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# Intersectionality Genealogy Revisited: From Radical Writings by Women of Color to Radical Writings for Transformation

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### Introduction

Intersectionality, as the celebration and recognition of differences, is finally becoming an interdisciplinary buzzword increasingly used both as an "analytical framework" to describe diversity in gender identities and as "a complex of social practices" (Hancock 2016: 7). Contemporary claims of intersectionality acknowledge power dynamics at the core of social practices and use it to explain experiences of inequality and disparate access to social resources. Not only as a key concept in Women's/ Gender Studies it has been adopted into many other disciplines (such as history, political science, geography, philosophy, cultural and postcolonial studies) and even in decision-making processes. Indeed, UN Commission on Human Rights officially recognized "the importance of examining the intersection of multiple forms of discrimination, including their root causes from a gender perspective" (Resolution E/CN.4/2002/L. 59 Cited in Nira Yuval-Davis, 2006: 194). Moreover, institutions such as the European Association for International Education- EAIE<sup>1</sup> embraces in his Spring 2018 edition intersectional analyses in Higher Education as the necessary pre-condition to non-hierarchical internationalization encounters. Its scope has become so inclusive that it identifies not just disadvantaged but also advantaged social positions; that is, not only the experience of exclusion but also that of privilege, voice and agency. Furthermore, on the realization that depending on the circumstances a person or group might be disadvantaged in one social context but advantaged in other, a growing trend

is adopting a more balanced view on processes of marginalization and privileging. As a result, a more nuanced perspective on visibility has evolved, one which is no longer seen as an asset in its own right but the possibility of a personal choice; that is, at a particular time and in a specific social location, (in)visibility may lead to beneficial societal positions.

This is a major breakthrough compared to the early stages of intersectionality where invisibility was not only perceived as a negative social condition but it became the driving force of the subversion of an essentialist, culturally-neutral gender. This force, mostly credited to black feminists in the US since 1980s, was nevertheless made up of heterogeneous voices, women of color voices, not just black ones. This is an important fact that tends to be overlooked in contemporary historical revisionisms (Hancock 2016; Berger, and Guidroz 2009). To these regards, even though we acknowledge that the term was officially coined by a black feminist lawyer, Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, we strongly argue that its conceptual roots can be traced back to the XIX century and its theoretical roots are found in the literary and cultural women of color movement in the US, which took off in 1981 with the publication of the first women of color anthology called *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (Moraga and Anzaldúa 1981;1983). Through its pages, women of color vindications of invisibility, and their reluctance to see themselves as a part of a sisterhood that did not extend beyond “racial” and class boundaries made categories of difference so visible that they could no longer be ignored by mainstream gender theory, thus planting the seeds for intersectionality’s future articulation and reception.

Questioning therefore recurrent references to black feminisms as the origins of intersectionality, we would like to contribute to the growing body of knowledge that traces its genealogy in an Anglo-European context by questioning its strong associations with black feminisms in the US. In fact, we not only argue that expanding its historical scope, its conceptual roots go all the way back to the XIX century and the beginnings of the women’s/suffragist movement in the US. Mostly, we would like to make the case that it is thanks to its progressive dis-association with black feminisms that intersectionality was able to become inclusive and loose its restrictive connections to identity politics vindications. As we will see, by providing a middle ground for the post-modern/post-structural divide that took place in the 90s, a new sensibility would finally crown intersectionality as an inclusive concept and theory with the potential to provide a nodal point among conflicting cultural and literary movements, not just an indicator of discrimination and exclusion.

## Conceptual Origins-Historical Roots

Searching for the first documented reference to intersectional claims, Sojourner Truth, is generally agreed to be the first recorded evidence of a contestative gender. A runaway slave, became an emblematic figure of the anti-abolitionist movement especially after publicly challenging ‘white’ suffragettes to respond to what extent they could accommodate the experience of slavery and being black into their condition of being a woman. In her speech, she defiantly asked “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?” (Avtar Brahans Ann Phoenix 2004:77)

Giving voice to the invisibility of slaves in a colonial US, with the question of “Ain’t I a Woman?” (Sojourner Truth, 1985: 252) Sojourner Truth deconstructed prevailing ideas of ‘womanhood’ by showing how suffragettes’ claims of female subordination and exclusion were only particular to white, middle and upper class women. Ironically, even though many suffragette leaders such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony started off as anti-slavery advocates, as the movement progressed, the abolition of slavery remained a secondary cause and relationships of unequal power between whites and blacks were not discussed nor reflected in the foundational manifestos of Anglo-European feminist movement such as the *Declaration of Sentiments* (1848). On the contrary, her co-eternal suffragette leaders completely ignored Sojourner Truth’s claims and never publicly acknowledged her figure. Regardless the fact that she was a well-recognized anti-slavery advocate, she was considered peripheral by the leaders of the suffragette/ women’s movement. (Kum-Kum Bhavnani and Meg Coulson 2003: 74)

To trace intersectionality genealogical footsteps is therefore to question the reasons why these women leaders were not interested in the coalescing relationship of social and cultural categories of oppression and a new mode of oppositional consciousness articulated by the subordinated, marginalized or colonized subjects that Sojourner Truth was representing. And that takes us back to the Enlightenment times, American and the French Revolutions and the creation of modern citizenship via the *social contract*.

“I think, therefore, I exist”, said Descartes, and his postulates infused a new ‘reason’ on modern individuals, which revolted against the holy nature of absolute powers and its inquisitive history. ‘Liberty, Equality and Fraternity’ emerged as the new emblems of enlightenment reasoning. Thinkers such as Locke or Rousseau became the spokesmen of a new philosophical and political era: the bonding of modern citizens through social contract. However, Locke or Rousseau’s conception of citizenship was ingrained in a long history of west-

ern philosophical and religious tradition that considered women inferior to men and turned a blind eye to colonization and slavery. As an illustration to this point, in *Emilio, The Education*, Rousseau sculpts Emilio as the modern citizen, and Sofia, as his subjugated, virtuous and childish wife. Throughout his postulates, a naturalized sexual difference separates Emilio from Sofia and the existence of innate characteristics makes women and men indisputably different:

Woman and man are made for one another, but their mutual dependency it is not equal. Men depend on women desires; women depend on men because of their desires and their needs. We would survive more easily without them than they would without us. (cited in Schwartz 1984: 84)

Women's inferiority and subordination to men is therefore reasoned throughout *Emilio* on the basis that their duty is to obey and "to bear a husband's wrongs without complaining" (Ibid.), thus establishing a line of continuity with previous western andocentric and sexist traditions. A biological determinism not only accounts for Sofia's status as second-class citizens and justifies their sexual and spiritual subjugation but becomes the necessary condition for upper and middle-class Emilios to achieve active participation in the public realm and thus become full citizens (see Amorós 1985, 2005; Valcárcel 1998). In speaking of modern citizens, he completely ignores the context of the colonies and slavery therefore employing an imperialistic myopia that is found at the core of the discourse of social contract, liberty and fraternity. This imperialistic assertion is outlined and officially depicted in both the *Declaration of Independence of United States* (1776) and the *French Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen* (1789). Depersonalizing social interactions, "unsuitable citizens" (women, native-Americans or African slaves) are insisted to belong to the private sphere, the domestic realm, and as a result had no public voice. This is illustrated in Article 1 of both declarations: "Men are born and remain free and equal in rights. Social distinctions may be founded only upon the general good."

Incensed by males' preferential treatment and women's exclusion from citizenship, in France, two years after the *Declaration of the Right of Men* was signed, Olympia de Gouges (real name Marie Goze) wrote *The Declaration of the Rights of Woman* where she denounces a patriarchal logic that supported a conception of citizenship based on universal rights and duties but nevertheless, was depriving women of any political or social power. In fact, Olympia was giving voice to a story of betrayal, injustice and wrong-doings from part of her male comrades. Historically documented, women fought alongside men in the frontlines of the French Revolution. And Olympia was one of them. Together, women and men raised in arms to decapitate absolutist powers but when the French Revolution was over, not only were they excluded from citizenship from their male comrades, they were historically silenced and never

given the credit and recognition for the crucial role they played in the pursuit of Liberty and Freedom (Puleo 1993).

Paraphrasing her male counterparts, Olympia's defending tactic was to appeal towards the same reason of equality and liberty with the intention to downplay and criticize its male-biased interests and illegitimate purposes. And even though she did make reference to how the situation of slaves was equal to women's discrimination ironically, in article 1 of her Declaration, she replicates the same colonial logic and speaks on behalf a 'universal woman'. As she states: "Article 1: Women are born and remain free and equal in rights. Social distinctions may be founded only upon the general good." In a colonial context, this affirmation signals the ethnocentric limitations of what it can be claimed to be Sofia's imperialist complicity (Sotelo 2012); in addition, it reveals the contradictions inherent in future feminist manifestos since her categorization of 'woman/women' comes from the same essentialist standpoint than the universal generic 'man/men' that inhabits no specific or particular historical, economical or political context.

Equally suggestive is Mary Wollstonecraft *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), published a year later. Calling into question sexist traditions, she directly attacks Rousseau for legitimizing the female sex as intellectual inferior. "Many ingenious arguments have been brought forward to prove" she defies: "that the two sexes, in the acquirement of virtue, ought to aim at attaining a very different character; or, to speak explicitly, women are not allowed to have sufficient strength of mind to acquire what really deserves the name of virtue." ([1891]; 2006: 9)

Her repudiation, nevertheless, also bore the mark of an essentialist gender, forgetting that 'the feminine condition' (Sapiro 1992:323) could not be homogenized in a colonial context. This colonial invisibility of gender essentialism is still present a century later, in the foundational writing of US Women's Movement, *The Declaration of Rights and Sentiments* (1848) which takes after the *Declaration of Independence*: "We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men and women are created equal; [...] with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." (Cady and Anthony, 1889: 70, emphasis added) Without any intention of underestimating how the political subject of the Anglo-European feminism led a rebellion of values and systems of beliefs artificially designed and culturally imposed to support patriarchies, it is equally crucial to recognize how the 'woman of a domineering ethnic group', through a cultural complicity, in the naturalizing process of differences among women, did discursively reproduce colonizing cultural patterns, which are clearly depicted in the reductionist nature of female oppression made reduced into a mere question of gender, where the only nuance that the difference acquires is

that of the sexual difference in public vs. private theorizing framework.

As it can be observed, “*all men and women are created equal*”, in the same line than Olympia de Gouges or Wollstonecraft, what it stands for, is an extension of male’s economic, legal and political rights to women without ever taking into account the context of the colonies and slavery; that is, no critical insight is explicitly layered out into the conditions of women who lived in the outlaw of social structures.

As we can see, the vision of equality which these first feminists were claiming, was faithfully recreating the same sexist and patriarchal logic to which they were revolting against since they were discursively colonizing the material and historical heterogeneity of the lives of women, producing a ‘collective feminist subject’ that had the mark of the authoritative voice of Western humanist speech (Mohanty 1991: 53). Most importantly, it is precisely during this historical period when the naturalization of cultural differences within the solely category of ‘sexual difference’ not only becomes the bases of exclusion/subordination of women within an essentialist gender but mostly, it signals the birth of a very specific feminist consciousness and agency: western, middle-class biased (Aída and Suárez 2008: 45)

### The Birth of a Subversive Gender in 1970s

A hundred years leap in time, slavery abolished either in Europe and in the U.S, we find the well-known British writer Virginia Woolf giving voice in *The Three Gineas* to a displaced ‘universal womanhood’ affirming that she did not belong to any country, but to all simultaneously (1938: 81). Succeeding in facing patriarchal oppression, the analytical horizons of gender nonetheless continued to be an ‘outsider’ status. Thus, *A Room for One’s One* (1945) that Woolf was claiming for ‘the women’ was leaving Sojourner Truth question’s unanswered: how it is possible that some women had the right to claim their own space while others didn’t have the right to have a voice?

From late 1940s all the way to 1970s, mainstream foundational texts credited to contribute to the beginning of the ‘second feminist wave’ in the US, continued to replicate the same essentialist gender model. This can be observed in *The Second Sex* written by the French philosopher Simone de Beauvoir and published in 1949, a book that opened the path to the second feminist wave (Nicholson 1997). Her famous phrase, “one woman is not born a woman but she becomes a woman” (63) reinforced ‘sex’ as the ‘big difference’ of women and crowned the paradigm sex vs gender as one of the basic premises of feminist thought to explain how ‘gender’ is not the result of the innate characteristics attributed to the female sex, but nevertheless, is socially and culturally constructed. The same occurs in *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) where

Betty Friedan explores “the problem that has no name” linked to the lack of happiness and fulfilment of women in the 1950s and early 1960s in the US. Her analysis and focus on the plight of middle-class white women invariably carries the mark of a feminine essentialist gender. In addition, when in 1970 Kate Millet stated in *Sexual Politics* that “the personal is the political” her claim still weaves and renders the different experiences of less privileged women in the US invisible. And so it did Robin Morgan’s utopian anthology *Sisterhood is Powerful* (1970) which initially foregrounded a sense of affinity across cultural lines. Imbued with gender essentialist analyses, once again cultural and social differences among women are normalized in favour of a dominant norm. (Nicholson 1990: 261)

Fed up with a long history of invisibilization and restricted emphasis on the sexual difference between women and men, black Feminists in the US first raised their voices to denounce the lack of colonial legacy in the intersections surrounding gender. In “Double Jeopardy: To be Black and Female” Frances Beale brings into light the historical recognition that a black woman in America could justly be described as the ‘slave of a slave’. Thus, as she elucidates, the category of “race” finds its roots in a capitalist system:

In attempting to analyze the situation of the black woman in America, one crashes abruptly into a solid wall of grave misconceptions, outright distortions of fact and defensive attitudes on the part of many. The system of capitalism under which we all live, has attempted by many devious ways and means to destroy the humanity of all people, and particularly the humanity of black people. (1970: 2-3)

Echoing a long history of colonial unsettled issues, she thus emphasized the imperative to redirect attention towards racism as a much stronger oppression than sexism. Two years later, in 1972 Gerda Lerner published *Black Women in White America* and a year later Beverly Hawkins counteracts Simone de Beauvoir with *Women is not Just a Female* (1973) aimed at making visible “race” as an oppressive social category on the basis that minority groups shared a unique history in America “since they’ve been exploited, abused, dehumanized, and killed because of the color of their skin.” (1973: 3) The following year, the “Black Feminist Statement” was proclaimed by the Combahee River Collective. Revolting against gender intersections that entice class divisions, the fight towards imperializing nature of hegemonic universals gives voice to the invisibles and becomes itself their force:

We are actively committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual and class oppression and see as our particular task the development of integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that the *major systems of oppression are interlocking*. The synthesis of these oppressions creates the conditions of our lives. (Moraga and Anzaldúa 1981: 210; emphasis added)

### Women of Color United in the 1980s

As we can see, Black Feminists were leading the claims towards intersectional identities bringing awareness to interlocking categories of identity. However, they were not the only ones. As early as 1972 Marta Cotera, a prominent figure in the Chicana movement accused Anglo women of a “basic racism of the mind” (1977: 18) challenging them to respond if “the women’s movement was a move to place just another layer of racist Anglo dominance over minority peoples?” (18). Anna Nieto Gómez, Consuelo also accused Anglo-women of being the perpetrators of “sexual racism”; “Sexist racism, she stated, “is manifested by those who consider and recognize only the needs of the single, Anglo and middle class women” (1974: 43) In the same vein, Consuelo Nieto fervent defended that “for some it is sufficient to say, “I am woman.” for me it must be, “I am Chicana” (1974: 38). On this account, Marta Cotera made very clear that:

No one can deny that we are all women, but neither can we deny that we are not The same; that many of us have not shared in the gains made in the name of “Woman” in this country. Chicana share with the Blacks and other visible minority women many gaps in benefits enjoyed as a matter of course by white women (Garcia, 1997: 216)

The following year coloring Chicana’s invisibility and oppression, Anita Sarah Duarte spoke from the vision and the pain of “The Brown Women” (1975):

The Brown Woman  
 She wonders what the hell is meant  
 When the white women say “we’re all alike”  
 [...]
   
 Today the Brown women declare,  
 “No, we are not alike, you the white women  
 Have never felt the pain that we have  
 Endured and suffered. You the white women  
 Have never been discriminated as we have,  
 You the white women have never been  
 Denied  
 What we the Brown have known that we  
 Should never seek.  
 We the Brown women say,  
 “Yes, Unite, Sisters, Unite!”  
 But damn the white woman if  
 She discriminates  
 Against our race, and damn the  
 White woman if she thinks we will  
 Discriminate our race,

[...]
   
 Do not, we do not nor shall we ever accept  
 Racism to be a friend to you,  
 to be your sister. (cited in Garcia 1997: 194-5)

Driven by the need to “move the anger out” Asian Americans also had strong reservations regarding their white sisters. Like blacks and chicanas, they believed that white women and women of color came to feminism under profoundly different circumstances and with dissimilar issues in mind. (Cheng 1984 and Chow 1987) Summarizing the spirit of clashing views, Nellie Wong wrote:

It is easy, is it not,  
 To move the anger out,  
 From self expression to action,  
 From individuality to community  
 (*Chicanas in the 80s: Unsettled Issues* cited in Moreno 1980: 92)

Envisioning a new platform of dialogue in which all women of color voices could critically interact through agender that intersects with ethnic, social, class lines in April 1979, the chicanas Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherrie Moraga, co-editors of *This Bridge Called My Back: Radical Writings by Women of Color* sent a soliciting letter:

We want to express to all women – especially to white middle-class women – the experiences which divide us as feminists; we want to examine incidents of intolerance, prejudice and *denial of differences* within the feminist movement (Moraga and Anzaldúa 1981: Iii; emphasis added)

For women of color, intersectional approaches to gender meant the urgent need “to speak directly to the specific issues that separate us” (Moraga and Anzaldúa 1983:105). In the recognition of a new form of historical consciousness, there is an urgency “to name and color the painful ignorance” which drives division (xvii). Thus, acknowledging complexity and multiplicity, Rosario Morales stresses the fact that some of them “were brought here centuries ago as slaves, others had our land of birthright taken away from us, some of us are the daughters and granddaughters of immigrants, others of us are still newly immigrated to the U.S”. (105) Moreover, Pat Parker argues that gender revolution implies the interlocking awareness that oppression “is not simply a question of nationality but that poor and working-class people are oppressed throughout the world by imperialist powers”. (240) In what it can be argued to be the preliminary stages of an incipient intersectional theory, in “I am what I am”, Rosalio Morales describes herself as an unfolding identity, a multi-layered gender which does not repudiate its complexity but holds together a unity in many levels:

I am what I am and I am US American I haven’t wanted to say it because if  
 I did you’d take the Puerto Rican but now I say go to Hell I am what I am

and you can't take it away with all the words  
 And sneers at your command  
 I am what I am I am Puerto Rican I am US American I am New York  
 Manhattan and the Bronx... I'm Not hiding under no scoop... I am Boricuaas  
 Boricuaas come from the Isle of Manhattan. (14)

This interectional identity comes from a deep place that Moraga describes as the "Theory of the Flesh" to depict how gender has plural meanings that are both context specific and enfolded in one's identity; "the physical realities of our lives", she argues, "- our skin color, the land or concrete we grew up on, our sexual longings - all fuse to create a politic out of out necessity". In an attempt to make visible these categories she brought attention to the fact that:

We are the colored in a white feminist movement. We are the feminists among the people of our culture. We are often the lesbians among the straight. We do this bridging by naming ourselves and telling our stories with our own words. (1983: 217)

Encoding a theory that highlights the simultaneity of oppressions, Barbara Smith questions if *All the Women are White, All the Blacks are Male and Some of Us are Brave* (1984) and Audre Lorde depicts on her "Open letter to Mary Daly" that "to imply that all women suffer the same oppression simply because we are women, is to ignore how those tools are used by women without awareness against each other". (Moraga and Anzaldúa 1983: 95)

Asking for new stories, new tactics and new visions, Gloria Anzaldúa, develops a more creative insight; one that would open the path towards the disassociation with radical identity politics "Our strength lies in shifting perspectives", she explains, "in our capacity to shift, in our "seeing through" the membrane of the past superimposed on the present" (1983 xxvii; her commas). Concretely, Anzaldúa speaks of interlocking vectors of signification encompassing the prospects of an all-inclusive sisterhood.

Not only praising its attention to differences among women, *This Bridge* sought to magnify alterations in order to make visible gender's interlocking social categories. At its strongest and most provocative, however, *This Bridge* does not simply emphasize difference. Rather, it redefines difference in potentially transformative ways. By using difference as a catalyst for personal and social change, "shifting perspectives" implied a force able to make visible how the nature of their social inequality was multi-dimensional. (Cheng 1984; Chow 1987; Hooks 1981)

### Intersectionality and Identity Politics in the late 1980s

In 1987, Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* brilliantly pointed out to interdependent epistemologies that move beyond self-enclosed

identities. Through mestiza alliances, gender develops a new value system with the ability to blur boundaries, thus consolidating hybridity and complexity as defining features of intersectional identities. She states:

Because I, a *mestiza*, continually walk out of one culture  
 and into another:  
 because I am in all cultures at the same time,  
*alma entre dos mundos, tres, cuatro*  
*me zumba la cabeza con lo contradictorio.*  
*Estoy norteada con todas las voces que me hablan simultáneamente* (99)

Embracing simultaneity in the "dos, tres, cuatromundos in the Borderlands", intersectionality becomes a new psychic uncharted territory longing to be explored. The following year, Deborah King in her essay "Multiple Jeopardy, Multiple Consciousness: The Context of a Black Feminist Ideology" (1988), articulates the theory of "triple oppression" referring to the categories of ethnicity, class, and sexuality in the specific reality of women of color's concrete reality. The concept was calling for situating knowledges, nevertheless, 'triple' was too constraining and restricting in itself since it didn't allow for multiple re-conceptualizations of social categories.

From a genealogical point of view, as we have seen, by the end of 1980s, an increasing emphasis on 'situating experience' and articulating interlocking visions of gender was craving for a new "value system" to stretching gender theorizing in new directions. And it is in this receptive scenario that the term intersectionality is officially coined in 1989 by Kimberlé Crenshaw. In "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Anti-discrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics" (1989), she describes '*intersectionality*' as tool for highlighting how the categories of 'race' and 'gender' are mutually interconnected in the daily struggles and experiences of women of color. In the years to come, she would further develop the distinction between structural and political intersectionality, nuanced in "Beyond Racism and Misogyny" (1993) as the mechanisms by which power dynamics could be either positional (structural) or discursive (political). According to her view, then, structural intersectionality is concerned:

With the ways in which the location of women of color at the intersection of race and gender makes our actual experience of domestic violence, rape and remedial reform qualitatively different from that of white women. (1993:3)

As we can see, she identifies with women of color, not just black feminism, giving recognition to their heritage and movement. Nevertheless, highlighting the convergence between the structural and political dimension of intersectionality, the African American Patricia Hill-Collins in *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment* (1991) intro-

duces “the matrix of oppression” as the mechanism that informs a multifaceted gender from the standpoint of black feminism. Moreover, “matrix” points at the growing vision of Intersectionality as a complex of social practices. Collins informs:

Black feminist thought sees these distinctive systems of oppression as being part of one overarching structure of domination. Viewing relation of domination for any given socio-historical context as being structured via a system of interlocking race, class and gender oppression expands the focus of analysis from merely describing the similarities and differences, distinguishing these systems of oppression and focuses greater attention on how they interconnect. (226)

In this process of rethinking changeability, the problem with intersectional analysis was that, even though it foregrounded analytical categories which addressed cross-cultural, cross-national differences among women, the magnified emphasis on the experiences of women of color, diminish its inclusive potentiality. All these factors contributed to a clouded reception in mainstream gender theory in the decade of 1990s. To be sure, as we will see, the exclusive nature of identity politics categories such as ‘black-women of color’ would be therefore attacked by post-structuralist and postmodern feminists on the grounds that reproduced a discourse of division and separation among women.

### Posmodernist-Postructuralist Divide in the 90s

1960s and 1970s, the politicization of marginality and the des-identification of identity became a hallmark of critical western thought. Drawing strongly on the methodologies of Marxism, psychoanalysis, and linguistic structuralistic theories, gender theories had empathized with their struggles against the grand narratives of the Western enlightenment and modernity as much as with their focus on the de-articulation of a universal subject; a ‘post-modern condition’ situated in the context of the radical changes in social, economic and political structures brought about the intensification and globalization of capital. Within these rapid changing scenarios of meaning, the transformation in communications led by computer technology and cybernetics turned ‘globalization forces’ into ‘super-structural elements’ (Frankfurt School Marxists) of a new dispersed, flexible identity and subjectivity (Andermahr, Lovell and Wolkowitz 1997:206). Postmodern feminists therefore combined a criticism to an endocentric subject of modernity with an emphasis on partial, fragmented identities mediated by highly technological and virtual scenarios. Their focus on the collapse of boundaries and fixed categories of meaning would be a source of engagement with women of color, for whom the vexed concept of gender and its intersectional “new value system” (Anzaldúa 1987:103) was

now foregrounding of a recognition that commanded the capacity to ‘blur boundaries’ (mestiza consciousness). Postmodern emphasis on ‘fragmentated identities’ nonetheless, would distance themselves from women of color imperative to attend to multiplicity as a whole, not as a fragmentation. In turn, women of color demanded the recognition of multiplicity and hybridity, but not fragmentation.

In this academic scenario, a range of post-structuralist feminist theorists, influenced to various degrees by Derrida, Foucault and Lacan, sought to focalized the center of the analysis to the exploration of subjectivity as an ‘engendered performance’ (Weedon 2003: 26). RosiBradotti, for example, approaches the body as an-interface, a threshold a field of intersecting the material and symbolic forces. “The body is the surface where multiple codes (race, sex, class, age and so on) are inscribed”. (1998: 206) In the same line, for Teresa de Lauretis, gender is semiotic; is representation. Drawing on Althusser’s theories on ‘ideological state apparatuses’ (‘no one exists outside ideology’) for her, the construction of gender implies the realization that gender is at the same time “*the product and the process*” specifies de Lauretis “*of both representation and self-representation*”. (9; her emphasis)

However, it will be Butler “performative gender” (1990) which would temporally divert intersectional identities as a potential theory or method. Her strategic response would be to renegade of the concept of ‘subject’ in favour of a plurality of contingent, historically specific, power-laden discursive regimes that construct various ‘subject positions’ from which ‘agency’ (capacity for action) is possible. According to her view then, gender compromises: “the discursive/cultural means by which “sexed nature” or “natural sexes” is produced and established as “pre-discursive” prior to culture; a politically neutral surface *on which* culture acts.” (1995: 46, emphasis in the original)

That is, gender is a set of socio-cultural acts that individuals perform, and identity categories become “a site of permanent openness and resignifiability”. (52) This explains her reaction against ‘women of color’ as a totalizing identity politics category, an oppressive paradigm that needed to be questioned. In *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (1993) she further elucidates how the very paradox of subjectivation (*assujétissement*) “is precisely that the subject who would resist such norms is itself enabled, if not produced, by such norms. Although this constitutive constraint does not foreclose the possibility of agency, it does locate agency as a reiterative or rearticulatory practice, immanent power and not a relation to external opposition to power.” (15)

Thus, a performative agency and an (un)mediated voice burst into feminist theory to complement the intersectional awareness of social categories. However, the most controversial part of Butler’s view was that if identity was

oppressive, then, social liberation would depend on the freeing from normalizing categories of identity; that is, eliminating categories all together, something that women of color could not afford to do. Indeed, to Judith Butler's claim that identity is oppressive and therefore empowerment comes from the freeing of this identity, women of color replied that "yeah, it's easy to give up identity, when you've got one". (Hooks, 1990: 28) Adding on to this, theorist Chandra T. Mohanty while analyzing the problematic effects of the post-modern critique of essentialist notions of gender identity, she foregrounds the dangers implied in the dissolution of the category of 'race' since it is only "at the expense of recognition of racism". (1992: 75)

Differing however in their methodological approaches, for poststructuralists and postmodern feminists their main condemnation towards women of color intersectional identities was directed towards an identity politics model ('women of color' as a category of collective identity) which recreated a tendency to articulate essentializing discourses (see Pattynama & Phoenix 2006: 187) and was thus reasserting the very dualisms they were trying to undo.

On the contrary, Women of Color argued identity politics allowed for the recognition of another's specificity and that 'women of color- category' had become both an identity and a location at the margins of hegemonic gender theory. Indeed, women of color claim that differences between women could not be treated as abstract categories but rather as embedded in the individual personal relationship with a located experience. They agreed to 'blur boundaries' as long as they foregrounded its accountability for the power dynamics implied in its overlapping nature and its specific locations, since the relation of experience to discourse is what they believed to be at issue in the definition of intersectional identities.

Amid these methodological clashes, by late 90s, the emphasis on intersectional gender continued to be relegated in favor of the linguistic turn of the time. Additionally, due to the power dynamics operating within the academy, the critical insights by women of color/ third world feminism in the US remained to be considered second-class theory by 'mainstream scholars'. Postmodern and post-structuralist thinking governed academic circles and women's studies departments. As a result, as we will see in the following section, 'intersectionality' would be temporarily emptied out of its potentiality and its restricted emphasis on 'women of color experiences' would conceal its inclusive potential.

As a response to the contested nature of an intersectional approach strongly affected by its association with radical identity politics, a remarkable twist occurred in the latest edition of *This Bridge: This Bridge We Call Home*, in which *radical writings by women of color* turn into and become *radical writings for transfor-*

*mation* (Anzaldúa and Keating 2002). In its very title this transformation is put forward: the bridge made up by joining backs (1981, 1983) had become a home for many different voices (2002). In the Foreword "After Bridge: Technologies of Crossing" Gloria Anzaldúa strongly affirmed:

It questions the terms *white and women of color* by showing that whiteness may not apply to all whites, as some possess women-of-color consciousness, just as some women-of-color bear white consciousness [...] intends to change notions of identity, viewing it as a more complex system covering a larger terrain, and demonstrating that the politics of exclusion based on traditional categories diminishes our humanness. (2)

As we can see, boundaries are torn and apart and conventional identity categories such as whites-women of color are now "obsolete", "outworn", "inaccurate". (ibid) Having confronted criticism towards an exclusive theoretical focus on women of color's experiences of subordination, this anthology was intended to demonstrate a radical transformation towards the understanding of differences. In this process, an intersectional mindset becomes a source of radical connectivity. "This Bridge we call home is our attempt to continue the dialogue, rethink the old ideas, and germinate new theories" Anzaldúa explains (ibid); "We stand at a major threshold in the extension of consciousness", she affirms "of systematic change across of fields of knowledge. The binaries of color/white, female/male, mind/body are collapsing". (Ibid)

No longer delimited to restraining identifications with women of color's experiences, intersectionality finally demands inclusiveness to move into a new era of "post-identity politics" (see Verloo 2006). This is clearly depicted in Renée Bredin's analysis when she affirms: "We have come so far from the bridge...only to find that the way home is a return across that same bridge". (330) In these words, a new sensitivity towards transformation acknowledges commonalities and contains difference: identity labels only spilt, they do not heal.

By enhancing therefore moves toward a more inclusive theory that continually reinvents universal claims by particularizing their meaning, intersectionality offers a critical alternative to identity politics since it calls into question any homogenized or essentialized group-identity category such as 'women of color', or 'whites'. In the realization that identity politics only reinforces divisions, openness and whole-ness are embraced as the healing properties of new intersectional theories. In this process of dis-association from radical writings of blacks-women of color to radical writings for transformation, a new stage for intersectionality was bound, to some degree, to entail a new response within the academia.

### Current Reception of Intersectionality: Inclusiveness, (In)visibility and Agency

After the publication of *This Bridge We Call Home* in the first decade of the 21st century, intersectionality progressively disassociates with the previous strong focus on black-women of color experiences. In doing so, it constructively grows out of the richness of postmodern-poststructural interaction of the 1990s becoming in itself a bridge between methodological clashes in the Anglo-European academia. Indeed, intersectionality turns into a more eclectic and inclusive gender identity formula that expands over the radical writings of blacks and women of color to accommodate all-inclusive writings for transformation. It does so by embracing the multiple codes that poststructuralists were claiming with postmodern capacity to blur boundaries. And in turn, these positions enriched intersectionality with a performative dimension in which voice an agency account for much of its current success. In addition, intersectional identities offer an alternative to identity politics by calling into question any essentialist approach to “women of color” or “whites”.

As a result, through this process of searching for whole-ness and inviting deconstruction, an emerging “intersectional approach” (see Berger and Guidroz 2009) is currently recognized and celebrated as the on-going interaction of multiple identities and experiences of exclusion, subordination and privilege (Davis, 2008:67) which “produce different kinds of social inequalities and unjust social relations” (Lykee 2010: 50). As Kathy Davis points out, the new intersectional gaze matches perfectly with the postmodernist project of multiple and dislocated identities and its mission of deconstructing normative, totalizing and foundationalist categories. (2008: 71) In the same vein, Brah and Phoenix argue that intersectionality has unexpectedly provided a way to overcome incompatibilities between women of color’s theory and post/modern, post-structuralist feminism (2004: 82) since not only commits itself to make visible the material consequences of social and cultural categories of identity it applies however a methodology compatible with the deconstruction of these categories, the rejection of hegemonic universalism and the investigation of dynamics of power.

The power of intersectionality then, relays on the fact that it has become a new inter-disciplinary dynamic site of knowledge that tackles unequal social relations of power, both privileging and/or marginalization, in gender identity formation processes. It also reminds us of our capacity for action (agency) and our right to choose our (in) visibility in various societal positions. Furthermore, it challenges conventional assumptions of inclusivity and wholeness while inviting us to keep our eyes open on the challenge of meeting affinities

that collectively binds us to one another over our differences or group identities. In treating social categories as relational, intersectionality allows to both deconstruct these categories and examine the power dynamics implied in the meanings we contest, which provides a more balanced view on processes of marginalization and privileging. Consequently, differences are not in themselves divisive but potentially enact community building and solidarity. This nuanced approach is fostering a new consciousness and inspires assertive (in) visibility to become a permanent site of re-signification and agency.

In this spirit, we make the case that intersectionality’s own journey towards inclusivity holds the key to its contemporary success. As a result, the genealogical gaze here suggested aims at shedding light into the fact that only through a process of dis-association and whole-ness, intersectionality embodies and captures much of the analysis and vision that stands for today.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> See Spring 2018 edition of *Forum* <https://www.eaie.org/our-resources/library/publication/Forum-Magazine/2018-spring-forum.html>

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# A Study of the Transvestite(s) Demasculinized in Alfred, Lord Tennyson's "The Princess"

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## I

The *Random House Dictionary of the English Language* defines the word 'Transvestism' as "the practice of wearing clothing appropriate to the opposite sex, often as a manifestation of sexuality" (1397). Three things should not escape the readers' eye before inferring its meaning in Tennyson's poem. First, the act of "practice" induces an act of habit which also engages in the act of repetition. Essentially, the word practice *creates* in the habituated a sense of pleasure somewhere, which proceeds by being voluntary at first, and transforms itself into an involuntary pleasure upon deliberations. I do not suggest that practice cannot be discontinued, or that it might not yield displeasure. On the contrary, I strive to demonstrate why the act of "practice" is cyclical in general and in particular. Secondly, Transvestism, which is often limited to the man dressing himself in a woman's attire, gains an equivocal benefit from the meaning provided by the lexicon- something that I shall work upon in detail with *The Princess* in perspective. Lastly and most importantly, I emphasize not on the "sexuality" of any of the characters in this long verse poem; instead, penetrative focus on the various meanings (or lack of it) of the word "manifest" (from its original Latin *Manifestus*, meaning clarity) reveals how this thoroughly ambiguous word defines the larger ideologies and its illusive presence all throughout the versenovel.

My manner of dealing with the question of manifestation is different than the usual deciphering of its meaning. The question "What does the poem manifest?" is substituted in this critique by "What is manifested when the poem