



Feminist Theories and Activist Practices in Organization Studies

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Abstract

This piece reflects on the untapped potential of feminist theories and activist practices to address vital organizational issues and societal challenges such as inequality, sustainability and care for the environment. While we recognize and briefly review the progress on gender issues in organization studies achieved over the last decades, our focus is on identifying the critical and underutilized strands of feminist thinking offering fresh responses to these problems, including decolonial feminism, feminist ethics of care, posthuman feminism and ecofeminism. By way of illustrating our theoretical arguments, we discuss how five different papers recently published in *Organization Studies* address some of these issues, including the uncovering of hidden entanglements of power and performativity in a global bank and in the beauty industry by paying attention to body and affect, the underrepresented struggles of women in the Global South as they disrupt gendered practices through consciousness raising, contesting gender regimes at organizational social events and, finally, how the *social media operate at the intersection of gender and occupation*. We conclude by outlining future directions for research as we discuss the contributions of anti-racist feminist theory and decolonial feminist practice to completing the unfinished project of social change while making our scholarship more reflexive and inclusive.

Keywords

decolonial feminism, ecofeminism, equality, ethics of care, feminist theories and activist practices, performativity, power, posthumanism, social justice

Introduction

In this Introduction to this virtual Special Issue on feminist theories and activist practices, we discuss the relationship between feminism and organization studies, paying particular attention to feminist theory and activism. Feminism is a theory and approach that supports economic, political

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and social equality, specifically valuing and advocating for the equal opportunities of women. It also provides frameworks and practices for bringing about the unfinished project of social change (McRobbie, 2009). As a social justice movement, feminism calls out systemic discrimination and associated acts of violence, intervening actively to change the political landscape. The #MeToo movement illustrates how grassroots organizing resists sexual harassment and violence. Through collective organizing, feminism works towards eradicating gender inequalities and associated violences arising from poverty, lack of opportunity and recognition, and sexual violence, which puts women's bodies at considerable risk globally, including at work and in organizations. Economic crisis, climate crisis, lack of access to health, labour shortages and patriarchy have exacerbated gender inequalities, especially across intersectional lines of oppression such as race and class (Allison & Banerjee, 2014; Gray, Johnson, Kish-Gepart, & Tilton, 2018).

The Covid-19 pandemic has pushed women further into precarity (Akhter, Elias, & Rai, 2022; Arruzza, Bhattacharya, & Fraser, 2019; Özkazanç-Pan & Pullen, 2020), particularly in geo-political contexts which experience land theft and climate vulnerability, and where violence to women is normalized. In a recent article, 'We are boiling', Ana Maria Peredo et al. (2022) discuss how Covid-19 is the latest crisis that 'expose deeply rooted matters of social injustice in our societies' and that 'Management scholars have not been encouraged to address the role that business, as we conduct it and consider it as scholars, has played in creating the crises and fostering the injustices our crises are laying bare'. Such injustice stems, Peredo et al. argue, 'from inequality to racism, gender, and social discrimination through environmental injustice to migratory workers and modern slaves'. The contributors to this article rightly identify that 'the ideological underpinnings of the discipline [. . .] need to be challenged' (p. 339). Feminist theory and activism have been the means to challenge and contest ideologies that consolidate the relationship between capitalism and patriarchy, diminishing social justice.

Focusing on gender inequality, in March 2023, the United Nations secretary-general António Guterres cautioned that it would take 300 years to reach gender equality, commenting, 'gender equality is growing more distant'. Studies of gender, work and organization consistently report that the most vulnerable women include First Nations women, transgender women and non-binary people, single mothers, unemployed women, women who have left violent relationships, and mothers who cannot gain access to employment due to lack of child care and return to work provisions, housing, and skills shortage. Organizations have a clear role to play in addressing gender inequality, as feminist scholars have noted for some time.

Guterres calls for collective action to address escalating inequalities that will require the efforts of people and wide-ranging institutions. Importantly, in the field of gender studies, the nature of patriarchy in forming unequal social relations has shaped the foundation of feminist resistance. While some countries have witnessed progress toward gender equality, inequality is still bound within capitalist structures unless addressing inequality contributes to production and accumulation (Acker, 2006). We concur with Guterres (2023), who notes that 'Decades of progress are being undone as "patriarchy" is fighting back.' This is an important reminder that patriarchal forces are constantly changing and that feminism requires the capacity to change over time to counteract it. From this perspective, understanding feminism as a constant struggle against patriarchy which looks different in different local contexts is crucial for researchers for creating gender equal societies and social justice.

To achieve this, continued commitment, trust and collective action between feminists will be needed to address systemic structural barriers to equality. Organizations will have a significant role and much to learn from feminist theory and activism about organizing in the face of crisis and creating an alternative future. However, the challenges are also unequal: while in some parts of the world, women's participation in society and the economy is valued and feminist ideology and

activism accepted, in other parts of the world, being a feminist challenging violent misogyny and patriarchal rule remains dangerous as feminist politicians are shot dead on the streets of Brazil and feminist activists arrested for protesting in Turkey and Iran. The backlash of patriarchy also manifests in removing rights to control their bodies from women in the United States, Poland, or San Salvador. Feminist activism matters, and transnational feminism teaches us that collective action and solidarity across borders are required if feminism is to achieve its goals for women's rights and social justice.

This Introduction to this virtual Special Issue on feminist theories and activist practices will focus on the relationship between feminist theory and activism, and will be structured as follows: First, we reflect on the history of feminist scholarship in organization studies over three decades to illustrate the power differentials placing women in subordinate roles in society and the masculine domination of organizations, along with the gendered nature of the knowledge production process in academia which continues to marginalize feminist knowledge. Second, we discuss critical themes of power, embodiment, body and affect, intersectionality and transnational feminism, feminism of race, and postcolonial feminism, as foundational and diachronic building blocks of feminist scholarship. To illustrate such developments, we present research published in *Organization Studies* which showcases feminist ideas and their underlying calls for action. The articles selected are 'Becoming visible: Uncovering hidden entanglements of power, performativity and becoming subjectivities in a global bank' (Beavan, 2021), 'Disrupting the gender institution: Consciousness-raising in the cocoa value chain' (McCarthy & Moon, 2018), 'From "pretty" to "pretty powerful": The communicatively constituted power of facial beauty's performativity' (Hollis, Wright, Smolović Jones, & Smolović Jones, 2021), 'Balls, barbecues, and boxing: Contesting gender regimes at organizational social events' (Ortlieb & Sieben, 2019) and 'A seat at the table and a room of their own: Interconnected processes of social media use at the intersection of gender and occupation' (Vaast, 2020). By adopting feminist knowledge and methodologies these articles reveal inequalities and commit to social and epistemic change. Various strands of feminist thought emphasize a view that knowledge is not created from anywhere in favour of the postulate that each subject is specific and located in a particular time and place (Sprague & Kobrynowicz, 1999). This locatedness gives the knower access to the concrete world and a particular perspective on the object of study. While reviewing these articles, we also identify what work remains to be done to engage substantively with the radical potential of feminist work and research issues of crucial concern to organizations and societies. The justification for selecting the articles included here was to represent ideas and practices that collectively demonstrate a trajectory of feminist thought over time, and individually approach feminism as a theory and activist practice for addressing systemic inequalities. Finally, after reviewing the articles, we conclude this Introduction with a discussion of emerging contemporary issues for feminism and organization studies.

Each article published in *Organization Studies*, on its own, illustrates significant developments in applying feminist thinking in our field of study. Collectively, they show the wide-ranging possibilities of employing feminism to reimagine organizational theory and practice. These articles recognize the value of integrating feminist theory and methodology in empirical research and the opportunities for resisting gender inequality in theory and practice. In discussing each article, feminist contributions to understanding organizations and the organization of gender become apparent as feminism provides fundamental ways of seeing, reading, feeling and conceptualizing experience (such as inequality and violence) and analysing the socio-political context of organizations. By applying the feminist approach, we can also identify how hegemony is reproduced in the academy. For instance, if feminist scholarship is not classified as such, and if its authors (who are more often than not women) are not cited to acknowledge women's writing, then there is the possibility that organization studies remain neutral or blind to feminism (see Martin & Knopoff, 1997). Fiona

Wilson (1996), some decades ago, reiterated the problem of being blind and deaf to gender in organization studies and the ways such stances perpetuate dominant ways of seeing and reading organization. Historically feminist studies have been central in identifying the nature of the field – and who and what is absent from field-defining and shaping debates. Feminist organization studies play a vital role in consciousness-raising for social and epistemic change, as we see in the next section reviewing feminist organization studies.

More than 30 Years of the ‘F’ Word

In their 2013 article reviewing 20 years of gender and feminist scholarship in the journal *Organization*, Nancy Harding, Jackie Ford and Marianna Fotaki asked whether feminism was still a dirty and unusable ‘F’ word. The authors repeated a question by Marta Calás and Linda Smircich (1992) as they examined the intersecting social consequences of adopting feminist perspectives in organizational research, management and society. They also identified the potential practical impacts of such an uptake on women entering managerial positions, paving the way for gender equality in the workplace. Long before this, *Organization Studies* had published some of the first critical pieces highlighting the absence of gender research. For instance, Jeff Hearn and Wendy Parkin (1983) and Albert Mills (1988) offered critical reviews of gender theory’s place in organization studies, assessing the relative neglect of feminist influences on the field. These early contributions deepened organizational analysts’ understanding of workplace dynamics, especially around masculinity and men (Collinson & Hearn, 1994). Organizational theorists identified how masculine organization is problematic to feminist researchers (Katila & Meriläinen, 1999), and the advancement of gender equality in the workplace, including the importance of affirmative forms of masculinity. Since then, extensive research has been done on female- and male-dominated occupations, roles and processes and their effect on people and organizational outcomes.

Feminist research addressed structural organizational inequalities, as well as the potentialities of embodiment and difference within prevailing power relations in organizations and workplaces. Since the early 1990s, feminist scholars such as Joanne Martin (1990) and Silvia Gherardi (1995) have shown systemic inequalities in organizations by highlighting the gendered nature of organizations. Gender sociologist Joan Acker (1990) explained how organizations produce and maintain inequality regimes (Acker, 2006), while other organizational scholars revealed patterns of inequalities (Calás, Smircich, & Bourne, 2009). Yvonne Benschop and Hans Doorewaard (1998) analysed the gendered subtext of organizations that act as barriers to progress. Patricia Yancey Martin (1990) explored the nature of the feminist organization as a form of social movement organizing. Debra Meyerson and Maureen Scully’s (1995) practice of tempered radicalism captured how people such as feminists who both ‘identify with and are committed to their organizations, but are also committed to a cause, community, or ideology that is fundamentally different from, and possibly at odds with the dominant culture of their organization’ (p. 509) and the ways in which they find opportunities to engage in activist strategies for change. David Knights (1997) turned to postmodern feminist thought to identify various solutions to problematic dualisms such as rationality and emotionality in organization theory, highlighting the subordination of the feminine to the masculine. Organizational responses that systematically address political, structural and cultural barriers to equality have been stressed repeatedly, and feminist thought has been a central inspiration and resource.

Whilst feminist scholars continue to legitimize their thought and practice in management and organization studies, many (Calás, Smircich, & Holvino, 2014; Desivilya & Yassour-Borochowitz, 2008; Ely & Meyerson, 2000; Ely & Padavic, 2007; Fotaki & Daskalaki, 2021; Phillips, Pullen, & Rhodes, 2014; Vachhani & Pullen, 2019) have demonstrated the transformational impact of

feminist philosophy and activist practice on gender relations in organizations and societies (see also Bell, Meriläinen, Taylor, & Tienari, 2019). The importance of feminist theory, epistemology, methodology and analysis has been essential in researching marginalized, erased, or undermined people in gender scholarship. In the forthcoming *Handbook of Feminist Methodologies in Management and Organization Studies*, Saija Katila, Susan Meriläinen, and Emma Bell (2023, n.p.) write that feminist researchers '[. . .] critically question the nature of knowledge production and problematize how traditional methodologies often fail to centralize the experiences of women and others who have been marginalized in societies'. Drawing on feminist scholarship, the authors highlight the unique insights feminist methodologies can offer into organizations as arenas for the 'production and maintenance of social relations of inequalities and subordination including gender, race, ethnic, class and sexuality relations' (Calás, Smircich, & Bourne, 2009, p. 247) and 'particular positioning of theory, epistemology, and ethics that enables the feminist researcher to question "existing" truths and explore relations between knowledge and power' (Ramazanoglou & Holland, 2002, p. 16).

As Emma Bell et al. (2019) comment in their *Human Relations* special issue, 'Time's up! Feminist theory and activism meets organization studies',

Feminism is a long established, often neglected empirical and theoretical presence in the study of organizations and social relations at work [. . .] now is a new time for feminism, noting very recent examples of sexist oppression in social relations to illustrate why this rejuvenation is happening now. (p. 4)

Much has changed in organization scholarship and society, and wicked problems requiring redress, such as misogyny, racism and climate change, now benefit from feminist thought and activism. Feminism has entered popular discourse and acquired many positive connotations, thanks to writers (Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie), actors (Emma Watson), performers (Beyoncé), business people (Sheryl Sandberg) and politicians self-identifying as feminists. In the latter category, Hillary Clinton's US presidential candidacy was supported by Wall Street bankers. Nick Clegg, former leader of the Liberal Democratic Party in the UK, infamously became a Facebook executive. Although they all advocate equality between men and women in one form or another, their views on the causes and means to address continuing inequalities vary significantly. Despite the popularity of neoliberal feminism in the 21st century (for a critique, see Foster, 2017, or Arruzza et al., 2019) and supporting statements from famous public figures, feminism has not suddenly materialized out of nowhere. Nor does liberal feminism, with its focus on privileged women ignoring intersections of class, race, history, or geography, represent or respond to the needs of most of them (Srinivasan, 2021). The gender-based inequality approach originates in feminist philosophy, often emphasizing sexual and social relations between women and men, and focusing on power and control. It is also rooted in activist practice and political struggle for women's rights to vote, inherit property, and claim children's custody, reproductive rights, equal pay, land rights, war protests, and many other issues (e.g. Lewis, 2020).

Feminist Theory and Activism in Organization Studies

In *Organization Studies*, feminist thought is gaining momentum, even though other journals, such as *Human Relations*, have questioned 'why feminism is so poorly represented in the journals that our academic community constructs as prestigious. We suggest that feminism provides opportunities for distinctive practices of knowledge production that challenge the patriarchal social formations which characterize academic work' (Bell et al., 2019, p. 4). This Introduction to the virtual Special Issue on feminist theories and activist practices highlights feminist

approaches by showcasing some of the articles in *Organization Studies* that illustrate the themes that have been published, mapping the trajectory that feminist organization studies can take. Feminist scholarship produces unique insights into the causes and forms of and impediments to overcoming gender-based discrimination in the workplace and society, such as persisting inequalities in labour markets, raising awareness of the economic gaps between employment, child-care, pay and superannuation. However, there remain challenges in academia and business schools, specifically in researching gender equality in neoliberal and marketized academia. The feminist project's potential to bring about social change in some contexts seems less of a strategic priority (McRobbie, 2009).

We discuss articles that have advanced feminist theory and activism. Next, we discuss how research addresses specific topics and perspectives, both in the articles we review and in other relevant articles, including embodiment, body and affect, and approaches such as intersectionality and transnational feminism, and feminist race theories and postcolonialism. This choice reflects the foundational premises and developments within feminist theory: that individuals are situated in a matrix of race, gender, sexuality, class and power, including how global power relations shape very local living conditions. Each article embodies feminist theory to address hegemonic power relations and inequalities in organizational settings. They either adopt an activist positionality explicitly, or such activism can be inferred in their focus on feminist theory and/or social change. Taken together, these articles challenge hegemonic knowledge by focusing on relationality, interconnectedness and responsibility for the other. In choosing these articles for review, we considered whether they raise socially relevant topics or issues of growing importance and whether they represent new perspectives and fresh voices, warranting their showcasing in this virtual Special Issue. Taken together, these articles informed our thinking as to the direction that feminist organization studies is taking, and its possibilities. Each article embodies feminist knowledge and moves forward, uncovering new movements and potentialities for the development of future feminist thought.

Women's absence from the body of knowledge

The historical underrepresentation of women in academia explains the absence of feminist perspectives and continuing undervaluation of their contributions to the body of knowledge (Fotaki, 2011, 2013; Lipton, 2017; Oseen, 1997). Fotaki (2013) draws on Luce Irigaray's idea of women not having their own language to argue that their underrepresentation in positions of power in academia is due to their absence from the symbolic body of knowledge that continues to be reproduced. Cremin (2020) argues that this is an effect of repudiating the feminine as inferior to hegemonic masculinity, tracing its origins in the subjugation of nature and all other forms of life. This masculine disorder is a particular form of libidinal investment characterizing capitalist development (Cremin, 2020). In her work on discrimination against women, Fotaki (2011) draws on Julia Kristeva's notion of abjection of the female body and its functions, which are equated with nature and opposed to abstract thinking, as the root cause of such attitudes in academic institutions (see also Höpfl, 2000). Vachhani (2012) also highlights the subordination and absence of the feminine voice in academia, and suggests ways to change this by, for instance, speaking and writing differently about organizations and ourselves. Phillips et al. (2014) propose ways to address it by taking inspiration from Hélène Cixous's writing, introducing the idea of bisexual writing into organization studies to challenge masculine hegemony by confusing it rather than attempting to replace it with another (feminine) orthodoxy. Cixous' critique of a 'masculine libidinal economy' reveals that mastery and rigor are not so much an effort of inquiry but a manifestation of the inability to tolerate not-knowing in management and organization studies. They maintain that turning to feminist scholarship will account for the silenced and neglected voices and perspectives that may

enable new ways to reorganize social life based on the values of inclusivity and care. This, we suggest, is an essential precondition for making our societies liveable and surviving the multiple crises we face. The pandemic has exacerbated gender inequalities significantly, especially along racial and class lines, and has shown the value of care in institutions from government to schools (Mandalaki, van Amsterdam, Prasad, & Fotaki, 2022).

Invoking feminist thought, Katie Beavan's (2021) article 'Becoming visible: Uncovering hidden entanglements of power, performativity and becoming subjectivities in a global bank' is written differently, writing the feminine against masculine logic. Drawing on her own autoethnographic experiences of working in a US bank, she presents a field test of a telephone meeting to elucidate 'entanglements and flows of power, performativity and related becoming subjectivities, in a rich thicket of lived experience' (p. 1839). Following decades of post-qualitative inquiry, Beavan (2021) works with transversal feminist thought and writing to 'playfully-vulnerably assay with new ways of doing processual organizational research and making knowing-as-action, including with potential readers'. Her work responds to the call for writing differently (Fotaki, Metcalfe, & Harding, 2014; Gilmore, Harding, Helin, & Pullen, 2019; Mandalaki, 2021) as it draws on the performative literary tradition pioneered by feminist philosopher and playwright Hélène Cixous's *écriture féminine*, or 'women's writing' (Fotaki, 2013; Lipton, 2017; Phillips et al., 2014), one which examines the relationship between the cultural and psychological inscription of the female body and female difference in language and text (Showalter, 1981). This embodied writing brings to the fore unconscious affective entanglements, showing how feminisms and non-feminist theory and inquiry enable temporality, space, and human and non-human relations to surface. It also illustrates how we might experimentally approach the struggles (of power and process) between the ego-centric 'I' and its relationality in academic writing. This feminist perspective to organization studies shows the activist practices required to challenge masculine knowledge and practice. Importantly this article recognizes the relational struggles in organizational power and feminist resistance. Organizational researchers have recently engaged with feminist ideas when writing differently to explore issues of societal importance, such as the recent Covid-19 pandemic (Orr, 2023; Riad, 2023), rapacious extractivism degrading the environment and destroying people's lives (Daskalaki & Fotaki, 2023; Fotaki & Daskalaki, 2021), and the refugee crisis (Mandalaki, 2023), bringing in the potential of this work for novel understandings and also the possibility of resisting differently.

A power approach

Feminist perspectives have long explained the politics of gender by offering more nuanced and complex accounts of how organizations work in a global context and stressing the power of gendered discourses and practices in reproducing gender (Acker, 1990; West & Zimmerman, 1987). Some studies of gender have found their way into organizational scholarship published in this journal. These include Trethewey (1999) on disciplining the female body, Tyler and Cohen (2010) on gendering space, and Griffin, Harding, and Learmonth (2017) on the role of Disney films in promoting gender stereotypes. Others have analysed how the subjects themselves must constantly perform gendered discourses to reinforce social norms (Kenny, 2012; Riach, Rumens, & Tyler, 2014). These feminist scholars approach gender from a broad approach, adopting interdisciplinary perspectives that are less well-represented in organization studies and often considering discourse, subjectivity, power, race and class. They also question whether gender discrimination and neglect of feminist scholarship primarily reflect the asymmetry of power between women and men and are manifestations of women's subordinate position in society.

Feminist activists from outside gender and organization studies provide answers to this question by connecting their theories with political action. Silvia Federici, one of the most important feminist theorists of reproductive labour, explains how women's unpaid work, mostly in domestic labour of care, sex work and procreation, enables capitalist growth by reproducing labour and reducing labour costs. Her path-breaking writing is integrated with activism (Federici, 2012). Federici cofounded the Wages for Housework campaign mounted by the International Feminist Collective, which formed chapters in Italy, the UK and the USA to demand wages from their respective federal governments for labour performed by women in the home (Hoffmann & Yudacofski, 2018). Many feminist theories emerged from feminist political practice (see Firestone & Koedt, 1970; Segal, 2017). Therefore, it is essential to acknowledge the contribution of feminist movements and political activism to developing feminist thinking within and outside academia.

Judith Butler, a post-structuralist feminist philosopher, who drew on her activist practice in developing a theory of power through the performativity of discourse and fluidity of gender, is another such influential example. This perhaps explains why Butler's ideas, based on her first-hand experiences and observations first articulated in *Gender Trouble* (1990), have had tangible impacts on social movements, policy development, legislation and popular imagination. The intertwining of theoretical developments and activist practice in the work of those pathbreaking scholars demonstrates that feminism is about enacting theory in practice and developing theory through practice. For feminists writing and acting on theory is about being in the world. As Arundathi Roy, an acclaimed Booker Prize-winning, bestselling writer and feminist activist, explains, 'Fiction and non-fiction are only different techniques of storytelling. For reasons I do not fully understand, fiction dances out of me. Non-fiction is wrenched out of me by the aching, broken world I wake up to every morning' (Roy, 2002, n.p.). In other words, writing is something we do but cannot fully explain. Acting on what we write makes this real, especially when being a feminist means caring about working against injustice and toward equality for the excluded, dispossessed and powerless. In ignoring developments by major feminist theorists and their activist practices, we restrict our ability to reimagine ways out of the world's multiple crises.

While acknowledging the progress made in some of the works discussed above, we identify novel ways to develop feminist scholars' ideas further and apply them to rethinking various organizational issues and societal challenges. These are concerned with the reproduction of inequality regimes when the institution is power-laden through gender inspired by Joan Acker and Judith Lorber and the performative power of gendered social norms and discourses theorized by Judith Butler. Lauren McCarthy and Jeremy Moon's (2018) article 'Disrupting the gender institution: Consciousness-raising in the cocoa value chain' recognizes gender as a taken-for-granted institution (Lorber, 1994). This article speaks of gender orders and gender practices in daily organizational regimes in a gender equality programme, focusing on gender inequality and exclusionary practices in the Ghanaian cocoa value chain. The article highlights how research in non-Western contexts raises awareness of how various forms of inequality in 'faraway places' are structurally embedded in the current business model of global neoliberalism. Its analysis of the multidimensional gender institution explains the multiple power relations at play between value chain stakeholders. It also identifies the work engaging substantively with the radical potential of feminist ideas and researching issues of crucial concern to organizations and societies. Further, by employing feminist praxis destabilizing the status quo of gender orders, the article shows how social change can be worked towards by consciousness-raising. This should involve individuals connecting the gendered everyday with organizational regimes and orders, which gives people agency within institutions. Demonstrating a relational view of power (which emerges between all stakeholders) moves away from the gendered distributional perspective of power, which the authors comment as being 'where men hold power and can either provide or withdraw opportunities for

women' (p. 1172). The authors argue that organizations, and the individuals within them, must consider the multidimensional gender institution to challenge gender inequality.

In advancing Judith Butler's theorizing, two recent articles published in a Special Issue on power, performativity and process (Simpson, Harding, Fleming, Sergi, & Hussenot, 2021) deal with performativity and power in organizational settings – topics of growing interest for organizational scholars. The other is the article by David Hollis et al. (2021) titled 'From "pretty" to "pretty powerful": The communicatively constituted power of facial beauty's performativity' which is included in this virtual Special Issue. This article presents an analysis of the face as embodied and communicative text. The authors examine how the beauty industry unashamedly adopts a feminist stance in the post-capitalist economy. They use their analysis of the face as 'a significant locus of power upon which judgments concerning a person's status, worth and attractiveness are made' (p. 1885) to conceptualize power and performativity as communicatively constituted. Facial norms are read as 'shifting performative power in daily organizing, theorizing facial beauty as a communicatively constituted authoritative text' and 'exhibiting fluid, performative power during daily organizing processes' (Hollis et al., 2021).

The work by Hollis et al. (2021) is firmly rooted in poststructuralist work on the performativity of gendered discourses and other dominant social norms, pioneered by Judith Butler, which began to gain purchase in organization studies (Kenny, 2012; Riach et al., 2014; Visser & Davies, 2021) and management (Gond, Cabantous, Harding, & Learmonth, 2016). By integrating Butler's ideas of performativity and communication as constitutive to organizational theorizing, the authors show how power becomes performative when one-off acts of transition turn into repetitive and citational communicative accomplishments. Nevertheless, as performative power shifts endure, they are simultaneously resisted and always materialize imperfectly. The article builds on Butler's foundational ideas concerned with subverting the performative power of the norm through appropriation. However, the authors caution against assuming that such an approach will automatically lead to the rejection of the patriarchal norm rather than a voluntary submission to it. In their case, female consumers conform to the narrow canon of the beauty industry in the process that can be seen as one of being 're-naturalized' into 'normative femininity', albeit via the circuitous route of appropriating feminist language that Butler articulated in *Bodies that matter* (Hollis et al., 2021, p. 1901). This article demonstrates how feminist theory invigorates organization theory, facilitating new empirical and theoretical insights concerned with materiality surfacing in daily organizing and how embodied theorizing of performativity provides nuanced conceptualizations of power and organization.

Feminist approaches to embodiment, body and affect

Feminist approaches to embodiment, body and affect are rich and diverse and have developed over time. Their emphasis on the primacy of embodied experience challenges traditional, cognitive-based knowledge and abstract ethical theorization in various ways. Some path-breaking research published in *Organization Studies* focuses on the otherness of women's bodies and repudiation of the feminine as being equated with embodiment and uncontrollable affects. For instance, earlier work by Angela Trethewey (1999) examines qualitative data through the Foucauldian lens of 'biopolitical' discipline to discuss how women view their bodies in professional settings, suggesting that the female body is considered insubordinate and excessive. Caroline Gatrell (2019) draws on the same idea to highlight the difficult experiences of breastfeeding mothers in the workplace. By employing Kristeva's notion of the abjection of women, equated with nature and the unwanted body, from knowledge production, Fotaki (2011, 2013) examines women's continued underrepresentation in senior positions in universities and their relative absence from top jobs in management

and business schools. These works drawing on poststructuralist theory, embodiment and psychoanalysis take forward the sociological concept of the disembodied subject taking the form of an unspoken masculine norm, thereby excluding and marginalizing those who cannot achieve the qualities of this idealized worker (Acker, 1990).

Evolving from the above and Joan Acker's earlier foundational work in 1990 on the place of the body in engendering inequalities, this scholarship has sparked the development of organizational research centring around the performativity and materiality of discourse. For instance, Ashcraft and Mumby (2004) examine how gendered work identities are constructed in organizations and explore the dynamic relationship between gender and organization, through a unique focus on communicology as a dynamic, situated and embodied process of contesting and transforming dominant gender discourses. Fotaki et al. (2014) analyse the materiality of discourse through the prism of Luce Irigaray's work, while Harding, Ford and Gilmore (2022) combine Judith Butler's (1990, 1993) and Karen Barad's (2007) theories of performativity to understand the constitution of working bodies and how flesh materializes in organizational contexts. Collectively, their work demonstrates how power is associated with and located in different bodies. More recent organizational theorizing explores embodiment as a topic in its own right, taking inspiration from contemporary feminist new materialism to redefine the agentic, non-Cartesian body. Kate Harris and Karen Ashcraft (2023) radically depart from patriarchal philosophers' assumptions of people as abstract and generally disembodied selves in a novel way. Taking inspiration from Karen Barad, combining philosophy with physics, they offer the process of relational reflexivity as diffraction (diffraction being a method which appreciates the entanglements and differences within a changing, contingent and complex physical and social world). Diffraction thus maps interference, the process of making difference matter through relating differently. This signifies openness to embodied others by whom we become affected (Fotaki & Harding, 2017).

This is also reflected in some scholars' turn to the body as a source of knowledge and intelligence, for instance, in 'writing differently' about the body (Mandalaki & Pérezts, 2023). 'Writing from the body' (Fotaki et al., 2014; Gilmore et al., 2019; Phillips et al., 2014; Pullen, 2018) recognizes the body as a site of knowledge, while embodied knowledge is another way of recognizing and disrupting inequalities in organizations. Others use body and embodiment as metaphors and forms of self-expression, allowing for the definition of a new gender-egalitarian discourse in organizations (Pullen, 2006). Phillip Hancock (2008) and Alison Pullen and Carl Rhodes (2014, 2015) draw on the idea of a feminist philosopher, Rosalyn Diprose, of intercorporeal generosity to develop a new ethics of generosity and hospitality that might inform everyday organizational practice while transforming relations in society. In their recent work, Pullen and Rhodes (2022) also propose this approach for developing new organizational ethics.

However, despite this attention to the diversity of bodies in writings on embodiment, the management and organization studies literature has neglected various forms of corporeal differentiation in assuming that workers/employees and organizational subjects are abstract and generally disembodied. Researchers' disembodied approach to writing has been criticized for perpetuating economic, political, social and cultural disparities and inequalities and constituting oppressive organizational hierarchies and allied academic practices (Ashcraft, 2017; Höpfl, 2007; Pullen, 2006, 2018). Yet, power operates on and through bodies and the meanings attached to bodies, which are not simply products of social relations, but are organized, regulated and normalized in ways that reinforce the dominant social ordering (Fotaki & Pullen, 2019).

To address some of these gaps, and to understand the body's lived experience, researchers turned to the accounts of affect and embodied passion (Dale & Latham, 2015; Pullen, Rhodes, & Thanem, 2017) and the political implications of affect and desire (Fotaki, Kenny, & Vachhani, 2017). For instance, Lauren McCarthy and Sarah Glozer (2022) discuss how affective embodiment

is surfaced through alignment or misalignment with others' embodied experiences in institutionally disruptive work, allowing actors to replenish their emotional energy. Focusing on affect, body and embodiment transcends stubborn dualisms to nourish relational enactments that are difficult to accomplish within currently dominant approaches to organization and management studies (Ashcraft, 2017). It may also be an invaluable resource for addressing the challenges identified in recent debates on corporeal ethics (Kenny & Fotaki, 2015; Pullen & Rhodes, 2022) and ethics of care in organizations (Branicki, 2020).

In recognizing how gender regimes and the inherent inequalities within them (Acker, 2006) impact different bodies and how different bodies engage in gendered performances (Butler, 1990, 1993) in gendered contexts, Renate Ortlieb and Barbara Sieben's (2019) article 'Balls, barbecues, and boxing: Contesting gender regimes at organizational social events' provides rich empirical insights on gendered cultures and the ways in which they set the terms of inclusion and exclusion within them. The authors bring together Joan Acker's theory of gendered organization and Judith Butler's notion of gender performativity to examine social events held by companies and organizations. The authors use gender theory to challenge unequal gender regimes and the reproduction of gender inequality through the performance of gendered norms while showing how individuals can contest or reinforce them. Bringing together the concepts of gendered regimes developed by Acker and gendered performativity of Butler to critique the dominance of heteronormativity and masculinity in the workplace illustrates how feminist theories can fruitfully explain and offer ways to address persisting inequalities in organizations and society (Fotaki & Prasad, 2015). Of significance is how 'organizational social events are powerful hotbeds for traditional gender regimes' (p. 130) and their persistence. The study concludes by suggesting that gender regimes are contested terrains and make headway in seeing such regimes in more multiplicitous ways. This recognition poses essential questions for thinking about challenging such gender regimes through more subversive means such as humour and parody which have been important forms of worker resistance in organizations. In this way, feminist scholarship opposes the closing off of different approaches, showing that it is not monolithic but a creative, developmental endeavour and a political project in the making.

Intersectionality and transnational feminism

Intersectionality constitutes a profound development in feminist theory, signifying a shift from gender as an attribute possessed by individuals or practised in organizations, to gendering as a social process. This recent shift toward intersectionality underscores the understanding of identity as a performance act (Harding et al., 2013). For instance, Kathleen Riach et al. (2014) employ Judith Butler's frame of 'undoing' gender to develop a performative ontology of ageing as a negotiated, narrated process within organizations, driven by a desire for recognition and thus shaped by chrononormativity. They examine the experiences of LGBT people, commonly neglected in both organizations and organization studies, that all organizational subjects encounter in their desire for recognition as they grow older in organizational settings. Nick Rumens, Eloisio Moulin de Sousa, and Jo Brewis (2019) argue that organizational scholarship has overlooked queer theory as a productive site for non-normative forms of heterosexuality and has instead focused only on studying the workplace experiences of 'minorities', such as gay men and lesbians, in a way that is often reductive. Therefore, using queer theory to interrogate what is accepted as 'queer' in organizations and in organization and management studies has been an important contribution in queer feminist theory.

Emmanuelle Vaast's (2020) 'A seat at the table and a room of their own: Interconnected processes of social media use at the intersection of gender and occupation' is a qualitative study of women and gender-non-binary data scientists and their use of social media in their attempts to

reshape gender imbalances in their occupation. The increasing importance of social media was a critical factor prompting the inclusion of this article. However, it does not explicitly rely on feminist analyses but instead recognizes their usefulness in deconstructing gender in data science and performing critical analyses of social media uses. The study discusses how social media enables people to connect ‘on the basis of joint social identities’ (p. 1673) to overcome the exclusion of gender minorities. Importantly, given the masculine context of data science, the article highlights ‘how people use social media in ways that connect them to one another at the intersection of gender and occupational identities’. Social media can facilitate inclusion and the management of difference as they manage gender dynamics and present themselves institutionally. However, the study finds that such efforts are also riddled with ambivalence as those involved in diversity initiatives were anxious they might be perceived as overtly concerned with gender dynamics at the expense of professional competence. Akin to other studies showing how we can use social media to promote solidarity and resistance for women (Vachhani & Pullen, 2019), Vaast’s analysis confirms the political significance of social media and also shows how it is intertwined with the professional.

Framing how gender, sexual orientation and professional and social identity interact with one another in the workplace also shows the problems associated with adopting intersectionality as a straightforward sum of the component parts forming subjects’ identities. The aim of highlighting the multiple disadvantages experienced by those positioned at the intersections of various markers of difference (see bell hooks, 1981) emerged in a specific political context of how US courts failed to acknowledge Black women claimants in an anti-discrimination case as defined by both race and gender (Crenshaw, 1989). Feminist philosopher Anna Carastathis (2008) provocatively argues that intersectionality, the prevailing way of conceptualizing the relation between axes or systems of oppression (race, class, gender), might end by illicitly importing the very model it purports to overcome: that is, the unitary model of identity. Solidarity, she counterproposes, serves as a better norm for feminist practice than the inclusion of ‘difference’, which seems to be the norm underlying many intersectional accounts. In contrast, Sylvia Walby, Jo Armstrong, and Sofia Strid (2012) put forward the idea that theorization of the intersection of multiple inequalities has become a central issue in gender theory, with potentially wider applications for society, encompassing debates on cosmopolitanism, hybridity, multi-culturalism and even globalization. We suggest that intersectionality theory may also account for the ways in which organizations constitute some identities as abject, and some jobs as unacceptable, of low value or taboo.

Intersectional theory has been combined with transnational feminism originating in the field of gender studies in the US academy to account for the political situatedness of intersectionality in the globalized economy (Fernandes, 2013). Transnational feminist scholarship (Mohanty, 1998; Shohat, 2002) and intersectional analysis (Grewal & Kaplan, 2001) enable the discourse of excluded ‘others’ to be introduced in different geographical locales and clandestine spaces in global megacities, including the organization of work. Linking intersectionality with transnationalism is highly important and relevant to organization and management studies in theorizing issues of power, movement and space (Daskalaki & Fotaki, 2023; Fotaki & Daskalaki, 2021; Özkazanc-Pan & Calás, 2015; Tyler & Cohen, 2010; van Amsterdam, van Eck, & Meldgaard Kjær, 2023; Wasserman & Frenkel, 2015), alongside new forms of hybridity incorporating agency, resistance and submission that characterize mobile labour in the globalized economy. Transnational feminist frameworks provide the theoretical and activist resources to consider those living the most precarious and vulnerable gendered, racialized and classed lives and the ways in which organizations produce such inequalities, as well as considering the diversity of stakeholders which can also be resources for future change (cf. Özkazanc-Pan in Peredo et al., 2022). This requires rethinking Western conceptions of modernity with its impact on the geopolitics of knowledge production and

what counts as knowledge as deeply imbricated in the structures of its colonial domination over the rest of the world, discussed next.

Feminism of race and postcolonial and decolonial feminism

Among the most fruitful yet neglected developments in mainstream gender and management scholarship is the postcolonial critique of the idea of the universal conception of modernity with its claims on universality, which refers to Western subjects but excludes all others, and which the West has imposed on other parts of the world through imperial invasion and colonial governance (Bhambra, 2014). Edward Saïd (1978) powerfully articulates some of these ideas in his pioneering work *Orientalism*. Homi Bhabha, Aníbal Quijano and Walter D. Mignolo instead focus on coloniality as a long *durée* condition that has not ended with decolonization. Of more interest to this virtual Special Issue is decolonial theorization on intersectionality by Latin American feminists, including María Lugones, Gloria Anzaldúa, Teresa Martínez and many others, including Gayatri Spivak and Chandra Mohanty. The decolonial feminist perspective sees the effect of multiple relations of power rooted in the coloniality/modernity nexus, criticizing the assumption that the term *woman* has a uniform meaning, irrespective of context and history. Spivak (1988) does this by addressing Western efforts to problematize the subject and, in the process, questions how the Third World subject is represented in Western discourse. Since Western intellectual production reinforces the logic of Western economic expansion, she interrogates whether a subaltern woman can speak from with(in) this framework. Lugones (2008) re-reads the Western nexus of modernity/coloniality from a consciousness of race, gender and sexuality, rejecting the imposition of its homogenizing, separable categories arranged through hierarchical dichotomies and categorial logics that erase colonized women from most areas of social life. Lugones (2007) argues that gender itself is a colonial introduction, a violent introduction consistently and contemporarily used to destroy peoples, cosmologies and communities as the building ground of the ‘civilized’ West. Crucially, decolonial feminists also demonstrate that there is no understanding without acting and no resistance without defying the products of colonial imposition that reproduce patriarchal/capitalist socialities (Lugones, 2007, 2010). Relational embodied care and intra- and inter-communal alliance building inform their activist practices, offering a way to reorganize our societies (Fotaki, 2021) rooted in corporeal ethics (Pullen & Rhodes, 2022) and political care (Fotaki, 2023). Few organizational scholars have engaged with postcolonial thinking (Dar, 2018), and few draw extensively on the work of decolonial feminists (Jammulamadaka & Faria, 2023). In a rare work, Vijay, Gupta and Kaushiva (2021) draw on feminist postcolonial literary work from India, to theorize organizational change defined by solidaristic transgression, unsettled habitation and counter-discursive memory as three modes of academic writing that contribute to achieving this. Postcolonial theorization is also well suited to addressing issues of neocoloniality in organizations and the work of multinational corporations (Storgaard, Tienari, Piekkari, & Michailova, 2020), collective identity development in women’s rights movements (Basir, Ruebottom, & Auster, 2022) and women refugees coping with liminality in forced displacements (Alkhaled & Sasaki, 2022). However, even these works do not address explicitly the issue of race, which often underpins various subtle or less subtle forms of discrimination still present in organizations.

Kiran Mirchandani’s (2003) ground-breaking article ‘Challenging racial silences in studies of emotion work: Contributions from anti-racist feminist theory’ examined racial silences through the lens of emotion theory. Specifically, it highlighted the racial discrimination and exclusion of small-business owners who are ‘ethnically diverse women’ in Canada. Such racism remains entrenched in organizations and society. Drawing on feminist anti-racist theory, the author highlights ‘the fundamentally *relational* nature of emotion work’ (p. 736) that goes into adjusting to

inequality and shows how it ‘not only depends on the gender and ethnicity of the worker, and the occupation within which they are employed, but also on their social location vis-a-vis the stratification within the environment in which they live’ (Mirchandani, 2003, p. 736). This stresses the emotional toll of inequalities on women who experience them according to different axes of their social positionality defined by race, immigration histories and class resources, explaining why they self-manage and optimize their affect differently as they engage in paid work. It also helps us understand the affective genealogy of rage’s political genesis and effects within the feminist movement (Nash & Pinto, 2021).

Mirchandani’s article, published 20 years ago, is the only one in *Organization Studies* we have been able to identify that draws on anti-racist feminist theory to expose interrelations between gender, race and class in organizations. To date, anti-racist feminism has not been followed up in the journal despite the development of Black feminism and intersectionality in research elsewhere. Racism is both socially widespread and institutionalized, as shown by the Black Lives Matter movement and confirmed by a recent UK report on the London Metropolitan police (White, 2022). However, as Nash and Pinto (2021) argue, we must also look closer to home to better understand how entrenched racism still is in the fabric of both feminist theory and the discipline’s organization, and not just in the field of organization and management studies, as we elaborate in the concluding section. In an *Academy of Management Review* piece aptly entitled ‘The emperor has no clothes: Rewriting “race” in organizations’, Stella Nkomo wrote 30 years ago about the denial of the centrality of race to organization and management studies (Nkomo, 1992), yet the phenomenon continues (Nkomo, 2021). Anti-racist feminism enables organizational researchers to expose racial exclusions and advance inter-racial solidarity in our scholarship and activist practices. Intersectional perspectives encompassing class, gender and race have much to offer to combat poverty and social exclusion. In speaking about knowledge sharing beyond focusing on boundary conditions concerning issues of gender and caste (Qureshi, Sutton, & Bhatt, 2018), such perspectives decolonize various boundary objects, such as language (Dar, 2018). Positioning feminist decolonial approaches at the forefront of scholarship may go a long way toward ending the complicity of organization and management studies in ignoring and/or silencing pervasive, embedded and iniquitous forms of exclusion concerning caste (Chrispal, Bapuji, & Zietsma, 2021), race and ethnicity. Of central importance in anti-racist and decolonial approaches research is the local context in which patterns of inequalities and exclusions manifest, become embodied, lived and affectively experienced. Considering the contexts in which inequality exists and is reproduced through the specific power relations is also essential for feminist activist writing.

Discussion: Possibilities for Feminist Organization Studies

As we have seen, organizational scholarship draws on feminist thought to bring alternative perspectives to the mainstream. Feminist and gender approaches in organization and management studies are still growing compared to the wide-ranging published work on unequal treatment of women in management and the importance of including women’s voices which is often based on women’s experiences. In this Introduction, we provide an (inevitably partial) overview of critical works recently published in *Organization Studies*, helping the reader to find orientation in the field. However, after systematizing the existing literature across the themes, we found best represented the critical premises of diverse feminist theory and practice centred on power, embodiment, body and affect, intersectionality, and transnational feminism; our objective was to elucidate how we can take these ideas forward, and which of these held the greatest promise for moving our scholarship to promote equality and respond to multiple societal challenges. In this, we followed one of the reviewer’s suggestion to provide a map, ‘to help the reader move around in

this landscape, and only to be able to suggest a way forward'. We are thankful for drawing our attention to Rosi Braidotti's (2013) cartography approach as 'a theoretically based and politically informed reading of the present' (p. 164) for organizational scholarship's engagement with feminist theories. It also allowed us to articulate a possible way forward as 'cartographies aim at epistemic and ethical accountability by unveiling the power locations which structure our subject-position' (Braidotti, 2013).

While we identified the hegemonic masculine domination excluding and/or marginalizing feminist scholarship which is still a significant obstacle, we also felt we needed to take a broader view of social, racial and geopolitical limitations emerging from the insularity of historical narratives and epistemologies emanating from the West as an inextricable part coloniality/modernity project. Decolonial feminists expose how gender is intrinsically related to modernity and the coloniality of power which form the foundations of the coloniality of knowledge (Martinez, 2000; Mohanty, 2003). Decolonial methodology questions the colonial-modern-Eurocentric paradigms of gender imposed as universal. Such approaches can also reveal how colonial difference continues to produce bodies and affects through 'a persistently violent domination that marks the flesh multiply by accessing the bodies of the unfree in differential patterns devised to constitute them as the tortured materiality of power' (Lugones, 2007, p. 188). Such approaches can offer an invaluable resource for decolonizing management and organization scholarship and education 'not as an abstraction from lived experience but as a lens that enables us to see what is hidden from our understandings of both race and gender and the relation of each to normative heterosexuality' (Lugones, 2010, p. 742). We may perpetuate colonial legacies, often unwittingly, in what we write about and omit, how we write about feminist issues and struggles in our scholarship, and what politics we espouse in our activist writing and practices as academics and citizens. The work of Lugones (2020) highlights possible epistemological and ontological horizons that move beyond the limitations created by the modern-colonial gender system by incorporating discussions on intersectionality and intersexuality, including critical discussions on the limitations of binary sex logics, hegemonic heteronormativity, hierarchies of race and social conditions.

Finally, we also needed to examine our own exclusions in the 'mainstream' feminisms that subaltern feminists unmasked to be able to forge more plural and inclusive feminist approaches in organizations and society (Nash & Pinto, 2021). At the same time, we must extend the dialogue with unprivileged women, such as homeless women, precarious workers, immigrants, transsexual women, and prisoners, and build alliances across various social movements despite multiple challenges. First, because the capitalist system of exploitation is gendered and racialized but also creates multiple new forms of dispossession, and second, because women won't be truly free of discrimination without new, egalitarian and sustainable ways of governing our shared resources. As Silvia Federici (2004) reminds us, sexual hierarchies are always at the service of a project of domination that can sustain itself only by dividing, on a continuously renewed basis, those it intends to rule.

For sustainable growth of the field and moving towards gender equality, adopting a feminist view of gender as an effect of social processes amenable to change (Fotaki & Pullen, 2019), and thereby integrating feminism to enable critique of systemic organizational inequalities, is vital to sustaining the political activism required, in critique and action. Of particular concern to feminist thought, especially in developing future feminist organization studies that address the multiple crises that society faces, concerns two notable and interrelated developments in the field: feminist ethics of care and posthuman feminism and ecofeminism. Below we show how extending the hitherto underutilized but essential theories and practices highlighted above can reinvigorate our organizational scholarship and activism centred on these vital issues.

Feminist ethics of care

Care is often associated with gender and is deeply gendered, although care is both a human need and a capability. At the same time, feminists have long placed the logic of caring at the heart of their philosophy and practice, including various forms of activism (Fotaki, 2021, 2023), and many feminist writers and activists address care either directly or as an essential aspect of women's emancipation. Feminist ethical theory brings together feminist struggles with socio-political, philosophical and cultural analyses that take inspiration from Marxism (Federici, 2012), postcolonial theory (Mohanty, 2003), poststructuralism and psychoanalysis (for a discussion, see Fotaki & Harding, 2017). What unites these perspectives are the notion of agency as relational and ethics as emerging vis-a-vis the other, who is seen not as a threat but as a source and object of ethical decision making. Feminist political scientist Joan Tronto (1994) broadened consideration of care beyond gender and morality, positioning it in the political context. Such feminist logic of care rests on different ethical premises and philosophical assumptions from the financialized, extractivist neoliberal capitalism. It focuses on the politics of relationality (Fotaki, 2019), which implies a practice of care work aiming to sustain interdependent worlds and counter exploitation and domination instead of speaking about relationality in moral terms.

However, care's radical political potential is rarely considered in organization and management scholarship (Branicki, 2020; Fotaki & Harding, 2017, Ch. 6; Johansson & Wickström, 2023; Pullen & Rhodes, 2022). Although care ethics is not about women's morality, research continues to examine gender differences in the context of care in various business and management fields (Hamington, 2013), purposely or inadvertently reproducing the association of care with female and feminine characteristics. Pullen and Rhodes (2022) draw on their earlier work with feminist thought to critique theories of business and corporate ethics which 'enacts an unacknowledged patriarchy that associates ethics with traditionally masculine values of domination, greatness and sovereignty', offering a corporeal ethics of organization 'as a form of affective generosity that displaces patriarchal privilege in favour of the ongoing pursuit of care and nurturing of others and the elimination of human relations of domination' (p. 11; see also Kenny & Fotaki, 2015). Given the multiple crises we face, rethinking the human desire to care and the organization of caring work as a broader political practice and a part of democratic political action to promote justice and equality (*Care Manifesto*, Care Collective, 2020) is urgent. We must account for how global care flows are embodied, and distributed and who benefits from this embodied labour. Adopting decolonial methodology at the grassroots level with a strong emphasis on the ground, on a historicized, incarnate intersubjectivity, proposed by Lugones (2020), would allow for studying groups of people such as migrant and clandestine workers, carers from the Global South sustaining care systems in the Global North who are either silenced or ignored by mainstream gender research.

Posthuman feminism and ecofeminism

A growing interest in ecofeminism is reframing debates on essentialism concerning women's unique connections to nature as a source of strength or a root of their cultural oppression (Moore, 2004). This implies feminist ethics, concerned with the situated knowledge of speaking from a marginalized position to promote the emancipation of all human and non-sentient beings. Feminist posthumanism and ecofeminist movements (Braidotti, 2022; Shiva & Mies, 2014) stress how capitalist exploitation of the land and women's oppression are intertwined and rooted in the patriarchal organization of the world into binaries (man/woman, human/nature), and in the unequivocal superiority of the white, male, 'human' subject (e.g. Åsberg & Braidotti, 2018; Braidotti, 2013, 2017; Calás & Smircich, 2023; Gherardi, 2019). Their focus on the politics of human/non-human relations and how the role of materiality and affect has important implications for theorizing spatiality

in organizations (Halford & Leonard, 2006; Newlands, 2021; Tyler & Cohen, 2010; Wasserman & Frenkel, 2015) is neglected and undertheorized in organization studies. Barbara Simpson et al. (2021) began to address some questions raised in Rosi Braidotti's posthumanist work, but these are concerned mainly with performativity and power and do not speak about new materialisms. Similarly, Laura Visser and Olivia Davies (2021) draw on Karen Barad's work to explore the interplay between performativity and power in online healthcare, enacted through personal online healthcare communities. However, posthumanist feminist theorization has much more to offer beyond concerns with performativity. A shift to ecofeminist ontology requires a departure from anthropocentric, hierarchical discourses of nature that prioritize human (economic) development at the expense of other life forms, as Braidotti and political ethicists of care have argued. Their work can be productively employed along with other theoreticians, including Butler's work on spatial resistance and vulnerability, to discuss important political and ethical issues other than the performativity on which organizational scholars tend to focus. It might, for instance, be extended to rethinking enplaced protest and social movement organizing (Desivilya & Yassour-Borochowitz, 2008; Daskalaki & Fotaki, 2023; Fotaki & Daskalaki, 2021) and to framing women's organizing against neoliberal destruction. Feminist theorizations of space from disciplines outside our field of study (e.g. architecture in Rendell's feminist critical spatial practice framework) can also be usefully employed in resisting extractivism and environmental destruction (Daskalaki & Fotaki, 2023). Butler's conception of gender fluidity can also be fruitfully combined with the decolonial work of Lugones (2007) that sees gender binaries as a product of imposition of Eurocentric and heterosexualist patriarchy if it does not take away the grounds for politics leaving out obvious and verifiable inequalities unchallenged. Indeed, Lugones (2007) elucidates how the colonial-modern gender system and heterosexuality 'as tied to a persistently violent domination that marks the flesh multiply by accessing the bodies of the unfree in differential patterns devised to constitute them as the tortured materiality of power' (p. 188), is intertwined with the birth and expansion of global capitalism. Therefore, the work of subaltern feminists and activists provides another essential but, to date, underutilized resource for organization scholars. It has been informed by territorial-community feminism and the indigenous struggles and the resistances of those women who enact 'defense of the body-earth territory' (Cabnal, 2015) in the context of extractive industries, offering rich narratives of rural and indigenous women's resistance to violent attacks on their body and their land. Such perspectives connecting women to the environment and development explore the interconnections between globalization, environmental change and gender politics. Feminist theory and practice on the role of collective (human/non-human) subjectivities, embodied and affective socio-spatialities, and postcolonial aesthetics will continue to grow and potentially produce new vistas and ideas for radical political action (Calás & Smircich, 2023).

Conclusion

This Introduction to a virtual Special Issue on feminist theories and activist practices begins to sketch these trajectories and identify potential directions for further engagement with feminist thought, methodology and action in organization studies. Feminist ideas have shaped our world, producing crucial insights into the causes and forms of gender-based discrimination and violence in workplaces and society. However, feminist organizational scholarship remains sparse in organizational journals possibly because organizational scholarship either rarely engages with feminist theory or gives credit to feminist achievements. For instance, organizational scholars often take concepts such as 'performativity', a term coined by Judith Butler, and 'posthumanism' attributed to Karen Barad and Rosi Braidotti, out of their feminist context (see Harris & Ashcraft, 2023 for discussion on this issue). Such activity obscures their embeddedness in the feminist project of

promoting inclusivity and social change. Feminist thought is appropriated, leaving behind and erasing the woman writer whose experience and positionality in society is a source of knowledge. Ideas holding value to organizational scholarship are important but advancing without feminism itself goes against the project of recognition required in the move towards gender equality. This depoliticizes the knowledge creation and thought that was, is and should be political. Moving forward, the naming of feminism is crucial for sustained contributions to addressing the organizational implications of gender inequalities. First, it is crucial to name feminist theory and activism to enable researchers and readers to recognize the benefits of feminism to organization studies at large. This will broaden engagement with feminist thought and writing to contest its erasure, especially the erasure of women writers who have contributed to the field's rich history, and the use of feminist analysis to critique areas currently devoid of feminist critique. Second, collectivism and solidarity are essential feminist values, and activism, including for our organizational scholarship, is an advanced feminist practice. Learning from collective action is at the heart of feminism, standing in contrast to the ego-centric, individualized accounts of self-identity that shapes the neoliberal understanding of careers, identity work and definitions of success. Third, feminist theory and activism enable us to collectively develop new imaginaries where class, identity and affect are one (Cremin, 2020) rather than pursuing our atomized pleasures, as capitalism urges us to do when it appropriates gender politics. Feminism also equips women with the tools to create liveable lives (Ahmed, 2017) and champion social change for all, especially for precarious and vulnerable people. Relatedly this can help develop communities that embed care for others.

Furthermore, challenging the marginalization of feminist scholarship in academic audit structures requires careful consideration. International research assessment exercises such as the Research Excellence Framework (REF UK) or Excellence in Research Assessment (ERA Australia) contribute to the devaluation of feminist work as it is seldom acknowledged or considered in evaluations. Furthermore, journal publication lists such as the Association of Business Deans Council list (ABDC) on which neoliberal universities and corporate business schools increasingly rely to appraise output quality (and relatedly) restrict feminist scholarship (Fotaki, 2021). Combined, this means that doing feminist research can often be perceived as contributing to gender inequality because of the precarity involved in gaining employment and further opportunities. In this context of increasing precarity for employees and increasing managerialism in universities, where gender studies programmes are being closed and critical pedagogy threatened, pursuing feminist organization studies scholarship could be fatal. The Covid-19 pandemic revealed and exacerbated gendered intersectional inequalities in society (Akhter et al., 2022), re-embedding further the gendered neoliberal logic in many universities (Mandalaki et al., 2022). This suggests that feminist research is needed more than ever and that feminist researchers must call out why and how critical feminist knowledge continues to be delegitimized. This is not about expressing our *ressentiment* but rather about deploying our 'intelligent rage' (Nash & Pinto, 2021) to make our writing and actions purposeful. If we are to address the multiple crises that contribute to stark gender inequalities that are intertwined with poverty and coloniality, feminists will need to ask questions regarding the knowledges that become ignored, silenced and erased. Justice, epistemic and social, is urgent. Feminism, if we embrace it, brings history, infrastructure and tools to build new economies, organizations and communities. Finally, as one reviewer helpfully put it: learning from very sophisticated feminist theories and applying them to the material world in our academic practice means being an ethical researcher, decent teacher and caring colleague. We may sometimes fall short of this, but we also agree that without the inspiration of several generations of feminist thinkers, we would have been very different academics!

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Alison Pullen is a feminist researcher in organization studies. Using feminist philosophy and theory, she has recently written on affective solidarity and activism, feminine leadership, corporeal ethics and domestic violence. The purpose of this work is to bring about fundamental changes to pervasive gender oppressions both in organizations and society more generally.