

# Cartesianism, Feminism, Coloniality: Rethinking Gender Formation from Astell to Lugones

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This essay will examine both Mary Astell’s proposal for women’s education as a protofeminist project and Descartes’ meditations on rationalism and the mind-body duality to understand how Astell’s project functions as liberatory in her immanent approach to the Cartesian method. I argue that while Astell uses Descartes’ rationalist philosophy to justify the rational capacities of women, Descartes’ philosophy may in principle be used to justify the further subjugation of women and colonized peoples through the separation of mind and body. In addition, I will employ Maria Lugones’ “Coloniality of Gender” to further evaluate the historicity of the claims made by Astell and her use of Descartes. Through Lugones, I contend that the gender dichotomy, a colonial imposition, is essentialized by Astell through the logic of modernity. I, thereby, show the necessity of a decolonial analysis for undoing the presuppositions of a colonial logic with the purpose of abolishing the gender binaries imposed by coloniality.

Astell begins with perception to carry out her understanding of mind-body functionality. Her connection to Descartes’s method shows a belief which assumes gender to be congenital yet must be reformed through education and reason. Through thought and regulation of will, Astell justifies a position of gender presentation based on experience and our intellections of those experiences. For Astell, ideas are what we know and our immediate perceptions. What we know is not to be mistaken for what we know to be true or false, but rather they are matters that we have knowledge of. Both Astell and Descartes agree that ideas exist independent of their truth or falsehood. Astell claims, “[I]f by false we mean that which has no existence; our ideas certainly exists, though there be not anything in nature correspondent to it.”<sup>1</sup> What counts as false, rather, is our judgment of such ideas. What appears to us and the ideas that follow cannot be false insofar as the idea already and certainly exists. The faculty of ideas is our raw understanding as we receive them. Since our own perceptions can deceive us, we must train our faculties of reason so that we may understand their validity. This is not to minimize and underestimate the merit of ideas, but to view ideas as a point of departure to arrive at knowledge.

Descartes makes a similar account in *Meditations*, suggesting that “[W]e need not fear that there is falsity in the

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1. Mary Astell, *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies, for the Advancement of their True and Greatest Interest*, King’s Head (1697), 111.

will itself or in the affects, for although I can choose evil things or even things that are utterly nonexistent, I cannot conclude from this that it is untrue that I do choose these things.”<sup>2</sup> Descartes’ mind-body distinction is revealed in his theory of ideas and falsity. Our perceptions are not exactly concerned with truth, but instead with experience. Say that from afar we think we see someone, only to come up to them and find that who we think we saw is merely a shadow cast from a tree. It is not untrue that we had an idea of seeing someone, but rather our judgement and reality of it that follows from the idea. The idea of seeing someone is not false because the experience itself cannot be denied. As an idea, the concern is not with the truth of the idea but with the representations of our reality. Ideas exist in our minds according to things we know outside of us. So the idea of seeing someone is true as we know people to exist. For both Descartes’ and Astell, our understanding succeeds ideas because of the body’s limitations. Immediate understanding may remain confused regarding experience; however, in their view, intellectualization helps to overcome the limitations of this confusion—Astell understands this as a correction.

Astell’s adaptation of ideas takes influence from Descartes’ meditation three, where he suggests similarly that, “[M]oreover, I do know from experience that these ideas do not depend upon my will, nor consequently upon myself, for I often notice them even against my will.”<sup>3</sup> Descartes points out as well that our ideas occur against and do not depend upon our will. As thinking things, we cannot control our thoughts and perceptions as we receive them. We can think and believe that we saw a person from afar whether or not we choose to see them. While these ideas are in us, they are distinct from our will because the will negotiates with the thought. If we were to assume the opposite, namely that thought negotiates will, then we deny our own ability for intellection. Through the mind-body distinction there is a difference in our perception and the direction of our will because our bodies cannot intelligibly understand its experience.

In Astell’s method, correcting our ideas requires learning to regulate the will. Astell argues the will to be “whose office it is to determine the understanding to such and such ideas, and to stay it in the consideration of them so long as is necessary to the discovery of truth.” Astell accepts that the faculty of ideas and understanding is passive. Therefore, the faculty of the will is the faculty that makes determinations. By “regulating” the will, Astell reasons that we must train the direction of our thoughts in order to make judgments that conform to the truth: “[W]e can neither observe the errors of our intellect, nor the irregularity of our morals whilst we are darkened by fumes, agitated with unruly passions, or carried away eager desires after sensible things and vanities.” For Astell, our reasoning is derived from our ability to discern and negotiate several judgments. We can remedy the confusions of our perceptions through the will because we cannot

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2. René Descartes, “Meditations” from *Modern Philosophy: An Anthology of Primary Sources* edited by Roger Ariew and Eric Watkins, Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company (2019).

3. René Descartes, “Meditations” from *Modern Philosophy* edited by Roger Ariew and Eric Watkins, 48.

depend on the body to give testament to the truth. That is, through the regulation of the will, we can better understand our ideas and conform them to reason and virtue. As much as our ideas come from impulsive experiences, our judgements can arise as impulsive reactions to such experiences—the unregulated will thereby blurring our vision of truth. Reason, for Astell, holds moral significance because without it we succumb to our will's unregulated desires and emotions.

If, according to Descartes, reason is a universal human capacity not exclusive to only the few, then indeed this would extend to women as well. Astell argues in acceptance of this claim that, “[G]od does nothing in vain, he gives no power or faculty which he has not allotted to some proportionate use, if therefore he has given to mankind a rational mind, every individual understanding ought to be employed in somewhat worthy of it.”<sup>4</sup> Astell surveys Descartes’ argument as an emancipatory principle for women to be educated. God does not allot certain rational capabilities to only a few individuals or groups, but to the whole of humanity. This would suggest that women be included as people with the universal capacity to reason and therefore worthy of exercising that faculty through education so that they may be useful to society. As long as a woman is a thinking thing, she is also a judging thing, so such judgments should be refined through education. Astell contends that as women continued to be withheld from formal education, they were not taught how to regulate their will; thereby having to rely on their passions to form their intellect. Through education and knowledge acquisition, one can exercise their reason for moral and metaphysical purposes by control of the passions. Astell argues for the inclusion of women in education so that women may engage in a discourse of comparing ideas that will make judgments clearer thereby empowering them socially. She is not simply claiming that reason is conducive to being educated, but rather that the faculty comes into practice *through* education and that education will lead to women conforming their knowledge to will themselves towards what is considered good.

The proposal that Astell posits is not just education for women, but education that is specific to women. Astell also expresses fear of reproducing such knowledge, “We should not be deceived by the report of our senses; the prejudices of education; our own private interest, and readiness to receive the opinions whether true or false of those we love.”<sup>5</sup> As much as our perceptions can deceive us, we can also deceive ourselves through our own reasoning, hence, the necessity of regulating the will. Astell suggests that the purpose of her project is to educate women to discover their own rationale so as to overcome the reliance on passions. While such a project was meant to turn women around from corruption per education specialized for women through modern rationalism, the challenge is in how women’s education will not contribute to their own corruption. Not only does she propose the inclusion of women in education, but a separatist approach of education for women. This indicates Astell’s attitude on the difference in forms of thinking between genders, i.e., whether women have separate rational complexities from men based on a gender essentialism. This form of

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4. Astell, *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies*, 115.

5. Astell, *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies*, 111.

bourgeois feminism that Astell uses for her proposal thus takes the gender divide as its premise and accepts an ingenuous binary gender essentialism.

Astell justifies the purpose of women-only education, “[F]or indeed it concerns us most to know such truths as these, it is not material to us what other people’s opinions are, any farther than as the knowledge of their sentiments may correct our mistakes.”<sup>6</sup> Astell regards truth as neither agreeable nor disagreeable; rather, matters of truth exist outside of our opinions to the extent that our will and faculties can come to the same conclusions. She acknowledges the prejudices in education, perhaps the very prejudices that were used to justify poorly educating women. An education that is separate for women would act, for Astell, as a way for women to be in a space where they are not faced with dogmatic ideas that hinder their ability to reason but where women are allowed to be curious and produce knowledge of their own distinction. Since women were kept out of activities of reasoning in education, they were never given the capacity to correct their mistakes and critically apply the use of reason.

Astell annexes Cartesian Rationalism as a source for emancipation. In this regard, raising the consciousness of women would mean appealing to them through their gender. Astell argues, “[W]e are conscious of our own liberty, whoever denies it, denies that he is capable of rewards and punishments, degrades his nature and makes himself a more curious piece of mechanism.”<sup>7</sup> For Astell, we are conscious of our liberty because of the union between our mind and body. Perhaps, for Astell, we come into this world as free beings, but we deny ourselves liberty when we become passive to our bodies and limitations. Through rationalism, we can make our liberty realized. Considering the argument Descartes poses—i.e. that the mind’s mental capacities are not physical—our judgments would operate independently of the physicality of the body, externalizing sex and gender. Despite arguing against the logic of women’s incapacity to reason, (i.e. appropriating Descartes’ principle of universal reasoning to correct it) Astell argues that women’s capacity for reason exists independently of their gender if she fully accepts Descartes’ separation of mind and body.

In addition, I am suspicious of whether or not Astell viewed women’s reasoning as equal or diverse from that of men. This is not a claim of Astell positing natural inferiority to either gender, but rather questions if she believed in thought informed by and conforming to a binary of masculine and feminine. If we consider the claim of gender being a social construct while simultaneously viewing the mind as separable from the body, this challenges the notion of the social conditions the body experiences and how it is reacted to by the mind. Since Astell proposes to have a separate school for women, it is possible she believed in a feminine rationale that varied from men. While the mind is aware of its gender and the body is not, we consider the view that there are

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6. Astell, *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies*, 113.

7. Astell, *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies*, 101.

social and cultural influences that inform how we view and think about our bodies and selves. Gender is not innate in the body nor its biological functions but created and named with words we used to rationalize it. If the body experiences and the mind seeks to understand those experiences, such understandings may be socially and culturally conditioned towards a standard norm informed by modern rationalism.

A will that directs gender-specific thought would mean that Descartes' overlooks how the mind is never fully separated from the body. If gender has historically been associated with the body, but exists in the mind, this union shows how one can never be fully alienated from the body as Descartes suspects. Astell argues, "[I]f all Men are born free, how is it that all Women are born slaves? As they must be if the being subjected to the inconstant, uncertain, unknown Arbitrary Will of Men, be the perfect condition of slavery?"<sup>8</sup> Considering Astell's own critique of marriage, she must have understood how the woman herself is reduced to the body. Astell claims women's condition to be that of slavery, meaning that she lacks agency as she is reduced to the body, whereas men are seen as the embodiment of the mind and rational beings. This must be why—for Astell—Cartesian rationality is important to her project of women's emancipation: because *liberating the woman's mind would amount to liberating the body as well*.

Regarding marriage, Astell saw mental liberation from it as a physical liberation. Whereas Descartes' saw the body as a cage of the mind, Astell reasons through her proposal that the mind can cage the body as well through unregulation of the will. Descartes' poses that in order to control the manipulations of the body, one must aim to be fully independent of its influence through a utilization of the mind. Promoting an alienation for the body, women are called to disdain the body in response to being reduced to it. The problem here lies in that if women are asked to separate themselves from their bodies, they will never be fully conscious of how their bodies are dominated by the minds of men. Though she appropriates Descartes' method, she divests from fully carrying out his belief of full transcendence from the body. Through her method of regulating the will, she calls on women to transcend stereotypical notions and challenges them to rationalize themselves towards emancipation. Astell speculates on the gender binary of her time and raises consciousness of how its formation informs rational capacities.

As a flaw limited to the conditions of her time, wherein gender and sex were synonymous, Astell acts upon and in rejection of the meanings of gender. Her proposal to open up women's education while simultaneously exposing the inequalities of marriage signifies her belief of gender being an essential and legitimate category in society. Astell uncritically accepts Descartes' dualist rationality as justification for Women's place in society while having no material analysis, thus constituting her bourgeois feminist proposal. Despite her concern for women's emancipation, Astell nonetheless remains wedded to and, uncritically perpetuates, a gender binary peculiar to a European social framework.

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8. Astell, *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies*, 76.

Thus, her formidable critique finds its limitation in the epistemological presuppositions of the society in which she is involved, namely, a society predicated on Western Rationalism wherein gender formations remain essentialized.

In order to understand the complexity of gender, we need to turn towards an analysis that also stands outside of Europe. Accordingly, we will examine how the colonial project itself conditioned this binary form of gender. Thus, I turn to Maria Lugones' "Coloniality of Gender," where I will demonstrate how Astell's perpetuation of the gender binary arises from her uncritical acceptance of a Western Rationalism that justifies and essentializes gender formations. Maria Lugones uses the framework of Anibal Quijano's "Coloniality of Power" to establish gender formation as a colonial arrangement. Lugones broadens Quijano's scope of the coloniality of power by linking it to gender formation. Furthermore, not only does Lugones closely articulate the coloniality of gender, she also identifies the formation itself as a necessary concept of inquiry for understanding the West's efforts for social order and hegemony. Lugones refers to coloniality as "an encompassing phenomenon, since it is one of the axes of systems of power and as such it permeates all control of sexual access, collective authority, labor, subjectivity/intersubjectivity and the production of knowledge from within these intersubjective relations."<sup>9</sup> Colonialism formed identities that were framed around European terms and rationale. As such, these value-laden definitions and statuses, in terms of modernity, lead to the naturalization of labor through hierarchical relationships as both racial and gendered. The Eurocentric model of power throughout colonialism gave rise to social and geocultural labels such as "East" and "West," "European" and "African," and "Man" and "Woman:" the intention being the reproduction of knowledge under the control of Eurocentric hegemony, thereby making such knowledge seem organic under the guise of this control. By situating the West as a point of departure, the formations of gender and race act as a point of reference and establishment of power relations mediated by needs of empire building.

Prior to colonization, a rigid gender binary was not enforced nor was it a requisite for a society's relations. One can identify the fluidity of gender relations prior to colonization by examining Non-Western societies. Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí writes in *The Invention of Women* that gender has "become important in Yoruba studies not as an artifact of Yoruba life but because Yoruba life, past and present, has been translated into English to fit the Western Pattern of body-reasoning"<sup>10</sup> Fundamentally, the application of gender in the Yoruba society was a measure externally imposed via Eurocentric translations of the body. Indeed, Oyèwùmí criticizes this same system of knowing that Astell fashions her proposals against but is unable to comprehend in its severity and complexity; the limit of Astell's critique is found in her inability to recognize the colonial dimension of this system of knowing. What specifically differentiates both

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9. María Lugones, "Heterosexualism and the Colonial / Modern Gender System." *Hypatia* 22, no. 1 (2007): <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4640051>, 191.

10. Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí, *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press (1997): 30.

Oyèwùmí and Lugones from Astell is their regard of gender as mythically constructed—along with race—while Astell assumes the notion of “womanhood” to be a universal experience. Instead of understanding gender as a social category, Astell presupposes its essentiality and views patriarchal society as exploiting the nature of womanhood whereas, for colonized people, its exploitative dimensions begin with the genesis of a European construct of gender itself. Modernity’s imposition of dualisms—“Mind and body,” “Man and Woman,” and “Superior and Inferior”—thus act in service as a pervasive attempt to homogenize the world and cognitively subjugate those gendered and racialized.

Lugones brings in Paula Gunn Allen to explain the rigid binary that is imposed through colonial language. Native American tribes recognized multiple genders and homosexuality; gender was not a system for subordination, but of egalitarianism. Gynecratic egalitarianism, a familiar practice amongst Native American tribes, valued a woman’s spiritual and governing role. Lugones addresses the immaterial nature of gender by noting that, “[A]llen emphasizes the centrality of the spiritual in all aspects of Indian life and thus a very different intersubjectivity from within which knowledge is produced than that of the coloniality of knowledge in modernity.”<sup>11</sup> Organization of gender roles were recognized but not strictly regarded into an aggressive binary unlike Eurocentric gender systems. Gender took on more fluid positioning, much like the Hijras of South Asia or the Babaylan of the Philippines, in that gender was dreamt or recognized in ritual and thereafter practiced in society. Here we can see that the genesis of gender in these societies arose through practice and not through the mind. Rather than the emancipation of women as a result of thought alone, here we can ground it in practice, making it much more liberatory through the recognition of agency. Through the coloniality of gender, the imposition of the gender binary sought to solidify meaning of patriarchal gender roles as a valid rationality for global domination. Native American females, through coloniality, were linked to inferiority and thus transformed the tribal way of life to hierarchy that put “man” at the top. As it stands, the violence of this colonial imposition is enforced through western philosophical logic and deemed universal; the very imposition of a colonial logic curtails indigenous ways of knowing and being.

The Eurocentric locating of gender within biological anatomy contradicts these practices of organization. This is most likely what Lugones’ means when suggesting that “‘gender’ is antecedent to the ‘biological traits’ and gives them meaning.” In other words, Lugones argues that gender was used to legitimize the definition of biological traits, naturalizing biological differences through the idea that gender was itself tied to it. Lugones demonstrates how the colonial invaders ushered in patriarchy that put a supreme male entity at the center, forcing colonized people into a dichotomy of man and woman, while simultaneously negating them of status. This demonization was fueled by Western Civilization that branded (white) manhood as supreme in both body and mind, consequently reducing colonial subjects,

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11. Lugones, “Heterosexualism and the Colonial / Modern Gender System,” 198.

on the basis of race and gender, to animality, as Lugones notes.

For racialized and gendered colonial subjects, Oyěwù mí argues, “[F]or females, colonization was a twofold process of racial inferiorization and gender subordination. The creation of ‘women’ as a category was one of the first accomplishments of the colonial state.”<sup>12</sup> While we have already identified the binary of man and woman in globalized Eurocentric terms, it is both imposed as universal and made exclusive through its normative notions. The coloniality of gender constituted white men and women as normative. Through Cartesian duality, as previously mentioned, man was associated as supreme embodiment of the mind with women being associated with the body. If normative notions of man and women were in relation to white gendered beings, the experience of non-white, racialized people were excluded from knowledge as such, and excluded as beings—even more so for racialized women.

Accordingly, the work of Oyěwù mí, Allen, and Lugones make the inseparability of women of color and gender explicit. It is important to point out the explicitness in the very naming of racialized women under the umbrella of “woman of color”; a term which seeks recognition for such women while also reaffirming its existence outside of the mythical construction of women. Thus, one could argue it as an echo of the colonial legacy. Nevertheless, the inseparability is understood in terms of intersectionality. Lugones argues:

“Intersectionality reveals what is not seen when categories such as gender and race are conceptualized as separate from each other. The move to intersect categories have been motivated by the difficulties in making visible those who are dominated and victimized in terms of both categories. Though everyone in capitalist Eurocentered modernity is both raced and gendered, not everyone is dominated or victimized in terms of their race and gender.”<sup>13</sup>

In terms of the mythical constructions of race and gender, one did not predominate the other for racialized and gendered people. Especially in women of color, there was no racialization before gendering nor the opposite. Rather, it is in the combination between the two fictions that constituted deep inferiority under colonial force; the overlapping of labels which separate women of color from women. For Lugones, the framework of intersectionality guides the understanding of the coloniality of gender. The treatment of race and gender in relation to European/whites and colonized/nonwhite peoples informs the power relations in conflict. I argue that the dissection of these intersectional categories, once studied distinctly and closely, will show how the combination of distinctions form an identity that is distinct but on the basis of colonial fictions. At the same time, the cultivation of this identity is challenged by recognizing oneself unaccompanied by epistemic attachments. Simply put, how such an identity will come into being within the colonial structure and actively

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12. Oyěwù mí, *The Invention of Women*, 30.

13. María Lugones, “Toward a Decolonial Feminism.” *Hypatia* 25, no. 4 (2010): 192.



against the conditions that manifest through it.

The colonized woman's experience is very much distinct in experience from that of white, bourgeois women, but it is in the generalization of the status of women to signify "white women" where the cognitive problem of coloniality also resides. Where the term woman denotes white bourgeois woman, and man to white bourgeois men, the exclusion of colonized peoples forces them to identify with labels done to them in efforts for recognition. We have identified terms of race and gender to be colonial impositions, though I am hesitant to characterize the term woman of color as problematic. The term is correct in its frequent use of distinguishing the status of racialized women; in contrast, "white women" is often used in a dialogue that discloses the experience of victimization based on the intersection of race and gender. However, I claim that it remains accommodating to colonial language and reiterates its existence. In the same fashion, Astell's uncritical reiteration of gender essentialism also proves how maintaining such logic implies the problem without actually overcoming it.

Pre-colonial notions of gender thus challenge Astell's use of Descartes and proposals for women's liberation. Astell presupposes women to be universal and essentially characterized through the white European bourgeois experience. By engaging with simple reformations of the colonial system, she risks legitimizing and reproducing its power. Lugones claims of the white bourgeois womanhood that "[T]hey understood women as inhabiting white bodies but did not bring that racial qualification to articulation or clear awareness."<sup>14</sup> Astell held privilege through claiming womanhood without having to consider its racial implications. The relationship of Astell to the coloniality of power and gender is such that her and the women she advocated for were bound to the heterosexual system that excluded them from the production of knowledge and means of production. White bourgeois women nonetheless were administered to reproduce the race that would expand global domination. Astell understood the relations of power between man and woman through marriage in so far as it established a man's patriarchal dominion over a woman. Yet her acceptance of Descartes mind-body duality is a reflexive response. Whereas mind-body duality asks to separate the mind from the body and hold authority over the body, for both the colonized person and the woman—whom she posits as slaves to marriage—the subjugated person cannot overrule the body if the person is not even an owner and barely an agent of its own body. In addition, the Cartesian argument of universal rational capacities that Astell uses to justify education for women loses its meaning when we consider the inferiorization of colonial subjects to subhumans and animals.

Through the work of Maria Lugones, the understanding of gender as it appears to be fixed is complicated through her raising of gender's historicity within colonial power. The work herein lies in how to decolonize gender in the interim and to examine the ways in which the coloniality of gender is serving its purpose in the present. The process of

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14. Lugones, "Toward a Decolonial Feminism," 203.

decolonizing gender questions the points in which gender is a compulsory experience or a subjective, resonated identity. I am particularly interested in the application of decoloniality in relation to gender and how to confront the violent imposition of a Eurocentric conception of gender. Moreover, I am interested in the confrontation of gender without seeking recognition based on colonial terms and without fetishization of the past. We see the decolonization of gender in the movement to actively resist the colonial language and frameworks for gender. It is not about diversifying such colonially rooted impositions but working to destabilize it as a norm and point of reference. Doing so would, as a result, demobilize the systems that rely on its contradictions to exist. As suggested by Lugones, “[T]hus, it is not an affair of the past. It is a matter of the geopolitics of knowledge.”<sup>15</sup> Lugones elucidates how colonial language is used as a way to undermine non-Western approaches. This undertaking consequently constitutes the struggle for power and recognition. Through the notion of coloniality, present conditions of colonialism are reproduced ideologically and structurally. This knowledge seeks to establish globalized standards while concurrently establishing differences against that standard.

I am also wary of the ways in which decolonizing gender is going to confront gender altogether. How will it necessitate gender to the degree that gender is made obsolete or revised? To turn to making gender an obsolete category, especially without proper analysis of the intersections between race and gender, may render those who identify with genders outside of and beyond the eurocentric binary invisible. It risks misrecognizing the work of trans, third gender, and two spirit people. On the other hand, efforts to revise its meaning, without taking into account the coloniality of gender, may flatten its own efforts and risk essentializing once again. This essentializing harkens back to bourgeois proposals such as Astell’s that assumes an exceedingly broad perspective. The work of decolonial feminism seeks to understand its spectrum—across various cultures and practices—so that difference can be meaningfully and affirmatively recognized.

While I have identified decolonial feminism as understanding the spectrum and context through which various gender practices emerge in cultures, future work must be in dismantling the deficiencies that create gender-based oppression in the first place. Simply moving to ideological recognition does not dismantle the base at which gendered oppression operates, and only invites new strategies of exploitation and makes us participants. Along with the mere recognition of various gender identities, I find that this strategy may suppress the ways race, class, and power affect how gender is perceived. The goal of dismantling the gender dichotomy then is for people to not be reduced to gender in many aspects—meaning gender untied to labor and a system that depends on the significance of gender in order to operate. To not be limited to the gender binary in everyday life of expression and relation allows for the gender binary to lose significance as the point of reference. The aim is not to work *with* the rigid gender binary or go against the binary for

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15. Lugones, “Toward a Decolonial Feminism,” 742-59.

the sake of going against it but rather to build a new system based on openness and agency over necessity.