

Intersectionality's (brilliant) career –  
how to understand the attraction of the concept?

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## Bio Note

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## Abstract

In my paper<sup>1</sup> I take issue with proponents of 'intersectionality' which believe that a theoretical concept cannot/should not be detached from its original context of invention. Instead, I argue that the traveling of theory in a global context automatically involves appropriations, amendment and changes in response to the original meaning. However, I reject the idea that 'intersectionality' can be used as a free-floating signifier; on the contrary, it has to be embedded in the respective (historical, social, cultural) context in which it is used. I will start by mapping some of the current debates engaging with the pros and cons of the global implementation of the concept (the controversy about master categories, the dispute about the centrality of 'race', and the argument about the amendment of categories). I will then turn to my own use of 'intersectionality' as a methodological tool (elaborated in Lutz and Davis 2005). Here, we shifted attention from how structures of racism, class discrimination and sexism *determine* individuals' identities and practices to how individuals ongoingly and flexibly *negotiate* their multiple and converging identities in the context of everyday life. Introducing the term *doing intersectionality* we explored how individuals creatively and often in surprising ways draw upon various aspects of their multiple identities as a resource to gain control over their lives.

In my paper I will show how 'gender' or 'ethnicity' are invariably linked to structures of domination, but can also mobilize or deconstruct disempowering discourses, even undermine and transform oppressive practices.

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<sup>1</sup> This paper was first presented on 27.2.2014 at the workshop 'Intersectionality – a cross-disciplinary exchange' at the Free University Brussels. I thank Alison Woodward, Karen Celis, Patrizia Zaloni and Eline Severs for inspiring comments.

## **Introduction**

In a recently published article Maria Carbin and Sara Edenheim (2013) argue that the popularity of ‘the intersectional turn’ in feminist theory owes its success to the absence of considering the concept’s ontology and epistemology. “Intersectionality promises almost everything: to provide complexity, overcome divisions and to serve as a critical tool. However, the expansion of the scope of intersectionality has created a consensus that conceals fruitful and necessary conflicts within feminism” (ibid: 233). This argument is very much in line with Myra Marx Ferree’s (2013) important argument when she writes that “the idea of intersectionality as a moment of resistance to mainstream erasure of inequalities has been converted into the idea of ‘diversity’ understood as a positive, albeit neoliberal approach to social inclusion” (ibid: 11). These authors are echoed in the concerns of many pioneers and proponents of intersectionality who ask what has happened to the concept, how it has changed its meaning by leaving the original context in which it was contrived and from which it has been traveling and expanding (see f.e. Lewis 2013; Cho, Crenshaw and McCall 2013; Kennedy-Macfoy and Lewis 2014). Kimberlé Crenshaw for example expressed her bewilderment with the “misreading” of her concept:

“There is a sense that efforts to repackage intersectionality for universal consumption require a re-marginalising of black women. This instinct reflects a fatal transmission error of ‘Demarginalising’s’ central argument: that representations of gender that are ‘race-less’ are not by that fact alone more universal than those that are race-specific.” (Crenshaw 2011: 224)

This fear of witnessing the erasure of ‘black women’ in the process of the transnational traveling and appropriation of intersectionality is a serious concern that needs to be addressed. I will do this by focusing, in the first part of my talk, on the intersectionality’s journey and engage in an enquiry about gains and losses. In my second part I will go more profoundly into demonstrating how I use ‘intersectionality as a method’ and finally make some remarks about the future development of intersectionality.

## **The traveling of theory**

Although many feminist scholars refer to Edward Said’s seminal essay on Traveling Theory (1983), they hardly ever look at it in more detail. In my view this is a pity, because they often miss the point. Said argues that regarding any original (theoretical) text as a ‘*cultural dogma*’

is not more justifiable than following up the transformations of interpretation and meaning to this text through it travels (1983: 247). He distinguishes four stages in the traveling of texts:

*“First, there is a point of origin, or what seems like one, a set of initial circumstances in which the idea came to birth or entered discourse. Second, there is a distance transversed, a passage through the pressure of various contexts as the idea moves from an earlier point to another time and place where it will come into a new prominence. Third, there is a set of conditions – call them conditions of acceptance or, as an inevitable part of acceptance, resistances – which then confronts the transplanted theory or idea, making possible its introduction or toleration, however alien it might appear to be. Fourth, the now full (or partly) accommodated (or incorporated) idea is to some extent transformed by its uses, its new position in a new time and place.”* [emphasis added, H.L.] (Said 1983: 226/7)

I will work my way through these four stages, as I consider them crucial for the understanding of the heated debate about intersectionality’s travels and changing applications and to - what some consider as – its metamorphosis.

### ***Point of origin – multiple foundations***

When in 2005 the US American sociologist Leslie McCall wrote: “One could even say that intersectionality is the most important theoretical contribution that women’s studies, in conjunction with related fields, has made so far” (McCall 2005: 1771), she paid tribute to a concept that was coined in 1989 by the Black US law expert Kimberlé Crenshaw and spread quickly beyond the United States, first and foremost in the field of Gender Studies. Notwithstanding the term’s relatively short history, it does have a long past which is closely related to Black Women’s fight for equality, human rights and recognition. Formerly discussed as the ‘*gender, race and class nexus*’, intersectionality has several forerunners and founding narratives. Some authors consider as an early reflection of Black Women’s struggle against slavery, subordination and discrimination the speech from the year 1851 by Sojourner Truth, a former slave and anti-slavery activist:

“That man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody helps me any best place. And ain’t I a woman? Look at me! Look at my arm. I have plowed (sic), I have planted and I have gathered into barns. And no man could head me. And ain’t I a woman? I could work as much, and eat as much as any man – when I could get it – and bear the lash as well! And ain’t I a woman? I have borne children and seen most of them all sold into slavery, and when I cried out with a mother’s grief, none but Jesus heard me. And ain’t I a woman?...” (quoted in Brah and Phoenix 2004: 77)

With these words Truth addressed the exclusion of Black women from the collective of *Women* during a meeting of the burgeoning Women's rights movement in Akron, Ohio. Her plea for the consideration of 'race' and 'racism' as important markers of difference and inequality between women has proved relevant for the Women's Movement up to this very day.

More than 100 years later, in 1977, the manifesto of the 'Combahee River Collective', a Boston-based Black lesbian feminist organization, renewed this request. It highlighted the futility of privileging a single dimension of oppressive experience: "We believe that sexual politics under patriarchy is as pervasive in Black women's lives as are the politics of class and race. We also often find it difficult to separate race from class from sex oppression because in our lives they are most often experienced simultaneously" (The Combahee River Collective 1981: 213). This is an early manifestation of challenging hetero-normativity, simultaneously in the women's and in the Black movement. The demand for a "development of integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking" (ibid: 210) was followed, echoed and elaborated in Black feminist scholars' work, for example in Angela Davis' famous 'Women, Race and Class' from 1981. Strongly influenced by Marxism and the Frankfurt School, Davis insisted on the importance of 'class' as a crucial category for the analysis of Black women's inequality which intersects with gender and race. Davis revived a theme that had been fiercely discussed in the European Women's movement at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when Marxist feminists like Clara Zetkin (1896) and Alexandra Kollontai (1918) clashed with the representatives of the bourgeois feminist movement over their disregard of class differences between women.<sup>2</sup> While these earlier concepts of race-class-gender in which the categories were portrayed as markers of difference and exclusion and were added up to the 'triple oppression theory', intersectionality established a new agenda for women's and gender studies.

"Intersectionality is a conceptualization of the problem that attempts to capture both the structural and dynamic consequences of the interaction between two or more axes of subordination. It specifically addresses the manner in which racism, patriarchy, class oppression and other discriminatory systems create background inequalities that structure the relative positions of women, races, ethnicities, classes, and the like. Moreover, it addresses the way that specific acts and policies create burdens that flow along these axes constituting the dynamic or active aspects of disempowerment." (Crenshaw 2000)

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<sup>2</sup> Marxist-feminist theorists of the 1980 revisited this debate in their analysis (see Barrett and McIntosh 1982; Haug 1978).

Crucial for Crenshaw's framing of the concept is the interaction of the macro level (inequality structures functioning as social positioning) with the micro level (subjective experiences of discrimination and identity formation as an excluded group).

In summary, it was the analysis of the specific socioeconomic situation of Black women in the US which made it possible for the first time to speak of the simultaneity and mutual co-constitution of different categories of social differentiation, and to emphasize the specificity of the experiences shaped by these interactions.

### ***The ongoing journey through time and space***

Crenshaw's term intersectionality, suggesting an imagery of black women being positioned in the very dangerous middle of an intersection, became a dazzling success; it was adopted in gender studies in more or less all English-speaking countries from the start (Davis 2008: 68f.), and has made its journey into mainland Europe since the early 2000s; it is now used by gender studies scholars from/in Africa and Asia (Haq 2013; Purkayastha 2012).

In the UK the question of the interpenetration of 'race', class and gender had already been discussed as 'intersection' by Anthias and Yuval-Davis (1983). As a result, intersectionality received considerable attention from the mid-1990s onwards in the critical debate about racism and nationalism (Lutz et al. 1995). In continental Europe, the ground had been prepared for the concept in those places where the critical debate about migration, nationalism, ethnicity, and post-colonialism had been taken up to some extent, like the Netherlands (Wekker 2004; Prins 2006; Verloo 2006; Buitelaar 2006; Saharso 2002) where Mieke Aerts and Sawitri Saharso had already provoked heated exchanges in 1994 with an article in which they argued that conceptualising *gender as ethnicity* would have the advantage of avoiding the essentialization of gender by decentering it (Aerts and Saharso 1994). The latter request was taken up empathetically by Scandinavian scholars emphasizing the need to extend gender to include sexuality and pay attention to heteronormativity (Bredström 2006). Influenced by Judith Butler and Michel Foucault other scholars from Scandinavia have pointed to the subversive and disruptive effects that can be produced by marginalized ethnicities; 'ethnic trouble', argues Knudsen (2006), has the potential to place in question powerful images of belonging, 'home', and so on. It was also argued that there was a need for a constant reflection on and deconstruction of power, knowledge, and self-positioning, which was seen to imply

the decentring of gender (Lykke 2010; Staunæs 2003).<sup>3</sup> From the way intersectionality has been taken up and developed further at different times within Europe one can say that a significant division has shaped the reception of the concept: countries in which the English-language literature is more widely read or where English has become the most important language of sciences, the debate was taken up more quickly. Germany is also a latecomer to the debate,<sup>4</sup> and - as in many other countries - it were the academically marginalized scholars and activists, investigating the effects of racism, ethnicism and nationalism in combination with gender who embraced the concept in the first place; although over the last 15 years intersectionality received more and more attention, the debate was fraught with difficulties from the very beginning.

### ***Conditions of acceptance***

”Intersectionality” addresses the most central theoretical and normative concern within feminist scholarship: namely, the acknowledgement of differences among women. This is because it touches on the most pressing problem facing contemporary feminism – the long and painful legacy of its exclusions’ (Davis 2011: 45). According to Kathy Davis, by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> millennium, there was finally room in feminist theory and research to address differences between women.

During the 1990s difference and the multiplicity of *feminisms* had been the object of heated debates (see Uma Narayan 1997; Sara Ahmed 2000; Patricia Hill Collins 2000 and Seyla Benhabib et al. 1995).

By and by, the ubiquitous and universal feminist imagination as a ‘We’ was losing ground because critics – like the Black Women’s or the Third World Women’s movements’ scholars – could demonstrate its partiality. This fragmentation was often dreaded. Gudrun Axeli Knapp writes: “The presupposed generalized ‘We’ functions like a regulative idea: it has substantive effects, but it cannot be positively defined with reference to a collective with a substantial identity of experience and interest” (Knapp 2005: 253). Contrary to many Black and post-colonial feminists who embrace the multiplicity of *feminisms*, Knapp is of the opinion that the ‘indeterminateness’ of the ‘we’ is a useful expression of an aporia: “The aporia lies in the simultaneous indispensability and impossibility of a foundational reference to an epistemic or political subject” (ibid).

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<sup>3</sup> For more information on the dissemination of intersectionality in other parts of continental Europe see Lutz et al. 2011: 4ff.

<sup>4</sup> One of the first was my own article, Lutz 2001.

In a situation like this where one group is holding up the ‘we’ while others plea for its multiplications, intersectionality comes in - seemingly – as the solution of insurmountable contradictions, it became a concept of reconciliation.

In her analysis of intersectionality’s successful career Kathy Davis shows that intersectionality has been well and broadly received in women’s and gender studies, not despite but because of its vagueness and ambiguity which can be taken up in connection with so many issues. This, she argues, is what makes the approach a good feminist theory. On the basis of this assessment, Davis emphasizes the theoretical, methodological, and political advantages of the concept for the further development of feminist theory and practice. In an effort to explain the eager adoption of the term in various regions of the world, Davis explains:

“Intersectionality takes up the political project of making the social and material consequences of the categories of gender/race/class visible, but does so by employing methodologies compatible with the poststructuralist project of deconstructing categories, unmasking universalism, and exploring the dynamic and contradictory working of power.” (Davis 2011: 48)

I agree with Davis that difference has been a ‘painful’ divide in the feminist debate for many decades and that ‘intersectionality’ somehow carries the potential of addressing this divide by avoiding the evocation of identity politics. But I would say that despite all of the mentioned advantages, there is and was a danger of separating intersectionality from its history as a political project.<sup>5</sup>

### ***Appropriation and Resistance***

Over the last 20 years, intersectionality clearly released new energy as an answer to the search for a satisfying theorization of the interactions between different social structures and identity positions. The concept is developing in many and different directions; a plethora of research fields and works bear witness of this.

In spite or maybe because of so many endorsements, a number of controversies have dominated the debate (see also Davis 2008).

*First*, various researchers contributed to the *amendment* of the categories beyond the race-class-gender triangle by adding nationality (Anthias and Yuval Davis 1992), sexuality

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<sup>5</sup> Parallels with the academic reception of Critical Whiteness Studies are notable – see Tibberger et al. 2006.



(McClintock 1995), able-bodied-ness/disability (Meekosha 1990), and age (Williams 1989). The plea for the recognition of differences like religion, citizenship status (different ‘belongings’), sedentariness (vs. nomadism)<sup>6</sup> and geo-political location (‘the West’ versus ‘the Rest’) has led to further additions to the concept (Lutz 2001; Krüger-Potratz and Lutz 2002) and an attempt to summarize these categories as embodied, socio-spatial and economical diversifications (Lutz and Wenning 2001). This search for an *inclusive conceptualization* of multidimensional inequalities (open to further amendments) argues for the embedded consideration of more than one category (Leiprecht and Lutz 2005) by emphasizing the analysis of the categories’ contradictory and conflicting relations to each other, instead of focusing on distinct and isolated realms of experience (see McClintock 1995). The amendment protagonists have been accused of arbitrariness (the ‘etc.’ reproach), and Alice Ludvig (2006), justifiably, considers this multiplicity as the ‘Achilles heel of intersectional approaches’ (ibid: 247); indeed, the question of which differences are the most salient needs an answer, one of which is my suggestion to consider ‘race, class, gender’ as minimum standard to which other categories can be added, depending on the context and the research problem (Leiprecht and Lutz 2005).

*Second*, an ongoing dispute concerns the *meaning of the categories ‘race’ and ‘class’* and the different conceptualizations in the US and in Europe (Ferree 2011; Knapp 2005). Many European researchers regard ‘ethnicity’ as a more appropriate category than ‘race’ because, after the Holocaust, ‘race’ is first and foremost connected with Nazi racial ideology and is considered historical baggage that cannot be used in a positive way. In German mainstream sociology, this has resulted in not only avoiding the term but dismissing ‘racism’ as an analytical category altogether. However, a growing number of researchers inspired by anti-racist and postcolonial theory claim that ‘ethnicity’ carries a similar baggage of hierarchization and - in connection with ‘culture’ – has become a powerful tool of (symbolic, political and social) exclusion (Lutz et al. 2011: 10 ff.). The question of whether the answer should be a reintroduction of ‘race’ into the European debate is the subject of heated discussions (see Crenshaw 2011; Lewis 2013). Likewise, researchers have warned against equating the meaning of ‘class’ in the US context with the European meaning of the term (Ferree 2011). All in all, these debates mirror a genuine effort to deal with the traveling of theory and its adaptation in multiple geo-political societies and settings.

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<sup>6</sup> See, for example, the current debate about the Roma people in Europe.

*Third*, the question has been asked: *What exactly is intersectionality?* A buzzword? A theory? A concept? A heuristic device? A method? An analytical tool for textual analysis? A living practice?

I will restrict myself to mentioning a few contributions to these debates. Kathy Davis, for example (2008, 2011), regards intersectionality as a theory that goes far beyond its appearance as ‘buzzword’, as it offers new potential and perspectives for the connectivity of a broad range of social science scholars’ approaches. Katharina Walgenbach (2010) goes even further by considering intersectionality as a *new paradigm* for the scientific community in that it offers a set of terms, theoretical interventions, premises, problem definitions and suggested solutions. Klinger and Knapp (2005) embrace intersectionality’s potential for the building of ‘grand’ theory, but argue that on the structural level the term is unable to identify how and by what means race, class and gender as separate categories are constituted as social categories. Moreover, they are concerned with intersectionalists’ tendency to let go of ‘gender’ as a master category (by declaring that no category is sacrosanct) because they fear a political backlash in academia: once gender is regarded as a decentered category it could easily be made superfluous. Others, like myself, consider the concept as a *heuristic device* that is particularly helpful in detecting the overlapping and co-construction of visible and – at first sight – invisible strands of inequality (Lutz 2001).

Recently, some intersectionalists (Cho et al. 2013) have argued that it is more important to ask what intersectionality *does* than to argue about what it is, pointing to the political legacy and goals of the founding ‘mothers’ in the US. Insisting that intersectionality is first and foremost a tool for making visible various strands of discrimination, these authors – together with many others - reject the now popular use of intersectionality in a managerial context where it is purely considered as an addition to gender mainstreaming.

A look at recent articles by Kimberlé Crenshaw shows that she is very unhappy with the development that has taken intersectionality far from its original meaning and considers the outcome an ‘avatar’ of what she originally intended - because of the disappearance of the ‘black woman’ at the center of her concept. At the same time, Crenshaw herself dropped ‘class’ – a category that she originally considered a key category – in her recent articles and visualizations of intersectionality (see her website).

Others, like Gudrun Axeli Knapp, utter their concern that the popularity of intersectionality seems to function as a Mantra in a “doxographic discourse”, as a “shorthand for the latest news in feminist theory” (ibid: 2005: 254). If this is more than a (cynic) remark it seems high

time to push ahead a critical investigation and ask whether those works that are presented as intersectional analysis are more than a catchword.

In my view intersectional analysis is indeed not only a challenge but really hard to do. According to my own assessment I have noticed that many of its users forget, in the words of Donna Haraway, to count to four:

“It has seemed very rare for feminist theory to hold race, sex/gender, and class analytically together – all the best intentions, hues of authors, and remarks in prefaces notwithstanding. In addition, there is as much reason for feminists to argue for a race/gender system as for a sex/gender system, and the two are not the same *kind* of analytical move. And, again, what happened to class? The evidence is building of a need for a theory of ‘difference’ whose geometries, paradigms, and logics break out of binaries, dialectics, and nature/culture models of any kind. Otherwise, threes will always reduce to twos, which quickly become lonely ones in the vanguard. And no one learns to count to four.” (Haraway 1991: 129)

This quote comes from Haraway's seminal book „Simians, Cyborgs and Women“ published in 1991; I find it an apt metaphor for the description of contemporary appropriation and resistance to intersectionality.

It is a truism that the intermediation of the categories is difficult to analyse, and that not only conceptualising them as interdependent, but as mutually constitutive and as ‘relations’ is even more complicated.

Following Edward Said's four stages of the travelling of theory, it seems that the appropriation of intersectionality is met by lots of criticism and objection from various sides and standpoints: there are those who never believed in taking it on board in the first place and those who complain about the way it is appropriated.

Candace West and Sarah Fenstermaker give a very suitable summary of this situation:

“... some of us have drawn on basic arithmetic, adding, subtracting, and dividing what we know about race and class to what we already know about gender. Some have relied on multiplication, seeming to calculate the effect of the whole from the combination of different parts. And others have employed geometry, drawing on images of ‘interlocking’ or ‘intersecting’ planes and axes. ... Those of us who (...) were able to ‘forget’ race and class in our analyses of gender relations may be more likely to ‘add’ these at a later point. By contrast, those of us who could never forget these dimensions of social life may be more likely to draw on complex geometrical imagery all along. Nonetheless, the existence of so many different approaches to the topic seems indicative of the difficulties all of us have experienced in coming to term with it.” (West and Fenstermaker 1996: 357)

There is a much more conciliatory conclusion than the ones I quoted in the beginning of this paper.

However, is it really sufficient to acknowledge the often heard line, that in science *you get what you see* – which means that even theoretical sensitivity or the ‘informed gaze’-analysis does not protect reflexive and critical feminist researchers against blindness in certain fields and spots?

If this were the case, then all self-declared ‘intersectionalists’ could go back to ‘business as usual’.

In my own work, as a micro-sociologist, I take issue with this position. In the following I try to demonstrate that intersectionality, understood as a method/methodology, is a challenge that teaches us to count to four or at least to three.

### **Intersectionality as methodology and method**

A hotly debated subject among ‘intersectionalists’ is the question of the level on which intersectionality – considered as a methodology - does its work, i.e. on the structural or the individual level.

Floya Anthias (1998) has suggested a multi-level analysis that works on four levels: a) the level of discrimination (experience); b) the actors’ level (inter-subjective praxis); c) the institutional level (institutional regimes); and the level of representation (symbolic and discursive) (see also the adaptation of this model by Winker and Degele 2011).

In an effort to make use of intersectionality’s potential as a method Kathy Davis (2014 forthcoming) makes some suggestions how researches can learn to ‘do’ their analysis. She recommends to start with intersectionality’s premise that gender as the theoretical mainstay of feminist research *needs to be complicated*, that it should never “be treated as a standalone category, but is always and everywhere related to other differences and mutually constituted by these differences”. She then proposes to *test this assumption* by identifying a text, a photograph or a TV program which seems to be ‘about gender’, then read, describe and explain it and in a second step ask Mary Matsuda’s famous ‘other question’.

“The way I try to understand the interconnection of all forms of subordination is through a method I call ‘ask the other question’. When I see something that looks racist, I ask ‘Where is the patriarchy in this?’ When I see something that looks sexist, I ask, ‘Where is the heterosexism in this?’ When I see something that looks homophobic, I ask, ‘Where are the class interests in this?’” (Matsuda 1991: 1189)

This may sound like an easy procedure, as it offers the tantalizing possibility of exposing multiple positions and power inequalities as they appear in any social practice, institutional arrangement, or cultural representation; however, it requires a rather complicated analytical process and, given the openness of the invisible, it is not clear when one can stop (Ludvig 2006).

Matsuda's question means that one needs to avoid the narrow focus on one category as much as the mentioning of multiple differences without taking them into account. Instead one needs to start with cross questioning the categories that come to the fore at first sight.

For qualitative researchers, like me, working with biographical interviews and applying the hermeneutical case study analysis, the 'other question' functions as a directive to focus on various levels of the analysis:

First, it is crucial to reflect on partiality - the *differences in situatedness* between the two people involved in the interview; these differences can include class, 'race'/ethnicity, age, next to gender and nationality, but also able-bodiedness or religion; here, it is not advisable to use the mantra of what Judith Butler (1990) calls the "embarrassed 'etc.'" (ibid: 143) clause, where the researcher presents her/himself as white, middle-class, heterosexual etc. and that's it. Instead, it is important to ask what differences are brought to the fore by the interviewee in her/his self-presentation because one can assume that these play a role in the self-concept, the vision of life. As I have shown in an article written together with Kathy Davis in 2005, it is very likely that the interviewee her/himself uses intersectionality in the construction of her/his life-story – as much as the interviewer does in her/his analysis. Thus: *intersectionality needs to be doubly explored, on the level of the narrator and on the one of the analyst.*

Second, it is important to notice that interviewees *highlight gender, 'race'/ethnicity or class and age* etc. at certain moments in their narration in connection with certain experiences or phases in their lives. The identity category that is used in the first place or most of all, is not necessarily the most important. Rather it may be the identity aspect that is repeatedly attacked and therefore defended. In our case analysis of the life story of Mamphela Ramphele, an anti-apartheids-fighter and icon of the Black Consciousness Movement, a famous and influential intellectual-academic in South Africa and a former managing director of the World Bank, we have identified conflicts of belonging; in her interview and her biography, Ramphele highlights those forms of belonging which were not conceded to her in the first place, those she was not entitled to occupy (see Lutz and Davis 2005).

Third, *intersectionality on the level of power relations* is a crucial subject of analysis. For example in the Ramphele-case self-presentation is/was embedded in the context of violent and

institutionalized racism. As a narrator, however, Ramphele denies that there is nothing more to be said. Instead she shows that in such a society positions are never determined or fixed and unchangeable, but that the respective form of belonging depending on context, locality and point in time can result in gains or losses of power (ibid). Her story is that of a fighter and an exceptional woman; against all attempts to push her aside into the role of a victim, she reclaims the competences of an independent actor, organizing her own life and thereby contributing to the creation of a collective history.

By distinguishing these three levels of intersectional analysis we identify the opportunities to operationalize the categories of intersectionality in a case study analysis. We shift attention from how structures of racism, class discrimination and sexism *determine* individuals' identities and practices to how individuals ongoingly and flexibly *negotiate* their multiple and converging identities in the context of everyday life. Introducing the term 'doing intersectionality' we explore how individuals creatively and often in surprising ways draw upon various aspects of their multiple identities as a resource to gain control over their lives. We show how 'gender' or 'race' are invariably linked to structures of domination, can also mobilize or deconstruct disempowering discourses, even undermine and transform oppressive practices. We thereby show that individuals are not always and in every situation multiply vulnerable, but they develop strategies of resistance by drawing on multiple identities.

Nancy Fraser gives a good summary of this approach:

“Rather, individuals are nodes of convergence for multiple, cross-cutting axes of subordination. Frequently disadvantaged along some axes and simultaneously advantaged along others, they wage for recognition in modern regimes.” (Fraser 2003: 57)

Here the stress is on the understanding of individuals as not only dominated by oppression in all fields of life but also as people who – under certain circumstances – can make use of privileged aspects of identity.

This conceptualisation of intersectionality is also used in the construction of the European Union's anti-discrimination law – see the picture gallery from “Tackling multiple discrimination. Practices, policies and laws” (The European Commission 2007). This is an illustration of an understanding of identities as simultaneously merging advantaged and disadvantaged social positioning.

## Challenges and future lines of investigation

It is now evident that intersectionality has long left the field of gender studies; it has been imported by sociology, education, anthropology, psychology, political sciences, law and literary studies, health studies and social work and many other (sub)disciplines dealing with social inequalities and identities. A myriad of divisions among intersectionalists have already been mentioned. In this final part I want to expand on other fields of application.

Agreeing with those critics who want to see intersectionality embedded in the broader theoretical frame of inequality research, I argue for the use of theoretical tools that go beyond a pure assessment of the overlap and co-construction of categories of difference. But, not all categories of difference are equally salient; moreover, their impact on social positioning can be extremely dissimilar. It is, therefore, important to investigate diversity in the context of power relations and analyze in detail *which* of all possible differential facets makes the difference, creates unequal identities. The sociological theory of social stratification may be helpful here. Social stratification “relates to the differential hierarchical locations of individuals and groupings of people on society’s grids of power” (Yuval-Davis 2011: 162). The reduction of most social stratification theories being configured within the container of the nation state needs to be overcome by consideration of the continually shifting ‘orders of stratification’ on the global and the regional as well as on the national and the local level, and we should likewise “reject the naturalisation of any constructions of social divisions, and challenge the prioritisation of any of them, such as class and gender” (ibid: 166).

In her exemplification of such an approach Nira Yuval-Davis writes: “I find it problematic, for instance, that the construction of ‘black woman’ is automatically assumed, unless otherwise specified, to be that of a minority black woman living in white Western societies. The majority of black women in today’s world are black women in black societies. This has major implications for a global intersectional stratification analysis” (ibid: 162). Implicit in this statement is the conviction that debates about intersectionality and social inequalities can no longer reduce the analysis of gender, class and race to oppression and discrimination but need to consider the ‘privileged’ positionings within and between them – a position that is deeply contested, as many intersectionality scholars implicit and explicitly cherish a master category of oppression (see above).

Another debate that is being conducted is the search for a more adequate metaphor. Many criticize ‘intersection’ as a too rigid visualization, one that ignores the fact that stratification is better depicted as a matter of relations rather than categories. Whether this can be Nina

Lykke's botanical image of a 'rhizome', underground plant stems that move horizontally in all directions and bear both roots and shoots (Lykke 2011: 211), or her earlier idea of a nodal point, or something completely different, is still an open question.



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