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## **Intersectionality and decolonisation in Brazilian and Australian feminism**

Keywords: Intersectionality, Global South Feminism, Postcolonial Feminism, Decolonialism, Identity Construction

### **Abstract**

This paper explores the intersection of race and gender in Brazilian and Global South Feminism, focusing on the impact of the Western canon on women's identities, particularly in art history. This exploration reveals how traditional narratives exclude women and how Eurocentric and male-centric perspectives curtail recognition of women's contributions.

Through the lens of postcolonial feminism, which prioritises intersectionality, I argue, as a Brazilian contemporary artist and researcher, that a comprehensive understanding of non-Western women's experiences is required to address the limitations of Western feminist theories. Additionally, I explore the significance of Global South Feminism, which prioritises the struggles and liberation of women in regions burdened by colonial legacies and ongoing political challenges. I advocate for the amplification of marginalised women's voices and for engagement with their unique perspectives and realities.

By critically analysing these perspectives, this paper underscores the need for inclusive and decolonised feminist theories and practices. I call for transformative approaches and inclusive frameworks that promote a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the challenges faced by diverse women within the context of postcolonial and Global South Feminism in Brazil and Australia. Through collective efforts, I aim to navigate pathways towards equity and inclusivity, ensuring that feminist discourses are responsive to the needs and aspirations of all women.

### **Introduction**

In this literature and practice review, I explore the multifaceted nature of Brazilian identity, encompassing themes such as race, ethnicity, gender, colonial legacy and socioeconomic factors. The inquiry, grounded in personal experiences and relevant to both Brazil and Australia, outlines feminist perspectives on the Western canon, postcolonial feminism, Global South Feminism and decolonialism as critical

approaches shaping my research. These critical approaches provide a solid foundation for understanding the intricate interplay of identity, culture and power dynamics within artistic representations and thus significantly guide my PhD research project, which explores how digitally manipulated gendered bodies intersect with complex realms of identity, and challenge conventional perceptions.

### **Global South Feminism**

Global South Feminism is a feminist perspective and movement that emerges from and centres on the experiences, challenges and liberation of women in the Global South – a term encompassing countries and regions in Latin America, the Caribbean, sub-Saharan Africa, South and Southeast Asia, China, South Africa and Oceania, which have historically grappled with colonial legacies, economic disparities and political struggles (Grewal and Kaplan 1994; Mohanty 2003; Spivak 1988). This section explores this feminist perspective which, while speaking primarily to location, also acknowledges the intersectionality of gender with other forms of oppression, such as race, class, ethnicity and sexuality. Such perspectives provide valuable insights into the importance of inclusion, specifically in understanding the unique struggles faced by women in the Global South, and highlight the necessity of employing intersectional approaches to achieve social justice (Carneiro 2016; Crenshaw 1991; Grewal and Kaplan 1994; Mohanty 2003).

Exploring Global South Feminism has led me to recognise the personal dimension of my position as both an artist and a researcher, particularly the dynamic nature of identity within different socio-cultural landscapes. This acknowledgement sets the stage for a nuanced understanding of the interplay between theory and personal experience in the subsequent sections.

### ***Complex positionality***

In the academic and artistic spheres, I perceive my position as a fascinating binary of both privilege and marginalisation. This dual perspective enriches my investigation into identity, shedding light on how my unique standpoint informs a nuanced understanding of the intersectionality of gender and race, challenging societal constructs in distinct cultural contexts. Within this complex position, my research critically engages with the perception of digitally altered gendered bodies through a feminist lens, particularly focusing on the cross-cultural dynamics of Australia and Brazil. As I consider the broader implications of Global South Feminism in these

contexts, my positionality supports the exploration of complexities at the intersections of theory and lived experiences within this feminist perspective.

These cross-cultural dynamics between Brazil and Australia exemplify my complex positionality, shaped by how my body is perceived in both contexts. In the Brazilian context, I am identified as white – a categorisation of particular significance given that approximately 56% of Brazil's population consists of individuals of black or brown ethnicity, who are notably more socioeconomically vulnerable than the white population (Marinho et al., 2021). This socio-economic contrast directly influences my self-identification. The duality in racial identification and its socio-economic implications constitute crucial aspects of the intricate social landscape in Brazil.

Upon transitioning to Australia for my PhD, I observed the intricate intertwining of gender and race due to my distinct racial positionality in this context. According to the Brazilian scholar Ana Martins (2018), multiple factors contribute to my experience of this position. It arises from the perspective that, when viewed from an external Eurocentric standpoint, I am often perceived as a woman of color marginalised in this context – overlooking the intricate complexities inherent in my own positionality. Consequently, my positionality is not fixed but rather diverse and constantly evolving depending on the specific territory I inhabit.

As a Brazilian woman researcher, I am aware of my privilege but also acknowledge my potential marginalisation, shaped by cultural inclinations and historical legacies. Despite my inability to completely disengage myself from the privileges inherent in my background, I must actively attempt in my research to engage with all perspectives to unravel the multifaceted nature of women's experiences. Acknowledging Brazil's ambiguous racial continuum and problematic race ideologies, it becomes even more critical for me to recognise the limitations leading from my privileged positionality within Brazil's context. According to Brazilian feminist activist Sueli Carneiro (2016), black and brown women experience various forms of oppression that go beyond sexism, which leads to their marginalisation and invisibility. An intersectional approach rooted in the experiences of being a woman, a black woman, and economically disadvantaged is crucial (Carneiro 2016). Racism plays a role in devaluing all genders and creating social and intra-gender inequality by using racially dominant achievements as the standard. Attaining equality for black women requires exceptional social mobility, as racism further exacerbates gender

inequality through the exploitation and exclusion of marginalised groups (Carneiro 2016).

By encompassing the complex intersections of race and identity within Brazilian feminism, my academic and artistic exploration recognises privilege while underscoring the crucial necessity for inclusive perspectives that embrace the diverse experiences of women. This continuous effort significantly contributes to discussions on identity and gender dynamics within the Brazilian context. As the subsequent section examines challenges and perspectives in Global South Feminism, these insights broaden the foundation for comprehending my positionality and navigating feminist discourse across diverse cultural and regional contexts.

### ***Challenges and perspectives in Global South Feminism***

Pursuing a more comprehensive and inclusive perspective, Global South Feminism faces challenges within Western-based feminist activism, where their struggles are undermined when connected to a global context (Anyidoho 2021). African scholars, such as Olajumoke Yacob-Haliso and Toyin Falola (2021), express concerns about the lack of recognition and acceptance of knowledge produced on the African continent, both within and outside the continent, due to persistent colonial biases. Addressing the legacies of colonialism and the impact of capitalism, the seminal work of the Indian literary scholar Ania Loomba (1998) highlights the necessity for innovative approaches to comprehend colonial history, freedom, racial hierarchies and gender dynamics. Loomba's (1998) work extends beyond literary analysis to include the examination of historical and cultural texts to explore race, gender and colonialism. Her insights into how colonial and capitalist legacies shape communities and individual identities provide a valuable framework for understanding the challenges faced by Global South women and artists. By connecting Loomba's (1998) scholarship with my research, I can see a shared emphasis on challenging the lack of recognition and diverse representation of Global South women in both literature and art. Her work serves as a crucial foundation for re-evaluating Global South Feminism within Western-based feminist activism, aiming for greater inclusivity and acknowledgment of diverse perspectives (Loomba et al. 1998). This aligns with the broader goals of my research, as we both seek to address and combat the marginalisation of Global South voices.

In this context, the critical examination of my own positionality and active engagement with perspectives that challenge my assumptions are of paramount

importance. Through this process, I seek to expand my comprehension of gendered bodies in a cross-cultural context and generate research that is inclusive and attuned to the diverse experiences of women. While I do acknowledge my privilege relative to other women, particularly black and brown women, I am also mindful that my positionality undergoes a substantial transformation within the Australian context. This shift in perspective allows me to recognise the interconnectedness of race and gender and the mutual influence they exert on each other. Translating these nuanced discussions and experiences across different contexts poses a significant challenge, as the process of translation itself is inherently subjective and prone to bias. It necessitates careful navigation and interpretation to accurately capture the intricacies of meaning and cultural nuances.

The particularities observed within a Brazilian context align with the sociologist Raewyn Connell's (2014) critique of Eurocentric frameworks and dominant narratives that perpetuate inequality and marginalisation. Connell (2014) contends that the tension between global politics and Eurocentric theory has influenced contemporary feminism, which now emphasises global diversity and acknowledges postmodern notions of fluid and multiple identities, as well as local cultural variations. Other scholars, such as Mohanty (2003) and hooks (1984), have also contributed to this discourse, highlighting the need to challenge Western-centric perspectives and embrace intersectionality in feminist theory and activism.

Conversely, the unique circumstances of Australia, marked by a robust economy, sophisticated infrastructure and political stability, result in Australian Global South feminists frequently lacking the firsthand experience of marginalisation. This is reinforced, according to Collyer (2021), by Australia's ambiguous position within the global knowledge system, characterised by a reliance on metrics and a tendency to emulate British, American and European knowledge. By embracing neoliberal policies and integrating into Northern institutions, Australian scholars further align themselves with dominant Northern paradigms. While this benefits the academic elite, it may overshadow alternative sociologies and marginalised perspectives that challenge prevailing norms (Collyer 2021).

Incorporating the perspectives of Olajumoke Yacob-Haliso and Toyin Falola (2021), Loomba (1998), Connell (2014), Mohanty (2003), hooks (1984) and Fran M Collyer (2021) into my research project provides a nuanced understanding of the complexities within the Global South. Their insights address the necessity for a more inclusive and critically informed comprehension to address inequalities and pursue

global justice. Recognising the heterogeneity of experiences, power dynamics and historical legacies is crucial. This understanding underscores the importance of Global South Feminism in tackling the unique challenges faced by women in these marginalised regions and highlights the imperative of centring their perspectives in the broader dialogue on feminist theory and praxis (Essof 2020).

### ***Feminist perspectives on voice exclusion***

Marginalised women in Brazil, particularly black women, share a feeling of detachment from a political legacy that fails to address their struggles against patriarchal social structures (Cardoso 2016). This sentiment, echoed by Brazilian feminist scholar Cláudia Pons Cardoso (2016), myself and others involved in women's political mobilisation, emphasises the exclusion unveiled by critiques of mainstream feminism. The scholarly examination of feminisms and critiques of dominant feminism within Brazil has been constrained, accentuating the imperative for a more comprehensive exploration of the diverse experiences and challenges faced by historically overlooked women within feminist discourse (Cardoso 2016). The narrow focus on specific women's experiences has consequently overshadowed the hardships faced by black, indigenous and economically disadvantaged white women, assimilating them within the framework of dominant feminism. This critical neglect of diverse experiences of resistance against different forms of violence has contributed to their disregard or undervaluation (Cardoso, 2016).

Critiquing mainstream feminist discourse, Global South feminists perceive a lack of literacy considering the diverse experiences and needs of women in the Global South (Grewal and Kaplan 1994; Mohanty 2003; Spivak 1988). Their perspective advocates for inclusive and decolonised feminist theories and practices that reflect the realities and aspirations of women within their specific social, cultural and political environments. Scholars Gina Heathcote and Lucia Kula (2023), Josephine Beoku-Betts, and Akosua Adomako Ampofo (2021) address the perpetuation of excluding voices from the Global South, offering distinct perspectives on such exclusion and examining how researchers' social locations shape their understanding of marginalised communities (Grosz 1994; hooks 1984; Mohanty 2003; Narayan 1997; Spivak 1988). This critical examination emphasises the importance of reflexivity and collaboration with local scholars to challenge colonial structures in knowledge production (Haraway 1988; Harding 1991; Lorde 1984; Mohanty 2003; Smith 1999).

Expanding on these feminists' critiques of knowledge production, Raewyn Connell et al. (2017) argue that researchers in peripheral countries predominantly reference texts written by authors from the Global North, while researchers in the North tend to cite each other's work while largely disregarding the ideas and studies produced by researchers from the Global South. This pattern of citation and knowledge production creates a structure where knowledge originating from the Global North is considered the standard to aspire to, thus limiting the potential for diversity and innovation within different disciplines (Connell et al. 2017). Although recognising the interest of Global North scholars in bridging the sociological gap and generating empirical insights in Global South settings, as seen in Catherine Walsh's (2010) work acknowledging the importance of decolonial thought and the political-epistemic influence of Afro-Andean and Indigenous movements, there is a pressing need to critically examine this production of knowledge. This examination considers the agents involved in knowledge production, and the voices that are either included or excluded from the process (Hill Collins 2000; Smith 1999; Spivak 1999).

To address the exclusion of feminist voices, Global South Feminism holds the potential to create spaces for mutual learning, interactive thinking, and theoretical discussions that encompass diverse voices and broader agendas within the global counterpublic (Connell 2014). Integrating postcolonialism into this approach can contribute to a more comprehensive and inclusive understanding of gender dynamics and intersectionality in feminist theory and practice. This interdisciplinary exploration, influenced by diverse knowledge and power structures, has the potential to unveil new possibilities for experimentation and discovery (Millner and Moore 2022), ultimately enriching ongoing discussions about the perception of gendered bodies within the visual arts and broader society.

### **Postcolonial feminism**

Postcolonial feminism, arising in response to perceived Eurocentric limitations in Western feminist theories, offers a critical lens for understanding the diverse experiences of women in non-Western contexts (Bhabha 2004; Mohanty 1984; Parashar 2016; Rajan and Park 2005; Spivak 1988). This perspective facilitates my exploration of identity interconnectedness across cultural boundaries, enabling an examination of multifaceted identity within Brazilian and Australian contexts.

### ***Exploring postcolonial feminism in Brazil***

Postcolonial feminism acknowledges that the colonial legacy has resulted in the imposition of cultural norms and stereotypes on colonised peoples and has shaped contemporary societies and their gender relations (Lewis and Mills 2013). Furthermore, the process of colonisation embeds structural and institutional racism. According to Lewis and Mills (2013), black and third-world feminist theorists particularly criticised the excessive focus on white concerns in traditional feminist thought. In Brazil, postcolonial feminists comprehensively examine the historical legacies of colonialism and its enduring impacts on women's lives (Bahri 2013; Spivak 1988). By critically examining these dynamics, they challenge patriarchal and colonial frameworks, actively addressing issues of women's agency, rights, inequality and social protection (Economic and Affairs 2020; Mohanty 1984; Spivak 1988).

Prominent figures within the field of postcolonial feminism in Brazil have made significant contributions that have shaped its development and discourse. Afro-Brazilian feminist activist-writer Lélia Gonzalez (2022) has provided critical insights into the interconnected struggles for gender and racial justice, focusing on the intersectionality of racism and sexism and their impact on black women in Brazil. Gonzalez (2022) challenges the prevailing notion of Brazil as a racially harmonious society by unveiling the hidden manifestations of Africanness and highlighting the violent effects of intersecting oppressions. Additionally, scholars such as Heleieth Saffioti (1992) and Sueli Carneiro (2016) have played influential roles in shaping the theoretical foundations and praxis of postcolonial feminism in Brazil. Sociologist Saffioti (1992) has contributed to the theoretical foundations of postcolonial feminism in Brazil by deconstructing binary classifications and examining the phallogocentric ontology inherent in Cartesian scientific thought. Saffioti (1992) emphasises the significance of understanding social identities, including gender, class and ethnicity, as shaping the multifaceted nature of the subject, thereby challenging the notion of a singular social agent. Philosopher and activist Carneiro (2016) has played a pivotal role in advocating for a more inclusive Brazilian feminism that acknowledges the diverse experiences and inequalities among women. Carneiro (2016) introduces the concept of 'blackening feminism' to highlight the need for a specific Black Feminist lens that confronts racism alongside gender inequality, recognising the dominant influence of white and Western perspectives in traditional feminist theory (3). Together, the contributions of Gonzalez (2022), Saffioti (1992) and Carneiro (2016) have enriched the discourse of postcolonial feminism in Brazil, highlighting the importance of intersectionality, challenging Eurocentric and phallogocentric frameworks,



and advocating for a more inclusive and diverse feminist movement that addresses the specific struggles of black women and other marginalised groups.

Promoting intersectionality becomes essential to grasp the diverse realities and power dynamics experienced by women in Brazil. The complexity of power relations in Brazil is acknowledged, considering factors such as miscegenation and the impact of colonial legacies on women's lives (Gonzalez 1988, 2022; Saffioti 2001).

Postcolonial feminist scholar Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988) emphasises the importance of recognising the uniqueness of each discourse within the women's movement, each possessing its own distinct vocabulary, narratives and regulations (Polatdemir and Binder 2015; Spivak 1988). This understanding underscores the need to address diverse voices and perspectives, rejecting a single approach within the feminist movement. By adopting a feminist approach that embraces these diverse experiences, such as Black Feminism in Brazil, I seek a more comprehensive understanding of women's lived experiences.

### ***Challenges in Brazilian Black Feminism***

Exploring Black Feminism in Brazil presents a challenge in terms of using analytical categories that accurately reflect the experiences of women of colour (Cardoso, 2016). Unlike the term 'women of colour' in the United States, which encompasses various racial and ethnic groups, Black Feminism in Brazil primarily centres on the experiences of black women and their specific struggles within the country's racial hierarchy (Cardoso 2016; Carneiro and Camargo 2016). This focus is rooted in Brazil's history of slavery and racial mixing, which has created a distinct racial dynamic and a unique set of challenges for black women (Cardoso 2016; Carneiro and Camargo 2016). Additionally, some feminist activists advocate for an intersectional approach to Brazilian feminism, addressing the diverse needs of Brazilian women and incorporating a black perspective (Cardoso 2016). This perspective recognises the impact of heterosexist and patriarchal racism on the position of black women and informs their political agenda and relationship to various aspects of life (Crenshaw 1991; Gonzalez 1988; Hill Collins 2000; hooks 1981). Black Feminism in Brazil is complex due to nuanced racial identities influenced by factors like appearance, geographic region, social class, age and gender. Gender plays a role in how people are identified racially, with women facing stigma for the category 'preta' and negative connotations for the term 'negra' (Pereira and Siqueira 2022:6). Racial self-identification is also influenced by tradition, culture, ancestry and political positioning (Pereira and Siqueira 2022). Furthermore, both external and

internal categorisation are impacted by racist connections and the connotations associated with the black race. This leads to a preference for lighter colour categories, such as 'moreno', a phenomenon referred to as 'the ideology of bleaching' or bleaching referenced by intellectuals like Gonzalez (1988).

In a multicultural country like Brazil, this approach raises important questions about the relationship between feminism and anti-racism and calls for a genuine commitment to confronting racism within feminist practice. This commitment involves actively challenging and addressing racism, as well as critically examining the privileges held by white feminists in order to foster a more inclusive and equitable feminist movement (Cardoso, 2016). Recognising the role of race in feminism is crucial, considering the significance of this issue in shaping the situation of women in Brazil and the country's demographics (Cardoso 2016; Carneiro and Fischmann 2005). For instance, Carneiro (2005) emphasises that social indicators from the IBGE (Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics) revealed an increase in the number of black individuals, largely attributed to the efforts of associations and entities promoting black identity. This shift challenges the notion of whitening and suggests a rotation at the ideological level within Brazilian society.

This intersectional approach is central to my research concerns, which involve how gendered bodies are shaped by culture and gender identity. As hooks (1981) argues, it is essential to acknowledge the unique experiences of black women and other marginalised groups in the fight against oppression. Likewise, according to the feminist theorist Crenshaw (1991), intersectionality is not just a theoretical framework but a lived experience that must be addressed by social justice movements.

Exploring the intricate and interconnected dynamics of gender, identity, culture and oppression, activist artists like Juliana Notari demonstrate the profound impact of art as a potent medium for conveying narratives that embrace the diversity of experiences and identities within marginalised communities. Juliana Notari's artwork [Diva \(2020\)](#) is a prime example. This thought-provoking sculpture (figure 1), intricately delves into the enduring colonial traumas, wounds and traumatic legacies that persistently strive for recognition and reparation. The sculpture's form, resembling a vulva, serves as a metaphor for the intersection of colonial and patriarchal violence, challenging societal attempts to obscure these issues (Sybaris 2020). Notari's work informed my *Palimpsest Series IV* (figure 2), which explores similar themes through a deliberate choice of elements such as colour, contour, form

and gesture, to investigate the cultural aspects inherent to both Brazil and Australia shaping my identity.

Within this intricate cross-cultural narrative, the choice of the colour red takes on profound significance, alluding to the violence associated with colonial legacies and inherent in the experience of womanhood within a patriarchal society, transcending cultural and social boundaries to become a universal reminder of the challenges faced by women. This choice mirrors Notari's use of form in *Diva* (2020), where the vulva-shaped wound addresses the patriarchal underpinnings of society. In my photograph, the shape of the wound on my face resembles a gunshot wound, further emphasising the theme of violence. Like a bullet piercing through my consciousness, the vivid imagery encapsulates the harsh reality of womanhood. Within this composition, the apparent feminine form not only communicates gender but also carries weighty semantic and political significance. The element of water mixed with blood, immersing my body while leaving only my face and long hair visible, adds another layer of symbolism. This immersion represents the blurring of boundaries between individual and collective trauma, highlighting the pervasive nature of the violence being addressed. Deliberately small in relation to the enveloping darkness, my body emphasises the prevalence of obscurity, establishing a metaphorical space where fears associated with my body's spatial relationship and my role as a woman find sanctuary. This darkness becomes symbolic of my condition, providing a haven for the unseen and unheard dimensions of my experience.



Figure 11: Juliana Notari (2020), *Diva*. Digital image.



Figure 22: Patricia Amorim (2023), *Palimpsest Series IV*. Digital image.

Situated within the realm of artistic representation, this exploration adopts a dialogical approach, drawing on the insights of art historian Marsha Meskimmon (2016) and artist and writer Phil Sawdon (2016) as discussed in their collaborative work, *Drawing Difference: Connections Between Gender and Drawing* (2003). Their approach, through diverse feminist artworks, aims to dismantle the rigidity of binary thinking and challenge established dichotomies, particularly those reinforced by dualism through the imposition of borders and boundaries (Meskimmon and Sawdon 2016). Engaging in conversation and dialogue within this framework, characterised by physical interaction, a desire for agency, and the possibility of limitless exchanges between subjects and objects, fosters transgressions (Meskimmon and Sawdon 2016). These transgressions go beyond the limits of gender, extending into broader areas that include genres and intellectual discourse (Meskimmon and Sawdon 2016). Ideas of transgression and dialogue are present in my *Palimpsest Series IV*, where the gesture of looking directly at the viewer serves as an intentional act of confrontation, challenging the viewer to acknowledge and confront the depicted violence.

My artistic practice aims to bring to the forefront specific concerns related to the enduring legacies of colonialism and patriarchy, prompting viewers to confront these issues within the theoretical contexts explored in my research, fostering a more nuanced understanding of the interplay between gender, identity and culture, particularly within the Brazilian context. Additionally, incorporating elements from my experiences in Western Australia, such as the darkening of my body and its

immersion in water in my artwork, reflects my sense of invisibility in this context. These artistic choices reveal that my exploration transcends national borders, highlighting the importance of acknowledging the distinct features shaped by each cultural context. This approach underscores the diversity of experiences and perspectives within the broader discussions of gender and identity.

### ***Embracing Diverse Perspectives***

Postcolonialism has been effective in recognising the lack of diverse voices within its discourse, but it still fails to address the issue of who controls the narrative (Said 1995; Spivak 1988). Narrative, here, refers to how stories and personal accounts can be used to assert the voice and representation of marginalised individuals and communities (Spivak 1988). The dominant narrative still comes from the North and the Eurocentric perspective, which reinforces white privilege and perpetuates the unequal distribution of power in knowledge production and discourse (Bhabha 2004; hooks 1984; Mohanty 1984; Said 1995; Spivak 1988). From my perspective as a feminist Latin American artist living and conducting research in Australia, I am directly impacted by the colonial legacy in terms of my positionality within academia and artistic practice; ongoing racism shapes my experiences and perspectives. In this context, the racism I refer to encompasses a broader discrimination against non-white people, rather than specifically targeting First Australians. However, it is important to acknowledge that in the Australian context, discussions of colonialism often imply the latter.

The impact of the colonial legacy on knowledge production is significant, and shows how postcolonial feminist perspectives extend beyond the Global South, addressing communities affected by colonialism and systemic inequalities. One example of this broader application is the exploration of indigenous women's experiences in countries of the Global North through postcolonial feminist lenses (Arvin et al. 2013). In these contexts, postcolonial feminism emphasises intersectionality, examining the intertwined nature of gender, race and class within power systems and colonial histories (hooks 1984; Mohanty 2003; Spivak 1988). This interdisciplinary exploration contributes to ongoing discussions about gendered bodies in the visual arts and society, acknowledging the privilege of Western discourse and the importance of recognising diverse voices, particularly from the Global South (Connell 2020; Grosz 1994; hooks 1984; Mohanty 2003; Narayan 1997; Spivak 1988). By also interrogating the position of scholars like Connell with respect to the individuals they speak for, postcolonial feminists seek to navigate the complex terrain which addresses the

power dynamics inherent in knowledge production (Grosz 1994; hooks 1984; Mohanty 2003; Narayan 1997; Spivak 1988).

Expanding on power dynamics and identity construction, postcolonial feminist theory delves into the intersection of language and power, analysing their role in constructing gendered identities. Griselda Pollock (2003) emphasises language's influence on gender understanding, revealing how societal positions are constructed, maintained and confronted. Pollock (2003) argues that we must consider societies in which we live from viewpoints in which certain individuals are differentiated between centred and decentred. Centred positions are individuals considered the norm in society, while recentred positions are those of marginalised individuals (Pollock 1999).

Understanding the construction, maintenance and confrontation of these societal positions is essential when it comes to dismantling and reforming structures of inequality. This perspective provides a critical understanding of society and culture, which is not a static endeavour but rather one that is influenced by different interactions and arrangements of power and knowledge (Crenshaw 1991; Hill Collins 2000; hooks 1984; Lorde 1984). These insights drawn from Postcolonial feminist theory seamlessly integrate into this PhD research topic's broader framework, firmly situating the study within a decolonial perspective. This approach recognises the multifaceted subjectivities and agency of gendered bodies, challenging the rigid gender categories enforced by dominant power structures.

### **Decolonialism**

Decolonialism, as both an intellectual and political movement addressing the enduring effects of colonialism, acknowledges its pervasive impact on postcolonial societies (Fanon 1968; Young 2001). Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) underscores that decolonisation is an ongoing process encompassing various aspects of identity, including race, ethnicity, gender, colonial legacy and socioeconomic status. This movement challenges Eurocentric and Western-centric frameworks, critiquing the universalisation of Western knowledge systems and advocating for the validation of diverse perspectives and knowledge tradition (Mohanty 2003; Quijano 2000).

### ***Confronting racial inequality and cultural hegemony***

Much like the discussions on Brazilian feminism and postcolonial perspectives highlighted in the previous section, the decolonial movement in Brazil similarly

confronts and dismantles the enduring influences of colonialism on the nation's social, cultural and economic fabric (Almeida and Bezerra 2019; Paiva 2021; Santos and Meneses 2019). Scholars such as Tânia MP Müller (2018), Lourenço Cardoso (2018), Sueli Carneiro (2005), Juliana Cabral de O Dutra (2019), Claudia Mayorga (2019) and Ana Cláudia Lemos Pacheco (2017), stress the importance of analysing racial dynamics within the unique context of Brazil and emphasise the need for all racial groups, including those with privileges, to actively engage in dismantling racial injustices (Carneiro and Fischmann 2005; Dutra and Mayorga 2019; Müller and Cardoso 2018).

The myth of racial democracy is challenged by scholars like Carneiro (2005), who exposes the fallacy of harmonious race relations, and Cabral de O Dutra (2019) and Claudia Mayorga (2019), who highlight the exclusion of indigenous peoples from discussions on racism. This exclusion perpetuates marginalisation and hampers indigenous resistance movements within the broader struggle for racial justice. Lemos Pacheco (2017) underscores the impact of racial classification on individuals' experiences, urging a broader discourse that includes diverse racial perspectives to dismantle persisting inequalities. The decolonial perspective on Brazil's racial issues aims to acknowledge power dynamics within whiteness, challenge the racial democracy myth, include indigenous experiences and promote inclusive dialogues on race rights (Carneiro 2005; Carneiro and Camargo 2016; Fleuri 2018; Rosevics 2017).

Overall, decolonialism in Brazil seeks a transformative and inclusive society that dismantles colonial power structures and promotes the recognition and appreciation of diverse cultures, histories and identities (Ballestrin 2013; Fleuri 2018; Rosevics 2017). It aims to foster social and political change by challenging enduring hierarchies based on race, class, gender and ethnicity that perpetuate inequalities and marginalise certain groups (Fanon 1968; Mignolo 2012).

### ***Decolonial feminism in Brazil***

Decolonial feminism recognises the enduring impacts of colonialism on women's lives, emphasising the colonality of gender – a complex interplay of economic, racialising and gendering systems that subalternised women through socialisation, colonisation, capitalist exploitation and heterosexualism (Lugones 2010). This perspective aims to confront and dismantle intersecting systems of oppression, such as gender, race, class and colonialism, and advocates for inclusivity and diversity

within feminist movements (Lugones 2010; Vergès and Bohrer 2021). The focus is on empowering marginalised women and building alliances to create a more equitable and just society (Lugones 2010).

As various peripheral and subaltern feminisms, decolonial feminism in Brazil challenges the dominance of Eurocentric feminism, critiquing its western, white, universalist and Eurocentric features. Furthermore, the decolonial perspective critically analyses the dynamics between different groups of women and questions how certain forms of feminism may have been sustained by the exploitation of women from marginalised communities within their own countries (Dimenstein et al. 2020). Acknowledging complex and ever-changing social relationships, decolonial feminism advocates for a return to local contexts to reinterpret history and dismantle the Eurocentric matrix of oppression (Dimenstein et al. 2020).

In the context of decolonised feminism within the artistic perspective, Andrea Giunta (2021), an art historian and curator, not only recognises the growing acknowledgement of Latin American art facilitated by curatorial policies and research endeavours but also sheds light on the historical underrepresentation and marginalisation of African-Latin American artists, particularly women. Drawing on the insights of Brazilian theorist Djamira Ribeiro and Portuguese theorist Grada Quilomba, Giunta (2021) emphasises the dual obstacles faced by black women artists, confronting both gender-based and racial prejudices throughout the course of Latin American art history.

These obstacles are exemplified in the performance of the Brazilian artist Priscila Rezende, [Bombriil \(2021\)](#) (figure 3), which presents spectators with a literal interpretation of a well-known brand of steel wool, which concurrently has negative associations related to black women's hair. The artist's performance delves into the intricate and deeply rooted cultural connection, using her own hair as a tool to cleanse cookware, so symbolically challenging and evaluating mainstream interpretations of Black hair. This performance, along with the artistic contributions of other Afro-Brazilian artists, has significantly expanded the discourse within contemporary Brazilian art, introducing narratives rooted in personal subjectivities and enunciations deeply intertwined with the legacies of slavery, the diaspora, and the pervasive structural racism within Brazilian society.





Figure 3: Priscila Rezende (2010), *Bombriil*. Digital Image.

Decolonialism demands tangible, active engagement. As evidenced by the actions of artists, it becomes clear that embracing a neutral position holds no innocence (Paiva 2021). Artistic and cultural expressions play a pivotal role in the practice of decolonialism in Brazil, providing a platform for challenging dominant narratives and promoting alternative perspectives (Paiva 2021). Activist artists, such as Juliana Notari, challenge norms, provoke critical conversations and advocate for a more equitable society. Their endeavours underscore the crucial role of art in expressing decolonial ideas and reshaping perspectives (Paiva 2021). As these artists diligently challenge the status quo, they are redefining the artistic narrative, not merely as a manifestation of aesthetic prowess, as I also aim to do, but as a conduit for social change and reparation (Paiva 2021). The resonance of their creative voices is inherently bound to a broader endeavour – to shape an artistic landscape that isn't merely equitable, but one that embodies the principles of justice, authenticity and reflection (Paiva 2021).

### **Conclusion**

By unraveling the layers of colonisation and its enduring impact, this paper actively contributes to challenging the dominance of Western perspectives in feminist discourse. In synthesising historical exploration, feminist critique and decolonial perspectives, the paper highlights the enduring relevance of grappling with the

legacies of colonisation. This journey of exploration, reflection and challenge extends beyond the realms of academia. In the same way, this paper advocates to extend diversity in feminist discourse, heightened awareness and self-questioning, and challenging existing norms to other domains, such as the arts. Together, these endeavors contribute to breaking down barriers, fostering opportunities, and ultimately creating a more inclusive and diverse landscape in various spheres of intellectual and creative pursuits.

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