of indigenous women, African-American women, Chicanas, Asian-Americans, and other feminists who allegedly just “pop up” and make amendments after Euro-American feminists have laid the groundwork of feminism’s first two waves” (Gaard, 2010: 4). These feminisms, of which Ecofeminism is an example, counter the dominance of white feminist narratives. Ecofeminism problematizes the relationship between humans and nature, questioning the legitimacy of the claim humans make over the physical world, and reflecting upon how such an entitlement leads to normalized forms of dominance and exploitation. At the heart of ecofeminism is a critical interrogation of the meaning and implications of the association between women and nature:

“By speaking for both the original others, [ecofeminism] seeks to understand the interconnected roots of all domination, as well as ways to resist and change. The ecofeminist’s task is one of developing the ability to take the place of the other, when considering the consequences of possible actions, and ensuring that we do not forget that we all part of one another” (Plant, 1991: 214)

Ecofeminism combines feminist debates with the exploration of environmental concerns, focusing on justice in daily life around issues related to the use and development of natural ecosystems and their relationship with survival and quality of life (Buckingham, 2004; Shiva & Mies, 2014). Issues relevant to ecofeminism include the environment, food sovereignty, the politics and practices of extractive sectors, participatory democracy and reciprocity, climate justice, and monitoring of development banks. According to Stephens (2013), ecofeminism brings together an agenda that promotes a social justice ethic and challenges the legacy of modernity. For debates about gendered organization theory, ecofeminism offers an

outlook that positions gender inequalities as part of wider structural hierarchies of power and intersectional oppressions that should be seen as structurally created by the neoliberal capitalist system and reproduced in organizations (Young & Taylor, 2015).

Ecofeminism's intention is to dismantle the ways in which, in the name of the economic system, organizations deflect responsibility for inequalities that disproportionately affect women and minoritized groups. Bullis and Glaser (1992) speak of ecofeminism as offering an antagonistic discourse that counters a bureaucratic one. In this respect, its potential for both interrogating organizations and complementing discussions about gendered organization theory are expansive. Modern organizational discourses have historically presented sanitized narratives that undermine the salience of gender dynamics (see Ridgeway & Smith-Lovin, 1999). With its focus on the human/nature relationship as one of social domination (Warren, 1998), ecofeminism would help us to highlight the gendered logic underpinning understandings of the relationship between organizations and the physical world.

In this respect, discussions about gendered organization theory from an ecofeminist perspective operate at different levels. In broader terms, they start with the problematization of how humans raised within industrialized, contemporary societies connect and interact with nature, and how the experiences, values and perspectives of women interact with and shape the ecological movement (see Spretnak, 1987). At the organizational level, this perspective looks to understand the role of organizations in perpetuating extractive and exploitative environmental practices and their implications for gender (and other) inequalities. Moreover, ecofeminist organizational scholars might want to interrogate how organizational concepts both reify and leave unquestioned the exploitation of natural resources and the environment, e.g., by asking which interests are prioritized or what is the function of natural resources within organizational processes and how are they labeled and conceptualized.

Gender, sustainability and climate justice

The exploration of the relationship between gender, sustainability and climate justice is central to ecofeminist scholars. Attention is placed on the lack of theorizing about and accountability for decisions that have an impact on the environment and cascade to organizational and social life to disproportionately affect women and minoritized groups. The feminist agenda's relationship with environmental sustainability includes a link between unsustainable practices and gender inequalities. Pascual Rodriguez and Herrero López (2010) note that the foundations of traditional economics are rooted on the notion of an economic object that is qualified in relation to three abilities: appropriation, commodification, and profitability. These foundations are central to extractivist agendas that create tiers of human disposability; for instance, the historical market value attributed to "female labor" is lower than that attributed to "male labor" (Grimshaw & Rubery, 2007). This reproduces the historical positioning of the gender binary, which is key to the hierarchical, dichotomous, Western worldview, where masculine is linked to mind, reason and culture, and feminine is linked to physical, emotional and nature (Hausen, 1976; Prokhovnik, 2012). Under this logic, men are considered high-value economic objects and women are considered low-value economic objects.

Foundational ecofeminist scholar Karen Warren (2000) argues that there are key historical, symbolic and theoretical links between the domination of women and that of non-human nature. According to Warren, ecofeminism is structurally plural, and both presupposes and maintains difference, a point supported by Gaard (2010) who notes that "[s]pokespeople for

environmental justice women activists have tended to be women of color, working class, heterosexual, and/or omnivores. Thus, multi-directional tensions about homophobia, speciesism, classism, and racism have precluded many real, on-the-ground alliances" (p. 648). This plurality is central to how the rejection of the separation between nature and culture is articulated; ecofeminism understands that humans are part of ecological communities even if different from them in many ways. Against this backdrop, an interrogation of gendered organization theory from an ecofeminist perspective would move from a focus on gendering to an interrogation of the ecological dimensions of social and economic inequality, of which gendering is an integral part.

Another way to approach the issue of sustainability is presented by the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which were adopted in 2015 (UN, 2021). Some of the goals specifically refer to gender equality (SDG 5), decent work (SDG 8), industrialization (SDG 9), as well as responsible consumption and production (SDG 12), aspects which also concern our understanding of gendered organization theory. So far, there is limited discussion about how the SDGs might lead to meaningful change in organizational processes. Systematic reviews on how the SDGs have been implemented in management literature (see Chams & García-Blandón, 2019; Pizzi et al., 2020) do not include gender as a topic of discussion. This indicates that the mainstream literature on SDGs and management does not include feminist critique. Haynes and Murray (2017) came to a similar conclusion in their interrogation of the links between sustainability and gender equality in management education. Even though a social justice agenda calls for combining efforts to advance both gender equality and sustainability, this is rarely discussed as interlocked, they found there is a lack of connecting both concepts in management education, which led to their suggestion that we must incorporate discussions about gender equality into the lens of sustainability.

What kinds of questions should we ask?

A key concern of ecofeminism is the social organization required in order to challenge contemporary productive development, in particular through the socio-environmental empowerment of women and minoritized groups (Azamar Alonso, 2019). In this respect, at the core of an ecofeminist approach to gendered organization theory is the understanding of economic and political forces at work that shape inequalities in the ecological order, and that disproportionately affect women. In emphasizing the interdependency between humans and the environment (see Dobscha, 1983), ecofeminism offers the possibility both to reformulate the focus of attention and to use the feminist tradition of activism to achieve social change. This includes ways through which the ecological and environmental order can be dismantled and sustainable livelihoods and socially responsible organizations become the norm. Some key questions would be:

- How gendered is the discussion about sustainability in organization theory?
- How is the relationship between nature and culture problematized in gendered organization theory?
- How inclusive and diverse is sustainability knowledge about organizations?
- Who are the producers of sustainability knowledge about organizations and how are their voices being amplified to challenge dominant knowledge about organizations?
- How are the gendered dimensions of sustainability in organizations researched?
- How are the environmental impact, and the social footprint embedded in the theorisation about organizations?

Queering gendered organization theory

One key aspect in gendering organizations is the notion of an «ideal» worker, who is bodiless, has no sexuality or emotions. Acker (1990) argues that the “absence of sexuality, emotionality, and procreation in organizational logic and organizational theory is an additional element that both obscures and helps to reproduce the underlying gender relations” (p. 151). Consequently, gendered organizations rely, amongst others, on the control of sexuality, or more specifically on the control of men’s heterosexuality and the exclusion of men’s homosexuality or women’s sexuality altogether. To address sexuality within organization theory, therefore, seems to be one way forward to re-conceptualise organizations in general. A way to do so is provided by queer theory and approaches. In the following sub-sections, we elaborate on the interlink of gender and sexuality, or more specifically on heterogender, heterosexuality, and heteronormativity. We then turn our attention to ways on how a binary concept of gendered organization can be overcome, by looking at undoing gender and queering organization theory.

Heterogender, heterosexuality and heteronormativity in organization theory

Research on gendered processes within organizations often examines identity and positioning of women, for instance women in management or career. This kind of research, however, often overlooks the symbolic violence attached to the construct of woman and man. Adrienne Rich (1980) was one of the first discussing the execution of masculine domination through enforcing heterosexuality on women. In doing so, women are denied their own sexuality while male sexuality is imposed on them, both forcibly and subliminally. Consequently, lesbian experiences are often silenced. To overcome this, Pringle (2008) conceptualise gender as heterogender to highlight the entanglement of gender and heterosexuality. In doing so, researchers can examine “the ways in which gender is automatically informed by the heterosexual dualism” which otherwise would be “lost” (Pringle, 2008, p. S218).

The un-marked-ness of heterosexuality as well as silencing of non-heterosexual existence is part of what is called heteronormativity. Heteronormativity, goes beyond normalized sexual practices but refers to a way of living (Jackson, 2006), meaning it is not just about sexuality but concerns also assumptions of how people should conduct their life. Heteronormativity, therefore, captures power relations which continuously “ascribe heterosexuality a normative and privileged status by reinforcing a heterosexual/homosexual binary” (Rumens, 2012, p. 956). To unveil and challenge such power relations within organizations, scholars scrutinize Lesbian, Gay, Bi-, Trans-, Intersex and Queer (LGBTIQ) realities. Issues referring to coming out (Benozzo et al., 2015), friendships (Rumens, 2008, 2012), or identity negotiations (Woodruffe-Burton & Bairstow, 2013) show heteronormative constraints within organizations.

Priola et al. (2018) summarize the dimensions of heteronormativity on the social as well as on the organizational level. Separating the public and the private – and locating organizations and work within the public sphere – heteronormativity demands of LGBTIQ to be discreet at the workplace. Moreover, organizational silence over sexuality – famously captured in the former “Do not ask, do not tell”-policy of the US military– is depicted as a form of respect for LGBTIQ’s privacy. Another layer of heteronormativity shows in the denial of discrimination. Within organizations this shows in the rejection of the necessity for inclusion policies within an organization or the existence of discrimination (Priola et al., 2018).

While examining the silencing of and constraints for non-heterosexual realities produces important insights into power relations within organizations, Rumens et al. (2018) highlight

the need to also examine heterosexuality. Especially, because there are many ways, how sexuality influences organizations and either cement or render gender inequalities (Hearn, 2014; Priola et al., 2018). Altogether, there is plenty of scope for further research on the impact of sexuality on organizations and to advance organization theory.

Queering organizations and going beyond binaries

Queering discussions have been predominantly framed using a gender perspective, with little problematisation of, for instance, ableist perceptions of heteronormative spaces or practices, or how Western gender distinctions frame the meaning of queering in ways that excludes racialized sexual minorities by not allowing spaces of belonging for some queer racial male subjects (see Bui, 2014). We argue that the intersectional problematisation of queer needs more attention; for example, there is limited discussion of able-bodiedness and racialization as part of queering. In this respect, a gendered approach potentially risks reproducing and reinforcing existing norms and binaries, such as male/female, straight/gay, abled/disabled, among others, which is strongly linked to the reproduction of heteronormativity. Gibson-Graham (1996) notes that, “when theorists depict patriarchy, or racism, or compulsory heterosexuality, or capitalist hegemony they are not only delineating a formation they hope to see destabilized or replaced. They are also generating a representation of the social world and endowing it with performative force” (p. 543).

A way to challenge and overcome the heteronormative framing and generate both new insights and new concepts of organizations is queering. As a deconstructive practice that questions reified presumptions or norms (Rumens et al., 2018), queering attempts to undermine and shatter binaries, which opens the space for formerly unseen patterns and possibilities (Knights, 2015; Rumens et al., 2018). Queering theory doubts what is known, and secrets away whatever is obvious (Parker, 2002: 148). A basic idea for queering is that categories such as women and men are performatively enacted, or as Butler (2004: 42) puts it:

"Gender is not exactly what one “is” nor is it precisely what one “has.” Gender is the apparatus by which the production and normalization of masculine and feminine take place along with the interstitial forms of hormonal, chromosomal, psychic, and performative that gender assumes”.

An important queer problematization is that gender or sex get normalized and reified as ostensible natural categories. This normalization relies on performative acts, such as addressing newborns –and even not-yet-borns – as girls or boys. Such girling or boying of (not-yet-born) babies not only carries the label girl or boy but several normative ideas on what girls/boys would like or should be like. Butler (1993) notes that “performative acts are forms of authoritative speech: most performatives, for instance, are statements that, in the uttering, also perform a certain action and exercise a binding power” (p. 225). Hence, performativity is embedded in power acts which stabilize established forms of domination, such as a gender regime. This often happens pre-reflexively in the sense that people often perform without deliberately acting in a specific way, so “gender is socially constructed through gendered “performances”” (Lester, 2008:277). This to say, gender performativity is “the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names” (Butler, 1993: 2).

Deconstruction offers a way to unveil and overcome such pre-reflexive, performatively enacted norms. This would be accomplished through questioning established norms and asking whether something “has to be” in a particular way. In empirical research, this requires unpacking the perceptions of researchers and participants and questioning the concept of women or men, femininity, or masculinity. Each of these categories should be understood as “as an open, multiple, heterogeneous and unstable term that includes its own instabilities” (de Souza, Brewis, & Rumens, 2016: 608). Moulin de Souza and Parker (2020) argue that organizational scholars should think with trans (instead of about trans) to disrupt binary heteronormative assumptions and enable everyone to be themselves within organizations. Deconstructing gender and going beyond binaries can generate important and new insights for organization theory. For instance, in deconstructing the concept of leadership, Calás and Smircich (1991) show that seducing and leading are related but also that there is an inherent, masculine logic within images of leadership. Deconstructing the concept of leadership shows the “masculine monologic” of leadership including its absurdity (Calás & Smircich, 1991: 597), which opens up the space to think leadership differently.

Moreover, queering the concept of management and managers means unveiling that being a manager is a role which can be questioned and denaturalized (Parker, 2002). Queering management asks for an examination of the close entanglement of management discipline and management practice and the ways in which the reification of gendered practices and inequality regimes take place (Parker, 2002). In the case of diversity management, for example, Bendl et al. (2008) show that contemporary concepts of identity within organizations reproduce heteronormativity and binaries in the form of A and non-A, which consequently produce hierarchies of identities and social groups. The authors suggest deconstructing the performative acts of identity in order to develop concepts that go beyond reproducing inequalities. To this end, it is useful to combine intersectional and queer approaches when examining existing policies and code of conducts (Bendl et al., 2009).

To interrogate the performative creation and stabilization of organizational subjectivities is a step towards undoing gender within organizations from a queer perspective. For instance, adopting an intersectional queer of colour perspective, Bui (2014) discusses ideological-cultural institutions and problematises the multiple outsider status of queer Asian American men, who are “multiply marginalized persons within a White-dominated society and White-majority gay community” (p. 129). Another approach is adopted by Riach et al. (2016), who distinguish between organizational undoing and reflexive undoing. Organizational undoing refers to subjects adapting, hence undoing, their own lived experiences to fit within the organizational logic. Conversely, reflexive undoing is an analytical approach aiming to unveil organizational practices through which subjectivities are undone. In this context, undoing has to be distinguished from approaches that focus on the undoing of gender, in the sense of eradicating gender inequality (Kelan, 2018; Nentwich & Kelan, 2014). Another way of moving beyond heteronormative binaries is to take a phenomenological approach (see Ahmed 2006), which puts the body and bodily experiences into the focus of analysis. This can be used as a resource for queer studies and includes discussions about the ways in which (queer) bodies align to straight spaces. Vitry (2021) argues that “queer phenomenology teaches us that the more we work at aligning our bodies in straight spaces, the less we can imagine other orientations, other ways of alignment” (p. 939). Hence, queer phenomenology explores ways of organizing spaces and the reciprocal effect this has on mis-aligning bodies. This goes beyond including LGTBIQ+ people in the organization and focuses on a nuanced exploration of how bodies become oriented, or are contextually situated, by the ways in which they engage with time and space.

To move forward, however, one might not only need to think about the interaction of bodily experiences and queering spaces, but actually also consider to what extent this reproduces fixed images of able-bodiedness within organizations. This has been problematized by Crip Theory (see McRuer 2006, McRuer & Wilkerson 2003), which highlights that discussions about queerness and disability share a pathologized past. For example, in their edited volume on sex and disability, Mollow & McRuer (2012) raise questions about the space of untold desires of disabled people in scholarship, whilst Luciano and Chen (2015) problematize how “assumptions about what a “proper body” looks like and what it can do” (p. 183) leads to unresolved questions about human dignity and bodily sovereignty of disabled people. Relevant to organization theory is McRuer’s (2006) idea that “able-bodiedness, even more than heterosexuality, still largely masquerades as a nonidentity, as the natural order of things.” (p. 1). This hints at the invisibility of disabled workers (Tororei, 2009). The scarcity of critical problematization of able-bodiedness in organizations means that more attention is placed on “disabled bodies as a problem that needs resolving” than on dismantling the compulsory able-bodiedness within the ways organizations are theorized.

What kinds of questions should we ask?

From the perspective of queering organization and organization theory, potential questions should challenge the heteronormativity and able-bodiedness that is built into organizations, beyond adding the lived experiences of LGBTQI+ people to the analysis. Some questions include:

- What are the different forms of formal and informal organizing within organizations and to what extent do these reproduce heteronormativity and able-bodiedness?
- What are the material representations of organizational heteronormativity? (e.g., How are spaces designed? How are these designs racialised? Are there gender-neutral toilets?)
- To what extent does the ceremonial and remedial work (Gherardi 1994) reproduce a heteronormative symbolic order (e.g., in the way how people are addressed, how clothing rules are embodied and whether non-conforming gender practices would be possible)?
- How is heteronormativity entangled and compulsory in organizations and what implications does this have for structural and relational dynamics?
- To what extent do organizing processes rely on specific understandings of physical and mental fitness as well as gender and sex identity constructs?
- What are the tasks assumed with leadership roles and to what extent are these tasks limited to specific perceptions of corporality?

Gendered organization theory beyond the human

Discussions that look to go beyond reified and apparently fixed categories, such as women or men, have continued to expand, with some scholarship exploring the potential of going beyond the human in the study of organizations (e.g., Gherardi, 2019; Visser & Davies, 2021; Lindenbaum et al., 2020; Charles & Wolkowitz, 2018). These works adopt two main approaches; they either examine technological developments, such as digitalization or datafication, change the way organizations work –as technological innovations have done in the past– or by including other post-human perspectives, such as the role of cybernetic organisms --aka cyborgs, which are hybrids of humans and machines. These two approaches speak to the ways technology pervades the organization of the social world (see Joerges &

Czarniawska, 1998) as well as the ways in which “the human body is becoming more mechanical and computational and thus less biological” (Barfield & Williams, 2017).

Before going into the specific developments, it is important to note that engineering and technology are inherently gendered, which Wajcman (2004, 2007) notes is evident in the way technology is designed and promoted. In addition, the distinction between what kinds of tasks are considered as engineering or as administrative hints at a gendered understanding of technology (see Hartmann, 1976). Cynthia Cockburn (1985) elaborated on technology as a manifestation and production-site of power with implicit masculine norms. She shows how gendered identity and the self-perception of technological competence or incompetence are interrelated:

“This, combined with a continual division, retooling, and revolutionizing of labor processes in capitalism is what enables men to continually claim for masculinity the superior positions in the sexual division of labor and thereby maintain their distance from and control over women.” (Cockburn 2009: 271)

In other words, the skills and competencies needed to do engineering work or use technology legitimize the division of labor and, therefore, a masculinized hierarchy and income inequality. This also explains why the definition of skilled and unskilled work is often gendered, because women have been denied access to the necessary skills (Hartmann, 1976; Hacker, 1981). The link we could make as a result of the previous scenario is that technologically driven changes have historically reified gender inequality within organizations. In particular, the consideration that the human can be decentered from technological spaces because these are hybrid and liminal appears yet another attempt to promote gender-neutrality. The production of technology is also entangled with notions about collaboration and protocols of peer-production and open-sharing that are gendered, racialized, ableist, classed, among other sources of inequality and they both create and sustain particular forms of exclusion; e.g., cultural, social, corporeal, colonial, etc. If we consider Acker’s (1990) idea of the ideal worker (1990), this exclusion manifests in the ways technology reinforces organizational structures and hierarchies. Moreover, they shape the way products are designed and whose needs are taken into consideration (Schiebinger et al., 2018).

The socio-materiality of the digital

The ongoing digital transformation is likely to change not only processes and procedures within organizations but also organizations, which will require different theorisation to conceptualize the digitalized organization (see Kuusisto, 2007). So far, we do not know the full extent of the impact of digital transformations on our social and working lives. What we know, however, is that the rapid pace of technological development will inevitably result in some changes. Some authors (e.g., Brynjolfsson and McAfee 2016, Kumar et al., 2019) note that changes, such as smart cities, smart homes, smart transportation, smart industries, etc. will have a transformational impact on the future of life and work and will be as revolutionary as the implementation of steam engines at work. Brynjolfsson and McAfee (2016) argue that while the steam engine augmented physical strength of human and non-human bodies, digitalization augments the cognitive capabilities of humans. Computers can process data in previously unknown capacities, hereby either steer processes autonomously or provide information for further actions, which is likely to affect the efficiency of coordination and decision-making processes. Data analytics, for instance, is appraised for the promise to provide real-time information of people’s behavior and therefore increase not only the

velocity of information but also its validity (Lavalle et al., 2011; Lee, 2017; McAfee & Brynjolfsson, 2012). In this sense, we could argue that computers are objective and therefore the results of data analytics should be the best basis for any decision.

However, there are indicators that the seemingly objective data analytics can reify inequalities; experiments in machine learning have shown that algorithms reproduce existing racial and gender biases (Caliskan et al., 2017). For example, in their reporting of digitalized social welfare practices in the US, Eubanks (2008) noted that statistical modeling, algorithm and data analytics introduced in the US welfare system reproduced existing inequalities. Similarly, credit scores, university admission or hiring practices increasingly rely on data analytics and indicators which only depict a specific, narrow part of social life, and hence implicitly discriminate against anyone not fitting such an »ideal« person (O’Neil, 2016; Hamilton & Sodeman, 2020). In addition, there is much scope for gaming the indicators; for example, in their study of Uber drivers, Möhlmann and Henfridsson (2019) reported drivers manipulated the algorithm to artificially cause surge pricing; Bronowicka and Ivanova (2020) reported the practices of resistance to app-based management by Deliveroo and Foodora food-delivery workers in Berlin.

It is important to note that whilst there is an increasingly substantial body of work about datafication and its use, there is notable scarcity of research addressing the gendered, racialized and classed dimensions of digital labor (Leurs & Shepherd, 2017; Lai, 2021), which is relevant because the potential of data analytics can be undermined by the datafied inequality produced as a result of data encoded with gender, ethnic and cultural biases (Zou & Schiebinger, 2018: 2). As a consequence, gender scholars are well advised to interrogate and test the extent to which biases are reified as ostensibly valid results and what new forms of inequality are tacitly woven in digitalized organizations. Trittin-Ulbrich et al., (2021) note that despite how digital technologies reproduce and amplify existing social and organizational inequalities, there has been limited scholarly attention given to “the dark and potentially unexpected sides of digitalization for organizations and organizing” (p. 8). In this respect, the socio-materiality of the digital in organizations remains an open empirical question. One way to grasp the effects of a digitalized organization is to interrogate how the socio-materiality of the digital is used to (re)create, (re)produce and maintain organizational dynamics, processes and structures. To this end, it is important to understand that technology is not a mere artifact that organizational members can make use of, but rather that it also shapes people’s experiences and possibilities. Orlikowski (1999) points out the mutuality between technology and organization; this is, whilst technology can be seen as an external structuring force that influences the way organizations work, organizational logics also alter the way technology functions within the organization.

Moreover, organizational members produce technology (either by further developing the technology itself or by introducing new modes of handling it), whilst at the same time technology facilitates the development of forms of social interaction (e.g., tweeting about an event; use of intranet platforms). As a consequence of this, digital technology materializes in procedures, processes and norms. An example of this can be seen in the power-asymmetries that algorithms can generate in digital environments. Using the example of high-performing eBay business sellers, Curchod et al. (2020) demonstrate that algorithms are part of the power asymmetry of the sellers, in relation not only to eBay but also to the customer’s rating practice. Furthermore, the authors highlight that algorithmic performance monitoring impacts people’s agency; for example, sellers do not know how different ratings are condensed in the calculation of their status so they are anxious that one negative evaluation could trigger a

downgrade, which triggers automatic sanctions, such as blocking the account. This highlights the effects of the introduction of algorithmic management in the perpetuation of inequalities and power differentials in organizations, a prevalent feature of the gig economy. Work on the socio-materiality of technology within organizations studies rarely discusses gender. Here, it is also important to remember that the overwhelming majority of people working in coding as well as the overwhelming majority of people in decision making positions are men. Importantly, the notion of machine learning inherent to algorithmic management and decision making has been problematised; for instance, Logg (2019) notes that calling algorithms biased, anthropomorphizes them, and relieves responsibility from those who make the actual decisions.

Cyborgs and posthuman in organization

Another way to analyze the ongoing digital transformation of organizations is to look at it from the perspective provided by Donna Haraway (1994 [1985]) in her seminal *Manifesto for Cyborgs*. Haraway (1994 [1985]) points out that for cyborgs to exist as a figure, we must blur the distinction between humans and animals as well as the distinction between organic beings (human and non-human) and machines, and the boundary between the physical and nonphysical. The role of technology as “the architect of our intimacies” (Turkle, 2017:1) speaks of its centrality to the organization of our social world. Conversely, it is also linked to new forms of domination and control, a feature of a technology-driven society, which Haraway (1994 [1985]) terms *the informatics of domination*. Here, both communication technologies and natural sciences are tools to not only recraft bodies, but also to enforce new kinds of social relationships:

“Technologies and scientific discourses can be partially understood as formalizations, that is, as frozen moments, of the fluid social interactions constituting them, but they should also be viewed as instruments for enforcing meanings” (Haraway, 1994 [1985]: 102).

Haraway (1994 [1985]) explicitly refers not only to gender relations in this regard but stresses the need to examine racialised, (neo)colonial and classed forms of exploitation, as well as power imbalances. In a way, the figure of the cyborg should help to move our thinking and being beyond existing dichotomies, thereby abolishing existing domination patterns. Haraway (1994 [1985]) positions the figure of the cyborg as the successor of the deity, as its mere existence indicates emancipation from dichotomous thinking. Becoming a (metaphorical) cyborg, however, does not necessarily mean overcoming masculine norms but rather points towards pressure for women in men-dominated areas to abolish femininity and become dehumanized (Muhr, 2011). Basically, just becoming a cyborg without challenging social relations which feed into the informatics of domination will not alter existing inequalities. Consequently, to unmask and perhaps even abolish the gendering of a digitalized organization requires clarity of the different domination patterns that might be coded into the digital fabric. As Yvonne Benschop (2021) has noted, “cyborg feminism calls for new relations between humans and technologies in the inter-sectional boundary projects of AI and gender” (p. 10).

Next to cyborg feminism, agential realism (Barad 2007, 2018) and posthumanism (e.g., Braidotti 2013, 2019) invite scholars to think beyond the human and challenge anthropocentric, masculine ontologies. With the introduction of agential realism, Barad (2007) can be seen as one of the key figures in new materialism, a response to the linguistic

turn in the 1990s. Building on the work of physicist Niels Bohr, Karen Barad (2007, 2018), herself a physicist, emphasizes that ‘things’ are material discursive practices, meaning that any object or phenomena only emerges through intra-action. Intra-action is positioned as a contrast to interaction, as the latter would suggest independently existing entities prior to any form of action. Barad (2018: 230) argues that it “is through specific agential intra-actions that the boundaries and properties of the ‘components’ of phenomena become determinate and that particular embodied concepts become meaningful.” Through the ‘agential cut’ an ‘object’ can be separated from a ‘subject’ and thereby creates a relation for both. In different words: the ‘thing’ which exists, and to which one positions themselves against (i.e., builds a relation) only can exist if there is a position-taking (i.e., a relation-building) in place. Consequently, the apparatus we use to observe or perceive the world is the result of the observation practice and determines the boundaries of an observation. Therefore, “[r]eality is not composed of things-in-themselves or things-behind-phenomena but things-in-phenomena” (Barad 2018: 231) as the phenomena and things only emerge through agential intra-actions. This approach asks to see humans, when involved, as one part of an intra-action but not the central part of it. It allows us to see organizational phenomena in a broader, holistic perspective. For instance, Visser and Davies (2021) examined the ontological and processual entanglement of power and performativity using the concept of agential realism; they demonstrate that agency is not solely located in the hand of humans but can be seen as an ephemeral, distributed phenomena within the intra-action. Moreover, the authors highlight that looking at power-performativity with agential realism helps us to broaden our understanding of cause and effect as well as responsibility. Whilst it might be difficult to use agential realism to further our understanding of organization, the switch towards an onto-epistemological understanding of what an organization is and how it functions can help us to gain new insights.

Posthumanism is a broader philosophical approach to decenter humanism in our understanding of social life, including artificial as well as organic bodies (Wolfe, 2010). The posthuman “introduces a qualitative shift in our thinking about what exactly is the basic unit of common reference for our species, our polity and our relationship to the other inhabitants of this planet” (Braidotti 2013: 1 et seq). In transcending the nature-culture duality, posthuman approaches replace a binary world view with a more fluid one; post humanists argue that the ostensibly clear distinction between hu/man, animal and machine is blurred and therefore asks for further scrutiny. This means that the question of what is considered to be the human subject demands new kinds of answers, or as Braidotti (2013) puts it, the post humanist perspective works “towards elaborating alternative ways of conceptualizing the human subject” (p. 37). Such an alternative way could also enable a move beyond anthropocentrism, as it may allow for “an affirmative bond that locates the subject in the flow of relations with multiple others” (p. 50). This way post humanist thinking exceeds the humanist, universalist image of ‘man’ and conceptualizes the subject as a relational entity with affects (Braidotti 2019).

In decentering humans altogether, our understanding and imaginary of gendered organizations might (need to) change. Gherardi (2019) puts forward four images of thought to reframe gender altogether: (1) the image of rhizome, an underground network of plants, (2) the image of music, which generates affection and other effects in humans, (3) an attention to body and bodily experiences and how they change when the body is adjusted due to non-bodily influences, such as media discourse and (4) a non-living mode of thought, such as the figure of Desert or Virus, who are not considered as dead material but also not as living entities. Gherardi (2019) asks how our understanding of gender (and organizations) would

change, if we look at it using one of those images, or other images. A central point here is to consider which new dimensions of gender we would be able to see if gender is imagined as a subterranean network of plants, as a composition of music, as a fleshy product or as a Desert.

What kinds of questions should we ask?

Thinking about organization theory beyond the human, it is not only interesting to ask the extent to which digitalized processes and procedures are implicitly gendered, but also which processes and procedures are digitalized, the purpose of such digitalization and which inequalities are perpetuated by it. The opportunity of an approach that interrogates the centrality of technology in the creation, structure and maintenance of organization helps not only to explore the relationship between technology, work and organization but also the role of people within this relationship. Some key questions are:

- How is technology used to structure organizational processes and norms? For example, which kinds of meetings --between whom and which roles-- are taking place online or in person? Which kind of jobs are managed through algorithmic control? Which forms of exclusion do these uses create and perpetuate?
- What are the criteria for designing specific digitalized processes, products and procedures in a certain way? Are the criteria implicitly gendered, racialized, classed, ableist, ageist, sexist, etc?
- Whose interests are reflected in the way digitalization advances in the organization? What inequalities or disadvantages do those advances create?
- Which beings, materiality, bodies, thoughts, emotions or affects shape an organization? And conversely, what forms of inclusion/exclusion do these create? How are these gendered, racialized, classed, ableist, ageist, sexist, etc?
- What can we see if we do not only consider humans but also the needs and contributions of other beings within an organization?
- How would our understanding of organizations change if we consider how humans, cyborgs and non-human beings are valued in themselves and in relation to each other?

Table 1: Summary of approaches to (re)think gendered organization theory

Feminist Approaches	Main proposition	Key question
Intersectionality	Racism and sexism (as well as other forms of domination) are simultaneously present and as a result, organizations are locations that maintain, promote or potentially mitigate privileges and disadvantages.	In what ways do the intersecting effects of racism, sexism, classism and other forms of domination affect organizational structure, processes and culture?

Decolonial thinking	It is important to focus on subaltern non-hegemonic voices and interrogate hierarchies of legitimacy in knowledge production in/about gendered organization theory. In decolonial theorizing, difference is not used to qualify Otherness but to understand ontological situatedness.	What are the specific geopolitical coordinates from which knowledge is presented and what are the implications of that location for what and how knowledge is articulated?
Ecofeminism	It is important to understand that economic and political forces at work that shape inequalities in the ecological order. There is a link between gender equality and environmental justice.	How is the relationship between nature and culture problematized in gendered organization theory?
Queering	Binaries need to shatter for organizations to really matter. It is important to deconstruct binaries to understand what is happening in organizations.	What are the different forms of formal and informal organizing within organizations and to what extent do these reproduce heteronormativity and able-bodiedness?
Beyond human	There is no simple distinction between humans, other kinds of organic beings or machines. To decenter hu/man helps us to grasp inequality in a more holistic way.	How would our understanding of organizations change if we consider humans, cyborgs, and non-human beings?

Conclusion

We have discussed avenues to use feminist theories to enhance discussions on gendered organization theory. Our premise was that gender as an analytical category is insufficient to understand the complexity of inequalities in organizations. Instead, we argued for a more sophisticated understanding of the relationship between the intersection of categories of social difference (including gender) and their interdependence in the creation, perpetuation and maintenance of different forms of domination in organizations. We developed discussions that focused on intersectionality, decolonial thinking, ecofeminism, queering, and theories that go beyond the human; these discussions show the potential that these approaches have in theoretical, methodological and empirical terms.

An important point cutting across our discussions pertains to location as a fundamental principle of epistemological and ontological relevance, which allows us to interrogate and analyze organizations and people within them differently. The recognition that discussions

about organizations excluded diverse experiences was what led to the inclusion of gender. However, as we grapple with gender fluidity and social diversity, it is crucial to go beyond one-dimensional approaches in order to explore and understand the complexity of social life and how it materializes in organizational structures, cultures and processes. Therefore, our main proposition has been that we need to use broader frameworks that are more inclusive and intentionally engage in re-formulations of discussions that move beyond “gendered organization theory” in order to explore more comprehensively the meaning of organization, its structures, processes and dynamics.

Theoretical developments over the last decades provide us with many different avenues to follow. We selected some promising ones which enable scholars to re-think organization differently and thereby create insights which can help us to overcome existing inequalities and power imbalances. It could be argued that in doing so, we are putting gender to the side; However, we consider that the important contribution of these approaches to discussions in/about organizations is that they recognise the need to develop integrative frameworks that do not stop with problematizing gender, but equally do not assume that the issue is only gendered. Throughout the article, we have pointed towards issues linked to, for example, racism and ableism, as well as other forms of power struggles and sources of inequalities, such as the colonial epistemology, which are present in mainstream and critical management and organization studies and influence the way organizations are theorized and studied.

Similarly, the richness of these approaches does not preclude the tensions between them. For instance, the tensions between intersectionality and decolonial feminism is challenging but also generative. On the one hand, intersectionality interrogates the sources of inequalities; on the other hand, decolonial feminism interrogates the way the sources are understood. Similarly, whilst some ecofeminist discussions theorize within the traditional gender binaries, intersectionality’s focus on categorical complexity presents a more nuanced interrogation. In this respect, it is important to note that these theories must also be put in conversation and that the generative power of their interaction needs further exploration in theoretical, conceptual, methodological and empirical terms.

There are several ways in which a more integrated framework to understand gender in organizations could be useful to workers, managers and organizations. Perhaps the most important pertains to workers’ understanding of the complexity of their experiences and how these experiences are the result of a combination of factors that involve their intersectional identities, the ways in which these are mobilised and invoked by and for them and create instances of disadvantage and privilege. This understanding would give them greater insight into how they can frame claims of inequality and develop collective agendas that support their aims for social justice. For managers and organizations interested in identifying more effective ways to tackle inequalities, it is useful to understand organizations as complex sites where these inequalities are produced and reconfigured. In addition, asking questions such as, how particular arrangements and structures position different actors in the organization, whose interests are legitimized and whose interests are ignored give insight into areas that need attention and action. Finally, this integrated framework would support understanding inequalities not just as relational but embedded in structures and organizational arrangements that prioritize and value some identities over others.

It is worth noting that whilst we frame particular discussions in relation to specific points of interrogation, we would promote the importance of integration and dialogue between these approaches as they are interconnected. For instance, the implicit able-bodiedness in queering

organizations does not imply that this is the only issue within the remit of queering. There is a relationship between intersectionality and queer studies (see Duong, 2012; Fotopoulou, 2012) as there is one between decolonial thinking and ecofeminism (see Rocheleau, 2015; Wilson, 2018). Ultimately, our hope is that our ideas provide a thought-provoking roadmap to those with an interest in gendered organization theory to engage, challenge, question and interrogate how we advance discussions in ways that recognise the landscape of identities, experiences, structures, processes and practices that inhabit and take place in contemporary organizations.

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