



Against economy–culture dualism: an argument from raced economies

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Abstract

In this article, I argue that a mistaken economy–culture dualism underlies the pitting of identity politics against class. I propose we be ‘non-dualists’ instead, viewing economic distributions and cultural representations as importantly co-constitutive, since this non-dualism lets us best theorise the intersections of injustices like class and race. I argue that the most sophisticated dualist attempt to transcend class versus identity debates – Nancy Fraser’s ‘perspectival dualism’ – inadvertently instantiates ‘methodological whiteness’ and struggles to illuminate the intersections of race and class, overlooking how culturally specific representations and understandings importantly constitute economic structures and distributions. Jodi Dean’s contemporary restaging of the class versus identity debate, I suggest, repeats some of Fraser’s dualist missteps. To end, I propose a non-dualist approach which understands the economy as an ideological objectification of certain practices – an objectification which naturalises relations of raced, classed and gendered domination. Building on social reproduction currents of thought, I suggest a counter-hegemonic understanding of the economy – one informed by anti-racist, feminist and socialist rethinkings of what constitutes labour and who constitutes the ‘public’ of the economy’s imaginaries of public value.

Keywords

Culture, economy, identity politics, Jodi Dean, Nancy Fraser, perspectival dualism, race, raced markets, racialised capitalism, social reproduction theory

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Introduction

A common explanation of recent political shocks holds that a ‘cultural politics of identity’ has long overshadowed ‘class’ and the economy, and, via Brexit and Trump, the working class wreaked revenge for being so ignored.¹ Pitting class against identity is not new (e.g. Rorty, 1998). Facing this latest upswell, feminists and anti-racists have reasserted the need for intersectional analyses which insist ‘on the irreducible intermingling of race, class, gender, sexuality, and religion’ (Walters, 2018: 483).

Identity politics is ‘the anti-hero with a thousand faces’ (Bickford, 1997: 112) and I certainly do not defend everything ascribed to this loose category. Following Walters’ claim that ‘identity politics is where intersectionality lives’ (2018: 482), I defend what I see as the best of identity politics: intersectional ideas on how forms of oppression, and the ‘structural identities’ (Cooper, 2016: 390) arising from them, operate as interwoven and mutually mediating categories.

For those of us interested in Walter’s intersectional project, left critiques of identity weigh heavier than centrist calls for ‘post-identity liberalism’ (Lilla, 2018) – calls which neither re-centre class nor confront raced or gendered oppression. The core of left critiques is often the accusation that identity politics directs attention towards superstructural cultural issues which leave economic structures intact. Such charges are underpinned by a dualism that sees economy and culture as mutually exclusive categories, and economy as more ‘real’, ‘material’ or ‘objective’ than culture.

Economy–culture dualism remains common sense in political philosophy, theory and public discourse (for discussion, see: Robeyns, 2003; Ives, 2005). And, though many key intersectional theorists investigate class (e.g. Carby, 1982; Collins, 2000; Combahee River Collective, 2005), economy–culture dualism likely contributes to how class sometimes sits uneasily apart from listings of race, gender, sexuality, ‘etc’. Walby et al. diagnose ‘ambivalence as to the location of class’ in intersectional analyses and consider the intersection of gender and class to be ‘relatively neglected in current debates’ (2012: 231). While noting that none of race, class or gender are ‘obviously analogous’, Heyes (2018) states that ‘class in particular has a distinctively different political history’.² Yet all agree that class must be part of intersectional analyses. Given this, along with current restagings of the identity versus class debate, it is worth looking at economy–culture dualism as key in reproducing these arguments every decade or so. I argue that to move beyond this debate – and to best theorise the intersections of class with race, gender and sexuality – we must abandon economy–culture dualism.

Yet how to examine a position often implicitly assumed rather than argued for? Here, Nancy Fraser’s work on economic redistribution and cultural recognition is an invaluable source. Her ‘perspectival dualism’ is the best – most plausible, fully articulated and influential – form of economy–culture dualism around.³ Arising from a late 1990s schism between the ‘cultural left’ and the ‘social left’, it is explicitly designed to heal identity versus class schisms by retaining focus on economic

injustices without indulging sexist, racist, heteronormative backlash.⁴ I argue that perspectival dualism struggles to illuminate the intersection of race and class, and that better analyses do not pit the importance of economy and culture against one another, nor view the economy as an a-cultural, value-free zone.⁵ I then turn to Jodi Dean's contemporary left restaging of identity versus class debates, arguing that Dean's implicit economy–culture dualism repeats some of Fraser's mistakes.

With these lessons in hand, I outline an anti-dualist approach which understands the economy as a harmful theoretical objectification of certain practices and resources which shores up and naturalises raced, classed and gendered relations of domination. I argue that it systematically undervalues and overlooks certain groups' labour and utilises a conception of commensurable 'public value' based on racially exclusionary imaginaries of the public. Drawing on social reproduction theory, I suggest how we might build a better, counter-hegemonic understanding of the economy. I focus on intersections of race and class because this topic, and work on it by critical race theorists, deserve wider attention; similar conclusions could be reached by centring class and gender.

Perspectival dualism

For Fraser, economic redistribution and cultural recognition are different dimensions of, and perspectives on, justice. She aims to navigate between the extremes of 'deconstructive anti-dualism' (hereafter 'anti-dualism') and 'substantive dualism'. Anti-dualism views economy and culture as co-constitutive, and Fraser (2003: 60) worries that this makes *any* meaningful economy–culture separation impossible. By understanding all injustices as necessarily both cultural and economic she thinks it collapses different systematic injustices into one neatly and necessarily unified system. For example, calling struggles against sexist social structures 'economic' risks simplistically collapsing any difference between patriarchy and capitalism and assumes that blows to the patriarchy are necessarily blows to capitalism.

Fraser also thinks of 'substantive dualism' – the common modern understanding of economy and culture as two separate, self-contained spheres⁶ with corresponding spheres of justice – as a non-starter, for it inscribes contingent social categories that emerge historically from capitalism onto the world itself, problematically naturalising them. Fraser thinks these domains are neither entirely separate nor rigidly bounded; painting them so reinforces the disassociation of recognition and redistribution that she wants to undo. These realms are, in fact, 'more or less permeable' (Fraser, 1999: 44). Explaining this permeation, she writes that 'the economy is not a culture-free zone, but a culture-instrumentalizing and resignifying one' (Fraser, 1999: 44). Economic mechanisms take cultural *inputs* when useful for capitalist interests – as with gendered divisions of labour, for example – but economic mechanisms themselves remain a-cultural. However, 'in practice', economic and cultural injustices are almost always 'interimbricated so as to reinforce one another dialectically' (Fraser, 1995: 72).

In denying these complex overlappings, substantive dualism is the antithesis of anti-dualism, which views economy and culture as always co-present and co-constitutive. Perspectival dualism navigates these extremes by talking of the 'imbrication' of two nonetheless 'relatively autonomous', 'partially uncoupled' and 'analytically distinct' social orders (Fraser, 2003: 50, 90). Accordingly, justice requires two different perspectives: economic-redistributive and cultural-recognitive.

Though virtually every injustice is, in practice, two-dimensional (economic and cultural), they do not have each dimension equally; they sit along a spectrum. At one end sit 'ideal-type' purely economic injustices – class exploitation as understood by 'orthodox, economistic Marxism', for example (Fraser, 2003: 17–20). At the other end sit ideal-type purely cultural injustices – here Fraser's preferred examples are injustices suffered by 'despised sexualities' (2003: 17–19). In between lie injustices 'at root' economic or cultural to varying degrees; race and gender sit mid-spectrum, for example. To sit towards the economic end, an injustice must be at 'core' predominantly 'rooted in' the economic social order, meaning accompanying recognitive injustices will largely be derivative effects of redistributive injustice (Fraser, 1999: 27; 2003: 17–19). Injustices can be predominantly rooted in one social order because of the partial uncoupling of the economic and cultural orders that capitalism engenders.

However, Fraser has been much criticised for this seemingly ontological 'root/core' language (e.g. Swanson, 2005; Armstrong, 2007). For, if Fraser's dichotomy *is* ontological then perspectival dualism, like substantive dualism, mistakenly inscribes contingent social categories that emerge from capitalism onto the world itself, naturalising them.

The most charitable interpretation of perspectival dualism therefore instead focuses on an alternative explanation of the difference between economic and cultural injustices which mitigates these ontological overtones. This interprets Fraser (e.g. 2003: 63) as separating injustices along an economy–culture spectrum by assessing the *relative importance* of their economic and cultural origins, where these categories are socio-theoretical rather than ontological. On this understanding, *every* injustice is acknowledged to be both economic and cultural, where these are 'historically emergent categories of social theory' (Fraser, 1999: 40).

Fraser never explicitly defines the economy. Her clearest statement on this responds to Butler's (1998) arguments for including the production of humans themselves in the category of the economic, making heterosexism and the regulation of sexuality economic too. Fraser claims that this fails to improve on her 'simpler strategy of restricting the term economic to its capitalist meaning' (1998: 146).

Fraser often uses 'the economy', 'capitalism' and 'markets' synonymously (1998: 146, footnote 6; 1999: 36). An imagined society in which the economic order entirely subsumes the cultural order is 'fully marketized': markets decide everything (Fraser, 2003: 52). Markets alone are listed as the economy's 'core institutions' (Fraser, 2003: 58). Accordingly, markets distinguish the economic and cultural social orders: economic ordering is 'typically institutionalized in

markets'; cultural ordering works through institutions like 'kinship, religion, and law' (Fraser, 2003: 51). For Fraser, the economy is 'objective' and the cultural order is 'intersubjective' (2003: 49), though she never directly explains why. She denies that this distinction rests on a materialist–idealist dualism (Fraser, 1998). Instead, the economy's objectivity appears based on its value-free, impersonal, autonomous mechanisms, 'logic' and structure, as opposed to culture's value-laden, intersubjective 'patterns' (Fraser, 2003: 50).

Perspectival dualism, then, assesses the relative importance of the social-theoretical categories of economy and culture in explaining an injustice. Though charitable, this interpretation takes perspectival dualism a big step closer to anti-dualism by understanding it to view *every* injustice as simultaneously cultural and economic, albeit to different degrees. Two features keep the theory from collapsing into anti-dualism: Fraser's economy–culture spectrum imagery, and her understanding of economic and cultural social orders as relatively autonomous and analytically distinct. Using two of Fraser's examples, I now argue that we should reject these features and embrace anti-dualism.

Against an economy–culture spectrum

In the first example, a skilled white male industrial worker becomes unemployed when his factory closes. Fraser writes that this distributive injustice has little to do with misrecognition: 'it is rather a consequence of imperatives intrinsic to an order of specialized economic relations whose *raison d'être* is the accumulation of profits. To handle such cases, a theory of justice must reach beyond cultural value patterns to examine the structure of capitalism' (2003: 34). Our white worker's injustice sits tight towards the economy end of Fraser's spectrum; he is portrayed as suffering as pure a case of economic injustice as possible, given the concession that all injustices have some dual aspect to them.

Yet this portrayal is problematic. Critical race theorists and feminists have long challenged assumptions that the white, male experience is the 'neutral' classed experience. Racism 'ensures that black men do not have the same relations to patriarchal/capitalist hierarchies as white men' (Carby, 1982: 212). In the UK, for example, 'most ethnic groups fared worse during the [2008] recession because of higher non-employment, fewer hours worked, lower labour-market earnings, lower self-employment rates, lower self-employment earnings, lower investment income and higher housing costs' (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2015). Our white worker, then, will likely experience both employment and unemployment very differently to workers of colour.

His whiteness also affects community perception of his unemployment and, in turn, the political sympathy available to him and the compound harms likely to follow. White workers more easily translate skills into re-employment, for example (Chief, 2016). Furthermore, the 'white working class' is afforded attention that working-class people of colour can only wish for – attention focused on differentiating them from the rest of the working class via race and gender, rather than on

class barriers and injustices themselves (e.g. *The White Season*, 2008; Maidment, 2018). Take popular arguments claiming that the eclipse of class by identity politics uniquely harmed the white, male, working class, as if the struggles of other sections of the working class can simply be transformed into class-quietist gender or race politics.

Subordinating misrecognition, then, is not the only way that cultural recognition importantly affects injustices.⁷ Supposing cultural patterns do not importantly shape this injustice is a case of ‘*methodological whiteness*’ (Bhambra, 2017): a failure to acknowledge how race structures the world, resulting in treating a limited perspective, derived from white experience, as universal. In doing so, such approaches deny their own politics of identity. We cannot unify class politics, anti-racism and feminism by isolating supposedly pure cases for analysis and then adding our results together. We must rather recognise how raced and gendered recognition importantly shapes *all* workers’ economic experiences. Perspectival dualism tries to untangle raced misrecognition from class subordination, but both often manifest in experiences simultaneously co-constituted by class and race.

We must therefore reject Fraser’s economy–culture spectrum. There is no race-neutral class injustice the remedy for which suits white workers as perfectly as it suits workers of colour. To ignore this perpetuates methodological whiteness since the status quo falls back on white experiences as universal. Try as we might to find a case as close to the ‘economy’ end of the spectrum as possible, raced recognition remains important, pulling us back to an approach in which cultural recognition importantly shapes all economic injustices.

Against the economy as an autonomous a-cultural zone

I now argue against the second feature keeping perspectival dualism distinct from anti-dualism: Fraser’s understanding of the economy as an analytically distinct, relatively autonomous zone of objective a-cultural structures and strategic behaviours. I argue that this understanding struggles to make sense of Fraser’s second example: the injustice suffered by an African American Wall Street banker who cannot hail a taxi. Fraser sees little of redistributive importance to this case; hence the need to ‘reach beyond’ economic distributions to examine cultural value patterns. I suggest that perspectival dualism, even culled of its dubious ontological baggage, overlooks important mechanisms through which injustices like this arise and repeat.

Why will taxis not stop for our banker? Presumably because of racist cultural representations, as Fraser implies. But representations do not arise from nowhere; they must be produced and reproduced. Representations of black men as bad or risky customers cannot be divorced from a history in which black people were portrayed as less than fully human – as irrational and bestial – to justify and explain European expropriation of black land, labour and lives (Wynter, 2003).

Colonial *redistributions* of rights and goods relied on and facilitated racist representations from the start.

The afterlives of these representations remain powerful today. African Americans are frequently denied economic goods, services and opportunities because of these representations; our banker's lack of a taxi is one instance of a wider phenomenon which means that, as a group, African Americans are poorer (Bonilla-Silva, 2017: 2–25; Quillian et al., 2017). In these ways, racist representations importantly structure distributions.

Moreover, these distributive injustices play an important role in the contemporary justification and reproduction of representations of African Americans as bad, risky economic agents (Bonilla-Silva, 2017: 1, 39–43). Take Obama's speech to young black men: '[T]oo many young men in our community continue to make bad choices'. He 'confesses' that 'sometimes I wrote off my own failings as just another example of the world trying to keep a black man down. But . . . excuses are tools of the incompetent' (cited in Coates, 2013). This is emblematic of the tendency to represent black poverty as individual irrationality ('bad choices').

Racist representations present themselves as *explaining* contemporary raced distributions, when they in fact help to generate these distributions. We can describe this as apparent verification by systemic production (Wynter, 2003: 326). The racist representations suffered by our banker and raced distributions across the US are co-constitutive – they co-evolve, mutually constituting and reconstituting one another to reproduce a raced social order. Even if our banker somehow previously avoided these distributive injustices, they nonetheless play a key role in reproducing the raced representations which leave him taxi-less. Perspectival dualists' painting of such injustices as 'more cultural than economic' conceals this.

Tracing the co-constitutive distributive and representative origins of our banker's experience not only helps explain the contemporary persistence of racism; it also puts our banker's experience into a vital broader social context, showing its inseparability from the wider story of contemporary anti-black racism. We miss too much by separating the intersubjective ideological/representational elements of racism from its manifestations in distributions, to weigh their importance against one another.

Perspectival dualists cannot acknowledge this important co-constitution of representations and distributions. For, note that Fraser's insistence regarding the 'analytic distinctness' of economic and cultural perspectives (e.g. 2003: 50) cannot only be an insistence that economy and culture mean different things. Even Butler (1998) – arch-anti-dualist in Fraser's eyes – does not suggest that the terms mean the same thing, only that the line between them is fuzzy and unstable. If this were all that Fraser's 'analytic distinctness' meant, her whole project would oppose a straw person. She must retain some stronger sense of the 'analytic distinctness' of economy and culture than simply that they centre different aspects of social reality.

More likely, Fraser means that the categories are ‘analytically distinct’ in that they divide aspects of the social into two mutually exclusive kinds – economic-distributive and cultural-representative. On this interpretation, perspectival dualism splits co-constitutive representation–distribution loops into mutually exclusive halves for analysis because it uses dominant contemporary categorisations of economy and culture that are themselves mutually exclusive. This retains Fraser’s distance from Butler’s anti-dualism. The raced representations just discussed are then themselves non-economic by definition – at most, ‘inputs’ to the economy.

But, in addition to its methodological whiteness, this dominant economy/culture split serves a purpose within capitalism. Painting the economy as an a-cultural realm of objective facts, mechanisms and strategic imperatives sets it beyond the contingency of politics and culture – beyond dispute. Viewing the ‘strategic logic’ of *homo oeconomicus* as an objective a-cultural reality renders it non-theorisable as a particularly western ‘culture and class-specific’ conception of human behaviour (Wynter, 2003: 282). It matters little that we use this framing because it is historically dominant rather than because we see deep ontological truth in it; reproducing it within our social theory still strengthens its hold. This politically laden economy/culture split is too friendly to capitalism’s preferred colour-blind, value-neutral self-portrayal.

Nor can perspectival dualists fix this by altering the cut made between economy and culture. We cannot coherently divide these loops into mutually exclusive halves because economic-distributive ‘mechanisms’ are created and reproduced through cultural representations, making them vital parts of the economic structure. Contra Fraser (2003: 34), cultural value patterns are not ‘beyond’ the structure of capitalism but integral to it, as I now argue.

First, raced representations structure supposedly a-cultural, ‘strategic’ economic agency. The taxi case shows how economic decisions are commonly mediated through racist representations, structuring resulting distributions. When African Americans are denied goods, services and opportunities on offer to their white counterparts, each denial is a ‘strategic economic choice’. The uncertainties of real-world economic choices leave space for raced rules of thumb to guide actions. These representations structure our practices, and therefore come to constitute our social relations. These networks of relations in turn constitute our social structures – in this case, ‘the economy’.

Second, raced representations structure the economy through law. Fraser sees law as cultural, but US law continues to protect ‘whiteness as property’ – whiteness as a status according to which societal benefits are allocated (Harris, 1993). Recently revived arguments that affirmative action discriminates against whites have led courts to severely limit affirmative action, which is banned altogether in eight states (*Economist*, 2017). As courts view the normal workings of the economy as race neutral, they see race-based affirmative action as discriminatory, defending whites’ settled expectations of greater shares of jobs and education as a ‘neutral’ economic baseline (Harris, 1993: 1750–1790).

Or, take the legal construction of home carers, agricultural workers, immigration detainees and prison labourers – all disproportionately people of colour – as not proper ‘workers’, thus denying them standard workers’ rights (Zatz and Boris, 2013).⁸ Home carers (disproportionately women of colour) are not covered by the Fair Labor Standards Act, even if employed by a for-profit company. Arising from the raced feminisation of their labour, such understandings help perpetuate current economic distributions (Boris and Klein, 2012). Finally, take how western capitalist understandings of what constitutes labour are used to appropriate indigenous land in settler-colonial contexts (Povinelli, 1995). Raced representations are therefore not best understood as mere ‘inputs’; by patterning ‘strategic’ agency and informing the legal framework limiting and constituting economic activity, they *structure* the economy.

More generally, without underpinning representations in the form of norms, concepts and narratives – and their codification in law – there is no ‘specialised marketised zone’. Capitalist markets require laws determining who is a ‘worker’, and norms enabling decision-making under uncertainty. Fraser’s ‘fully marketised society’ is a fantasy: no market can exist without legal frameworks and social norms underpinning its function and setting its form. These frameworks and norms cannot themselves be marketised on pain of regress. The supposed ‘autonomy’ of markets is one of capitalism’s myths; left-leaning, feminist, anti-racist approaches should not perpetuate it.

Our stranded banker cannot get a taxi due to racist representations but, I have argued, if we end our analysis there, our understanding of this injustice remains shallow. To understand the continuing prevalence and power of such representations, we must understand how they are co-constituted by raced distributions. The cultural representations and economic distributions that comprise systemic anti-black racism co-evolve and co-constitute one another. Fraser’s adoption of the dominant capitalist method of splitting this co-constitutive loop instantiates methodological whiteness and problematically depoliticises the economy.

But we cannot improve this split; these loops cannot be divided into mutually exclusive halves since the ‘specialised marketised zone’ is necessarily structured by representations. Understanding the economy as an a-cultural, analytically distinct, partially autonomous zone is politically problematic and implausibly ungrounded. To best understand our banker’s experience, we should view economic distributions as importantly co-constituted by cultural representations.

Contemporary left critiques of identity politics: the case of Jodi Dean

Jodi Dean’s work shows promising signs of having shed perspectival dualism’s methodological whiteness. She argues against coding the working class as white, and thinks expropriation and extraction as well as waged exploitation form the basis of class struggle (Dean, 2016b). She views her communism as informed by

struggles over civil and women's rights, gay and trans rights (Dean, 2012: 184) and envisages a Communist Party (her preferred political-organisational form) working as a solidaristic resource and consciousness-raising space for women and people of colour (Dean, 2016a: 211–231). That she is nonetheless a strident critic of identity politics should therefore worry those of us interested in intersectional analyses of structural identities.

For Dean, identity politics is necessarily individualistic, depoliticising and fragmenting – it inhibits solidarity and relies on the exclusion of class. She tires of hearing 'ad infinitum' that the personal is political, which she sees as excluding structural analyses by shrinking politics to personal value bids based on the unique authenticity of one's own experiences (Dean, 2016a: 264; 2016b). And she decries the 'fixity' read into identity categories (Dean, 2016b).

Against this, Dean advocates class struggle that unites us as a collective, 'the people'. The people are a political category defined by their shared experiences of capitalist exploitation and expropriation, and therefore apparently avoid the logic of identity politics (Dean, 2012: 80). Unlike Dean's version of identity politics, the people's collective identity is not reducible to individual identities; it is a 'common relation to a common condition of division' (2012: 191). For example, the Occupy slogan 'we are the 99%' 'does not unify this collectivity under a substantial identity – race, ethnicity, nationality' (Dean, 2012: 200).

It is unclear what Dean means by labelling race, but not 'the people', as a 'substantial' identity, given the widespread critical acceptance that races are socio-political constructs not biological groups. Nor is it uncommon for anti-racist theory and practice to understand race as arising from and based on antagonistic oppressive social relations. For example, race 'names a relation of subordination' (Chen, 2013; also Bonilla-Silva, 2017: 9–10). As Barbara Tomlinson points out, for those concerned with anti-subordination, 'the experience and subjectivity of specific identities is not really the focus of the argument but rather a proxy or tool to examine and counter structural injustice and subordination' (2013: 1000).

Dean therefore invokes classed subjectification in similar ways to how the best discussions of race invoke raced identity; 'the people' are not the only subject produced through certain modes of subordination or exploitation. By portraying the people as unique in utilising a collective, non-essentialist subject/identity category for political struggle, Dean unfairly caricatures too much good theory and activism.

Dean pits class struggle against identity politics in a second way. She understands class struggle as the 'fundamental antagonism through which society emerges' (Dean, 2012: 82). Explaining, she writes that class struggle 'operates according to a logic fundamentally different from that of identity politics' (Dean, 2006: 57). Whereas feminist, gay, and anti-racist activists' basic goal is, she argues, to 'find ways of getting along... to translate antagonism into difference', class struggle does not aim for 'mutual recognition or respect' but rather at 'transforming relations of production so as to eliminate capitalism altogether'

(Dean, 2006: 57–58). Dean's second reason for pitting identity against class thus invokes familiar metaphors of cultural superstructural recognition versus foundational economic relations of production.

In line with this, Dean criticises the Left for limiting itself to 'small battles, policy options, and cultural interventions, victories that can be absorbed and defeats that can be forgotten' (2016a: 25). These victories can be absorbed because identity politics based on gender, race or sexuality leave 'communicative capitalism's basic structure intact' (Dean, 2016b). Only the full inclusion of 'the people' is theorised as capable of 'distorting and disrupting' the capitalist order, not the full inclusion of women or people of colour (Dean, 2012: 80–82). Racism, then, is not part of capitalism's 'basic structure' but part of its cultural superstructure.

This strikes a warning bell that gets louder when Dean reveals the exact contours of her economy–culture cut. For example, 'labour unrest' counts as economic, but conflicts around 'abortion, pornography, busing, crime, affirmative action, and gay rights' are 'cultural' (Dean, 2012: 63). Anti-harassment law is understood as more problematically individualistic and less a matter of 'broad economic justice' than wage and pension law advances (Dean, 2012: 44–45, 63).

This kind of economy–culture cut – construing issues like crime as individualistic cultural conflicts, in contrast to struggles for wages and pensions – again instantiates methodological whiteness. After all, the criminal justice system marks people of colour as 'criminals' and uses this labelling to limit their access to a wage via employment discrimination, and to economic goods like housing, education and benefits (Alexander, 2012). While incarcerated, prisoners work for below minimum wage without the legal protections afforded to 'employees'. The criminal justice system thus crucially shapes the forms of exploitation and expropriation that people of colour experience.

This cut also instantiates *methodological maleness*, given how criminalising abortion denies women control over their reproductive labour and workplace harassment conditions their access to a stable wage. By categorising these as individualistic cultural issues, Dean reinforces the misguided representation of these practices as outside the basic structure of the economy. Sure, struggles around crime and abortion do not necessarily abolish capitalism. But nor does union organising for paid sick leave or unemployment support – actions which Dean readily classifies as the people 'disciplining capital' (2012: 44). While Dean is surely right that 'not all feminist and antiracist struggles are necessarily progressive' (2006: 59), this does not prove that class is more 'fundamental' than race or gender; not all class struggles are necessarily progressive either (e.g. Wrench, 1989).

By assuming that capitalism's basic structure is unraced and ungendered, and thus that struggles along the lines of raced or gendered identities are 'cultural', Dean repeats Fraser's mistakes. Our legal definitions of 'work' and 'workers' are raced and gendered, producing gender- and race-specific forms of economic exploitation and expropriation. Because the raced and gendered representations that structure the economy are *both* cultural and economic, the battle that Dean draws between 'cultural' politics based on gendered and raced identities and

class struggle based on relations of antagonistic capitalist exploitation and expropriation is simplistic and unhelpful.⁹

Unsurprisingly, the economy–culture dualism underlying Dean’s view also struggles to make sense of the intersection of race and class. Take Dean’s analysis of the 2014–2015 riots in Ferguson and Baltimore, USA. Dean writes that ‘identity as an operator for politics is now itself fully saturated’ (2016a: 256): it allows for no more useful political work and is now only damaging, ‘reducing the space of change to the individual’ and encouraging solidarity-sapping calling out and shaming. She thinks the most striking symptom of identity’s saturation is the ‘economic rupturing of identity categories, that is to say, the emergence of identities as themselves sites of class struggle’ as seen in these riots (Dean, 2016a: 257).

It is hard to tally her claims that identity does only damage with her acknowledgement of the radical challenge these riots presented to the economy’s basic structure, for the riots happened under the banner of an unapologetically ‘substantive’ black identity. Her economy–culture dualism cannot make sense of struggles that are both economic and emerge along the lines of raced identity. Like Fraser, Dean seems to envisage ‘cultural’ identity politics and class struggle as mutually exclusive categories of analysis. And, like Fraser’s, Dean’s approach fails to make sense of a world in which important concepts, structures and struggles are fundamentally *both* economic and cultural. Jonathan Dean’s (2015) ‘new communism’ therefore repeats some old mistakes.

A non-dualist proposal

Key to economy–culture dualism is the assumption that the categories of economy and culture divide the social into two mutually exclusive kinds. Giving up this dualism need not force us into monism, however – we need not think the concepts are interchangeable or that they collapse into one another. Between dualistic mutual exclusivity and monism lies a whole spectrum of non-dualist possibilities. I now propose one such non-dualist understanding of the economy. The economy, I argue, is an ideological objectification of particular practices and resources marked as of commensurable public value by dominant common sense. The imagined ‘public’ in question over-represents dominant groups, meaning the common-sense evaluations involved in demarcating ‘the economy’ likewise overvalue their labour and interests. In this, I build on Wynter’s (2003) suggestion that ‘the economy’ is a science of reproducing the conditions of life for a particular kind of person – a white, upper-class man. To end, I explore the implications of this for class versus identity debates.

Co-constitutive racist representations and racist distributions structure our social practices and so come to constitute our social relations. Above, I suggested we single out one network of social relations which we objectify as the social structure, ‘the economy’. To build on this, some theoretical background is helpful. Social structures, as used here, are ‘theoretical entities, postulated to do work in a social theory’ which are constituted, to an important degree, by social relations

(Haslanger, 2016: 114). Social relations are in turn constituted by social practices: patterns of co-ordination behaviour that respond to social resources (broadly understood) as these resources are interpreted and shaped by cultural meanings (Haslanger, 2018: 245).

For example, in UK offices the practice of making tea responds to the resources of tea, coffee, etc. (culturally appropriate workplace drinks), and the time and labour involved in making these (culturally gendered female and 'domestic'). This practice part-constitutes hierarchical social relations if women workers are always tasked with making tea for everyone in a meeting. This hierarchical social relation would then constitute part of 'the patriarchy' – a theoretical entity postulated by feminist theory to objectify gendered relations of domination.

The economy is a social structure in this sense – a theoretical entity that objectifies certain relations and the practices that constitute them, including the resources and cultural understandings involved in these practices. However, unlike critical theoretical entities like 'patriarchy' or 'white supremacy' which do vital work in social theory (and which are Haslanger's focus), 'the economy' does *harmful* ideological work. It shores up relations of domination and subordination by systematically overvaluing certain resources, labour and lives and overlooking or devaluing others, while presenting as a transparent, neutral representation of reality.

It is controversial to call the economy a 'social structure'. Swanson (2005: 89) thinks this label is 'theoretically untenable and politically debilitating insofar as it treats social practices like capitalism as autonomous and relatively intractable structures and leaves their complexity and contingency under-theorized'. However, the understanding of social structures adopted here is designed to defang such worries. Haslanger does not naturalise, fetishise or ahistoricise social structures. They are understood as only as intractable as the social relations that constitute them – relations which are the contingent results of historical processes, neither unchanging nor necessarily uncontradictory.

Understanding the economy as an ideologically harmful objectification of a specific set of social relations undoes any separation of human subjects and practices from mysterious, 'objective' social structures. This is an important step beyond the mere 'addition' of class and race: it frees us from unhelpful imaginaries that see class but not race as arising from an objective economic realm, setting class up as more objective than race's supposedly subjective character. Just as white supremacy is constituted by the actions and relationships of human subjects (and their material frameworks), so too is the economy – no hierarchy of objectivity is suggested.

Which practices – responding to which resources, and interpreted by what cultural meanings – constitute 'the economy', then? The term selects according to dominant common-sense evaluations of which practices are important to the production, distribution or consumption of resources (including labour) of commensurable public value, and in what ways. The economy is therefore demarcated by three evaluations: first, of which practices are significant to the production,

distribution or consumption of publicly valuable resources; second, of which resources are of public, commensurable value; third, of the kind of value/disvalue of these economic resources. I now turn to how this economic/non-economic demarcation shores up relations of domination and subordination by systematically overvaluing certain practices, resources and lives while devaluing others.

First, note that on this approach the practices constituting ‘the economy’ will *always* have a cultural dimension. Like all social practices, economic practices rely on a cluster of concepts, beliefs, narratives and attitudes which make them and the resources they involve intelligible to participants, and therefore allow for practices’ repetition. For example, market exchange practices rely on culturally specific concepts (price, ownership, etc.), beliefs (e.g. in the value of a currency) and narratives about what is appropriate to exchange with whom. You won’t get far trying to sell an eight-year-old a car; you could sell them a snack, but if you are that child’s parent you break the conventional bounds of this practice by doing so. Acknowledging the cultural dimension of economic practices lets us explore the culture and class specificity of their logic (Wynter, 2003: 282).

Dominant conceptions of the economy centre practices of marketised exchange, understood as comprised of equal individuals with different bundles of resources and needs trading things of equivalent value according to our pre-given utility curves. Inhabitants of this sphere are conceived as neoclassical homo economicus, a character so wilfully abstracted from social context that many economics textbooks start their reasoning from Robinson Crusoe (Watson, 2018). On this understanding, the economy is constituted by market exchanges (along with the practices of production and consumption that keep these exchanges ticking over) and the resources accorded supposedly a-cultural financial value by these exchanges.

Left theorists correctly point out that this neoclassical picture overemphasises *formally* equal exchange relations, overlooks relations of domination arising from differential ownership of the means of production and overvalues and naturalises marketised practices as at once efficient, fair and neutral. In these ways, this common-sense theoretical entity, ‘the economy’, helps shore up relations of classed domination. And feminists correctly point out that it shores up gendered domination by devaluing (under-paid) or ignoring (unpaid) practices of care and reproductive labour. Furthermore, when the caring/mothering practices of working-class women are included in the economy, it is because they are seen as dangerously destructive of economic value; these women are portrayed as hyper-visual sites of public expense by dominant discourses which cast them as ‘*drains* on national resources’ (Hancock, 2003: 44; emphasis mine).

Similarly, common-sense demarcations of the economy ignore and undervalue raced labour practices and cast people of colour as of potentially destructive economic disvalue. As we have seen, work practices raced non-white are overlooked and undervalued in cases like those of home carers, prison workers and immigration detainees, locking participants into relations of hyper-exploitation without basic legal protections. A particularly clear statement of this devaluation came when the UK Government excluded immigration detainees from minimum wage

laws on the grounds that the minimum wage would not ‘reflect the *true economic value* of the work likely to be carried out’ (UK Parliament, 2005; emphasis mine). As Bales and Mayblin (2018: 200) point out, the immigration status of detainees determines the value of this work: ‘they perform the same jobs as their citizen counterparts ... at a rate of 13 per cent of the national minimum wage’.

Relatedly, the bounds of the economy are drawn by calculations of commensurable public value based on a dominant whitewashed cultural representation of the public. A Supreme Court Justice defended home carers’ non-worker status on the grounds that if these carers *were* covered by wage laws, millions would be unable to afford care, making denying them worker status in the public interest (Boris and Klein, 2012: 8). The value of legal protections and minimum wages for home carers does not figure as a relevant part of this calculation of public interest because the ‘public’ involved quietly excludes them.

Similarly, Brexit debates drew on and solidified a raced representation of ‘the people’. Nationalist rhetoric – ‘we want our country back’ – represented ‘a wilful whitening of class identities for racist ends’ by political elites (Bhattacharyya, 2017: 20). Just as the gendered public/private divide animates common-sense understandings of the economy, so too do racially exclusionary imaginaries of national communities. Such imaginaries animate a conception of ‘public value’ that quietly elides people of colour’s labour and lives.

Given this exclusion from the relevant imagined communities, it is perhaps unsurprising that when people of colour *are* included in the economy, it is often because they are presented as involved in practices that importantly threaten or destroy economic value. Despite much evidence refuting a connection between recent immigration and crime, British people remain convinced that recent immigrants – especially undocumented ones – represent a serious criminal threat (Stansfield and Stone, 2018: 604). This is one example of how people of colour are cast as endangering economic value. Media photo captions in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina describing black people as ‘looting’ but white people doing the same thing as ‘finding bread and soda’ (Ralli, 2005) evoke a similar logic. Our black banker who cannot get a taxi suffers the consequences of this, excluding him from equal economic participation.

Therefore, as commonly used, ‘the economy’ selects a group of practices according to dominant common-sense evaluations of which practices are important for the production, distribution or consumption of resources of commensurable public value, and in what ways. These evaluations systematically overlook the labour and interests of people of colour, and when people of colour *are* included in ‘the economy’ they are often cast as active threats to economic value. The economy, then, is a theoretical entity whose terms and boundaries support the illusion that white people sustain the efficient production, distribution and constructive consumption of things of value while people of colour drain or threaten such resources and practices. Its methods of picking out, valuing and naturalising a certain network of practices help maintain raced (gendered, and classed) relations of domination.

Designating a practice as ‘economic’ is therefore not an ‘ultimately arbitrary’ categorisation (contra Swanson, 2005: 95). To be admitted into the category of the economic is either to have established your practice as one that produces, distributes or consumes resources of a certain kind of public value, or to have it marked as threatening this value. This designation is not ontological, but it is performative and powerful: once a practice, person or resource is seen as valuable/unvaluable in this way it has very real implications. For one thing, casting people of colour not only as less productive but as potential destroyers of economic value helps dehumanise them and results in (and justifies) their subjection to greater violence in the name of securing value. Let me take these in turn.

In our current moment, when to be fully human is to fit the mould of homo-economicus, it is unsurprising that we dehumanise those cast as dangerous to this achievement. The economic is intimately bound up with the contemporary category of the human (Wynter, 2003); as Bhattacharyya puts it, ‘something in the status of “worker” and perhaps “potential worker” . . . slides into the demarcation of the human under capitalism’ (2018: 65). This is unsurprising, perhaps, given the neoliberal creep of economisation and the resultant increased subservience of imaginaries of non-economic value to the economy.

With the dehumanisation of those deemed economic threats comes violence done in the name of securing economic value. So, when immigration detainee Jimmy Mubenga, already handcuffed, is killed by UK immigration guards on a crowded plane, we find that the guards sent dozens of racist messages like this one: ‘Fuck off and go home you *free-loading, benefit grabbing, kid producing, violent, non-English speaking cock suckers . . .*’ (Lowenstein, 2015). Likewise, the unarmed child Trayvon Martin is killed for looking like a burglar to George Zimmerman, who saw him as one of those ‘punks’ who ‘always get away’ (Yankah, 2013). This violence is done, in part, in the name of securing ‘the economy’ – a set of practices which reproduce the conditions of life of a whitewashed public through exploitation, expropriation and exclusion.

This understanding of the economy accords with Skeggs’ (2014: 1) argument that economic value and wider social values are ‘always dialogic, dependent, and co-constituting’. It recognises how racist moral and social devaluations of people of colour and the work they do cannot be untangled from their economic devaluation. Common-sense economic evaluations of what practices importantly produce, distribute or consume resources of commensurable public value are always also cultural, ethico-political evaluations.

The economy–culture dualism still has many advocates across public and academic discourse – as the recent uptick in ‘class versus identity’ explanations suggests. However, elsewhere moves towards theorising the co-constituting relations of class, gender, race and sexuality are gaining ground, as evidenced by the recent resurgent interest in social reproduction theory (e.g. Camfield, 2016; Bhattacharya, 2017; Bhattacharyya, 2018; Fraser et al., 2018). To end, I explain how social reproduction approaches aid escape from the class versus identity impasse, and

how the non-dualist conception of the economy outlined above harmonises with and builds on such approaches.

The cornerstone of social reproduction theory is an expanded conception of labour integrating ‘reproductive’ and ‘productive’ work. For example, Camfield (2016: 300) understands labour as ‘conscious, meaning-saturated activity through which embodied subjects relate to each other and the rest of nature and in so doing produce and reproduce the social’.¹⁰ Befitting its Marxist Feminist origins, caring practices – paid or unpaid – are central exemplars of labour on this approach. This widening of the category of work reveals the threads of hyper-exploitation and expropriation running through the experiences of home care workers, prison labourers, immigration detainees, as well as women denied control over their own reproductive labour or subjected to sexual harassment to secure a wage.

This framework lets us talk of certain relations as both capitalist and racist; no ‘pure’ capitalist logic is sought beyond or behind the practices that form and maintain capitalist social relations. In this way, social reproduction theory offers important resources for escaping the class versus identity dead end. For it lets us conceive of these practices of hyper-exploitation and expropriation as raced and gendered but also importantly *classed* forms of domination, helping undo the pitting of raced and gendered ‘identities’ against class.^{11,12}

However, an expanded conception of work alone is not enough to dissolve class versus identity debates. Recall the dehumanising violence done to those deemed outside the economy, and their ongoing exclusion; these ‘spaces of death may not present opportunities for accumulation in any straightforward sense’ (Bhattacharyya, 2018: 20). To make visible the classed dimension of *these* practices we must return to the exclusionary nature of dominant conceptions of the ‘public’ which animate the economy, as argued for above.

These violent exclusions – done in the name of protecting a whitewashed ‘public’ – can therefore be understood as, at least in part, a defensive shoring up of current class hierarchies, either by elites wanting to deflect working-class anger towards raced outsiders, or by those who feel it the only way to protect their limited access to the means of sustaining life. Both suggest the urgent necessity of a strong intersectional class politics, lest people of colour are left to bear the brunt of class pain mis-directed into ethno-nationalist anger.

In his attempt to theorise gender, race and class together, Camfield rejects a focus on common-sense understandings of the economy in favour of a focus on ‘the social relations involved in processes of producing the means of human life’ (2016: 293; see also: Bhattacharyya, 2018: 52). Building on this, just as social reproduction theorists suggest counter-hegemonic understandings of work, we might likewise suggest a counter-hegemonic understanding of the economy: one animated by an expanded conception of labour as those practices significant to the production, reproduction, distribution and consumption of the means of life, which understands resources’ public value as stemming from their ability to sustain life and which conceives of the public in question through an imagined community free from raced exclusions.

Rather than simply ‘adding on’ sectors here and there (Cameron and Gibson-Graham, 2003), such an understanding necessitates a fundamental reconception of the logics through which we draw ‘the economy’ – of which practices are deemed significant and which resources are deemed valuable/unvaluable to which public, and why. Rejecting the notion of life in service to financial value, it centres Bhattacharyya’s (2018: 52-53) call to put the economy in service to life. It invites anti-racist, feminist and socialist rethinkings of labour and public value, and recognises the need to connect these to concurrent rethinkings of the category of the human.

Conclusion

We urgently need intersectional analyses that insist on the irreducible intermingling of race, class and gender; with inequality intensifying and fractures appearing along overtly raced lines, we lack the luxury of rehearsing another decade of identity versus class debates. As Dean’s work suggests, contemporary iterations of these debates remain underlain by economy–culture dualisms which instantiate methodological whiteness and struggle to analyse the intersections of race and class.

In place of these dualisms, I proposed an analysis of the economy as a harmful ideological objectification of certain practices, selected for their supposed importance to the production, distribution and consumption of resources of commensurable public value. I argued the theoretical entity, ‘the economy’, does harmful social theoretical work, shoring up and naturalising raced, classed and gendered relations of domination. This economy is importantly structured by both cultural concepts, meanings and understandings, and by material and immaterial resources and distributions. To end, I suggested that social reproduction theory can help dissolve class versus identity debates and used insights from this theoretical current to inform a counter-hegemonic understanding of the economy – one which, among other things, calls on us to properly recognise the lives and labour of people of colour.

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Notes

1. This article was accepted for publication in June 2019. E.g. Fraser (2016). Goodhart (2016) similarly talks of Brexit as a classed ‘peasants’ revolt’ of the ‘left behind’. These explanations whiten the working class and ignore the driving role of white elites and middle classes (Bhambra, 2017).
2. Better reasons for the relative de-emphasis of class compared to gender and race lie in intersectionality’s origins in black feminist thought (Cooper, 2016).
3. Fraser’s recognition/redistribution paradigm looms indicatively large in topic introductions by Markell (2008) and Squires (2008). Walters borrows terms from Fraser when she calls identity versus class ‘a battle between a politics of recognition and a politics of redistribution’ (2018: 481). Fraser’s framework structures studies ranging from the welfare state (Dahl, 2004) and disability (Dodd, 2016), to social work (Boone et al., 2018) and education (Öchsner and Murray, 2018).
4. The social left are the old guard, primarily worried about redistribution and class, in contrast to the younger, cultural left who came of age during the ‘identity politics’ era (Fraser, 1998).
5. There are signs that, over the years, perspectival dualism became less dualist (compare Fraser 1995 and 2003). Insofar as this is true, I impress the importance of these concessions and the need to take them further.
6. Mitchell (1998) gives a wonderful genealogy of this view.
7. Awareness of status dominance *and* subordination also lets us see subordination of people of colour and women as constitutive of white, male identity.
8. Though it garners less critical attention, much of this also holds true for the UK. Home care workers likewise struggle to access minimum wages (Merrill, 2016; Plimmer, 2018). Such work is done primarily by women and ‘increasingly by migrant women’ (Mullally and Murphy, 2015: 59). McGregor (2007: 814–815) found raced divisions between permanent and temporary caring staff, with better working conditions secured by predominantly white permanent carers. The UK has the largest prison population in the EU, and the most privatised prison system in Europe (Bell, 2013). Prisoners who work earn an average wage of £9.60 a week (Bell 2013, 59). Black people are more disproportionately imprisoned in the UK than in the US (Lammy 2017, 3). The UK has one of the largest immigration detention estates in Europe, also increasingly privatised, and predominantly peopled by detainees of colour who work for well below minimum wage (Bales and Mayblin 2018).
9. Dean caricatures political struggles around raced identities by casting them as unthreatening to capitalism’s basic structure (cf. Wilderson, 2003: 231). As Jonathan Dean (2015: 245) argues, the claim that ‘only radical class politics aims at wiping out the other’s socio-political role and function’ is absurd.
10. Camfield (2016: 291) rejects any material–ideational dualism.
11. So long as class domination includes relations of expropriation and exploitation, as Dean (2012) agrees it should.

12. Fraser's latest paper in fact accords with some of these ideas. Co-authored with two social reproduction theorists, it abandons recognition versus redistribution language and any dualistic zero-sum weighing of culture and economy. They aim to be 'right in the thick of ... [class struggle] even as we are helping to redefine it in a new, more capacious way' (Fraser et al., 2018: 119). Fraser might have been hugely influential in outlining economy–culture dualism but this latest shift adds her considerable intellectual weight to the ranks of a more productive approach.

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