

The Commodification of Sexuality and Gender: A Brazilian Case Study

“If we can better understand how the current capitalist system has co-opted and commercialized basic human emotions, we have taken the first step toward rejecting market valuations that purport to quantify our fundamental worth as human beings. **The political is personal.**”¹

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Author bio

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Abstract

This paper explores the commodification of sexuality and gender through a Brazilian case study and bibliographical review, examining its intersectional implications and the detrimental effects on women, particularly those from marginalised backgrounds. By analysing marriage as a commodified institution, the research highlights how patriarchal power structures perpetuate gender-based oppression. Men from wealthier nations seeking submissive partners in Brazil illustrate the global nature of this commodification. The analysis extends to how these effects are magnified for Black and trans women, who face overlapping systems of oppression. The study contends that the commodification of gender is a deep-rooted issue, intertwined with economic inequality and cultural biases, as noted by Sacramento (2019) and Olivar and Garcia (2017). This article does not claim to offer a definitive solution but seeks to ignite debate. It challenges the normalisation of neoliberal economic agendas that reinforce gender-based oppression, advocating for a holistic approach to social liberation.

Keywords: Commodification of Gender; Intersectionality; Gender-based Oppression; Neoliberalism; Brazilian Studies.

The commodification of sexuality and gender turns aspects of private life into “marketable”, constantly up-for-sale exploitation and exploration. Under this reality, relationships can be measured as commodities instead of intimate experiences. The most impactful consequences of these commodification processes are objectifying and exploiting the human body and sexuality. Women are the most affected targets of this effect of capitalism in our culture.² Race and economic status are also determinant factors, and black and trans women suffer more intensely and are often abused by a racist and sexist legal system; the violence they suffer is intersectional.

This article explores the relationship between gender-based violence, intimate labour, and marriage in Brazil. It article argues that the capitalisation of sexuality and gender is entirely

¹ Kristen R. Ghodsee, *Why Women Have Better Sex under Socialism: And Other Arguments for Economic Independence* (USA: Bold Type Books, 2020), 11.

² Denise Comanne, “How Patriarchy and Capitalism Combine to Aggravate the Oppression of Women,” CADTM, May 28, 2020, <https://www.cadtm.org/How-Patriarchy-and-Capitalism-Combine-to-Aggravate-the-Oppression-of-Women>.

related to gender-based violence and private relationships in our culture, and it is a tool of neoliberalism that is directly and aggressively opposed to women's liberation and reinforces misogynists and oppressive gender roles. To illustrate how this happens, a comprehensive literature review will be presented, setting scenarios and critical analyses of these. This subject is specifically relevant in times where gender and de-colonisation studies are getting more space in academia.

This article will theoretically draw upon Mohanty's elucidation on the concept of neoliberalism, which argues that "neoliberal discursive landscapes in the academy, and in state and trans-national governance practices, are characterised by the privatisation of the social justice commitments of post-1960s radical social movements and their attendant insurgent knowledge (originally institutionalized in women's and gender studies, race and ethnic studies, etc.)."³ Mohanty uses the example of the feminist motto "the personal is political", demonstrating how these concepts are often reframed as individual experiences rather than being viewed collectively within a broader societal context.⁴

Further, I also highlight the need for a Marxist feminist approach to the issue. Mohanty's emphasis on the limitations of postmodernist feminist knowledge projects in the neoliberal academy explores the concept of "Eurocentric feminist globality", where she refers to the notion of hegemonic feminist knowledge production and its contemporary dominance. In this article, she mentions that [her work] "highlights the limitations of postmodernist feminist knowledge projects in the neoliberal academy".⁵ Therefore, the concept of "Eurocentric feminist globality" encompasses the fact that neoliberal ideas and theoretical approaches undermine antifascist, anti-colonial and feminist ideas. This academic perspective, also referred to as "doing whiteness as usual", criticises how mainstream feminist knowledge production comes from a middle-class white background. Investigative, exploratory and nonconformist academic work and reflection can influence further work and people's experience of their place in a community. I propose a radical analysis of power structures and how Marxist-Feminist academics can highlight their complications and propose solutions.

Intersectionality is important for feminist theories, especially in a country with such economic and social disparities like Brazil, because the social circumstances of individuals of colour vary, much like the disparities observed in gender and sexual experiences. Previous studies show that women of colour have different places in society compared to their white counterparts, and ignoring this will only widen the gap of inequality.⁶ Intersectionality, here, is fundamental due to its awareness that "subjectivity is constituted by mutually reinforcing vectors of race, gender, class, and sexuality".⁷

Mohanty critiques how Western feminist texts often depict "Third World Women" as a monolithic, singular category, typically framed from the perspective of predominantly white

³ Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "Transnational Feminist Crossings: On Neoliberalism and Radical Critique," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 38, no. 4 (June 2013): 971, <https://doi.org/10.1086/669576>.

⁴ Mohanty, "Transnational Feminist Crossings," 971

⁵ Mohanty, "Transnational Feminist Crossings," 967

⁶ Kimberle Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color," *Stanford Law Review* 43, no. 6 (July 1991): 1241–99.

⁷ Jennifer C. Nash, "Re-Thinking Intersectionality," *Feminist Review* 89, no. 1 (June 1, 2008): 1–15, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1057/fr.2008.4>.

women, thereby oversimplifying and homogenising their diverse experiences. The definition of colonisation I wish to invoke here is a predominantly discursive one, focusing on a certain mode of appropriation and codification of ‘scholarship’ and ‘knowledge’ about women in the third world by particular analytic categories employed in specific writings on the subject.⁸ The usage of the term Third World Woman is problematic in itself, Mohanty argues that the use of the term leads to generalisations from a colonised perspective. Her idea helps reveal how mainstream feminist approaches in neoliberal contexts ignore or marginalise the experiences of women from disadvantaged backgrounds, further entrenching systems of oppression.

To avoid perpetuating this oppression, other forms of feminism, such as third-world, transnational, and global feminism, must claim more space in the academic and activist spaces to assert that marginalised women in the third world possess the capacity not only to drive feminist transformations but also to serve as a central source of more impartial knowledge in comprehending social realities, whether at the local or global level.⁹ Under an intersectional analysis, “although all women suffer oppression and face discrimination, their life experiences are radically different. Women are not united as a sex but are divided on the basis of class”¹⁰, therefore, it is crucial to explore forms of oppression when talking about gendered violence and women’s experiences.

This intersectional and anti-colonial critique challenges the assumption that all women from “Third World” countries face identical challenges within a uniform context. In reality, women’s experiences vary widely, and important differences are often overlooked by the simplistic notion of a “woman from a poor country”. Coogan-Gehr notes that the generic terms “Third World Women” and “women of color” that emerged in the 1980s contributed to the marginalisation of African American women’s academic contributions, leading to a decline in feminist studies.¹¹ This issue is pertinent to the study of the commodification of sexuality and gender in Brazil, as it highlights the intersection of global capitalist markets with local cultural practices. The interplay between international demands and Brazilian gender and sexual norms illustrates how global economic systems shape local identities. Additionally, Brazil’s history of colonisation, racial mixing, and economic development continues to influence contemporary gender and sexual identities.

On the other hand, this article provides insights from specific contexts, offering situated knowledge about how commodification affects individuals and communities differently based on their race, gender, class, and sexuality. This work draws from critical theories, including intersectionality and Marxism, to interrogate the commodification of sexuality and gender. It also reflects on how knowledge is produced and whose voices are prioritised or marginalised in these discussions.

The exploitation of sexuality and gender can often be present in subtler forms in private lives, such as the relation between gender-based violence and marriage. Taking another shape but

⁸ Chandra Talpade Mohanty, “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses,” *Boundary 2* 12, no. 3 (1984): 333, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/302821>.

⁹ Ranjoo Seodu Herr, “Reclaiming Third World Feminism: Or Why Transnational Feminism Needs Third World Feminism,” *Meridians* 12, no. 1 (2014): 1–30, <https://doi.org/10.2979/meridians.12.1.1>.

¹⁰ Breanne Fahs, *Burn It Down! Feminist Manifestos for the Revolution* (London; New York: Verso, 2020), 198.

¹¹ Mohanty, “Transnational Feminist Crossings,” 967.

coming from the same source, we cannot ignore the reality of intimate labour in Western society. This quality of work is viewed as unskilled and only worthy of low wages. It is often performed by women of colour and/or from a marginalised background, involving domestic or sexual labour and/or direct civil marriage, “crossing the boundaries between economic and intimate realms”.¹² Even though the commodification of sexuality and gender happens in different levels and forms globally, it is still a common truth across cultures. Moreover, this reality is deeply entangled with social contracts such as marriage, especially for women (cis or trans). Gender and sexual oppression are rooted in the capitalist system, with a massive part of the societal structure relying on unpaid labour, often performed by women, as previously studied by Bhattacharya and Vogel (2017).

Gender Roles and the Brazilian Reality

Various factors, including race, class, and sexuality, shape the experiences and roles of women in society. Despite this diversity, a shared understanding of what constitutes a “woman” and her place within cultural and societal frameworks often exists: mother, wife, docile, maternal, etc. Joan Scott (1986) highlights that the role of women cannot be reduced to simplistic terms because gender itself is a complex, dichotomised concept that is continuously reinforced by societal sexism and gender ideology. Gender is inherently broad and multifaceted, making it crucial to adopt an intersectional approach. This research draws on a framework that integrates intersectional and anti-colonial critiques. The framework acknowledges that women’s experiences cannot be fully understood without considering the interplay of multiple social factors, including economic conditions and cultural practices. By integrating these factors, we gain a deeper understanding of how various forms of oppression intersect and affect women differently, challenging reductive and monolithic views of gender.

The level of violence and oppression that cisgender and transgender women suffer, for instance, is not the same, nor will they handle the legislation or support in the same way. Trans women experience much higher rates of violence and exploitation while having fewer options for safety. Queer women are more vulnerable to discrimination and have fewer job opportunities, often pushing them into unsafe, unstable, or illegal activities, such as sex work and drug trafficking. Consequently, they face heightened violence both in public and private settings. They also have less access to social protection, exacerbating the severity of the brutality they encounter and limiting their available alternatives.

Nonetheless, the generic ideas of women’s societal role are entangled deeply in the popular imagination. According to the UN Women Country [Brazil] Fact Sheet, for instance, in 2019, the adolescent (15 to 19 years old) birth rate was 49.1 per 1,000 women,¹³ and they allocated 11.6% of their time to unpaid care and household tasks, compared to only 5.2% by males. In contrast, up until 2021, women occupied just 15.2% of the parliamentary seats. This data shows how “women’s place”, life opportunity, representativity and reality are related.

To understand better the idea and the reality of women’s role in Brazilian society, Olivar and Garcia (2017) studied “body usage” (referring to sex labour) in two impoverished cities in

¹² Julia Meszaros, “Commodification of Intimacy and Sexuality,” in *Companion to Sexuality Studies*, ed. Nancy A. Naples (April 14, 2020), 258–78, <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119315049.ch14>.

¹³ Cisgender.

Northern Brazil. Their work presents an overview of the local economy and women's participation. They explore the reality of these women and how they explain morality and family in context to their "body usage": "As children, they actively contributed to domestic chores by 'looking after the house', 'washing clothes and dishes', 'looking after siblings', 'cooking'. These are gendered tasks that only women, mothers and daughters perform, and in some cases, boys are forbidden to perform or learn such tasks", which highlights gender stereotypes and expectations, especially in poorer areas of the country.¹⁴ Both unpaid domestic labour and underpaid (and hazardous) sex work have been part of these women's life since they were children; it limits their role in society. It is worth noting that, in this specific article, all women interviewed were from a minority background. They were all indigenous. This bears the question of whether sex work is the other alternative when marriage [as means for social ascension or stability] is not a possibility.

Sacramento (2019) explores the reverse of the norm of men migrating for "love". Typically, cisgender women are the ones migrating for marriage, "On a global scale, the vast majority of so-called love and/or marriage migration involve flows of women from developing countries (mainly Southeast Asia and Latin America) to more prosperous countries".¹⁵ To be precise, in terms of women migrating for marriage, "research on the globalization of care and reproductive work shows that the feminization of migratory flows is often motivated by the growing need for labour in sectors of activity considered to be feminine".¹⁶ Sacramento's article highlights the reality of this reverse migration and why these men do so. Not only do they often do it for job prospects, but also to settle family and for romantic reasons. Nevertheless, what they see and seek in Brazilian women is the unpaid work of care that comes with the "wife pack"; a docile, submissive woman, who is responsible for the house chores and family emotional support:

These men associate Brazil with a supposed female authenticity that is fast disappearing in Europe (...). The comments of a 70-year-old Portuguese tourist-resident of Ponta Negra are enlightening: Oh man, I think the women here are more feminine (...) much more than the Portuguese. The Portuguese woman, for me, has become too butch (*machona*), more possessive. I've seen it! She likes to control, likes to rule. But I think here they are gentler, sweeter. (...) Here [in Brazil], the girls are beautiful, because they are humble. Here I like their character much more. All the women in South America are humbler; here, the girls are beautiful, loving, true.¹⁷

This is particularly interesting because, according to the European Institute for Gender Equality (2023), countries that excel in promoting gender equality have already achieved significant parity levels, consequently appreciating its economic advantages. For the sake of the analyses for Sacramento's work, according to World Bank Open Data, Portugal's GDP was \$24,274.50

¹⁴ José Miguel Nieto Olivar and Loreley Garcia, "'Usar O Corpo': Economias Sexuais de Mulheres Jovens Do Litoral Ao Sertão No Nordeste Brasileiro," *Revista de Antropologia* 60, no. 1 (April 2017): 140–164, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26605346>.

¹⁵ Octávio Sacramento, "For Love, Labour, and Lifestyle: European Men Moving to Northeast Brazil," *Anthropological Forum* 29, no. 2 (March 1, 2019): 134–152, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00664677.2019.1579704>.

¹⁶ H  l  ne Le Bail, "Marriage Migration: Female Paths," *Cogito*, May 18, 2020, <https://www.sciencespo.fr/research/cogito/home/marriage-migration-female-paths/?lang=en>.

¹⁷ Oct  vio Sacramento, "For Love, Labour, and Lifestyle: European Men Moving to Northeast Brazil," *Anthropological Forum* 29, no. 2 (March 1, 2019): 139, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00664677.2019.1579704>.

in 2022, whereas Brazil's was \$8,917.70. This happens because well-developed countries have a strong relationship with women's workplace participation, generating riches for their nations. Hence, what Sacramento's article indicates is that these men are migrating, looking for gender stereotypes that are typical of underdeveloped countries and their misogynist social rules and perceptions.

"Sacramento's research highlighted the unequal nature of these unions because most marriage migration flowed from poorer countries to wealthier countries, corresponding to the hierarchy of spaces in terms of prosperity. Moreover, the flows related to colonial histories and revived exotic and erotic imaginaries and racist stereotypes".¹⁸ The "*female performance*" disappearing in developed countries can still be found (and fostered) in the poorest nations. This traditional role of a woman is something that suits men and a patriarchal society, especially under the rules of traditional marriage.

The Economics of Marriage and Women's Place in It

"For women, until quite recently, marriage was one of the few options for a reasonable economic existence as an adult. It was often economically advantageous for men as well."¹⁹

The issue of the commodification of sexuality is the exploration of women and how it keeps them as invisible (but highly dependent upon) parts of society. The care of kids and elders, the house chores, and the emotional labour into caring for family needs are examples. Scholars have highlighted that in nations where welfare states are modest in size, families unable to afford paid care services may turn to marriage migration as a viable option.²⁰ Part of this comes from the perception that women are as gentle, loving, understanding, and caring; while men are strong, brave, and providers, accounting for the fact that, according to Gender Statistics: Social Indicators of Women (2018) in Brazil, employed women do 73% more house chores hours than men. The relevance of this is quite profound; women having more housing responsibilities means less participation in the workforce and reinforcement of ideas of women as housewives, which impacts women in positions of management and their ability to change this reality, both on a micro level (representativity and cultural perceptions) and macro level (policies and legislations). The 2018 report on gender statistics is "Gender Statistics: Household Chores Affect the Insertion of Women in the Labor Market" because this is the conclusion of all the numbers gathered in the report.

This relation between housework (unpaid) and participation in the labour market (paid) is worth noting because social position and wealth are directly related to gendered violence. The Brazilian Public Security Forum published the *Visível e Invisível* report in 2023, and it shows that women from a poor background are more susceptible to violence: "In relation to income, the data show that as monthly family income increases, the prevalence of violence decreases, although even among women with more than ten minimum wages income levels are high. 31.2% of women whose monthly family income is up to 2 minimum wages have suffered violence in the last year, 28.4% among those earning between 2 and 5 wages, 27.4% among those with income between 5 and 10 wages, and 22.6% among those with more than ten wages.

¹⁸ Le Bail, "Marriage Migration: Female Paths."

¹⁹ Suzanne Sinke, "Migration for Labor, Migration for Love: Marriage and Family Formation across Borders," *OAH Magazine of History* 14, no. 1 (September 1, 1999): 17, <https://doi.org/10.1093/maghis/14.1.17>.

²⁰ Le Bail, "Marriage Migration: Female Paths."

It is noteworthy that physical aggression (13.8%) and beatings (7.7%) are much more frequent among women with an income of up to 2 minimum wages.”

It is crucial to emphasise that unpaid labour, marriage, societal expectations tied to gender roles, and cultural perceptions of women are interconnected concepts. While various facts and perspectives are presented, these social factors are essential for understanding the broader issue of how the commodification of gender and sexuality harms women. However, using the term “women” alone is insufficient. Not all individuals with vaginas identify as women, highlighting the need for an intersectional approach. Experiences cannot be fully understood without considering the interplay of multiple social factors, including economic conditions and cultural practices. Gendered violence does not affect all women in the same way; consequently, not all women have the same resources to combat violence, nor do they possess the same opportunities to escape harmful relationships.

However, the numbers show how gender-based violence, intimate labour, and marriage must be analysed under critical lenses: “The analysis of prevalence by age group indicates that almost half of the women aged 25 to 34 have experienced some form of intimate partner violence throughout their lives (48.9%). [...] 1 in 4 women aged 25 to 34 reported having suffered some form of sexual offence and/or forced attempt to have sexual intercourse with an intimate partner.”²¹ Thus, gender-based violence, intimate labour, and the dynamics of marriage are more than concepts in society’s imagination. They are factors determining levels of violence and chances, options of rescue and an alternative reality for women.

Furthermore, this violence is a regular factor. The Women’s Health’s Report (2021) on The Effects of Domestic Violence on Children showed that youngsters who reside in households where incidents of domestic violence have occurred retain an elevated likelihood of repeating this pattern in their adulthood, either by engaging in abusive relationships or adopting abusive behaviours themselves. Therefore, perpetuating abusive behaviour and domestic violence.

Transgender, Economical and Racial Factors

For an intersectional approach, we must consider class, gender, sexuality and race backgrounds; not all women do housework in Brazil. The upper middle class often hire live-in maids and, much more often than not, women of colour from a poor background. A study by the International Labour Organization (ILO) published data that one in three Afro-Brazilian women works as a domestic servant. “This [racial] link becomes especially relevant for the study of the domestic sphere given that a racial pattern prevails in Brazil by which most employers are.”²² So, housework and their stigmas will not affect all women similarly. It is firmly a class issue as much as it is gendered.

However, the economic aspect of it goes both ways. On the one hand, women who perform house chores (in their own homes) have less representation in the workplace; on the other, the

²¹ “Visível e Invisível: A Vitimização de Mulheres no Brasil,” 2023, <https://forumseguranca.org.br/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/visiveleinvisivel-2023-relatorio.pdf>.

²² Elizabeth B. Silva and Patricia Pinho, “Domestic Relations in Brazil,” November 21, 2014, 95, https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Elizabeth-Silva-4/publication/48990800_Domestic_relations_in_Brazil/links/546f23cc0cf24af340bf65c6/Do_mestic_relations_in_Brazil.pdf.

work of maids is unpaid and digs the social differences even deeper. Silva (2010) wrote *Maids, Machines and Morality in Brazilian Homes*, where she sheds light on this reality from a close and intimate point of view:

In Rio de Janeiro, in the southeast of Brazil, Maria, the maid, stepped out of the kitchen at 1 pm bringing food to the table. [...] Maria was only seen when she served water, coffee, at meal times, or she quietly and unobtrusively made the beds, mopped the floors, and clean the bathrooms in the morning. Maria was up before 7am to serve breakfast and she was still up at 9pm clearing the table after dinner. Maria came from Northeast and had been working for Anita for about 10 years. Anita relied on Maria for all the housework. Anita was an academic, like me. She worked poverty and land reform in the Northeast. She would never consider her life without “a” Maria. She did not engage with my attempts to converse servants and their social inequalities. [...] Anita alone earned 10 times more than she paid Maria. Maria worked very long hours, had no pension, house or security. They were the same age.²³

The Brazilian Public Security Forum published a report in 2023 that shows women of colour are proportionally more victimised by violence than their white counterparts. According to this report, “Black women showed much higher levels of victimization than white women in cases of severe physical violence, such as beatings (black women with 6.3% and white women with 3.6%) and threats with a knife or firearm (black women with 6.2% and white women with 3.8%)”. This shows how an intersectional approach is fundamental to understanding and tackling the issue. Talking about women but not their race or class is blind and superficial.

Another form of oppression that needs to be considered is the transgender woman. Brazil is a highly violent country for the LGBTQ+²⁴ community. Therefore, trans women suffer much higher rates of violence and exploitation while having fewer options for safety. “Sadly, Brazil is also one of the most violent countries for LGBTQ+ people. According to global data collected between October 2019 and September 2020, Brazil witnessed the highest number of murders of trans and gender-diverse people of any country, having reported 43 per cent of the global total.”²⁵ Not only that, but more data on LGBTQ+ reality in Brazil, Micro Rainbow International published a report on the poverty of the LGBT+ community in Rio de Janeiro. From their data, a significant majority of those surveyed, amounting to 87%, indicated experiencing discrimination in diverse public settings from various sources, such as service providers, due to their sexual orientation and/or gender identity. Additionally, 61% of the participants disclosed discrimination within educational institutions. People from these communities are more vulnerable to discrimination, have fewer job opportunities, for times pushing them to unsafe and unstable jobs and/or illegal activities (including sex work and drug trafficking), and again, more susceptible to violence, both in public and in their private lives.²⁶ Highlighting that not only this community is more susceptible to violence, but it also has less access to social protection.

This violence extends to private life and choices; disparities might influence the potential for forming relationships and social networks among LGBT+ individuals in different social

²³ Elizabeth Silva, “Maids, Machines and Morality in Brazilian Homes,” *Feminist Review*, no. 94 (2010): 23, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40664127>.

²⁴ Lesbian, gay, bi, trans, queer and ace.

²⁵ Brazil Institute and Jaret Waters, “Fighting Gender-Based Violence in Brazil,” *Wilson Center*, December 2, 2021, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/fighting-gender-based-violence-brazil>.

²⁶ Lucas Paoli Itaborahy, “LGBT People Living in Poverty in Rio de Janeiro” (Micro Rainbow International C.I.C., June 2014), https://mrifoundation.global/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/Final-LGBT-Poverty-in-Rio_web_reduced.pdf.

classes, education and other social factors. Race is another decisive matter, as women of colour suffer not only from machismo (sexism) and transphobia but also racism.²⁷ Regarding education, for instance, white women have 2.3 times the number of brown or black women who have completed higher education.²⁸ It is well understood that levels of schooling and access to formal education are directly linked to employment and salary opportunities.

To understand women's position in society, we must consider certain factors; societal norms and expectations greatly influence women's status. When their gender and sexuality are treated as commodities, it significantly affects how they are perceived and the roles they can hold in society. The belief that women can be owned or their bodies commodified, contributes to increased violence against them and perpetuates discrimination; this makes women vulnerable to ongoing mistreatment and discrimination. Furthermore, when they come from a marginal background or a place of "no recognition", these factors gain more potential. Thus, the brutality they face is more extraordinary, and the alternatives they have are smaller.

In the specific case of trans women in Brazil, the numbers on marriage and social arrangements are unclear, but due to the high levels of gender and sexual-based violence, one could assume the percentage is much lower. In an interview with Al Jazeera²⁹, Maria Clara Araujo, the first black trans woman to attend a federal university in Brazil, said "I'm aware my life expectancy is 30 years old and I need someone to protect me. If I didn't have my mother and father to help me, I'd probably turn to prostitution to support myself". Maria's reality and painful realization show how these women have a smaller safety net and, therefore, are more vulnerable to social violence and less able to have access to social networking to live a fulfilling life.

Marriage Wealth: intimate labour *and* economies of affect

In contemporary societies, time is a precious resource. More often than not, society seeks to be productive and lucrative in its activities, not only in public but also in its private domain. Consequently, domestic labour, emotional support, and even intimacy can be understood as services traded between partners; this creates a transactional element in the relationship. When intimate experiences, the private sphere, and emotions are treated as commodities, making a fair share of these invisible duties becomes mainly transactional. The commodification of social relations presents the face of neo-liberalism, where all aspects of life, including private, can be profitable commodities. Meszaros (2020) contrasts Marx's ideal of the "social character" of joint familial labour in the pre-capitalist era,³⁰ where both natures of labour (male and female) would have the same value and appreciation.

Future research would benefit by further examining the pairing of commodification and intimacy, casting them as the main topic rather than separating out topical foci on marriage, household work, sex work, nursing, adoption, etc. We must ask not only what differentiates erotic dance and hospice care, but also

²⁷ Itaborahy, "LGBT People Living in Poverty in Rio de Janeiro," 21.

²⁸ Agência Notícias IBGE, "Gender Statistics: Household Chores Affect Insertion of Women in Labor Market," Agência de Notícias - IBGE, March 7, 2018, <https://agenciadenoticias.ibge.gov.br/en/agencia-press-room/2185-news-agency/releases-en/20262-gender-statistics-household-chores-affect-insertion-of-women-in-labor-market>.

²⁹ Bowater, Donna, and Priscilla Moraes. 2015. 'Brazil: Targeting Trans People with Impunity'. Al Jazeera. 22 April 2015.

³⁰ Nicole Constable, "The Commodification of Intimacy: Marriage, Sex, and Reproductive Labor," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 38 (2009): 54, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20622640>.

what such multiple and varied examples can tell us about the meaning of intimacy for all involved. The focus on transnational mobility of both elites and non-elites within neoliberal globalisation and the ongoing tension between more complex micro level patterns of power and agency and broader macro patterns of global inequality are also key.³¹

In contemporary capitalism, it is essential to grasp that marriage is not solely about love, intimacy, trust, and companionship. Instead, it often involves an exchange, making it transactional. Unfortunately, this dynamic tends to be unfair towards women, who are usually burdened with the unpaid and unrecognised labour of intimacy. Furthermore, this transactional aspect of marriage also influences women's societal roles and positions.

The bottom line for the most visible economic factor is that the idea of women being traditionally 'caring' and 'nurturing' reinforces the social expectations and possibilities and endorses traditionally female professions that are undervalued and underpaid, such as nurses, teachers, and similar fields. Cis-women mainly carry out Brazilian primary education. According to INEP (2023), 79.2% of the primary education teachers are female. Understanding this connection between the commodification of gender and its marriage relationship is crucial in neoliberal forms of economic politics.

Gray, Mel, et al. (2005) state that in neoliberalism, the recognition of professional credibility depends on adherence to market principles, for social work has consistently leaned towards promoting client self-reliance rather than subjecting them to state control. Therefore, the neoliberal practice not only diminishes the human side of the professionals affected by these policies but also reduces the population that can afford services that would otherwise be public. In this case, families who cannot afford private social work services will rely on women's unpaid labour. It is the same root for a variety of problems: the profit over society's well-being, the undervaluation of social workers (teachers, nurses, carers, etc.), but also the unpaid work that many women take upon themselves when their families cannot afford to pay for these private services.

Conclusion

The commodification of sexuality and gender has several negative effects on women, and it perpetuates a misogynistic and patriarchal structure of power. In a society that seeks to profit and transform relationships into marketable exchanges, marriage ceases being a life experience and acquires the characteristic of a commodity; more often than not, in these relationships, men are "buying", and women are in constant debt – with their families, with society and themselves.

In Brazil, data indicates that marriage is linked to gender-based oppression, with this violence being reinforced by public opinion and cultural attitudes. Sacramento's insightful research reveals that men from wealthy countries migrate to Brazil to establish businesses and seek "love", often in search of docile and submissive women, who are less common in more developed nations. This pursuit serves both profit and personal desires, as they aim to acquire a trophy wife who embodies their ideal of what a wife should be. Additionally, Silva's intimate exploration of housework reinforces the argument about the harmful effects of commodifying sexuality and gender, particularly for women from disadvantaged backgrounds.

³¹ Constable, "The Commodification of Intimacy", 58

The ramifications of unfairness and imbalance are even more explicit for black and trans women and other members of society who are not part of the “status quo” than on their counterparts. These classes of oppression occasionally intersect, making attentiveness to their social affairs more critical. Our society relies on their devalued work daily, and as a rule to keep society functional. Either via marriage, cleaning, caring or even prostitution, women are undervalued, abused, and victims of perpetual oppression that prevents them from climbing social ladders and breaking the vicious cycle.

In addressing the effects of the commodification of sexuality and gender, we encounter a multifaceted challenge. While the straightforward solution would be refraining from treating relationships and individuals as commodities, our economic structure complicates this matter. To navigate this complexity, our focus should shift towards minimising the impacts. One aspect involves ensuring that women are accorded the same level of respect as men within society, which can seem like a distant reality, but steps must be taken; by empowering women, fostering legislation and laws for this change, and validating comprehensive socio-political policies that guarantee women’s rights and well-being. However, this pursuit is deep and delicate, due to its analogy with economic concerns; these would involve addressing factors like poverty, rent distribution, equal opportunities and societal bias, which are deeply intertwined with the issue of the economic system we exist in.

Effecting change in the entire system might be monumental, but we can still strive to make targeted adjustments. This challenge transcends mere economics (ending poverty, as utopic as it can sound, would be a solution that would take time to see its effects). The challenge is cultural issue that spans issues ranging from prostitution and sexual objectification to distorted perceptions of women and gender stereotypes. We can strive for a fairer and more balanced society by prioritising inclusive legislation and addressing economic disparities. This effort confronts cultural norms and dismantles harmful practices. This paper does not intend to give a final solution to the effects of the commodification of sexuality and gender because saying that the neoliberalism agenda is corrupt and unfair is not enough nor original; several academics from different backgrounds have raised criticisms of this form of economic politics. However, we must spark the debate and showcase how deeply embedded this problem is in our society and realise that ideas that Western society can accept as normal are reinforcing gender-based oppression. The goal is not theoretical reflection, but social liberation.

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