

Colonialism, Migration, Pandemic

The Immutable Evidence that Capitalism Is Racist and Misogynist

LILIA D. MONZÓ

Capitalism is a force of destruction. Even those who stick staunchly by the myths equating capitalism with democracy and who proclaim it is the “best system in the world” recognize the necessity to tame its ravenous thirst for accumulation that has left the vast majority of the world scrambling to survive. The radical left recognizes, following Karl Marx, that capitalism cannot be reformed and must thereby be struck down to create an alternative that allows all people to thrive and live with dignity. Yet the radical left is divided on numerous fronts, including on questions of how class and race are related. Understanding the centrality of race is of critical importance, as it affects all anticapitalist work. Racism effectively divides the working class and thereby minimizes our potential to develop a multiracial mass movement against capital.

When we examine the history of capitalist development, we see over and over that the non-Western world and its peoples have been displaced to make way for the interests of the white man. Although the concept of race as a defining characteristic of peoples was constructed to justify U.S. slavery, there can be no question that the genocidal wars waged by white colonizers and settlers were tied to conceptions of the Indigenous “Other” as alien, subhuman, and exploitable capital. It was the pillaging of foreign lands for resources, the enslavement of the non-Western world, and the rape of its women that allowed for the development of mass production, industrialization, and the global capitalist economy.¹

Capitalism is a global racialized structure. Although many of the exploited working class are white peoples, people of color, especially women of color, have generally borne the brunt of the human suffering inflicted by capitalism. There is no doubt that colonialism and U.S. slavery were economic systems, but they were also brutal attacks on non-Western peoples who were considered “barbaric animals.”

Moving forward to today’s imperialisms, we see similar characterizations of the non-Western “Other,” albeit with a more politically correct tinge.²

LILIA D. MONZÓ is an associate professor of education in the College of Educational Studies at Chapman University. She is the author of *A Revolutionary Subject: Pedagogy of Women of Color and Indigeneity* (Peter Lang, 2019).

This racist xenophobia is also made less visible with the advent of greater and greater divisions by culture, ethnicity, and religions, which then act as ideological justifications for subimperialist nations.³ Of course, as race is a social construct, racism can be deployed against peoples based on ethnicity, religion, or other markers of difference within the non-Western world. However, one thing remains clear: racism and its colonial and imperial manifestation – the structural consequence of established human hierarchies – have never been directed at the Western world. That it was white colonizers and settlers who established these hierarchies and placed themselves at the top, justifying the genocides of the “less-than-human” world was and is no accident. It provided wealthy and property-owning white heterosexual men with a clear provenance to establish a racialized capitalist order that guaranteed their continual rule and prosperity within the system.⁴

Today’s global forced migration is a result of a long history of dislocation of the poor within the Global South, under the threat of war, poverty, and environmental disaster. Media images of people surging to new borders in search for survival and a better life have become an accepted “normal” and sometimes even produce disdain from some. Indigenous women and women of color face unparalleled violence, not only from colonialism’s physical and ideological assaults, but also from male peers who, through sexist behavior, attempt to find some semblance of control and power within their otherwise decrepit lives.⁵ It is not surprising then that global migration has become a feminist issue, affecting more and more women of color and Indigenous women who attempt to escape, often with and for their children, the inhumanities they encounter.

In a similar vein, the COVID-19 pandemic was initially racistly perceived as a “Chinese virus,” fueling anti-Asian sentiment and giving the Western world, with its superiority complex, a false sense of protection that has resulted in thousands of deaths.⁶ While initially affecting more affluent communities, the spread of the virus and its death toll has highlighted, once again, the structural racism and sexism of U.S. society. Without a doubt, like in all crises, the economic impact of the virus will fall greatest on the poorest peoples, overrepresented by racialized groups, whose hourly wages are lost when small businesses collapse and nonessential jobs are lost.

Capitalism is and has always been a racialized and gendered enterprise that has guaranteed the global domination of a predominantly white, male capitalist class.

Racism and the Colonial Imperative of Capitalism

Many radical scholars have argued that racism plays an important role in sustaining capitalism by dividing the working class and justifying ineq-

unities. This realization goes as far back as Marx, who supported race-liberation and anticolonial movements not merely because he believed they would pave the way to class consciousness, but because they were struggles against subjugation. As Marx noted in response to the U.S. Civil War and the struggle for abolition: “Labour in a white skin can’t emancipate itself where it is branded in a black skin.”⁷

Although Marx called for a class consciousness across all workers, he came to realize that human hierarchies and racism significantly divided the working classes. Regarding the working classes of England and Ireland, Marx wrote to his friends Sigfrid Meyer and August Vogt in 1870:

Every industrial and commercial center in England now possesses a working class divided into two camps, English proletarians and Irish proletarians. The English worker hates the Irish worker as a competitor who lowers his standard of life.... He regards himself as a member of the ruling nation, and consequently, he becomes a tool of the English aristocrats and capitalists against Ireland, thus strengthening their domination *over himself*. He cherishes religious, social, and national prejudices against the Irish worker. His attitude towards him is much the same as that of the “poor whites” to the Negroes in the former slave states of the U.S.A.⁸

Marx continues:

This antagonism is artificially kept alive and intensified by the press, the pulpit, the comic papers, in short by all the means at the disposal of the ruling classes. This antagonism is the secret of the impotence of the English working class, despite its organization. It is the secret by which the capitalist class maintains its power. And the latter is quite aware of this.⁹

The concept of “race,” which differentiates peoples via prescribed presumed characteristics, has been used to justify inequalities by blaming the oppressed for their lot in society. That whites, generally, fare much better in societies than ethnic and racial minorities is explained through an ideology of meritocracy that rewards white people’s supposedly superior ingenuity and motivation. Accordingly, Richard Wolff posits that, “instead of being a produced idea, an ex-post justification of structures of social subordination, race morphs instead into some preexisting ‘reality’ that *caused* or *enabled* the subordination.”¹⁰ As I have argued elsewhere, racism serves three important functions under capitalism: “1) to create an ideological ferment against people of color that serves to justify inequality, 2) to minimize the value of a segment of the working class and drive down the wages of all workers, and 3) to divide the working class and thereby stunt the working-class consciousness and unity necessary to bring down capitalism.”¹¹

Wolff further articulates that racialized groups bear the brunt of the inequalities produced by capitalism and serve as “shock absorbers” to a system that necessitates inequality and suffers from internal crisis (cycles of depressions and recessions).¹² As such, it is people of color who end up in the lowest-paying jobs, experience the worst working conditions, are the first to be laid off, are failed by underresourced schools, and have the most limited opportunities, while white people have greater occupational opportunities and greater access to resources and benefits. This mitigates the burdens of capitalism for white working classes, who often perceive these privileges as inherent rights.

However, the link between racism and capitalism goes much further, to the fundamental necessity of capitalism for expansion through colonialism, which was made acceptable through the ideological dehumanization of the colonized world. In the first volume of *Capital*, Marx refers to “so-called primitive accumulation” to highlight that the conditions of expropriation that spurred on capitalism were not merely an a priori condition, but a continuous, necessary condition for maintaining and reproducing the system. As Marx points out, the horrific process of transition from feudalism to capitalism in England involved the violent expropriation of the means of production of noncapitalist communities and societies through “conquest, enslavement, robbery, and murder.”¹³

Although Marx was highly concerned with the exploitation of workers, he was clear that this on its own is insufficient to maintain England’s continuous accumulation and exploitation and to meet the potential growth of capitalist production. He recognized that the colonial enterprise was at the heart of the tremendous economic growth that continued to spawn out of capitalist relations. Marx posited that with the growth of wealth that accompanies accumulation proper (concentration), we see more and more concentration of the means of production in the hands of fewer and fewer capitalists who increasingly buy out their competition and consolidate their capital. This process of centralization is distinct from accumulation in that it is capable of tremendous growth and is responsible for the emergence of specific industries. Marx uses the example of Ireland, which was at the time experiencing significant depopulation due to the potato famine of 1845, wherein one million people died and many others fled to the United States. While people were either starving or fleeing, and workers who remained lived under extreme pauperization, the total social capital of the country was significantly prosperous. Farms were being highly centralized, with farms of between fifteen and thirty acres growing by 61,000; farms of over thirty acres growing by 109,000; and a reduction in the total number of farms to 120,000. Basically, small

farms of under fifteen acres were being expropriated by the wealthier capitalists. According to Kevin Anderson, Marx argued that the system of accumulation imposed on Ireland was especially beneficial to the English aristocrats who sought to buy meat and wool from Ireland at the cheapest possible prices for the English market, but, more importantly, the surplus population of Ireland was especially beneficial to the English bourgeoisie who employed them as cheap labor for their factories, which in turn brought down the wages of the English working class.¹⁴

The colonial expansion of the West into the non-Western world provided an explosion of wealth for the West that has continued its global stronghold in economic development. Capitalism has always been an international enterprise, having been born out of the expropriation of lands, the exploitation and enslavement of labor, and the theft of resources of the non-Western world, what Marx called “chief moments of primitive [primary] accumulation.”¹⁵ Without the violent dispossession of the non-Western world, capitalism would not have flourished, much less developed into the giant monster it is today.

In *The Accumulation of Capital*, Rosa Luxemburg provided a brutally honest portrayal and unequivocal indictment of imperialism and the colonizer’s barbaric pillaging and murderous treatment of Indigenous peoples. It was Luxemburg who foregrounded and argued vehemently that imperialism was integral to capitalism. In her view, capitalist production was dependent on the creation of new markets for consumption in the noncapitalist world. According to Peter Hudis, Luxemburg perceived that the only way to increase means of production (constant capital) was by first selling the product of labor and turning it into “pure value,” or the money form. Her approach was market driven and gave too much power to notions of supply and demand.¹⁶ Hudis points out that what Marx argued, and Luxemburg did not grasp, was that in certain industries the product itself—in its use form—is inserted as the means of production into new cycles of production; it need not be realized in its abstract value form through the market (money) prior to its insertion into capitalist production. Hudis also notes that Marx argued that the material or use form of the product is of “decisive importance in pre-determining the *direction* in which surplus value is invested.”¹⁷ What this suggests is that land, obtained by conquest and expropriation, is often used as capital in the development of new industries of production. Thus, colonialism and imperialism are not just about expanding markets, but also about the use of resources that could be directly injected into new cycles of production. Marx’s theory of accumulation explains from an economic standpoint the devastation that Western capitalism erected on the non-Western world, a

devastation that continues today, even as much of the non-Western world has itself become capitalist. Imperialism today foregoes many of the contractual agreements of the colonial enterprise, but continues to facilitate accumulation of capital for big business by securing its interests through proxy wars, free trade, ease of regulations, and the exploitation of other lands and its peoples.

Settler colonialism differed from colonialism in general in that the colonizer opted to make the colonized lands *their* lands. This brutal enterprise has involved a continuous process of elimination of Indigenous peoples and their ways of life via genocide, sexual and reproductive violence, and epistemicide. It has also remained an economic project of appropriating means of production (land and other resources) and of extracting surplus value from workers. The transatlantic slave trade allowed for both elimination of Indigenous peoples and the insertion of a racialized Black body marked as slave labor.¹⁸ The population growth that erupted out of the white man's desire for an increased slave labor and the ownership and ravaging of nonwhite women's bodies resulted in large numbers of peoples of color that today make up the majority of the oppressed.

There is a longstanding feud between race and class theorists regarding which oppression came first and caused the other.¹⁹ This feud is especially prevalent in discussions regarding the development of Western imperialism, the colonization of most of the non-Western world, and U.S. slavery, which resulted in mass genocides and horrific brutality against Indigenous, Black, and Brown peoples, as well as subhuman ideologies of non-Western peoples that have been sustained for over five hundred years. The genocide and conquering of foreign lands, the establishment of colonies throughout the Global South, and settler colonialism was and is an economy of dispossession meant to enrich and support the so-called development of the West.²⁰ The different levels of economic "development" between the West and the non-West are a direct result of this dispossession.

Race as a category that differentiates people based on phenotype and assigns inferiority to all but the white race was developed during the plantation era to justify the transatlantic slave trade and an era of unfathomable atrocities against Black peoples in the name of greed, industrialization, and the amassment of an overwhelming wealth for white plantation owners whose bloody bounty remains within the hands of white people today.²¹ However, the genocides of the Indigenous world that preceded U.S. slavery cannot be attributed to mere economic accumulation. Depictions by the conquistadores make evident that there was an inherent fear

and hatred of the “Other” that played an equally dominant role in the slaughter of Native peoples. Whether we name this “fear of the ‘Other,’” “civilizing the savage,” or “saving their souls” with Christian indoctrination, these ideas derived from the same white supremacist ideologies and social conditions that today most refer to as racism.

Walter Migñolo argues that deeds do not just happen in so-called Western civilization in the abstract, rather they happen *to* and *by* a racially marked, gendered body that include other characteristics located in a particular space and time.²² According to Ramon Grosfoguel, the “western imperial being” developed out of René Descartes’s “I think, therefore I am” that proclaimed an objective and rational truth to Western patriarchal thought and severed it from the body politic, rendering all those who fall outside the narrow confines of Western man subhuman—irrational and animalistic.²³ Grosfoguel points out that this logic was made possible by the *ego conquiro*, I am, therefore I conquer, and led to and was supported by the *ego exterminus*, the logic of genocide and epistemicide. It was through this process that white ruling-class men internalized themselves as superior beings because they had conquered the world. They conquered the world through the main four genocides/epistemicides of the sixteenth century: “1) against Muslims and Jews in the conquest of Al-Andalus in the name of ‘purity of blood’; 2) against Indigenous peoples first in the Americas and then in Asia; 3) against African people with the captive trade and their enslavement in the Americas; 4) against women who practiced and transmitted Indo-European knowledge in Europe [and were] burned alive [when] accused of [being] witches.”²⁴

Women of Color and Capitalism’s Colonial Project

Colonization and imperialism have had a severe and qualitatively different impact on women of color. While the origins of oppression of women predates capitalism, colonialism, and industrialization, research suggests that these structures intensified oppression and inequalities for women in general and for women of color in particular. Maria Mies traces the development of women’s oppression to the tools of destruction used against women when hunter-gatherer societies began to shift to agricultural production. Women (and sometimes men) were stolen from other tribes or taken as wives and put to work in agriculture for the amassment of goods. The gendered division of labor thus emerged as a system in clan society, resulting in the exploitation of women for survival.²⁵ Despite this, there is also evidence that these societies were nonetheless more egalitarian for women, who found support and soli-

parity among other women in the clan and who held some power as the primary producers of daily subsistence needs.²⁶

The land enclosures that came with private property and pushed people into the hubs of industrialization for waged labor led to a heightened exploitation of working-class women in factories and increased their vulnerability under the newly developed nuclear family structure. Although capitalism promised greater social mobility and freedom from the class determinism that existed under feudalism, it has never lived up to this ideal for the vast majority. Silvia Federici traces the material conditions that led to the current state of oppression for women and argues that the women who found it difficult to survive within Western enclosures that restricted land to private owners were discredited as “witches” to maintain ideologies of greater freedom and opportunity under capitalism. The witch hunts that ensued across Europe and the Americas, and which lasted approximately three centuries, was not only a femicide but a violent assault on women’s psychology and ways of being, relegating them to the privacy of the home to avoid capture. Federici argues that these conditions affected women’s personalities and societies’ perceptions and expectations of them. These, in turn, brought down the value of their labor power. This gendered division of labor has persisted but shifted under globalization, making women of color particularly exploitable.²⁷

Clearly, women and their oppression are foundational to capitalist production. Poor women have always worked, but in addition to their “productive” labor, they have often also performed unwaged caring and informal labor (often nonunionized and unregulated), including birthing, raising, and socializing the next generation of workers for capitalist production.²⁸ These functions have often been relegated to women of color. In the Americas, the systematic rape of Indigenous and Black women contributed to the relegation of future generations of people of color to the working class, with little opportunities for social mobility.

Capitalism depends on the bodies, labor, and control of women, and of women of color especially. Through psychological, physical, and emotional violence, women are commodified as pawns of pleasure, denied the right to control their own bodies, and coerced into a family structure that often denies their human rights. Sexism and the nuclear family, complicit in capitalist production, secures the next generation of workers socialized to accept the status quo and to reproduce a class-based, racialized, and gendered division of labor that secures the power of heterosexuality, white people, men, and the ruling class.²⁹ It should not be surprising, then, that colonial settlers in the Americas established patriarchal

relations among some Indigenous communities that had previously been matriarchal and more egalitarian.³⁰

These class, gender, and race relations can also be evidenced at a global scale in an international division of labor.³¹ It is no accident that the West, with its colonial heritage and subsequent higher gross domestic product, is often able to force poorer countries to serve their economic and political interests. The North American Free Trade Agreement is one example of this, wherein restrictions have been lifted to allow the United States (and to a lesser extent Canada) to push out rural communities and take over land and resources, as well as supplant local business with their maquiladora industries. Another example is the various wars waged against the Middle East for oil.³² The winners have consistently been the West (the United States in particular) and big business, who get little push back from those who perceive racialized countries as “backward” and “dependent.” The outsourcing of almost everything (including surrogacy) to these non-Western countries for miniscule wages paid to predominantly female employees and sometimes children is perceived as “helping” them, with little understanding that the reason these countries are in need of “help” is because Western empires have systematically exploited their peoples and taken their resources, including through the continued practice of land grabbing.³³

Migration: Consequence and Fuel of Capital

Although migration has been a human practice since time immemorial, its process, purpose, and consequences have significantly shifted as a result of the global racialized capitalist system. In the Americas, there is evidence that Indigenous peoples have traveled north and south freely for thousands of years, until the creation of national borders through conquest.³⁴ The migration that was part and parcel of a life contingent on respect for the earth and its changing conditions came to a halt as capitalist fervor turned land into property and nations into “imagined communities” ideologically bound together by the protection and development of “their” country against a racialized “Other.”³⁵ In the United States, the development of “legal papers” to enter a “foreign” country was applied to peoples whose ancestors had been traveling through and often living on the same lands, while the colonizing settlers were given the status of “citizen.” Upon this new order, immigration became seen as an individual decision divorced from international economic and political conditions.

Survival and life opportunities, including family reunification, have always been crucial factors in migration. We can think to the time of the

potato famine in Ireland, which brought thousands of peasant families to the so-called New World. Consider also migration due to the climate crisis, or the significant exodus of peoples escaping war, both historically and currently, as with the hundreds of Syrian refugees seeking safety today. In each case, migration is part of a broader global economic and political context of imperialism, colonialism, environmental racism, and so on.

While the potato famine has been described in most history texts as an unfortunate ecological disaster that destroyed the livelihood of thousands of farming communities, farmers in Ireland, then a colony, were dependent on the potato because monocrop farming made Ireland dependent on England in ways that were to be replicated across most colonized countries. Monocrop production, controlled initially by the colonial empire and later by foreign-owned (mostly Western) corporations, left the “developing” world significantly vulnerable and dependent on the export of the particular crop. This was certainly also the case in Mexico and Central and South America, wherein the U.S. United Fruit Company became the greatest corporate entity of the Americas, making billions off the people and their lands. While the United Fruit Company was decreed unlawful, other foreign-owned corporations have followed suit, making foreign investment in Latin America one of the greatest processes by which to accumulate capital for big business. The U.S. government, often a puppet of big business and eager to retain its political power in the world, was the brains behind the North American Free Trade Agreement, which lessens foreign trade restrictions, facilitates foreign access to land and resources, and allows for the hyperexploitation of Mexican and Indigenous peoples. U.S. intervention across Latin America has a long history, but suffice it to say that the economic dependency that has resulted in U.S. corporate investment, which in turn has made U.S. business and the U.S. government very interested in the political climate of the region, has given the United States significant room to manipulate local elections throughout the Americas and to develop a war on drugs, responsible for much violence and thousands of deaths.

Although some argue that the turmoil faced within some countries is a function of their state of development, the *rate* of development, often associated with moral and intellectual superiority leading to innovation and infrastructure, can easily be recognized as a function of the “developed” world’s (Global North’s) expropriation and exploitation imposed on the less “developed” world (Global South). Migration is a global issue intricately tied to a racialized capitalist system.

Neither *Yanqui* arrogance nor their deadly machinations are sufficient to combat peoples’ needs for survival. Out of economic necessity or run-

ning from political persecution, people from Latin America and around the world come seeking entry to the United States—with and without papers—in search of a better life, one with greater economic security and opportunity for their children. And both their families (and the governments) encourage them to do so because the remittances that are sent back to the country of origin are critical to their families and to the countries' survival. Poor countries depend on these remittances that collectively amount to billions of dollars in revenue each year.³⁶

However, the disdain that migrant communities often face in the industrialized world and is reflected in nationalist dogma that suggest immigrants take “our” resources must be understood as a falsehood, especially given the deadly origins of U.S. colonial settlement. Within industrialized nations, immigrant, particularly undocumented immigrant, populations are depended on as pools of cheap labor necessary to maintain the countries' higher levels of development. Consider that, in the United States, even as the political rhetoric of closing borders intensifies and deportations increase, guest-worker programs, which have been likened to slave labor, are planned for expansion.³⁷ The type of jobs that immigrant workers, especially undocumented immigrants, take are those that U.S. workers are less likely to accept because they are back-breaking and/or offer extremely low wages and reprehensible working conditions.³⁸

Although often perceived as a gender-neutral phenomenon, the feminization of migration is increasingly being acknowledged, with women making up almost half of all migrants worldwide (47 percent), many of them migrating alone or with their children. As with men, women are not only pushed to migrate for survival and life opportunities, but they are also pulled by the labor demands of the “developed” world. David Titensor and Fethi Mansouri argue that a “crisis of care” is putting migrant women in high demand within the industrialized world.³⁹ Specifically, the majority of migration to the United States is made up of women (58 percent).⁴⁰ Immigrant women are often the backbone of particular sectors of the economy in the United States, especially in domestic work and the garment industry. Both sectors highly exploit women with cheap wages and unregulated labor. Domestic labor is especially vital to the economy and to the narrative of opportunity. Poor and middle-class families that depend on two incomes for social mobility necessitate a cheap labor force to take over the caring work that otherwise would fall on the women in the family. Immigrant women and the low wages they are paid allow for more affluent (usually white) women to work for better wages and pursue education and other types of professional lives.⁴¹ It is also clear, then, that the advancement of the goals of equality of the predominantly white

women's movement is highly contingent on immigrant women, who end up caring for other people's families while forced to leave their own children unattended. Undoubtedly, capitalism is a global racialized and gendered economic system that preys on the working poor across the world.

Pandemic

Inevitably, crisis under capitalism means a greater negative impact on people of color. The COVID-19 pandemic devastating the world has highlighted the racialization of capitalism. It is no accident that the United States, the most hypercapitalist society, has had the greatest number of infected peoples and the highest overall death toll. In early June, confirmed cases in the United States reached two million with over a 110,000 deaths.⁴² The arrogance of the Donald Trump administration, which failed to recognize the recommendations of scientists and the medical profession, along with a lack of care for the most vulnerable to the pandemic, has led to preventable death tolls. Although some states, including New York, are showing a decrease in cases, political leaders in various states, even some hard hit, have prematurely begun to open up businesses (even high-contact ones) that have been shut down to all but essential workers for the past month, which will result in greater risk.

The pandemic has hit communities with a long history of economic inequality, racist discrimination, and government neglect the hardest, resulting in a disproportional number of deaths within Black communities. Specifically, the deep South has always been a dangerous place for Black peoples. In the state of Louisiana, for example, reminiscent of the excruciatingly slow response to help victims of Katrina, it was found that, by April 9, 70 percent of those who had died from COVID-19 were Black, despite the fact that only 32 percent of the state population is Black.⁴³ This scenario is being replicated not only across all Jim Crow states in the deep South, but more broadly across the country.⁴⁴ Unfortunately, data on infected cases, treatment, and deaths by race are either not being systematically collected or released.

The American Medical Association has refuted any speculation about biological or genetic factors that may make certain racialized groups more susceptible to the virus.⁴⁵ Instead, it has rightly noted that the greater vulnerability that Black peoples face has to do with the structural inequalities and racism they experience in society. Specifically, they point to the fact that they have less access to health care due to economic disparity and lack of insurance, as well as the predominantly white health professionals' tendency to dismiss their symptoms rather than test and treat them. This racist bias can be exacerbated (conscious-

ly and subconsciously) when shortages of testing and treatments exist.⁴⁶ These racist and death-threatening conditions have persisted in Black communities for generations, such that Black people are more likely to develop chronic illness, such as diabetes, hypertension, and heart disease, at disproportionate rates and earlier in life, making them much more vulnerable to COVID-19.⁴⁷ Due to lack of affordable health care, Black people are likely to seek medical attention when symptoms persist and their prognoses are more severe, adding to their vulnerability. This “perfect storm” is also true of Indigenous and Latinx communities due to similar racist conditions.

Consider, for example, that jobs in the United States are highly classed, raced, and gendered. Factory work has large numbers of workers who work side by side in cramped quarters. Such spaces allow for the easy spread of the virus. It is, thus, not surprising that the meat-packing industries, which employ predominantly immigrant workers, have seen significant outbreaks. Yet, it seems that the Trump administration perceives these workers’ lives to be expendable, as it calls for the meat-packing industry to remain open despite the risk to workers.⁴⁸

Indigenous peoples are also at higher risk. Disease brought on by white settlers has a long history of spreading and wiping out Native tribes. Their susceptibility to diseases has continued as a result of poverty and lack of resources. Native Americans living on Indian reservations often lack water, sanitation, and good health care services. More than a quarter of Indigenous peoples under age 65 lack health insurance. Like other communities of color, Native peoples have greater probabilities of having diabetes and other conditions that put them at higher risk for COVID-19. The Navajo Nation, for example, reports more coronavirus cases per capita than any U.S. state.⁴⁹

In addition, working-class peoples, who in the United States are overwhelmingly overrepresented in communities of color, are more vulnerable due to their lack of resources, including having to travel on crowded buses and subways. Other communities that are at high risk are people in prisons, detention centers, and refugee camps, where infections spread quickly and widely. These spaces are overwhelmingly Black and Latinx due to the prison-industrial complex that targets Black and Brown bodies for caging and unpaid (or almost unpaid) labor. *The Intercept* reports that the spread of the virus in ICE detention centers has led to a court order demanding the release of seven hundred immigrants who have either tested positive for COVID-19 or who are at high risk. The detainees have been communicating with the outside world electronically and, in one women’s detention center in Irwin County, Georgia, the

women have reported their significant fears of the spread of the virus due to “overcrowding and deficient sanitation.” The report documents how the women have been abusively retaliated against for speaking publicly about the conditions they face.⁵⁰

The economic disparities that exist in the United States are surely to be exacerbated by the economic recession already being felt. The most vulnerable are inevitably those who work for hourly wages without benefits or the ability to have any savings to fall back on when jobs are lost. According to *Global Citizen*, the most likely to face the greatest economic costs are women of color. Homeless people, most of them people of color, also face new trials as a closed society leaves them with few avenues for shelter, food, and other basic needs.⁵¹

Poor students also face disparities in terms of access to education, which is heightened as students and teachers move to web-based learning, since poor students are less likely to have access to computers, the Internet, books, and other resources that more affluent students usually have. Again, the poorest students are found in “inner city schools,” many of which are 100 percent or almost 100 percent minority schools. Immigrant or second-generation immigrant students whose parents do not speak English may also lack the support necessary for the asynchronous learning currently taking up at least half the school day. Many poor students are having to do all of their schoolwork in less than adequate learning spaces, without a desk or a quiet space, perhaps even sitting on the bed or the floor.

Women of color in this pandemic are at higher risk across the world and in the United States. While data is lagging on the impact of COVID-19 on people of color, even less data is attending to the intersections of race and gender. Yet, we only need to know that women of color face the worst economic conditions and have the least access to health care in almost every country in the world. Furthermore, as the expected caretakers of the family, women are often forgoing their own safety to take care of their children and elderly relatives who present symptoms of the virus. There is also a greater number of women in the health care professions across the world (90 percent), including in the United States (78 percent).

Hope: Women of Color

Capitalism produces many contradictions. Those made most vulnerable under capitalism are also indispensable to the system and, therefore, have the collective power to bring the system down. Crisis heightens inequalities and oppression, but it also makes these more visible, revealing the greed and exploitation that creates such conditions, and daring the

world to once again turn a blind eye. Capitalism has both grown out of and further produced relations of racialized and gendered domination. We cannot hope to effectively develop a socialist alternative based on equality and democracy as long as these relations remain unchallenged. A Marxist socialist alternative can only develop when we work to challenge all systems of oppression and build a society that recognizes the inherent, equal value of every life, including that of the earth that sustains us.

While these systems of oppression often appear to be separate structures, a socialist alternative must encompass antiracist and antisexist efforts, which inherently challenge capitalism's class relations. Although historically forgotten or ignored, working women's important contributions to revolutionary movements across the world are increasingly being recognized. Women of color, as one of the most oppressed groups in the world, are an especially vital revolutionary subject. Their intersectional experiences can and do bring people together across multiple identities, striking against long-established, white, and patriarchal notions of organizing that have reinforced and perpetuated the relations of domination at the heart of capitalism.⁵² Their experiences of oppression, marginalized on various fronts, provide key insights into how to move in the world in ways that create a path of unity and love for each other and the world.

Notes

1. Jim Blaut, "Colonialism and the Rise of Capitalism," *Science and Society* 53, no. 3 (1989): 260-96; Joseph E. Inikori and Stanley L. Engerman, eds., *The Atlantic Slave Trade* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992).
2. Meng Zhao, "The Media, Education, and the State: Arts-Based Research and a Marxist Analysis of the Syrian Refugee Crisis" (PhD dissertation, Chapman University, 2019), 8.
3. Fatih Çağatay Cengiz, "Race and Religion in South Africa and Turkey's Sub-Imperialist Expansion," *Politikon* 46, no. 3, (2019): 257-74.
4. Ramon Grosfoguel, "The Structure of Knowledge in Westernized Universities: Epistemic Racism/Sexism and the Four Genocides/Epistemicides of the Long 16th Century," *Human Architecture* 11, no. 1 (2013): 73-90.
5. Lise Vogel, *Woman Questions: Essays for a Materialist Feminism* (New York: Routledge, 1995).
6. Peter McLaren and Yan Wang, "US Needs to Move Away from Its Blame-China Trajectory," *China Daily*, April 13, 2020.
7. Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1 (London: Penguin, 1976), 414.
8. Karl Marx, "Letter to Sigfrid Meyer and August Vogt," April 9, 1870, in *Selected Correspondence*, Karl Marx and Frederick Engels (Moscow: Progress, 1975), 220-24, available at marxists.org.
9. Marx, "Letter to Sigfrid Meyer and August Vogt."
10. Richard Wolff, *Capitalism's Crisis Deepens: Essays on the Global Economic Meltdown* (Chicago: Haymarket, 2016).
11. Lilia D. Monzó, "Marxist-Humanist Perspectives on Race, Gender, and Immigration," *International Marxist-Humanist*, August 3, 2018.
12. Wolff, *Capitalism's Crisis Deepens*.
13. Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, 874.
14. Kevin Anderson, *Marx at the Margins* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).
15. Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, 532.
16. Peter Hudis, "The Dialectic of the Spatial Determination of Capital," *Logos* 13, no. 1-2 (2014).
17. Hudis, "The Dialectic of the Spatial Determination of Capital."
18. Evelyn Nakano Glenn, "Settler Colonialism as Structure: A Framework for Comparative Studies of U.S. Race and Gender Formation," *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity* 1, no. 1 (2015): 54-74.
19. Lilia D. Monzó and Peter McLaren, "The Future Is Marx: Bringing Back Class and Changing the World—Revolutionary Critical Pedagogy as Moral Imperative," in *International Handbook of Progressive Education*, ed. M. Y. Eryaman & B. C. Bruce (New York: Peter Lang, 2015): 643-70.
20. Fred Magdoff, "Twenty-First-Century Land Grabs," *Monthly Review* 65, no. 6 (November 2013): 1-18.
21. Alex Callinicos, *Race and Class* (London: Bookmarks, 1993).
22. Walter Mignolo, "Epistemic Disobedience, Independent Thought and Decolonial Freedom," *Theory, Culture and Society* 26, no. 7-8 (2009): 159-81.

23. Grosfoguel, "The Structure of Knowledge in Westernized Universities."
24. Grosfoguel, "The Structure of Knowledge in Westernized Universities," 77.
25. Maria Mies, *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale: Women in the International Division of Labour* (London: Zed, 2014).
26. Mark Dyble, Gul D. Salali, Nikhil Chaudhary, Abigail Page, Daniel Smith, James Thompson, Lucio Vinicius, Ruth Mace, and Andrea B. Migliano, "Sex Equality Can Explain the Unique Social Structure of Hunter-Gatherer Bands," *Science* 348 (2015): 796–98.
27. Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch* (Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 2004).
28. Vogel, *Woman Questions*.
29. Lilia D. Monzó, *A Revolutionary Subject: Pedagogy of Women of Color and Indigeneity* (New York: Peter Lang, 2019).
30. Diane-Michele Prindeville, "Feminist Nations? A Study of Native American Women in Southwestern Tribal Politics," *Political Research Quarterly* 57, no. 1 (2004): 101–12.
31. Mies, *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale*.
32. William I. Robinson, *Global Capitalism and the Crisis of Humanity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014).
33. Magdoff, "Twenty-First-Century Land Grabs."
34. Carlos G. Véllez-Ibáñez, *Border Visions: Mexican Cultures of the Southwest United States* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1996).
35. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 2016).
36. David Tittensor and Fethi Mansouri, "The Feminisation of Migration?," in *The Politics of Women and Migration in the Global South*, ed. Tittensor and Mansouri (London: Palgrave Pivot, 2017), 11–25.
37. "Guestworker Program," *Farmworker Justice*, accessed April, 24, 2020.
38. Monzó, "Marxist-Humanist Perspectives on Race, Gender, and Immigration."
39. Tittensor and Mansouri, "The Feminisation of Migration?"
40. "Gender and Migration," Migration Data Portal, accessed April 24, 2020, migrationdataportal.org.
41. Monica Boyd and Elizabeth Grieco, "Women and Migration: Incorporating Gender into International Migration Theory," *Migration Information Source*, March 1, 2003.
42. "Coronavirus Update, United States," *Worldometers*, accessed June 5, 2020.
43. Elizabeth Cooney, "Who Gets Hospitalized for Covid-19? Report Shows Differences by Race and Sex," *STAT*, April 9, 2020.
44. Aletha Maybank, "Why Racial and Ethnic Data on COVID-19's Impact Is Badly Needed," *American Medical Association*, April 8, 2020.
45. "States Tracking COVID-19 Race and Ethnicity Data," *American Medical Association*, April 24, 2020.
46. "COVID-19 FAQs: Health Equity in a Pandemic," *American Medical Association*, April 16, 2020.
47. Cooney, "Who Gets Hospitalized for Covid-19?"
48. "White House Embraces Optimism as Death Toll Surpasses 60,000."
49. Rebecca Klar, "Navajo Nation Reports More Coronavirus Cases Per Capita Than Any US State," *The Hill*, May 11, 2020.
50. Debbie Nathan, "Women in ICE Detention Face Reprisals for Speaking Up About Fears of Covid-19," *Intercept*, April 28, 2020.
51. Leah Rodriguez, "Women of Color Are Experiencing the Biggest Economic Losses Amid COVID-19 Pandemic," *Global Citizen*, April 8, 2020.
52. Monzó, *A Revolutionary Subject*.



The indictment of Africa against Europe is grave. For four hundred years white Europe was the chief support of that trade in human beings which first and last robbed black Africa of a hundred million human beings, transformed the face of her social life, overthrew organized government, distorted ancient industry and snuffed out the lights of cultural development. Today instead of removing laborers from Africa to distant slavery, industry, built on a new slavery, approaches Africa to deprive the natives of their land, to force them to toil, and to reap all the profit for the white world.

— W. E. B. Du Bois,
Darkwater (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Howe, 1920), 57–58.