**Intersectionality in Transatlantic Perspective**

The concept of intersectionality initially emerged in the USA during the early 1980s in the context of Black feminist critiques of the lack of attention to issues of race and racism within US feminist scholarship. While this critique was highly influential within US women's studies, it remained linked to this original project of theorizing gender and race (and, to a lesser degree, class) and exploring the specific vulnerabilities of women of color. Since then, the concept of intersectionality has been taken up in Europe, where it has become something of a "buzzword" within feminist scholarship (Davis 2008).

In her provocative essay, Gudrun-Axeli Knapp (2005) argues that the triad race/class/gender needs to be analyzed as a "travelling theory". Drawing upon the seminal study of Edward Said (1983), she shows how these concepts, as they have been developed in US discourse, cannot be deployed unproblematically in a European context. The term "race" (with or without quotation marks) tends to evoke irritation or unease, given its association with the racist politics of National Socialism, while the notion of "class", which in Germany is almost exclusively used in the context of Marxist theory, reverberates with the seemingly "outdated" polemics of the seventies (Knapp 2005: 257). Knapp suggests that, while the specifics of the historical context at first sight seem to preclude taking up the triad of race, class and gender, it is the same history which — on a more general level — turns the programmatic of intersectional analysis into a significant part of the critical feminist project.

In this chapter, I explore some of the differences in the way intersectionality has been taken up in US and European feminist scholarship. After tracing the transatlantic travels of the concept, I discuss the differences in how the concept has been deployed, situating these differences in the historical, academic, and ideological contexts of US and European feminism. Finally, I will draw some conclusions about why this particular theory could become so popular within transatlantic feminist discourse and what this might mean for thinking about feminist theory in a global context.
Intersectionality in the US

The U.S. legal theorist Kimberlé Crenshaw is generally given credit for having coined the term intersectionality. It was intended to address the fact that the experiences of women of color tended to fall between the cracks of both feminist and anti-racist discourse. Crenshaw (1989; 1991; 1992), for example, showed how the structural obstacles facing women of color make them particularly vulnerable to sexual violence (battery, rape, media representations). While both feminism and anti-racism have been concerned with sexual violence, both have failed to address the ways that race and gender intersect to produce this vulnerability. Feminists have been primarily concerned with getting the issue of domestic violence on the political agenda as a “women’s issue”, and have tended to downplay differences among women. In contrast, anti-racists have focused on the historical stereotyping of Black men as rapists of white women, thereby neglecting intra-race violence against women of color. Because of their intersectional identity as both women and of color, Black women are marginalized in both discourses. Crenshaw argued that an intersectional approach was required which would take the simultaneous effects of gender and race on board and show how they intersect to shape the multiple dimensions of Black women’s experiences with violence.

Crenshaw may have introduced the term intersectionality, but the issues she was addressing were hardly new in US feminist debates. Black feminists as well as US Third World feminist scholars had produced numerous critiques of how the experiences of women of color had been neglected in feminist discourse and had already underscored the importance of theorizing multiple identities and sources of oppression. As early as 1977, the Combate River Collective, a Black US feminist lesbian group, issued a stirring and highly influential manifesto in which they argued that gender, race, class, and sexuality should be integral to any feminist analysis of power and domination (reprinted in Hull et al 1982). Several years later, the first anthology of black feminist thought appeared with a title that provocatively stated what was at stake with intersectionality: All Women are White, All Blacks are Men, and Some of Us Are Brave (Hull et al, 1982). By the late eighties, the triad “gender, race, class” had become a mantra for much of US feminist scholarship whose most central normative and theoretical concern became the acknowledgement of differences among women and the long and painful legacy of feminism’s exclusions (Zack 2007; 197). It is within this context that intersectionality emerged as a convenient concept, which seemed ideally suited to dealing with several of US feminism’s most pressing concerns.

First, it promised to address (and redress) the distressing exclusion of the specific experiences of women of color from earlier feminist scholarship. It drew attention to the ways that the experiences of white women and women of color were different and focused on the ways that multiple differences produced vulnerabilities.

Second, it provided a systematic approach to the detrimental effects of race, class, and gender which went beyond the previously popular notion of “triple jeopardy” (King 1988) that treated each new category of difference as an additional burden for the poor woman of color. Intersectionality promised to uncover multiple oppressions by showing how categories of identity “converge” to produce heightened vulnerabilities at different levels (structural, political, and representational) (Crenshaw 1991).

Third, intersectionality promised to put an end once and for all to the problematic strategy of drawing analogies between the oppression of women and the oppression of people of color. This strategy had not only been employed by feminist abolitionists during the first wave of feminism, whereby the condition of women was compared to slavery. It also returned during the second wave in the wake of the Civil Rights movement when the workings of sexism were treated as similar to racism, thereby neglecting the different histories and dynamics of sexism and racism as systems of domination. Intersectionality avoided such analogies by focusing on the specific ways that race is “gendered” and gender is “racialized” in different contexts and how both are linked to the continuities and transformations of social class.

And, finally, intersectionality promised—although didn’t always deliver—a methodology for doing feminist research. Matsuda (1991) describes the (deceptively) easy procedure of “asking the 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?’” (1991).

“Asking the other question” became the mainstay of an “intersectional” perspective, offering the tantalizing possibility of exposing multiple positions and power inequalities as they appear in any social practice, institutional arrangement, or cultural representation.

In the US, intersectionality is most closely associated with US Black feminist theory and critical race studies. It is part of the political project of theorizing the relationships between gender, class, and race. However, it has also been adopted
within poststructuralist theoretical frameworks invested in the deconstruction of gender and all categories of identity.

McCall (2005), for example, maps out this strand of feminist theory, referring to it as the “anti-categorical” approach to intersectionality. Postmodernist critiques of the binary oppositions of modernity detailed with the critiques of feminists of color who argued that gender could not be seen as a unitary homogenous category reflecting the essence of all women. Although there were many parallels between these two strands, there was also considerable resistance from US feminists of color and US Third World feminists who were reluctant to reject the use of categories of difference out of hand. Feminists of color tended to focus their critique on broad or sweeping categorical generalizations rather than on categorization per se. Many were wary of poststructuralist feminist theory’s tendency to pay insufficient attention to the material consequences of these categories of difference in the experiences of women of color.

Alexander and Mohanty (1997) argue that postmodernist attempts to move beyond essentialism by pluralizing identities or dissolving the analytic unity of categories is detrimental to understanding processes of domination which are still articulated through racialization and racism. However problematic categories of identity are, identity politics remains a force to be reckoned with in the US. As Crenshaw (1991) had already noted, “recognizing that identity politics take place at the site of where categories intersect thus seems more fruitful than challenging the possibility of talking about categories at all” (377). In a similar vein, Spivak (1993), whose work is embedded in poststructuralist theory, has admitted that “strategic essentialism” may be the most important critical helpmeet in the actual resistance to the effects of racism and sexism.

In conclusion, the concept of intersectionality has primarily been introduced to bring “race” and racism into feminist scholarship on gender. The salience of “race” is hardly surprising, given the history of slavery and racism and its continued relevance in the US today. While the color line is not the only social division, it is safe to say that almost any form to discrimination or exclusion in the US will be shaped by processes of racialization. Although intersectionality is increasingly being used to explore other marginalized identities— notably of queer sexuality (Rosenblum 1994; Puaz 2002; Schippers 2004), people suffering from HIV/AIDS (Dworkin 2005), or disability (Schrimpf 2001; Thomson 2005) — it is “race” which is – and remains – the primary intersection. While the term “intersectionality” frequently pops up in postmodern feminist theory and US feminism has borrowed insights from deconstruction to think critically about “race” as a construction, the material effects of racism and the strategic importance of an identity politics based on race have remained the focus of US debates.

Crossing the Atlantic

Intersectionality made its appearance in European women’s studies in the mid-1990s. Particularly in the UK, but also in Germany, the Netherlands, and Scandinavia, it has become a familiar topic in women’s studies conferences and postgraduate and graduate courses on feminist theory. Articles devoted to the topic of intersectionality have appeared in feminist journals throughout Europe, including a special issue of *The European Journal of Women’s Studies* devoted entirely to intersectionality and the debates it has generated (2006). Anthologies (like the current volume) have emerged and more are being planned (Hearns et al. forthcoming). In short, the end is nowhere in sight.

Many of the reasons for the popularity of intersectionality in Europe are the same as in the US. Brah and Phoenix (2004) attribute the emergence of the concept in the UK as part of “decentering” processes which were generally at work in the social movements of the second half of the 20th century. Along with the feminist movement, anti-racist, Marxist, and gay and lesbian movements were all giving voice to subordinated sexualities, class injustices, or other subaltern realities (Brah and Phoenix 2004: 78). Retrieving Black women’s experiences was an important part of the appeal of intersectionality for British feminism and, indeed, Brah and Phoenix situate their history of intersectionality not in Europe, but in US debates on the situation of African American women. While this has been typical for the European reception of intersectionality, there have also been some important differences in the way the concept has been taken up in different European contexts. These differences are linked to the different histories of domination and exclusion as well as the current multicultural realities of Europe, particularly in the context of increasing migration. Intersectionality has, therefore, not simply been taken on board, but it has been rearticulated and elaborated so that it can address the issues deemed important within European feminist scholarship. I will now take a look at some of the debates which the concept of intersectionality has engendered in Europe — in particular, concerning discourses on “race”, the problem of how many differences are required for an intersectional analysis, the issue of how intersections should be conceptualized, and, finally, the importance of agency for intersectional analysis.
European debates

The first difference between European and US debates about intersectionality concerns the centrality as well as the meaning of the category “race”. While “race” was the starting point and focus of US scholarship on intersectionality, Europeans have been less quick to use the term. In German debates, for example, the term itself carries too much historical baggage that feminists and other progressively minded intellectuals are wary about using it at all. If it appears in critical inquiries, it is to deconstruct its nefarious history in legitimating the genocide of millions of racialized “others”. Given this history, it is unthinkable that race could be employed as a basis for a progressive identity politics (Knapp 2005: 257). In the UK, “race” was employed in the seventies as part of political strategy. However, from the outset, the term was also the subject of ongoing critique. For example, Anitias and Yuval-Davis (1992) problematized the conceptualization of “race”, “gender” and “class” as separate categories of difference, suggesting that “racialization” was more appropriate for understanding how gender, class, and national belonging were all racially inflected. In many European contexts, race is replaced by the term “ethnicity”.

For many European feminists, ethnicity is regarded as more appropriate than “race” to feminist theories of identity. In contrast to “race” which is imbued with all of the baggage of biological determinism and essentialism, ethnicity seems better suited to explaining cultural differences, religious beliefs, or adherence to traditions – all considered more salient to understanding processes of racialization in contemporary European multicultural society. The widespread and diverse patterns of migration throughout Europe (from economic migration to refugees from various conflict situations) as well as polarization around issues of secularization and Islam in the wake of 9/11 have made categories like religion, tradition, and national belonging seem more important to many European feminists for understanding the current inequalities and exclusions than “race”. Thus, feminist scholars have often replaced the category of “race” which was so central to the US discussions of intersectionality with “ethnicity” or even “cultural difference”.

The second difference in the debates concerns the issue of which (and how many) categories were required for an intersectional analysis. In the US, intersectionality has always been about the triad race, class, and gender (“The Big Three”). The methodology of “asking the other question” generally meant starting with gender and then bringing in the category of race and, somewhat belatedly, class. While most European feminist theorists would agree that race (like gender and class) are relevant in most contexts (Leiprecht and Lutz, 2006; Yuval-Davis 2006), no category is sacrosanct, including gender. For example, two Dutch feminists argued provocatively for treating gender as an ethnicity (Aerts and Saharso, 1994). As they put it, such a move would resolve the nagging problem of essentialism in gender theory and provide a way to think about gender in a more dynamic and culturally sensitive way. Lykke (2005) takes this discussion a step further when she suggests that feminist scholars need to question their automatic reliance on “gender” as a central category of analysis. She argues that we should be willing to ask whether “gender” should automatically be part of a feminist intersectional analysis or whether there might be occasions where it can be left aside in favor of more relevant categories of difference.

This reluctance to prioritize specific categories in intersectional analysis has resulted in another problem – one which has been the subject of extended debate within European feminism. How are decisions to be made concerning which categories to include and which to leave behind when analyzing a specific context or practice? Some feminist scholars have advocated casting a broad net in any intersectional analysis. For example, Lutz (2002) has come up with no less than fourteen “lines of difference” (sexuality, nation/state, culture, ability, age, sedentariness, origin – just to name a few), but the list is potentially endless. While most European feminists would advocate moving beyond the “Big Three”, some are wary of introducing too many differences. According to Bredström (2006), multiplicity is the “Achilles heel of intersectionality”. It not only hogs the question which differences are “most salient” in a specific context (Knapp, 1999; Skiegs 1997; Yuval-Davis 2006), but it provides no help in deciding when it is time to “ask (another) question” and when it is time to stop (Ludwig 2006). Thus, the European debates about multiple categories have broadened the US focus on gender/race/class, thereby making the analysis of intersectionality a much more complicated endeavor.

The third difference concerns the desirability of conceptualizing intersectionality as a crossroads of converging oppressions. In the US, the image of a crossroads, as introduced by Crenshaw, defined intersectionality as “what occurs when a woman from a minority group tries to navigate the main crossing in the city... the main highway is ‘raceism’ road. One cross street can be Colonialism, then Patriarch Street. She has to deal not only with one form of oppression but with all forms, those named as road sign, which link together to make a double, a triple, multiple, a many layered blanket of oppression” (Yuval-Davis 2006: 196). While highly evocative, this image was problematic for many European feminist scholars for several reasons. First, it implied a separate systems approach to social
divisions, whereby racism, sexism, and class were treated as discrete systems of domination. For many European feminist scholars who had been engaged in longstanding critical debates with Marxist theory, this approach to “-isms” seemed hopelessly old-fashioned and inadequate. While the concept of “intersectionality” seemed to offer a rejection of a static systems approach to social inequality, the “crossroads” image looked suspiciously like more of the same. Moreover, the idea that each new “crossroads” exacerbated the level of subordination experienced by a particular individual or group was more additive than interactive. It said nothing about the dynamics of the intersections, nor the ways that the divisions themselves were mutually constitutive.

The UK based feminist scholars Antias and Yuval Davis (1983; 1992) were highly influential throughout Europe with their critique of the US conception of intersectionality as a crossroads. They argued that it should not be seen as a conflation or convergence of differences, but rather as a model for thinking across difference. This transversal version of intersectionality made space for a consideration of the specific histories and ontologies of social divisions as well as the different ways that categories of difference themselves are mutually constituted and conflated rather than separate and additive. It corresponded with Foucauldian paradigms of power which were becoming popular in feminist scholarship throughout Europe. Intersectionality did not have to remain mired in the business of uncovering structured patterns of domination. It could proceed (rather than stop) at the moment of intersection, initiating dynamic, multi-layered, and complex analyses of the operations and transitions of power in different contexts and at various levels of social life (Yuval-Davis 2006; Knudsen 2006). Thus, European debates took up where the US representations of intersectionality left off, elaborating the notion of converging crossroads to an exploration of the quality of the intersections and the power dynamics which emerged through them.

The fourth difference in European debates concerns the issue of agency. In the US, intersectionality has primarily been employed to uncover vulnerabilities and constraints which are increased by multiple identities. The motto seems to be: the longer the list of differences, the heavier the burden (Prins 2006: 282). This monolithic focus on difference as source of disempowerment has been criticized by European feminists who argue that it neglects individual agency and precludes the development of a more sophisticated approach to identity. The starting point for many of these discussions has been the sociological debate about the relationship between structure and agency, whereby attention is shifted from how structures of racism, class structure, or sexism determine individual’s identities and practices to how individuals ongoingly and flexibly negotiate their multiple and converging identities in the contexts of their everyday lives. For example, Lutz and Davis (2005) introduce the idea of “doing intersectionality” in order to explore how individuals creatively and often in surprising ways draw upon their multiple identities as a resource to gain control over their lives. They show how gender or race, while invariably linked to structures of domination, can also under certain circumstances be mobilized to deconstruct disempowering discourses or to undermine and transform oppressive practices. This shift in focus has also entailed the expansion of the focus on vulnerabilities and exclusions produced by intersecting identities to the ways these intersections enable possibilities for action and – in some cases – empowerment. (Saharso 2002; Staunes 2003; Buitelaar 2006; Prins 2006). In other words, individuals are not simply “multiply vulnerable”, but they take “strategic advantage” of their multiple identities (Sondergaard 2005).

The Scandinavian debate takes this discussion a step further. Inspired by the work of Judith Butler and her notion of gender as a performance which is constantly in danger of causing “trouble”, feminist scholars have looked to intersectionality as the means par excellence for subverting normative identities. Just as heteronormativity and deterministic views about gender can be unsettled by various gender outlaws (from gender benders to homosexuals to the transgendered), other differences (for example, marginalized ethnicities, different national belongings) can produce “trouble”. Knudsen (2006), for example, talks about the “ethnic trouble” which non-dominant ethnicities may cause in mainstream society (p. 64). Marginality is not simply a source of vulnerability, however, but can also open up possibilities for subversion and resistance. Within the space in which identity categories are embled with meaning, there are many possibilities for “upsetting the applecart” (Staunes 2003).

By making agency more central to intersectionality, European feminist scholars have used it as a starting point for a more sophisticated conception of identity – a conception which abandons knee-jerk responses to difference as automatically disempowering and attends to the “unexpected ruptures” and “ambivalences” in the subject positions available to an individual (Burman 2003; Staunes 2003: 109). It coincides with postmodern theory by disrupting thinking about identities in terms of static binaries or fixed locations (“roots”), exploring instead the “routes” which an individual takes in the course of her or his life history (Prins 2006; Buitelaar 2006). And, last but not least, intersectionality allows feminist scholars to situate identities in a global context, whereby identities are part of complex and contradictory locations, of “disapora spaces” (Brah 1996; Brah and Phoenix 2004) which both constrain and enable their possibilities.
Intersectionality: between politics and methodology

So far, I have discussed some of the differences in the European feminist reception of the concept of intersectionality. While the term was enthusiastically embraced, it was also the subject of heated critical debates—debates which irrevocably altered the meanings and scope of intersectionality as theoretical perspective. The differences in the US and European reception of the term are instructive not only because of what they tell us about the context in which feminist theory is produced, but also because they provide a welcome opportunity for both US and European feminist scholars to reflect on the possibilities and limitations of their own theoretical production.

In another article (Davis 2008), I have argued that one of the reasons for intersectionality’s popularity was that it addressed one of the most important theoretical and normative concerns within feminist scholarship today; namely, the acknowledgement and theorizing of differences and divisions between women. Intersectionality accomplished this, first, by giving centrality to a politics of multiple identities and attending to the complexity of power relations emerging from women’s multiple positioning in the contexts of their everyday lives, and, second, by offering a methodology which would address and redress the exclusions which have been rampant in feminist scholarship. It provided a more inclusive and simultaneously, more sophisticated way of doing feminist inquiry.

While intersectionality has been taken up by both US and European academic feminism as a political and methodological helpmeet, the trajectories of its reception on either side of the Atlantic have been different and contradictory. In the US, intersectionality was primarily linked to the political project of understanding the effects of gender, class, and race on women’s identities, experiences, and struggles for empowerment. It was directed at uncovering the multiple vulnerabilities encountered by, in particular, poor women of color, and of critically interrogating the white, middle-class bias of US feminist scholarship. In contrast, European feminist scholarship embraced intersectionality as a welcome methodological helpmeet in its project of unsettling gender and deconstructing the binary oppositions and the universalism inherent in the modernist paradigms of Western philosophy and science (Phoenix 2006; Brah and Phoenix 2004).

Critical perspectives inspired by poststructuralist theory, including postcolonial theory, diaspora studies, and queer theory, all took up intersectionality as an alternative to static conceptualizations of identity and in line with the postmodern project of conceptualizing multiple and shifting identities. It fit neatly with the sophisticated, Foucauldian-inspired perspectives on power that were popular within European feminist scholarship (Staunnes 2003; Knudsen 2006) and promised to enhance the theorist’s reflexivity by allowing her to incorporate her own intersectional location in the production of self-critical and accountable feminist theory (Lykke 2005).

The different trajectories of intersectionality on either side of the Atlantic reflect the different political and academic contexts in which the theory was taken up. For example, in the US, poststructuralist feminist theory stood on uneasy footing with the political project of theorizing race, class and gender. It was criticized for being overly esoteric and paying insufficient attention to the material consequences of these categories of difference in the experiences of women of color. Many critical race theorists were wary of the political relativism which pervaded deconstructive thinking. While the connection between categorization and the exercise of power was recognized (McCall 2005), US proponents of intersectionality were not willing to reject the use of categories of difference out of hand, arguing that the importance of identity politics in specific historical contexts had been an important and often more effective strategy of resistance to the pervasive effects of racism and sexism in the US than the postmodern deconstruction of categories could ever be (Crenshaw 1991).

While European feminists have had few qualms about linking intersectionality to poststructuralist theory, they have been highly critical of many of the concepts adopted by theorists of race/class/gender. For example, many European feminists who had embraced intersectionality because it meshed with their engagement with poststructuralist theory, were apprehensive about the primacy given to women’s “experience” in US versions of intersectionality or the use of standpoint thinking to uncover the “voice from below”. The insistence on identity politics not only seemed old-fashioned in the European context, but it reeked of essentialism and reductionism—cardinal sins in European feminist scholarship.

Conclusion

The key to intersectionality’s popularity as traveling theory is that it provided an unanticipated way of overcoming the incompatibilities between feminist theory
on race, class, and gender and postmodern feminist theory. It took up the pol-
tical project of making the social and material consequences of the categories
of gender/race/class visible, but did so by employing methodologies compa-
tible with the poststructuralist project of deconstructing categories, unmasking
universalism, and exploring the dynamic and contradictory workings of power
(Brah and Phoenix, 2004: 82). It offered the Race/Class/Gender feminists a
theoretically sophisticated methodology that could help them avoid some of the
pitfalls of additive approaches to multiple identities. And it lent poststruc-
turalist feminist theory some political credibility, enabling it to counter some
of the criticisms that it was too distant from the material realities of women’s
lives and too relativistic to be of use for women’s concrete political struggles.
In short, intersectionality provided the basis for a mutually beneficial colla-
borations between theoretical projects which had previously found themselves on
opposite sides of the fence. Thus, intersectionality provided a platform — “a joint
nodal point” — for disparate theoretical approaches within feminist scholarship
(Lykkse 2005).

It is my contention that a consideration of intersectionality’s “travels” can be
instructive for feminist debates on both sides of the Atlantic. European debates
might help US feminist perspectives on intersectionality become more methodo-
logically sophisticated. They have demonstrated that intersectionality can lead
to a more complex conception of “race” as well as a recognition of other relevant
differences in specific contexts. They have also shown why it is important not only
to uncover the convergences of differences, but also to explore their dynamics.
They have broadened the discussion of difference to include the ways differences
can be enabling and empowering as well as disabling and constraining. Most
importantly, however, the specific contribution of the European debate about
intersectionality is that it shows the potential of intersectionality to become a
feminist methodology par excellence — ideally suited to deconstructing essen-
tialist constructions of identity, decentering dominant discourses, and producing
situated, critically reflexive feminist knowledge.

However, it is not simply a matter of US feminists having something to learn
from their European “sisters”. For contemporary European feminist theory, the
US debates on intersectionality are also instructive. The insistence of US theorists
on keeping the political salience of intersectionality at the forefront can provide a
useful reminder to European feminists that, they, too, need to maintain a vigilant
watch on the “dark sides of (European) modernity” (Knapp 2006: 260). Under
the banner of poststructuralism, European feminist theory sometimes runs the
risk of a too-easy assimilation of difference, becoming “a pillow on which white

feminists can rest their heads without having to think through their own positions
of power” (Lykkse 2003). Attention to the “origins” of intersectionality as a theory
intended for understanding the positions of the most vulnerable in any context
can help keep European feminist theory normatively on track. It can remind
European feminists of the continued necessity of examining its own historical
and present complicity in racialized, nationalist, and global structures of power.
In short, intersectionality promises feminist scholars of different theoretical
perspectives and political persuasions on both sides of the Atlantic the best of
all possible worlds. We can have our cake and eat it, too.

Annotations
1 In his seminal study on travelling theory, Edward Said (1983) argues that the most
interesting feature of any theory is how it is rearticulated and transformed after it
leaves its point of origin. Theories are not written in stone, but are responsive to
the historical, social, and political context in which they are received, making
the meanings as well as the purposes for which a theory is used different. In his view,
the critical potential of a theory resides precisely in its capacity to generate alternative
meanings, to invite rearticulation and transformation.
2 It is impossible to do justice to this writing, but here are some of the most well-
known and frequently cited works: Davis 1981; Hooks 1981; 1992; 1994; Carby
1982; Smith 1983; Moraga and Anzaldua 1984; Ware 1992; Zinn and Dill 1994;
Collins 1990.
3 Similar arguments have been made by Collins (1990; 2000); Hooks (1992; 1994);
4 Interestingly, they go back much further, citing a speech given more than a century
ago by the ex-slave and abolitionist Sojourner Truth at a convention on women’s
rights, held Akron, Ohio in 1851 (Brah and Phoenix 2004: 77) where she, speaking
before a predominantly white audience of abolitionists, many of whom were
women, is reputed to have said: “That man over there says that women need to be
helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches, and have the best place everywhere.
Nobody helps me any best place. Ain’t I a woman? Ain’t I a woman? Is treated
as a metaphor for intersectionality — as a statement for challenging universal
definitions of gender as well as showing why the experiences of poor women and
women of color always need to be situated within multiple sources of oppression.
5 An exception is a brief flurry of activities among Afro-Germans, often the off-
spring of black GIs stationed in Germany and local German women. See, for ex-
ample, Oguntowe et al. (1992).
6 “Black” was a signifier of a politicized identity uniting (post)colonial subjects in
Britain of both Asian and Caribbean descent in a way that both mirrored but was
also different from the Black Power movement in the US. See, Carby (1982). See,
also, Ware (1992).
This is not to say that there would be no reason to talk about race in the European context. Europe not only bears the legacy of colonialism and a "civilizing mission" legitimated through racial superiority ("the white man's burden"), but participated extensively in the international slave trade throughout the 17th century.

See, for example, Smith (1998).

Helma Lutz (2002) has provided a list of fourteen lines of difference: gender, sexuality, race or skin color, ethnicity, national belonging, class, culture, religion, able-bodiedness, age, sedentariness, property ownership, geographical location, and status in terms of tradition and development. The list is not only endlessly expandable, but each category requires ongoing redefinition (p. 13). See, also, Lutz and Wunnen (2001).

Leiprecht and Lutz (2006) offer an interesting compromise, whereby race, class, and gender are taken as a "minimum standard" for intersectional analysis to which other categories can be added, depending upon the context and the specifics of the research problem.

See also Knapp (1999), for a good discussion of the German debates about social inequality and the potential contribution which intersectionality can have.

This does not mean that US feminist scholars were not interested in using intersectionality to introduce complexity into the analysis of power. See, for example, McCall (2005). However, the introduction of complexity resided less in finding ways to think across intersections than to map structural divisions.

Analogous to "doing gender" (West and Zimmerman 1987) and "doing difference" (West and Fenstermaker 1995).

The distinction between "roots" and "routes" was initially made by Stuart Hall and it underlies much of the thinking within postcolonial feminism. See, Hall (1996).

References


