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Social Processes of Oppression in the Stratified Economy and Veblenian Feminist Post Keynesian Connections

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Abstract

Conceptions of social stratification and oppression should be central to Post Keynesian inquiry. The article takes a Veblenian feminist view to discuss aspects of oppression in economies of stratification, and outlines connections to areas of Post Keynesian economics. The article is structured around “five faces of oppression” delineated by political theorist Iris Young (1990): exploitation, violence, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and marginalization. The paper reframes those based on a conception of evolving social processes and diverse economic relations, and employs Veblen’s theory of surplus and stratification, which has a broad understanding of domination that goes beyond capital accumulation. The article provides illustrations of these interconnected aspects of oppression, and discusses how each is co-opted today. The article presents specific connections to Post Keynesian economic analysis and concludes by highlighting the potential of Post Keynesian economics for social justice.

Key Words:

Stratification; Oppression; Thorstein Veblen; Feminist Post Keynesian Economics; Social Processes

JEL codes: B52, B54, E12, Z13, Z18

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1. Purpose and the Importance of Social Process

Post Keynesian Economics is set to provide realistic and critical analyses of the capitalist economy. It presents distinct theories of production, distribution, employment, money, and policy formulation in historical time (see Kregel 1973; King 2002). The Post Keynesian approach disputes supposedly technical notions of productivity that justify distribution and economic conditions. Income differentials are not technical or natural facts but result from socially organized political decisions (Kregel 1979, pp. 46-60; Harcourt 2016; Semenova and Wray 2016). In addition, Post Keynesian analyses convey persistence of instability, crises and unacceptable suffering and deprivation (Kregel 1980; Wray 2016). Arguably the stratified economy is the basic subject matter of Post Keynesian economics. This means that conceptions of social stratification and oppression should be central part of Post Keynesian inquiry. What is the importance of Post Keynesian economics in countervailing oppression and in working towards social justice? The article takes a Veblenian feminist view to delve into the meaning of oppression, making connections to specific areas of Post Keynesian economics.

The article is structured around “five faces of oppression” delineated by political theorist Iris Marion Young’s (1990) - exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence. Rather than directly applying Young’s analyses, I reorder those elements for the purpose of the present discussion, reframe them in light of Thorsten Veblen’s theory of surplus and stratification, and discuss those as constituted by what I envision as interconnected social processes (depicted in Figure 1). I see the “five faces of oppression” also as areas of strife, struggle, opposition to oppression, “survival of non-invidious interests” (Veblen [1899] 1994, 203), and “countervailing power” (Galbraith [1952] 2017, 111). Further, in my view, the “faces of oppression” can be understood also as methods of aggression or ways to inflict harm. The article also gives examples of pseudo-oppressions or co-optations that distort reality.

I understand the five dimensions of oppression as entailing decision-making, behavior, institutional organization, developments, and invidious distinction at macro-, meso-, and micro-levels. For that reason, I argue that *social process* is a central concept in discussing stratification and oppression. Social process can be understood as a combination of multiple interconnected elements – activities, conventions, working rules, conventions, standards, social beliefs, norms, signs, symbols, rhetorical devices, expert discourse, conventional wisdom, identities, going

concerns, as well as bodies, ecosystems, and landscapes. For example, gender and race are social processes that entail socially created and evolving categories, characterized by historically specific institutions, which give rise to specific habits of thought (actions). These include racism, misogyny, and sexism, among others. So, gender or race, for example, are not simply demographic descriptions or issues, nor are they simply identities, or immutable given categories. They are emerging, evolving, and contextual social processes that interconnect with processes of social provisioning and environment, and are part of diverse economic relations. A multitude of historically specific socio-economic-ecological processes form systems of social provisioning (See Figure 1 for a depiction of evolving processes and Todorova 2014; 2015a; 2015b).

My formulation of social processes comes out of working within institutional economics along the lines of Veblen's 1898 [2011] urging that economics should study cumulative processes and living social humans as agents in historical time and specific contexts. This is congruent to other approaches in heterodox economics, and particularly with Post Keynesian emphasis on historical time. Social processes include formation of oppressive dynamics, emergence of invidious distinctions, as well as survival of non-invidious interests. I discuss these central topics in Veblen's works in connection to feminist concerns. More specific connections to Post Keynesian economics are presented later. The article concludes with a discussion of Post Keynesian economics and social justice. In this article social justice is understood as working towards transformation and remedying the faces of oppression as delineated below.

Veblen's concepts of invidious distinction, exploit, predation, and cumulative process are bridge between Post Keynesian insights about the economy and the five faces of oppression understood through a prism of political economy. Veblen has a theory of domination that goes beyond capital accumulation. This is valuable for Post Keynesian analysis of unemployment, inequity, deprivation, and power, and distribution. The article stresses cumulative and multidimensional harms, and their importance for analyzing crises – a central occupation in Post Keynesian economics. Then, it discusses how Post Keynesian economics enlightens pertinent economic problems - in fact challenging various dimensions of oppression. The conclusion highlights the potential and importance of Post Keynesian economics for advancing social justice, stressing an often-unrecognized link to Veblen's critique of economics, as well as the need for broadening the approach.

Figure 1. Processes and Economic Relations (Zdravka Todorova)

Biological and Geographical Processes	Social Processes	Social Processes - Economic Provisioning	Diverse Economic Relations
Biospheric Processes	Gender		
Biota	Race and Ethnicity	Care	Gift
Information sourcing	Nation	Labor	
Habitat	Kinship & Community	Recreation	Obligation
	Language	Consumption	
Bodies	Citizenship &	Mobility and residence	Debt/Credit
Birth	Residency	Communication, expression, and persuasion	Tribute
Lactation	Social class		Exchange
Cognition, Emotions, Spirituality	Cast	Cultivation of knowledge, tools, memories	Reciprocity
Sexuality	Worship/Spirituality	Resource creation, direction and usage	Sacrifice
Aging		Undertaking (investing; mobilization)	Exploit
Illness		Machine process (production; mechanization)	
Impairment		Supervision and Surveillance	
Death		Threat and Punishment	
Information sourcing		Distribution of Social Product	
Spaces		Ownership and Economic Class	
Landscapes		Social Distinction and Emulation	
Localities		Waste	
Buildings/architecture		Deprivation	
Infrastructure		Predation and Accumulation	
		Subordination and Domination	
		Violence and Aggression	
		Justice	

2. A Veblenian Start: Surplus and Stratified Economies

Invidious distinction is the foundation of Veblen's ([1899] 1994; 1898a, b [2011]; [1919] 2005; 1923) theory of stratification based on hierarchical distribution of socially produced surplus and invidious distinction. Systems of hierarchical gradation apply to consumption, leisure, employments, and interpersonal relations and politics. Examples of invidious distinction include: subordinate-master signification of drudgery vs. exploit; supremacy; exhibition of force and domination; conspicuous leisure, consumption and waste. Those are part of social processes and form oppressive institutions that are injurious and exploitative to people and groups.

Invidious distinction can involve dehumanization, aggression, violence, and exploitation, as in the practice and organization of slavery, for example. Racism, sexism, misogyny, aggressive/superiority nationalism, ableism, ageism, austerity, consumerism, and other cumulative and systemic practices (habits of thought and actions) originate in invidious distinction. Each entails notions of superiority, domination and exploit of groups, and can justify dehumanization and aggression. Instead of being exceptions, those are embedded in the economy, and support vested interests. As discussed below, it can be argued that in times of crises invidious distinction has vital consequence for those that are exploited and marginalized.

One layer of invidious distinction in economic activities within the stratified economy is "exploit" vs. "drudgery" (Veblen [1899] 1994). In Veblen's theory, slavery, capture, and gender-based oppression through capture, and "ownership-marriage" inform the origins of ownership, patriarchal household, and invidious distinction of employments (Veblen [1898a] 2011, 177). These are the bases of hierarchical division of labor. Necessary drudgery work is relegated to oppressed groups and is socially devalued, even if industrially important. Serviceable labor, close handling of materials, repetitive and exerting drudgery and chores are deemed socially odious or irksome. Drudgery is not just manual work, but the lowest status employments that are necessary to sustain life, relegated to slaves, servants, low-income workers, and low status employees. Some of it constitutes unpaid and care work.

On the other hand, acquisitiveness and exploit convey force and social strength, and allow conspicuous leisure. Exploit – "getting something for nothing" occurs through predation and domination, and is a claim on the social surplus and joint stock of knowledge. Exploit affords

aggrandizement, enlargement of vested interests, persuasion about public virtue, and supremacy, as well as avoidance of necessary drudgery. Activities and behaviors of exploit are emulated, because they afford higher order of social engagements, consumption and leisure, as well as ability to direct resources or exert command over others. Exploit creates and deepens invidious distinction. That could result in conservatism or (and) in destruction of institutions. However, there are also cumulative processes of survival of non-invidious interest.

The capitalist economy, specifically, is structured on industrial and pecuniary employments. Workmanship is the center of industrial activities. However, under invidious comparison, workmanship is oriented towards putting forth “evidence of power” and “manifestation of capacity of force” rather than producing something for its own sake as human use (Veblen [1898c] 2011, 165). Workmanship is directed also to improving acquisitive activities such as salesmanship, speculation, environmental extractivism, fraud, and the production and marketing of “vendible imponderables” (Veblen 1923). This can take the form of “free income” that supports vested interests and intangible assets used for extension of credit and absentee ownership. Those might be socially wasteful and exploitative, but connote high status, usually measured in pecuniary terms (1898b [2011]; [2005] 1919; 1923).

This general description is not limited to a capitalist economy, and is not offered to claim universality. It is a guide for inquiry about different contexts. Veblen’s contrast between “exploit” and “drudgery” is broader than capitalist relations, and has a meaning outside of markets. Thus, exploitation has a broader scope – beyond capital accumulation. This recognition does not negate the capitalist-worker economic class analysis. Rather, it opens up inquiry about the centrality of predation, invidious distinction and oppression in multiple processes such as race and gender, as well as within different economic relations – such as gift and obligation.

3. “Five Faces of Oppression” and their Co-optations

Next, we discuss five overlapping dimensions of oppression. As a starting point I use the categories delineated by Iris Young (1990), which she called “faces of oppression”: *exploitation*, *marginalization*, *powerlessness*, *cultural imperialism*, and *violence*. To stress the interconnected

and cumulative “faces” of oppression, I utilize a conception of evolving social processes and diverse economic relations. In addition, I stress that all forms of oppression entail resistance, countervailing powers, and struggle for collective accountability. The section also discusses how each of the five faces of oppression is co-opted, in efforts to perpetuate oppression through dominance and to hinder public conversation and inquiry. Those co-optations are distortions and rhetorical devices that appear at micro-, meso-, and macro- levels. This section leads towards an understanding of cumulative harm, that is especially important for addressing crises and pertinent economic problems that engage Post Keynesian economics.

3.1. Exploitation

Exploitation can be discussed at the level of distribution of wages, profits, rent. However, the scope necessarily broadens beyond economic class when we explore oppression. A broader concept of exploitation can be understood as direction and extraction of energies of lives, communities, labor, people and their environments, resulting in structural relations based on domination. The questions are: who does what for whom, under what conditions, how, and why? Labor, production, and distribution are central in those answers but those are entangled with race, gender, worship, social class, citizenship, nation, sexuality, caste, and language, and other social processes; as well in different economic relations: such exchange, reciprocity, gift, obligation, debt, sacrifice, tribute, etc. It is useful to consider a multitude of economic relations and processes (as depicted in Figure 1), that produce exploitation under different and historically specific circumstances. Analyses about the multiple social aspects and sites of exploitation have been part of political economy inquiry (for example see Davis 1982; Matthaei 1982; Greenwood 1984; Shulman 1990; Dugger 1996; Peterson 1998; Gimenez 2005; Müller 2019; Banks 2020; Darity 2022).

Sites of employment are also stratified and can intensify exploitation. Domestic workers, for example, operate within a less regulated work environment. This work is historically racialized and relegated to women with marginalized economic status, and it has been lagging in labor advancements (Glenn 1992; National Domestic Workers Alliance, 2023). Further, intimate and emotional labor need a special attention in analysis of exploitation (Müller 2019). Emotional labor “... requires one to induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outer countenance that

produces the proper state of mind in others...” (Hotchild, [1983] 2012, 7). Different social groups can be expected to provide more emotional labor at work, and endure more cumulative harms.

Further, when intimate labor is part of coercion and subordination for the purpose of exploitation, bodily and psychological harms are more intensely and directly related to emotional, mental, and bodily autonomy of the self. This is the case for example in human trafficking for sexual exploit and reproductive and sexual slavery (Murad 2017; Zammit Borda 2022) and in organized global care provisioning chains.

Coercion, socially constructed moral obligations, and ideologies of superiority and subordination enter also the organization of paid and unpaid caregiving (Glenn 2010). This has to do with gender, racial, ethnic, and citizenship hierarchies and practices, including racialized servitude and domestic work, inadequacy of public support for care, individualized responsibility for caregiving, inequities, as well as the development of global care chains markets (Khanal and Todorova 2019).

Exploitation and social hierarchy are intrinsically connected, as elaborated in the Veblenian framework, where distribution of socially produced surplus is based on systems of hierarchical gradation, which in turn promote emulation and invidious comparison and distinction. This results in social processes and oppressive institutions that are injurious and exploitative. In that sense, exploit is not limited to capitalism. Particularly, however, pecuniary vested interests create and entrench invidious distinction. This direction between exploitation and stratification has been highlighted in stratification economics (Darity 2022). Slavery and colonial slave trade as methods of exploitation lead to the emergence of race as a category of invidious distinction, and contributed to the enlargement of vested interests as described in *Capitalism and Slavery* (Williams ([1944] 2021). It created a social stratification in an already exploitative and stratified economy. As explained also by Darity (2020), plantation slavery in the Americas and the Caribbeans and slave trade had structural importance to the British and American economy in terms of forward and backward linkages. The importance of the cumulative effects of organized exploitation on industrial development parallels the importance of cumulative effects of slavery on present-day racial inequality (discussed below).

Exploitation is coopted to obfuscate social stratification. For one, dominant classes’ contribution to the social product is overattributed and the *social* stock of knowledge is undervalued. This is done by reframing what Veblen called “free income” – interest, rents, (absentee) ownership as

“productive” and socially justified rather than extractive. Obviously, this has been the subject matter of political economy and heterodox economics, and is discussed by Veblen ([1908] 2011; 2023) among others. Another example of coopting and claiming exploitation is the narrative of “taxpayer’s money” going to “waste” on social expenditures, public goods, or righting wrongs. Such concerns have roots in fear for greater equality, losing privileged group status and opportunities for exploitation. For or example McGhee (2021) describes how actions based on domination and scarcity cost advancement for all. For Post Keynesians this resonates also with Kalecki’s ([1943] 1990) narrower point that capitalists will sacrifice even profit to discipline workers through unemployment. Indeed, there are even higher – social justice.

3.2. Powerlessness

My conception of powerlessness here differs from that offered by Young (1990), who focuses on groups. I stress instead to situations of severe restrictions. Even under the most severe constraints, people strive to survive by maintaining humanity, social bond, and individuality, even as those are direct targets of aggression (see examples from camps during Holocaust by Des Pres [1976] in Niewyk 2003). That is, under regimes of oppression and harsh constraints people seek ways to preserve their humanity, survive, and resist (see Patricia Collins [1990] 2022). Nonetheless, I argue that “powerlessness” is important to signify the creation of situations where people are severely restricted, confined, and harmed. When people perish in boats at sea, there is powerlessness, that could have been prevented, but there are fortresses of exclusion. When people are crowded and locked in trucks where they can’t move and even breathe, they are in a completely powerless position, but it is a business of trafficking, ongoing violence, and fortress border politics (see Smale and Eddy 2015). When people are covered with debris waiting for somebody to take them out, they need help, available equipment, and ready rescue teams (see Wassef et al. 2023). When there is an overwhelm of force – there is a physical limit to resistance.

In my view, recognizing powerlessness in such severe created situations raises questions about individual conduct and institutionalized systems of oppression and predation that “transport” people into such positions. The concept of powerlessness is powerful in recognizing severity and need for stepping into social accountability and self-preservation of humanity. Such actions include

public undertakings such as setting up of international tribunals and courts, altering border practices, refugee and border policies – elements of citizenship, race and other processes.

An example of coopting powerlessness is when so called “incel” (“involuntary celibate”) groups, who invoke a sense of powerlessness, and blame feminism, complaining that women are too powerful, or refuse their advancements (Farel et al. 2019). Online group activities represent only one layer of those co-optations. The cooptation of marginalization and powerlessness occur also in academic discourse and politics, albeit in different ways. This is part of gender process in intersection with other processes such as race, ethnicity, nation, citizenship, and sexuality. Another cooptation of powerlessness is misattribution of such to people constructed as “others” for the purpose of social stratification and subordination.

Cooptation of powerlessness, relativism, and aggression by means of it, should be challenged. On the other hand, when accountability and justice are not socially organized, there is disempowerment of the oppressed and of humanity.

3.3. Violence

Clearly exploitation is entangled with violence. This is described by Marx ([1867] 1975, ch. 31), as well as by Veblen (1923) when he described the evolution of American capitalism and the place of forced labor, slave trade, “land-grabbing,” “hurried exploitation” of natural resources, environmental plunder, and violence, in “legalized seizure” of “natural resources and their conversion to private gains” and “absentee ownership.” (170-171; 187-188) In addition, Veblen notes that the institution of slavery of the South “so ingrained in the common sense” ... “has left its mark on the culture of that section so deeply etched into the moral tissues of its people that the bias of it will presumably not be outgrown within the calculable future.” (170). In discussing the origins of absentee ownership, Veblen is concerned with cumulative effects on people, culture, social relations, knowledge, and nature.

Such cumulative effects can amount to “violence enacted over time,” described by Rob Nixon as “slow violence.” Those can be ignored because of “... imperceptible change whereby violence is decoupled from its original causes by the workings of time.” (Nixon 2011, p. 11) This includes

cumulative harms such as incremental erosion of soil, gradual destabilization of habitats and sources of fresh water, long term effects of exposure to toxic e-waste, land-fields, and mines. In combination with debt and economic insecurity, these slow depletions lead to socioenvironmental landscapes of concentrated toxicity and deprivation, rooted in social stratification and oppression. These become racist “sacrifice zones” as described by Lerner (2010), where people have been expected to be less able to resist politically and economically, even though they resist by finding common grounds across communities (McGhee 2021, 206-16). Amidst impending climate catastrophe, addressing slow violence, begins with “... an understanding the modern world as based on the historic destruction of the worlds of others” (Bhambra and Newel 2022, 3).

Breaking bonds and social networks, destroying social landscapes, displacing people, harassment, and terrorizing, seek to weaken social powers and reproduction. These are efforts to remove competition in terms of different worldviews, self-aggrandizement, and desire to gain dominance or uniformity. Such patterns are expressed in wars of conquest, imperialist exploitation, subordination to monetary exchange and accumulation as organizing principles of economic activity, frontier expansions, colonial settlements, and other aggressions. For a pertinent discussion of destruction of social landscapes, social bonds, and civilian populations in genocide and for the purpose of submission in war see Shaw (2023, 13).

Violence is co-opted when it is misrepresented as provocation. This is a common tactic for abusers, rapists, and generally aggressors. Talking points about aggressors being provoked into violence or war (see for example Tooze 2006, 462) should not be condoned. Such false victimhood at all levels, as in the case of the current Russian war - evidenced by official speeches and strategic (media) narratives - should be challenged by Post Keynesian and heterodox economists concerned with social justice and social economy.

3.4. Cultural Imperialism

As in exploitation, cultural imperialism is not limited to capitalism, but to all colonial and subordinating relations that aim at destroying social bonds and reproduction (see Zammit Borda

2022 for the case of Yazidi genocide). It is also practiced in politics, education, and academic inquiry, and the public organization of everyday life.

Commodification is one form of cultural imperialism. Marx ([1867] 1975 ch. 31, 750) described how colonial mercantilist expansion created the conditions of capitalism, imposing commodification and marketisation, imposing specific economic relations – debt-credit and exchange. The role of a monetary obligation through direct taxation is discussed also by Semenova and Wray (2016). Forstater (2005) describes how colonial taxation served the purpose of commanding people into below subsistence wage labor, directing and extracting resources, and establishing market-based relations of commodification. There were sanctions for non-payment that involved surveillance, policing, threat, punishment, and prison labor. Colonial administrations deployed also narratives of civilizing, dignity, and morality. All this entailed social and environmental disruptions with cumulative effects on livelihoods, including displacement and migration of people in effort to obtain money wages; switching to production of cash crops; changing techniques of resource management, food insecurity (Forstater 2002; 2005); and hierarchical gender division of labor, and a new patriarchal notion of household (Hodgson 2000). Violence, exploitation, and cultural imperialism met in imposing debt and exchange as hegemonic economic relations for the predatory enlargement of vested interests and commodification. As discussed by Forstater (2005) this created the conditions for global capitalist trade and its cumulative effects, including food insecurity. Addressing those cumulative harms, including severe effects of climate change involve an understanding of “...the modern world as based on the historic destruction of the worlds of others” (Bhambra and Newel 2022, 3).

Indeed, destruction of inquiry about different worlds is part of vested interest efforts for cultural imperialism. Cooptation of cultural imperialism is evident when public education and curriculums are under attack, such as vilification and misrepresentation of Critical Race Theory and gender studies (Oladipo 2023; Nittle 2023); and diversity, equity, and inclusion practices in public instructions. The cooptation is the claim that there is an overreach of a viewpoint in public education, while seeking to restrict inquiry, and people’s individuality. In the USA this is part of continuous attacks on public education in favor of charter schools, and shrinking curriculum of public higher education, and push for surveillance. This entails also publicly expressed intolerance towards differences regarding gender, sexuality, and reproduction. State-supported intolerances

promote authoritarian politics across borders today. Cultural imperialism cannot be challenged while supporting authoritarian regimes.

Invoking the controlling of bodies for “the public good” cosplay victimhood while practicing cultural imperialism. In the USA, narratives of protection of bodies take place amidst arguments for expansion of teenage labor to address staffing shortages, and amidst growing violations of existing child labor laws (Radde 2023); exploiting migrant children in unsafe conditions of production (Dreier and Luce 2023); taking away transfer programs important in providing support care for children (Swenson and Torbati 2021); and restricting reproductive care (Roberts 2023) amidst significant reproductive and healthcare inequities (Chinn et al. 2021), which leads us to marginalization.

3.5. Marginalization

Marginalization normalizes threat, restricts mobility, space, and public participation, and as it limits livelihood, leads to deprivations. Marginalization also involves invidious distinction regarding needs, quantity and quality of resources, agency about decision-making, as well as creative expression. In Young’s (1990, 50) words, marginalization “blocks the opportunity to exercise capacities in socially defined and recognized ways.” Those capacities can be understood through the capabilities approach (see Robeyns 2017).

Building on the capabilities approach and on institutional economic theory, I find it useful to group needs and areas of human life that are also aspects of marginalization, stratification, and cumulative harms, in the following manner (Figure 2). First, marginalization inhibits people’s capabilities - what they can do socially, politically, economically, what activities they are occupied in, and how they spend their time. Second, marginalization pertains to health, relations to community, polity, natural environment, and the spaces people inhabit. Third, marginalization is directly connected to belonging individuality, and autonomy. Fourth, marginalization is associated with alienation and suppression, at the expense of expression, creativity, and the ability to practice workmanship. Fifth, marginalization is related to steady access to livelihood and security. This includes care, being cared for, and caring for others, while being safe rather than experiencing deprivations. These elements of human life indicate also dimensions of cumulative harms and

ways in which marginalizing practices are injurious to people and groups. Therefore, those areas represent also areas for aggression.

Figure 2. Marginalization, Stratification, Harm (Zdravka Todorova)



Marginalization meets violence, invidious stereotyping, and aggression in abundance of examples. A case in point is lynching in the United States, which operated outside of law and formal courts as a form of local mob “justice” (see Giddings 2022). Lynching became racialized, and racial invidious distinction governed who is subjected to formal court and who could be deemed outright guilty by a local mob. Lynching’s evolution and practice was part of processes of race, violence, threat and punishment, as well as gender process. Violence and marginalization through incarceration and indebtedness secured the provision of convict labor and peonage in the USA after the emancipation of slave population was driven by solidarity in vested interest and desire for economic dominance. This was facilitated by vagrancy laws and heightened criminalization of African Americans. This secured the availability and brutal usage of convict labor for private and later for state enterprises, as well as paved the path for racial bias in incarceration and policing (see Lichtenstein 1996; Blackmon 2009; Public Broadcasting Service 2012).

Today, racialized mass incarceration, police force and surveillance continue this connection between marginalization and violence. Black Lives Matter is an expression of a resistance of this cumulative process of violence and marginalization, and asserts that black lives matter too. It is a movement that rejects and objects to invidious distinction. Monitoring and incarceration - processes of surveillance, threat and punishment (processes illustrated in Figure 1), are tied in a cumulative way to marginalization and violence. This is the case with sexual abuse to prison pipeline (Vafa and Epstein 2023). Women are more likely to not meet bail and await trial in conditions of inadequate health services (Kajstura and Sawyer 2023). Housing insecurity after and before incarceration leads to marginalization and brings higher risk of being a victim of violence (see Sawyer 2019). Furthermore, this is in the context of economic policies in the USA that have expanded the “penal-industrial complex” and the privatization of incarceration, instead of public service job creation and equitable full employment (see Wray 2000).

Marginalization can be institutionalized gradually. For example, marginalization through exclusion laws under the Nazi regime went over a number of years through state policies since 1933. Marginalization escalated into violence from group to group, starting with the most vulnerable, such as children with disabilities via medical clinics, and the restriction of expenditures on their food (Friedlander ([1995] in Niewyk 2003). Steps like book burning, boycotting and assault on Jewish businesses, propaganda, “scientific expertise,” gradual exclusion laws regarding public education, civil service, and work, and mobility restrictions (see Bergen 2019; United States Holocaust Memorial Museum) exemplify institutionalization of marginalization and violence towards specific populations. In military expansion into the East, people were seen as means of production, potential drain on food, and obstacles that had to “evacuated” from the lands (see Tooze 2006, ch. 14).

Marginalization based on invidious distinction is employed by authoritarian regimes to weaken social powers regimes via restricting participation in public life, education, and mobility; as well as to secure exploitation and to dominate. For example, Afghani women and girls have protested continuously amidst repressions and violence, jail, and threat of property confiscation (Fetrat and Abbassi 2022). Education of women is of particular threat to authoritarian control and conservatism, as it means wider participation in public life. Veblen’ ([1899] 1994, 216 and 231)

makes a similar point when discussing the survival of non-invidious interests and the harms of gendered hierarchical “spheres”.

In addition, Patricia Collins ([1990] 2022, 129) discusses the role of “controlling images” that convey persistent stereotypes and portrayals, specifically regarding historical socio-economic positions of African American women (see also Mutari et al 2002). These support exploitation, and burden communities as site of exploitation of unpaid collective labor (Banks 2020). Collins also discusses the importance of resistance and self-defined knowledge for survival of marginalized groups, as does Banks 2020).

Cooptation of marginalization is clear in the emergence of “manosphere” as well as in exhibitions of far-right rage. Common complaints are about feminism as the culprit of their purported marginalization. Some of those discourses invoke male- and white-supremacy, misogyny, and racialized online harassment of women. Men are described as victims of women, non-whites, and of “multiculturalism” (Farel et al. 2019). Those complaints are about sharing privileges, encountering competition from multitude of social groups, and are used in political efforts to restrict public goods and education. These seek to preserve benefits from marginalization and subordination of people. Deserving a better understanding are the cumulative effects of marginalization and the rest of the faces of oppression, as stressed in the following section on cumulative harms.

4. Cumulative Harms and Crises

Post Keynesian economics stresses the systemic and persistent nature of crises (see for example Wray 2016). This point intersects with cumulative harms of the faces of oppression. For one, because of cumulative (intergenerational and system wide) harms, members of a subordinate group could do all the right things to succeed in a society, but they still will have lower economic rewards as compared with similarly accomplished individuals from dominant groups (Darity 2022, 402). Cumulative causation is at the center of understanding oppression as a historical process of invidious distinction. It is also at the center of undertaking appropriate countervailing powers that address structural problems.

For example, Darity et al. (2022) argue that “concrete quantitative estimates of the costs of American slavery and racial suppression to those who were enslaved and oppressed should be a central part of our understanding of US history.” The authors argue for reparations, and explain the ongoing consequences of cumulative harms that limit African American lives because of slavery and subsequent racial oppression. They favor using Black–White wealth gap as an indicator for the long-term negative effects of slavery and racial injustices such as lynching, massacres, segregation, marginalization and exclusion from home ownership, and unequal social policies. In addition, the authors argue for estimation of value of owed debt for depriving Black Americans “of a possible avenue to intergenerational wealth when they were denied the 40-acre land grants” to freed slaves (Darity et al 2022, 116).

In pre-COVID USA white median families had eight times the wealth of Black families and five times the wealth of the Hispanic families, when looking at the difference between families' gross assets and their liabilities (Bhutta et al. 2020). Wealth accumulation enables different standards of consumption and access to opportunities and financial security. It is affected by factors such as: inter-generational transfers, homeownership opportunities, access to tax-sheltered savings plans, savings, health, and family needs and dependents. This includes lasting effects of housing segregation and redlining (Lipsitz 2007; Baradaran 2017; Bhutta et al. 2020; Jenkins 2020; Townsley et al. 2021). Further, the Black-White wealth gap increased after the Great Financial Crises (Weller and Hank 2018), and cumulative effects on wealth gap from the COVID are unfolding (Khanal et al. 2021).

Cumulative effects on wealth distribution are relevant not only for access to opportunity, but also for understanding disparities, capabilities, and vulnerabilities during crises. During the COVID crisis it became evident that mortality due to the virus and complications was also disproportionate. Residents of majority-black counties had almost six times the rate of deaths as residents of majority-white counties in the USA, as reported by Kijakazi (2020). Pirtle (2020) argues that observed racial inequities in health effects and outcomes during COVID are result of racial capitalism – where racism and capital accumulation are mutually constitutive. This includes cumulative effects on comorbidities that make people more vulnerable, as well as on factors determining health – such living spaces, environments, access to nutrition, and health care. There

is also insufficient buffer of resources that people can draw on during crises, due to inequality and “unfreedoms” such as detention and incarceration.

During the COVID pandemic “essential” workers found themselves in more dangerous social positions. In the USA Black workers were employed with disproportionately higher share in hospitals, nursing facilities, postal services, couriers, warehousing, waste management, which meant greater job security but also higher strain and risk, with no access to remote work. This occupational segregation is not a random preference, but is rooted in social stratification and related segregated job-search networks (Brown, 2020). Black workers in the USA are overrepresented in low-paying occupations without employer-provided retirement plans, health insurance, paid sick and maternity leave, and paid vacations (Banks 2021). Black American women have been disadvantaged and being devalued both as laborers and as carers, while providing low status service work such as cooking, cleaning, and low-wage caregiving for white families, and not having access to better paid jobs until the 1970s (Banks 2019). During COVID, non-white women were more likely to fall in the “essential workers” category, and earn less (Folbre et al, 2021; Peterson 2022).

As noted, the “drudgery” vs. “exploit” organization of employment and care is a feature of the stratified economy. Bowels (2013) offers a “skill” matrix of differentiation in employments among the working class, and their position to engage in decision-making and appropriation of the social surplus. As Buder et al. (2022) argue, occupational segregation and unequal employment rewards, stem from the social division of labor associated with social status rather than objective contribution to production. “[C]apitalism, as explicitly constituted in the workplace, is an inherently unstable complex socially combative system.”

Stratifications have cumulative and harmful effects on people within social hierarchies during crises. This is of importance to Post Keynesian economics and its focus on persistence and systemic crises, with the consequence that mitigating crises and their effects requires redressing structural inequities, marginalization, and invidious distinction. Cumulative processes of marginalization, exploitation, and violence, essentially target groups based on race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, age, mental health, social class, and citizenship. Those invidious cycles could be

reduced and interrupted by rescue intervention and participatory public programs. Equity-minded participatory public policies such as job guarantee (discussed below) can focus on needs, capabilities, equitable community, democracy, and can counter marginalization and reduce and prevent violence. That is why countervailing powers of equity and advancements of subordinated groups meet backlash and collective actions (including violence) to preserve dominant status (see DiMaggio 2021 and Baradaran 2017), even at the expense of overall advancement and access to public goods for all (McGhee 2021 pp. 18-39).

5. Post Keynesian Connections

A foundational argument in Post Keynesian economics is that capitalist economies are inherently unstable and characterized by systemic inequalities and crises (Robinson 1936; Kregel 1980; Fukuda-Parr et. al. 2013; Wray 2016). The significance of those points ought to be linked not only to social stratification but also to oppression. This section presents some venues for doing that. Each Post Keynesian insight about an economic problem highlights some aspects of oppression. However, as suggested, the delineated faces of oppression are interconnected, so each can be detected within the venues discussed below, especially within a specific context.

5.1. Saving is a Residual of Industry and Stratification.

Post Keynesian economics argues for the residual nature of savings at the aggregate level, disputing a theory of distribution and investment based on productivity, and a theory of money and investment based on capital saving and thriftiness. Post Keynesian theory stresses the centrality of income, investment, credit, and expectations and the social organization of the economy as determinants of economic activity (Robinson 1936; Kregel 1973). As discussed, aggregate income and accumulation is based on, and can lead to stratification. Indeed, the focus on thriftiness as a generative force in the economy has a long history in political economy, rooted in exploitative class perspective of those at the top of the social hierarchy and in their vested interests. Veblen's ([1908] 2011) critique of theories of capital, productivity, distribution stressed that that the basis of capital is the joint stock of knowledge and industry, with "drudgery" (and some care work) at the bottom of social status and remuneration. Veblen critiqued deceptive

treatments of ownership, capital, and interest as productive, rather than as “free income” explaining that this is rooted in understanding of a handicraft – rather than credit-based industrialized monetary economy (see 1923 ch. III), which is echoed in Keynes’s monetary theory of production.

Instead, the focus on thriftiness leads to framing problems of income insecurity in terms of saving behavior of individuals that do not address the cumulative effects of oppression, such as marginalization. One such policy is to encourage individualized savings via employer’s tax breaks for retirement and employees tax breaks for saving accounts. As shown by Weller (2016), in the US this approach to income insecurity sidelines low-income households and precariously employed. Those with low labor market risk exposure tend to be the ones who benefit more from tax-advantaged savings. “Household groups least likely to benefit from savings incentives are nonwhites, Hispanics, households with no college degree, and households with incomes at the bottom of the income scale.” (Weller 2016, 137) Given structural inequities, reliance on individualized saving accounts for retirement exacerbates marginalization because groups are subjected to unequal financial and labor market risk exposure. “Those who already have state-of-the-art survival suits to protect against the turbulent seas of rising risks also get secure and stable financial life rafts, while those without them need to sink or swim.” (Weller 2016, 147) Further, in the context of reparations Linwood Tauheed (2022) explains that savings are important, but their accumulation depends on the cumulative inequities of the various incomes from work and business, including theft and fraud – part of racial oppression.

Post Keynesian theories of saving, investment, money, and the public sector are central in addressing exploitation and marginalization left unchallenged and unresolved in behavioral approaches to economic insecurity. Instead, Post Keynesians advocate wealth-building programs like “baby-bonds” (Darity and Hamilton 2012; Cassidy et al. 2019). In addition, Post Keynesian analyses of financial fragility lead to advocating public banking that ensures basic access to all households, instead of reliance on multipurpose banking that is less transparent and brings higher risks for depositors and borrowers (see Wray 2016; Baradaran 2017; Marshal and Rochon 2019), and can complement community development approaches discussed by Tauheed (2022).

5.2. Crises are about Systems.

A central theme in Post Keynesian Economics are capitalist crises and their systemic nature, persistence, and need for structural remedies. This theme can be developed to redress structural inequalities, social stratification (see Fukuda-Parr et al. 2013) as well as the multiple faces of oppression. This is evidenced in the case of COVID, there has been disproportional effects on groups (Banks 2021; Warnacke 2021). There are also the fragilities of health provision (Scott and Pressman 2021), and intensity of collective unpaid labor (Banks 2021). The centrality of care in the economy has been studied by feminist economists for decades, but the pandemic revealed to all deficiencies in the systems of care provisioning.

The crises made more noticeable fragmentation of care in terms of provision, access, politics, space, and global care chains (Todorova 2022). Indeed, a pandemic crisis necessitates a response different from mitigating an effective demand crisis, as the pandemic economy largely halts production along with public consumption activates (Kregel 2020). I will note that the COVID economic shut-down resembled the stoppage of production and mass layoffs in Eastern European countries in the beginning of 1990s, when vast, deep, and prevalent contraction in output literally shocked economies amidst collapse of government social safety and new forms of exploitation. The long lasting “shock therapy” was then glorified as economic expertise. At that time Post Keynesian economics informed “scholarly concern” of the AGENDA-Group, about the transformation programs (Kregel et al. 1992, 4; King 2002, 227).

This shock therapy destruction was endured only because of traditionally functioning small-scale and kitchen garden subsistence production, high level of preexisting homeownership, built public infrastructure, support through familial and intergenerational relations and obligations, unpaid labor and prevalence of gift, and a degree of communal reciprocity. Redistribution, destruction of production, and chronic crises were imprinted with the emergence, activities, and continuous regrouping of organized criminal formations, with political corruption, and eventually with the emergence of a number of authoritarian governments. Remittances, temporary mobile labor, trafficking, and extraction became institutionalized. Less oppressive paths of economic restructuring through full employment and sustainability, were possible from the very beginning, but were not built.

Cultural imperialism in the above contexts deserves attention. The invisibility of care systems, the diverse economic relations beyond market exchange that support societies and get people through crises and transformation, and the impositions of market solutions is a mark of cultural imperialism as a face of oppression. The idea of collateral damage and sacrifice is readily accepted during crises, restructuring, or take-overs. However, collateral damage thinking does not have social justice as an end-in-view, but provides apology for violence, and should be challenged. Post Keynesian economics is well-positioned to do that, given an understanding of systemic and persistent nature of crises and structural change, combined with a broader view of the economy. The five faces of oppression should become also more explicit in those analyses to unveil premises of invidious distinction behind inaction in the face of chronic crises, economic transformation, and aggression, and show cumulative harms.

5.3. Full Employment Means a Commitment to Job Guarantee and Equity.

Full employment is another central point in Post Keynesian economics. Commitment to full employment would counter the threat of oppression that is associated with unemployment and declines in the bargaining positions of vulnerable workers (Paul, Darity and Hamilton 2018). That possibility is politically understood and fought by vested interests, who dislike redirection of government deficits towards public investment and consumption (Kalecki [1943] 1990), and particularly leading to greater equality, access, that disrupt subordination.

The notion of full employment should be broadened to encompass a feminist and institutional view of work and the definition of economy. This could contribute to a broader view of “socialization of investment”. In the original view unemployment occurs because investment is undersocialised – more money can be made from speculative activities rather than production. But market production does not include all economic activity. A broader view of undertaking - beyond investment for profit includes social endeavors that require labor, planning, organizing, but are not for making money, rather for sustaining lives (Todorova 2022). Undertaking is undersocialized when there are shortcomings in life-provisioning within the economy in both the private and public sector, and the burden is carried by households and communities. Maintaining full employment then has a meaning beyond market activities.

Job guarantee policy provides a public commitment to full employment, equity, and environment. It departs from relations of domination that marginalize and help confine people, which could sustain violence. Job guarantee programs have been discussed for some time in Post Keynesian Economics, including its social justice and transformative and democratic aspects (Wray and Forstater 2004; Paul et al. 2018; Tcherneva 2020; Alexander and Banks 2021). This provides a bargaining floor and would help strengthen collective bargaining for workers, which is especially important for those most vulnerable to oppression. The employment program would provide a price floor at a living wage and a relatively quick start in local areas. It is open to everybody, and democratically organizes job to meet community needs and sustainability. This is in addition to necessary expansion of social policies, wealth-building programs (Darity and Hamilton 2012; Banks 2021), and alleviating some of the inequities related to gendered collective work by marginalized communities (Banks 2020).

The program could also enhance necessary public preparedness for emergencies such as pandemic, accidents, and natural and human made disasters. The availability of job guarantee programs represents an empowerment because it gives an accessible option to people who find themselves in abusive dependent relations at home or at work. Importantly, with job guarantee an opportunity to leave an abusive situation is less limited by individual socio-economic position, labor market competitiveness, and is not subject to the macro state of business confidence.

Sadie Alexander (Alexander and Banks 115-16) argued that at the root of the economic downward spiral was the inequitable distribution of the lowered cost of production. Remedy for such deflationary pressures, she argued are to address the inequities through equitable taxation, public works in infrastructure and community needs, improved worker compensation, including migrant labor conditions, non-discrimination, and a guaranteed living wage. Full employment commitment would relieve "...fear of those destructive forces which play one against the other and result in economic poverty and want of the masses of the white as well as the black workers of America." (115).

Paul et al (2018) discuss how the USA has moved away from commitment to full employment, and simultaneously has resisted a commitment to redress structural racial inequities. Describing the racial justice struggle for full employment mandate in the USA Baker et. al. (2017) quote Coretta Scott King: "...the unemployed are not pawns to be sacrificed in some collateral damage

in the war against inflation.” Collateral casualties and means-to-an-end thinking in economic policy needs to be continuously challenged. Commitment to a job guarantee means moving away from collateral damage thinking in macroeconomic and public policy. While the history of money is a history of instituting class-based societies and socially-created inequities, money – can represent a social relation of public commitment to full employment and a public purpose for social justice and restoring communities (see Semenova and Wray 2016).

5.4. Price Instability is about Business and Industrial Structures, and Life Systems.

This leads us to economic power, price setting, inequality, and inflation. It is well known that Post Keynesian economics points to cumulative dangers of deflation – such as unemployment and financial crises, which have differential effects on social groups. In addition, Post Keynesians have inquired about the role of administered prices and price-setting decision-making about output and distribution. Power is the central concern in the Post Keynesian theory of business enterprises that engage in long term planning and want to exercise degrees of control through market development, interfirm cooperation, market differentiation, and innovation (Shapiro and Mott 1995; Lee 1996; Lee and Jo 2018). Prices can increase through profit margins, wage costs, and changes in production coefficients, that depend on supply-side factors.

These elements of price setting affect also distribution and also stratification. Changes in methods of production depend on technology and business practices. These are changes in methods of extracting value within global commodity chains, such as seeking cheap labor (deflationary pressures) reproduced by social relations and unpaid work, and securing revenue for investment as well as political power.

Business practices of market control, such as just-in-time input production and delivery across long supply chains, should be part of understanding and addressing inflationary pressures. For example, the shift toward producing cars based on chips, is a business strategy of planned obsolescence, consumer surveillance, and marketable data collection, that made supply of cars highly susceptible to shortages in chips. As Doctrow (2023) puts it, modern car producers “... redesigned our cars to be mobile surveillance platforms stuffed full of anti-repair digital locks, which means that cars need dozens of chips just to function.” Business strategies of power and

expected profits (echoing also Veblen's theory of the business enterprise) are important for identifying inflationary factors, including capacity issues - inability to respond to normal demand. Wage setting is affected by power associated with business practices, and depends on social stratification, occupational segregation, and bargaining positions. There is no sense trying to keep inflation down, by keeping some people involuntarily unemployed or marginally attached to the labor force at all times, beyond wanting to maintain a socially unjust stratified economy for the sake of vested interests' exploitation and subordination.

In addition, different social groups have a different relation to the price level. High income inequality means highly distinct patterns of consumption. There can be high demand by high income earners while low-income earners would suffer decreased consumption standards due to this inflation. Just like businesses can cover mark ups of one product from charging higher mark ups on another, they can have higher profit margins for one consumer segment, when sales are in danger of shrinking due to lower demand. Further, sectoral inflation such as in healthcare, impacts groups differently based on age, medical conditions, access to insurance, while also skewing distribution.

Overall, demand side explanations and wage-driven inflation have limited explanatory role in Post Keynesian reasoning. Instead, the focus is on supply-side and structural factors of inflation. For example, Semenova (2023) argues that climate change is expected to become a structural driver of inflation. In addition, environmental unpredictability, centralized food production, changes in land use, and neoliberal organization of fictitious commodities, disrupt provisioning, subsistence, and contribute to migration and displacement, enhancing inequities (Khanal and Todorova 2021). Environmental, social, and cost price pressures are intrinsically connected in social processes that also constitute oppression.

Finally, conception of supply side factors, needs to include an understanding of labor force reproduction and the role of paid and unpaid care (which is the industrial concern of lives and livelihood). Systemic, rather than fragmented and sporadic public support for care provision, should be part of addressing supply-side pressures on inflation. The supply of labor depends also on its condition for reproduction. Overall, inflationary pressures should be investigated as symptoms of under-socialized investment: concentrated predatory markets, social stratification and disparities, increasing environmental uncertainty, and unsupported care systems.

6. Conclusion: Post Keynesian Economics and Social Justice

The article reframed Iris Young's five faces of oppression through the lens of social process that I develop while reading contemporary issues and feminist concerns with an understanding of Veblen, political economy, and Post Keynesian economics. The emphasis is on processes over time, rather than on fixed social categories that intersect, and on cumulative causation and cumulative harms, rather than only inequality.

The article stresses the importance of Post Keynesian economics in social justice – working for countervailing powers to the five faces of oppression. While Post Keynesian economists have been largely marginalized within the discipline (See King 2000, 244-5) they have called problems ahead of time on issues such as financial crises, household debt, inequality, structural unemployment, pricing, and inflation. I note this not to convey dominance and sense of completion, or to say that Post Keynesians should be mainstream. Instead, I stress that Post Keynesian economics is a resistance to cultural imperialism in economics and education. It has persisted in offering alternative analyses and educational texts.

Veblen ([1898] 2011) offered a critique of economics based on “economic man” - a “homogeneous globule of desire” who is not born, has no history, has no consequence, and is not a “prime mover” - only reacts in prescribed ways conceived entirely outside of the life process. This presentation of economic “agent,” is still in the textbooks, still informs the bases of economic theories and instruction. It also acts as a prescriptive model of disciplined behavior. Students are to learn the conventional wisdoms and in time to react according to the theories. While presenting an alternative expertise is not sufficient for “problem-posting education,” “demythologizing” (Freire [1970] 2021, 83) economic theory, and demystifying economic controversies, is part of that. Public education, inquiry, and democratizing institutions are essential countervailing powers to fascist movements.

Post Keynesian analyses can help challenge oppressive relations behind economic policy, theory, and economic phenomena, such as inflation. Post Keynesian economics has a particular place in clarifying the meaning of scarcity at the intersection of economic jargon, ideology, actual deprivations, and ecological crises. In addition to persistence of crises, cumulative harm of oppressive social processes need to take center stage. In that, the scope of sources should expand

to include oral history, personal accounts, image, and film – in other words accounts of diverse experiences as a source of knowledge, memory, and action.

The five faces of oppression: exploitation, violence, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and marginalization entail countervailing powers at micro-, meso-macro- levels, including individual, community, and policy, and collective actions. Exploitation drives resistance. Marginalization means relying on communities, and is countered by efforts to build public capabilities. Powerlessness calls for social accountability. Cultural imperialism is countered by sharing experiences, inquiry, and memory. Violence is countervailed with empowerment and public commitment. The countervailing powers involve collective action, solidarity, and community. But those also move exclusion, aggression, and invidious distinction. In the words of Paulo Freire ([1970] 2021, 92) there is an “incessant pursuit of humanity denied by injustice.”

For one, we need to challenge collateral damage thinking in economics, and the described co-optations of oppression. Infact in my view, Post Keynesian theory is largely about challenging such thinking. Therefore, Post Keynesian economics has a role in exposing economic theories that encourage sacrificing populations for no good reason but maintaining social stratification, and domination. This means challenging the end-justifies-the-means kind of analyses that undergird authoritarianism and any fascist movements, and are present in economics, and the profession. Post Keynesian economists should challenge the uncritical normalization of such logic in public discourse, economic expertise, and in the profession.

To advance understanding of contexts and harmful power dynamics, Post Keynesian economists would benefit from people’s narratives, experiences, and accounts. That means revisiting notions of and sources for scientific inquiry. There is also a need for broader analyses of economic relations - beyond market vs. non-market dualisms. As conveyed here, there is a diversity in the kinds of economic relations that support and harm people’s lives and economies (Figure 1 above), and those need to be part of the subject matter of Post Keynesian economics.

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