

Intersectional Socialism: Rethinking the Socialist Future with Intersectionality Theory

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Abstract

Intersectionality theory can achieve more than an examination of mechanisms of power and oppression. It can also, shed light on what things might become. Drawing on this particular application of intersectionality theory, I argue that it can be deployed to imagine a socialist future and, in so doing, restore socialism's utopian energies. This is achieved by tackling a distinctively socialist issue – the future of work – and showing the kind of conceptual innovations intersectionality theory can help develop. The future of work thus imagined is conceptualised as a dialogically coordinated production of life.

Keywords

co-formation, future of work, intersectionality, production of life, socialism

Introduction

Intersectionality theory aims to probe the mechanisms of oppression and help bring about social change (Collins, 2019; May, 2015). Interest in intersectionality, however, has unfolded alongside the 'ruse' of neoliberalism (Duggan, 2003). Under its guise, the 'universalist rhetoric' of class politics is misleadingly pitted against identity politics. Furthermore, 'utopian energies' appear to have been 'exhausted' (Habermas, 1986), with socialism no longer appearing to offer a viable alternative to capitalism.

Despite a far from impressive record for the labour movement on such issues as race in the UK and the USA, at times even tolerating openly racist members and views (Dawson, 2013; Marable, 2001; Shawki, 2006; Virdee, 2014), '[m]any of the intellectual precursors of intersectionality theory were committed Marxists and/or socialists' (Bohrer, 2019: 31). Take, for example, the activist work of early black feminists such as

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Bonita Williams and Esther Cooper Jackson, who were key figures making up what McDuffie (2011) called a ‘black left feminism’. Many of them joined the US Communist Party, convinced that it was best placed to serve the interests of black working-class women (McDuffie, 2011). What united such black feminist activists was a ‘theory of “triple oppressions”’, which emphasised ‘connections among racial, gender, and class oppression’ (McDuffie, 2011: 4). This theory would come to influence a text often treated as foundational for intersectionality scholarship: the 1977 Combahee River Collective (CRC) statement. This was described by McDuffie (2011: 4) as a ‘socialist feminist manifesto’. In this statement, which was the first to refer explicitly to ‘interlocking’ systems of oppression (Combahee River Collective, 2017: 15), Barbara Smith, Beverly Smith and Demita Frazier, among others, hoped that black feminism would ‘add to the synthesis and creation of a new hybrid like socialism’ (Frazier, 2017: 140). The CRC statement was therefore an explicit call for rethinking socialism through an intersectional lens. But, to date, it remains unclear what such a socialist ‘hybrid’ future might look like.

In what follows I provide some core insights into the kind of socialist future intersectionality can help formulate. I do so by, first, presenting the approach to intersectionality with the greatest potential to envision an alternative future. Second, I expose the affinity between intersectionality and socialism. Finally, I provide an illustration of the kind of conceptual innovations intersectionality can provide socialism with in imagining an alternative future. I do so by exploring a distinctively socialist issue, namely envisioning the future of work. Here I will show how intersectionality can help us overcome the tension marking socialist thought between approaches that seek to move beyond work and those that seek to re-imagine it by envisioning what I chose to call a *dialogically coordinated production of life*.

Intersectionality as ‘Co-formation’, Relationality and Emancipation

Intersectionality scholarship comprises multiple approaches and multiple ways of categorising them. Uniting those approaches is an analysis of power executed by making explicit interlocking forms of oppression (Bohrer, 2019; Hancock, 2016). Simply put, intersectionality is an analytical tool setting out to understand how different structures of power and domination intersect and investigate the experiences resulting from those intersections (Collins and Bilge, 2020). But while scholars in the field tend to agree on the existence of multiple and intersecting structures, they disagree on the nature of those intersections and the scope of application of intersectionality itself. Furthermore, while most intersectionality approaches have been formulated with ‘an eye toward creating possibilities for change’ (Collins, 2019: 4–5), some share a closer affinity with the task set out in this article than others. I shall therefore focus on those most appropriate for envisioning a future beyond capitalist oppression.¹ The most future-orientated approaches are, I wish to argue, those embodying what May (2015) called a ‘resistant imaginary’. Under such a reading intersectionality does not simply offer a diagnosis of the way things are, but also provides insights into how things could be. It equips the theorist of power

and domination with a range of conceptual tools particularly fruitful for imagining non-capitalist relations. It is an intersectional approach 'biased toward eradicating multiple forms of inequality' (May, 2015: 33). Where, then, can such an approach be found? What does it tell us about the operations of power under capitalism? What sort of emancipatory insights into the future can it offer?

I shall answer those questions by drawing largely on Collins' (2019) *Intersectionality as Critical Theory*, particularly the category of intersectional approaches she calls 'co-formation'. Expressing a particular concern for the way intersectionality makes sense of the interaction between different structures of oppression, Collins (2019) distinguishes 'additive' models from those engaging in 'articulation' and 'co-formation'. The latter, she argues, not only 'lies at the core of intersectionality itself' (Collins, 2019: 244), but also 'represents a more advanced form of relational thinking' than its counterparts (Collins, 2019: 250). It understands structures of power and domination as co-constitutive and inextricable from one another. For this reason, it provides a holistic understanding of oppression, setting out to explain how different categories of oppression are in a 'seamless process of mutual construction' (Collins, 2019: 241) and, for this reason, are never fixed or stable. The categories and intersections identified by this approach are thus 'liminal' or 'in-between' spaces, 'awaiting a new language that better describes what happens there' (Collins, 2019: 251–252). They are spaces of socio-cultural innovation, transgression and transformation. Co-formation is therefore not only useful for understanding the complex ways power and domination operate, but also particularly fruitful for thinking the world anew.

Such an intersectional approach is most widespread among Global South feminists like Anzaldúa (1983, 1987) or Moraga (1983), whose work has been strongly influenced by the experiences of peoples subjected to colonial rule by the Global North. Because the analysis expands beyond categories of class, race, gender, sexuality and so on recognisable in the West, to account for the power of the Global North over the Global South, this approach tends to assume a distinctively holistic character. It is depicted by Anzaldúa (1983: 228) herself in the following terms:

Think of me as Shiva, a many-armed and legged body with one foot on brown soil, one on white, one in straight society, one in the gay world, the man's world, the women's, one limb in the literary world, another in the working class, the socialist, and the occult worlds. A sort of spider woman hanging by one thin strand of web.

Marking such an approach is an ambivalence, or 'ambiguity' as she calls it (Anzaldúa, 1987: 79) that does not just tell us something about power but also about the nature of existence and, more specifically, the nature of identity. Structures of power and domination are thought to be mutually constitutive in virtue of the fact that identity itself is a 'blending that proves that all blood is intricately woven together' (Anzaldúa, 1987: 85). There are not only 'multiple grounds of identity' (Crenshaw, 1991: 1245) but also multiple ways such grounds blend to form an internally differentiated identity. If identity is a blend, so is oppression. No system of oppression stands alone or exists without the other. Ambiguity reigns to the extent that there is no centre or homogeneity in identity and oppression. There are only blends, 'borders' and 'margins' (Anzaldúa, 1987: i).

The co-formation approach to intersectionality is therefore much more than a prism or theory. It is also a critique that, in the process of engaging critically with power and domination, offers a path for an alternative worldview with the potential to bring about an alternative future. This worldview is marked by what Keating (2009: 84) called an 'ethics of radical interrelatedness'. It opposes Global North binary thinking, informed by a Cartesian dualism separating body and mind, nature and humanity, or reason and emotions (Plumwood, 2002). It also questions the distinctively Global North treatment of bounded individuality as a given condition of existence, which has served to naturalise inequality and justify the privilege of dominant groups (Plumwood, 2002). What intersectionality as co-formation presupposes instead is a vision of a 'holistic world of connectedness and interdependence' (Collins, 2019: 248). In sharp contrast with Global North binary thinking, it treats the latter as given conditions of existence, thereby echoing the indigenous Amerindian cosmologies researched by anthropologists such as Viveiros de Castro (2012, 2014) and some key tenets of decolonial thought, particularly those associated with the concept of 'pluriversality' (Escobar, 2018). Under the guise of this intersectional approach 'nothing exists by itself [...] everything interexists' (Escobar, 2018: 84). Co-formation, then, entails distinctive ontological presuppositions on which rests an ethics of radical interrelatedness holding the potential for resisting the dominant imaginary and envisioning a world beyond modern-capitalist relations.

What, then, does it tell us about the nature of capitalist oppression? How can the idea of mutually constitutive structures of power and domination be applied to the study of capitalist oppression? Before answering those questions, it is important to note that capitalism is here being understood and treated as more than an alienating and exploitative economic system. Drawing on Ashley's Bohrer's own interpretation, I regard it as a 'complex and multifaceted system of domination' that is best analysed by grasping the 'unity of oppressions' (Bohrer, 2019: 64). Under capitalism, class oppression, patriarchy, heterosexism, racism, colonialism and ableism intersect in complex ways to produce structures of material and symbolic domination. Instead of marking a 'moment of historical progress' capitalism 'has created more brutal and insidious forms of enslavement' through, for example, the white bourgeoisie's ruthless expropriation of Global North workers and colonised populations, as well as through the subjugation of women to the sphere of reproduction (Federici, 2004: 63–64).

To adopt a critique of capitalism from the standpoint of intersectionality as co-formation is to recognise such complex intersections in accounting for capitalist oppression. It means doing more than conceptualising oppression as a merely economic issue. Racism and patriarchy, for example, are much more than economic phenomena. Fraser (1995) also recognised this in the distinction she makes between the 'struggle for distribution' and 'struggle for recognition'. The former, she argues, is rooted in political economy and manifests itself as a socio-economic injustice. It represents the economic side of capitalist oppression, such as class oppression. The latter is 'cultural or symbolic' and is 'rooted in social patterns of representation, interpretation, and communication' (Fraser, 1995: 71). Homophobia, it is argued, is an example of such a social injustice. It is considered as an instance of oppression marked by a lack of tolerance of, and respect for, cultural difference. But there are problems with this approach to capitalist oppression, especially in terms of the relationship between structures of power and domination it entails. For

example, Fraser's approach makes it rather difficult to understand the complex ways in which sexuality and political economy intertwine. Because culture and the economy are here understood as two separate axes of oppression, it becomes difficult to appreciate how 'the regulation of sexuality was systematically tied to *the mode of production* proper to the functioning of political economy' (Butler, 1998: 40, emphasis in original).² In short, it runs the risk of obscuring connections that are essential to grasp in order to make full sense of the complex operations of oppression under capitalism.

Second, then, analysing capitalism through the prism of intersectionality as co-formation requires us to do more than simply recognising the existence and role of extra-economic arrangements in oppression. It entails showing the complex ways economic arrangements and their extra-economic counterparts interact; that is, to regard 'patriarchy, white supremacy, colonisation (both direct and indirect) and heterosexualism are fundamental, constitutively ineradicable, equiprimordial elements' (Bohrer, 2019: 64). Only this way can it become possible to understand how, for example, the creation of capitalist economic relations rested on, among other things, the construction of new sexual identities (D'Emilio, 1993) and the confinement of women in the private sphere/home following a Europe-wide witch hunt (Federici, 2004; Mies, 2014). Intersectionality as co-formation, then, entails a holistic approach to capitalism and capitalist oppression highly attuned to both difference and inter-connectedness at once.

This, along with co-formation's ontological presuppositions, bear important implications for the way emancipation is imagined and, consequently, for the way the socialist future itself is envisioned. Intersectionality theorists have, generally speaking, been critical of the universalist rhetoric embodied in Marxist accounts of class emancipation (see, for example, Bohrer, 2019 and Collins, 2000). This is mainly due to the fact that this understanding of emancipation implicitly or explicitly universalises the experiences and interests of a particular group, thereby under-stating the importance of additional and equally consequential mechanisms and experiences of oppression. Furthermore, when other categories of oppression are acknowledged, they tend to be considered as 'epiphenomenal to primary class relations' (Bohrer, 2019: 47). Under such a universalist rhetoric, sameness is achieved at the expense of difference. Emancipation is forced to rest on an abstract universality. This is not only problematic because emancipation turns into an exclusionary rather than inclusionary political project, but also because it risks reproducing the supremacist logic upon which capitalist oppression rests (Mbembe, 2017). Intersectionality as co-formation, therefore, warns against sacrificing difference in emancipatory action.

But what it does *not* do is oppose universalism by celebrating a narrow particularism (Césaire, 2010: 152). Contrary to many interpretations of intersectionality theory, people do not draw 'their politics from their identities' but, rather, 'derive their identities from their politics' (Cho et al., 2013: 803). Intersectionality does not offer a vision of society made up of separate and conflicting groups, incapable of reaching beyond the narrow confines of their identity category. It tends to rest on an altogether different set of presuppositions. For, identity is not construed as a bounded realm of experiences or interests but as something that exists relationally. For example, one is never simply male or female, white or Black. One's identity is a coalition of interests. To engage in intersectionality as co-formation is to adopt a 'coalitional approach to subjectivity' (May, 2015: 41). In fact, as Bohrer (2019: 251, emphasis in original) pointed out, intersectionality 'pioneered

thinking of identity categories *themselves* as coalitions'. For those reasons, intersectionality is particularly appropriate for envisioning political coalitions and for forging solidarity across diverse political struggles (Collins and Bilge, 2020).

How, then, are particularism and universalism expected to relate to one another in the vision of an emancipatory future emanating from intersectionality as co-formation? To answer this question I propose to turn, once again, to the work of Anzaldúa (1983: 233):

Not all of us have the same oppressions, but we empathize and identify with each other's oppressions. We do not have the same ideology, nor do we derive similar solutions. Some of us are leftists, some of us practitioners of magic. Some of us are both. But these different affinities are not opposed to each other.

Particularity, or difference, is not here construed as something that divides us. To be different does not mean, as Global North supremacist thinking would have it, to be separate from others. Anzaldúa, along with other Global South feminists and decolonial scholars, insist on the possibility for celebrating difference and commonality at once and for moving beyond the binary between particularity and universality. For them, it is 'our differences that, paradoxically, we must share' (Mbembe, 2017: 178). Intersectional emancipation, as I chose to call it, entails 'making connections through differences' (Keating, 2009: 95). It entails recognising that 'diversity [is] a universal project' (Mignolo, 2000: 273) or, in a manner akin to Amerindian indigenous thought, that difference is 'a bond rather than a division' (Walker, 2020: 148). Under such a reading, then, the singularity of individuals' experiences and interests is recognised but is regarded as one constitutive part of a wider whole (Keating, 2002). Particularity and universality do not oppose but complement one another. In fact, they become necessary for one another.

Intersectionality as co-formation, therefore, does not only conceptualise structures of power and domination in relational terms. Identity, and by extension self-determination, are also apprehended relationally. They are 'both an individual and collective project' (Alexander, 2002: 99). Because of this, any vision of emancipation and the institutions expected to bring it to life must be treated as 'the result of the critical dialogue between diverse critical epistemic/ethical/political projects' (Grosfoguel, 2007: 212) or between what Collins (2019) called different 'resistant knowledge projects'. Put concretely, it means ensuring that the interests embodied in diverse struggles are recognised and affirmed in the conceptualisation of an alternative (socialist) future, not as epiphenomena of class relations, but as interests in their own right, complementing one another in the search for an alternative. It means adopting what Collins (2019) called 'flexible solidarity'; that is, to turn difference into the basis for collective action. Such an analytical tool brings into relief the 'relational difference' (Collins, 2019) between diverse struggles. It constitutes a strategic political tool essential for 'empathising and identifying with each other's oppressions' and offering a socialist future imagined at the intersection of those struggles. To borrow the late Wright's (2010) definition, socialism entails 'social empowerment'; that is, equipping oppressed groups with the means to exert control over their conditions of existence by re-organising institutions and practices around the values of equality, freedom and cooperation. A socialism that is intersectional in outlook draws on flexible solidarity to achieve more than a mere re-organisation of the economy; that is, to

re-imagine the relationship between economic (production) and extra-economic (reproduction) life. In what follows, I deploy flexible solidarity for the more specific task of imagining the intersectional socialist future of work.

Insights into an Intersectional Socialist Future of Work

Many contemporary accounts of the (socialist) future of work tend to be marked by a rather positive assessment of work automation, with some going as far as claiming the end of work. Although such ‘post-work’ approaches run through a long line of thinkers, including ‘Marxists, Keynesians, feminists, black nationalists and anarchists alike’ (Srnicek and Williams, 2015: 86), they have gained particular momentum in a context of precarity, increasing computerisation of work tasks, the rise of artificial intelligence and the proliferation of social media platforms. Bastani (2019), Benanav (2020), Gorz (1994) and Mason (2015) could all be regarded as proponents of post-work approaches to an alternative future. All tend to draw inspiration from the work of Marx (2000a), particularly the ‘Grundrisse’, in which the German philosopher depicts the replacement of human work by machines as beneficial for the emancipation of the working class. Under this reading, then, the socialist struggle should devote its attention to creating a society where time spent at work is minimised and where emancipation is sought in activities other than work itself.

But it would be mistaken to treat this approach to the future of work as fully representative of socialist thought. Another set of approaches, marking an altogether different stance, can also be observed. This time, socialism is not expected to strive for full automation or post-work but for giving workers the chance to identify with their work and treat it as an outlet for self-fulfilment. This stance is, rather paradoxically, also drawn from Marx’s (2000b) work, particularly his critique of alienation as formulated in his ‘Economic and philosophical manuscripts’. Here, work is understood as an essential component of human life and potential source of autonomy and pleasure. Emancipation is achieved *through* ‘free labour’.³ This approach to emancipation runs through the work of socialists, particularly those of a libertarian outlook, like Morris’ (1995) *News from Nowhere*, Cole’s (1980) *Guild Socialism Restated* and Albert’s (2003) *Parecon*. For both the emancipation *from* work and emancipation *through* work stances, however, the future of work is predominantly apprehended from the standpoint of the labour movement and class oppression. How, then, could putting intersectionality to work help overcome such an internal tension within socialist thought? What conceptual innovations could be drawn from such an exercise?

A particularly illuminating yet strikingly under-acknowledged starting point for answering those questions can be found in disability studies and, more specifically, critical disability studies. One issue frequently raised in this scholarship is not so much the fact that disabled people are excluded from meaningful forms of work, as the treatment of work as a basis for self-worth and ‘social membership’ (Abberley, 1996). As Bates et al. (2017: 172) noted, ‘[w]ork is enabling’ but also ‘debilitates and exploits’, and must therefore be treated ‘with caution’. Also, many are not and will never be in a position to undertake work and, consequently, envisioning a society in which work is expected to serve as a basis for

the all-round development of individuals risks excluding many disabled people. Critical disability scholars, therefore, tend to challenge the productionist or 'work-based model' (Abberley, 1996). But, contrary to calls by several disability scholars, critical disability scholars are 'wary of drawing the conclusion that fighting oppression should involve our widescale inclusion in social production' (Abberley, 1996: 71). The fight in question is better served by, for example, re-organising social life so that all individuals, including disabled people, have the 'ability to be in control and make decisions about [their] life' (Oliver, 1990: 91). At first glance, then, critical disability scholars could be said to appear rather critical of the emancipation through work approach.

Interestingly, though, their critique of work does not tend to be complemented by an endorsement of a post-work future of the kind advocated by the likes of post-work proponent, André Gorz. In fact, Gorz, a key figure of the emancipation *from* work approach, is an explicit target of criticism in Abberley's (1996) work. The latter takes issue with the fact that despite advocating the 'liberation of time', Gorz 'still sees purposive activity and competence as a condition of social inclusion' (Abberley, 1996: 69–70). Gorz's post-work vision does not sufficiently break with the productionist paradigm of action. His demands for self-realisation consequently fail to resonate with disabled people and even risk creating new conditions for disabled people's social exclusion. In fact, I wish to contend that despite not offering a definitive resolution of the socialist debate, the above contributions do hint at an important demand, that is, to re-organise economic life around a logic of action radically different from the one found in capitalist societies. They challenge capitalist oppression by, on the one hand, rethinking what counts as self-determination and, on the other, questioning the exclusionary reduction of social production to a set of behavioural norms aligned with the productionist ethos.

Similar reservations are echoed in the work of black feminist scholars. For example, Collins (2000), like critical disability scholars, takes issue with dominant definitions of the relationship between work and self-determination. Those definitions, she argues, cannot be fully understood without grappling with the power relations framing them. Those with most power to influence how work, social production and self-determination come to be defined are not only non-disabled, but also white and male. The tendency to treat work as a basis for individual(ist) self-worth can be explained by the fact that white (non-disabled) men tend to be in better-paid and generally more fulfilling occupations than their black female counterparts and are, consequently, more inclined to treat it as 'something for self' (Collins, 2000: 48). However, the history of black labour is of a rather different character. It is a history of disenfranchisement, marked by patterns of what Dawson (2016) called 'expropriation' and 'super-exploitation', resulting in sharply different understandings of work from those found among white workers. Historically, it has been a lot more difficult for a black worker to treat their work as a source of self-worth than for a white worker (Collins, 2000). In fact, much of the work – often involving caring practices (Collins, 2000) – black women have performed under capitalism would not be regarded by the socially dominant group – non-disabled white men – as a source of self-worth. They would not even recognise it as work. This is why black feminists like Collins (2000) do not so much problematise work as a particular conception of it.

Such a position is, to a degree, echoed in the work of eco-feminists like Federici (2004) and Mies (2014), who have also been explicitly critical of the emancipation from work thesis. In Mies' (2014: 215, emphasis in original) work, for example, one finds an explicit criticism of post-work proponent Gorz:

For Gorz, the only problem remaining is to distribute the rest of this labour among the people and to move forward to the realization of the Marxist paradise, in which people's main problem will be to fill their leisure time with creative activities. What Gorz and others systematically exclude is the underside of paradise, or 'hell'. This paradise of the Brave New World is based on continued imperialist exploitation of external colonies and of women, the internal colony of White Man. These will be the people who still produce *life*, and to a large extent in unfree, housewifized forms of labour in the so-called informal sector. Because in spite of complete automation and computerization, people still have bodies which need food and human care, etc., and this does not come from machines.

Like the emancipation through work thesis, demands for emancipating individuals from work tend to embody conceptions of the relationship between work and self-determination that reflect the experiences, interests and values of white men. Particularly problematic in Gorz's own approach is the view that all will equally be in a position to experience self-determination outside of work. Such an approach insufficiently accounts for the gendered and racialised character of activities that machines will probably never be able to undertake and, in turn, runs the risk of turning the socialist future into an acutely unequal world. It ultimately remains trapped within the narrow confines of white working-class emancipation. It follows that if one wishes to take flexible solidarity seriously in the conceptualisation of an alternative (socialist) future, one must reject the 'Marxist view that self-realization [. . .] can be achieved only *outside* the sphere of [. . .] necessary labour' (Mies, 2014: 216, emphasis in original). With flexible solidarity, then, one can help expand visions of socialist work beyond those constructed by capitalist social relations, and maximise the inclusionary character of emancipation.

In fact, one key lesson to be learned for the deployment of intersectionality as executed above is the fact that the terms of the debate on work offered by socialist thought must be significantly re-assessed. For, it should have now become clear that the most fundamental question one ought to ask in order to achieve emancipation from capitalist work is not so much whether work can or cannot be emancipatory, but what counts and does not count as work. Such a question encourages us to address both economic-material and cultural-ideological transformations, and to do so by rethinking the relationship between production and reproduction through which capitalism has historically distinguished work from non-work. To be sure, such calls are not new. Feminists, particularly those of a socialist persuasion, have compellingly exposed the problems associated with what they call the capitalist sexual division of labour. What I wish to contend here, however, is that a genuinely intersectional socialist approach to the future of work must treat the critique of this sexual division of labour as a basis for thinking emancipation. It must be driven by what Dinerstein and Pitts (2021: 130) called a 'politics of social reproduction', which aims to 'reinvent [. . .] work and forms of reproducing life' akin to those proposed here.

The material and ideological separation such a division entails could indeed be said to have played a fundamental role in giving expression to the kind of ‘rationalist dualisms’ that:

justify elite forms of power, not only by mapping the drama of the master subject and his Others onto a dualism of reason and nature, but by mapping many other aspects of life onto many other variants of these basic forms. (Plumwood, 2002: 17)

For example, the capitalist sexual division of labour contributed to the treatment of housework as something irrelevant for the general social interest and, in doing so, has also reduced ‘women to a double dependence: on employers and on men’ (Federici, 2004: 97). But it has also served to discipline sexual practices according to bourgeois – read heteronormative – norms of domesticity (D’Emilio, 1993). Under such a reading, homosexuality can only be tolerated if it complies with such norms in the form of, for example, same-sex marriage. To become less ‘animalistic’, homosexuality had to be pushed out of the public sphere and become assimilated within the ‘dominant culture of privacy’ (Warner, 1999: 179). It had to become ‘homonormative’ (Duggan, 2003). Finally, since ‘racial and ethnic inferiorisation drew strongly on assimilating racially subordinated groups to women, or to animals and children’ (Plumwood, 2002: 106), it has operated along similar lines to those I have just discussed. Like gender and sexuality, capitalist racial oppression has involved an ideological othering of groups, which has served as a basis for their material subjugation. Like women and homosexuals, racialised others are not regarded as quite human (Dawson, 2016; Plumwood, 2002). Like them, their access to the public sphere has been severely limited. For, unlike white men, capitalism has historically denied them the possibility to be treated as individuals free to navigate the public sphere freely, that is, as free wage-labourers (Dawson, 2016). The capitalist sexual division of labour, therefore, both divides, excludes and hierarchises. It provides a basis upon which the ideological deployment of gender, sexuality and race can be given material form and serve as a basis to subjugate unworthy others.

What, then, could take the place of the capitalist sexual division of labour? How could the relationship between production and reproduction be rethought in such a way as to serve the goal of intersectional emancipation? First and foremost, and consistent with the relational vision of emancipation discussed in the first section of this piece, production and reproduction must be recognised and institutionalised as inter-existing spheres of action. To do so, one must move away from the treatment of production as a sphere of action of a strictly material orientation and the treatment of reproduction as an ‘unconscious “natural” activity’ (Mies, 2014: 47). Mies’ (2014) concept of the ‘production of life’ offers one possible avenue for achieving this. It aims to bring together activities contributing to the ‘*production of immediate life* in all its aspects’ (Mies, 2014: 217, emphasis in original), including the production of goods contributing to the satisfaction of biological needs, childrearing and housework. It expands the scope of labour to activities that do not directly contribute to the accumulation of wealth and production of commodities. As such it reaches beyond the narrow confines of productionist work, to include activities generally contributing to ‘*human happiness*’ (Mies, 2014: 211–212, emphasis

in original). Whether one teaches a child how to use a knife and fork, contributes to the construction of a new house or grows the food we eat, one is said to contribute to the production of life. Production and reproduction are here said to inter-exist to the extent that they co-constitute the production of life and, in virtue of doing so, are indispensable to one another.

But, while Mies' (2014: 217) primary concern was for the 'development of a feminist concept of work', it is important to note that the 'production of life' could also help capture a range of demands beyond those found within the feminist movement. Take, for example, the experiences of queers of colour in the USA and, particularly, the black ballroom culture in major cities like New York and Detroit. Here, competitions in ballrooms involve the creation of intricate support networks such as 'houses', all led by a 'father' or 'mother', and competing against one another throughout the year. Such 'houses' prepare their members for the different balls, while acting as surrogate families for their members who, often rejected by their biological families for asserting their queerness, have come to 'forge alternative kin relations and ties' (Bailey, 2013: 80). The work involved in preparing for ball performances is here indissociable from the work involved in forging kin relations. Combining self-expression and strong community ties, ballroom 'houses' ensure that their members do not simply personally gain from their involvement in such kin relations but also contribute to making other members' lives better (Bailey, 2013: 210). For instance, a house mother like Blanca Evangelista in the TV series *Pose*, does not only provide emotional and material support to her 'children', but can also gain materially and emotionally from their work on the ballroom floor, especially when they succeed in winning multiple categories. Black ballroom culture, therefore, does not simply redefine kin relations, it redefines what a home is, along with the boundaries between private/reproduction and public/production. In fact, the different practices involved in ballroom culture entail complex imbrications between individual and collective self-determination, as well as between material, symbolic and affective work, all contributing to what Mies would call the production of life.

Particularly significant, in fact, is what they reveal about the centrality of caring practices entailed by Mies' concept. Rather than being confined to the sphere of reproduction by the sexual division of labour, they become constitutive of the various activities essential for individual and collective life, as well as for production and reproduction. To be sure, this is something disabled people, whose own material life depends on such caring practices, would find familiar (Oliver, 1990). But what is proposed here is to expand the scope of care to include society at large. Just like ballroom culture, the concept of the production of life 'forces a reexamination and expansion of the meaning of labor' (Bailey, 2013: 209). It encourages us to think of 'kin work' or the labour of care, as a 'category of labour' (Di Leonardo, 1987: 449). Other practices like those involving a 'fictive kin' (Collins, 2000: 179) supporting blood mothers in reproductive work – othermothers – reflect such an expanded conception of labour. Here reproductive work is not apprehended as an 'unconscious natural activity' but involves, instead, an intentional labour of care. Such insights are echoed in what Federici (2019: 110) called the 'communalization of housework', involving the delivery of activities like childrearing through networks of mutual care and support provided by the extended family or the local community. But, as

the practices reviewed above indicate, the treatment of care as a form of labour opens up the scope for recognising that care itself has a role to play in both reproductive life and material production.

Joan Tronto's concept of 'caring democracy' could be said to offer insights into what the reconciliation of caring practices with work might entail. Here, we are told that 'any worker [is] attuned not only to his or her own welfare but also to the ways in which others also have needs' (Tronto, 2013: 87). Caring, along with the relation of (inter)dependence it entails, is being affirmed as an intention or commitment someone freely chooses. The choice to enter into a relation of dependence is both celebrated and regarded as a powerful enactment of freedom. But despite such important insights and the general tendency to echo socialist thinkers' concept of 'social freedom' (Honneth, 2017),⁴ little is said about the institutional forms required for giving life to such caring practices. Put differently, little is said about what might enable workers to be attuned to others' needs.

Such insights do nevertheless exist. They can be found in the work of libertarian socialists like Albert (2003), Cole (1980) and Devine (1988), whose alternative to the capitalist market provides some thought-provoking institutional avenues for reconciling work with caring practices. All, for example, tend to ground emancipatory practices in a dialogue between democratically organised producers and consumers. Associations of producers and consumers would ensure that each member's needs are attuned to those of other members. But the interests of individuals qua producers differ sharply from those of individuals qua consumers. Demands emanating from consumption could, for example, exert significant pressure on production and interfere with producers' autonomy. This is why, for libertarian socialists, 'negotiated coordination' (Devine, 1988) must not only be secured within those associations but also between the workers who 'create the social product', and the consumers who 'enjoy the social product' (Albert, 2003: 91). For Cole (1980: 89), this is a necessary precondition for replacing greed and fear with the sense that one has made a 'direct and useful contribution' to society. Here the 'general social interest' is therefore said to be formulated through the 'conscious social decisions and action' (Devine, 1988: 13) of producers and consumers attuned to each other's needs. It is the result of a labour of care among producers and consumers, as well as between those two groups.

But taking flexible solidarity for the task of overcoming the capitalist sexual division of labour seriously means doing more than merely deploying the (communal) labour of care in this way. Central to capitalist oppression is the exclusion of reproductive life from the 'general social interest' (Devine, 1988). As it stands, the model of dialogical coordination presented above risks reproducing some of those oppressive mechanisms. For, it falls short of indicating how institutional practices would ensure workers become attuned to the needs of, for example, 'intimates in one's household' (Tronto, 2013: 87). It fails to show how activities making up reproductive life are expected to contribute to the realisation of the general social interest. To do so, one must envision how such activities are expected to relate to those making up material production. To this end, the latter must accommodate categories of interests beyond those of producers and consumers. Interests of mothers or fathers, for example, are not reducible to either production or consumption. Yet both motherhood and fatherhood affect and are affected by material production. In

fact, because groups of this kind have an interest in ‘how particular means of production are used’ they must ‘be involved in the decision’ (Devine, 1988: 132). Ensuring the representation and coordination of such extra-economic interest groups within the formulation of the general social interest is therefore an essential step towards envisioning the future of work as the production of life.

Conclusion

Drawing on Collins’ (2019) work, intersectionality was deployed as a method and substance for thinking the socialist future. As substance, intersectionality as co-formation helps envision a future stripped of the kind of divisions and binaries underpinning capitalist hierarchies. As method, it assumes the form of a strategic political tool known as flexible solidarity. With it, different resistance knowledge projects were brought into dialogue with one another to imagine the future of work. Such exercises, it was argued, have led to a radical rethinking of the meaning of work itself and helped overcome the *impasse* of the debate between emancipation *from* work and emancipation *through* work marking socialist thought. More specifically, it encouraged us to rethink the terms of the debate and connect the transformation of work under socialism with the wider transformation of the relationship between material production and reproduction. This, I argued, entailed rejecting the view that ‘the only socially valuable work is that which produces monetary income’ (Tronto, 2013: 84), accepting that caring is itself a form of work and that, consequently, caring practices could, and indeed should, become central to a socialist future of work. What was offered here, then, is a future vision of work recognising the importance of the labour of care in the general production of life. It is a vision that forces us to rethink what counts as work and to turn it into an in-between space, thereby imbuing it with a notable degree of ambiguity. For, under its guise, work is neither defined as material production, nor as reproduction. It is also inextricable from the act of consumption. It thus crosses our multiple grounds of identity as producer, consumer and mother/father or fictive kin. The intersectional socialist future of work envisioned here, nevertheless, ‘awaits a new language that better describes what happens there’ (Collins, 2019: 252). Given dialogical coordination of democratically organised associations within material production, consumption and reproduction provides its institutional basis, I propose to name the socialist future of work the *dialogically coordinated production of life*.

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Notes

1. I do not have enough space here to provide a full list of approaches and categorisations. A much more detailed overview of the field can be found in Bohrer's (2019) *Marxism and Intersectionality* and Hancock's (2016) *Intersectionality: An Intellectual History*.
2. For a critique of Fraser's work from an intersectional perspective, see Yuval-Davis (2011).
3. I am here adopting a Marxist interpretation of the terms 'work' and 'labour', as depicted in Dinerstein and Pitts (2021: 53). 'Work' is used to refer to a core human activity through which individuals realise themselves and mediate their relationship to nature. 'Labour', on the other hand, refers to the version of work unfolding under capitalism. The term 'free labour' is therefore used here to denote an alternative to (capitalist) labour and emphasise the unfree character of the latter.
4. In one of his latest discussions on socialism, Honneth (2017: 28) defined social freedom as one whereby individuals 'realize their capacity for freedom as members of a free social community'. It is a form of freedom grounded in caring practices.

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