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Jennifer Manning

Technological University Dublin, jennifer.manning@tudublin.ie

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Decolonial feminist theory: Embracing the gendered colonial difference in management and organisation studies

Jennifer Manning 

Technological University Dublin, School of Management, Dublin, Ireland

Correspondence

Jennifer Manning, Technological University Dublin, School of Management, City Campus, Dublin, Ireland.

Email: jennifer.manning@tudublin.ie

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Abstract

Feminist theories in management and organization studies, each with their own ontological and epistemological assumptions, offer critical perspectives of the status quo to challenge our idea of progress in the discipline, yet there is limited engagement with ideas, theories, or practices from the lived experiences of Global South women. Decolonial feminism engages with debates pertaining to coloniality/modernity and indigenous identity and gender in Latin America, while providing a space for the voices and lived experiences of marginalized, non-Western(ised) women. Positioned in the context of Guatemalan Maya women and deploying critical insights from decolonial feminists, I unpack how the discourse *about* Global South women silences their voices and agency. Integrating decolonial feminist theory allows us to rethink management and organization studies as a Western gendered system. Interrupting mainstream narratives to bring a new geopolitics of knowledge and knowing from the perspective of the gendered colonial difference.

KEYWORDS

coloniality, decolonial, feminist, Maya women, modernity, indigenous knowledge, postcolonial

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"Being a woman, indigenous and poor, in this society, condemns one to exclusion in the majority of spaces."

Calixta Gabriel Xiquin, a Kaqchikel Maya writer and feminist advocate, in Krogstad (2015, p. 50).

1 | INTRODUCTION

This paper is an argument for the valued contribution decolonial feminist theory can make to management and organization studies (MOS). Decolonial feminism is an emerging theoretical concept led by Lugones (2008; 2010) that centers decolonial theory in racial/gendered feminist context. Decolonial feminist theory engages with debates pertaining to coloniality/modernity and Global South indigenous identity and gender, while providing a space for the voices and experiences of silenced, "othered" women in MOS (Bhambra, 2014; Lugones, 2010; Paludi et al., 2019; Schiwiy, 2007). In this paper, I provide insight into how the voices and agency of women in the Global South have become silenced and how the discourse about Global South women presents them as the "other": a homogenous group of women characterized by their feminine gender and their being "Third World". Decolonial feminist theory is introduced as a framework to provide space in MOS for the silenced voices of women from the Global South to become agents in the production of knowledge and a visible part of the MOS discourse. By this means, this theoretical perspective facilitates the production of knowledge from the perspective of "otherness", specifically the gendered colonial difference.

Decolonial theory critiques Western representation of the "other" and reveals how knowledge produced in and by the West is layered with colonial power, thereby creating and sustaining a politics of Western knowledge dominance and rendering the "other" an object of knowledge (Mignolo, 2007; Prasad, 2003; Said, 1978). Integrating this theoretical lens into MOS enables us to understand knowledge as situated. That is, knowledge is embedded within a social, cultural, historical and political time and place that reflects contextual features and lived experiences (Haraway, 1988). Decolonial feminist theory values all knowledge and lived experiences as equal, and in so doing provides a new framework within the geopolitics of knowledge production, one that demands respect for the pluralization of differences. Integrating decolonial feminist theory into MOS adds richness and complexity to current theorizing. Grounded in Global South women's lived experiences, decolonial feminist theory challenges the male/masculine, white/Western and bourgeois/managerial epistemologies that have come to dominate our discipline (e.g., Ferguson, 1994; Metcalfe & Woodhams, 2012), thereby encouraging the acceptance of *another* way of working and organizing.

As an emerging theoretical concept, decolonial feminism builds upon the work of non-Western(ised), indigenous and women of color activists engaged in women's movements in their community and society (Cunningham, 2006; Espinosa Miñoso, 2017; Hernández Castillo, 2010; Lugones 2007, 2008, 2010). It implies a new path that is not an imposition or prescription, but a worldview, a way of seeing and doing and understanding gender that emanates from marginalized women in the Global South. Many Global South women live in an in-between world (Lugones, 2007, 2008), a world full of uncertainties, ambiguities and contradictions; a space between indigenous worldviews and contemporary social and cultural life constructed by modernity/coloniality. Using a decolonial feminist framework to understand the everydayness of these in-between worlds identifies the complexities of the women's lived experiences. Moreover, the absence of this lens highlights the limited engagement with Global South women in MOS resulting in a limited understanding of these in-between worlds and the contribution they can make to our understanding of work and organization/organizing (Manning, 2017a, 2017b, 2018).

A decolonial feminist theoretical framework is a critical, reflexive tool that, when applied to MOS, has a threefold contribution. First, it can challenge coloniality/modernity, capitalism and patriarchy whereby its application in MOS can allow scholars, activists and managers to rethink the work and agency of Global South women, and in so doing we can rethink MOS as a Western gendered system. Second, decolonial feminist theory is a way to think from the perspective of "otherness" and align ourselves with the social and economic

struggles of Global South women. In so doing this theoretical perspective enables us to enter into a dialog with Global South women to bring insight into MOS theory and practice from different experiences, perspectives, worldviews and ways of working and organizing from those who are overlooked, often ignored and have to fight to be heard. Third, it is a call for pluriversality. Decolonial feminist theory encourages an epistemic move toward embracing a pluriversality of knowledges, ideas and experiences in MOS. The purpose is to create a plurality of knowledge whereby all cultures, all nations remain equal, and as such all people and all communities have the right to be different precisely because everyone is considered equal (Paludi et al., 2019).

In this paper, I use the terms “others” and “Global South” broadly and cautiously. The “Global South” is a highly politically contested and debated discourse. It refers to the geographic, socioeconomic and political divide that exists between the countries of the economically “developed world”, known as the Global North or the West, and the countries that are referred to as “Third World” or “developing nations”, primarily former colonies of the Global North that are seen as poor (C. T. Mohanty, 2003a; Prasad, 2012). The term Global South is used throughout this paper to refer to the countries that are victims of first, colonization and subsequently, neoliberal maldevelopment, and as such they are considered economically developing or underdeveloped. The “other” refers to those who do not fit the Western profile of modernity, that is, persons and cultures that are considered non-modern. The postcolonial theorist Spivak (1988) uses the term “subaltern” to emphasize the position of the marginalized “other”, which refers to those socially, politically and geographically outside the dominant power structures.

As a white, Western (Irish) woman, I must reflexively locate myself in this paper so not to be seen as speaking for all “othered” Global South women. My first engagement with decolonial feminist theory was during my doctoral research which explored the work and lives of marginalized, indigenous Maya women working together in backstrap weaving groups in rural, remote Highland communities in Guatemala. Having previously lived in Guatemala, I was profoundly impacted by how much I learned from this experience –from complex worldviews, to challenging lived experiences, to alternative ways of working and organizing. My worldviews were built upon an ontology of modernity that did not adequately recognize the work, lives and knowledge of ‘others’. Bringing this experience into my doctoral research, within MOS little is known about how marginalized Maya women construct their identity as women, and about their work and organization/organizing experiences in the context of their social, cultural and historical location. To undertake my doctoral research, I developed a decolonial feminist ethnography (Manning, 2016, 2018, forthcoming). Traditional ethnographies reinforce imperialist tendencies and epistemic violence, and produce authoritative, descriptive studies about ‘others’ (Foley, 2002; Madison, 2012). However, developing a decolonial feminist ethnography encourages researchers to engage with the politics of power and positionality in the research process to create space for the voices and lived experiences of “others”. This approach to research encourages researchers to strive toward being ethically and reflexively engaged throughout the research process, whereby the participants are agents in the knowledge being produced.

The Global South context of this chapter is focused on the Americas: specifically the historical, social and cultural context of the Maya population in Central America. The lived experiences of Maya women are woven throughout the paper as an example. In what follows, first, there is an introduction to the decolonial concepts of modernity/coloniality and a discussion highlighting how the voices of Global South women have been historically silenced. There follows an analysis of decolonial feminist theory and a discussion of the evolution of this theoretical lens in relation to the many feminist theories that have come before it, particularly focusing on postcolonial feminist theory. The “doing” of decolonial feminist theory in MOS follows this, which includes a brief integration of empirical evidence enabling us to rethink MOS as a Western, gendered system. The paper concludes with an overview of the contributions in integrating a decolonial feminist theoretical framework in MOS.

2 | MODERNITY/COLONIALITY: THE HISTORICAL SILENCING OF GLOBAL SOUTH WOMEN

Before challenging the discursive silencing of Global South women's voices in the MOS discipline, this paper first unpacks the history of the colonization of Global South women's knowledge, agency and gender. This section weaves together a discussion of an ontology of modernity with insights into the colonization of the Maya population in Central America, while outlining the consequences of colonization in the silencing of Global South women's voices.

2.1 | Understanding modernity: How we view the Global South through a lens of coloniality

Decolonial theory is founded in the modernity/coloniality dialogs between prominent Latin American scholars. The work of Mignolo (2005, 2007, 2011), Escobar (2007, 2010), Dussel (Dussel & Ibarra-Colado, 2006) and Quijano (2000, 2007), among others, founded decolonial theory by critiquing Eurocentric modernity and claims of universality. Dussel and Ibarra-Colado (2006) explain modernity as a phenomenon that denotes the sociocultural centrality of Europe from the moment the Americas were discovered. Modernity refers to the crystallisation of discourses, practices and institutions that have developed over the past few hundred years from European ontological and cultural colonization (Escobar, 2010; Misoczky, 2011). Escobar (2010) explains that the world and all knowledges constructed on the basis of an ontology of modernity became a universal ontology, and this universal ontology has gained dominance over certain worldviews, institutions, constructs and practices. Decolonial theorists argue that the idea of the universality of a Western ontology is based on the displacement of those in the Global South from the effective history of modernity. As a result, history becomes a product of the West, and modernity became synonymous with the West by displacing the actions, ideas and knowledge of those in the Global South. In so doing, Western modernity created the "other". The "other" refers to those who do not fit the profile of modernity, that is, persons and cultures that are considered non-modern. This is exemplified in the Guatemalan National Census, 1894, written by the ruling Ladino population (persons of European descent and a mixture of Maya and European heritage), as cited in Grandin (2000, p. 130):

The Ladinos and Indians are two distinct classes; the former march ahead with hope and energy through the paths that have been laid out by progress; the latter, immovable, do not take any part in the political and intellectual life, adhering tenaciously to their old habits and customs.

Dussel and Ibarra-Colado (2006) argue that modernity is founded in the convergence of three related processes: capitalism as an economic and civilizing system for which people consider there is no alternative; colonialism of epistemic, cultural, political and social systems; and Eurocentrism, the universality of European ontology. Modernity is specific to "the context of Eurocentric hegemonic patterns of knowledge and its claims of universality" (Misoczky, 2011, p. 347). Escobar (2010) explains that the world and all knowledges constructed on the basis of an ontology of modernity became a universal ontology, and this universal ontology has gained coherence over certain constructs and practices, for example, the primacy of humans over other humans, animals and nature; the idea of the individual separate from the community; the cultural constructs of "the economy" and "the market", and implementation of capitalism as a socio-natural form.

Despite the elimination of direct political, social and cultural domination established by the Europeans over the conquered in Latin America (and Africa, and much of the Middle-East and Asia), the relationship between Europe (and their Euro-North American descendants) and the "others" continues to be one of domination (Hulme, 2008; Quijano, 2007). Rather than direct imposition from the outside, the universality of a Eurocentric ontology of

modernity is maintained by colonization's successor, Western imperialism and neoliberalism, referred to in this paper as coloniality (Quijano, 2007; Said, 1978; Ul-Haq & Westwood, 2012). Mignolo (2011) and Restrepo and Escobar (2005) explain that modernity and coloniality are mutually dependent phenomena: coloniality is constitutive of modernity and there can be no modernity without coloniality. Coloniality refers to "the pattern of power which has emerged as a result of colonialism" and is an explicit strategy of epistemological control and domination (Misoczky, 2011, p. 347). As explained by Mignolo (2007, p. 162), "modernity, capitalism and coloniality are aspects of the same package of control of economy and authority, of gender and sexuality, of knowledge and subjectivity".

2.2 | The coloniality of Global South women

"We are not myths of the past, ruins in the jungle, or zoos. We are people, and we want to be respected, not to be victims of intolerance and racism." Rigoberta Menchú Tum, one month before being awarded the Nobel Peace Prize (as cited in Porras & Riis-Hansen, 1992).

The Maya civilization dominated the Central American region for nearly 2,000 years before Spanish colonizers arrived in the early 16th century. At the peak of Maya civilization, Maya society was one of the most advanced on Earth, having developed a complex culture with knowledge of astronomy and mathematics and an intricate written language. It was also a brutal culture with warfare, slavery and human sacrifice commonplace. Although ruthless and violent, the ancient Maya were not a patriarchal, hierarchical society. Maya women occupied important and leading positions as rulers, warriors, priestesses and healers in their society. The Maya cosmology respects men and women equally. The value of women is emphasized in the strong connection between women, the Earth and the moon, manifest in their leading deity, the Moon Goddess. The Maya calendar is based on a cycle of 260 days, reflecting the gestational cycle of women and also the cycle of the moon (Krogstad, 2015). The principles of duality and complementarity guided the relationship and behavior between men and women in Maya communities. Gender complementarity focuses on the interdependence of productive roles of male and females, whereby gender relations are grounded in separate but mutually supported spheres of activity (Stockett, 2005).

Much research suggests that precolonial Global South conceptions of gender were complex and structured differently from European conceptions (Connell, 2014), and Western understandings of the sexual division of labor do not accurately characterize past social and cultural systems in Latin America (Stockett, 2005). In the Maya philosophical conception, the man–woman relationship is based on the principles of duality and complementarity, resting on equality and respect between man and woman and fluidity between man/woman (Lopez, 2006). Maya cultural traditions had male, female and third gendered (neither male or female and both male and female) deities, and both men and women ruled throughout the many Maya kingdoms. Indeed, gender was not segregated according to sexuality; it was understood to be fluid (R. Joyce, 1997; Looper, 2002; Marcos, 1998, 2009). Ancient text and figures reveal men wearing women's clothing, gods with male and female aspects, and androgynous figures were commonplace (Stockett, 2005). Sexual bodies and cultural expressions of gender appear to have been malleable, which sometimes results in more than two kinds of bodies and more than two kinds of genders (R. A. Joyce, 1998; Stockett, 2005).

Butler (2004, p. 10) explains that gender is a historical and social category that is continually enacted, albeit under the constraints of existing norms that differ across "geopolitical boundaries and cultural constraints on who is imagining whom, and for what purpose". Our understanding of gender in the context of modernity is a construct that regards the Western ideals we uphold about masculinity and femininity, roles and power relations. Spanish colonization brought with it mandatory conversion to Christianity which imposed upon the Maya population a Christian patriarchal and hierarchical society with the fundamental belief of the inferiority of women and their submissive position to men (Grasco, 2005). The inequality of women was explicit in Spanish social and religious

customs; women were prohibited from participating in political, professional and religious institutions. Modernity/coloniality resulted in the emergence of the sexual division of labor, whereby women are an identifiable category subordinate to men in all situations in Maya society.

Colonization colonized the sense of self and identity of the Maya population, their understanding of cosmology, work, and their gender relations; in so doing, implementing European understandings of gender and erasing the various conceptualizations of gender that pre-existed European modern/colonial gender systems (Bhambra, 2014; Connell, 2014; Lugones, 2010; Schiwy, 2007). Maya women's identities and gender were therefore colonized. Lugones (2008) describes the coloniality of gender as an encompassing phenomenon, where all control over sex, subjectivity, authority and labor is organized around it. According to Lugones (2010), the universalized ontology of modernity organizes the world into homogenous, separable categories arranged through hierarchical dichotomies that have erased Global South women from most areas of social life. As such, gender has permeated the discourse of colonization and is inseparable from discussions of decolonization.

Modernity and the coloniality of gender infiltrate all aspects of social existence in the Global South and give rise to new social and geocultural identities, thereby creating gendered identities as well as racial identities (Lugones, 2007, 2008). Colonization created the concepts of race and gender; the imposition of race accompanied the interiorization of those in the Global South, and the imposition of gender accompanied the interiorization of Global South women (Lugones, 2008; Oyěwùmí, 1997). The Western gendered system, maintained by the coloniality of gender, permeates patriarchal and Western control over Global South women's identities and their production of knowledge (Lugones, 2010; Schiwy, 2007).

2.3 | The coloniality of knowledge in management and organisation studies

The coloniality of knowledge can be used as a lens to understand how MOS relies on modernity to view progress in our discipline. The coloniality of knowledge argues that the West's knowledge system attained dominance through participation in colonization and sustained this dominance through persistent intellectual and cultural imperialism that has marginalized and, in some cases, eradicated alternative knowledge systems, social structures, organizations and ways of working and organizing (e.g., Alcadipani & Faria, 2014; Calás and Smircich, 2003; Ibarra-Colado, 2006; Jack et al., 2011; Mignolo, 2007; Misoczky, 2011; Nkomo, 2011; Quijano, 2007; Said, 1978; Spivak, 1988; Ul-Haq & Westwood, 2012; Walsh, 2007). Modernity and the coloniality of knowledge enforce Western managerial and organizational discourse and work practices upon the lives of those in the Global South, dictating a Western tradition of managerial and organizational thinking that defines how and what should be studied and practised (Imas & Weston, 2012).

The coloniality of knowledge is concerned with intellectual hegemony of knowledge produced in the West following practices of Western knowledge production and dissemination. As explained by Quijano (2007, p. 170):

The cultural repression and the massive genocide together turned the previous high cultures of America into illiterate, peasant subcultures condemned to orality; that is, deprived of their own patterns of formalized, objectivized, intellectual, or visual expression.

Ibarra-Colado (2006) explains that the coloniality of knowledge is a means of control by detaching those in the Global South from their native condition and capacity for autonomous thought. Coloniality of knowledge has enabled Western-centric intellectualism and imperialism to flourish, in so doing creating unequal core-periphery relationships between institutions, academics and systems of knowledge between the West and the "rest" (Ul-Haq & Westwood, 2012). Faria (2014) and Ul-Haq and Westwood (2012) argue that MOS academic centers are located in the West, and this is where the terms and categories of academic debates and discourse are determined. The West therefore remains at the center producing and disseminating knowledge and the "other" are the nations

consuming knowledge. Simultaneously the West dismantles “other” knowledges, social organization and ways of life (Mignolo, 2007).

MOS discourse has become a construct of the West. The work of academic activists and critical management scholars, including Alcadipani et al. (2012), Contu (2018), Dar (2018a; 2018b), Dar et al. (2020), Faria (2014), Ibarra-Colado (2006; 2008) and Ul-Haq and Westwood (2012), explains that this is evident in a number of ways. First, the widespread mechanical transfer of academic programmes and textbooks from Europe and America, for example, by MOS “gurus”, ensures the reproduction of their ideology. Further to this, the implementation of case studies to teach MOS follows a stereotypical European or American businessperson: white, male, liberal, upper/middle-class, heterosexual. Additionally, the dominance of the English language in academia places many academics from the Global South at a disadvantage and creates barriers for them publishing in leading academic journals, of which the top “international” journals only consider knowledge produced in the English language. Finally, Global South academics in the West and Global South adopt Western epistemologies to the point that they see little value in their own MOS traditions, ignoring or reshaping them to become palatable to Western theories. This is not to say that Global South scholars are not aware of the coloniality of knowledge. Many scholars acknowledge this but note that Western frameworks give them recognition in the international arena. In other words, “to belong in “the international community”, you must speak the Center's language, use its concepts, discuss its agendas and perform to the stereotype of the “imperfect South” while keeping “a polite silence” on the real causes of your problems” (Ibarra-Colado, 2006, p. 471).

3 | UNDERSTANDING DECOLONIAL FEMINIST THEORY

3.1 | Western feminist discourse in management and organisation studies

Over 20 years ago, Calás and Smircich (1999) noted that feminist theory and theorizing from/of the Global South represent the most significant theoretical developments in MOS, arguing that these critical perspectives can provide multi-theoretical lenses to MOS and challenge our understanding of power and its relation to gender, ethnicity, race, class and sexuality. There are a variety of feminist perspectives, each with their own ontological and epistemological assumptions, focused on how to implement societal and organizational changes regarding gender (Calás & Smircich, 2006; Özkazanç-Pan, 2019), yet there is limited engagement with ideas, theories or practices emerging from Global South feminists. Western feminist theories offer critical perspectives of the status quo to challenge our idea of progress in MOS, and raise concerns over gender and gender relations, equality and social justice within the context of nations, societies and organizations (Özkazanç-Pan, 2019). However, early feminist frameworks are situated in the West and thereby tend to privilege the experiences and perspectives of already privileged Western women (Calás and Smircich, 1989; 2006; Harding et al., 2013; Lorber, 2010; C. T. Mohanty, 2003b; Özkazanç-Pan, 2012, 2019).

For example, the first wave of feminist theories – liberal, radical and psychoanalytical – have different epistemological assumptions, yet share fundamental ontological assumptions whereby women's oppression is situated in their condition of being women. Thus, they are concerned with issues of equality, similarity or difference and seek solutions to how women and men can exist together, or separately, without subordination or oppression. Often referred to as “women's issues”, the three theoretical perspectives are politically united in their concern to reform MOS. However, they are largely focused on lives and experiences of white, Euro-American, middle-class, heterosexual women (Calás & Smircich, 2006; Gherardi, 2003; C. Mohanty, 1988). The second wave feminist theories – socialist and poststructuralist/postmodern – understand gender as a socially systematic process that is (re)produced through relations of societal power, historical processes and dominant discourses; institutions and epistemologies which become naturalized as “the way it is” (Calás & Smircich, 2006). Thus, it is with the second wave of feminist theories that alternative ontologies, worldviews and experiences begin to enter feminist discourse

in MOS. However, it is the third and fourth wave of feminist theorizing – postfeminism, standpoint, postcolonial and decolonial – that contest white Western feminist theorization of gender. While each has different ontological and epistemological assumptions, here we see the integration of alternative lived experiences and perspectives in feminist theorizing, from the experiences of women of color to the questioning of gender and gender binaries, whereby knowledge, worldviews and experiences are understood to be socially, culturally and historically situated (Haraway, 1988; hooks, 1981; Calás & Smircich, 2006; C. T. Mohanty, 2003a; 2003b). The fourth wave feminist perspectives of postcolonial and decolonial theorizing challenge the constructions of Global South women in Western discourse that represent them as uniformly lacking development, education, knowledge, progress, wealth, agency, etc., thereby presenting them as the “other” (Calás & Smircich, 2006; Mohanty, 2003a, 2003b). By way of postcolonial feminist theory I will introduce decolonial feminist theory, as there are important distinctions between the two epistemologically similar theories.

3.2 | From postcolonial to decolonial feminist theory in management and organisation studies

As analyzed by Özkazanç-Pan (2019), postcolonial feminist lenses highlight issues of representation, knowledge production, power relations and Global South women's lived experiences. This framework provides insight as to how people from the Global South are spoken about and for in Western texts, demonstrating the epistemic violence experienced by those in the Global South whereby their voice and agency are ignored (Spivak, 1988). Indeed, while the voices and experiences of Global South women are marginalized from MOS, such women's bodies and labor are overrepresented in low-wage, low-status, low-productivity work (Calás & Smircich, 2006; Özkazanç-Pan, 2019; Spivak, 1999).

Many postcolonial feminists have critiqued theorizing and ideologies emanating from white, Western feminists' position of privilege where their writings are generalised on the grounds of their own experiences while they speak for/about Global South women. The foremost postcolonial feminist scholars, Spivak (1985; 1988; 1999) and C. Mohanty (1988; 1991; 2003a; 2003b), argue that feminist writings discursively colonize the material and historical heterogeneities of the lives of women in the Global South, which produces a composite, singular Global South woman – the homogenized, gendered “other” – an image that carries with it the authorizing signature of Western imperial discourse. In Western academia, texts and culture Global South women are presented as a homogenous category needing economic development and an oppressed figure in need of Western emancipation (Barker, 2000; Mohanty, 2003a, 2003b; Wood, 2001). In such representations, the Global South is conceptualized as a singular place and the Global South woman is a sexual-political object whose subject position is already determined (Mohanty, 2003a, 2003b; Spivak, 1988). Global South women are therefore assumed as a coherent homogenous group of women with the same interests and desires, whether from a rural or urban area, educated or unschooled and regardless of religion, class and ethnic-racial location. These women are assumed victims of particular cultural and socio-economic systems and are defined by their gendered identity (C. T. Mohanty, 2003a), with such representations affording them no agency. Postcolonial feminist theorists argue that Western feminists position themselves as the “saviors of their poor Third World sisters” (Mendoza, 2002, p. 301), and appropriate and colonize the constitutive complexities that characterize the lives of Global South women (C. T. Mohanty, 2003a). As a result of this systematic appropriation of the figure, identity and image of women in the Global South, a characterization of these women has been created that only emphasizes their feminine gender (sexually constrained) and their being “Third World”, that is, ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, religious, domesticated, family-oriented, victimized, etc (Mendoza, 2002; Mohanty, 2003a, 2003b; Spivak, 1988).

Referring back to my example of Maya women, Sanford (2000; 2001) explains that the publication of Rigoberta Menchú Tum's (1983) autobiography, *I, Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian Woman in Guatemala*, challenges Western representations of Maya women. Principally, it dismantles the characterizations that negated the dynamic and

varied political response of Maya women to state violence during the Guatemalan Civil War (1960–1996). This book came to represent the antithesis of stereotypes of Maya women as silent, traditional, static subordinates without politics or agency. O'Donnell (2009) explores the representations of Maya women in Western feminist discourse that universalize and normalize their experiences as “Third World” women, finding that Maya women are portrayed as helpless victims, characterized by their vulnerabilities and denied their experiences as politically conscious agents with a voice.

Intellectually and epistemologically postcolonial and decolonial feminist theory share an intertwined relationship. Epistemic violence forms part of the two theoretical perspectives and both argue that Western feminist theory has aided the construction of Global South women as the “other”, creating binary identities between Western(ised) women and “other” women (Lugones 2008, 2010; C. T. Mohanty, 2003a; Spivak, 1988). However, rather than suggesting that all women are unique without the possibility for alliance or allyship between Western and Global South women, postcolonial and decolonial feminists acknowledge differences in the form of inclusive feminism (Cunningham, 2006; Özkazanç-Pan, 2019; Spivak, 1999). Integrating both perspectives into MOS helps to redefine MOS scholars' approach and recognize non-Western(ised) Global South women, not as the “other” or inferior, uneducated females in low-wage, low-status work, but to bring forward their experiences and struggles in a way that foregrounds and nurtures their understanding of their work and organized existence and lived experiences. Indeed, postcolonial feminist theory has made significant contributions toward decolonizing MOS thought, discourse and practice (see, e.g., Calás & Smircich, 2006; Metcalfe & Woodhams, 2012; Nkomo, 2011; Özkazanç-Pan, 2012; 2019), and much of decolonial feminist theorizing is built upon the seminal work of postcolonial feminist scholars and activists (e.g., C. T. Mohanty, 2003a; Spivak, 1988).

However, Espinosa Miñoso (2009) argues that postcolonial feminist theorizing is colonized by hegemonic practices of Global South feminists who establish certain distance from privileged, white Western feminists, while simultaneously maintaining continuity with the metrics of modernity and colonial privilege, for example from an elite ethnic or social group, with formal education and schooling, etc. Thereby, constructing indigenous, black, poor, lesbian women as the “other” within the “other”. As a result, we still know little about marginalized, indigenous, black, poor, lesbian, non-Westernized women, particularly in Latin America, as their voices are eclipsed by the discourses *about* them. Decolonial feminism is an emerging theoretical concept, centering postcolonial feminism in a Latin American cultural, social and historical context, challenging coloniality/modernity, and ascertaining that gender is a colonial construct (Lugones, 2007, 2008, 2010). The epistemological origins of decolonial feminist theory can be attributed to the Chicana feminist movement, motivated by the historical, social and cultural marginalization of women of Mexican descent in the U.S., (e.g., Anzaldúa, 1999; Saldivar-Hull, 1991; Sandoval, 2000), the work of gender theorists in postcolonial countries (e.g., Connell, 2014; Oyèwùmí, 1997), black feminism and women of color feminist politics and activists (e.g., Hill Collins, 2008; hooks, 1981; Roshanravan, 2014), and, most notably, intersectionality (e.g., Crenshaw, 1989, 1991; Holvino, 2010; Liu, 2018; Moraga and Anzaldúa, 1983).

Decolonial feminism engages with debates pertaining to coloniality/modernity and indigenous identity and gender in Latin America, while providing a space for the voices and experiences of marginalized, non-Western women to speak of their identities, who they are and how they manage their personal and organizational lives (Bhambra, 2014; Lugones, 2010; Schiwiy, 2007). According to Espinosa Miñoso (2017), decolonial feminist theory is a critical tool to dismantle the racist/sexist coloniality/modernity project. It is an episteme intrinsic to the process of decolonization that disrupts prevailing senses of social organization and the historical-political-economic order. MOS can benefit from decolonial feminist theory as it engages with the complexities of intersectionality to recognize the specific experiences of work associated with indigenous, non-modern and alternative ways of working and organizing by women in the Global South to provide space for “other” and indigenous knowledge, and breaks the mechanical transfer of knowledge from the West (Ibarra-Colado, 2008; Lugones, 2010; Paludi, et al., 2019). Thus, grounded in Global South women's lived experiences, decolonial feminist theory encourages the acceptance of *another* way of working and organizing, and seeing and doing, from the perspective of the gendered colonial difference.

3.3 | The practice of decolonial feminism in management and organisation studies

Decolonial feminism comprises of women who, beginning with their own history of colonization, adopt decolonial feminist practices and weave them into their own indigenous struggles, experiences and worldviews (Bastian Duarte, 2012). Latin American decolonial feminist activists and scholars (e.g., Espinosa Miñoso, 2009; 2017; Paredes, 2010; 2008) resist the coloniality of knowledge and gender that creates the system of dominance imposed upon indigenous, black and marginalized women by working toward a collective goal of decolonization and depatriarchalization. Bastian Duarte (2012, p. 162) and Hernández Castillo (2010, p. 539) provide an extract of Bastian Duarte's (2002) interview (in Spanish) with Alma López, a Maya K'iche' woman from Guatemala, who explains that Maya women's understanding of feminism is complex and based on the women's social, cultural and historical location that is ignored by mainstream Western academics:

As an indigenous feminist I intend to recover the philosophical principles of my culture and to make them fit into the reality of the twenty-first century. That is to say, to criticize what I don't like about my culture while proudly accepting that I belong to that culture. Indigenous feminism is to me part of a principle – women develop and make revolution to construct ourselves as independent persons who become a community that can give to others without forgetting about themselves. The philosophical principles that I would recover from my culture are equality, complementarity between men and women, and between men and men and women and women. That part of the Maya culture currently doesn't exist, and to state the contrary is to turn a blind eye to the oppression that indigenous women suffer. The complementarity is now only part of history; today there is only inequality, but complementarity and equality can be constructed. ... The feminist movement that comes from academia is scarcely related to us. Why learn something that is unrelated to your reality or your culture? ... We need to rebuild the feminism of indigenous women.

Decolonial feminism provides marginalized, indigenous and black women in Latin America space to (de)construct their identity, gender and epistemologies (Sandoval, 2000). However, much of the discourse of decolonial feminism in Latin America remains in rural, indigenous regions, published in Spanish, Portuguese and the numerous indigenous languages throughout the region (Radcliffe, 2015; Richard, 1996; Schiwy, 2007). Moreover, within MOS the integration of decolonial feminist approaches are limited and quite recent. For example, Paludi et al. (2019) apply a decolonial feminist theoretical lens to examine the historical representations of Latin Americans in archival Pan American Airways promotional material whereby they focus on the image-making of Latinas as a romanticized, child-like “other”. My research applied a decolonial feminist theoretical framework to explore the lived experiences of Maya women working together in community weaving groups (Manning, 2017a, 2017b). In what follows, I draw on my doctoral research to very briefly exemplify the application of a decolonial feminist lens in MOS.

Contemporary Guatemala is a patriarchal society, and exacerbated by colonial and post-colonial repression, Maya women suffer from triple discrimination: as poor, indigenous women. However, decolonial feminist theory provides insight into Maya women's contemporary social and cultural location, as impacted by their long and complex history. Modern Maya cultural identity is evident in the preservation of traditional Maya dress (the *traje*) made and worn by Maya women, and Maya identities are ideologically constructed through language practices. Language and the *traje* are the primacy of Maya ethnicity and identity. The wearing of the *traje* and the speaking of Mayan languages promotes cultural distinction from the Ladino population; they are the antithesis of modernity/coloniality and signify a shared cultural identity between Maya people, and thereby act as powerful expression of social identity (Fischer, 2001; Hendrickson, 1995; Hiller et al., 2009; Manning, 2017a). Maya women make their *traje* through backstrap weaving, a traditional Maya artform of producing textiles. The process of backstrap weaving and the wearing of the backstrap woven *traje* are embodiments of Maya culture

and gender passed on through generations of women that symbolize the cultural creativity and resilience of Maya women (Hiller et al., 2009; Tedlock and Tedlock, 1985). In some rural Highlands communities in Guatemala, Maya women work together in backstrap weaving groups to produce and sell textiles. These groups espouse indigenous philosophies of harmony and equality where the women value the collective, cooperative space of their group. Marginalized Maya women are rendered to the home, yet domesticity and maternity are not opposed to participation and active citizenship. Their domesticity is reconciled with community participation, leadership, equality and income-generating work. At the same time, Maya women defy coloniality/modernity by refusing to abandon their languages, *traje* and backstrap weaving practices (Manning, 2017a, 2017b, 2018). The poetry of Maya writer Calixta Gabriel Xiquín credits the historic resilience of Maya culture to the resilience of Maya women: "(Maya) women refuse to allow Maya men, Ladinos, the state or scholars to define them or their past" (Krogstad, 2015, p. 56).

Maya women's organizational practices are created in an in-between space, a space between indigenous worldviews and contemporary social and cultural life constructed by coloniality. In this in-between space, a space filled with ambiguities and contradictions, Maya women balance coloniality/modernity with their own ways of working and organizing. The women, their lives and their organizations are characterized by plurality, in which they negotiate tensions and contradictions. The social, cultural and historical context in which Maya women have constructed their working groups marks the specific form their organizations take, as well as their conceptions of organizing. That is, the groups are characterized according to the women's condition of being poor, indigenous and women (Manning 2017a, 2017b, 2018). Thus, it is the application of a decolonial feminist lens that enables us to understand Maya women organizing as a space for the collective reflection of women to recognize their experiences of exclusion as Maya women and to exercise their self-determination. Maya women are constructing emancipatory experiences of work and, in the process, are contributing to new knowledge production about alternative ways of organizing from their gendered and indigenous identity and position of socio-economic exclusion, that is, their gendered colonial difference.

Many Global South women live in an in-between world (Lugones, 2007, 2008), a negotiated space between indigenous worldviews and modernity/coloniality. A decolonial feminist lens marks their distinction from the homogenized, voiceless "other" in need of rescuing. Decolonial feminist theory creates space for a feminist discourse that truly reflects and dignifies Global South women's understanding of identity, gender and epistemologies from the lived experience of their gendered colonial difference. This is an inclusive feminism (Cunningham, 2006; Dulfano, 2016) that offers possibilities for change in MOS, whereby differences across ethnicity, race, history, religion, culture, understandings of gender and so forth provide rich insights into Global South women's experiences of modernity/coloniality and their agency in resisting practices that have oppressed them.

4 | A DECOLONIAL FEMINIST FRAMEWORK FOR MANAGEMENT AND ORGANISATION STUDIES

In conclusion, integrating decolonial feminist theory into MOS acts as a double maneuver in allowing us to rethink MOS as a Western gendered system. First, it interrupts contemporary feminist theorization in MOS by highlighting that feminist theorizing is situated ontologically in the West. Second, it interrupts mainstream MOS narratives. The geopolitical production and dissemination of MOS knowledge centers on an ontology of modernity through which we view all notions of progress and possibility. Decolonial feminist theory offers a new geopolitics of knowledge and knowing, one that demands pluriversality and brings with it the gendered colonial difference. Integrating decolonial feminist theory into MOS provides space for Global South women to speak of their identities, lived experiences and their work and organization/organizing experiences; in so doing, challenging the hegemonic practices that eclipse their voices with discourses *about* them (Espinosa Miñoso, 2009; Lugones, 2007, 2008). The contributions of this paper are thus threefold:

4.1 | Rethinking modernity/coloniality in MOS

Faria (2014), Ibarra-Colado (2006), Lugones (2007 2008; 2010) and Manning (2017a; 2017b) explain that MOS, in the context of an ontology of modernity, does not acknowledge non-Western experiences, and subsequently there are no recognized experiences of work and organization/organizing by Global South women. Coloniality/modernity rendered invisible their knowledge contributions. Decolonial feminist theory challenges the dominant structures that have made invisible the agency of Global South women by giving legitimacy to their knowledge and their experiences of gender, identity and work. Embracing the gendered colonial difference acknowledges that Global South women have agency, and encourages theorization *with* them, not *about* them. That is, as academics we need to work *with* Global South women to bring into MOS knowledge about alternative, non-modern and indigenous ways of working and organizing built in the margins and brought to “the center”. Theorizing *about* Global South women and their work and organization/organizing practices is contrary to the decolonial feminist theoretical perspective. Global South women have to become agents in the research process and the production of knowledge. Thus, a decolonial feminist lens in MOS embraces a more meaningful engagement with Global South women and their knowledge and lived experiences (Manning, forthcoming).

4.2 | Thinking from the perspective of otherness

Challenging modernity/coloniality in MOS allows us to think from the perspective of “otherness”. Decolonial feminist theorizing in MOS responds with respect to the gendered colonial difference, and creates a space where Global South women, grounded in their experience of “otherness”, are using their indigenous knowledge to develop their own solutions to the socio-economic marginalization and ethnic and gender discrimination imposed upon them through the coloniality of knowledge and gender. Theorization about work and organization/organizing can no longer be seen only through an ontology of modernity perpetuated by Western(ised) academics, nor as an intervention on behalf of voiceless Global South women, whereby both perspectives end up reproducing Global South women’s “otherness”. Decolonial feminist theory is an epistemic and political shift in MOS, recognizing the agency in/of the gendered colonial Global South woman with different experiences, worldviews and ways of working and organizing.

4.3 | A call for pluriversality

Modernity/coloniality legitimized Western knowledge above all other knowledges, however pluriversality calls for dismantling of the hegemony of Western knowledge where the differences between center-periphery disappear and pluriversal knowledges can coexist equally (Mignolo, 2011). Decolonial feminist theory argues that thinking is inevitably located (e.g., Lugones, 2007; 2008; 2010; Mignolo, 2005; 2007; 2011). This enables the coexistence of different ways of life and different ways of knowing, while creating a pluriversal space for diverse epistemic encounters that recognizes and values knowledge that has been produced from the lived experience of the gendered colonial difference. The gendered colonial difference could therefore be understood as thinking from another location using alternative knowledge traditions by Global South women who build agency from their experiences of “otherness”. Decolonial feminist theory can bring into MOS pluriversal understandings of work and organization/organizing that draw on local realities and indigenous worldviews within which gender, identity and work and community and familial structures are understood locally and constructed from the lived experience of the gendered colonial difference. Lugones (2007; 2008) and Dulfano (2016) explain that Global South women live in an in-between world filled with complexities, where they negotiate conflicting experiences of gender, identity and

work. Their voices need to be heard if we are to construct a pluriversal understanding of work and organization/organizing representing the knowledge and lived experiences of Global South women.

Integrating decolonial feminist theory into MOS is an epistemic move that encourages those in both the West and the Global South to understand that “there is life beyond Northern academia, both in terms of managerial theoretical concepts and in terms of organizational practices” (Alcadipani et al., 2012, p. 131). To this end, this epistemic move brings us toward pluriversality through which MOS theorists can conceptualize the coexistence of many work and organizational epistemologies.

4.4 | Concluding thoughts

In light of the contributions from decolonial feminism, I provide new directions for re-thinking work and organization/organizing from the lived experience of the gendered colonial difference. Decolonial feminist theory helps transition MOS from a discipline centered on modernity toward transmodernity by recognizing that knowledge produced by Global South women comes from a world in-between modernity and indigenous worldviews. Decolonial feminist theory challenges the characterizations of these women as powerless victims, and demystifies them as women with their own agency, voice, knowledge and ways of working and organizing.

The diversities, distinctiveness and complexities of Global South women's lived experiences can bring to MOS a new geopolitics of knowledge and knowing. It is only with the voices of Global South women that decolonial feminist theory can destabilize the male/masculine, white/Western and bourgeois/managerial epistemologies that have come to dominate our discipline, and encourage the acceptance of another way of working and organizing that is equally valued. Together, Western(ised) academics and Global South women can address the imbalance in our discipline whereby we raise the voices of those working and organizing in the socio-economic and academic margins to become recognized producers of knowledge.

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ORCID

Jennifer Manning  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1665-4813>

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AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Jen is a lecturer in Critical Management and Critical Thinking, Strategic Management and Research Methods in TU Dublin. Her research employs a decolonial feminist lens to explore colonialism, patriarchy and capitalism in management and organization studies. Her work promotes alternative ways of working by integrating the voices, lives and experiences of those “othered” and marginalized, particularly indigenous Global South women, into mainstream discourse. As an ethnographer, Jen has developed a critical, empowering approach to research, namely, Decolonial Feminist Ethnography.

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