EDITORIAL

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Radicalizing diversity (research): Time to resume talking about class

Abstract

In this editorial, we plea for radicalizing diversity research by re-engaging with the notion of class. We argue that theories of class, which are today seldom used in critical diversity research, have the potential to conceptualize the relationship between difference and power in ways that go beyond the current focus on equality within capitalist organizations. Theories of class radicalize diversity research by providing a conceptual vocabulary to ground the critique of diversity in the critique of capitalism. To highlight this potential, we first reconstruct the ideological historical context of the 1980s in which diversity research emerged, re-embedding it in a broader political project to restructure the economy, work and society as a whole. We then present four main uses of the concept of class in management and organization studies and the theoretical traditions that underpin them. We go on to introduce the four contributions to this Special Section, illustrating how class, variously understood, can inform critical understandings of diversity. We conclude by leveraging class within four strategies for more radical diversity scholarship: classing workers, occupations, and workplaces; classing diversity; classing meritocracy; and classing struggles for social justice.

KEYWORDS

capitalism, class, diversity, equal opportunities, inequality, meritocracy, radicalism, social justice

1 | THE RISE OF DIVERSITY AND THE DEMISE OF CLASS

The notion of diversity emerged in the mid-1980s, a time when social class, both as an explanatory framework for society and a mobilizing collective identity in politics, had already started its slow but steady decline. The fall of state communism and the Eastern Bloc in 1989 became the symbol of the inevitability of capitalism, epitomized by the slogan "There is no Alternative," delegitimizing trade unions and eroding workers' rights in the name of global competitiveness. The world economy was being fundamentally redrawn by the Transatlantic USA–UK alliance, with the policies of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund imposing globalization on national economies

and deregulating flows of capital. In intellectual and academic circles, post-Marxist political philosophers came to terms with the tainted legacy of Marxism by rejecting the idea that class was a "given" category reflecting the "objective," material position of actors in capitalist societies (Habjan & Whyte, 2014). Positing the undecidability of the social, they re-theorized antagonism on the plane of discourse. In doing so, they moved away from conceptualizations of class relations grounded in actors' position in the capitalist economy, toward political struggles for hegemony along a multiplicity of identities (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985).

The concept of diversity in business was part of this epochal shift. Launched by the *Workforce* 2000 Report of the Hudson Institute (Johnston & Packer, 1987), diversity was put forward as a much more capital-friendly overarching notion for sociodemographic differences than the legal notions of equal opportunities and affirmative action, which had emerged from the civil rights movement. Diversity recast difference as a potential source of economic value for companies to tap into (Edelman, Riggs Fuller, & Mara-Drita, 2001; Kelly & Dobbin, 1998; Özbilgin & Tatli, 2011). Early critiques of diversity in management and organization studies (MOS) accordingly attacked the overtly instrumental nature of this notion and the shift away from groups toward individuals, arguing that its adoption by practitioners and scholars would obscure power inequalities in organizations (Litvin, 1997; Lorbiecki & Jack, 2000; Wrench, 2005). Despite their merit, these analyses were not informed by class; rather, they pleaded for retaining prior understandings of difference grounded in the law and ethics (Liff & Wajcman, 1996; Muhr, 2008). In this sense, they fundamentally differed from critiques of diversity formulated outside MOS, which saw diversity as a strategy of capital to individualize employment relations, fragment the labor class, and profoundly redefine the functioning of labor markets (for incisive analyses, see Fraser, 2017; Guest, 1987; Harvey, 1993; Howell, 2016).

Most of the critical diversity research has accordingly been grounded in an ethical and legal paradigm of equality. Drawing from traditions such as feminism, post-colonialism, critical discourse analysis, and labor process theory, among other, it has documented and theorized how gender, race/ethnicity, able-bodiedness, age, and heterosexuality (jointly) function as principles of the unequal organization of work, more or less subtly reproducing subjection and oppression, showing that organizations are not the neutrally operating meritocracies they claim to be (van den Brink, Holgersson, Linghag, & Deé, 2016; Scully & Blake-Beard, 2006), and that diversity management programs ultimately legitimize the current unequal social order (Kalev, Kelly, & Dobbin, 2006; Romani, Holck, & Risberg, 2019).

While an ethics of equality and a legal framework enforcing it are clearly essential to the formulation of critiques of diversity, they are not sufficient. They approach power primarily at the organizational or managerial levels, overlooking the economic, social and institutional aspects of labor relations in the broad economic regime. Indeed, in critical diversity studies, organizations are commonly theorized as normative matrixes of power producing "domesticated" subjectivities (Swan, 2010; Tyler, 2019) and ordering them hierarchically into a system of "enduring stratification" (Scully & Blake-Beard, 2006). Management is accordingly understood as exerting power by producing and enforcing unfair categorizations, meanings, norms, rules, practices, processes, and moods that exclude, marginalize, and/or unequally reward specific categories of employees. Power is rarely theorized as enacting social relations specific to capitalism as a way of organizing the economy and society. That is, management and organizations are not conceptualized as informed by class and class relations.

The limitations of critical diversity research have become particularly apparent in the wake of the economic crisis of 2008. While the crisis triggered a surge in research on the role of organizations in sustaining and exacerbating societal inequality (Amis, Mair, & Munir, 2020; Bapuji, Ertug, & Shaw, 2020; Dunne, Grady, & Weir, 2018) and postcapitalist, alternative organizing for social justice (Barin-Cruz, Aquino Alves, & Delbridge, 2017; Zanoni, Contu, Healy, & Mir, 2017), it did not substantially affect critical diversity research. We still miss a conceptual vocabulary for setting up an emancipatory social justice agenda amidst and beyond capitalism (Holck, 2018a, 2018b; Janssens & Zanoni, forthcoming). Equipping critical diversity research with such a vocabulary is an important step in re-engaging with class, giving voice to a radical research agenda to critique diversity as part of capitalism and to envision noncapitalist alternatives to it.

In the fall of 2018, we launched a call for papers for a special issue on diversity and class but could gather only a limited number of submissions. This special section is composed by the four original contributions selected through the peer-review process and this editorial. In the remainder, we first review how class has informed MOS, elaborating on the distinct conceptualizations of class underpinning various streams of research. We then introduce the four contributions, discussing how each articulates the relation between diversity and class. We conclude by delineating a research agenda for radicalized critical diversity studies grounded in theories of class.

2 | CLASS IN MOS

Generally, four types of research on class can be distinguished in MOS and, more specifically, critical diversity studies. The first three strands are grounded, respectively, in Weberian, Bourdieusian, and Marxist conceptualizations of class. The fourth investigates class as one of multiple intersecting social identities shaping individuals' experiences of oppression and inequality at work.

2.1 | Class, occupations, and the reproduction of social stratification

A first strand of MOS research dealing with class documents the characteristics of different classes and then examines the relation between individuals' class position in society and their work-related opportunities and experiences. These studies are often underpinned by a Weberian approach, in which class refers to the social stratification of a society into multiple, hierarchically ordered groups constituted through three overlapping dimensions: economic wealth (classes), social prestige (status in the eyes of others), and political power (the party one belongs to, or the ability to achieve goals despite opposition from others). Together, these three dimensions structure a complex set of social relationships that explain the unequal distribution of power (Weber, 1978; E. Wright, 2005). Like Marx, Weber refers to property and lack of property as the two "basic categories of all class situations" (Weber, 1961, p. 182); however, by adding education and status, he further differentiates among a larger number of more or less privileged classes.

In MOS, this understanding of class is central in the extant literature on the mechanisms through which organizations and institutions reproduce inequality (e.g., Amis at al., 2020; Bapuji et al., 2020; Pitesa & Pillutla, 2019). Some empirical studies investigate how individuals' lower class position in society affects their access to employment conditions, jobs, and career opportunities within organizations and occupations, reproducing the existing social stratification (Li et al., 2002; Warhurst & Nickson, 2007). Other studies examine how specific organizational practices, policies, and norms disproportionately affect individuals in lower-rank jobs and/or belonging to the working class (Warren, 2015). In some cases, class is combined with gender to explain the reproduction of inequality in organizations and society (e.g., Bonney, 2007; Lautsch & Scully, 2007; Warren & Lyonette, 2018). Some of this literature is informed by the sociological works on class inequality by Goldthorpe (e.g., 2007) and Savage (e.g., 2015), in which occupation (or job) is a proxy for social class and applied to understand differentiation in employment relations (i.e., service relationships vs. labor contracts), as well as class-based patterns of stratification. Goldthorpe's model has been occasionally used to argue for the continued relevance of class in the differentiation of job characteristics and terms of employment (e.g., Crompton, 2010; Williams, 2017). This is an important point, as it draws attention to the deepening inequality along class lines in employment conditions, work process, and access to rewards. A growing number of individuals, and those belonging to historically subordinate groups in particular, are today working in extremely precarious conditions and earning below the living wage (Ortlieb & Sieben, 2014; Ozkazanc-Pan, 2019; Warren & Lyonette, 2018).

2.2 | Class, capitals, and (failed) social mobility

A second strand of MOS studies dealing with class is inspired by the work of Bourdieu. Here too, class is related to social stratification; however, the emphasis is on the key role of social practices in producing and maintaining class (Bourdieu, 1977, 1986). Social stratification is continuously reproduced by social actors' every-day practice within social fields defined by norms that structurally advantage some over others. For Bourdieu, individuals' *habitus*—the embodied dispositions acquired through their class-specific socialization—positions actors unequally in the competition for resources and power. Those born and raised in the higher classes possess forms of economic capital (e.g., money and property), social capital (social networks), and cultural capital (e.g., social competence and educational qualifications) that make it easier to win "the game," gain rewards, and keep their privileged position in society.

MOS scholarship has increasingly drawn on Bourdieu to show how groups of employees are excluded or stuck in a disadvantaged position at work, primarily based on their race, gender, age, nationality, and religion. This literature highlights that individuals' positions in society influence their ability to accumulate and valorize their stock of capitals (e.g., S. Friedman, Laurison, & Miles, 2015). Alternatively, the framework is used to explain how social actors (fail to) move up the hierarchical ladder with a focus on how mobility between classes and positions is strategically navigated, often around the possession of the right forms of capitals (e.g., McLeod, O'Donohoe, & Townley, 2009; A. Wright, 2009). Other studies conversely present how elites strategically use their accumulated capitals to exclude the "lower classes" and/or female individuals from access to high-status in social fields (Herrera & Agoff, 2019; Johansson & Jones, 2019; Maclean, Harvey, & Kling, 2014).

Despite the political potential of this stream of literature, it too often offers rather apolitical analyses emphasizing the "mechanics of the game" (Tatli & Özbilgin, 2012). Individuals are "mechanically plotted" in a field, based on the types and amount of capitals they possess, to reconstruct how they strategically and instrumentally navigate hierarchically ordered fields in competition with each other. The adoption or contestation of valued social norms by less powerful actors is, for instance, only addressed to explain their individual strategies to obtain rewards in the field. Yet the sole focus on individuals' practices means losing sight of how such practices both emerge from and reproduce stratification: individual actors' rationality is produced by embodied social practices embedded in class and their actions reproduce social inequality within the organization and in society at large (Bourdieu, 2003).

2.3 | Class as control and resistance in wage work

A third strand of MOS studies is predicated on Marx's idea of class as a material position and a subjectivity defined by the antagonistic relation between capital and labor under capitalism. For Marx, while social stratification characterizes most societies, capitalism divides society between a small group of individuals who control the means of production—the capitalist class—and a larger group of individuals dispossessed from them—the labor class (Marx, 1976). Capitalism is also characterized by the formal "freedom" of the labor class (as opposed to slavery or feudal relations) to engage in wage work, a seemingly neutral and fair exchange between capitalist and worker on the labor market. Behind this facade, Marx argues, the labor class actually must sell its labor power for a wage, as it has no other means of subsistence. Marx also stresses that the capitalist class is dependent on the labor class to produce commodities for exchange on the commodity market, as this is a condition for capitalism to be sustained. The relation between capital and labor is an exploitative one—capitalists pay wages that are lower than the value of the produced commodity obtained through sale in the market. Marx places class at the center of history because he considers capitalism not solely as organizing the economy, but society in its entirety. Marx's historical materialism further sees the labor class as a privileged actor in moving history forward, dialectically, through the struggle

against the private property of the means of production and exploitation by the capitalist class (Thompson & Smith, 2001).

In MOS, labor process theory draws on Marx to conceptualize class primarily as the dynamics of capital's control and labor's resistance in the workplace. This research is grounded in the idea of the so-called "indeterminacy of labor," referring to the fact that "the precise amount of effort to be extracted cannot be "fixed" before the engagement of workers, machinery and products for purposeful (profitable within capitalism) action in the labor process" (C. Smith, 2006, p. 390). This entails capital controlling workers to ensure that the purchased labor power is expended into actual labor and a surplus is produced. Early labor process studies focused on deskilling as a managerial strategy to ensure labor exploitation at the point of production (Littler, 1982; Nichols, 1980). Later studies rather examined the heterogeneous ways in which management controls workers to transform labor power into profitable labor and, conversely, how workers resist managerial control (Cressey & MacInnes, 1980; Edwards, 1979; A. Friedman, 1977). Some of these studies have explicitly investigated the role of gender and nationality/migration status in the power relations between management and workers (e.g., Hearn & Parkin, 1987; Knights & Willmott, 1986; Wickman, Moriarty, Bobek, & Salamonska, 2009).

2.4 | Class intersecting with gender, race/ethnicity, and age

Different from the three previous strands of research, which are grounded in sociological theories of class, the fourth strand approaches class in relation to a broad understanding of diversity. It does not rest on a distinctive conceptualization of class. Rather, it starts from various markers of difference including class, understood as ontologically similar (Verloo, 2006) and leaving their specific articulation a matter of empirical investigation (Tatli & Özbilgin, 2012). Critics have observed that this approach tends to lock the literature into a recurring demonstration of the empirical modalities of gender, race, and class in the structure of organizations (for an excellent discussion, see Ferguson, 2016).

In this last strand of MOS studies, class is thus approached as one among multiple intersecting sociodemographic markers structuring power in organizations. Bringing the notion of intersectionality into MOS, Acker theorized how organizations constitute structural "inequality regimes" that are at once premised on gender, race, and class (Acker, 1990, 2006; see also; Pullen, Kerfoot, Rodriguez, & Lewis, 2019). She conceives of organizations as power landscapes, or "loosely interrelated practices, processes, actions, and meanings that result in and maintain class, gender, and racial inequalities" (Acker, 2006, p. 443). In the last decade, the theoretical work of Holvino et al. (Holvino, 2010; Rodriguez, Holvino, Fletcher, & Nkomo, 2016; Ruiz Castro & Holvino, 2016) on intersectionality has emphasized the inseparability of race, gender, class, ethnicity, sexuality, and nation. It called for renewed attention to the structural power dynamics created as multiple dimensions of social difference interact across individual, institutional, cultural, and societal spheres of influence.

The feminist organizational literature using an intersectional lens has been flourishing (Calás & Smircich, 1996; Harding, Ford, & Fotaki, 2013; Villesèche, Muhr, & Śliwa, 2018). In most intersectional studies, class is mentioned, perfunctorily, as one among several key sociodemographic variables, invariably given less importance than gender and race/ethnicity. Intersectional studies specifically integrating class in their analysis remain rare. Those that do, most often combine it with gender (e.g., Rickett & Roman, 2013; Slutskaya, Simpson, Hughes, Simpson, & Uygur, 2016) and, in fewer cases, also with race (Ruiz, Castro & Holvino, 2016; Soni-Sinha, 2013). This strand of literature generally understands class as one of multiple relevant intersecting identities that explain the exclusion experienced by workers, forming a barrier to their full participation in work and society (e.g., Adib & Guerrier, 2003; Romani et al., 2019). The focus is often on the subjectivities, identities, and experiences of inequalities of individuals located at the intersection of multiple power-laden social markers of difference (Rodriguez et al., 2016).

3 | CONTRIBUTIONS TO THIS SPECIAL SECTION

This Special Section includes four contributions that, together, showcase how re-engagement with the notion of class, variously understood, can inspire novel, more radical conversations about diversity. Olimpia Burchiellaro's ethnographic study presents a key moment in a community campaign organized to oppose the closure of a queer pub as part of the urban redevelopment of a London district. Adopting an understanding of class as a process of structuring space, relations, and identities at the service of capital accumulation, she shows how gentrification becomes a "classed" organizing principle of sexuality: an issue of class. While the original "queer" pub welcomed marginalized forms of sexuality and opened at late hours, the LGBTQ pub proposed by the development plan needs to conform to urban middle-class governance. In other words, Burchiellaro shows how the so-called "revitalisation" of the district and its new inscription in the cosmopolitan urban space imposes capitalist norms of intelligibility of sexual expression. The new pub must remain within the frame of what is perceived as desirable for the middle-class awaited new inhabitants of the district. The study thus shows how economic relationships of class shape the terms of the "inclusion" of diversity.

Vijayta Doshi's study views embodiment of service work through an urban/rural lens, showing how service work dynamics inform relations between customers and workers. She investigates how affluent clients with an urban background interact with retail workers with a rural one in cosmetic counters in Indian urban shopping malls. She examines the worker–customer interaction, in which workers' rural bodies are othered and denigrated, a process imbued with symbolic violence. Workers take part in this violence, as they attempt to modify their bodies to gain higher "urban status." However, this status is never granted by the urban customers. The double negation of the rural body and the acquisition of urban capital maintains the retail workers' subordination. In this contribution, the lack of recognition of the rural, low-paid service worker points to how the rural/urban divide is not only a geographical but also a "classed" distinction that organizes work and society in the Global South. Accordingly, Doshi highlights how the service work literature on embodiment needs to address the urban/rural divide as an important dimension of the way in which class permeates service work.

In Jeremy Bohonos' ethnographic study, we become familiar with the harsh working conditions of employees of a construction company in the US Mid-West, and the difficulties they encounter to support their families and make ends meet. The study shows how gaining and keeping access to resources (e.g., employment) is essential to understanding individuals' position in the social order. Working-class white men are privileged in the US racial and gender hierarchy, but their working-class status means they are at once structurally subordinated and in a precarious socioeconomic position. Bohonos considers this tension via the notion of white privilege (Macintosh, 1997) and points to its inherent class dimension. White working-class men benefit from their racial status within their social class and create "white spaces" from which they exclude people of color from access to permanent employment. However, in their interactions with wealthy clients of color, they are confronted with their subordinated class status. Bohonos' study thus stresses the importance of material resources and the relative, "classed" nature of privilege.

Finally, the article by Andreas Giazitzoglu and Daniel Muzio illustrates how recruits of a UK professional service firm with a working-class background learn the rules of the corporate hegemonic masculine game and develop, over time, appropriate forms of cultural capital to play it successfully. The masculinity expected in this context is not just any form of masculinity, it is a (white male) middle-class masculinity. This contribution first shows that, while codes of masculinity are known to exclude women from professional service firms, their class dimension is often overlooked. The authors also show the symbolic violence of social mobility: those from a working-class background learn early that they must unlearn their lower-status habitus to keep this well-paid work. In adopting a middle-class habitus, they experience a disconnect, if not a complete estrangement, from their origins and family. This symbolic violence results in class injuries, an insight that invites to problematize upward class mobility.

4 | TALKING ABOUT CLASS: FOUR STRATEGIES TO RADICALIZE DIVERSITY RESEARCH

We see the four contributions to this Special Section as illustrations of what class can offer, theoretically and politically, to critically oriented diversity research. (Re-)engaging with class is a condition, we argue, to radicalize this tradition of scholarship. In its various guises, class provides conceptual vocabularies for spelling out an emancipatory social justice project grounded within capitalism, yet with the ambition to overcome it. We explore four key research strategies with class at the forefront: *classing* workers, occupations, and workplaces; *classing* diversity, *classing* meritocracy, and *classing* struggles for social justice.

4.1 | Classing workers, occupations, and workplaces

A first strategy to radicalize diversity research focuses on the inextricable link between class and workers, occupations, and workplaces. Diversity research has traditionally privileged middle- and high-rank, white-collar jobs (e.g., corporate board members, (top) managers, academics, professionals, doctors, etc.) over lower-rank ones (Zanoni, Janssens, Benschop, & Nkomo, 2010). Despite some increased attention for the lower-ranks in the wake of the 2008 crisis (e.g., Cohen & Wolkowitz, 2018; Rajan-Rankin, 2017; Soni-Sinha & Yates, 2013), these studies remain today both numerically and theoretically marginal (van Eck, Dobusch & van den Brink, forthcoming). Scully and Blake-Beard's (2006, p. 448) call for research on class that "provoke[s] a rethinking of how work gets done and who (at the juncture of many social identities) gets the returns" remains relevant.

Adequately documenting experiences of exploitation and oppression are warranted because most individuals belonging to historically subordinated groups are in lower-rank jobs and occupations. Their exclusion from diversity research produces knowledge that is inherently skewed in favor of the higher classes, and therefore obscures how class is central to the practices through which labor exploitation and oppression occur. Such practices are different for workers in higher-rank, better protected, and valued jobs than for workers in lower-rank, less protected, and valued positions. For instance, new technologies, such as IT and AI distinctively affect technical and operative jobs in manufacturing, often upskilling the former and deskilling the latter (Fontana, Paba, & Solinas, 2020; Spencer, 2017) further limiting operators' discretion and increasing surveillance (Kellogg, Valentine, & Christin, 2020). They reconfigure jobs and redefine the "ideal worker," often integrating historically subordinate groups into the capitalist work process, as classed subjects, in less favorable working conditions (Ozkazanc-Pan, 2019; Zanoni, 2011, 2019), as the shop floor studies of the 1970s and the 1980s have well documented (Cavendish, 1982; Cockburn, 1985; Ong, 1987).

As demonstrated by the studies of Vijayta Doshi and Andreas Giazitzoglu and Daniel Muzio, considering service workers and professionals as classed subjects moreover allows us to unpack and problematize individual trajectories of "upward" social mobility, in particular, the deep symbolic violence inherent in processes of subjection. Social mobility requires individuals to undergo a transformation of their embodied self—in their class, gender, and race—constituted through socialization over time, to mimic more valued attitudes, mores, behaviors, tastes at work and, generally, in society at large. Diversity research commonly elaborates critiques of assimilation expectations and practices along gender, race, ability, and even religion and language norms. However, it rarely questions expected assimilation in relation to the norms associated with high-ranking jobs and with the middle- and high-class. The enactment of these norms by individuals not originally socialized into them is, on the contrary, considered as proof of the existence of equal opportunities and the possibility of upward social mobility.

To bring classed subjects to the fore, research designs are needed that go beyond one single occupational group. We still too often design studies to examine diversity *within* one occupation, comparing the opportunities

of individuals with different sociodemographic profiles within the same job. This type of design structurally disconnects the examined power dynamics from the class structure of organizations. As a result, we not only take classed hierarchy for granted but we end up naturalizing it. By "classing workers, occupations, and workplaces," we would, on the contrary, ask ourselves from the very outset how our choices of investigating specific groups and topics affect what we can or cannot see about power and inequality.

4.2 | Inscribing diversity into capitalism: classing diversity

A second strategy to radicalize diversity research is to conceptualize diversity as the capitalist production of difference. Despite increasing awareness, in academia and outside, of how wage work is undergoing continuous processes of casualization (e.g., zero-hour contracts, (bogus) self-employment, and forced part-time), fragmentation (outsourcing and crowdsourcing), increasing exploitation, and how capital accumulation simultaneously also relies on contemporary forms of dispossession (posted workers, forced labor, and slavery), diversity research often does not go beyond the empirical observation that historically subordinate groups are overrepresented in more precarious work. Yet the ideal worker is not only the one thought to be most suited to do the work (Acker, 2006; Ashcraft, 2013), but also, crucially, the one who is available to do so under the least favorable conditions possible or, in other words, the one most easily exploitable (MacKenzie & Forde, 2009; Romani et al., 2019; Zanoni, 2011, 2019). Labor markets are continuously fragmented, both symbolically and institutionally, to integrate workers into capitalism on unequal terms (Harvey, 1990; Lazzarato, 2006; Zanoni, 2020a, 2020b). Capitalism does not simply register preexisting differences between workers. Rather, it *produces* difference in ways that allow the extraction of as much value as possible by virtue of that same difference.

In this sense, we need to better theorize diversity as produced by capitalism, and, conversely, capitalism as constitutive of it. It should, however, be noted that understanding diversity through the lens of class does not position the "economic" over the "cultural"; rather, it rests on an understanding of social relations and subjectivities as fundamentally shaped—or "mediated"—by the capitalist organization of the economy and society. Here, identities are not reified into general positions in a hierarchical social system, which is incidentally capitalistic, but rather are, from the outset, themselves produced by capitalism (Fraser, 2017; Walby, Amstrong, & Strid, 2012; Zanoni, 2019).

Some contemporary strands of Marxism are particularly useful to conceptualize the articulation between class and other subordinated differences in capitalism. For instance, Marxist feminist social reproduction theory draws attention to the socially reproductive work—ranging from childbearing to care, education, and so on—largely occurring in the domestic sphere, communities, and public welfare services (e.g., schools and hospitals), and which is needed for capital to valorize itself (Bhattacharya, 2017; Federici, 2012; Vogel, 1983/2013). Importantly, this tradition of scholarship emphasizes that a healthy, competent, and compliant labor class needs to be created and maintained outside the sphere of capitalist production. The work required to do so is undervalued because it is largely undertaken by subordinated groups, especially (racialized) women, often along international chains of care. The structural undervaluation of this work has been increasingly debated, as the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted its essential role in sustaining human life. Drawing on the history of racial relations, Black Marxism draws attention to how racial domination, both in the form of slavery and other forms of coercion, such as incarceration and the governance of migration, is constitutive of capitalism from its origins to the present day. Capitalism does not only rest on wage labor but also, conversely, on the violent and structural exclusion of some from it. In this sense, capitalism is thus essentially "racial capitalism," as held by the Black Lives Matter movement (Issar, 2020; Robinson, 1983/2000); capital accumulation occurs through dispossession, bestowing unequal life chances and unequally differentiating the value of human beings (Melamed, 2015). Both social reproduction theory and black Marxism reinterpret what is usually considered the "other" of capitalism (the sphere of reproduction and slavery and coercion, respectively) as its essential premise and make it into a key terrain of class struggle.

The inscription of diversity into capitalism, its "classing," also requires a different approach in empirical research. Rather than investigating diversity *in* organizations, we need to conceptualize the organization as part of the broader circuit of capital, as well as the "outside" on which capitalism rests (e.g., reproductive labor, forced labor, but also, in other variants of Marxism, nature, noncapitalistic economies, etc.). These approaches require us to pay much more attention to the multiple institutional forces (legal, ideological, spatio-temporal, etc.) through which labor is fragmented, and which jointly constitute the unequal terms of work and employment considered legitimate in a society. Management policy should be understood as drawing on, leveraging and itself shaping a broader system of governance, including labor market regulations and their actual (lack of) enforcement, asylum, and migration policies (Anderson, 2010), welfare policies (Durbin, Page, & Walby, 2017; Zanoni, 2019), international trade policies, and processes of economic and institutional integration such as NAFTA and the EU (M. Wright, 2006), to name a few. This understanding is conducive to conceptualizing "differences"—as they are materially, symbolically and affectively produced both in workplaces and elsewhere—as functional to the process of capital valorization.

4.3 | Classing meritocracy in capitalism

A serious engagement with theories of class can further help radicalize diversity research by advancing more fundamental critiques of meritocracy. This is what we propose in our third strategy: classing meritocracy. Much of today's critical and mainstream diversity research shows that, despite their formal policies and branding, most organizations are not meritocracies. In organizations, workers with different sociodemographic profiles and comparable competences do not receive equal opportunities and are rarely rewarded equally (Castilla & Benard, 2010; van den Brink et al., 2016). Much of the critically oriented diversity literature has developed critiques of these various forms of discrimination, grounding them in the ethical and legal principle of equality. However, the MOS literature generally accepts the capitalist firm as the "given" setting of diversity and does not question the wage relation or the competition between workers that underpin it. Accordingly, critical diversity research strives for achieving "real" equal opportunities within the firm, overlooking that capitalism is essentially predicated on inequality (Bell, Leopold, Berry, & Hall, 2018; Marx, 1976; Zanoni, 2011). While these analyses keep equal opportunities on the managerial, political, and scholarly agenda, they implicitly contribute to reproducing the myth of capitalist meritocracy by failing to question the very possibility—in principle if not yet in reality—that capitalistic organizations *can* be meritocracies and thus fair to all (yet see Bell et al., 2018; Zanoni, 2011). The notion of class brings to the forefront awareness of the essential role of meritocracy (even if in a mythic, unfulfilled form) in the legitimation of capitalism and the inequality it produces and our own role in this legitimation.

Capitalism needs the ideology of meritocracy: the market is presented as an ontological space where fair competition takes place. That is, competition between formally "free," undifferentiated (i.e., not sociodemographically inscribed) individual workers occurs, so that they can engage in a "fair" exchange with capital, in which the workers sell their labor power and firms pay a wage corresponding to its market value. In principle, discrimination distorts competition between workers, to the extent that it creates barriers between groups of workers that diminish competition between them, undermining the (alleged) efficient allocation of resources to maximize wealth creation. In this abstract sense, then, equal opportunities are not in contradiction with neoliberal capitalism; rather, they are its necessary condition (see Fraser, 2017).

Under capitalism, the law thus plays a highly ambiguous role. On the one hand, it outlaws discrimination to sustain the illusion of actors operating out of free will in a market that should reward their merits. On the other hand, it simultaneously protects the fundamental "discrimination" between those who possess the means of production and those who do not—capital and labor—as well as between different types of labor power. On the first point, Walby, Armstrong, and Strid (2012, p. 232) state: "(Class) is important in the structuring of the employment laws and institutional machinery of tribunals and courts that implement these laws. The implementation of the laws

on nonclass justiciable inequalities (e.g., gender, religion, etc.) takes place in institutions that were originally established to secure justice and good relations for class-based relations between employers and employees." On the second point, the law often legitimizes and facilitates the unequal compensation of workers based on their place within the organizational hierarchy (Berry & Bell, 2012), or the differentiation within labor. By so doing, it systemically facilitates the exploitation of lower-class, female, racialized, ethnic minority workers who are disproportionately present in the lower ranks of organizations. Acker even terms this kind of class structure "inevitable" (2006, p. 453), pointing to the impossibility of conceiving a project of radical equality within capitalism (Fraser, 2017). The strategy "classing meritocracy" thus invites further problematization of meritocracy under capitalism.

4.4 | Classing struggles for social justice

The fourth radicalizing strategy we propose concerns the role of class in envisioning anti- and post-capitalist diversity (Zanoni, 2020a, 2020b). We have argued that we cannot understand gender, race, ethnicity, ability, sexual orientation, age, and so on today as existing outside, prior to and independent of capitalism, a mode of organizing the economy and society that mediates all social relations (e.g., Mojab & Carpenter, 2019; S. Smith, 2005). In this sense, any project envisioning difference free from oppression or subordination cannot be disconnected from the overcoming of capitalism, through (class) struggle. This is not the same as to claim that the identity of class should a priori be granted primacy over other identities in struggles for equality. Rather, it is to say that, under capitalism, struggles for equality need to engage with class, as a relation deeply structuring social reality, in readily visible ways in the sphere of work and market relations, but also, in more subtle—but fundamental—ways in education, the family (in its heterogeneous forms), communities, civil society, the state, and so on, where the conditions for the reproduction of capitalism are maintained. Class struggle contests the capitalist mediation of social relations in the spheres of commodity production and circulation as well as in the sphere of social reproduction. It is not merely the struggle of one group (labor) against another (capital) over the value produced in the workplace. In this expansive understanding, class struggle encompasses all those struggles for transformation of the social relations that constitute us as gendered, racialized, able-bodied or disabled, and so on (Bhattacharya, 2017). Class struggle is at the core of any project of solidarity, independent of the location and the actor that pursues it, such as political parties, civil society, trade unions, or even the state (e.g., Alberti, Holgate, & Tapia, 2013; Holck & Muhr, 2017).

In 1996, Gibson-Graham argued for the "queering" of capitalism (Gibson-Graham, 1996a, 1996b). She warned that critiques of capitalism that represent it as overly monolithic and that subsume the social in its totality under the capitalistic hegemonic order are performative: they normalize our own impulses to destabilize dominant discourses of capitalism, ultimately contributing to its perpetuation. She pleaded for research and practice pointing to disharmony, incoherence, and contradictions within capitalism, as a way to open up a space for alternative representations of the economy, economic difference, and economic invention to imagine alternatives. Today, 25 years later, we—as critical diversity scholars—are in a paradoxical situation. We reproduce quite totalizing narratives of capitalism's instrumentalization of differences, yet no longer have the vocabulary to deconstruct capitalism's totalizing effects.

On the one hand, research on diversity management observes, each time anew, the overall incapacity of firms' diversity management practices to achieve substantial changes towards equality (Holck, 2018a, 2018b; Kalev, Dobbin, & Kelly, 2006; Romani et al., 2019). Resistance is limited to individuals' skillful bending, circumvention, and strategical appropriation that at best creates openings for their own social mobility (Holck, 2016; Ortlieb & Sieben, 2014; Van Laer & Janssens, 2017; Zanoni & Janssens, 2007), but leaves structural inequalities largely unaltered. On the other hand, firms still largely remain the "natural" setting of diversity and delimit its horizon of possibility (Janssens & Zanoni, forthcoming). Diversity research would benefit from engaging more in dialogue with the emergent MOS literature on alternative spaces where the economy and life are organized differently and social

relations and subjectivities take alternative forms (Bell et al., 2018; Daskalaki, Fotaki, & Sotiropoulou, 2019). Capitalism can never fully exhaust life (Dinerstein, 2015); it always contains in itself the possibility of its own negation, or de-mediation (Cameron & Gibson-Graham, 2003; Gibson-Graham, 1996a, 1996b). It is in this disjuncture between life and capitalism, in the interstice, the "cracks" and the "excess" that practices experimenting and prefiguring a noncapitalistic future can emerge (Bonefeld, 2014), politically nurtured by alternative libidinal investments such as hope (Dinerstein, 2015). Clearly, "classing struggles for social justice" is not a return to an "essential" subject preceding capitalism, but a re-imagining of diverse subjectivities and social relations (Zanoni, 2020a, 2020b).

5 | CONCLUSION

With this editorial and the four contributions to this Special Section on Class and Diversity, we aim to recover the theoretical and political potential of the concept of class for diversity research. The emergence of the notion of diversity at the same time as the demise of class, understood both as objectively structuring society and a collective project, has left us without a vocabulary to articulate difference and inequality under capitalism. Meanwhile, diversity is continuously reconstituted, symbolically, institutionally, materially, affectively, through the unequal positioning of lives in the service of capital. We need theory that qualifies our critique of differences as inequality as a key element of capitalism. Treating difference as distinct from capitalism is not only theoretically inaccurate, but also ineffective in pursuing social justice. It normalizes the status quo. Class informs difference and is thus essential, we believe, to a radical antagonistic diversity research.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

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