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Transnational Feminisms in Development

A Manifesto for Emancipatory Praxis

ABSTRACT This article joins feminist theory with testimony to deliver a manifesto for development and change. I begin with a review of the intersectional, postcolonial, and decolonial literatures, showing how transnational feminisms are rethinking development from below. Next, I share my growth as a white feminist scholar engaged with antiracist and decolonial praxis. Bringing theory into dialogue with lessons from the field, I identify six pathways for emancipation, or personal commitments to decentering whitestream logic in research and practice. These pathways have helped awaken me from the enchantment of a modern-colonial world-system engaged in endless warfare with difference. Recognizing that we do not have to be alike to be united in the struggle for global justice, I encourage you to share your own commitments to development. Through knowledge sharing, we may reclaim institutional spaces for the purpose of healing justice, helping address the trauma of systemic oppression from within as well as from without. KEYWORDS Intersectional feminism, Postcolonial feminism, Decolonial feminism, Global justice, Social change

Transnational feminist paradigms and movements are situated at the grassroots of development. Having emerged in opposition to the forces of neoliberal globalization in the late twentieth century, transnational feminisms promote global justice by constructing alternatives to development grounded in women's knowledge and agency (Desai 2009). In contrast to global feminism, whose "gender and development" approach assimilates difference in accordance with Eurocentric norms and practices, transnational feminists are centering knowledge traditions established by Women of Color and Third World feminists. In the late twentieth century, Black feminists constructed an intersectional feminist lens to unpack and dismantle the categorical matrix of domination in North America (Collins 1990; Crenshaw 1989). In Africa and Asia, postcolonial feminists examined the nexus of patriarchy and colonialism, refuting Western assumptions about the nature of gender and identity (Mohanty 1984; Oyěwùmí 1997). Straddling the North/South divide, decolonial feminists working in Latin American and Indigenous contexts theorized the relationship between patriarchy and capital, while also interrogating the psychosocial realm of self–other colonization (Anzaldúa 1987; Lugones 2010).

This article contributes to the sociology of development in two ways. First, it provides a theoretical review of three marginalized bodies of knowledge, making transnational feminist discourses accessible to a broader development audience. My coverage purposely decenters whitestream logic to clarify the intersectional colonialities of oppression,

Sociology of Development, Vol. 9, Number 4, pps. 346–365, electronic ISSN: 2374-538X © 2023 by the Regents of the University of California. All rights reserved. Please direct all requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content through the University of California Press's Reprints and Permissions web page, https://www.ucpress.edu/journals/reprints-permissions. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1525/sod.2023.9.4.346

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exposing a patriarchal world-system that deploys colonial and capitalist ideology to secure control over people, lands, and resources for development.[1] Second, I share reflections from the field to unpack the psychosocial lessons I have learned as a development and justice scholar. Connecting theoretical insights with lived moments of interracial connection, learning, and healing, I identify six standards that have come to shape my research, teaching, and service:

- Operating from the margins rather than seeking validation from the center;
- Decolonizing engagement by transferring control to marginalized peoples;
- Seeking situated and holistic understanding of our commonalities and differences;
- Embracing paradox and ambiguity as poststructural lessons;
- Respecting intellectual traditions by refusing to depoliticize my work; and
- Aligning my inner journey with outer passages to social change.

My inquiry offers transformative insight into development research and practice at a time of global crisis. According to Christopher Chase-Dunn (2013:179), the converging cataclysms of economic inequality, biosphere destruction, accelerated capital accumulation, and failed global governance comprise a "perfect storm of calamities" that is opening scope for systemic social change. Transnational advocacy networks are addressing these crises by supporting peripheral communities that are working to establish alternative social orders (Smith et al. 2018). Transnational feminist scholars are addressing these crises by challenging disciplines to shift the social relations of knowledge production from a top-down mode of scientific colonization to the bottom-up modalities of emancipatory, decolonial, and Indigenous science (Chilisa 2020). Recognizing that modern disciplines were constructed by bourgeois European men and their settler-colonial peers at a time when European imperialism dictated the social relations of knowledge production, it is time for development scholars and researchers to unpack the dehumanizing assumptions enocoded in disciplinary standards and research methods that reify global North and elite white authority in development research and practice.

Transnational feminisms also offer emancipatory insight into sociological debates on structure and agency. Rather than assuming an either/or position, these bodies of knowledge engage both/and logic to identify and unpack paradoxical social forces (Collins and Bilge 2016). My reading of the literature suggests that global justice cannot be realized without recognizing the existence of entrenched power structures; but nor can it be achieved by refusing to embrace the anti-structural logic that empowers people to transgress and transform socially divisive borders. It is only by learning how to navigate complex realities that we may begin to actualize egalitarian relationships in our everyday practice as scholars, professionals, and agents of change. Healing justice, or the "personal and political action toward care," lies at the heart of this paradoxical endeavor (Woodly 2021:91).

If transnational feminisms inform our understanding of development in the global South, the global South discourse on development also provides transformative insight

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into the broader nature and meaning of development. The contributions in this article turn the conventional paradigm on its head, challenging us to address the current crisis in development from the bottom up and from the inside out. In contrast to the hegemonic modality of development, which is a top-down paradigm enacted in hierarchical and rational ways by experts who are trained in detachment, transnational feminisms in development are diversely situated in marginalized zones of resistance and enacted with relational awareness. Far from viewing the global North as advanced and the global South as in need of development, transnational feminisms suggest that the global South has much to teach the global North about the social relations of development, its psychosocial impacts, and grassroots agency.

I conclude this article by positing that the modern-colonial world-system replicates itself through psychosocial discourses of fear and techno-rational systems of control. Not only has the capitalist logic of continuous economic growth produced a mass extinction event that is threatening human and other-than-human survival (Sol 2019), but also whitestream science has rationalized the production and transmission of knowledge in ways that assimilate and erase alternatives to development (Keahey 2023). Scholars and professionals may address this issue by moving beyond abstract analyses and expert-driven interventions that reify the ideological warfare of modern-colonial existence.

POSITIONALITY, METHODS, AND VOICE

My inspiration derives from a 2016 conference session on intersectionality, when I expressed desire for greater connectivity between the antiracist feminists of the global North and the postcolonial feminists of the global South. Patricia Hill Collins responded by saying, "If you want to see the international and domestic spheres reconnect, you're going to have to build a bridge."[2] As a white woman from the United States, I am not certain I am the right person for this task. My identity is entangled with the violence of a settler-colonial ancestry composed of European immigrants and a few Others who occupy the vague periphery of my family's historical records. Yet as a queer woman, I have been marginalized and punished for gender transgression; as a sociologist of development, I have learned how to traverse different worlds; and as a global justice activist, I have cultivated an antiracist and decolonial mindset. Thus, it is in the spirit of cross-racial and cross-cultural loving that I share my engagement with the emancipatory knowledges I have encountered in worlds where whiteness does not reign (Lugones 1987).

This article disrupts scholarly convention in terms of methods and voice. The first half reviews the intersectional, postcolonial, and decolonial feminist literatures. Rather than using rational logic to select a sample of texts based on citation counts or other claims of emblematic status, I employ an embodied approach, sharing the knowledges of the scholars, poets, and activists who have informed the development of my own consciousness. My voice is fairly latent in these sections, for my objective is to allow these feminist voices to stand in their own skin, without imposing whitestream judgement. In the second half of the article, I share autoethnographic reflections of my experience as

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a scholar and practitioner. This coverage primarily weaves between two foundational periods of African fieldwork, but it also shares more recent insights gained from my current position in U.S. academe.

In 2005, I conducted research for a grassroots rural livelihoods organization in Ghana, where I had the rare opportunity to learn emancipatory methods from Ghanaians who were working with remote communities to restore Indigenous farming practices. In 2010, I facilitated a research project with small-scale South African Rooibos tea farmers, where we employed participatory action research (PAR), the "methodology of the oppressed" (Sandoval 2000:1), to develop a radically egalitarian praxis of co-learning and political conscientization. More recently, I secured tenure at an interdisciplinary school that is part of a large research university in the United States. If transnational feminisms have helped me understand that the oppressor without depends on the tyrant within to secure and maintain systems of control, then my transgressions across these social, intellectual, and geographical borders have helped me recognize and begin letting go of the colonizing mindset of alienated fear that inhibits my growth. It is with a spirit of gratitude that I now turn to the emancipatory bodies of knowledge imparted to me.

INTERSECTIONAL FEMINISM

The early origins of intersectional feminism have been traced to Sojourner Truth,[3] a nineteenth-century abolitionist and women's rights activist from New York. Before dawn one day in 1826, Truth gathered her infant daughter in her arms and walked away from slavery, delivering a powerful vision of social change based on the agency of those who refuse to accept oppression (Painter 1996). Truth later became a traveling activist who delivered fiery talks on issues related to abolition, women's rights, and prison reform. In 1851, at the Ohio Women's Rights Convention, she gave the speech "Ar'n't I a Woman?" in which she deftly deconstructed truth-claims about gender in a patriarchal slave society.[4] Refuting idealized notions of femininity with a vivid account of her embodied reality, this famous speech showed that "what we call 'identities' are not objects but processes constituted in and through power relations" (Brah and Phoenix 2004:77).

The Combahee River Collective emerged in 1974 to confront homophobia and racism within the U.S. feminist movement. Formed by Black lesbian feminists, the collective was "named after Harriet Tubman's 1853 raid on the Combahee River in South Carolina that freed 750 enslaved people" (Taylor 2017:4). The collective's 1977 statement was the first feminist document to employ the language of interlocking systems of oppression, and by the late twentieth century, several Black feminists were unpacking multi-axis inequities. In sociology, Patricia Hill Collins (1990) theorized race, class, and gender as a matrix of domination and called for the rejection of colorblind and gender-neutral language that fails to acknowledge systemic oppression. In 1989, the Black feminist lawyer Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw coined the term *intersectionality*. In a legal study of Black women plaintiffs who had sought justice in cases of discrimination and assault, Crenshaw documented the matrix of sexism and racism that eroded their

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constitutional right to a fair trial. Envisioning an intersectional justice system, Crenshaw argued that courts would bolster rights for people who are "singularly disadvantaged" by protecting the rights of those inhabiting multiple points of oppression—namely, the least valued people in a nation where skin, sex, and money historically have informed one's social status, privileges, and legal rights (167).

McCall (2005) opened a new chapter in intersectionality by considering analytical approaches for measuring categorical complexity. While her work encouraged scholars to embed multidimensionality into quantitative research, scholars like Rodó-de-Zárate and Jorba (2012) have critiqued the coupling of intersectionality with statistical logic. In short, the abstraction of identities into measurable categories segregates people into narrowly defined groups and reifies the individual as the unit of analysis. The subsequent movement of intersectionality into whitestream research and practice has diluted insurgent Black feminist knowledge in identity politics and studies. According to Bilge (2014), neoliberal forces have co-opted intersectionality through statistical application and rationalized management tools. Far from ending oppressive practices, diversity, equity, and inclusion policies have redirected identity politics to the service of global capital. Noting that "the annexing of intersectionality by disciplinary feminism is by no means coincidental to the systematic marginalizing of racialized scholars and activists," Bilge (2013:420) has called for a radical return to the margins.

As the next section discusses, feminists from South Asia and Africa gave rise to postcolonial feminism in the 1980s and 1990s. While their work shifted focus to the Third Worlds of the global South, postcolonial feminism emerged in dialogue with intersectional feminism, where cultural outsiders like Audre Lorde and Gloria Anzaldúa contributed to the early development of post- and decolonial knowledge (Mohanty 1991). In a Black civil rights speech at the 1983 March on Washington, Lorde (2009:212) mentioned the need to connect with resistance movements in other world regions:

> Today we march, lesbians and gay men and our children, standing in our own names together with all our struggling sisters and brothers here and around the world, in the Middle East, in Central America, in the Caribbean and South Africa, sharing our commitment to work for a joint livable future. We know we do not have to become copies of each other in order to be able to work together. We know that when we join hands across the table of our difference, our diversity gives us great power. When we can arm ourselves with the strength and vision from all of our diverse communities then we will in truth be free at last.

POSTCOLONIAL FEMINISM

Hailing from India, Chandra Talpade Mohanty sparked the rise of postcolonial feminism by interrogating the colonial assumptions informing Western feminist scholarship. According to Mohanty (1984), the logic of methodological universalism trains Western feminists to perceive Third World women as uniformly uneducated, sexually constrained, and bound by patriarchal tradition. Not only have studies equated the prevalence of

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traditions like veiling with the control of women without investigating their actual experience, but also whitestream feminists have detached concepts from cultural context, surmising "the mere existence of a sexual division of labor" as proof of oppression (348). In a similar vein, Oyèrónkẹ́ Oyěwùmí (1997) examined precolonial relations among Nigeria's *Ọ̀yọ́*-Yorùbá. She found that society was stratified, but that gender played a limited role in organizing social relations, as age and seniority were the primary markers of position. Oyěwùmí surmised gender inequality among the modern Yorùbá to be a consequence of colonial education. In this way, Yorùbá has become "a genderless language in a genderful world" (174).

In the 1980s, the South Asian Subaltern Studies Group formed to align a poststructural critique of modernity with cultural Marxism (Levien 2013). Inserting a feminist voice into the discourse, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988 [1985]) showed how the objectifying narratives of imperial rule had served to assimilate and harden local identity categories. In a study on India's independence movement, she found that a triumphalist male discourse had largely erased women's participation, causing her to conclude that "the subaltern as female cannot be heard or read" (104). The Swazi scholar activist Patricia McFadden (1992) responded to this issue by giving voice to women involved in Southern African struggles for independence, making visible the sexism and homophobia that women have confronted within liberation movements.

Postcolonial feminism also has delivered an important critique of the liberal bargain undergirding Western identity politics. Just as women make patriarchal bargains to access benefits in male-dominated societies, Sa'ar (2005) has shown how racially marginalized people bargain with liberalism in an effort to escape systemic exclusion. Yet the liberal politics of identity ultimately reify structural violence, as liberalism "thrives on essentialist trappings of people in fixed cultural categories, despises 'brown' people who 'go white' and cannot accommodate 'white' people with 'brown' minds" (695). As an Israeli scholar and activist for Palestinian rights, Sa'ar has argued that a politics of identification offers a more emancipatory foundation for resistance because it recognizes the psychosocial and relational possibilities of locating commonality across difference.

In recent years, postcolonial feminists have developed methods for bringing global South epistemologies into Western disciplines. Chilisa (2009) reminds us of the fact that Western scholars historically have extracted data from oppressed peoples to develop theories that proclaim their subjective view to be universal truth. This process of scientific colonization has continued to inform the development of disciplinary theories, methods, and ethics, making it challenging for scholars to produce knowledge in noncolonizing ways. Chilisa (2020) addresses this problem by developing a relational research paradigm grounded in postcolonial and Indigenous methodologies. Likewise, global North scholars are revisiting their role as researchers in the global South. To prevent recolonization through research, Schurr and Segebart (2012) advocate the use of PAR and note the importance of cultivating critical self-awareness and deep sensitivity to power at all stages of the knowledge-building process.

In the next section, I cover the divergent terrain of decolonial feminism. This knowledge branch is rooted in a centuries-old tradition of decolonial scholarship. In the

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sixteenth century, Indigenous scholars working at colonial universities in Santo Domingo, Lima, and Mexico City produced studies that identified the correlation between European epistemology and the settler-colonial violence occurring around them (Mendoza 2015).

DECOLONIAL FEMINISM

In the Texas borderlands of the 1980s Chicana feminist movement, Gloria Anzaldúa theorized *conocimiento*, or the knowing of those who traverse multiple worlds.[5] For Anzaldúa, people with borderland identities often experience a profound lack of belonging. Yet their continual movement from one culture into another paradoxically opens the door to *mestiza consciousness*, an emancipatory awareness of belonging to all worlds (Anzaldúa 1987).[6] Like the physical forces that create life, cultural borderlands reside in a state of *nepantla*, an in-between realm where differences collide and bring new realities into being. While Anzaldúa drew from Aztec philosophy to challenge white patriarchy, she cautioned that "it is not enough to stand on the opposite river bank, shouting questions," because opposition reproduces the violence of the oppressor (78). Rather, one should cultivate tolerance for contradiction and ambiguity by working to break down paradigms that hinder social transformation. The path of *conocimiento* involves using "pain as a conduit to recognizing another's suffering," even when facing those who have caused harm (Anzaldúa 2002:572). Given the difficulty of this task, reflective and embodied practices like meditation, prayer, and communion with nature are essential for *las nepantleras* (border crossers). These practices are continually available to people seeking a calm port along the stormy bridge to global justice.

María Lugones coined the term *decolonial feminism* as part of her engagement with the Latin American Modernity/Coloniality Group. Informed by Quijano's (2000) work on the coloniality of power, the group formed, in part, to examine racism within the capitalist world-system. As an Argentinian feminist and U.S.-based Woman of Color, Lugones (2010) incorporated and moved beyond an intersectional lens by theorizing the coloniality of gender. In short, colonialism has imposed a heteropatriarchal world-system that has erased the divergent gender and sexual histories of Indigenous peoples. This has caused the colonized to turn against themselves, demonstrating the importance of epistemic sovereignty to human and social well-being.

In the American Indian territories of North America, Mack and Na'puti (2019) have articulated an Indigenous sovereignty framework for decolonial feminist praxis. It calls for collective self-determination over lands and political cultures, individual self-determination over one's body and life, and the right to spiritual and emotional spaces that support caring relations and intergenerational continuity. Given the failure of legal frameworks to address settler-colonial violence, American Indian organizations are asking scholars and activists to envision and enact Indigenous sovereignty from the bottom up, through concerted investments in community-based praxis.

As an Argentine *mestiza* scholar studying violence against women, Rita Segato (2018) finds that modern-colonial logic trains men (and some women) to rule by assault. This

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"masculinity mandate" has become a key tool for capitalist expropriation and parastatal domination (204). Not only do rape and femicide serve to control women's bodies, but these acts also signify the existence of a patriarchal state authorized to deploy violence to ensure the obedience of its subjects (Segato 2016a). More broadly, the capitalist world-system has entered into a psychopathic phase marked by extreme concentrations of wealth and power, inculcating insensitivity to pain and feeling (Segato 2016b). In a world where global power elites war for profit and seed indifference to cruelty, Segato argues that empathy and compassion are vital tools for resistance.

In an Indigenous critique of international political economy, the Mexican feminist Rosalba Icaza (2017) argues that the historical movement of modernity is founded on colonial power dynamics that have inscribed "monoculturalist and imperialist understandings" of international relations, development, and human rights (28). These are extended across spacetime through techno-rational policies and practices that engender irrational outcomes. Working in the post-Soviet context, Madina Tlostanova (2010) concurs, noting that the rational concept of emancipation conceals an irrational myth expressed as the "just war" (36). For Tlostanova, global recovery lies in amplifying transnational movements that embrace both intellectual and social diversity, while also ensuring the rights of humans and other species to bodily and cultural integrity.

TRANSNATIONAL FEMINISMS IN DEVELOPMENT

In the 1970s, international agencies sought to integrate women into their development plans in response to calls for focus on the differential barriers facing women. Largely driven by liberal feminists working in international organizations, the "women in development" approach assumed that the lives of Third World women would "improve once they had been integrated into the development process" (Koczberski 1998:396). While it offered "a different approach to 'doing' and 'viewing' development, its concepts, strategies and perspectives" remained grounded in an existing framework driven by elite Western professionals, and its projects largely failed to deliver on their promises (395).

In the 1980s, agencies began pivoting to a "gender and development" (GAD) approach, which has become a distinctive subfield of research and practice. Generally speaking, however, GAD has remained welded to Western logic, reproducing the white-stream assumptions of liberal feminism in a global feminist guise. Not only has GAD been criticized for conflating empowerment with modernization, but also its embrace of modern-rational technologies has reified colonial power relations (Radcliffe 2015). In a recent study conducted with gender advisors, development-in-practice scholar Emily Springer (2020) has found that agencies seeking funding for projects are compelled to adopt quantitative metrics to measure performance, thereby reinforcing bias against global South knowledges and hindering the ability of organizations "to deliver meaningful and sustainable change in people's lives" (76).

Transnational feminisms are situated in the periphery of GAD, where grassroots organizations are pursuing "globalization from below" responses to hegemonic power (Moghadam 2005:18). Occupying the tense juncture of development and resistance,

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actors are negotiating the paradoxical thresholds of structure/agency and theory/practice to emancipate development knowledge in practice. The transnational movement shares a commitment to coalition building, but intersectional, postcolonial, and decolonial feminisms remain situated in their own cultural knowledges and histories, providing the discourse with multidimensional insight into emancipatory praxis.

Intersectional feminism differs from postcolonial and decolonial feminisms in its engagement with spacetime, categorical identity, and relations of difference (Kerner 2017). First, intersectionality rarely moves beyond local or national settings. In contrast, post- and decolonial feminisms place global influences at the center of analysis, shifting focus from categorical identity to the integral forces shaping local- and national-level power relations. Second, intersectionality tends to focus on the present, engendering a sense of static timelessness in relation to identity, whereas post- and decolonial feminisms assume a historical material perspective that supports a more fluid awareness of identitarian shifts through spacetime. Third, post- and decolonial feminisms build solidarity by transgressing identitarian borders, while intersectional feminism offers a clearer view of empirical patterns that shape group experiences with social inequality.

In a decolonial examination of gender, Lugones (2011) refutes the philosophical principle of categorical separation present in whitestream intersectionality, arguing that statistical analyses reproduce hierarchical classification systems that historically have produced the colonial rupture of being. Velez (2019) notes that decoloniality shares "deep resonances" with intersectional feminism due to a "shared commitment" to Women of Color (391) while also arguing that social change will not be achieved by endlessly interrogating categories of difference but by working to "dismantle categorical logics with the aim of transforming their very meanings" (400).

Within intersectionality studies, the epistemologically violent process by which Black women are being removed from their own theoretical invention is but one manifestation of the vestiges of the patriarchal slave system in the academy (Bilge 2020). If categorical rationalization has enabled whitestream feminism to capture and dilute the intersectional frame, insurgent feminists recognize that identity is "a starting point for intersectional inquiry and praxis, and not an end in itself" (Collins and Bilge 2016:132). Retaining the radical critique of its Black feminist origins, this context-driven branch of intersectionality identifies flashpoints for mobilizing across categorical borders (McKinzie and Richards 2018). Context-driven intersectionality supports post- and decolonial feminisms by interrogating the relationship between identity and settler-colonial power.

Finally, it is important to note that postcolonial and decolonial feminisms also diverge in praxis. According to Asher (2013), decoloniality claims difference on three grounds: it considers the "conquest of the Americas" as central to the rise of the modern-colonial world-system; it moves beyond the analytical impulses of postcoloniality to enact change; and it advocates delinking from academic privilege to pursue direct action with the people. Whereas postcoloniality offers a poststructural lens from which to deconstruct power and inequality, decoloniality emphasizes the urgency of moving beyond endless critique. It reminds us that the time to liberate our inner selves and outer worlds is now.

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MANIFESTO FOR EMANCIPATORY PRAXIS

One of the revolutionary features that transnational feminisms share is their inherent unruliness. This calls into question the very logic by which we define and understand these bodies of thought, for one may argue that there are as many differences within the particular paradigms I have presented as there are without. For transnational feminists, a key question is how to embed radically divergent politics of alterity within global ethics without enforcing categorical knowledge and universal values. Like Chávez (2019), I argue that egalitarian futures will not be realized by universalizing codes of conduct. The pathways I present below derive from my own lived experience and are but one set of many possible roads to liberation.

Operate from the margins

I have made a conscious decision to operate from the margins rather than seeking validation from the center. This is partly because I feel more comfortable at the margins, for I came of age in the American West at the queer fringes of the 1990s punk youth movement. However, I also spent my early adulthood working abroad, where I was able to learn from cultural differences. If my preference for the margins originated in a feeling of not quite fitting into conventional U.S. society, my professional experience has convinced me of the importance of cultivating border thinking in my praxis. Like Icaza (2017:26), I have found that the liminal spaces of late-stage modernity offer "different epistemological positions" that challenge master narratives about globalization, development, and human rights. It is by residing at the margins that I have been working to gain insight into liberatory ways of knowing and being.

When conducting fieldwork in post-apartheid South Africa in 2010, I lived in familial homes in coloured communities.[7] This experience was emotionally challenging: the region where I worked remained racially segregated, and as I became socialized into coloured South Africa, it became increasingly difficult for me to navigate white space. While my experience helped me understand structural racism, it also taught me the agentic power of community. As a foreign white person, I sat at the dinner table with people who welcomed me into their lives despite their experiences with racism, elitism, sexism, and in some cases ablism, often perpetrated by people who resembled me. If the center maintains its power by enforcing conformity and rejecting difference, it is in marginalized spaces that liberating relationships can be formed. The acceptance I experienced within coloured community has helped awaken me from "the enchantment of imperial modernity" (Mignolo and Tlostanova 2006:219), enabling me to shift my praxis. Although I remain beholden to academic standards, I have reoriented my perspective by consciously choosing to seek confirmation of my work from the collective margins rather than from the elite center.

Decolonize engagement

Like Bagele Chilisa (2020), who has drawn from a globally diverse range of Indigenous cosmovisions to develop noncolonizing research methods, I am committed to moving beyond the extractive praxis of scientific colonialism. PAR is not well received within the

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U.S. academy, but my journey into this methodology has provided me with tremendous opportunity for intellectual and interpersonal growth. When conducting doctoral fieldwork in South Africa, I employed PAR to organize a community-based research team that, among other things, collectively and consciously explored relations of power. Some academic peers scorned this phenomenological approach, stating that one cannot uncover truth by asking people to discuss their perceptions of power. However, I was not operating from a positivist paradigm that seeks universal answers, but from an interpretivist and emancipatory paradigm that seeks to learn from difference in order to transform development in praxis.

PAR provided the means for my research team to build a deep coalition "grounded in tense, creative inhabitations of the colonial difference" (Lugones 2010:748). We created a space for co-learning at a time of community crisis, and my involvement in this space taught me that my assumptions about identity were not always validated by local experience. For example, the remote and religious communities where I worked were perceived by outsiders as bound by patriarchal tradition. Although the women in my research team expressed gender concerns, they agreed that gender roles were more fluid and forgiving for women than for men. Over time, the men in my research team also began to express frustration with a gender system that defines manhood solely in terms of one's ability to provide for a family financially (Keahey 2018). Not only did such discussions enable women and men to develop a mutually supportive agenda, but our complementary interpretations of broader research data also enhanced data validity. In short, our use of multi-investigator triangulation helped us meet Mohanty's (1984) call to problematize the generalizability of difference.

Seek situated and holistic understanding

Feminist ethics emphasize the importance of situating knowledge in women's experiences, contexts, and relationships (Porter 2014). In 2005, as part of my early research training as an MA student, I conducted a study for a grassroots sustainable livelihood organization in the North East Region of Ghana. The mostly male Ghanaian field officers taught me how to implement the feminist imperative of situating knowledge—to which they had been exposed in their training—and they shared with me African methods for obtaining a more holistic understanding of local experiences and perspectives. Instead of centering my research on more accessible locations, my comrades encouraged me to extend my inquiry into the most remote corners of the region, where people were more impoverished. The field officers noted the necessity of finding reliable translators who understood the terrain but who were not in a position of local power. Given the ethnic diversity of the region, they advised me to learn the differing gender customs and to develop culturally sensitive methods that would ensure the inclusion of women's voices. These grassroots field lessons have remained central to my research, helping structure my subsequent work in South Africa.

Ghana also taught me something about cross-cultural perception. When I arrived in the predominantly Muslim and polygamous terrain of the North East Region, I was nervous about how I would be perceived as a single foreign white woman. Over time,

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I learned that my fears were unfounded. I also found that some of my colleagues feared my perception of them. One evening a field officer invited me to dinner at his farm, deep in the countryside. His two wives had prepared a feast but did not join us. My colleague confided that he had spent many days debating whether to invite me because his wives were afraid of being judged by a white lady for being in a polygamous marriage. I replied that polygamy may not be my custom, but if I were to manage a remote farm while my husband was away at work, I would want other women around to share in the labor. Laughing, he went to tell his wives. They both came out laughing, and the evening shifted from a mood of formal reserve to one of friendly openness and lively chatter, in which I learned the secrets of calling free-ranging goats back home to slumber. If we are to have any hope of transcending structural power relations in praxis, we must not only cultivate an appreciation for cultural difference but we must also have the courage, as my colleague did, to broach uncomfortable subjects.

Embrace paradox and ambiguity

Instead of fearing the abyss of ambiguity, I strive to recognize its transformative potential. My efforts to develop a more holistic understanding have taught me the paradoxical nature of existence. In the context of feminism, liberal and global protagonists view GAD as a rational process of "institutional mainstreaming" that involves integrating women into educational, economic, and governance structures. Transnational feminisms propose a more revolutionary process of "institutional transformation" to address crosscutting inequities and underlying relations (Rai 2018). As a white woman whose second-wave feminist mother marched for justice so that I could obtain a life of economic independence, I have been a beneficiary of institutional mainstreaming. I also am acutely aware that my race and nationality have eased my entry into an academy that largely fetishizes or excludes difference; and it is this recognition that drives me to demand a deeper commitment to institutional transformation.

Although the ideologies of mainstreaming and transformation are distinct, in material reality these dynamics are mutually entangled, raising the question of whether one can exist without the other. When paradox arises in my praxis, I have learned to view it as a message to stop concretizing reality and start opening my mind to the freeing influence of poststructural logic. For example, my South African research team had such different perspectives on race that they could not come to a consensus on the appropriate terminology for their racial identity. While most identified as coloured or brown, some rejected the notion of racial identity, choosing instead to identify as working-class or South African. I struggled to understand this seemingly colorblind position. It took a long discussion with Ernest to help me understand that his rejection of racial identity was centered on a deep-seated conviction that racial categories operate as the whip of the master.[8] Ernest was not colorblind in the white sense of refusing to see racial inequality. Having lived through apartheid in a racially marginalized body, he was acutely color aware. Yet he consciously chose to frame his battle for equality using the language of class in an effort to steer away from a racial classification system that has harmed his nation. In this vein, I am learning to recognize occurrences of paradox and ambiguity as anti-

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structural doors that, if opened, provide access to the psychosocial realm of *nepantla* and the potential that this transgressive space offers for reimagining the social relations of development.

Respect intellectual traditions

As a white feminist, I have made the conscious decision to challenge the pattern of whitestream co-optation by refusing to depoliticize the lineages that Women of Color and Third World feminists have established. The detachment of intersectionality from its Black feminist roots has allowed neoliberal forces to commodify the rhetoric of diversity, equity, and inclusion, causing this antiracist branch to lose its revolutionary edge (Salem 2018). This theft has not been without consequence for my Black comrades. In a reflection on their experience in the academy as a queer Black scholar, Amber Jamilla Musser (2015) notes that university administrators routinely deploy intersectional language to market their commitment to diversity; yet they have yet to see actual changes to institutional practices and interpersonal relationships that have harmed them. Along with other scholars who inhabit multiple marginalized identities, Musser navigates an academy that puts them on exotic display while co-opting their work.

This effect is by no means limited to the geographical terrain of the global North. In an account of oppression within the South African academy, Sieraaj Francis (2020) shows that white administrators, whose colonizing practices are misaligned with decolonial epistemologies and ontologies, are steering academic decolonization agendas, making it clear that decolonization is only a priority for universities in terms of their desire to deliver a new plantation product, or a marketable simulacrum of social justice. In short, Black scholars around the world are subjected to the vestiges of slavery and colonialism within academe, producing intellectual food for the ivory tower without gaining the benefits of tenure.

Intersectionality is not an abstract framework without a sociocultural history. It is a Black and Woman of Color feminist praxis, developed to address the needs of the most marginalized members of society. Like the Combahee River Collective (1977 [2014]), I believe that it is by amplifying the voices of people "at the bottom" that we can "make a clear leap into revolutionary action" (276). I do not share the same skin color as most of the feminists and global South scholars covered in this article; indeed, I am aware that one of my ancestors was a slaveowner. Yet Black lesbians were the first to open my passage to emancipation by equipping me with tools that are not of the master (Lorde 2015 [1981]). I strive to honor the gift of their insurgent knowledge by refusing to retreat to the shady verandah of white privilege.

As a result of this conviction, I too have experienced a racist and heteropatriarchal academy. During my time in a tenure-track position at a major U.S.-based university, I have experienced relentless pressure to conform to whitestream logic. When I entered into this position, I was advised by a well-meaning white scholar to hide the socially engaged nature of my work by repackaging my use of PAR as generic qualitative research to make it more "publishable." When I refused on grounds of scientific ethics, I discovered I had to build bridges between disciplinary siloes that spoke to different facets of my

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fieldwork. This period of intellectual growth was made possible by my placement in an interdisciplinary school. Several years into my position, however, my college and school went through a regime change. After enduring several years of harassment, I found the courage to file a complaint. Thanks to those who provided me refuge from this storm, I have come to viscerally understand the Combahee River Collective's message of liberation from the bottom up, and the imperative of constructing healing relationships that counteract the trauma of oppression.

Align inner and outer liberation

After completing my 2005 fieldwork in Ghana, I traveled along the coast, where I met a European woman who was traveling alone as well. As admittedly privileged tourists, we decided to take a day trip to the colonial lighthouse at Cape Three Points, at the southernmost tip of the nation. Given the remoteness of the location, we hiked in from the nearest accessible village alongside several local youth who decided to join us when we asked for directions, and whom we paid for their service. On our arrival, we found a construction crew noisily dismantling a statue in front of the lighthouse, and as we approached, the crew shouted with excitement at the unexpected discovery of a time capsule buried underneath the century-old British statue.

The foreman noted our arrival and decided the world had brought two races together to learn from the past. We all sat down to watch him open the capsule. It contained a letter, written by the British husband and wife who had managed the lighthouse at the turn of the twentieth century. This missive began by asking for our forgiveness, for the couple admitted that they knew colonialism was wrong. Assuming that the twenty-first century would be a more enlightened time than the one in which they lived, the couple feared the future would harshly judge their participation in the British colonization of West Africa. Most of the letter focused on trivial British matters like the price of bread in London; however, the couple also spoke of their feelings of isolation. While they knew the fresh fruits and seafood of the region to be good, they informed us that they chose to subsist on an imported diet of salt beef and potatoes, as they were British and not African. The letter also mentioned their fear of the local villagers, whom the wife suspected of eating cats.[9] She had made it her mission to gather up as many of the village cats she could find to put on boats for England, with the hope that these would survive the voyage and find British owners.

After the reading of the letter, our oddly assembled group settled into a discussion, with the construction foreman questioning the couple's idealistic vision of the twenty-first century. At one point in our dialogue, I mentioned that the previous evening I had watched a middle-aged white man get out of a truck blazoned with a corporate label and strut into a hotel with a child prostitute in an overt display of neocolonial power. Several people agreed that Ghanaians were still suffering the vestiges of colonialism, but the foreman added that on this day he had watched two white women walk out of the forest to have a conversation about colonialism with African men after they had pulled a British statue out of the ground. Given this evidence, he believed social relations were improving. Pointing to us, he said, "You two have the freedom to come to Ghana and make African

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friends. But imagine the loneliness of the white lady in this letter, who had no one to talk to even though there were people all around. You must remember that in those days white women weren't allowed to mix with Africans. None of us were free!"[10]

For many years, the letter from the British couple haunted me, for despite the compassionate wisdom of the foreman, I could not comprehend how people could participate in the structural violence of slavery, colonialism, and genocide when they knew these formations to be wrong. Five years later, I had the privilege to travel with local women colleagues through Namibia. During the journey, we camped in remote desert and spoke little, enabling each of us to experience moments of vast stillness. Reflecting on physical and emotional violence I had experienced in my life, I realized that fear lies at the root of all that is broken in the world. It is because of fear that we desire to control and choose to harden, until we find ourselves standing "on the opposite river bank" (Anzaldúa 1987:78) shouting hate to the group that harmed us, and in so doing forgetting how to love ourselves.

As I have become more self-aware, I have begun to recognize the violence and trauma that exists inside me, and to know that my warring selves are but reflections of the warring selves of the oppressor. Through the strange account of a lonely white woman living in the British Gold Coast colony of West Africa, and through the compassion of a black man who dug up her statue and recognized her suffering, I have come to see the imperative of healing my own fractured selves.[11] To transmute the psychopathic zeitgeist of late-stage modernity, there is an urgent need for healing justice. As a social work scholar trained in community health and decolonial feminist praxis, Maria Ferrera and colleagues (2023) show how healing justice projects can be enacted within cross-cultural and academic communities. In short, this praxis requires people who are willing to step into discomfort and share testimonies of painful pasts that "make our own humanity visible" so as to open space for psychosocial healing (31).

TOWARD EMANCIPATORY DEVELOPMENT

Transnational feminisms join a broader body of feminist philosophy and global South development studies that reject the categorical separation of theory from practice. The feminist philosopher Alison Jaggar (2000) exposes the cognitive dissonance occurring within the modern-rational discourse on justice and human rights, where the theoretical principles of liberty, equality, and justice are at odds with the empirical reality of a world-system where the most elite members of society determine what justice means and how to enact it. The paradoxical relationship between moral intention and material outcomes also may be explained by the fact that ethical rationalism separates human reason from lived reality. By compacting complexity into measurable categories, rationalism generates "either-or options" that give rise to "inclusionary-exclusionary responses" and the reproduction of social inequity (Porter 2014: x).

The feminist ethic of care offers a starting point for building an emancipatory development ethic that reconnects our minds and bodies through a politics of co-learning and mutual support. Feminist theorists define *care* as "a species activity that includes

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everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our 'world' so that we can live in it as well as possible" (Fisher and Tronto 1990:40). Rational self-interest and care for others are not mutually exclusive, nor should these values be essentialized according to gender, for examples of both abound in lived reality and across all social groups. The care ethic simply reorients the justice discourse from one of rational management to one of interpersonal change by drawing attention to the fact that "care and compassion are part of the process of knowing and becoming" (Truong 2006:1269).

Transnational feminisms further connect the feminist ethic of care with the politics of alterity, offering "hope for responding to the urgent global problems that modernity has created and cannot solve" (Rojas 2016:380). This politics may also be described as a praxis of *radical relationality*. In the black feminist terrain of North America, Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge (2016) have defined radical relationality as an intersectional practice of deep reciprocity enacted with all beings—human or otherwise—for the purpose of healing intergenerational trauma. As a Buddhist feminist working in the postcolonial tradition, Sokthan Yeng (2020) defines it as a meditative practice in which one combats discrimination by learning how to express anger with mindfulness. In decolonial feminism, Indigenous American, Afro-Caribbean American, and Latin American feminists have articulated radical relationality as a pluriversal cosmopraxis of coming-into-being that involves transforming our relationships with one another and all forms of life, so that we may know what it means to love and be loved (Tickner and Querejazu 2021).

Transnational feminisms demonstrate the importance of Women-of-Color and global-South bodies of knowledge to the evolution of development in theory and practice. While these frames identify interlocking systems of oppression, each also recognizes the agency of the oppressed. According to the Bolivian feminist sociologist and Indigenous rights activist Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui (2018), the praxis of emancipation involves strengthening ties to the human and nonhuman beings with whom we share a sense of solidarity or kinship. It also involves taking the time to learn from our complementary and interconnected opposites, with whom we may live in communion or conflict, occasionally blending to create something new but often merely coexisting, like vibrantly contrasting colors on a mountainside or two sides of one coin.

WHAT IS YOUR MANIFESTO FOR LIBERATION?

In this article, I have provided a review of intersectional, postcolonial, and decolonial feminisms to share transnational feminist knowledge and develop a manifesto for emancipatory praxis. My contribution shows how structure and agency intertwine at the internalized and interpersonal levels of everyday research and practice, both complementing and supporting broader sociological studies of development.

Situating their analysis at the structural and systemic level, Smith, Hooks, and Lengefeld (2020) examine the influence of the military-industrial complex on the capitalist world-system, showing how core nations generate great wealth for Western power elites by financing wars in peripheral nations, resulting in a treadmill of destruction that

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destabilizes local ecologies and societies alike. Transnational feminisms add to this broader discourse by unpacking the internalized and interpersonal interplay between structure and agency, opening room for resistance to corrupt social institutions that are incapable of solving the problems they have created (Lugones 2011).

The constant warfare occurring between the self and the Other in ways both broad and minute is most visible in the psychopathic zeitgeist of a world-system that rationalizes and accustoms people to acts of cruelty (Segato 2016b). Given the psychosocial violence shaping our collective existence, the first step toward social change lies in reclaiming the capacity to stand in vulnerable and loving relation with our fractured inner selves and the also fractured selves of others (Anzaldúa 1987). As a cultural outsider, uncomfortable with the skin, gender, and nation into which I was born, my development journey has been one of unlearning the whitestream logic that reduces my existence to categorical boxes. Even situated as I am in a position of academic and social privilege, I admittedly find that it is all too easy to feel powerless in the face of tyranny. The voices amplified in this article serve to remind me that I have the power to resist these nihilistic impulses and a responsibility to build healing and just coalitions here and now.

Recognizing that our journeys may be different, I would like to conclude by asking: What is your manifesto for liberation? Far from viewing my praxis as a universal code of conduct or my transnational feminist orientation as a rejection of other knowledge traditions, I encourage you to revisit the values guiding your own work, the knowledges that have shaped it, and the lessons that your lived experiences impart. We do not have to be alike to build healing coalitions that provide shelter to one another in troubled times. At crucial moments such as the world is facing today, it is our love for one another that will give us the courage and compassion to turn our focus away from the voice of the oppressor and begin establishing healing and just relations with difference. ■

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NOTES

1. *Whitestream* refers to conventional views or practices that are biased in favor of elite white people, knowledges, and histories. As part of the decentering process, I only capitalize terms denoting marginalized racial and ethnic groups.
2. This statement is reconstructed from my notes and memory.
3. Née Isabella Baumfree.
4. This speech is often titled “Ain’t I a Woman?” as historians have recorded Truth’s work in a Southern dialect. However, Truth, who was raised speaking Dutch in rural New York, most likely used “ar’n’t” in this speech (Painter 1996).
5. In the United States, some people of Mexican origin claim Chicano/a/x identity to indicate cultural heritage and Indigenous consciousness.
6. *Mestiza* refers to a woman of mixed European and Indigenous ancestry.
7. *Coloured* is the official South African term for Indigenous and mixed-race peoples. I do not capitalize it because people labeled as coloured do not always identify with this categorical identity.

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8. Ernest is a pseudonym.

9. This perception was wholly false, according to my Ghanaian interpreters.

10. I later recorded his words in a journal based on my memory of the conversation.

11. From here until the end of the article, I purposely use lowercase for racial signifiers in accordance with postcolonial feminist convention, which challenges us to move beyond categorical assessments that reify division. This shift came about as a conversation between author and copy-editor, in terms of thinking through the differing and shifting conventions on the typographic treatment of racial terms.

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