

Haslanger, Marx, and the Social Ontology of Unitary Theory: Debating Capitalism's Relationship to Race and Gender

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Abstract: Taking up a recent critique of Nancy Fraser by Sally Haslanger, this paper defends the primary thesis of Marxist-Feminist unitary theory that the systematic reproduction of modern forms of racial and gendered oppression is due to their co-articulation with the reproduction of capitalist social relations against three criticisms offered by Haslanger. It develops its defense of Fraser's articulation of unitary theory by acknowledging a social ontological deficit in that theory insofar as it does not contain a theory of the social construction of human kinds and amending this deficit by drawing on revised aspects of Haslanger's own work. It argues that the global reproduction of race and gender as hierarchical social relations is a consequence of the reproduction of capitalism although local gender and race kinds are asymmetrically co-constituted by non-capitalist social practices.

Keywords: Sally Haslanger, Nancy Fraser, Capitalism, Patriarchy, White Supremacy, Social Ontology, Marxist-Feminism

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1. INTRODUCTION

Recent work in Marxist-Feminism and Marxian anti-racist theory has reopened the question of the relationship between capitalism and racial and gendered oppression.¹ At stake are not only political questions bearing on feminist, anti-racist, and anti-capitalist strategy, but also social ontological questions regarding the mode of existence of such social kinds as race and gender, construed as constructed effects of material social relations. Are race and gender as we know them constituted by capitalism or do they have meaningful existence outside of it? Are patriarchy and white supremacy separate systems that interact with capitalism, or is capitalism a system that necessarily produces relations of racial and gendered domination? To what extent can feminist and anti-racist struggles succeed without confronting capital, and to what extent can anti-capitalist struggles succeed without confronting the material bases of racial and gendered oppression? Under the headings of social reproduction theory and unitary theory, thinkers² have worked to clarify, extend, and defend the thesis, first suggested by Lise Vogel in her 1983 *Marxism and the Oppression of Women* (2013), that gender and racial oppression are integrated moments of the reproduction of capitalism, rather than consequences of distinct and self-reproducing but interacting systems such as patriarchy and white supremacy. This work, like all social theory, necessarily presupposes a social ontology, but reflection on this ontology has not been a primary concern in the existing literature, to its detriment.³

Since her 2012 collection *Resisting Reality*, Sally Haslanger has made a number of significant strides in developing a comprehensive critical materialist constructivist social ontology, deepening her accounts of social practice, structure, ideology, and materiality and building on her earlier analyses of the social construction of race and gender. In this paper, I depart from a recognition that Haslanger's project is tendentially developing in a direction compatible with those strands of Marxian theory concerned with providing historical materialist accounts of racial and gendered oppression. In this regard, she is an ideal social ontological interlocutor for unitary theory. However, her work has

1 See, for example: Arruzza (2014), Chen (2013), De'Ath (2018), Fields and Fields (2012), Gonzalez and Neton (2013), Fraser and Jaeggi (2018), Manning (2015), Vogel (2013).

2 In this article I use "unitary theory" because the main subject at issue is the immanence of racial and gender oppression to capitalism. See: Arruzza (2016) and (2014); Ferguson (2020), Jaffe (2020), Bhattacharya (2017), Fraser and Jaeggi (2018), De'Ath (2018).

3 The work of Isabella Bakker and Stephen Gill is an exception, although it does not, to my knowledge, engage the broader analytic social ontology literature. See Bakker and Gill (2004).

not yet explored the ontological significance of the historical specificity of social kinds and the consequences that capitalism's unique mode of sociality entails for social theory. Such concerns are foregrounded in Marx's work and Marxist-Feminists are right to insist that they need to be grappled with in theorizing capitalism's relationship to race and gender.

Haslanger herself has initiated an exchange with unitary theory by posing important critical questions to some of the key positions of Nancy Fraser's articulation of unitary theory in her co-authored dialogue with Rahel Jaeggi, *Capitalism: A Conversation in Critical Theory* (2018). Haslanger's criticisms touch on some of the most hotly debated issues within unitary theory, and precisely pinpoint the claims that are most in need of social ontological elaboration.⁴ In what follows, I will respond to Haslanger's misgivings with Fraser's expanded theory of capitalism in part by drawing on insights and concepts developed in Haslanger's own work in addition to contributions from a broader background of contemporary Marxian theory, recast as social ontology. I will argue that we can read Marx's critique of political economy as developing a historically specific social ontology of capitalist societies and that, on this reading, capital names a systematic and synthetic schema for relating social practices in constrained ways. Understood in this way, the claim of Marxist-Feminist unitary theory that relations of racial and gender domination are moments of the totality of *capitalism*, rather than moments of separate systems of patriarchy and white supremacy, is not a claim about the fundamentality of the economic to social life, but rather a claim about the consequences of the unique mode of social *systematicity* that characterizes capitalism. Drawing together this reading of Marx and Haslanger's account of the constitution of social kinds, I argue that, to the extent that we take social kinds to be constitutively constructed by patterned and constrained social practice, unitary theory suggests that our analyses of the construction of such social kinds as race and gender kinds ought to reflect the historically specific organizing role that capitalist social relations play in shaping the ends and means of those concrete practices that jointly constitute the kinds in question.

4 The unresolved debate between F.T.C. Manning, Sara Farris, and Cinzia Arruzza that played out in the 2014 *Viewpoint Magazine* dossier on gender and capitalism turns around the interpretation of the Marxian notion of a "logic of capital" and the link between such a logic, however construed, and gender categories qua historical social constructions. I take both of these issues to be social ontological—the first prompts a re-reading of Marx as a social ontologist, the latter the incorporation of contemporary analytic social ontological insights into social kinds.

2. SETTING THE PROBLEM: HASLANGER'S CRITICISM OF MANNE AND FRASER

In a recent response to Kate Manne's *Down Girl*, entitled "Why I don't believe in patriarchy," Haslanger simultaneously criticizes Manne's use of the concept of patriarchy as a social system and Nancy Fraser's expanded theory of capitalism as an institutionalized social order that depends upon and reproduces relations of gender and racial domination by means of institutionally produced "separations" between social spheres of production and reproduction and exploitation and expropriation.⁵ The stakes of Haslanger's critique are high—this discussion bears on how we are to understand the nature of social structures, the criteria under which a social structure can be said to be systematic, and the relationship between capitalism and racial and gender oppression.

In broad strokes, the strategy of her criticism is to demonstrate that giving the name "patriarchy" to the social order as a whole is unduly reductive, and further, that naming a particular sub-system of the social order "patriarchy" is not a tenable alternative given the failure of past "dual" and "triple" systems approaches to socialist feminism. The point is extended to target not only theories of patriarchy but also contemporary Marxist-Feminist unitary theories, such as Fraser's, that take capitalism to be the proper name for the social order as a whole, inclusive of relations of gender and racial domination, as opposed to simply an economic system.

Since I broadly agree with the logic of her departure from Manne's position, I will focus instead on responding to her criticism of Fraser, with whom I substantially agree and whose conviction that capitalism is the proper name for the multiply oppressive social order that connects and organizes the reproduction of human life globally I share.⁶ Haslanger levels three significant criticisms of Fraser's position that raise the social ontological questions that the rest of this paper will be addressing:

⁵ Manne (2017), Haslanger (2020b). Haslanger refers to Fraser and Jaeggi (2018). A condensed presentation of Fraser's position can be found in Fraser (2014).

⁶ My view on the inadequacy of the concept of patriarchy as a name for either the social order or for a separate social system that enters into conflict or combination with capitalism is in line with Arruzza's view that attempts to theorize patriarchy as a mode of production have been unpersuasive and the alternate hypothesis that would explain patriarchy qua system with reference to a psychological or psycho-sexual motor "risks falling into a fetishistic and ahistorical conception of the human psyche" (Arruzza 2014, 17).

1. There is an ambiguity in how gender and race are connected to capitalism.⁷ Do capitalist social positions *constitute* or merely *track* pre-constituted race and gender positions?
 - (a) If the latter, then it would seem that Fraser needs to posit additional non-capitalist systems of race and gender constitution (Haslanger 2020b, 6 n.5).
2. Capitalism is not “*the engine of history*” insofar as all societies face multiple coordination problems and “explanations of the precarious and dysfunctional equilibria we achieve must be attentive to the many dimensions—biological, geographical, historical, symbolic, material—of these problems” (Haslanger 2020b, 7).
3. There is not enough justification to name the overarching social order capitalism, “even if it somehow includes sexism, racism, and other forms of subordination” because:
 - (a) “capitalism is as shaped by racism and sexism as they are shaped by capitalism”
 - (b) and “various of the oppressive systems predate capitalism, and are likely to continue after capitalism ends (depending on how it ends)” (Haslanger 2020b, 6).

Departing from these criticisms, she sketches her preferred alternative conception, under which, “racism, sexism, ableism, heteronormativity, etc. each have ‘logics of their own’ that interact with the logics of capitalism and the local material conditions to produce particular social formations” (Haslanger 2020b, 6). Since capitalism emerged “from prior ways of organizing sex, reproduction, infant care, ethnic differences and ethnic conflict, different bodily capacities, aging, our relation to nature and non-human animals, and such,” we should understand capitalism to have taken up and transformed these “prior forms of organization and the narratives that accompany them, in different ways” (Haslanger 2020b, 6). Yet, depending on the questions that we are asking, we can also analyze the process of “uptake” from the perspective of other practices, such that we can say “capitalism is doing gender now; likewise, gender is doing capitalism now” (Haslanger 2020b, 7).

⁷ “If we ask the question: why in the current social system is care work and wage work divided along gender/race lines [...] the answer isn’t just: that’s just how things turned out. Or, that’s how capitalism works” (Haslanger 2020b, 6).

Ultimately, Haslanger proposes that we consider the social order from the perspective of its various oppressive consequences, and, from there, make use of adjectival categories such as “capitalist” and “patriarchal” to analytically distinguish features of the social order that are relevant in giving an explanation of the cause of the particular effect in question. In her words, we ought to “see the social order as ‘cooking together’ a set of ingredients, resulting in a *capitalist white supremacist nationalist ableist ageist heteronormative [...] etc [...] patriarchal order* and [...] treat the mentioned elements as analytical categories that can be used to explain certain features of the system” as “different elements have explanatory priority in response to different questions” (Haslanger 2020b, 7).

I view Haslanger’s criticisms and suggestion as hinging on crucial social ontological problems regarding the historical specificity of social structures and social kinds, the criteria under which a social structure can be said to be systematic, and the individuation of social orders or totalities. In what follows, I take up Haslanger’s criticisms in the order they are presented above.

The first of her criticisms locates the absence of an explicit theory of social construction in Fraser’s presentation of the capitalist constitution of race and gender. Because I agree that unitary theory ought to include such a theory and further take Haslanger’s constructivism to be the most sophisticated available, the first part of this article reconstructs the core features of Haslanger’s own constructivist social ontology that come to play a role in my defense of Fraser’s unitary theory and introduces Haslanger’s standing analyses of the social kinds *race* and *gender*. I then argue that Haslanger’s recent work on practices, structures, and structural explanation ought to motivate a reconsideration of her earlier analyses of race and gender kinds, which can be recognized as underdetermined in light of the demands of a materialized and practical social ontology. While unitary theory needs to adopt a social ontological position like Haslanger’s on the construction of human kinds, it cannot adopt her standing treatments of the categories race and gender because these analyses take race and gender to be essentially transitive across concrete practically enacted societies, rendering them problematically underdetermined both by the standards of Haslanger’s own more recent work and by the lights of Marx’s mature methodological reflections. Thinking the construction of social kinds as a practical, rather than ideal, affair necessitates attending to the kinds of historically emergent patterns of social constraint on practice that form the primary objects of analyses for Marxian historical materialism. Because we are interested in the practical constitution of dominant and subordinate race and gender kinds as durable and effective realities in capitalist

societies, I turn to extracting a complex of social ontological ideas from Marx's work that together yield the Marxian conception of the historical specificity of capitalist sociality and that form the basis upon which Marxian unitary theory differentiates itself from other strands of materialist feminism.⁸ Situating the practical construction of race and gender within the overall socio-natural metabolic reproduction of capitalist society suggests more historically determinate accounts of the content of race and gender kinds and a provisional answer to the first of Haslanger's critical questions. Developing this response in more detail and responding to the latter two criticisms requires presenting Marx's value theory and modes of subsumption. Drawing on these Marxian contributions, I defend unitary theory against Haslanger's further criticisms and argue that maintaining a practical constructivist stance about race and gender as she does requires adopting an account of socially specific homeostatic mechanisms of systematic reconstruction, of the type that the Marxian account of the value dynamic at the heart of capitalist societies provides for unitary theorists like Fraser.

3. UNITARY THEORY AND THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF RACE AND GENDER

Haslanger's first critical question targets an important ambiguity in Fraser's presentation of unitary theory that indexes a recognized theoretical problem for the approach. Unitary theory has sought to reject and distinguish itself from the once (and arguably still) dominant Marxist position that capitalism, qua system, is fundamentally indifferent to race and gender, although segments of the capitalist class may opportunistically mobilize racism and sexism in the interests of accumulation. While, this "indifferent capitalism"⁹ view takes race and gender, and racial and gendered oppressions, to be non-capitalistically constituted, unitary theorists have multiple paths available to them. Arruzza has argued for an agnosticism about the constitution of race and gender kinds, refocusing discussion on demonstrating that racial and gendered oppressions are necessary consequences of the historical development of global capitalism.¹⁰ By contrast, Chen, De'Ath, Gonzalez and Neton, and Manning have called for a Marxian account of *race* and *gender* as, in Gonzalez and Neton's words, "categories that are as specific to capitalism as 'capital'" (Gonzalez and Neton 2013, 57).

8 On the role of value theory in social reproduction theory, see Ferguson (2020, chap. 8).

9 This formulation is Arruzza's. See Arruzza (2014).

10 See Arruzza (2015).

I take responding to the call for categorial analysis of race and gender kinds to be a necessary task for unitary theory to fulfil if it is to convincingly respond to the first of Haslanger's criticisms without falling into either an ahistorical biologism or psychologism or collapsing into a veiled re-iteration of multiple systems theory. The answer to Haslanger's question must be that the relations constitutive of gender and race as salient oppressive social realities across local differences are, at least predominantly, historically specific capitalist social relations. Thankfully, Haslanger's own work on the social construction of race and gender kinds has already laid the social ontology groundwork for providing just such an analysis and, I claim, it should be critically revised and adopted by Marxian thinkers working to clarify the contours of the capitalist construction of race and gender.

3.1. Kind Objectivity and Kind Dependence

Most of the essays in Haslanger's 2012 collection *Resisting Reality* take up and develop the idea that race and gender are best defined as *hierarchical social relations* and consequently, what it is to have a race or gender as a property is to be racialized or gendered, that is, to be practically positioned within a social system in particular ways. While gender and race cannot be treated identically, they are parallel in some ways:

Roughly, women are those subordinated in a society due to their perceived or imagined female reproductive capacities [...]. Races are (roughly) those groups that are situated hierarchically due to the interpretation of their physical features as evidence of their ancestral links to a particular geographical region. As with gender, the social relations that constitute race vary cross-culturally and transhistorically, but there are structural parallels across these different contexts (Haslanger 2012, 8-9).

In both cases, gender and race categories are grounded in social processes of interpreting¹¹ perceived or imagined physical properties and assigning corresponding social statuses.

Haslanger argues that some social kinds, like race and gender, are both metaphysically objective ("there is something about how things are in virtue of which the members of the type differ from non-members") and socially

11 Note that, in view of her later work on practices, discussed below, interpreting and assigning in this context need not be intentional. See Haslanger (2017).

constituted (the features that are relevant for type membership are social) (Haslanger 2012, 383, 203, 190). Importantly, Haslanger's conception of a type/kind¹² is comparatively minimal. She endorses a Kripke and Putnam-inspired realist "type-externalism" about social kinds for which objective types need only have a degree of unity among their members "beyond a random or gerrymandered set" (2012, 374). On her suggested gloss of the position:

[T]erms/concepts pick out an objective type, whether or not we can state conditions for membership in the type, by virtue of the fact that their meaning is determined by ostension of paradigms (or other means of reference-fixing) together with an implicit extension to things of the same type as the paradigms (2012, 374).

In the case of social kinds, a kind can have unity on the basis of relational properties, such as the role that it plays in a social practice or theory (Haslanger 2019b, 156). Crucially, on her externalist position, "in order to understand the content of a concept—what a given concept is a concept *of*—one must investigate the world, not the mind" (Haslanger 2014, 11). Because conceptual content is to be discovered in the world, we can be, and often are, wrong about our own concepts. In the case of *race* for example, "our concept of race represents race as a biological category because doing so appears to justify the entrenchment of our practices about race. But it doesn't follow that race is what we think it is" (2014, 112). Realism and semantic externalism about kinds entails that "some properties are more important than others in structuring the world, and it's not up to us, so to speak, which these are" (Haslanger 2012, 156). In the cases that we are interested in, the kinds *race* and *gender*, the relevant features to determine are the social practices by virtue of which individuals are constitutively constructed as differentially gendered and racialized.

We should note that at this point Haslanger does not offer a theory of the structural parallels that account for the unity of the social relations constitutive of gender and race as such over and above historical and cultural difference. The theory of the objective reality of kinds furnishes us with a language to speak about social construction as such, but, if it is to play a role in our primary debate regarding the character of social wholes, it needs to be supplemented with

12 These terms are often used interchangeably. In the essay I am citing here, Haslanger uses "types," elsewhere Haslanger, and the literature more generally, uses "kinds" but stipulates that these are social kinds with different criteria of unification than natural kinds with intrinsic, or historical, essences.

a further theory of the constitution and organization of social relations into durable structures. In the formulations indicated above, Haslanger's gender and race analyses have the virtue of identifying the unifying properties of the kinds as social relations, but the suggested relations (privileging and subordinating as such in light of perceived or imaged features) in her existing accounts remain too abstract to situate within determinate societies. What they gain in generality for answering "what is" questions, they lose in concreteness for illuminating plausible answers to "why" and "how" questions. Haslanger's later work does offer the kind of sophisticated theory of social practice, structure, and structural explanation that we need in order to situate racializing and gendering relations within concrete societies characterized by social structures with durable homeostatic equilibria. It does not, however, actualize this potential in the form of revised analyses of race and gender.¹³ The later work, by furnishing the terms by which to situate the earlier account of race and gender within a broader social ontology of practices allows us to both more precisely frame the issues at stake (the constitution of gender and race as capitalist, the role of capitalism as a historical "motor," and the correct name for the social order as a whole) and to locate the point in Haslanger's thinking that Marxian unitary theories, by emphasizing Marx's notion of historically specific social form and purpose, problematize.

3.2. Haslanger's Practical Materialism

On Haslanger's most developed published view to date, practices

[...] are patterns of learned behavior that enable us (in the primary instances) to coordinate members of a group in creating, distributing, managing, maintaining, and eliminating a [source] (or multiple [sources]), due to mutual responsiveness to each other's behavior and the [source(s)] in question, as interpreted through shared meanings / cultural schemas (Haslanger 2018, 245).¹⁴

This account has the virtue of tracking between overly intentional "thick" understandings of practice and overly broad, merely patterned, "thin"

13 Section 5 of Haslanger (2017) begins to move in this direction but does not explicitly revise Haslanger's account of race in light of its account of (presumably kind constitutive) systemic racism in practical terms.

14 Note that I have modified uses of "resource" to read "source" following Haslanger's recent shift in terminology. On the reasons for her shift, see Haslanger (2019a, 14 n. 12). Sewell is responsible for the schema—resource conceptual pair. (Sewell, 1992)

understandings. As, for Haslanger, “practices, are not fully intentional, as such, but neither are they mere regularities in behavior such as blinking or squinting in bright light” (2018, 237). Rather,

[...] practices fall along a spectrum from explicitly coordinated behavior that is rule-governed, intentional, voluntary, (e.g., games), to regularities in patterns in behavior that are the result of shared cultural schemas or social meanings that have been internalized through socialization and shape primitive psychological mechanisms governing cognition, affect, and experience (e.g., bodily comportment, verbal inflection) (2018, 235).

The object of a practice, on Haslanger’s account, is a *source* assigned a negative or positive value and unified qua source within the process of a given practical enactment by one or more embodied social *schemas*, which are themselves objective complexes of public social meanings that may be linguistic or para-linguistic. Schemas, in turn, are unified, individuated, and (potentially) modified in response to material features of the sources that they organize and in response to their interaction with other social practices.

Schemas are said to be in a twofold relation of interdependence with their sources. Causally, “schemas emerge and develop in response to sources and sources emerge and develop in response to schemas” (Haslanger 2016, 13). Constitutively, schemas are “defined by the sources they organize, and somethings being a source of a particular kind depends on what schema interprets/organizes it” (2016, 13). Schemas are constitutively constrained and individuated not only by the properties of their sources, but also by their implication within broader patterns of social practice. To make this point, Haslanger draws on Joseph Rouse’s theory of the mutual responsiveness of practices:

The bounds of a practice are identified by the ways in which its constitutive performances bear upon one another [...] One performance expresses a response to another, for example, by correcting it, rewarding or punishing its performer, drawing inferences from it, translating it, imitating it (perhaps under different circumstances), circumventing its effects, and so on. (Rouse 2007, 530; as quoted in Haslanger 2018, 240)

In this way, practices can be said to be normative and modifiable by processes of social learning that need not always involve the faculty of judgment in its robust construal.

The constitutive constraints imposed on practices by their sources and by their embeddedness within milieus of practices are the two grounds, on Haslanger's account, of the opacity of practice to individual agents,¹⁵ and of the mind-independent socio-natural objectivity of practices that can be taken up as a source, and potentially modified, by other practices.

Haslanger advances the materialist intuition that guides her work on practices towards a non-individualist¹⁶ systems account of the constitution of the social, such that what is included in the social world is what "contributes to the system, i.e., its structural and functional parts" and that authorizes structural and functional explanations of social phenomena (Haslanger 2020a, 9). On this account, "social systems are, necessarily, world-involving and embodied" and "many of the meanings we attach to the world are not arbitrary and unconstrained" because "we have to cooperate with the world as we coordinate with each other" (2020a, 11). Consequently, "a social ontology suited to understanding social systems [...] must include the worldly components upon which our attitudes and activities depend" (2020a, 11).¹⁷

Thus far we have emphasized that for Haslanger, social practices—the basic elements of social being—are co-constituted unities of mutually active sources and schemas. Practices, in turn, can be organized into structures that act back upon their constitutive component practices such that the practice-structure relation, like the source-schema relation, is dynamic. Social kinds are conceived from this perspective as relatively stable objective phenomena that ontologically depend on structures and practices. Social kinds are thus by definition *revisable*, but not *freely* so—attempts to revise, produce, or eliminate

15 We can misapprehend our own practice because we are ignorant of certain relevant characteristics of sources (e.g. we take something to be something that it is not or to have a property that it does not), because the public social meaning of a practice as it is embedded in networks of other practices is unknown to us (e.g. rules of etiquette in a newly encountered community), or because there is a disjuncture between what we take ourselves to be doing and what we are actually doing according to a public schema (e.g. contributing to inflation).

16 She endorses Epstein's critique of ontological individualism on the grounds that "social properties are often determined by physical ones that cannot plausibly be taken to be individualistic properties of persons" (Epstein 2009, 190).

17 A consequence of the complex imbrication of social phenomena within networks of practices and worldly things is that we are prone to producing unintended consequences in our practices, unintended consequences that "are not random or inexplicable" but that "can often be explained" and potentially criticized only by "situating them within a system that is not defined by the intentions or purposes of the collectivity" (Haslanger 2020a, 12). It is precisely because social phenomena often exceed intentionality due to their dependence on material parts and their imbrication within systems of practical coordination that Haslanger takes the fundamental unit of social ontology to be *practices* rather than beliefs, attitudes, or discourses either individualistically or collectively construed.

social kinds will be constrained by ongoing structured social practice. Finally, since social kinds are objective, they produce effects that constrain and enable practices and revising social kinds entails altering the social terrain of agency.¹⁸

By locating the construction of race and gender within social structures composed of patterned and constrained social practices, we can begin to think through the meaning of the systematic reproduction of these kinds. Haslanger's work offers to unitary theory a vocabulary for expressing the immanence of gender and race to social practice that allows discussion to advance beyond the opposition of social construction to biologism towards a more nuanced consideration of the relevant social practices and structures themselves. However, while Haslanger provides a theory of the constitutive construction of kinds and of the emergence of social structures out of patterned social practices, she does not attempt to explicitly locate the construction of race and gender within concrete structures of social practice, instead retaining generic definitions of hierarchical race and gender kinds that abstract from the practically enacted form and function of hierarchical social relations as such. By the lights of Haslanger's more recent formulation—what counts as social is what contributes to a system of practices—analyses of kinds are “pre-social” so long as they do not yet locate kind-constitutive practice in relation to determinate social systems. In this way, her analyses of race and gender kinds as they stand remain underdetermined in abstracting from (1) the social functions of race and gender oppression, (2) the practical mechanisms of the reproduction of race and gender, (3) the differences that separate capitalist social reproduction from prior and/or alternative modes. It is just these considerations that have been at the heart of debate among materialist feminists that unitary theory has intervened within by drawing on Marx's account of the historical specificity of capitalist society, to which we will now turn.

18 To provide an example, the introduction of legal restrictions on abortion reshapes, within their jurisdiction, the network of practices that gender categories as social kinds constitutively depend on, altering the social being of gender and, in turn, differentially affecting the constraints on action for differently gendered agents.

4. DEFENDING CONSTRUCTIVIST UNITARY THEORY ON MARXIAN GROUNDS

4.1. Marx's "Two-Level" Social Ontology

I have so far argued that unitary theory requires a theory of the constitution of social kinds in order to locate the construction of race and gender in dynamic relation with the reproduction of capitalism and that, while Sally Haslanger's work provides a viable theory of the practical social construction of kinds, her standing analyses of race and gender kinds are too abstract, both by the standards of her later work on social systems and by Marxian standards that we will turn to shortly, to play a role in determinately locating the practical mechanisms, capitalist or otherwise, of hierarchical practical kind constitution. In this second section, I will offer a preliminary analysis of the mode of integration of the reproduction of race and gender into the reproduction of capitalism qua institutionalized social order that responds to Haslanger's challenges to Nancy Fraser. In order to do this, I overview three key Marxian social ontological contributions—socio-natural metabolism, value mediation, and practical subsumption—and demonstrate how these concepts bring the unique character of capitalism as a synthesizing system into view.

A unique feature of Marx's approach to social ontology is his emphasis on the concrete determination of social phenomena within the context of historical modes of socio-natural metabolism (social configurations of the mediation of human dependency on nature). Marx provides a clear statement of his views on the historical specificity of social categories in the 1857 methodological "Introduction" appended to the *Grundrisse*.¹⁹ In this text, Marx is concerned with elaborating his criticism of political economy's penchant to abstract categories away from the concrete networks of practice that they take on meaning within, as well as with developing his own methodological alternative to this practice of bad abstraction. Taking on the economists' concept of *production*, Marx writes:

Production in general is an abstraction, but a rational abstraction in so far as it really brings out and fixes the common element and thus saves us repetition. Still, this *general category*, this common element sifted out by comparison, is itself segmented many times over and splits into many determinations. Some determinations belong to all epochs, others only to a few. [...] [T]he elements which are not general and common, must

¹⁹ "Introduction" in Marx (1973[1857]).

be separated out from the determinations valid for production as such, so that in their unity—which arises already from the identity of the subject, humanity, and of the object, nature—their essential difference is not forgotten. (Marx 1973[1857], 85)

In this text we can see both the object of Marx's critique—the abstraction and naturalization of what is historically specific—and the outline of his own position, which I will call his “two-level” social ontology. On this view, we can speak of general transhistorical features of practices (that they take place in time, that they require the expenditure of energy, etc.), but such speech remains at a distance from the determination of any given practice as it actually exists, for, in addition to its generic features, all social practice will also have historically specific features determined by the network of practices that make up the society's mode of mediating its material reproduction.²⁰

The process of socio-natural metabolism then refers to the concrete schema and practices that govern the exchange and transformation of matter between human societies and non-human nature.²¹ All forms of social organization are constrained by generic limits on socio-natural metabolism, but each concrete society must give a particular form to socio-natural metabolism within these constraints. What it is to be individuated as a society, for Marx, is to have such an individuated mode of socio-natural metabolism, and what individuates *capitalist society* is that the process of socio-natural metabolism is subordinated to the schema of *value*.²² From a Marxian perspective, that is, societies are not individuated by national, linguistic, or cultural borders, but by distinct modes of socio-natural reproduction and inter-human material

20 For a comprehensive defense of reading Marx on abstraction in this way, see Murray (1988, chap. 10).

21 Note that matter here does not play an ontologically foundational role. Matter, like “sources” for Haslanger, is always to be considered from the perspective of a transformational practice rather than statically. Similarly, following Alfred Schmidt, I would argue that for Marx “nature” is given form according to an abstract schema of social practice in the same way that, as in our example above, “wood” is given form qua source by practices of logging, building, etc. On the details of Marx's position on socio-natural metabolism, see Saenz de Sicilia (2016, 98-119), Echeverría (2014) and Schmidt (1971, *passim*).

22 See Marx's letter of July 11 1868 to Kugleman on this point: “No natural laws can be done away with. What can change in historically different circumstances is only the *form* in which these laws assert themselves. And the form in which this proportional distribution of labor asserts itself, in the state of society where the interconnection of social labor is manifested in the *private exchange* of the individual products of labor, is precisely the *exchange value* of these products.” (Marx 2010[1868], 3-8)

dependence.²³ In turn, our efforts at forming good concepts for grasping social kinds require attending to the historically specific kind-constitutive networks of practice within which these kinds take on meaning. We cannot assume that social categories are transitive across modes of socio-natural metabolism, but rather need to investigate the historically actual networks of schema and source constraints that inform the kinds they aim to grasp.

Here we can begin to respond to the first of Haslanger's challenges to unitary theory. Haslanger has queried as to whether capitalist social positions are genuinely *constitutive of race and gender* or if they merely track otherwise constituted social kinds. I believe that a defensible unitary theory can make the claim that capitalism, qua mode of socio-natural metabolism, sets the *global concrete* parameters of race and gender constitution, but that *local concrete* contexts of racialization and gender distinction will also be informed by non-capitalist social practices with varying degrees of systematicity. To illustrate this further, if, on Haslanger's definition, women are those "socially subordinated due to their perceived or imagined female reproductive capacities" then "woman" is a transhistorical category (Haslanger 2012, 8). Such a category may be useful in unifying vastly differing regimes of gender domination, as Haslanger intends it to in its original formulation²⁴, but it, in its abstraction from the social form and purpose of differential privileging and subordination according to perceived or imagined characteristics, obscures consequential differences in the organization of social practice that are relevant to the discussion of the relationship between capitalism, gender, and race. By contrast to this transhistorical analysis of the practical content of the social kind *women*, the revised unitary theory thesis instead claims that where historically specific capitalist relations of production prevail, women are those socially subordinated due to their perceived or imagined capacities to *reproduce labour*

23 Patrick Murray helpfully insists that although it is foundational to liberal-capitalist ideology that society as a whole has no purpose and that purposes and meanings are individually chosen with a great degree of freedom, it is crucial to recognize that a mode of socio-natural metabolism unites means and ends (Murray 2017, chap. 1). As Martha Campbell reads Marx on this point: "Marx's Case against idealist philosophy of law is that the goal of each particular way of life is realized through the process of satisfying needs; against economics, it is that satisfying needs is the means for realizing the goal of a particular way of life." (Campbell 1993, 146)

24 "[T]o be a Chinese woman of the 1790s, a Brazilian woman of the 1890s, or an American woman of the 1990s may involve very different social relations, and very different kinds of oppression. Yet on the analysis suggested these groups count as women." (Haslanger 2012, 230)

power.²⁵ Analogously, we can provisionally²⁶ amend Haslanger's race analysis, following Fraser: racially subordinated peoples are those socially subordinated due to the interpretation of physical features as evidence of their ancestral links to a particular geographical region and thus *marked as inherently expropriable*. These modified analyses are designed to be minimally practically concrete abstractions and are intended to hold whenever and wherever capitalism, qua institutionalized social order, obtains. For many purposes,²⁷ social theory needs to advance towards a more concrete level of determination that would situate local practices of racial and gendered subordination within more finely differentiated practical social structures. I take this to be the area where intersectionality theory has excelled, attending to local contexts of the non-additive co-constitution of specific racialized gender kinds.²⁸ Nevertheless, the explanation for the reproduction of race and gender as oppressive social kinds

25 There is debate within unitary theory on the "tracking" property of capitalist gender kinds. Lise Vogel argues that the sexed capacity to generationally reproduce labor power is what is tracked, Gonzalez and Neton argue, following and modifying Butler, that "sex is the naturalization of gender's dual projection upon bodies" and what is tracked is only a relational property of abjection that indexes the conjunctural articulation of production and unwaged social reproductive activity (Gonzalez and Neton 2013, 79), and Aaron Jaffe has proposed a powers ontology to suggest that what is tracked is not sex, but simply labor power reproductive capacities (Jaffe 2020, 58-70).

26 More provisionally because the existing concrete analysis of the capitalist reproduction of race and of the systematic articulation of racialized expropriation and valorization is less conclusive than the analogous literature on gender. I am optimistic that competing accounts of the anchors of racialization in valorization may be synthesized in the future. Of the existing analyses, in addition to Fraser and Jaeggi (2018, 39-47 and 101-108), compare Dawson (2016), Chen (2013), Roediger and Esch (2014), Chang (1985), Rodney (2019), Toscano and Bhandar (2015), Ince (2022), and see the useful overview of current debates in the introduction to Roediger (2017).

27 For example: understanding the categorial differences between "White," "Colored" and "Black" in apartheid South Africa's tri-partite racial order.

28 It is at the local level, rather than in terms of the articulation of social systems as wholes, that the thematic of ideological remnants and holdovers plays a role. We can observe, in many local contexts, apparent continuity with pre-capitalist gender norms and ideologies (e.g. in the social imaginary and practice of the post-war religious right or in post-colonial revivals of supposedly pre-colonial rigid gender roles). The point here is that (1) explanations of these continuities require reference to plural local histories and yet, (2) the re-iteration of these forms occurs on the conflictual practical terrain of the reproduction of capitalism. This is not to discount the importance of the local. From the perspective of organized social action, challenge to the capitalist race/gender paradigm is often articulated through the grammar of locally specific configurations of social practice. Nevertheless, challenges that do not extend to contesting the anchors of race and gender in the reproduction of capitalist socio-natural metabolism are liable to reconfigure the parameters of particular oppressive kinds and the populations slotted into them without abolishing durable structural oppression as such.

as such in capitalist societies lies at the same level of abstraction as the practical mechanism for concretely mediating global material interdependence.

For a unitary theory that has adopted Haslanger's social ontology of practices, structures, and practically constructed kinds and integrated it into a Marxian account of capitalism as a mode of socio-natural metabolism, the key distinction is not between a capitalist order that would "track" otherwise constructed genders and racial categories and the pre/non-capitalist construction of these social kinds, but instead between the highly abstract but historically determinate form under which production and social reproduction and exploitation and expropriation are distinguished and the various concrete contributions of local practices to socially practicing the significance of these distinctions. The contribution of pre- or non-capitalist practice is not to determinately construct human kinds, which are then opportunistically mobilized by capitalism, but instead to "fill out" the social content of kinds beyond the limited contours of the capitalist distinction that anchors the hierarchical relations of gendering and racialization. The way this happens is geographically and historically variable, within limits.

It is a central plank of Fraser's position that capitalism historically transforms in response to crises that it generates across the institutional boundaries that characterize it—economic crises, social reproductive crises, ecological crisis, political crisis, and crises of the operation of racialized expropriation. These transformations motivate revisions in the practical parameters of race and gender constitution.²⁹ What persists across these transformations and singularly marks the unity of capitalism over and above both local differences and historical differences across regimes of accumulation is the durability of the institutional boundaries (economy/polity, society/nature, production/reproduction, exploitation/expropriation) themselves and of the value dynamic at the heart of capitalism that both presupposes and remediates the practical instantiation of these boundaries. To further develop this claim, we will need to specify the difference that the capitalist master schema of value mediation makes for social theory.

4.2. Value Mediated Sociality: The Capitalist Difference

The particular form that socio-natural metabolism takes is not ontologically neutral, which is why Marx's social ontology is genuinely two-level. Capitalism, from the perspective of social ontology, is characterized by an emergent novel

²⁹ Fraser sketches a number of such transformations that correlate with her preferred schema for periodizing intra-capitalist history in chapter two of Fraser and Jaeggi (2018).

way of ordering social practices into a structured, albeit contradictory and conflictual, whole that I will refer to as value mediation, and that we can take to be a highly abstract master schema constitutive of a mode of sociality as such.³⁰ Under this schema, anything can potentially be (although as we will see, not everything can *actually* be) taken up under the commodity form and assigned a socially mediated exchange value in monetary terms, which validates the practices involved in the production of the commodity or commodified service as participating in the distinctly capitalist mode of socio-natural metabolism. Importantly, Marx's theory is, in Dianne Elson's apt phrasing, not so much a labor theory of value as it is a "value theory of labor"—a theory of the form that nature transforming activity takes under capitalist social relations (Elson 2015, 144). The aim of capitalist socio-natural metabolism is not to produce generic wealth or any particular use values,³¹ but rather to valorize value in monetary terms. In order to adequately grasp the ontology of the present social world we must attend to the types of distinctions that this master schema introduces in social practice.

Value, the distinguishing mark of capitalist social form, emerges out of the abstraction involved in the subsumption of labor to capital. What is distinctive of this social form is that labor practices are both socially validated³² and temporally constrained by the relations that their commodity products enter into in markets. Value, an emergent relational property of commodities,

30 I am inspired in this connection by Lotz' treatment of what he terms "the capitalist schema." (Lotz, 2014)

31 Although individual practices, and indeed, all particular practices of individuals taken in aggregate may aim at concrete ends intelligible according to teleological practical schema, the social mediation of these practices generates altogether alien results. As Lukács puts it: "It is a teleological project when a woman goes to the market and buys five pears. In the market, however, the thousand teleological projects give rise to a market causality, which connects up with other market causalities, so that the individual teleological projects are effective only in their causal product. It is the insuperable aspect of objectivity and lawfulness in social existence, that the outcome of the individual teleological projects which it consists of presents a quite different aspect of that which was intended in them." I disagree, however, with Lukács endorsement of a version of methodological individualism: "If anyone analyzed society completely into its component parts, he would arrive, I believe, at the single teleological project as the atom from which society is built up." (Lukács 1967, 76-77)

32 Marx discusses social validation in the context of prices. A commodity has a socially valid price if it is able to find a buyer in a competitive market. Within the context of his theory, the labor time involved in a given labor process is validated as socially necessary only by means of the sale of the commodity products of this labor process at a given competitive price. Thus, excessive concrete labor time, relative to a competitor's standard, in a given labor process is not reflected in the value of the commodity product of labor and this labor time is not *validated* as socially *necessary* labor time. For a more detailed treatment of this process, see Reichelt (2007).

is immanently measured by what Marx calls the abstract socially necessary labor time involved in commodity production. Crucially, abstract socially necessary labor time is “not tallied as individual sums of abstract labor, much less sums of average labor time, but it is produced initially as an aggregate result of all capitalist production that is distributed to individual commodities through competition in markets” (Murray and Schuler 2016, 133). It is only with the exchange of money (value’s necessary form of appearance and external measure³³) for commodities that the concrete labor that went into their production is socially validated as temporally normative abstract labor. Time norms emerge out of inter-capitalist competition, and producers that wish to remain in business are constrained to meet or exceed these norms in their production processes.³⁴ Importantly, these temporal constraints, aimed at extracting surplus value, arrive on the scene as “laws” of second nature. Their force is “impersonal,” caused by the social form itself and only contingently by this or that capitalist.

What does an invocation of formal causality like this mean? Here I follow William Clare Roberts in holding that it is only by attending to the practical character of subsumption that we can make sense of Marx’s invocations of capital as a “subject” that exercises a kind of “impersonal power” by means of its form. Capitalist subsumption, taken generically, refers to the conflictual and perpetually incomplete subordination³⁵ of concrete practical activity to the end of valorizing value (Roberts, 2009). It is the name for the mechanism by which capitalism ‘takes up’ practices as moments of its system.

Marx distinguishes between three types of subsumption in the “Results of the Immediate Process of Production” posthumously appended to Fowkes’ English translation of *Capital I* (Marx 1976[1867], 975-1038). *Formal subsumption* is the subordination of a concrete labor process to the end of producing commodities intended to be exchanged and, importantly, to competitive time norms enforced by commodity markets. We should note immediately that this subsumption abstracts away from the concrete ends of various labor practices—once formally subsumed, the point of producing shoes is not to provide footwear, but to make a profit. *Real subsumption* refers

³³ See Elson (2015) and Heinrich (2012, 64-70) on these points.

³⁴ For a detailed account of the generation of time norms, see part one of Tombazos (2014, 9-118).

³⁵ Note that while I typically elide the success qualifier for subsumption for the sake of legibility, practical subsumption is never guaranteed and the process of subsumption is characteristic site of conflict in capitalist societies that indicates the fragility of the macro-level phenomenon of capitalist accumulation due to its dependence on human practical activity. On subsumption struggles, see the important work of Das (2012).

to the transformation of the concrete characteristics of the labor process in view of better serving the end of valorizing value; its paradigmatic form is the assembly line.³⁶ The often neglected third type, *Hybrid subsumption*, refers to the inclusion of productive activity that is organized on a non-capitalist basis into the valorization cycle, paradigmatically by means of financial instruments or coercive rent extraction. Hybrid subsumption occurs outside of the wage relation and involves productive processes in which capital does not directly own the means of production. In this way, it conditions a reproduction of historical asynchrony as it introduces a pressure that depends on the historical dominance of capitalism in order to maintain domains of informally capitalist practices (as in the relationship between merchant capital and slave production in the plantation system). This paradoxical form of inclusion by means of incomplete form-determination has significant political implications, not the least of which is the increased dependence of these practices on various forms of ideological naturalization and direct threat or exercise of force that account for their departure from the logic of equivalence that characterizes formal capitalist society.

At the level of global capitalism as a whole, we can discern an overall *dynamic of subsumption* that registers the shifting paths taken by capital's systematic drive to subordinate nature-transforming activity to the ends of valorization. Importantly, the dynamic of subsumption is not linear—there is no overall progression of capitalist society from a “stage” of hybrid subsumption to a formal and finally real stage, rather all directions of movement are possible as capital contains no drive towards the more efficient production of wealth, only an imperative to valorize value.³⁷ The fluidity of the dynamic of subsumption points to the internal tendency of global capitalism towards spatial and temporal differentiation rather than homogenization and is a key explanator of the persistence and reproduction of global inequality. The co-existence of domains of violently enforced hybrid subsumption and highly advanced technological production is not a result of contingent anachronism but a product and precondition of the “asocial sociality” of capital

36 In the two modes of subsumption we find echoes of the two axes of the constraint on practice identified by Haslanger—formal subsumption constrains labor practices by setting them into constitutive relation with exchange, consumption, and financing practices; real subsumption constrains labor practices by altering the material characteristics of the labor process.

37 See Sáenz De Sicilia's decisive critique of stagiest interpretations of Marx on subsumption (Sáenz De Sicilia 2016, 211-215).

accumulation at the world scale.³⁸

It is worth dwelling on the consequences of value mediated sociality and the dynamic of subsumption for social ontology. What Marx discovered in his analysis of the commodity was a distinct form under which the “laws of nature” assert themselves as capitalism—a novel mode of socio-natural metabolism that presents itself as entirely asocial (qua private) and that organizes human interdependence in ways that encourage agents to misrecognize themselves as lone individuals confronting “the way things are.” Behind this veil, Marx discovers the workings of a social process of synthesis that, without being directed, constrains and patterns social practice in ways that exceed intention.³⁹ Indeed, the value-mediated social is independent of *any* concrete ends. It has a directionality⁴⁰—expansion in value terms—that is disconnected from and indifferent to all use-values (and thus should not be confused with the “development” that may or may not occur in concert with valorization), to all other social schemas that might assign positive or negative values to sources, in Haslanger’s terminology.

The indifference of capitalism, qua mediating structure, coupled with its emergent expansive directionality, markedly distinguishes it from such social system concepts as patriarchy that make reference to exogenous ends such as the production and maintenance of men’s domination. In this regard, class, just like race and gender, is a presupposition and re-produced consequence of valorization, but the end of valorization is not class rule, but simply expanded valorization.⁴¹ This is part of what Marx means in insisting that capitalists appear in *Capital* only as “personifications of economic categories”—what is being analyzed are social form-determinations, not strategies for the elite

38 On the subsumption dynamic and developmental unevenness see Tomba (2012, 144-158); Harootunian (2015); and Walker’s (2016) illuminating illustration of the appearance of these issues in the Japanese capitalism debate.

39 As Marx puts it, “Men are henceforth related to each other in their social process of production in a purely atomistic way. Their own relations of production therefore assume a material shape which is independent of their control and their conscious individual action” (Marx 1976[1867], 183).

40 I cannot provide here the full demonstration for why capitalist societies are constrained to expand in value terms. Among the many sources that deftly handle this, I would direct readers to Postone. It is also Postone (1993, 286-306) who has most clearly distinguished the unidirectional historical temporality that emerges under developed capitalism from the teleological concept of history that unfortunately mars Marx’s early work, particularly the *Communist Manifesto*. The view of history I present here takes historical temporality to be a constructed result of patterned social practice. On contrasting and incompatible theses about historical temporality in Marx’s early and late work see Bensaïd (2002, 7-90); Tomba (2012); Harootunian (2015, 1-73).

41 See Postone (1993, 314-324) on this point.

maintenance of hierarchy (Marx 1976[1867], 92).

That capitalism is essentially a mediating structure is crucial to why unitary theorists like Fraser take it to be the correct name for the social order as a whole. Haslanger has asked after the “cook” that brings together various social practices into a *social order*; for unitary theory, capitalism just is this “cook” that carries out a unique form of what Adorno terms “social synthesis” (Adorno, 2000). Further, while Haslanger’s second contention is that “capitalism is not the ‘engine of history’” because “[s]ocieties all face the challenge of solving multiple coordination problems, where the problems and their possible solutions pull us in different directions,” from a Marxian perspective, capitalism is the closest thing we can identify to an “engine of history” insofar as it is an abstract mediating meta-schema that constrains the organization of responses to use-value defined concrete coordination problems (Haslanger 2020b, 7). The persistence of numerous readily soluble coordination problems from hunger, to housing, to fossil fuel dependence indexes the social incapacity of concrete ends to transcend the abstract social domination of valorization over practice. To the extent that solutions to coordination problems undermine the conditions of capital accumulation they are bound to encounter significant resistance—both of the overtly political and of the more insidious impersonal social structural variety. This does not mean that capitalist exploitation is more *fundamental* than gendered and racial oppression, but rather that capital’s drive to self-expansion compels it to mediate social reproduction by subsuming nature transforming practices to the abstract end of the valorization of value, durably systematizing the social and synthetically relating spatially, culturally, and historically disparate practices along the way.⁴²

4.3. Capitalist Society’s Limit Points

While recognition of the centrality of valorization to capitalist societies has led some Marxian thinkers to oppose capitalist exploitation to gendered and racial domination on the grounds that where racism and sexism impede accumulation they are cast aside, this view is both contradicted by the long run of the historical record and depends upon mistakenly taking the “logic” of capitalism to be an abstract model, rather than a really existing and historically

⁴² Sewell, in the article that informs Haslanger’s concept of social practice suggests an intriguingly similar point: “[T]he commodity form, by making almost all resources readable as exchangeable commodities, organizes a virtually universal intersection of structures, which means that changes in any one structure—an increased or decreased accumulation of resources or a new procedure—can affect an indefinitely vast number of other structures that intersect through the medium of money” (Sewell 1992, 26).

dynamic outcome of patterned social practice.⁴³ However, just as this view errs in abstracting a minimally determined “logic” of capital from historical social practice, there is a danger for unitary theories to overextend the reach of the systematization that the historical emergence and development of the valorization process introduces into capitalist societies.⁴⁴ Reflecting on the periphery of capitalist subsumption will help us to avoid these errors in responding to Haslanger’s final critical point.

To be clear, unitary theory does not claim that all social practice is value-mediated. Part of what it means for capitalism to be a historically specific, rather than an eternal, social form is that the dynamic of capitalist value-mediated sociality presupposes a number of non-value mediated natural and social facts (e.g. natural resources, contract law) as well as a number of only indirectly value-mediated social facts and practices (e.g. unwaged domestic work, police enforcement of contract law). These are what Nancy Fraser refers to as capitalism’s background conditions of possibility that must be in place in order for the value-mediated metabolic cycle to operate. As Fraser argues, “commodification is far from universal in capitalist society. On the contrary, where it is present, it depends for its very existence on zones of non-commodification” (Fraser 2014, 67). The non-commodity presuppositions of capital accumulation need to be systematically reproduced, and the way in which this happens is clearly socially constrained, however, it is not constrained by something like “pure” economic laws.

The practices that unitary theory takes to be constitutive of race and gender, and indeed class, as hierarchical social kinds are of this sort—that is, they are globally constrained by the necessary reproduction conditions of the value dynamic, but not directly value mediated and normatively standardized across local contexts. As Marx shows in the final section of *Capital I*, on “so-called primitive accumulation,” while valorization presupposes dispossessed proletarians eager to sell commodified labor power for a wage in order to purchase commodified means of subsistence and the valorization cycle itself reproduces this condition, capital cannot spontaneously generate its own initial conditions—for this, a complex combination of colonial expropriation, legal reform, forced enclosure, and state repression was necessary (Marx 1976[1867], 873-940). The processes that establish the conditions for

⁴³ See Wood (1995) and Arruzza (2014) critique of Wood.

⁴⁴ The hyperbolic limit of the latter errance can be found in the post-autonomist “social factory” thesis, which depends on a misreading of Marx’s concept of “real subsumption” in order to claim that post-Fordist capitalism mobilizes all of social life towards value production. See Negri (1988).

the value dynamic to emerge are not themselves functional parts of the value dynamic but a collection of consequences of non-capitalist social systems (e.g. of the breakdown of the feudal class system in the European case) and historical processes not characterized by the degree of homeostasis necessary to qualify them as systems (e.g. outcomes of individual colonial wars of conquest). Nevertheless, once valorization is set into motion, it begins to exert dynamic pressure on social practice directly, by means of subsumption, and indirectly by the overall subordination of reproductive socio-natural metabolism to the aim of surplus value extraction. Insofar as the historically specific social form of value introduces necessary distinctions in social practice (between value productive and unproductive labor, between exploitation and expropriation), there is a global practically realized social pressure to institutionally stabilize these distinctions in quasi-natural forms. I take this to be what Fraser is arguing when she writes:

Once gender and race are understood right side up, in a pragmatic, de-substantialized way, as outcomes rather than givens, the conclusion appears inescapable: if capitalism requires that production and exploitation be hived off from reproduction and expropriation, respectively, and if it requires that the latter functions be assigned to separate and distinct classes of persons, designated expressly for that purpose, then capitalism cannot be detached from gender and racial oppression (Fraser and Jaeggi 2018, 111).

We might put the point another way: there are structural limits to the reform-ability of capitalism and these are necessarily reproduced along with the reproduction of social life. In a powerful phrase deployed by Kyriakides and Torres and further developed by Chris Chen, these practical “limit points of capitalist equality” play a determining role in a social order that has, since its inception, been characterized by a contradictory ideology that attempts to square the universal “equality of man” (a way of representing the indifference of capital to concrete labor power) and racial, class and gender hierarchy (ways of representing practical limits) (Kyriakides and Torres 2012, 36; Chen 2013). Even if the emergent capitalist social order picked up on pre-existing practices of sexual, religious, and geographical subordination, these practices are nevertheless transformed at the level of the practical parameters of their reproduction by their implication in the reproduction of capitalism, and, to the extent that we are practical materialist social ontologists, it is just these practical parameters that constitute the persistent actuality of systematically reproduced racial and gendered domination.

Turning to Haslanger's third critique, we must mark an important disanology between race and gender, as it is clear that differently configured forms of institutionalized gender domination prevailed in much of the world prior to the advent of capitalism. By contrast, there is significant historical debate as to the existence of racism and, consequently, its constructed product "race" prior to the inauguration of the modern capitalist world system.⁴⁵ Philosophy cannot resolve this debate, and my position does not depend on its resolution. My claim is that capitalism, as a historically actualized form of the organization of socio-natural metabolism contains systematic imperatives that constrain patterned social practice in ways that produce social distinctions constitutive of differential race and gender hierarchies and further, that it is by *means of* the unique mode of social mediation characteristic of capitalist societies that the social *compulsion* of racial and gendered domination is reproduced today.

The Marxian unitary theory approach does not require positing any additional "systems" of oppression such as independently existing patriarchy or white supremacy, because it instead identifies practical necessities entailed by the constrained form of socio-natural metabolism that bear upon the organization of the social into practically distinguished human kinds. That said, a full account of the practical networks that constitute gender and race in their necessary overlap at the level of individuals has yet to be produced. Indeed, there is a great deal of variation in the ways in which gender and race are constituted across segments of the capitalist social, according to variations in localized aspects of the dynamic of subsumption (e.g. international division of labor) and in local variations in ideology, cultural history, and other non/indirectly-value mediated practices.⁴⁶ That differently organized racial orders and vastly different ideologies of race and gender prevail in different local contexts is evidence that while specific "thick" constructions of individuated race and gender kinds may be informed by cultural and psychological factors, the *fact that the social is racialized and gendered as such* over and above these various realizations of race and gender speaks to the need for a more

⁴⁵ Within a broadly Marxian context, contrast here the overview of literature provided by Grüner (2020) with the arguments of Robinson (2000) and Horne (2020). Against the consensus view that race and racism are modern phenomena, McCoskey (2012) and Isaac (2006) argue for the existence of ancient proto-racisms and Heng (2020) and Whitaker (2019) identify Medieval theological and rhetorical roots for modern racism.

⁴⁶ Jennifer Bair's (2010) work on the simultaneous variation and interdependent patterning of globalized gendered production and labor market relations compellingly illustrates the asymmetry of the co-constitutive relationship between capitalist imperatives and local cultural practices of gender constitution.

abstract analysis of social structure that transcends these local differences. If we exclude those hypotheses that would ground the systematic character of the reproduction of social structure in either the psyche, biology, or cultural essences, for lack of compelling evidence, we are left with the global coordination of social activity that accompanies capitalism. The point then is not that non-value mediated features of the social do not play a role in locally determining the contours of kind-constitutive social practice—indeed they do and may even be the most salient features of particular phenomena of oppression—but rather that, in the absence of an account of how such features of practice systematize at the scale of capitalism as a whole we are left wondering how non-capitalist practices of race and gender can be “doing capitalism now” in anything more than a fragmented, marginal, and deeply asymmetrical way.

If there is not an identifiable, transhistorical or historically emergent, “gender system,” that can reproduce itself independently of any given society’s overall mode of socio-natural metabolism, then what kind of thing would “gender” in the formulation “gender is doing capitalism” be? Here, Haslanger’s earlier accounts of the construction of gender and race as relations of subordination and domination along one or more axes are, again, too abstract to play the role of social form determinants. However, there is another sense in which we can talk about gender and race “doing” capitalism that supposes that the gendered and racialized character of social relations under capitalism is a historical consequence of pre-capitalist patriarchal and/or racialized relations. Cedric Robinson, for example, famously argues that:

Racism [...] was not simply a convention for ordering the relations of European to non-European peoples but has its genesis in the “internal” relations of European peoples. As part of the inventory of Western civilization it would reverberate within and without, transferring its toll from the past to the present. In contradistinction to Marx’s and Engel’s expectations that bourgeois society would rationalize social relations and demystify social consciousness, the obverse occurred. The development, organization, and expansion of capitalist society pursued essentially racial directions, so too did social ideology. As a material force, then, it could be expected that racialism would inevitably permeate the social structures emergent from capitalism (Robinson 2000, 2).

Robinson places the historical origin of racialism in feudal European social relations and provides an account of the way that racialization was a structural moment of the reproduction of these social relations. When European social

relations are revolutionized and capitalism gets off the ground, racialism survives the transition and is, in turn, reproduced through the global expansion of capitalist social relations. In this case, there is no free-standing “race” system, but instead a theory of the embedding of racial subordination within the structured socio-natural metabolism of first pre-capitalist European feudalism, and then Euro-centric, but globalizing, capitalism. A similar argument can be made for the integration of gender domination into European feudalism and many other pre-capitalist social orders. What is crucial here is that although race and gender (not unlike money and even commodity markets) may historically precede capitalism in some form or another, their ongoing constitutive reproduction is due to their structural implication in the reproduction of capitalist social relations, not to a kind of cultural or ideological afterlife that persists at a distance from the practical coordination of the reproduction of social life.⁴⁷ Further, for unitary theory, the way that race and gender are reproduced in mediation with valorization sets specific “limit point” constraints on their categorial parameters. Attempts to practically revise the social content of these kinds in emancipatory ways will, for this reason, inevitably enter into direct conflict with the materialized force of the totality of capitalist society.

Finally, Haslanger is right to worry that racial and gendered oppression may outlive capitalism, depending on how it ends. There is no guarantee that a successor system will not mediate its reproduction in ways that differently actualize social kinds that we might recognize as continuations of race and gender as we know them. However, whatever the successor order may be, if it continues to be systematically characterized by hierarchically polarized human kinds, it will be so due to the socially generalized reproduction of kind constitutive oppressive practices in line with its own specific social form and purpose.

⁴⁷ If a constructivist account is not to collapse into a naturalized account, it must posit some durable practically enacted social relations that account for the persistence of social kinds over time. If a kind is to survive, these social practices must be buttressed by some combination of further social practices, differentially constraining and enabling materialized consequences of prior and ongoing practices, and natural facts. Here Barbara Fields’ warning against treating ideologies as if they were independent of the material practices they interpret is apt: “But race is neither biology nor an idea absorbed into biology by Lamarckian inheritance. It is ideology, and ideologies do not have lives of their own. Nor can they be handed down or inherited: a doctrine can be, or a name, or a piece of property, but not an ideology. If race lives on today, it does not live on because we have inherited it from our forebears of the seventeenth century or the eighteenth or nineteenth, but because we continue to create it today” (Fields and Fields 2012, 146).

5. CONCLUSION

Although her recent comments on Nancy Fraser's unitary theory of capitalism, racial, and gender oppression were critical, I have argued that Sally Haslanger's broad project of developing a practical materialist social ontology committed to grasping the mechanisms involved in the social construction of race and gender has much to offer Marxist-Feminists concerned with specifying the relationship between the reproduction of capital and racial and gendered oppression. I have worked to show how an amended version of unitary theory that integrates an account of the social construction of human kinds is equipped to respond to Haslanger's criticisms by arguing that capitalism, as an essentially mediating structure, is the correct name for the "cook" that synthesizes the social in a way that results in the reproduction of racial and gendered oppression and thus race and gender as durable social kinds. I have submitted a theory that emphasizes the determinate global contribution of practical capitalist "limit points" to the constitutive construction of race and gender qua systematically reproduced social relations while leaving room for differing local cultural and historical determinants to mediate the practical realization of particular race and gender kinds in concrete contexts. Finally, I have suggested reasons for social ontologists of all stripes to attend to the problematic of the historical specificity of social kinds as theorized by Marx.

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