

The Gender Distinction in Communization Theory

P. Valentine

2012

Contents

The Communizing Current on Gender	4
Gender in Capital	6
Whither Sexual Violence	8
Abolition of Race?	10

Communization theory is primed to do what only a minority of Marxist feminists have attempted to do over the last 50 years of inquiry: rearticulate the capitalist mode of production as being constituted no less by the man/woman relation than by the class relation.¹² What would ideally emerge from such a project is a “single system” in which the gender relation and the class relation are equally necessary elements within a totality, rather than the subsumption of one to the other, or the erection of a “dual system” of two different and autonomous systems of patriarchy and capitalism. We say communization is “primed” for this project because one of the major interventions of communization theory has been to theorize communism as the abolition not only of capitalists, but also of workers; of work itself and thus of value; of the wage labor relation itself and thus of the distinction between “work” and “life.” This latter distinction has been cast in a variety of terms including the conceptual dyads public/private; social/nonsocial; public/domestic, and is almost unequivocally understood by gender theorists as a grounding element in the production of gender.

Communization’s very starting point is a demand for the abolition of fundamental material elements of the reproduction of gender — the division of social life into two “spheres.” This implies an analysis of the system of gender and class as a unity, and because it focuses on the gender binary as a material relation of exploitation or oppression in which the two sides are produced rather than given, it also articulates the patriarchy in a way which opens avenues toward new and more rigorous theories of gender oppression that are able to link the exploitation and oppression of women with violence and oppression based on heteronormativity and cisnormativity. However, until the work of *Théorie Communiste* (TC) and recently Maya Andrea Gonzalez, conversations around communization had completely ignored gender. Today, many merely add gender to the list of things to be abolished through communization, which amounts to little more than buttering the toast of communization with radical cultural gender theory.³ A more or less idealist critique of the gender binary, of the essentialist identities of “woman” and “man,” which could lead equally to their destruction or proliferation, is attached to a theory of communization without affecting the concept of what constitutes the capitalist totality. The mere shift from women’s liberation to gender abolition cast in these basic terms represents little advance in theory over the well-trodden “postmodern” shift to de-essentialize identity (an important move, but not particularly new or rare). As TC have written,

If the abolition of the gender distinction is necessary from the point of view of the “success” of communization, it is not in the name of the abolition of all the mediations of society. It is in its concrete and immediate character that the contradiction between men and women imposes itself on the “success” of communization, against what that relation implies in terms of violence, invisibilisation, the ascription to a subordinate position.⁴

¹ An earlier version of this text was published in MUTE magazine as “The Gender Rift in Communization.”

² Examples include I. M. Young; Silvia Federici; Catharine MacKinnon; Fulvia Carnevale. Others such as Gloria Joseph, Evelyn Nakano Glenn, Maria Mies, and Angela Davis have pressed for a theory that also articulates race as a necessary structural element.

³ Maya Andrea Gonzalez, “Communization and the Abolition of Gender” in Benjamin Noys (Ed.), *Communization and its Discontents: Contestation, Critique, and Contemporary Struggles* (New York: Minor Compositions/Autonomedia, 2011).

⁴ *Théorie Communiste*, “Response to the American Comrades on Gender.”

Only a substantive theory of the production and reproduction of gender in capitalism can give real non-idealist content to the abolition of gender. The important questions are: what is “woman” and “man,” what is the gender relation, and what is its relation to class? The nascent forays into gender theory from the communizing tendency have tended towards two major elisions: avoiding the problematic of race and its relation to class and gender, and displacing an analysis of sexual violence to the sidelines of the production and reproduction of the gender distinction. Nonetheless some theories of communization, as we have mentioned, are extremely provocative towards a more general and accurate account of capital that takes all these issues rigorously into its purview.

The Communizing Current on Gender

TC’s initial texts on gender claimed: “it’s immediately apparent that all societies hinge on a twofold distinction: between genders and between classes” and “the evidence of the abolition of genders will be a revolution in the revolution.” The initial texts — “Gender distinction, programatism and communization” and the two annexes, “Gender — Class — Dynamic” and “Comrades, but Women,” published in *Théorie Communiste* Issue 23, were still filled with inner conflict and tension around how exactly to describe the material basis of the gender distinction and the way in which it is related to the class relation.⁵ Their stronger, and more provocative analysis (which is not often referenced by other male-dominated theory collectives) addressed women’s role and experience in working class struggle. TC understands that women experience an entirely different realm of oppression and exploitation than men, so that whenever they rise up, this rising up calls into question the differential positions of men and women — namely, that men do the appropriating of women and women are those who are appropriated by men (even and especially the men who are supposed to be their “comrades”). When women call this relation of appropriation into question, men will fight back, fight against the women, in an attempt to put the women “back in their place.”⁶ As Lyon, a member of TC, says in the recently published *SIC* journal: “The defense of the male condition is the defense of male domination. It is the defense of the existence of two separated spheres of activity.”⁷

However, the real material ground of the gender distinction is not fully formed in these early texts. The concept of separate “spheres” or “realms” was concretely raised, but the material genesis and reproduction of the distinction between these spheres, as well as the consistent description of “women” as loosely but not systematically associated with “biological” traits such as child-bearing, XX chromosomes, breasts, vaginas and so forth, was not explained. In particular, they attributed the production of “women” (which they generally equate with the production of the gender distinction) with the fact that the increase in the population is the “primary productive force” in classed societies.

⁵ These two supplements are translated into English and made available at petroleusepress.com.

⁶ “When women fight, whether in the private or public sphere, when they attack the very existence of those spheres which is constituted by their separation into public and private, they must confront their male comrades, insofar as they are men *and* insofar as they are their comrades. And they (the women) are the men’s comrades, but women.” *Théorie Communiste*, “Comrades, But Women,” originally published in *Théorie Communiste*, Issue 23, English pamphlet (2011).

⁷ Bernard Lyon, “The Suspended Step of Communization,” *Sic: International Journal for Communization*, Issue 1, 2012, 163.

When queried further TC wrote “Response to the American Comrades on Gender,” a dense and lengthy text that left many important questions unresolved.⁸ They do argue that class societies are defined by surplus being expropriated by some portion of society, and that “up until capital [...] the principal source of surplus labor is the work of increasing the population.”⁹ We might cast this in more concrete terms by saying: the way to increase surplus labor in classed society is to produce more people, and this is made difficult by high infant death rates and/or vulnerability to death from the environment, war and attack. In many places the way to ensure the continued production of surplus at all was to ensure that as many babies as possible are birthed, to avoid a decrease of the population.¹⁰ TC write: “Population can be called the principal productive force only insofar as it becomes the productive force of labor (rather than science or the means of production, etc). It becomes this [...] insofar as a specific social arrangement has population as its object.”¹¹

This begins to answer the question of “what is woman,” and the inchoate answer is woman is she who is appropriated by society for the purpose of increasing the population. It is easy to see also that severe gender distinctions will necessarily arise in places where there are intense pressures on population stability, and thus intense conscription of women to constant childbearing.

Both Gonzalez and TC correctly articulate the way this ontologically negligible feature (child-bearing) comes to ground a hierarchized social relation:

The possession of a uterus is an anatomical feature, and not immediately a distinction, but “baby maker” is a social distinction which makes the anatomical feature a natural distinction. Within the nature of this social construction, of this system of constraint, that which is socially constructed — women — are always sent back to biology.¹²

[...] sexual difference is given a particular social relevance that it would not otherwise possess. Sexual difference is given this fixed significance within class societies, when the category woman comes to be defined by the function that most (but not all) human females perform, for a period of their lives, in the sexual reproduction of the species. Class society thus gives a social purpose to bodies: because some women “have” babies, all bodies that could conceivably “produce” babies are subject to social regulation.¹³

But the questions remain: why and how? While countless activities slip easily between the boundaries dividing the two gendered “spheres,” why is baby bearing not only confined to the female/domestic/private/non-social/non-waged sphere, but constitutive of it? Why, then, is child-bearing so pernicious a domestic activity, if others (cleaning, laundry, emotional labor) traverse

⁸ TC was asked the following questions by some American Comrades: 1. *Why do all class societies depend on the increase in population as principal productive force?* 2. *What does it mean for the increase in population to be the main productive force?* 3. *TC often write that “labour is a problem for capital.” Does this mean the falling rate of profit? Or does it mean the increasing surplus populations pose a problem of revolt? Or both?* 4. *TC say that women/the family are a problem for capital. Is this merely because labor is a problem for capital, and women/the family reproduces labor?*

⁹ *Théorie Communiste*, “Comrades, but Women,” op. cit.

¹⁰ Gonzalez mentions this also. Maya Gonzalez, op. cit., 226.

¹¹ *Théorie Communiste*, “Response to the American Comrades on Gender,” op. cit.

¹² *Théorie Communiste*, “Response to the American Comrades on Gender,” op. cit.

¹³ Maya Gonzalez, op. cit., 224.

the spheres more easily? Why haven't we started making babies in test tubes? Why hasn't surrogate motherhood become more popular (though its popularity is dramatically rising)? Why aren't women paid to bear children the way most men are paid to manufacture goods? These questions must be answered in order to explain why and how baby-making can be understood as the essential activity that constitutes the female, non-waged sphere.

Further, and more fundamentally, how does this appropriation of women, on whatever basis (childbearing or no) begin? In other words, what is the origin of the gender distinction and how is it reproduced?¹⁴ These questions are outside the scope of this article, but we do believe that the answers both involve gendered physical violence and sexual violence, which we will address cursorily below. These questions are displaced and de-emphasized within communization theory as it currently stands.

Gender in Capital

TC and Gonzalez both agree that, once capital comes on the scene, there is a shift in the material basis for the appropriation of women, because "In the capitalist mode of production, the principal 'productive force' is the working class itself."¹⁵ If the production of woman emerges from a situation in which the increase in the population is the principal productive force, this means that the production of woman fundamentally changes in capitalism. They argue that "the determination of a public sphere" is actually the "source" of the sex difference, and we may infer that this is because the public sphere formalizes the appropriation of women in/as the private sphere. Due to capitalism's absolute distinction of labor as separate from "reproductive activities in the private sphere," we find that "the cleavage between production and reproduction, of home and workplace, is perfect, structural, definitive of the mode of production."¹⁶ TC writes:

The sexed character of all categories of capital signifies a general distinction in society between men and women. This general distinction "acquires as its social content" that which is the synthesis of all the sexualities of the categories: the creation of the division between public and private [...] the capitalist mode of production, because it rests on the sale of the labor power and a social production that does not exist as such on the market, rejects as "non-social" the moments of its own reproduction which escape direct submission to the market or to the immediate process of production: the private. The private is the private of the public, always in a hierarchical relation of definition and submission to the public. As general division and given its content [...] it is naturalized and it actually exists in the framework of this society as natural division: all women, all men. It is not enough to say that all the categories of the capitalist mode of production are intrinsically sexed. It is necessary also that this general sexualization is given a particular form: the distinction between public and private where the categories men and women appear as general, more general even

¹⁴ TC disavow a serious discussion of the origins of the gender distinction, which seems disingenuous considering the important role that the theory of the origin of capitalism (in primitive accumulation) plays for the theory of class exploitation.

¹⁵ *Théorie Communiste*, "Response to the American Comrades on Gender," op. cit.

¹⁶ *Théorie Communiste*, "Response to the American Comrades on Gender," op. cit.

than the differences of class which are produced as “social” and “natural.” The distinction between men and women acquires its own content at its level, specific to the level produced, which is to say, specific to the distinction between public and private: nature (that which the social has produced at the interior of itself as non-social and which actually comes to appear as obvious, natural, because of the anatomical distinction).¹⁷

We agree that the categories of the capitalist totality are sexed; that this sexuation arises from a distinction between the realm of wage labor and that of something else. But is the distinction that grounds the hierarchical gender binary that between “public” and “private,” or between “production” and “reproduction,” or between the “social” and the “non-social”? This ambiguity of the real, material and historical nature of the separate spheres betrays a further ambiguity concerning the real material construction and reproduction of the gender distinction, before and during capitalism. How are women produced and kept in such a relation of hyper exploitation and appropriation? What are the material mechanisms that enable men to reproduce themselves as men, the appropriators?

Because capital does not consistently face dwindling populations (and in fact, the opposite is often true) both TC and Gonzalez agree that we cannot maintain the same theory of gender when capital comes on the scene. Childbearing can no longer be the functional reason for appropriating women in their totality, because it is no longer the principal productive force. At this juncture, Gonzalez nonetheless continues to posit childbearing, or “sexual reproduction,” as the ground of gender hierarchies in general.¹⁸ This argument relies heavily on the fact that childbearing / sexual reproduction remain for the most part unwaged and unsubsumed (for it is this non-waged quality which makes it particular, in her account), but it doesn’t tell us why these activities *remain* unwaged. The argument removes gender from a logical, structural understanding of the capitalist mode of production, relegating to a biological characteristic that no longer has necessary social meaning. In this account, because increase in population is no longer the primary productive force, it has no reason to continue to ground the gender distinction, and so could theoretically disappear. According to this theory, as Gonzalez says explicitly, the gender distinction could be hypothetically resolved within capitalism through the a-sexual Solanas-throwback method of test-tube babies.¹⁹

TC sometimes leans toward Gonzalez’s argument as well,²⁰ but more often emphasize the ever more materially distinct separation of “spheres” necessitated by the wage-relation as the material ground for gender in capital. In so doing, TC attempt to locate the gender distinction on a high level of abstraction within the totality of capitalist social relations, such that capitalism cannot be theorized without gender (even hypothetically). Whether or not this is possible or not remains to be seen, as they have not articulated the specificity and materiality of the logical necessity of gender to capital with much detail — for instance, a central question remains: how is the separation of spheres materially reproduced in capital? What material forces ensure its continued

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Gonzalez, op. cit., 228.

¹⁹ Gonzalez, op. cit., 233.

²⁰ Lyon writes that gendered domination “would always have had the allocation of women to childbirth as its content, that by which women exist as such.” and “The public/private distinction shows that, in the capitalist mode of production, the definition of women is globally constrained to their role as childbearers.” Bernard Lyon, “The Suspended Step of Communization,” 164.

existence, in the way that the proletariat's lack of ownership over the means of production is both part of its definition, and a central cause of its exploitation?

Whither Sexual Violence

Sexual violence and rape are consistently displaced or left out of a schematic account of the gender relation within TC and Gonzalez's theories. Gonzalez effectively draws the notion of separate "spheres" of activity into more concrete terms, where we are able to talk about the real patterns of employment women experience, and the real concrete ramifications of pregnancy and childrearing on the appropriation of women inside and outside the wage relation, but she ends up treating the relation between actual men and actual women of similar classes in an abstract space where violence does not occur. It is impossible to accurately theorize the feminized "sphere" without referring to sexual violence, and so this represents a serious oversight in the existing theory. Women's subordination in the home; women's experience in waged labor; childbearing — all these things are produced directly through sexual violence as a mechanism of control over women's bodies. Sexual violence is not an unfortunate side effect in the appropriation of women — it is a necessary element of that appropriation. Sexual and domestic violence ("private" violence within intimate family or friend relations) are the types of violence that are constitutive of the gender relation.

Gonzalez's mention of violence against women in general is confined to two footnotes, and only one mentions sexual violence. The first reads: "[...] violence against women, sometimes carried out by women themselves, has always been necessary to keep them firmly tied to their role in the sexual reproduction of the species."²¹ It is significant that the text to which the footnote refers discusses "violence against women" in terms of women's death through childbirth and the taxing experience of bearing upwards of eight children in a lifetime, not direct violence against women by men. In the footnote itself, the violence Gonzalez mentions has no immediate perpetrator. Gonzalez's use of the passive voice omits the agents of violence from the discussion entirely. The only thing to blame is the system in general. Even though violence against women is almost always at the hands of men, Gonzalez immediately reminds us that it may be carried out even "by women themselves." She distances violence on women's bodies from the structural relation between men and women, effectively sanitizing the relation between men and women by shifting violence to the abstract social totality. Globally, including in the US, women are more likely to be raped by a man than to have high levels of literacy. Women in the military are more likely to be raped by a man than to die in combat. Women are raped at home and at the workplace by men. Rape and sexual assault function, among other things, to keep women confined to their duties which either benefit men of their own class or a higher one (their unpaid work — be it sex, emotional labor, cleaning, etc.) or capitalists who employ them (under threat of rape and assault, women are coerced into working longer, harder and to not complain or organize in the workplace).

Gonzalez's only other reference to violence against women comes in a second footnote, where she states:

²¹ Gonzalez, *op. cit.*, footnote 192.

Radical feminism followed a curious trajectory in the second half of the 20th century, taking first childbearing, then domestic work, and finally sexual violence (or the male orgasm) as the ground of women's oppression. The problem was that in each case, these feminists sought an ahistorical ground for what had become an historical phenomenon.²²

While her comment here is ambiguous, Gonzalez again seems to be dismissing the centrality of sexual violence in the reproduction of patriarchal gender relations, in addition to rejecting "radical feminist" theories (radical feminism here flattened into homogeneity), suggesting that sexual violence is an "ahistorical ground" for a theory of gender, though she does not make a case for why it should be considered as such.

In the "Response..." TC makes several references to violence and to sexual violence, and even to rape, as mechanisms of the gender relation, but in their formally published texts on gender, in *Théorie Communiste* Issue 24 and *SIC*, TC do not mention rape or sexual violence.²³ They do put a strong emphasis on the direct physical violence that proletarian men inflict upon proletarian women, when those women attempt to struggle in a way that problematizes the separation of the spheres. They draw from accounts of Argentina's piquetero movement:

There are female comrades who declare in the assembly: "I couldn't come to the 'piquete' (road blockade) because my husband beat me, because he locked me down." For that, the women-question helped us quite a bit... because you've seen that it was us, the women, who were the first to go out for food, job positions, and health... And it brought very difficult situations — even death. There were husbands who did not tolerate their wives attending a meeting, a 'piquete.'"²⁴

It is meaningful that rape and systematic sexual violence make no appearance in the formally published texts of TC on gender, nor in the entirety of *SIC*, nor *Communization and its Discontents*.²⁵ The neglect of rape and sexual violence as structural elements of the gender distinction, and thus of the capitalist totality, leads to an account of gender that cannot make sense of an enormous amount of gendered social relations. Some have argued correctly that some strains of feminist emphasis on rape have served a racist or classist function within struggles and analysis, but it is also true that the neglect of rape and sexual violence is just as easily used in racist or classist attacks.²⁶ If they are not rooted in a systematic structural relation, rape and sexual violence

²² Gonzalez, op. cit., footnote 203.

²³ "Domestic labor, positioned within the division of labor, forms of integration/interpellation in the immediate process of production, 'atypical' forms of the wage system, everyday violence of marriage, family, negation and appropriation of female sexuality, rape and/or the threat of rape, all these are the frontlines where the contradiction between men and women plays out, a contradiction whose content is the definition of men and women and the ascription and confinement of individuals to these definitions (none of these elements is accidental). These frontlines are the loci of a permanent struggle between two categories of society constructed as natural and deconstructed by women in their struggle. The frontlines are never stable. The public-private distinction is constantly redefined: the present 'parity' is a redefinition of its boundaries but also a redefinition of what is private." *Théorie Communiste*, "Comrades, but Women," op. cit.

²⁴ *Théorie Communiste*, op. cit.

²⁵ And banal, daily domestic or intimate gendered violence barely appears.

²⁶ For a critique of Susan Brownmiller see Alison Edwards, "Rape, Racism, and the White Woman's Movement: An Answer to Susan Brownmiller," 1976.

are “bad things” that some “bad people” do, and on these accounts, those bad people blamed by law, media and white supremacist popular opinion, are more often than not poor and of an ethnic or racial minority. We observe some beginnings of structural theories of rape and sexual violence in Kathy Miriam’s elaboration of Adrienne Rich’s concept of “sex right,” which she articulates as “the assumption that men have a right of sexual access to women and girls [which] allows for specific acts of coercion and aggression to take place.”²⁷ This theory also grounds Miriam’s expanded theory of compulsory heterosexuality. Although too philosophical and non-material/historical to immediately cohere with a structural communist theory of capitalist social relations, Miriam describes processes that must be included in our accounts. To ignore sexual violence and compulsory heterosexuality in an account of structurally gendered capitalist social relations is equivalent to ignoring the way in which the threat of unemployment and the growth of unemployed populations structures the relation between labor and capital.

Understanding sexual violence as a structuring element of gender also helps us to understand how patriarchy reproduces itself upon and through gay and queer men, trans people, gender nonconforming people and bodies, and children of any gender. Gendered divisions of labor within the waged sphere, in conjunction with baby-bearing, do not account for the particular patterns in which, e.g., trans people are economically exploited within capitalist economies, which differs dramatically from cis-women, as well as the endemic murder of trans women of color which amounts to a sort of geographically diffused genocide.²⁸ It cannot account for the widespread rape of children by male family members. But if we consider sexual violence as an essential material ground in the production of hierarchized gender relations, then we can begin to see how such patterns relate to the production of the categories women and man and the distinction between the spheres of waged/unwaged; social/non-social; public/private.

Abolition of Race?

Many have argued that the category “woman” is not required for the social functions currently performed by women to “get done” – that is to say, capitalism could rid itself of gender, and still maintain the necessary distinction between “spheres” of social/non-social or waged/unwaged. The emerging communizationist gender theory, on the other hand, argues generally that the categories “women” and “men” are nothing other than the distinction between the spheres of activity. Abolishing gender while retaining the waged/unwaged division is like abolishing class while retaining the split between the owners of the means of production and those who are forced to work for a wage in order to survive.

The very same maneuvers are used to make similarly deflationary arguments about what is usually called “race” or “ethnicity.” Even theorists who emphasize the critical importance of race often claim that, at base, race and ethnicity are historical leftovers of past violences that capital has picked up, found useful, and mobilized to its advantage. Some of the theorists most intent

²⁷ Kathy Miriam, “Towards a Phenomenology of Sex-Right,” *Hypatia*, Vol.22, Issue 1, February 2007, 225 and Adrienne Rich, “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence,” *Signs*, Vol. 5, No. 4, Summer, 1980.

²⁸ The visibility of this genocide, as with most, is almost totally nil. Its invisibility is only emphasized when social movements recognize some isolated incidents, which makes it only more important to mention, for example, in the United States the recent (somewhat more publicly recognized) murder of Brandy Martell in Oakland, as well as the severe sentencing of CeCe Macdonald, who defended herself from a violent transphobic attack. These types of transphobic murders and victim-blaming punishment happen every day worldwide with no notice.

on integrating a theory of racial and ethnic oppression into the analysis of capitalism — from autonomists like Harry Cleaver and Selma James to canonical theorists of white supremacist, capitalist society like Stuart Hall — continue to insist that race is in some sense subordinate to or an inflection of (or in Hall’s terms, an articulation of) class.

The race question has yet to be put on the table for communization theory. Theorists who analyze race and racialization as a fundamental social relation that grounds and reproduces capitalist society (from Cedric Robinson, who wrote the epic *Black Marxism*, to the recent “Afro-pessimists” like Frank Wilderson and Jared Sexton) have not been addressed within communization theory. This is a testament to the persistent eurocentrism of current communization theory, even as it is drawn into the American context.²⁹

Frank Wilderson claims that white supremacy: “kills the Black subject that the concept, civil society, may live” and later states:

We live in this world, but exist outside of civil society. This structurally impossible position is a paradox because the Black subject, the slave, is vital to civil society’s political economy: s/he kick-starts capital at its genesis and rescues it from its over-accumulation crisis at its end. Black death is its condition of possibility. Civil society’s subaltern, the worker, is coded as waged, and wages are White. But Marxism has no account of this phenomenal birth and life-saving role played by the Black subject.³⁰

Similar to Miriam’s phenomenological and hermeneutic account of the sex-right, this language is not yet legible to existing communist or Marxist conversations, in part because it does not consistently use the analytical categories familiar to those conversations, and in part because there is little impetus to investigate the real meaning of racialization for capitalism within white-dominated theoretical and political circles. The absence of rigorous efforts to engage with and integrate analyses of race that do not mesh seamlessly with Marxist categories — and that at times force a rethinking of some of those categories — threatens to undermine the strength of communization theory. The limits of such conversations are threatening to their strength, for these theories of sex-right and black death reveal a truth that, if ignored or dismissed, leaves an account of the totality not only incomplete but a potential tool of capitalist violence.

We believe that capital is a totality that is “classed,” “gendered” and “raced” by virtue of its own internal logic. These are not three contradictions that sit on three thrones in the centre of the capitalist totality, homologous with one another, dictating its logic. We must reveal exactly how race and gender are necessary social relations based on particular material processes within the capitalist mode of production.³¹ Through the recent work of communizationist gender theory, we have come to understand “women” as the category describing those whose activity, unwaged and waged, is appropriated in their totality by society (“men”). This relation inscribes two distinct

²⁹ Communists have certainly not dealt with race *well* elsewhere, but European ultra-left and communizationist theory remains somewhat uniquely unconcerned with race — as do its American counterparts. This results in a Eurocentrism that cannot even begin to understand Europe.

³⁰ Frank Wilderson, “Gramsci’s Black Marx: Whither the Slave in Civil Society?” *We Write*, 2 (January 2005), 9, 15.

³¹ Some formations in the US are beginning to take on this task. See for instance the recent document by CROA-TOAN, “Who Is Oakland?: Anti-Oppression Activism, the Politics of Safety, and State Co-optation,” escalatingidentity.wordpress.com.

“spheres” that ground the gender binary. The fact that the boundaries around these spheres are violently policed does not mean they are static — in fact their policing also involves a constant manipulation of the boundaries. We understand “proletariat” as the category describing those who do not own the means of production, and are forced to either sell their labor to those who do (the “capitalists”) or are cast out to waste away. How are we to understand the category of “racialized,” or perhaps of “black,” or perhaps “ethnicized”? It seems possible that these categories are necessarily related to capital’s necessary overproduction of humans within the necessary movement of capitalist development, and its consequent need to kill, obliterate, remove and dispossess such bodies.³² But how do we structure this theory, and how does it relate to waged exploitation and to the two “spheres”? One fruitful direction for communization theory to take might be to bring theories of surplus population (such as those articulated in the recent *Endnotes 2*) into dialogue with theorists of race and ghettos, prisons, and unemployment, in particular the work of Loic Wacquant, Ruth Gilmore, and the above-mentioned Wilderson. Communization theory must also look to, critique, and expand upon the work on race done by autonomist Marxists such as Selma James, Silvia Federici, and Harry Cleaver, all of whom emphasize the key role of race in reproducing stratification within the working class, constructing a hierarchy of labor powers, and providing the ruling class with a mechanism with which to fracture and divide proletarians.

For now, we note the obvious fact that the reproduction of racial and ethnic hierarchies affect, form and constitute every moment and place of capital’s reproduction. A range of feminists, from African-American antiracist feminists like Patricia Hill Collins to eco-feminists like Maria Mies, have noted and argued that gender is produced through racialization, and that racialization is produced through gender. Indeed, communization’s theory of gender is deeply flawed due to its failure to comprehend how gender itself is fundamentally structured through systems of racialization. The work of Evelyn Nakano Glenn provides strong evidence of the way in which the female sphere of reproductive labor discussed by TC and Gonzalez is itself propped up by severe and violent racial divisions. The historical reliance of white women on the paid reproductive labor of women of color has allowed white women to embody a feminine cultural ideal decoupled from dirtier and more physically demanding domestic tasks, and this former experience of womanhood is the more frequent object of feminist analysis, communization included. The paid labor of women of color has also allowed white women to enter the labor force without forcing the burden of reproductive labor upon men. Glenn shows how this racial division of reproductive labor establishes a particular relationship between white women and women of color, in which racial hierarchy becomes the mechanism by which white women can offload some of the labor forced upon them by their husbands onto other women.³³ Any theory of gender and capital which ignores these facts will remain woefully wrong.

Communization has now been able to say, there is never a proletarian who is not gendered, so we must also be able to say, there is never a proletarian or a “woman” or a “man” who is not raced. We must also be able to articulate the way that the binary categories of “men” and “women” describe a structure of appropriation, but do not describe people (who vary in gender and experience of gendered violence far more than the discussion has indicated thus far). We look forward to communizationists, the ones we know and read, or ones we don’t yet know, taking up

³² “Misery and Debt: On the Logic and History of Surplus Populations and Surplus Capital,” *Endnotes 2*, 2011, 20 – 51.

³³ Evelyn Nakano Glenn, “From Servitude to Service Work: Historical Continuities in the Racial Division of Paid Reproductive Labor,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, Fall 1992.

these issues. If not, communization will become as archaic and as useless as any other communist tendency — or worse, a small but sly tool of the counterrevolution.

The Anarchist Library (Mirror)
Anti-Copyright



P. Valentine
The Gender Distinction in Communization Theory
2012

Retrieved on 17 December 2023 from liesjournal.net/volume1-12-genderdistinction.html

usa.anarchistlibraries.net