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**HACIA LA INTERSECCIONALIDAD : DIFERENCIAS  
DENTRO DE DIÁLOGOS INTERCULTURALES ANGLO-  
EUROPEOS.  
TOWARDS INTERSECTIONALITY : DIFFERENCES WITHIN  
ANGLO-EUROPEAN INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUES**

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# HACIA LA INTERSECCIONALIDAD: DIFERENCIAS DENTRO DE LOS DIÁLOGOS INTERCULTURALES ANGLLO-EUROPEOS

## INTRODUCCIÓN

### DESCRIPCIÓN DEL PROYECTO Y OBJETIVOS GENERALES

Mi interés personal en la complejidad de experiencias de vida de las mujeres me impulsó a buscar un acercamiento intercultural a través de mi propia disciplina, Filología Inglesa; concretamente, estudios literarios y culturales en países de habla inglesa (literatura de EEUU es mi especialidad). Siempre me ha interesado la inter-culturalidad en la identidad de género desde un ángulo conceptual lo más inclusivo posible, antes de que el término ‘interseccionalidad’ se cruzase en mi camino. A lo largo de los años, mi curiosidad y mi pasión fueron tomando forma gracias a una formación interdisciplinar en Estudios de Género/Mujeres.

Descubrí por primera vez *This Bridge Called My Back: Radical Writings By Women of Color* (Moraga y Anzaldúa 1981, 1983)<sup>1</sup>, la primera antología de mujeres de color en EEUU, el último año de mi carrera aquí en la universidad Complutense de Madrid. Supuso toda una fuente de inspiración en la que sus palabras sacudieron mi conciencia crítica feminista, como nunca antes.

Entendí por qué se dice que el dolor es un magnífico maestro. Y no es que haya un dolor más doloroso que otro, ni más saludable, ni más placentero, sino que es nuestra manera de interpretarlo, de vivirlo, lo que nos ayuda a superarlo o a morir por él. El dolor enseña cómo el

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<sup>1</sup> De ahora en adelante me referiré a esta antología en sus dos primeras ediciones como *This Bridge*.

sufrimiento fácilmente puede traducirse en parálisis. Y que en sus momentos más prístinos, nos recuerda a qué sabe el vacío y el abandono. Pero si no se sucumbe a él, si se canaliza como una fuente de aprendizaje y de crecimiento, entonces, en la aceptación profunda, todo se convierte en una bendición capaz de transmutar ese dolor en grandes posibilidades y nuevas alternativas de cambio y transformación.

Dentro de la historia de la conciencia feminista, y más concretamente, dentro de la evolución del pensamiento crítico en el movimiento feminista anglo-europeo, el desamparo que históricamente han sufrido las ‘mujeres de color’ en EEUU fue ese dolor que se tornó épico y transformó todo un desencuentro en un diálogo intercultural. Fue un *sentirse invisibles* y hasta cierto punto *‘inapropiables’*<sup>2</sup>, como se sugiere en una reciente colección de ensayos, que se transmutó en esa fuerza y determinación que impulsó a Gloria Anzaldúa y a Cherrié Moraga, las dos únicas chicanas que en 1980 formaron parte de la conferencia Nacional de la Asociación de Estudios de Mujeres en Estados Unidos (NWSA), a concebir esta primera antología de mujeres de color en Estados Unidos.

Considerado un movimiento literario y político reconocido y bien documentado dentro del mundo académico anglo-europeo sobre todo desde la década de los 80s, las auto-denominadas ‘mujeres de color en EEUU’, englobaban tanto académicas como activistas, desde diversas disciplinas y posturas políticas, unidas contra la articulación racista de un género esencialista dentro de un feminismo hegemónico ‘blanco’. En un principio, me movió particularmente las palabras de las escritoras chicanas Gloria Anzaldúa y Cherrié Moraga y las afro-americanas Audre Lorde y Barbara Smith. A pesar de la multiplicidad de sus circunstancias de vida y por encima de la complejidad de sus prioridades políticas específicas,

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<sup>2</sup> *Otras Inapropiables: feminismos desde las fronteras.* Bell Hooks, Audre Lorde, Chela Sandoval y Gloria Anzaldúa. Madrid: Traficantes de sueños, 2006.

estas mujeres se reconocieron mutuamente como parte de una identidad histórica. Juntas, despertaron a la *conciencia del tercer mundo en un primer mundo* revolucionando así, el dominio académico del discurso de la identidad política y la resistencia cultural. En este sentido, es importante entender que las mujeres de color no pretendían amalgamar procesos coloniales tan dispares y diversos como la inmigración mexicana o la de origen africano, sino que reivindicaban el reconocimiento de lo que, Partha Chatterjee, en *La Nación y sus fragmentos. Historias coloniales y poscoloniales* ha descrito como “la lógica de la diferencia colonial” (“the rule of colonial difference”)<sup>3</sup>. Y fue a través de las páginas de esta antología donde comencé a cuestionarme un género entendido como universal femenino. En lo que supuso un apasionante descubrimiento tanto personal como intelectual, comencé a preguntarme por mi posición privilegiada como una estudiante universitaria europea de clase media, así como por la interconexión indisoluble entre las diferentes categorías sociales que conforman mi identidad de género. De la misma manera que me cautivó la determinación de estas mujeres-no-blancas de desafiar cualquier discurso esencialista de género o categorización estática, me sobrecogió profundamente la frustración y sobre todo, el dolor que empañaba sus reivindicaciones y denuncias. Su retórica contestataria reflejaba la intensidad de su dolor; la urgente necesidad de sentirse escuchadas y comprendidas, y sobretodo, de negociar la razón de las diferencias entre mujeres. Sentí la imperiosa curiosidad de comprender la raíz de tanta rabia y tantos desencuentros entre feministas y fue entonces cuando supe que esta antología se convertiría en el hilo conductor de un viaje conceptual y teórico en el que acababa de embarcarme. Y así, el rechazo de las mujeres de color /feminismo del tercer mundo en EEUU a

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<sup>3</sup> Chatterjee, Partha. *The Nation and its Fragments. Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1993.

no identificarse y no integrarse completamente dentro del movimiento feminista anglo-europeo dominante, se convirtió en el punto de partida de mi investigación.

En los años siguientes, cuando comencé mi investigación doctoral en la universidad de Berkeley, California (2005), quedé fascinada no solo por la cantidad de literatura y estudios dedicados al movimiento de mujeres de color en EEUU (sobre todo a partir de la década de los 60s en adelante) sino sobre todo, al descubrir que *This Bridge* (este puente) había evolucionado hasta convertirse en 'home' (hogar) y que los escritos radicales de mujeres de color se habían transformado en una teoría inclusiva (no sólo articulada y enfocada a mujeres de color) en *This Bridge We Call Home: Radical Writings for Transformation* (Anzaldúa y Keating 2002).

Críticas iniciales hacia un género universal femenino y la insistencia en la especificidad de sus experiencias de un género en constante interacción con otras categorías sociales tales como la etnia, orientación sexual o clase social, habían sido reemplazadas por nuevas propuestas creativas a las teorías de género tradicionales. En el propio título de esta última antología podía vislumbrar los augurios de un continuo proceso de evolución hacia las diferencias entre mujeres, que deseaba comprender en mayor profundidad. Inscrita en los departamentos de Estudios Latino-Americanos y Estudios de género/mujeres en UC Berkeley, descubrí el apasionante debate feminista intercultural alrededor de las categorías intrínsecas de género. Mi interés en la interconexión de estas categorías creció en estos cursos. A medida que iba desarrollando mis líneas de investigación centradas en sus clamores de invisibilidad teórica dentro de un feminismo institucionalizado en el ámbito académico, sus postulados me llevaron hasta al concepto de la interseccionalidad. Entré en contacto con la obra de las primeras teóricas afro-americanas que comenzaron a teorizar sobre la interseccionalidad, Kimberlé Crenshaw, Patricia Hill Collins y Barbara Smith. Sus palabras despertaron en mí, la lucha

contra de relaciones de poder desiguales, tanto desde el punto de vista de privilegio o marginación social, en procesos de formación de identidad de género.

Sin embargo, al investigar sobre estos temas, no podía comprender cómo, aunque los estudios de género se habían enriquecido enormemente gracias a la publicación de estas antologías de mujeres de color, no había suficiente reflexión crítica sobre el papel que sus reivindicaciones habían tenido dentro de la evolución de los estudios de género/mujeres. Sin embargo, lo que sí era capaz de calibrar era mi posicionamiento en mitad de un largo diálogo intercultural sobre género en el cual me faltaba entender los dos ángulos de una misma historia. Si quería comprender la verdad que operaba por debajo de esta controversia, me era necesario acercarme más en profundidad a los orígenes de la teoría feminista dominante. Para conseguirlo, cursé el Master de Estudios de Mujeres ofertado por esta universidad (2007-2009).

De la mano de conocidas pensadoras y académicas feministas tales como Celia Amorós, Amelia Varcárcel, Luisa Posada o Rosa Cobo entre tantas otras grandes pensadoras feministas que tuve el honor de conocer, conseguí profundizar mi conocimiento sobre los orígenes del movimiento y práctica feminista desde una perspectiva europea.

A través de un intensivo revisionismo histórico que se remonta a las primeras documentadas reivindicaciones feministas en tiempos de la ilustración, progresivamente fui comprendiendo los orígenes de una articulación esencialista de género. Entendí cómo en el momento en que se cuestiona la categoría ‘mujer’ como una experiencia universalizadora y estática, despegó este apasionante debate intercultural de género. De igual manera, la categoría de identidad política ‘mujeres de color’ se fue construyendo a medida que se fueron creando nuevas alianzas políticas entre feministas-no blancas que priorizaban estratégicamente las

diferencias más visibles tales como el grupo étnico, la clase social y la orientación sexual, en nombre de la democratización de *todas* las diferencias. Y así, desde una perspectiva postcolonial, la obra de la británica Mary Wollstonecraft (1792), de la norteamericana Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1848) o de la filósofa francesa Simone de Beauvoir (1949) respondían a una visión particular, blanca, europea de clase media, a pesar de inclinarse a hablar en nombre de ‘todas’ las mujeres. Siguiendo la misma lógica descolonizadora, la teoría de género más visible dentro de los parámetros del mundo académico, estaba circunscrita a unos sistemas de publicación y redes de distribución altamente politizados.

Al tiempo que llegaba a estas conclusiones, entré en contacto con las teorías posmodernistas y pos-estructuralistas del género que habían guiado las reflexiones críticas de los 90s. Sobre todo, la obra de la teórica y pensadora norteamericana Judith Butler en *Gender Trouble* (1990) y *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (1993) y su teoría de la performatividad arrojaron luz sobre los procesos de identidad de género gracias a sus sutiles análisis constructivistas. Las reflexiones teóricas de críticas como la norteamericana Nancy Fraser y la turca-estadounidense Shelia Benhabib, sin duda me acercaron hasta el epicentro del debate sobre la articulación de las diferencias entre mujeres que tuvo lugar en la década de los 90s y que mi opinión, más brillantemente se refleja en el encuentro que tuvo lugar en Filadelfia, U.S. en otoño de 1990 (capítulo 4). Como resultado, a medida que iba alcanzando una visión más clara de las posturas posmodernistas y pos-estructuralistas en contraposición a los fundamentos de las ‘mujeres de color’ en EEUU, se iban perfilando incompatibilidades metodológicas entre ambas perspectivas que explicaban el rechazo a incorporar la *interseccionalidad* como una herramienta de análisis dentro de las teorías de género. Junto a ello, otras posturas críticas de carácter ‘transversal’ tales como las británicas Nira Yuval Davis

y Floya Anthias en *Racialized Boundaries: Race, Nation, Gender, Colour and Class and Anti-Racist Struggle* (1992) me llevaron a repensar mi propio enfoque de la interseccionalidad al desafiar la efectividad en su clamor a la inclusividad, en sus pretensiones tan intrínsecamente ligadas, teórica y analíticamente, a las experiencias de las mujeres de color.

El giro definitivo en mi investigación llegaría a finales del primer año académico de este Master en estudios de mujeres (2008), cuando me fue concedida una beca para representar a esta universidad en el curso europeo anual de verano, de carácter interdisciplinar, llamado NOISE (perteneciente a la red europea ATENEA), que aquel año tuvo lugar en la universidad de Utrecht, Holanda. Bajo el título ‘In Between Understanding and Practicing Gender: Intersectionality and Interdisciplinarity’, pude acceder a la fascinante capacidad del concepto de la interseccionalidad crítica. A este respecto, fueron instrumentales las aportaciones científicas de reconocidas académicas y pensadoras feministas tales como Rosi Bradotti, Kathi Davis y Gloria Wekker. Como resultado de este encuentro, comprendí que el alcance de la interseccionalidad era fundamental para entender cómo el análisis de la identidad venía fertilizando la investigación de numerosas intelectuales y académicas. Supuso, de hecho para mí, una revelación que ha guiado esta investigación. Y así, inmersa en las últimas teorías y análisis sobre identidades interseccionales, los retazos de mi investigación previa se fueron perfilando, revelándose como un inesperado ‘momentum’ de consenso alcanzado en una larga controversia intercultural de género. Llegado este punto, los argumentos principales en este camino hasta la interseccionalidad, habían quedado establecidos.

Desde los comienzos de esta investigación, me interesó particularmente la existencia de una larga y complicada historia dentro del pensamiento feminista en cuanto a modos de pensar interseccionales. Prosiguiendo con mi interés en el análisis de dinámicas de poder implícitas en

cada una de nuestras interacciones diarias, comencé mi exploración sobre el legado político y literario del concepto de la interseccionalidad en respuesta a varias preguntas que deseo formular : ¿Cuáles son las dinámicas de poder implícitas en los significados/categorías que cuestionamos independientemente de la línea de investigación seguida?. ¿De qué manera se puede separar la identidad de género de otras relaciones de poder?

En la búsqueda de la articulación de un sujeto feminista colectivo pero múltiple, estas preguntas sintetizan uno de los objetivos de esta tesis doctoral de hacer visibles significados divergentes y a la vez conectados entre sí; niveles de abstracción teórica y de experiencias específicas y particulares, unión y deconstrucción de categorías y clamores de representación inclusiva que se han ido entrelazando a medida que ha ido evolucionando el conocimiento de las diferencias entre mujeres. Y así, en este camino hacia la interseccionalidad crítica en los análisis de identidad de género, tal como se concibe, se cuestiona y se teoriza a día de hoy, nuestra intención es la de enfatizar los cambios más radicales y representativos desde las primeras contestaciones feministas anglo europeas.

Con especial énfasis en la intervención crítica del auto-denominado feminismo del tercer mundo/mujeres de color en EEUU tras la publicación en 1981 de la antología *This Bridge* , otro de nuestros objetivos principales es la de representar un cambio de paradigma sin precedentes que forzaría a la teoría de género dominante en los 80s a repensar sus propios límites etnocentristas e incorporar una política de nuestros posicionamientos (Rich 1984) que implica necesariamente el reconocimiento de que todo conocimiento es siempre parcial y ‘situado’ (Haraway 1988). Por otro lado, en los 90s, tanto las teorías de género posmodernistas/post-estructuralistas como las feministas promotoras del impulso transversal desafiarían a las mujeres de color a volverse más autocríticas desde un punto de vista

metodológico (critican ‘mujeres de color’ como una categoría de identidad política excluyente) y epistemológico (critican que el enfoque interseccional se restrinja a las experiencias de las mujeres de color). El choque metodológico que se traduce en diferentes posturas teóricas a la hora de entender la opresión, será un punto importante de análisis en esta evolución de un género interseccional. Nuestro enfoque quedará entonces delimitado a un mapa teórico y metodológico en el que la evolución de la recepción de las diversas categorías sociales que conforman la identidad de género irá pareja a mayor desarrollo de las teorías sobre la interseccionalidad.

Pretendemos también subrayar la naturaleza indómita de un continuo desencuentro entre feministas dentro de este diálogo intercultural académico, dentro de los estudios de género/mujeres que ha dado y sigue dando lugar, a uno de los intercambios intelectuales más fructíferos y análisis metodológicos más elaborados que la academia anglo-europea ha presenciado en las últimas cuatro décadas.

La teoría y práctica de género contemporánea es extraordinariamente diversa y heterogénea. Interdisciplinar desde sus comienzos, los estudios de género conforman un amplio y complejo campo de estudio al que contribuyen muchos discursos. Sin embargo, a través de mi formación académica y mi proceso de investigación, he podido establecer que uno de los cambios más radicales que separa la postura contemporánea con respecto a los feminismos precedentes es una progresiva aceptación de las diferencias y el reconocimiento de su naturaleza interseccionada e interdependiente con la categoría género. Esta idea, como hemos señalado, será uno de los hilos conductores que se entrelazarán en los siguientes capítulos. La atención puesta en las diferencias y en la especificidad puso en marcha una intensa investigación en procesos de formación de identidad de género que para las mujeres de color

suponía el reconocimiento de que otros aspectos además del género, tales como la clase social, el grupo étnico o la orientación sexual. Por el contrario, para posturas posmodernas o post-estructuralistas suponía subrayar los procesos discursivos, lingüísticos y comunicativos que entran en juego en la construcción de género. Conscientes de la naturaleza interdisciplinar de nuestra investigación, buscamos no sólo plasmar la interacción de las teorías de género con otros reconocidos campos de conocimiento crítico, sino trazar un mapa general de la evolución de las teorías interseccionales de género. Un camino conceptual y analítico que ha sido largo y tedio, que ha dado lugar a acalorados debates pero que indudablemente ha alterado de manera radical el enfoque en el que se llevan a cabo análisis de género. Consideramos importante dar voz y reconocimiento a la complejidad teórica de estos diálogos, a toda una generación de pensadoras altamente reconocidas y con una extensa obra. Tal y como recuerda Linda Alcoff la madurez intelectual de estas pensadoras es tal, que reconocidos filósofos como Jürgen Habermas ahora debe responder a las críticas de Nancy Fraser así como Jacques Derrida con Judith Butler (2001)<sup>4</sup>.

Para delimitar nuestro análisis de la evolución del entendimiento y apertura hacia las diferencias en su camino a la interseccionalidad, esta tesis propone una lectura crítica de los textos más representativos dentro de los círculos feministas en los estudios culturales y literarios en momentos históricos relevantes, desde una mirada principalmente postcolonial. Como parte de un diálogo que continua, se compone de un conglomerado de voces algunas articuladas tan atrás en el tiempo como en el s. XVII, otras tan recientes como en el 2010. Intentamos suavizar estas discontinuidades poniendo énfasis en una reiterativa desazón entre voces marginales dentro de la teoría feminista anglo europea con respecto a la democratización

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<sup>4</sup> Alcoff, Linda. "Philosophy Matters: A Review of Recent Work in Feminist Philosophy". *Signs* 25 (3) (2000): 841-82.

de las diferencias entre mujeres. Así, uno de los principales objetivos de esta tesis doctoral es la de representar diversas instancias en estos diálogos, con el propósito de trazar las cartografías de los estadios y figuras más representativas dentro de la continuidad de este debate en torno a la naturaleza interseccionada de las categorías sociales con las que el género interactúa y su progresiva incorporación dentro de los estudios de género/mujeres en el mundo académico anglo-europeo.

Con objeto de acotar nuestro foco de investigación, por un lado hemos utilizado las diferentes antologías de *This Bridge* en sus diferentes ediciones (1981, 1983, 2002) y los textos, antologías y escritos más ampliamente reconocidos dentro del movimiento de mujeres de color en EEUU; y por otro lado, hemos hecho una selección de los textos fundacionales y más reconocidas escritoras, académicas y teóricas dentro de lo que, utilizando la terminología de mujeres de color, se podría denominar como teoría de género dominante en el mundo académico anglo-europeo. Así, nuestro propósito es la de ilustrar los orígenes y desarrollo en la evolución histórica y crítica del paradigma de la interseccionalidad celebrando así su consolidación como uno de los paradigmas más transformativos con los que cuenta la teoría de género contemporánea.

Al hilo de esta idea, hemos considerado importante completar este trayecto histórico (centrado sobretudo desde la época de los 80s hasta nuestros días) con un estudio de campo actual que aportara la inmediatez y actualidad que requiere un debate que continúa abierto. En este sentido, la campaña electoral 2008 para la presidencia de los Estados Unidos, no sólo enfrentó a una mujer blanca, Hillary Clinton en contra de un candidato afro-americano Barack Obama, sino que reabrió viejas heridas entre feministas. Algunas voces feministas recurrentes a lo largo de los siguientes capítulos, tales como las afro-americanas Kimberlé Crenshaw o

Alice Walker, las norteamericanas Robin Morgan, Zillah Eisen o la británica israelita Nira Yuval-Davis se levantarán de nuevo en pro de una visión interseccional de la identidad ante acusaciones de traición a todas aquellas feministas que apoyasen primero a un hombre antes que a una mujer. Inesperadamente, esta campaña se tornó en un campo de batalla para argumentos de identidad política que puso de nuevo en evidencia la difícil y conflictiva naturaleza de los debates interculturales de identidad de género.

Uno de los argumentos que defendemos en relación a la teoría de género en los estudios feministas toma cuerpo dentro del propio título de esta tesis doctoral ('diálogos interculturales'); y así, nos referimos a diálogos dentro del pensamiento y producción feminista anglo-europea con una doble intención. Por un lado, como un desafío a las taxonomías tradicionales y por otro, como cuestionamiento a una historia unificada, es decir, a una única versión, dentro del desarrollo de los estudios de género/mujeres. Intentamos así poner énfasis en la especificidad y particularidad en los discursos de la identidad de género entre feministas anglo-europeas, históricamente 'situados', continuamente rescritos y reinscritos con nuevos matices y significados hasta abrazar la interseccionalidad como una herramienta analítica hasta cierto punto consensuada. A lo largo de los diferentes capítulos, estos diálogos se centrarán en la evolución del entendimiento de las diferencias entre mujeres (enmarcado en el diálogo feminista anglo-europeo) hasta llegar al concepto de la Interseccionalidad: Sobre todo a partir de la época de los 70s, las diferencias separan a las mujeres (denuncia del racismo dentro del movimiento). En una segunda etapa (90s) las diferencias comienzan a ser entendidas como una marca de identidad y fuente de crecimiento personal. Por último, en una tercera etapa (s. XXI) una mayor conciencia en la intersección de lo local con lo global y la predisposición de las mujeres de color a renunciar a categorías de identidad política

excluyentes, la interseccionalidad será por fin celebrada como la promesa de la inclusividad en las teorías de género contemporáneas.

El estudio de las diferencias irá parejo con una teoría que emerge de las tensiones alrededor de las intersecciones de género; qué variables, qué parámetros normativos y contextos políticos había que cuestionar y priorizar. Es decir, a medida que analizamos la evolución de las diferencias entre mujeres, se irá trazando un recorrido teórico-analítico hacia la interseccionalidad en las diferentes etapas dentro del mundo académico anglo-europeo, en un intento por arrojar luz sobre los continuos esfuerzos por que se teorice sobre la interdependencia de las categorías sociales de identidad de género como una herramienta de análisis trans-cultural.

Dicho esto, nos gustaría resaltar que no nos acercamos al concepto de ‘diálogos’ como una situación idílica en la que no existen dinámicas de poder. Por el contrario, creemos que ‘diálogos interculturales’ enfocados a debatir variables de poder es el primer paso para desestabilizarlas. Por lo tanto, nuestro acercamiento hacia esta controversia es la de una conversación en continuo desarrollo que ha proporcionado y continúa ofreciendo análisis teóricos cada vez más complejos en torno a relaciones de poder desiguales.

Con esta idea en mente, el objetivo central de nuestra investigación es, como hemos sugerido, por un lado, trazar una genealogía en la progresiva aceptación de las identidades de género y por otro, proporcionar una revisión general del estado de la cuestión en los debates contemporáneos sobre la interseccionalidad. Dando voz a un continuo reexaminar en los principales paradigmas de la teoría de género, buscamos proporcionar una revisión lo más clara y accesible posible alrededor de los debates más representativos. Sin embargo, no buscamos proporcionar una visión única o estática, ya que somos conscientes de que ha habido muchos

otros intentos por articular identidades de esta naturaleza con otros nombres, otras metáforas y otros marcos teóricos. Nuestro propósito es por tanto proporcionar una visión de momentos específicos, que plasmen miradas particulares pero que a la vez ayuden a transmitir el espíritu general que ha gobernado estos debates, pero sin intención de trazar un itinerario definitivo o único.

Para proseguir este propósito, hemos prestado especial atención a aquellos textos que en nuestra opinión mejor cuestionan discursos hegemónicos de género así como todos esos aspectos sin explorar con respecto a las categorías sociales que más brillantemente han sido desafiados y alterados tanto por las mujeres de color/feminismo del tercer mundo en EEUU como por la intervención crítica de las feministas post-estructuralistas y posmodernas en la década de los 90s. Siguiendo esta línea de investigación ahondamos en los orígenes de la interseccionalidad y su desarrollo hasta nuestros días. Para finalizar, sostenemos que la articulación explícita de análisis interseccionales dentro de los estudios de género contemporáneos ha satisfecho una larga y antigua reivindicación por parte de las mujeres de color/feminismo del tercer mundo en EEUU. Sin embargo, no ha sido hasta ahora, una vez despojado de su fuerte identificación con la categoría de identidad política ‘mujeres de color’ cuando ha conseguido el marco inclusivo, conceptual e interdisciplinar que todo paradigma de género necesita.

Consecuentemente, en el transcurso de esta evolución en el entendimiento de las diferencias entre mujeres, nuestra tesis intenta situar históricamente el concepto de interseccionalidad volviendo atrás en el tiempo, partiendo de la época de la ilustración y enraizándolo en el contexto específico contemporáneo haciendo especial énfasis desde la década de los 80s hasta nuestros días.

A este objetivo, el propósito del capítulo 1 es hacer visible cómo en los orígenes de la teoría feminista anglo-europea, se naturalizaron las diferencias entre mujeres en pro de un género femenino con pretensiones universalistas. Nuestra investigación parte de la época de la ilustración europea por ser en este momento histórico en el que por primera vez se pronuncia públicamente el discurso de ‘igualdad, libertad y fraternidad’ entre los nuevos ciudadanos de una incipiente metrópolis. Dentro de un marco feminista postcolonial, nos acercaremos a pensadores propulsores del liberalismo y el contrato social, tales como Locke y más concretamente Rousseau, con el fin de desarrollar un entendimiento de las relaciones de poder dentro de estos primeros discursos sobre la igualdad. Así, prestaremos especial atención a la creación de un ‘canon occidental’ y un ‘lógica occidental dominante’ articulada dentro de la configuración política de un sistema colonial capitalista en plena expansión. En particular, exploraremos el concepto de la ‘diferencia colonial’ (Chatterjee, 1993) como una persistente herramienta de colonización discursiva de las diferencias culturales y sociales.

Como veremos, la Declaración de Independencia Americana y Francesa abrirán el camino hacia la creación de un movimiento feminista. Las premisas ilustradas que afirmaban que todos los ‘hombres’ eran libres e iguales, fueron creando progresivamente las condiciones sociales que llevaron a las primeras feministas a reivindicar derechos universales. Sin embargo, a través del análisis de textos fundacionales tales como *la Declaración de los derechos de la mujer* (1791) de la francesa Olimpia de Gouges o *Vindicación de los derechos de la mujer* (1792) de la británica Mary Wollstonecraft, se revelará un lógica colonial implícita en estas primeras vindicaciones feministas europeas. En sí, la visión de igualdad que se plantaba se inscribía dentro de los parámetros exclusivos de la ‘diferencia sexual’. Al colonizar discursivamente la heterogeneidad de experiencias de vida de las mujeres, se recreaba la

misma lógica patriarcal contra la que ellas se revelaban, dando lugar a un ‘sujeto feminista colectivo’ que llevaba la marca de un discurso occidental dominante.

En el siglo XIX, nos adentraremos en el escenario norteamericano, analizando *la Declaración de Sentimientos* (1848) y figuras relevantes como Elizabeth Cady Stanton y Lucretia Mott. Nuestra tesis intentará subrayar cómo la ‘diferencia sexual’ no solo se convierte en el paradigma crítico contra la subordinación/exclusión de las mujeres sino que marca el nacimiento de una conciencia y una lucha feminista específica: occidental, blanca y de clase media. Así, pretendemos enfatizar la falta de conciencia de clase o racial en estas primeras declaraciones oficiales con la intención de hacer visible como la relación de grupos minoritarios dentro del movimiento feminista ha estado marcada desde sus orígenes por dinámicas de poder excluyentes.

Ya en el siglo XX, en el capítulo 2, nos centramos en el progresivo reconocimiento dentro del mundo académico, de las experiencias de las mujeres como fuente de conocimiento crítico. Después de la segunda guerra mundial, la lucha por los derechos civiles en la década de los 60s supondrá el comienzo de la descolonización de la imaginación occidental dominante y la des-articulación de un sujeto universal. Por primera vez en la historia moderna, las mujeres anglo-europeas de clase media acceden al mundo académico dando comienzo lo que se ha denominado como ‘segunda ola’ feminista. Nuestra intención es trazar una visión general sobre feminismos dominantes en la década de los 70s para poder calibrar la subsiguiente intervención crítica de las mujeres de color/feminismo del tercer mundo en EEUU. Como analizaremos, a pesar de los diversos enfoques críticos (influenciados por el marxismo/socialismo, liberalismo, psicoanálisis y teorías radicales) todos ellos estaban unidos por una concepción de la identidad femenina en la que el género como categoría de análisis, se define solo en relación a la

‘diferencia sexual’ entre sexos como la causa fundamental de la opresión de las mujeres. Se comienza a tomar conciencia de la importancia en los análisis sobre el género de otras categorías sociales tales como la clase social (feminismo marxista/socialista) o la orientación sexual (teorías radicales-lesbianas) pero se hace desde una perspectiva aditiva y no interrelacionada; es decir, se teoriza sobre estas dimensiones sociales como niveles de abstracción que se añaden al estudio de las relaciones de género.

Dentro de este marco, inspiradas por un escenario global de descolonización (tanto de antiguas colonias como metrópolis) y la defensa de los derechos humanos y civiles, sobre todo a partir de la década de los setenta<sup>5</sup>, varios grupos de feministas procedentes de diversas disciplinas académicas y prácticas políticas, residentes en Estados Unidos pero con un origen étnico atravesado por el estigma de la esclavitud, el genocidio, la expropiación y la colonización, es decir, mujeres asio-americanas, afro-americanas, nativo-americanas, chicanas y latino-americanas, comienzan a defender la etiqueta social y académica de ‘mujeres de color’ como reivindicación al racismo, clasismo y discursos esencialistas del género dentro del movimiento feminista anglo-europeo. Nuestro objetivo es el de enfatizar cómo a finales de los 70s, un gran número de voces feministas elegían no identificarse y no integrarse dentro del movimiento. Este recorrido histórico busca también preparar el terreno para el análisis de la primera antología de mujeres de color *This Bridge Called My Back: Radical Writings by Women of Color* (1981) la cual es heredera y busca dar voz a una larga historia de reivindicaciones de invisibilidad por parte de las mujeres de color.

A este respecto, en el capítulo 3 exploramos *This Bridge Called My Back: Radical Writings by Women of Color* en sus diferentes ediciones (1981, 1983) como un cambio de

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<sup>5</sup> Consciente que la periodización se remonta a siglos atrás tomo como punto de partida la década de los setenta por concentrarse en ella mayores rastros cronológicos de un despegue literario.

paradigma radical que condujo a una re-conceptualización de la identidad de género en las teorías tradicionales. El nacimiento de unos poderes sociales y culturales donde nunca antes los había habido queda patente en la propia introducción de *This Bridge* en 1981 donde tanto Gloria Anzaldúa como Cherrie Moraga articulan una nueva categoría de concienciación política:

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 and denial of differences within the feminist movement. We intend to explore the causes and sources of, and solutions to these divisions. We want to create a definition that expands what “feminism” means to us (Iii)<sup>6</sup>

Con la determinación de hacer de la revolución del pensamiento crítico algo totalmente irresistible<sup>7</sup>, estas mujeres dieron voz a diferentes comunidades internamente colonizadas que se encontraron, se reconocieron y se aliaron en los márgenes de lo normativo. Motivadas por una visión común, emprendieron un proceso de descolonización, ya no solo de la teoría y de la práctica académica sino uno mucho más revolucionario y transformador: aquél que busca despertar conciencias a través de experimentar los límites y las aperturas de nuevos espacios de colectividad atravesados por la práctica y el pensamiento feminista.

Nuestra intención es reflejar un diálogo abierto entre feministas que continuará en los siguientes capítulos hasta llegar hasta el concepto de la ‘interseccionalidad’. El criterio que seguiremos en la elección de las voces mas representativas estarán marcada por un enfoque de género en su intersección con otras categorías de identidad social. En el estudio de las

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<sup>6</sup> Traducción: “Queremos expresar a todas las mujeres –especialmente a las mujeres blancas de clase media- las experiencias que nos dividen como feministas; queremos examinar episodios de intolerancia, prejuicio y rechazo de las diferencias dentro del movimiento feminista. Pretendemos explorar tanto las causas como las fuentes y las soluciones de estas divisiones. Queremos crear una definición que expanda lo que “feminismo” significa para nosotras”.

<sup>7</sup> Palabras de la escritora afro-americana Toni Cade Bambara “1981 Foreword” en *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, Moraga, Cherrie y Gloria ALzandúa., eds., Watertown, M.A. Persephone: xLiii.

diferencias situadas en el centro de las teorías de género, *This Bridge* no sólo magnifica las diferencias en nombre de la democratización de todas las diferencias, sino que redefine estas diferencias, que entonces dividían a las mujeres, como fuente de empoderamiento y crecimiento personal. Como consecuencia de su impacto, se activó el estudio de las dinámicas de poder implícitas en la articulación dominante del paradigma género, así como su efectividad a la hora de representar la complejidad y diversidad de experiencias de vida de las mujeres.

Así, bajo una mirada postcolonial, la genealogía oficial de la evolución de la conciencia feminista llevada a cabo por conocidas teóricas como Lydia Sargent (1981), Allison Jaggar (1983); Hester Eisenstein (1985), Gayle Green y Coopelia Kahn (1985) y Elaine Showalter (1985) se revelará como una ‘espacio imaginado’ (‘imaginary space’ Sandoval 2000: 52.3) en el que la propia definición de feminismo es puesta en entredicho. Nuestro propósito es por tanto ilustrar como la teoría de género dominante desde la década de los 70s hasta el final de los 80s, es atacada por el feminismo del tercer mundo como una fantasía conceptual, una ilusión colectiva etnocéntrica en la que la conciencia de categorías sociales tales como la clase social, orientación sexual o grupo étnico son meramente añadidas al género como si de niveles de abstracción teórica y no experiencial, se tratase.

La publicación en 1987 de Gloria Anzáldua *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* abrirá el camino hacia una nueva subjetividad psíquica (‘la conciencia mestiza’) en la que la hibridez y la multiplicidad del género supondrá todo un desafío epistemológico que no respeta límites tradicionales. En el estudio de las experiencias situadas en las intersecciones de clase, orientación sexual o pertenencia a un grupo étnico, las fronteras, dejan de ser entendidas como un mero concepto territorial *per se* y comienzan a teorizarse como posiciones identitarias. Tal es la fuerza teórica de los escritos de mujeres de color en EEUU que la singular presencia de un

feminismo del tercer mundo en Estados Unidos resultó imposible de ser ignorado en los mismos términos que en décadas anteriores. Sus postulados se convirtieron en una emboscada teórica, en un misterio a ser resuelto por el feminismo anglo-europeo a través de diversas disciplinas.

Como consecuencia, la articulación explícita de 'lo político de nuestros posicionamientos' ('the politics of Location' 1984) llevada a cabo por la poetisa y teórica feminista Adrienne Rich supondrá el reconocimiento de un nuevo mapa cognitivo de género en la que la categoría 'mujer' debe necesariamente posicionarse. Pretendemos así hacer visible como, gracias a la intervención crítica de las mujeres de color, la identidad de género se empieza a entender cómo particular, específica y siempre 'situada' en su contexto histórico socio-cultural.

Dentro de este marco, exploraremos el nacimiento de un género interseccional como un concepto teorizado por primera vez por la afro-americana Kimberlé Crenshaw a finales de los 80s, buscando hacer visible cómo las categorías 'género' y 'raza' están mutuamente interconectados en las experiencias y luchas diarias de las mujeres de color.

En el capítulo 4, ya en la época de los 90s, en un contexto en el que la formulación de la interseccionalidad por las mujeres de color se ve desplazado por un nuevo 'énfasis en la problematización del lenguaje' y la dimensión discursiva de la identidad de género, exploraremos el impacto de las teorías postmodernas y pos-estructuralistas. En particular, prestaremos especial énfasis a la teoría de 'la performatividad' de la lingüista, académica y pensadora feminista norteamericana Judith Butler. Nuestro propósito es clarificar las incompatibilidades metodológicas entre estas posturas que explicarán la reticencia a incorporar el concepto de 'interseccionalidad' en las teorías sobre el género. Dentro de este contexto de

confrontación metodológica, la categoría ‘mujer’ se tornó imposible de formular de una manera consensuada entre propias feministas. A este respecto, nos centraremos en el ‘debate de filadelfia’ (Great Philadelphia Philosophy Consortium-Sept 1990) cuyas figuras mas representativas serán Judith Butler, Shelia Benhabib y Nancy Fraser. Como conclusión del debate, sostenemos que se reconoce la necesidad de articular la complejidad en las teorías sobre el género en marcos teóricos abiertos a la especificidad y alianzas estratégicas.

Llegando a finales de los 90s, exploraremos el impacto de posturas críticas de carácter transversal tales como el de las británicas Anthea Floya y Nira Yuval-Davis que desafiarán el potencial inclusivo de la interseccionalidad por estar intrínsecamente unido a las experiencias de las mujeres de color.

Una vez ya en el s. XXI, en un contexto marcado por la re-articulación de fórmulas de identidad de carácter más inclusivo, continuamente reinventándose a sí mismas, las mujeres de color aceptan abandonar categorías de identidad política excluyentes en pro de la interseccionalidad crítica. Desde la radicalidad hacia la transformación, la última edición de *This Bridge, This Bridge We Call Home: Radical Writings for Transformation* (Anzaldúa y Keating 2002) supone un momento de apertura dentro de este diálogo intercultural en el que las categorías se desgarran y se convierten en más permeables.

Así, el capítulo 5 propone una revisión sobre una nueva sensibilidad en la teorización de un género interseccional tras esta última edición de *This Bridge*. Asimismo, proporcionaremos una revisión general del ‘estado de la cuestión’ en las teorías actuales sobre la interseccionalidad, prestando especial atención a dos líneas de investigación bien diferenciadas: la interseccionalidad sistemática y la constructivista. Nuestro propósito es por un lado, establecer una línea de continuidad e inmediatez en las teorías sobre la interseccionalidad

y por otro, exploraremos cómo su reciente éxito dentro de los estudios de género reside en que, una vez despojado de su fuerte identificación con las experiencias de vida de las mujeres de color, se ha convertido en una plataforma interdisciplinar que consigue aunar posturas hasta ahora confrontadas como los feminismos posmodernistas/pos-estructuralistas y los feminismos postcoloniales.

El papel de la subjetividad y la capacidad de acción toman fuerza en los nuevos acercamientos al carácter interseccional del género. En este marco, la última parte de nuestro análisis se centrará en la exploración de la interseccionalidad como un ‘yo en continuo diálogo’ propuesto por la académica y teórica feminista holandesa Marjo Buitelaar. Deseamos concluir este recorrido histórico-conceptual hacia la interseccionalidad celebrando que las categorías de identidad social interconectadas se entiendan como posiciones del yo, voces orquestadas en las intersecciones ‘situadas’, subjetivas y performativas, de nuestras interacciones diarias. Como resultado, dentro de este dinámico e interdisciplinar marco analítico, por un lado se subraya la intersección constante de las categorías sociales en la identidad de género, al tiempo que estas categorías se ponen en cuestionamiento crítico.

Para finalizar, proponemos una mirada interseccional a la pasada campaña electoral para la presidencia de Estados Unidos (2008) que enfrentó a un candidato afro-americano, Barack Obama contra una mujer blanca, Hillary Clinton. Sorprendentemente, esta campaña enfrentará y dividirá de nuevo a feministas, reabriendo viejas heridas en la reivindicación de una feminidad esencialista. Por tanto, nuestro objetivo en este último apartado será reflejar la naturaleza controvertida de este diálogo intercultural en el que repetidamente se ha advertido de los peligros de un enfoque de género que no se interconecta con otras categorías sociales, destruyendo así la posibilidad de alianzas, coalición y solidaridad a través de las diferencias.

En suma, nuestra intención en este último capítulo es la de hacer visible la tensión entre la teoría de género como un proyecto dual. Por un lado, concebido como un discurso crítico dentro del ámbito académico que cada vez alcanza un mayor consenso y aceptación; y por otro, como un proyecto de transformación social lleno de desencuentros en el plano político. Como nota final, buscamos incitar a la reflexión de los peligros que encierra la reproducción de viejos paradigmas de exclusión social, tales como la articulación de un género neutro, que no tiene en cuenta su intersección con otras categorías de identidad social

## **MARCO TEORICO Y APUNTES METODOLOGICOS**

Durante los últimos cuarenta años, los estudios feministas han se han convertido en un reconocido campo de conocimiento interdisciplinar caracterizado por la forma de cuestionar, desde una perspectiva crítica, los enfoques tradicionales en las experiencias de las mujeres. En particular, los estudios de género/mujeres se centran en el análisis de la categoría género en su interacción con otras variables sociales tales como la clase social, orientación sexual, grupo étnico, dis-capacidad, edad, etc. Hoy en día, en muchas universidades, se han implementado líneas de investigación y docencia relacionadas con género, identidades de género, relaciones de género en las que se cuestiona el determinismo biológico que tradicionalmente ha impregnado las ciencias humanas/sociales así como la percepción esencialista de un género en que las diferencias se naturalizan. Dentro de este marco crítico, nos acercamos a los estudios de género/mujeres como “un vibrante fenómeno transcultural en continuo desarrollo y una red de actividades interconectadas”<sup>8</sup> (Lykke 2010; foreword) tal y como sugiere la teórica y

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<sup>8</sup> Traducción mía: “ A vibrant an developing transnational phenomenon and web of activity”.

académica sueca Nina Lykke en *Feminist Studies: A Guide to Intersectional Theory, Methodology and Writing*.

A diferencia de los enfoques multi-disciplinares, se podría afirmar que una perspectiva interdisciplinar se caracteriza por una apertura hacia herramientas teóricas y metodológicas previamente delimitadas a ciertas disciplinas. Al compás de este enfoque, pretendemos hacer visible un fructífero intercambio entre disciplinas dentro las teorías de género así como la re-significación de premisas de otras disciplinas en su incorporación a la teorización de las diferencias desde una mirada de género. Así, nos centraremos en los estudios culturales feministas como un sub-campo dentro de los estudios de género/mujeres que combina análisis semióticos, textuales, discursivos, a momentos influenciado por la dimensión de lo simbólico y el poder de los deseos y el subconsciente; pero que a la vez examina la dimensión socio-cultural en la que se inscriben las identidades de género. Llegado este punto, es necesario subrayar que los estudios culturales feministas, que emergen en su interacción con el campo interdisciplinar de los estudios culturales (originado en los 60s en el centro de estudios culturales de Birmingham, Inglaterra), desde sus comienzos, han proporcionado análisis críticos sobre interacciones sociales. Durante décadas, las académicas feministas han sido reconocidas en sus análisis del género en la de-construcción de dimensiones sociales como ‘lo público vs. lo privado’ y su impacto en las relaciones sociales de género; y el cuestionamiento de conceptos clave como ‘identidad’, ‘subjectividad’ o ‘capacidad de acción’. Es nuestro propósito dar voz y proporcionar un reconocimiento a esta tradición académica feminista.

Al tiempo que pretendemos dar un reconocimiento a esta versión oficial de un feminismo institucionalizado dentro de los parámetros académicos anglo-europeos, nuestro enfoque se inscribe dentro de una perspectiva feminista post-colonial (feminismo del tercer mundo en

EEUU) con el fin de desarrollar un mayor entendimiento de las relaciones de poder entre feministas y de explicar los orígenes de la interseccionalidad. Por otro lado, el impacto de las teorías posmodernistas y post-estructuralistas complementará nuestro análisis de las categorías de identidad social como el resultado de un proceso discursivo en vez de un enfoque estructural o basado en la experiencia.

Al presentar las posiciones más reconocidas dentro de los debates feministas sobre las categorías sociales de identidad de género, sobre todo pretendemos subrayar un acercamiento múltiple. Desde un punto de vista epistemológico, las teorías de género han estado en un continuo diálogo con otras ramas del pensamiento tales como el liberalismo, marxismo/socialismo, psicología (capítulo 2) teorías posmodernistas y post-estructuralistas (capítulo 2 y 4). De igual manera, estas posturas han entrado en diálogo con posturas post-coloniales y antirracistas (capítulo 1 y 3). Consecuentemente, nuestra propia cartografía engloba diversas posturas, buscando transmitir la heterogeneidad, complejidad y diversidad de voces y posturas que conforman el conglomerado teórico feminista.

Al mismo tiempo, es nuestra intención enfatizar los puntos de unión y perspectivas comunes entre diferentes posiciones epistemológicas, sobre todo en el cuestionamiento del conocimiento canónico occidental desde una mirada de género. Y así, presentamos la evolución de las teorías de género hasta alcanzar el concepto de la interseccionalidad como parte de una reflexión crítica en la que los significados continuamente se re-significan y se negocian en pro de la totalidad de experiencias de vida de las mujeres.

En primer lugar, partimos de una visión general de un feminismo ilustrado y sus voces más representativas como la francesa Olimpia de Gouge y la británica Mary Wollstonecraft (capítulo 1). En el contexto norteamericano del s. XIX, nuestro foco de análisis será la

*Declaración de Sentimientos* (1848) En segundo lugar, nuestra mirada se centrará en la articulación de las experiencias de las mujeres como conocimiento crítico con la intención de reflejar como lo que ha se denominado como la ‘segunda ola feminista’ comenzó a introducir variables sociales en los análisis de género, aunque desde un punto de vista aditivo (la clase social, orientación sexual, el grupo étnico se *suman* a la categoría género) y no interconectados al género.

A continuación, nos centramos en resaltar un movimiento paralelo de voces marginales presente desde las primeras manifestaciones feministas pero reconocido con fuerza tras la publicación de la antología *This Bridge Called My Back: Radical Writings by Women of Color* (Anzaldúa y Moraga 1981, 1983): las mujeres de color /feminismo del tercer mundo en EEUU. Al ser una antología bien reconocida y documentada, nuestra lectura es una interpretación personal de sus mayores aportaciones y más reveladores análisis. Nuestra selección de fragmentos y citas está por tanto mediada por lo que más me ha movido y me ha enseñado a lo largo de esta investigación y por lo que más me ha enriquecido, tanto personal como intelectualmente.

Con la intención de ilustrar el impacto en las teorías de género de la intervención crítica de las mujeres de color, utilizaremos otros textos relevantes dentro de este movimiento tales como *The Black Feminist Statement* del grupo feminista afro-americano Combahee River Collective (1977), “Under Western Eyes” de la Bengali afincada en EEUU Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1988). Y abriendo el camino hacia la interseccionalidad, en la obra de la afro-americana Kimberlé Crenshaw y Patricia Hill Collins. Ya en la época de los 90s, analizaremos el choque de posturas metodológicas entre mujeres de color y feminismos posmodernistas y post-structuralistas, sobre todo a través de figuras como Dona Haraway, Teresa de Lauretis,

Rossi Bradotti, Sandra Harding y en especial, la controversia que se llevó a cabo en el debate de Filadelfia, U.S (1990) entre Judith Butler, Nancy Fraser y Sheila Benhabib. Por otro lado, cuestionando un enfoque interseccional altamente asociado a las experiencias de las mujeres de color, exploramos a las feministas británicas Nira Yuval Davis y Flora Anthias (*Racialized Boundaries: Race, Nation, Gender, Colour and Class and Anti-Racist Struggle* 1992).

Una vez en el siglo XXI, y haciéndose echo de las críticas contra categorías de identidad política excluyentes (mujeres *de color*) proponemos un análisis de la última edición de *This Bridge* y el cambio tan radical que engendra con respecto a anteriores ediciones. Así, *This Bridge We Call Home: Radical Writings for Transformation* (Anzaldúa y Keating 2002) será el preámbulo de una nueva sensibilidad hacia teorías interseccionales en los nuevos diálogos contemporáneos. El análisis de esta última antología está sujeto al mismo criterio que las precedentes; sin embargo, no llevaremos a cabo una interpretación tan detallada. Principalmente, pretendemos establecer una línea de continuidad en las reivindicaciones de las mujeres de color y sus aportaciones críticas en cuanto al problema de cómo conseguir nombrar las diferencias entre las mujeres de una manera no-jerárquica ni excluyente. Al mismo tiempo, justificamos la elección de esta antología, así como las voces más destacadas dentro del movimiento literario de mujeres de color, como la búsqueda por plasmar un camino hacia la interseccionalidad desde la radicalidad hacia la transformación.

Por último, revisamos las teorías y líneas de investigación actuales basándonos por ejemplo en la edición especial sobre interseccionalidad en el *European Journal of Women's Studies* (2006); *Feminist Studies: A Guide to Intersectional theory, Methodology and Writing* (Lykke 2010) o *Intersectional Approach: Transforming the Academy Through Race, Class and Gender* (Berger and Guidroz 2009).

## CONCLUSIONES

Finalmente, como conclusión, destacamos el potencial de la interseccionalidad como un campo de conocimiento dinámico, interdisciplinar y transformativo, capaz de aunar posturas metodológicas hasta el momento percibidas como incompatibles. Al mismo tiempo, buscamos enfatizar cómo las teorías de la intersección genérica siguen siendo un área de perspectivas confrontadas, marcada por la controversia desde sus orígenes. Sin embargo, el tono final de esta tesis doctoral no pretender ser ni mucho menos pesimista, ya que este apasionante diálogo intercultural de género, continua, sigue abierto a nuevos entendimientos en la búsqueda por alcanzar esa fórmula conceptual que de voz a las diferencias entre las mujeres.

En mi lectura del potencial inclusivo de la interseccionalidad, reconozco el legado intelectual y político de las mujeres de color en EEUU, guiado por el imperativo de interrogar constantemente las dinámicas de poder implícitas en los significados, conceptos y teorías que formulamos para explicar nuestra identidad. En este sentido, la intervención crítica de las mujeres de color, sobre todo tras la publicación de *This Bridge*, supuso todo un cambio de paradigma sin precedentes dentro de las teorías de género. Sin embargo, más allá de la introducción de una mirada como la que realizamos sobre los análisis del género, el gran mensaje de las contribuidoras de *This Bridge* ha sido la necesidad de situar nuestras experiencias específicas y la (in)-capacidad de escucharnos con el corazón abierto. Esta predisposición requiere asumir la posibilidad de llegar a cuestionar nuestras más profundas creencias y modos de entender al mundo en pro de la democratización de *todas* las diferencias, en aras de establecer un diálogo intercultural en el que todas las voces y experiencias de vida, sean representadas. A su vez, implica el propósito de trascender categorías sociales pre-

establecidas con el fin de entender las dinámicas de poder implícitas en las variables de género que entran en juego en nuestras interacciones diarias.

Bajo esta rúbrica, una mirada interseccional nos recuerda que toda teoría es acción, verbal e intelectual. Y así en un proceso desde la radicalidad hacia la transformación, la evolución del entendimiento de las diferencias puso en marcha un fascinante debate que culminaría con la celebración del potencial inclusivo de la interseccionalidad crítica en los estudios contemporáneos de género/ mujeres.

Al analizar las experiencias de las mujeres de color en EEUU como punto de partida de este diálogo intercultural académico anglo-europeo, he buscado situar bajo una mirada crítica conceptos tales como ‘diferencia’ e ‘igualdad’, no sólo entre mujeres sino en el ámbito de las relaciones sociales en general. Al mismo tiempo, mi intención ha sido la de arrojar luz sobre la complejidad inherente en la teorías sobre la identidad de género y su impacto y su efectividad desde un punto de vista interdisciplinar.

Por otro lado, una de las ideas que más he enfatizado ha sido el desafío de las mujeres de color ante una versión unificada del movimiento de mujeres dentro de un ámbito académico anglo-europeo. De hecho, tal y como se explorará a lo largo de los capítulos, la intervención de las mujeres de color en EEUU puso en marcha nuevas formas de alianza entre mujeres que desestabilizarían categorías sociales convencionales. En un momento en el que las diferencias entre mujeres eran percibidas como una fuente de división y exclusión social (80s), levantaron sus voces en contra de una articulación del género femenino entendida como universal. Insistieron así, en la particularidad y en la especificidad de sus necesidades y experiencias haciendo visible la intersección constante del género con otras variables sociales tales como la clase social, pertenencia a grupo étnico, orientación sexual, edad, etc. Como ya hemos

enfaticado, juntas construyeron un puente metafórico tan largo y tan ancho que primeras críticas y desencuentros consiguieron reemplazarse por creativas alternativas teóricas y la promesa de una fórmula inclusiva en los análisis de la identidad de género: *una perspectiva interseccional*.

De hecho, en este camino hacia la interseccionalidad, el mayor reto frente a las teorías tradicionales ha sido el reconocimiento de una visión interseccionada de la identidad, desbancando así el análisis aditivo en las variables sociales del género. De la misma manera, supone una alternativa crítica a las categorías de identidad política, al poner en cuestionamiento la homogeneidad y el esencialismo inherente en etiquetas tales como ‘mujeres de color’ o ‘mujeres blancas’. A este respecto, aplaudo la naturaleza crítica del propio pensamiento feminista, tanto de las mujeres de color, como los feminismos dominantes en la academia, que han encontrado en la interseccionalidad una manera de reconciliar sus postulados y premisas con procesos de auto-crítica constructiva.

Como en todo paradigma emergente, existen discrepancias en su uso y en su aplicación. Sin embargo, mi objetivo ha sido plasmar una visión general, al compás de una mirada específica, dentro de una conversación que continua. Reconozco por tanto, que en los múltiples niveles de intersección de las categorías sociales de identidad, muchos aspectos quedan todavía por explorar. En este sentido, mi propósito ha sido establecer un puente entre las principales premisas y parámetros de análisis interseccional, haciendo visible un recorrido histórico en la evolución del entendimiento de las diferencias.

La resistencia ante un discurso esencialista de la identidad de género y una teoría feminista articulada como ‘un espacio imaginado’ (capítulo 2) ha estado llena de acusaciones y

separatismos pero también supuso el comienzo de un apasionante diálogo: cómo negociar la identidad de tal manera que todas las partes se incluyan.

En su aspecto más liberador, la interseccionalidad supone el alcance de una fórmula ideada para aunar posturas confrontadas y establecer nuevos puentes teóricos. Se reconoce que las interacciones en las que no existan dinámicas de poder son *utópicas* y por lo tanto, lo que realmente está en juego es concienciarse en cómo operan estas relaciones desiguales para poder así desestabilizarlas. En este sentido, podría afirmarse que lo que las teorías contemporáneas sobre la interseccionalidad ofrecen al mundo académico es la realización de que las identidades no son nunca fijas sino que gravitan continuamente a través de categorías sociales. Y así, y aún a costa de repetirnos, en la búsqueda de análisis de identidad de género más elaborados y más complejos, la interseccionalidad nos invita a reconocer que nuestros conocimientos son siempre situados (en este caso, occidental, europeo de clase media) y este posicionamiento personal e intelectual impacta siempre nuestras teorías y nuestra forma de enseñar. Por eso, defendemos que un ambiente académico en el que se reconozcan figuras académicas que compartan esta concepción producirá un compromiso teórico y práctico con los retos de la sociedad del siglo XXI.

Para finalizar, me gustaría resaltar que, a través de este descubrimiento personal y académico, he llegado a reconocer mi propia posición privilegiada y así siento como mi responsabilidad moral cuestionar los enfoques esencialistas sobre el género, utilizar enfoques metodológicos que ayuden a desestabilizar dinámicas de poder y ser más inclusiva en mis análisis. Por esta razón, tanto desde un punto de vista conceptual como metodológico, sostengo el uso de modelos interseccionales dentro de un continuo poner en cuestionamiento las identidades de género.

En mi propia lectura, la interseccionalidad nos recuerda la proximidad e indisolubilidad del género con otras categorías sociales, al tiempo que demuestra cómo están inherentemente ligadas a otras formas de conocimiento social y cultural. Al mismo tiempo, nos invita a reflexionar sobre cuáles son los conceptos y teorías necesarias en la lucha por la justicia social desde nuestro conocimiento y experiencia situada para imaginar e insistir que modelos de análisis más inclusivos son posibles mientras continuemos de-construyendo las dinámicas de poder en las que nuestras identidades se inscriben. Sólo entonces, las ciencias sociales en general, y los estudios de género/mujeres, culturales y literarios en particular, podrán convertirse en ese espejo en el que todas las voces encuentren su expresión específica y matizada. Al hilo de esta idea, y resistiendo la tentación de un final utópico, me gustaría enfatizar la necesidad de continuar interrogándose sobre el género, nuestro papel, capacidad de acción y nuestra responsabilidad dentro de la infinita red de relaciones sociales en la que nuestras identidades toman cuerpo.

En mi opinión, el verdadero reto de estas teorías no se halla en encontrar maneras de transgredir imperativos de género con el fin de conseguir que nuestras teorías sean más inclusivas o democráticas, sino en desarrollar nuevos conceptos que nos permitan una mejor comprensión de las condiciones, tanto materiales como simbólicas, que justifican y a la vez impactan nuestra identidad de formas muy específicas. Al final, estos conceptos son los que están íntimamente unidos a los horizontes de cambio que imaginamos, los diálogos interculturales que deseamos entablar y el tipo de mundo con el que nos atrevemos a soñar y por el que luchamos.

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## INTRODUCTION

### DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT AND GENERAL GOALS

My own interest in exploring the complexity of women's lives spurred me to pursue an intercultural approach to gender through my own respective discipline, Literary and Cultural Studies in English-Spoken countries (U.S Literature is my major). I always longed for an all-inclusive conceptual articulation and embracement of identity, in its most intercultural engagement, even when I hadn't encountered the very concept of intersectionality in itself. Over the years, my passion and curiosity found expression through an interdisciplinary training in Women's Studies.

I discovered *This Bridge Called My Back: Radical Writings by Women of Color* (Moraga and Anzaldúa 1981, 1983)<sup>9</sup> the first women of color anthology in the U.S, the last of my undergraduate years here at the Complutense University of Madrid. It was so inspirational. What it mostly moved me about this anthology was the power to mold theory in their own flesh and turn it into action. A well-documented political and literary movement most visible in the Anglo-European academy since the late 1980s, self-identified women of color in the U.S compromised both activists and scholars, from many diverse disciplines and backgrounds, first united with a clear vindication against a racist articulation of gender within mainstream feminisms. Dispelling the mantra of a 'unified sisterhood' as the primary explanatory force and

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<sup>9</sup> Hereafter cited as *This Bridge*, the book has two editions. I mostly use the second edition published by Kitchen Table Press, 1983. However, some quotes will also be taken from the first edition, published by Persephone Press, 1981 since they correspond to the early stages of my research.

arguing against additive analysis of 'race' and 'class' *This Bridge's* contributors were enlarging the scope of gender analysis to ways never before anticipated. Indeed, *This Bridge* brought together a prestigious list of scholars- Gloria Anzaldúa, Cherríe Moraga- not only to showcase the most influential essays on the topic but to also highlight subsequent developments of these approaches from a variety of disciplines and intellectual and political positions. I was particularly struck by the insights of Chicanas Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga and African-Americans Audre Lorde, Barbara Smith and how they enacted new forms of alliance aimed at destabilizing conventional identity-based boundaries. Through its pages, on the problem of theorizing women's experiences in an accurate, grounded and nuanced way, the challenge of a universal female gender was first introduced to me. Engaged in both an intellectual and personal discovery, I came to terms with my own privileged position as a European middle-class student which made me reflect upon how I was constituted as a knowing subject and to what extent I juggled and valued multiple aspects of identity. Along with this discovery, as much as I was impressed by their determination to trouble any essentialist discourse of gender and subvert it to any kind of static classification, I was particularly puzzled by how angry and hurt they were. Their oppositional rhetoric reflected the intensity of their pain; their urgent need not just to be heard but to be approached with a deep listening and a willingness to negotiate differences among women. I was then drawn to understand the roots of their frustration; where the rigid accusations, embattled self-naming and the oppositional politics came from. It became evident therefore that this anthology would become the metaphorical spine of a theoretical journey I was about to embark on. At that point, the refusal of women of color to neither to identify nor to fully integrate within the women's movement became the starting point of my research.

In the following years, when I started my doctoral research in UC Berkeley, CA, U.S., back in 2005, I was struck not only by the great amount of literature and studies that attended to the literary and political experiences of women of color in the U.S from the late 1960s onwards, but mostly to discover that *This Bridge* had evolved to become a ‘home’ and that radical writings by women of color had transmuted into an all inclusive (that is, not only women of color) transformative theory in *This Bridge We Call Home: Radical Writings for Transformation* (Anzaldúa and Keating 2002). First critiques against a ‘universal female gender’ and the insistence on the particularity of their experiences and needs from positions which combined gender with ‘race’, class, colonial legacy, sexuality, dis/ability, age and other social categories, were being replaced by creative alternatives to traditional gender theories. From its very title, I could sense an ongoing evolution towards differences that I wanted to comprehend further. Enrolled in both Latina-American Studies and Women’s/Gender Studies<sup>10</sup> departments at UC Berkeley I came across a fascinating intercultural feminist debate around the interlocking socio-cultural categories of gender. My interest in interconnected categories surrounding gender blossomed in these graduate courses. As I developed my research interests most centrally in their vindications of invisibility, their theories caught my attention in the light of intersectionality. I thus encountered the work of the first intersectional African American feminist theorists Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989, 1993) Patricia Hill Collins (1990) and Barbara Smith (1983). Their words awoken in me the pursuit of tackling unequal social relations of power, both privileging and/or marginalization, in gender identity formation processes.

Nevertheless, and as much as investigated on these issues I couldn’t comprehend back then how, although gender studies had benefited from the proliferation of several women of

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<sup>10</sup> In claims of a more inclusive label that would represent all genders within Women’s Studies scope, back in 2005, doing my doctoral courses at UC Berkeley, the department of Women’s Studies became Women’s/Gender Studies. Nowadays, it is a widely spread name in most universities which foster feminist studies.

color path-breaking anthologies, there was not enough critical insight on the role of their vindications in shaping Women's/Gender Studies. What it came to me as a realization, nonetheless, was that I was caught in the middle of a long-standing intercultural gender dialogue in which I lacked both sides of the story. If I wanted to fully grasp the reason underneath this controversy, I would need to investigate the origins of mainstream feminist theory. To do so, I enrolled on a European-based women's studies Master here at the Complutense University of Madrid (2007-2009).

In this Master, I had the opportunity to become a student of well-recognised feminist scholars, writers and theorists in Spain such as Celia Amorós, Amelia Varcárcel, Luisa Posada, Rosa Cobo, among many others. I am so thankful for their critical insights and thoughtful classes. Through an intense historical revisionism dating as far back as the first feminist vindications in Enlightenment times, I progressively came to understand the roots of an 'essentialist gender'. Finally, I was able to comprehend that the evolution of differences among women takes off in the moment in which the existence of a universalized experience as 'women' is put into question. That is, woman with capital letters, static, singular and essentialized marks an uneasy movement of destabilization in which gender identity starts to be interrogated. Similarly, 'women of color' is made up in the course of new political alliances aimed at strategically prioritizing some differences 'gender, class, ethnicity, sexuality' in the name of *all* differences. I understood thus that the gender theory that had been most visible to me such as the work of British Mary Wollstonecraft, The American Elizabeth Cady Stanton or the French philosopher Simone de Beauvoir had been disciplinized, colored by racial privilege in the academy, with a very particular set of political priorities despite being inclined to be articulated in universalistic claims. As a result, I also came to notice that the 'mainstream

gender theory' available to me had been produced within politicized systems of publication and distribution.

Moreover, the tremendous impact of postmodern and poststructuralist gender theories in the decade of the 1990s, specially through *Gender Trouble* (1990) and *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (1993) by Northamerican Judith Butler, gave me thoughtful theoretical insights unto identity-process formation. Critical theorist such as Nancy Fraser and Sheila Benhabib took me to the very core of the debate around the articulation of differences. Consequently, once I gained a clearer view of both women of color and postmodern and poststructuralist's perspectives, light was shone unto the existence of crucial methodological incompatibilities that explained the reluctance to incorporate intersectionality within gender analysis. Moreover, so-called 'transversal theorists' such as British Nira Yuval Davis and Floya Anthias (1992) made me rethink my own approach towards intersectionality when they challenged intersectional approaches for being strongly attached to identity politics.

In addition to this, the summer of 2008 provided an unexpected twist into my research. At the end of the first academic year of the Master, I was granted with a scholarship to represent Complutense University at the annual European Women's Studies Summer Course- NOISE (ATHENEA network), held that year at Utrecht University, Netherlands. It was then when the promising interdisciplinary embracement of intersectionality unfolded in its entire splendor. Focusing on the celebration of 'In Between Understanding and Practicing Gender: Intersectionality and Interdisciplinarity' (its title), I was fascinated by the enthusiasm that it seemed to provoke the fact that intersectionality aimed at uniting so-called conflicting methodological perspectives. By the hand of well-known feminist scholars such as Italian philosopher and gender theorist Rossi Bradotti, North American cultural and gender theorist

Kathy Davis and Suriname-Dutch cultural and gender theorist Gloria Wekker I clearly saw that, methodologically speaking, intersectionality finally had the potential to become that ‘bridge’ women of color in the U.S had long dreamed about. Immersed in the latest developments in research and theories by a new generation of European intersectional scholars, the bits and pieces of my previous research ultimately revealed to me as a momentum of unexpected consensus within a confronting intercultural dialogue. At that point, the main guiding arguments to this journey towards intersectionality had been established.

From the very preliminary stages it interested me that intersectional ways of thinking have a long and complicated history in feminist thought. Following therefore my own interest in power dynamics engaged in social justice, I decided to explore the political and literary legacy of the concept of intersectionality with the following questions in mind: What are the power-dynamics implied in the meanings we contest?; and to what extent is gender identity able to separate in practice from other power relations?

These questions reflect this dissertation’s goal of pulling the threads of divergent and connective meanings, layers of both theoretical abstraction and specific and particular experiences, of categories and feelings, inclusion, collective awareness and particularity. To do so, and in order to depict the crucial and fundamental changes towards gender analysis since the first Anglo European feminist vindications, it became important to highlight how ongoing clashes and misconceptions in regards to differences among women have resulted in one of the most fascinating, fructiferous and insightful theoretical journeys the Anglo European academia has continuously witnessed over the past decades. More specifically, I considered relevant to emphasize that after the publication of *This Bridge* (1980s) a paradigm shift had occurred thanks to the critical intervention of women of color. Indeed, the intersectional identities of

*This Bridge* challenged gender theories to articulate their own politics of location and ‘situated knowledges’ (Haraway 1988) in such a way they were forced to incorporate an interlocking understanding of socio-cultural categories. Furthermore, in the 90s, postmodern/poststructuralist and transversal feminists forced women of color to become more self-critical methodologically and epistemologically and speaking. The interest therefore is delimited to understand how the evolution and development of differences parallels the development of intersectional analysis, from its much disputed origins till its enthusiastic current reception in Anglo European Women’s /Gender studies.

Along these lines, I wish to stress that contemporary gender theory and practice and its feminist epistemological positions are extraordinarily diverse. Gender studies, interdisciplinary by nature, are a very complex field to which many discourses contribute. However, through my own studies and research, I came to realize that the major paradigm shift that separates contemporary versions from earlier feminisms is a growing response to the demands for a politics of difference. This will be an important shared perspective depicted through the interweaving arguments of the following chapters. The attention to difference and specificity led to an intense investigation of the production of gender identity which for women of color meant a greater focus on aspects other than gender that generate identity, for example class, ethnicity and sexuality. On the contrary, for postmodern and poststructuralists it meant highlighting the discursive, linguistic and communicative processes that construct gender identity. Acknowledging the interdisciplinary nature of this research, I not only aim at describing an engagement with gender feminist theory, structuralism, postmodernism and other main intellectual fields of knowledge. I am particularly interested in giving a general overview of so-called ‘intersectional approach’, which caused and continues to produce, heated debate

but nonetheless, it has undeniably radically altered the way gender research is conducted, in an interdisciplinary manner. Furthermore, one of the driving impetus of depicting the complex theoretical momentum reached within the ‘linguistic turn’ of the 1990s is to give voice and bring recognition to a generation of fully mature thinkers and their considerable body of work. As Linda Alcoff remembers “now Jurgen Habermas has to respond to Nancy Fraser, Jacques Derrida to Judith Butler (2000: 841)<sup>11</sup>

In order to examine the evolution of understanding of differences in an Anglo-European production and reception, this dissertation proposes a critical reading of the most relevant texts in the cultural, literary, feminist circles and postcolonial thinking at major historical junctures. As part of an intercultural ongoing conversation is made up of pieces: some written as long ago as the XVII century, some as recent as 2010. I try to smooth over these discontinuities by highlighting a persist uneasiness among marginal voices within Anglo-European feminist theory. Therefore, this dissertation is intended to map the main representative voices and stages in this ongoing discussion around the interlocking categories of gender and its progressive adoption within Women’s/Gender studies. In order to narrow down our research focus, I use on one side, the different anthologies of *This Bridge* and the most well-known texts within women of color movement and on the other, I gathered the foundational texts and most well-recognized scholars-writers-theorists within mainstream gender theory.

My aim is to illustrate the historical and intellectual journey of an intersectional mindset with the purpose to celebrate the ‘coming of age’ of a very transformative paradigm. On this ground, I found important to conclude with a contemporary case-study that would provide the immediacy and actuality that an ongoing conversation deploys. The 2008 Electoral Presidential

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<sup>11</sup> Alcoff, Linda “Philosophy Matters: A Review of Recent Work in Feminist Philosophy *Signs*, 25 (3) (2000): 841-82.

Campaign in the U.S brought together important voices in this discussion such as Afro-Americans Kimberlé Crenshaw and Alice Walker, North American Robin Morgan, and British Nira Yuval-Davis. With this undercurrent analysis, I intend to reflect the controversial nature of gender theories of identity. Although it is undeniable that they are heavily influenced by intersectional approaches, nonetheless still a very much contested methodological and epistemological realm.

One argument that I make about gender theory in feminist studies is embedded in the very title of this dissertation; I refer as ‘dialogues’ in feminist thinking and production as a challenge to both traditional taxonomies and to defy any unitary history of Women’s/Gender studies. My point here is to heighten the particular specificities in the discourses of gender identity among Anglo-European feminists, very much historically –at times almost momentarily- located, continually rewritten and reinscribed with new meanings. Consequently, it is my intention to foreground how its epistemological concepts, constituencies and strategies have evolved touching upon the very concept of intersectionality. As it will be depicted in the following chapters, throughout the time span covered, the evolution of differences among women encompassed a theory which emerged out of tensions between movements and power-laden debates about which intersections, power differentials and normativities should be given priority in which political contexts. Thus, to the extent that I have stressed the evolution of differences among women, I have also mapped intersectionality’s various stages within the Anglo-European academia, in the light of on-going efforts to theorize intersectional categories of identity as a cross cultural tool.

However, I don’t mean that ‘dialogues’ are not deployment of power dynamics. On the contrary, I believe that ‘intercultural dialogues’ discussing power differentials is the first step

to destabilize them. Thus, I have approached its controversy as a part of an on-going intercultural debate that has offered and continues to provide, highly sophisticated theoretical insights in addressing the power dynamics implied in the intersections of gender. Nonetheless, as a much-disputed concept, I intend to reflect how intersectional approaches to gender are still under continuous interrogation.

Having this in mind, the central focus of my research is to both trace the genealogy of the awareness of intersectional identities within gender discourses and to produce a general overview in the state of art of current contemporary debates. With the intention to give voice to an undergoing reexamination of the central tenets in gender theory, I believe that in order to depict the complex nature of the debate that I analyze, I need to provide an accessible, clearly explained review of the main concepts within gender arena as well as relevant debates. At this point, I urge to emphasize that many attempts have been made to articulate ‘intersectional identities’ along the way. To these regards, I acknowledge and underline that many feminist discussions of intersections have been carried out under other names, using metaphors and frameworks other than intersectionality. Indeed, this study does not intend to provide one and only version of this intercultural debate, rather it aims at analyzing one particular instance of many others. I intent therefore to capture a general sense of this debate, to provide a glimpse into a conversation through its most well-known and representative voices but with no purpose to map a definitive itinerary or one way argument.

Seeking this interest, I paid special attention to those texts which best articulated the destabilization of hegemonic discourses of gender and those unmarked aspects that are challenged or altered by women of color and postmodern/poststructuralist feminists’ intervention. Along these lines, I investigate the origins of intersectionality and how it has

developed till nowadays. To conclude, I sustain the argument that the explicit articulation of intersectionality at the turn of the XXI century, gave voice to a theoretical endeavor that until then had been widespread and outspoken among women of color academic circles but it lacked the proper articulation that an all-inclusive conceptualization establishes.

Consequently, in trying to trace the evolution of understanding of differences among women, my argument is an attempt to re-historize intersectionality by shifting it to back the Enlightenment times and rooting it in the specific context of the present era. In short, I believe that a toolkit of effective resistance such as the concept of intersectionality must be continually historically calibrated.

To this purpose, Chapter 1 of this dissertation makes visible the ways in which Anglo-European feminist theory originated out of the naturalization of differences among women. I intend to trace the logic of difference in Western canonical knowledge and mainstream feminism to provide an overview to identify the common contours of future gender theories. I believe that, in order to be able to contextualize the most radical contributions of the self-proclaimed literary movement women of color in the U.S. which reaffirmed itself as Third World Feminism in United States, it is indispensable to trace a diachronic journey. The framing of a historical background would clarify why its protests, insights, and illuminating breakthroughs will entail a new stage within the development of a cross-Atlantic feminist dialogue.

This chapter is divided into five sections. Starting in section 1.1 with an ‘introductory historical journey to de-colonial linkages’ to provide a postcolonial framework, I take off in section 1.2 ‘the Logic of Difference in Modernity’, with the European illustration as a historical stage in which for the first time in history, the discourse of *equality* and *liberty* is

publicly uttered by the new citizens of the incipient European metropolis. Hence, this research is grounded in postcolonial and feminist theory in order to develop an understanding of power relations in the discourse of equality since the first Enlightenment thinkers. Liberal thinkers such as Locke or Rousseau will be approached as the spokesmen of a new political era: the bonding of modern citizens through social contract. This social bonding, nonetheless, was ingrained in a long history of Western philosophical and religious tradition that considered women inferior to men. I will therefore pay special attention to the creation of 'Western authority knowledge' with the intention to unearth a Western dominant logic articulated in the political configuration of a colonial capitalist system. In particular, I will explore the concept of 'colonial difference' as the persistent discursive colonization of social and cultural differences. Along these lines, it will be underscored the concepts of 'gender essentialism and cultural imperialism' as theorized by Sandra Harding and Uma Narayan in *Decentering the Center: Philosophy for a Multicultural, Postcolonial and Feminist World* (2000).

In the next section 1.3 'Enlightenment Premises: First Feminist Manifestos' the American and French Declarations of independence will be explored as the opening path to the creation of a feminist movement. The illustrated premises that affirmed that all the 'men' are born free and equal, and therefore with the same rights, progressively created the necessary social conditions that facilitated the first feminist claim of universal rights and duties arguing that women were equal of reasonable thinking and capable of self-government.

However, by analyzing Olimpia de Gouges's *Declaration of the Rights of Woman* (1791) and Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) it will be revealed an implicit inheritance of colonial thinking within the early dominant feminisms. The vision of equality which these first feminists were claiming, was faithfully recreating the same sexist and

patriarchal logic to which they were rebelling 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. Due to the rule of colonial difference in which cultural and social differences were naturalized in favor of a dominant norm, for these first feminist voices difference equaled *sexual difference* alone. On this ground, this section is particularly devoted to foreground how in the realms of hegemonic structures of power, direct or overtly these women were locating gender strictly with the framework of sexual difference, in the dichotomy between the public and the private, thereby enabling the mediation of an abyss of experiences too broadly confronting as to be homogenized in a single category of 'woman'.

At this juncture, in section 1.4 titled 'North American Scenario: First Feminist Declaration' the *Declaration of Sentiments* (1948) and its key figures will be analyzed, such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton. Furthermore, I will continue arguing that 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. Specifically, the absence of a class or racial consciousness is precisely what concerns us in this first announcement. That is, the lack of inclusive representation of these women who were experiencing oppression in terms of slavery, cultural assimilation, working-class or immigrant stigma.

To conclude with the historical journey, in the final section 1.5 "The Crusade for the civil rights: A joint Enterprise", in the midst of the suffrage campaign the figure of the first documented African American ex-slave, Sojour Truth, will be introduced as a counter-voice

that defies essentialist understandings of 'women'. Central to this argument is the understanding of the development of the first feminist 'notions of the self' as closely linked to their relationship to power dynamics, falling into the very ahistorical trap or lack of any particular social and cultural context they had being telling men to avoid. Moreover, I will look closely at one historical crossroad that it will be reproduced overtime and it will be analyzed in the 2008 U.S. Presidential Electoral Campaign (Chapter 6). In seeking women's vote, those in favor of granting the vote to women before it was given to black males, confronted those feminist who believed that both causes were equally crucial. Within this context, I will focus on how the failure of the suffrage movement to sustain its commitment to the democratic ideals for all citizens is the first documented broken commitment to racial and social equality among women.

My point is to emphasize the historical background that fostered class and 'racial' division among feminists. In particular, how the relationship of minority groups to the women's movement has been from the very beginning marked by complex factors affecting the development of white women's authority voice and non/white women's invisibility. Replicating the same logic, first Anglo-European feminist claims can be affirmed to be those of a 'sexual equality' vindicated from a *cultural neutral gender* signaling the ethnocentric limitations of the first feminist manifestos.

Continuing tracing the logic of difference within Western canonical knowledge and mainstream feminism Chapter 2 focuses on the emergence of women experiences as a body of critical knowledge. Starting with the section 2.1 'The Beginning of the Decolonization of Western Imagination' I provide a general overview of how new scientific approaches such as psychoanalysis and semiology began to break down the binaries that had governed Western

philosophy (as abstract/concrete, mind/body, culture/nature). In doing so, a new stream of critical consciousness began to be articulated within the boundaries of Anglo European rationale and imagination. This section is therefore intended to provide the intellectual framework that made possible that 'women's experiences' reached a new theoretical dimension and began to be mobilized, approached and analyzed as 'critical knowledge' by the end of the decade of the 1960s, once the politization of marginality and the des-identification of identity became a hallmark of critical western thought.

In the next section 2.2 'The Subversion of Gender' I focus on the initial task of so-called 'second wave' feminist theorists to generate theories that would account for the fundamentality of women's oppression. My aim here is to display some broad characteristics that might figure in clarifying what mainstream feminism encapsulated in the 1970s, with the purpose of understanding the resulting racist claims, the anger and the frustration of women of color in the U.S. 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 des-articulation of a universal subject. Consequently, I briefly map out the main features in the different approaches of the most representative trends that theorized what they understood to be the constituting nature of feminism. As it will be depicted, for liberal feminists, for whom gender equaled sexual difference alone, women and men are basically the same and they drew heavily on this to press for changes in the status. On the contrary, for Marxist/Socialist feminism the influence on Marxism brought to their theorizing an awareness of historical change and class position. However, class was added to gender as an analytical tool. Moreover, a radical positioning awoke determined to free gender from its *Sexual Politics*'(Millet [1970])

1979) patriarchal constraints and so, for radical feminists such as Robin Morgan or Mary Daly, the true revolution was based on the destabilization of universal structures of patriarchy as the primary determinant in women's oppression. This new radical impetus to theorize an engendered subjectivity also led to many theorists such as Luce Irigaray or Nancy Chodorov to turn into psychoanalysis.

Under these trends, gender theory encompassed a broader definition to include the play of the unconscious, dreams and the imagination in the production of scientific discourse. I will therefore pay special attention to the interdisciplinary articulation of the concept of gender which becomes a key paradigm to underscore how individual and collectives' identities/representations and spaces have social, cultural and political implications. The problem, however, was that in the growing tendency to document women's oppression and the paramount of gender as an organizing principle of social life, encompassing generalizations about 'woman', 'sisterhood' and 'patriarchy' started to get institutionalized. Therefore, my intention is to show how, albeit its different premises and viewpoints, what bounded all together was a conception of women identity grounded in the liberal approach of a feminist subject which found its roots in Enlightenment feminisms in which gender is defined in relation to 'sexual difference' alone. On this basis, sexual difference (women vs. men) was considered to shape not only the definition of gender but, as it had happened in the first feminist vindications and manifestos (Chapter 1), was articulated as the fundamental cause of women's subordination.

Along these lines, I intend to prepare the terrain to grasp the "Collective Wrath and Insidious Differences" (section 2.3) that drove parallel movements by Women of color in the U.S to denounce mainstream feminism for its racist and essentialist discourses of gender. In the

section 2.3 therefore my goal is to show how since the late 1960s, albeit invisibilized within academic circles, minority voices urged to depict the existence of major philosophical and tactical issues between women of color and white women's liberation groups. A general overview is intended to give voice to the most representative figures in the different women of color groups, mostly African Americans, Chicanas, Asian Americans and Native Americans. In particular, I seek to emphasize how, by the decade of the 1970s, it was completely undeniable that a growing number of feminist voices were choosing neither to identify nor to fully integrate within the women's movement.

Indeed, it is my primary concern to document the long history of women of color's claims to highlight the intellectual antecedents of *This Bridge* in order to better understand the critical arena to which this anthology is embedded in and indebted to. In sum, my intention is to clarify how, until sufficient capitalist, cultural, political and historical conditions enabled an era of decolonization and economic globalization throughout the globe, the critical intervention of women of color in the U.S would not have been envisioned.

I end this section by mentioning the birth in 1977 of *The National Women's Studies Association* (NWSA) as a professional organization that aimed at representing diversity within the academia and whose role will be recurrent throughout these chapters, especially when I reach current times in the discussion towards intersectionality.

Moving on to Chapter 3 'Differences that Divide (1980s)', I focus on the path-breaking anthology edited by chicanas Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga *This Bridge Called My Back: Radical Writings by Women of Color* (1981, 1983) as a confirmation of an-going understanding of how 'race'/ethnicity, one's culture, socio-economic status and sexual orientation can deny easy access to any legitimized gender category. In the first section, 3.1

titled 'Women of Color/Third World Feminism in the U.S: The Building of a Bridge' I explain that I choose this anthology because its insights have collapsed for the first time traditional boundaries of identity and subjectivity, bringing into play fragmentation and power dissymmetry among feminists of different nationalities and backgrounds. It will be emphasized how this multi-genre book challenged 'white identified' feminists to deal with racism, classism, and other interlocking oppressions as never done before, leading to a major reconceptualization of mainstream gender theory. My intention in analyzing this anthology is to reflect an 'open conversation' among women that will continue in the following decades until reaching the concept of 'intersectionality'. For the sake of the analysis, the criteria I have followed in gathering what I consider to be the most representative contributors, has been mediated by their focus on theorizing the interlocking nature of social categories.

Consequently, my point here is to heighten how the recognition of differences among women -in practice, in struggles and theorizing, would prove gender theory as something less solid, more complex and diverse than had appeared to be in the beginnings of the 'second-wave' period. As this analysis is intended to show, the strategy that women of color would follow situates difference at the focal point of gender theory. Specifically, I bring attention to how, in contrast to neo-liberal perspectives to differences as the object of study (chapter 1 and chapter 2), for women of color, differences were experienced and theorized as strategies (see Sandoval 2000).

Motivated to break down all the racial frontiers which were enchainng gender to a mere sexual difference framework, women of color explicitly acknowledged in this anthology their historical bonds with colonized countries, hence awoken to the 'consciousness of a third world

within a first world<sup>12</sup>. Consequently, in the section 3.2 called '*This Bridge: A Radical Paradigm Swift*', I intend to map how the democratization of cultural specificity compromised a commitment of aligning social categories in the specificity of their daily interactions reflected in the very titles of the sections of the anthology. I provide a general guideline of the most important content of the sections bonded by the disruption of the prevailing additive model of gender (chapter 2) and the unfolding of a multidimensional nature of gender. Moreover, I highlight the insistence on creating alliances among people from a variety of social locations. This unity, conceived as a continuous process of metamorphosis, emerged out of an intersection of different vectors of oppression/privilege capable of weaving difference, equality and diversity into a coalition of these interactions, utilizing them as political tactics constructed in response to dominating social powers. These social powers are located and refrained as an unfair capitalist patriarchal system that goes back to colonization times (see chapter 1).

In the following section, 3.3 '*This Bridge: Second Edition and Its Impact*' I review the reflections made by its editors two years after it was first published. As a cutting-edge collection, it had forefronted the intersections between race, class, gender and sexuality in ways that would invariably transform traditional paradigms within U. S. feminisms. To this respect, in this section I make the case that not only praising its attention to differences among women *This Bridge* magnified them 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. As a result of its impact, a reaction-in chain was activated towards the study of power dynamics

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<sup>5</sup> The expressions 'third world' and 'first world' are not capitalized throughout my writing with the intention to signal how these terms, in this post-modern and economical globalization era, are so frayed around the edges that their geographic and economic boundaries are no longer clear.

within differences among women from a rhetorical making. Consequently, a central question would remain how to approach the definition of feminism itself.

On this ground, section 3.4 aims at giving voice to a discussion that revealed 'gender analyses as an imaginary location'. First, the analysis will be centered around the 'official' genealogy of feminist consciousness undertaken by influential theorists such as Lydia Sargent (1981), Allison Jaggar (1983); Hester Eisenstein (1985), Gayle Greene and Coopelia Kahn (1985) and Elaine Showalter (1985). It will be reviewed how, seeking to trace an objective historical account of the history of feminist consciousness, these theorists divided this evolution into 'liberal' 'Marxist' 'radical/cultural' and 'Socialist' stages. Nevertheless, as it had happened with the early theorists of 'second wave' feminism (chapter 2), power dynamics among scholars played an important role in the contesting discursive asymmetry between gender theory as a body of knowledge within the academy and its effectiveness in giving voice and representing inclusively the wide variety of women's experiences.

In order to question mainstream theorizing, I will show the major counter-attacks made by women of color to these institutional strands. Mostly, it will be brought into surface dissymmetrical power relations implied within gender's multiple and overlapping axes of signification. In particular, it will be highlighted an analytical myopia carried out since Enlightenment times that had turned feminist theory into a conceptual fantasy around a flawed gender. It was flawed because it was added to other social categories as if they were layers that could be taken apart from each other. It did not thus stand for how the relations of power implicate one another. Therefore, the purpose of this section is to illustrate how the feminist theory produced from the decade of the 70s to the end of the 1980s was attacked by women of

color as the articulation of an *imaginary space* (Sandoval 2000: 52.3) an ethnocentric collective illusion and theoretical delusion.

Following the impact of *This Bridge's* theoretical insights, the rest of the sections are intended to map the grounds of the birth of an intersectional mindset. Consequently, in section 3.5 'Hibridity', I focus on the work of Gloria Anzaldúa in *Bordelands/ La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987) highlighting the emergence of a fundamental epistemic challenge. Indeed, with the 'mestiza consciousnesses, a new psychic subjectivity developed in such a chameleonic fashion that it did not respect previous boundaries any longer. Most importantly, boundaries stop being a territorial concept *per se* to become identitary positions. Thus, my goal is to bring light to the awareness of the hibridity of gender as a means of disrupting dualities such as center/margin, us/them for it affords for the possibility of inhabiting the borderlands located at the intersections of categories.

In section 3.6, I celebrate the articulation of 'The Politics of Location' as the result of women of color's major insights into a new gender cross-examination, allowing the unique and genuine character of women's experiences to finally become both the source and analysis of critical knowledge. First articulated by North American feminist theorist and poet Adrienne Rich is intended to give voice to a new cognitive mapping of gender and its interlocking social categories in the recognition that gender must be specifically located. Along these lines, I intend to emphasize how feminist struggle no longer meant a synonym of resistance to relations of domination (in its broad a-historical patriarchal sense) but "the capacity for action that specific relations of domination enable and facilitate" (Mahmood 2005: 203).

Finally, in the last section of this chapter, 3.7 ‘The Birth of An Intersectional Gender’, I intend to locate the specific birth of intersectionality as a concept theoretically formulated and validated within women of color academic circles at the end of the decade of the 1980s.

Starting to the notion of ‘triple oppression’ articulated by Deborah King in her essay “Multiple Jeopardy, Multiple Consciousness: The Context of a Black Feminist Ideology” (1988), I explore its ‘triple’ limitations when it comes to analyzing social categories. One year later, the African American lawyer and feminist theorist Kimberley Crenshaw coined ‘*intersectionality*’ in “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics” (1989), as tool for highlighting how the categories of ‘race’ and ‘gender’ are mutually interconnected in the daily struggles and experiences of women of color. An intersectional mindset was finally in motion. Reinforced by prominent feminist theorists such as African American Patricia Hill Collins in *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment* (1991) the critical intervention of *This Bridge* had finally found a promising epistemological tool to make visible the experiences of women of color.

Moving on to the decade of the 1990s, in Chapter 4, I will explore the development in the understanding of differences as a ‘Source of Empowerment and Agency’. This chapter is divided into eight sections. First, in 4.1 ‘Mapping the Grounds for the Debate’, it will be explored how, due to a negative and reactive criticism to gender brought up under the light of intersectionality, postmodern and poststructuralists feminists dashed into this academic Anglo European debate aiming at destabilizing singular identities even further. The term ‘subject’ will become ingrained in a grammatical meaning embedded in the linguistic structures and predicates which were central to post-structuralist theories of subjectivity. In these theories,

the identification with the position of the subject in language constitutes the subjectivity of the individual. For postmodernist, the attention will be placed on the collapse of boundaries and fixed categories of meaning. As a result, crucial methodological incompatibilities between women of color's insights and postmodern and poststructuralist feminist will arouse and gender and its interlocking categories will become a contested site subject to variable interpretations. In doing so, a fascinating debate would take place engaging minority groups and mainstream feminists alike. My goal therefore is to offer a glimpse and to make sense of this very critical moment in the history of the evolution of differences among women that changed gender's theory narrative in ways never anticipated.

For the purpose of describing the tremendous impact of post-structuralist and postmodernist theories<sup>13</sup> unto gender perspectives in the sections 4.2 'Postmodern Theories' and 4.3 'Poststructuralist Theories', I intend to summarize the chief theoretical approaches and most representative voices that, apart from women of color insights, most influenced gender theory in the 1990s. Consequently, in the section 4.2 'Stepping into Postmodern Theories' I mostly rely on the work of North American scientist and theorist Donna Haraway (1990), highly influenced by Foucault, in her ciberfeminism. It will be explored how she introduces virtual scenarios for the advancement of re-conceptualizing a new understanding of gender and its interwoven axes of differences. I will look closely at how postmodernist focus in 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" (Alzandúa 1987:103) was now foregrounding of a recognition that commanded the capacity to 'blur boundaries' (mestiza consciousness). Postmodern emphasis on 'fragmentated

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<sup>13</sup> Postmodern, in this sense, is broader than poststructuralism, since encompasses not only F. Derrida, Lacan but also theorists as Habermass, Gramsci, Bakhtin and Bourdieu.

identities' nonetheless would distance themselves from women of color imperative to attend to multiplicity as a whole, not as a fragmentation. Furthermore, in section 4.3 'The Role and Re-signification of Poststructuralist Theories' in more 'textualist-discursive stance', chiefly associated to various degrees with Derrida, Foucault and Lacan, it will be analyzed how post-structuralist feminist theorists, sought to focalize the center of the analysis to the exploration of subjectivity as an 'engendered performance'. Within this context, deconstruction will be embraced as a necessary methodological tool to analyze identity. Moreover, human embodiment, passive for traditional gender theory, would turn into a dynamic and interactive constructivist ('subject positions') process for post-structuralist gender theory. For Italian feminist philosopher Rossi Bradotti (1998) it meant the incorporation of 'nomadic subjects'. For the Bengali-U.S based Gayatri Spivack, the feminist subject will necessary be part of 'subaltern consciousness' (1988). Moreover, for Italian feminist film critic Teresa de Lauretis, the value-coding of gender theory needed to be approached through semiotic lenses. Thus, she draws on the theories of Althusser and mainly Foucault to defend what she called as 'technologies of gender' (1987).

Nevertheless, if there was a theory that really made an impact was Judith Butler's theory of performativity. In order to understand why her theory offered an innovative alternative to describe the deconstruction of subject positions, and why it became one of the most influential trends among academic circles throughout the 1990s, section 4.4 will focus on 'Performativity'. In *Gender trouble* (1990) and *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (1991) Butler denaturalizes gender categories by proposing that they are performative; that is, gender is part of an overall structure of power that can be disrupted by individual agency. Butler's main point would be that power relations not only determine and constitute the subject

but there are the very pre-condition for its agency. As we will see, performative agency 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. As a result, I will explore in section 4.5 the 'Methodological Clashes' that would provoke much heated debated. On this ground, it will be approached how, framed in a context marked by the problematization of language, the increasing impetus by women of color to apply an intersectional gaze will be halted by strong criticisms of identity politics and its emphasis on experience. Moreover, the 'counter-affirmation' of oppositional identities will be opposed by post-structuralists on the basis that ended up in reasserting the very dualisms they were trying to undo. Indeed, both post-structuralism and postmodernism argued that the reliance on personal identity leads to an individualistic notion of change. Positioning themselves very differently, women of color firmly opposed to transcend 'gender's politics of location' since the relation of experience to discourse is what they believed to be at issue in the definition of gender theory.

In sum, I intend to depict in a clarifying way how post-modern/poststructuralists feminists were claiming that there were multiple realities only accessible through representations of culture, or deconstructions of language and discourses, and therefore no single truth or accessible reality could be tackled if realities were only what people believe them to be. On the contrary, women of color completely rejected this relativist perspective. They understood nonetheless, that language is a critical element in connecting knowledge and experience, if it is through language that identities, subjectivities and experiences are made,

given meaning and remade. In other words, the charge of interlocking oppressions led not only to a reflection of the intersection of axes of oppression/privilege with gender, but also to the reworkings of what constitutes identity. Within this spirit of methodological clashes the concept of 'woman' was impossible to formulate in a consensual way precisely for feminists themselves.

The magnitude of the controversy would be measured in the next section, 4.6 'The Philadelphia Debate'. In this section, I focus specifically on the clashing that arose at 'The Greater Philadelphia Philosophy Consortium' (September 1990) in which, specially critical theorist Turkish- United states theorist Seyla Benhabib and Northamerican post-structuralist Judith Butler, performed a fructiferous interdisciplinary cross-over aimed at generating communication across theoretical boundaries and political divisions. It will be analyzed Behabib's perspectives such as those exposed in "Feminism and Postmodernism: An Uneasy Alliance" and Butler's counter-views as displayed in "Contingent Foundations". To mediate, will use North American critical theorist Nancy Fraser's article "A *False Antithesis: A Response to Seyla Benhabib and Judith Butler*"<sup>14</sup>.

I seek to provide a general overview of the most important exchanges to recreate the thrilling atmosphere that governed the discussion. It will structured around on one side, Benhabib's denial of postmodernist premises and her dispute with Butler about an unclear normative vision of agency which follows from or it is implied by her theory of performativity. And on the other, Butler's reaction to critical theory as the articulation of a 'stable subject' will be subjected to the denounce that any type of 'comprehensive universality' recreates totalizing notions of gender identity only achieved at the cost of producing new and further exclusions.

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<sup>14</sup> All these articles, plus some more written in response among the authors with interventions from other theorists such as Drucilla Cornell were published on the book *Feminist Contentions: A Philosophical Exchange*. New York and London: Routledge, 1995. My analysis of these texts comes from this book.

At one point, either critical theory or a post-structuralist perspective will become completely incompatible. In order to successfully approach gender and its social categories, it will be demanded to choose between one and the other.

To mediate in the debate, Nancy Fraser argued that their arguments had created a series of ‘false antithesis’ that were clouding current gender theories. Her point was to depict the links between both standpoints to demonstrate that they were not so incompatible after all and both insights were enriching gender analysis. As Fraser would argue, the discursive signification of gender brought by the ‘linguistic turn’ remained only one dimension of sociality among others.

In the next section 4.7 ‘Conclusion to the Philadelphia Debate’ it will be lay out the conclusions reached. Mainly, it is my goal to specify how despite methodological and theoretical clashes, the point remained that ‘differences’ had emerged as a central –albeit contested and paradoxical- concept within gender theory. Accounting interlocking differences through open-ended cartographies consequently remarked a crucial priority since if the Philadelphia debate reached any conclusion that would be the need to articulate more complex frameworks open to both specificity and strategic alliances. Indeed, even though women of color acknowledged the relationship between categories and the dynamics of power, their anthologies were a claim, as a much as a demonstration, of how, in specific historical contexts, the use of identify politics had been a crucial mechanism of resistance and a more effective criticism than the semiotic deconstruction of classism or sexism as categories of power.

Finally, on the last section of this chapter, 4.8 ‘Transversal Gender: Rooting and Shifting’ I will look closely at how, in a moment where disconcertion arose on how to proceed with the gender-identity debate, the concept of intersectionality was also being strongly attacked by its restrictive emphasis on ‘women of color experiences’. Therefore, I will focus on how, in the

attempt to theorize how social divisions are a source of empowerment and agency, British feminists Nira Yuval-Davis and Floya Anthias were demanding intersectionality to move beyond its restrictive emphasis on identity politics. In *Racialized Boundaries: Race, Nation, Gender, Colour and Class and Anti-Racist Struggle* (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1992), their point would be to highlight that a restraining homogenization of oppression (as ‘women of color in the U.S/U.K.’) led to a formulation of intersectionality in such a way that dismissed the importance played by the symbolic dimension of gender identity construction. On that ground, Anthias and Yuval-Davis brought into question the need to develop an analytical framework that would enable the articulation of both the material and the symbolic dimensions of social divisions in an intercultural way.

Influenced by Italian Transversal feminists, Yuval Davis will develop the model of ‘rooting and shifting’ gender identity positions. At this point, within the Anglo-European Academia, the debates will be centered around two main ways of approaching and interpreting the intersectionality of social divisions: on one side it was the intersectional model developed by Third World feminists in the U.S and on the other side, the constitutive ‘rooting’ and ‘shifting’ model offered by the British transversal feminists

Within this context of re-articulating more inclusive identity-formulas, and in the midst of this new epistemological impetus, in Chapter 5 titled ‘A New Sensitivity in Theorizing Intersectionality’ (XXI century), the urgency of the implementation of an ‘intersectional’ vantage point to differences among women will start to vibrate powerfully again. I will look at how the paradoxes, power dissymmetry and fragmentations of the XXI century context required feminists to shift the identity debate to one approach that would enable an analysis of the global and the local interwoven.

The distribution of this chapter consists in five sections. In the first one 5.1 ‘From radicalization to transformation: *This Bridge We Call Home. Radical Writings for Transformation* (2002)’, I will reveal a remarkable twist in women of color’s perspectives within this on-going intercultural dialogue. In order to address the contested nature of an intersectional approach strongly affected by its association with radical identity politics, women of color would be finally willing to abandon restrictive labels. As a result, Gloria Anzaldúa and Anne Louise Keating edited *This Bridge We Call Home*, in which *Radical Writings by Women of Color* transmuted into *Radical Writings for Transformation* (2002). In this section, I am particularly interested in clarifying my selection of this anthology, in its different editions, as the best example of both the pillar and the outcome of this intercultural debate. I truly believe that best exemplifies a radical transformation towards the understanding of differences as a source of radical connectivity. The message sent by the editors was that clear: the loosing of previous restrictive labels, while intensely painful, is the only path to create shifts in consciousness and transgressive opportunities for change. Anzaldúa’s most provocative claim relays on her emphasis on consciousness, as the shifts she proposes go from the external (culturally-imposed and racialized categories) to the internal (self-selected ways of thinking and acting) (see Keating 1996) And it is precisely at this point, that is, the loosing of previous restrictive labels in a stage in which differences among women had evolved to incorporate an intersectional approach to gender identity, in which I will emphasize to what in my opinion lays the key to understand the evolution of differences in its journey towards intersectionality. As opposed to a more in-depth analysis in previous editions, my intention is to underscore the drastic shift that is embodied in its latest edition: that is, positioning radical connectivity through an intersectional mind-set that gives voice to the representational and

symbolic dimension of identity as much as the experimental. In particular, I intend to make visible the grounds of a new approach towards intersectionality; one that would no longer delimit or distract intercultural dialogues by the means of its identification with women of color's experiences. In this spirit, I approach *This Bridge We Call Home* as an insightful momentum within this intercultural dialogue, in which boundaries tore apart, broke down and finally became more permeable.

Finally, it will be stressed how, at this point, 2002, the intersectional awareness of gender identity had become the continuous reinvention of universal claims by the particularization of specific meanings. On this ground, a new stage for intersectionality was bound, to some degree, to provoke a new response within the academia. In the next section therefore 5.2 titled 'The State of Art: The Result of a Very Intense Debate', I will explore and diagnose a new receptivity to collaborative approach. In order to do so, I shall outline the main frames of what it's been recently named as the 'Intersectional Approach' (see Berger and Guidroz 2009).

First, I begin by questioning the general interpretation of the term 'intersectionality' in itself. Aware that, as any emerging research paradigm there can be competing definitional claims and disagreements in its use and application, I seek to bridge the most recognized standpoints in order to advance this critical body of literature through new junctures of analysis. I rely on current discussions as those depicted in the *European Journal of Women's Studies* 2006 Edition and the latest analyses on this issue as such exposed in *The Intersectional Approach: Transforming the Academy Through Race, Gender and Class* (Berger and Guidroz 2009) and in *Feminist Studies: A Guide to Intersectional Theory, Methodology and Writing* (Nina Lykke 2010). Furthermore, I bring into the discussion previous interlocutors such as African American Kimberlé Crenshaw, British Nira Yuval-Davis or North American Kathy

Davis and fresh and new insights by a new generation of scholars currently working on intersectional issues. In doing so, I intend to establish both a line of continuity and actuality, that is, to provide a breath of immediacy. With the intention to explore what makes intersectionality so successful nowadays it will be revealed how unexpectedly, it has turned into an interdisciplinary joint platform that provides a way to overcome incompatibilities between women of color's theory and postmodern, post-structuralist feminisms.

In the midst of a general feeling of celebration nonetheless, it cannot be said that a consensus on how to apply it as a methodology or even how to articulate it as a theory, has been reached yet. However, it will be stressed how there is an agreement on social categories of gender being treated as relational and interlocking. On this ground, I will focus on how the key issue of the debate will be more on how to handle the separation of the different analytical levels in which intersectionality is located rather on the relationship among social categories themselves (see Yuval-Davis 2006). At this juncture, in the next section 5.3 'Systematic vs. Constructivist Intersectionality', it will be underlined that within the wide variety of political and theoretical positions on all these points, I intend to map out what are the most well-known positions within the field. This analysis follows Dutch feminist and political philosopher Baukje Prin's (2006) distinction between British and North-American trends, albeit both anti-essentialists in its perspective towards identity, into what she calls 'systematic intersectionality' (mostly US-based) and 'constructionist intersectionality' (mostly UK-based although strongly influenced by Judith Butler's theory of performativity).

Within the systematic perspective, I will rely heavily on the frequently quoted article, "The Complexities of Intersectionality" (2005) written by US-based feminist sociologist Leslie

MacCall. In her proposal, MacCall would insist on three necessary approaches towards intersectional theory and analysis: the anti-categorical, intra-categorical and inter-categorical.

After describing these approaches, reactions to the systematic models it will be introduced by theorists such as Prin. Counterviews will pinpoint that the constraints of the systematic approach and its limits on representing complexities derive from the fact that the way categories are approached, as implicitly part of a structure of domination and marginalization, translates in a static notion of power. Consequently, constructivist-oriented theorists such as Prin and Anne Phoenix and Pamela Ptynama will unearth how the systematic approach falls short when it comes to the role played by agency and subjectivity and the ways individuals both form and negotiate their social identifications.

And it is precisely at this point, where agency and subjectivity place such a crucial role in the intersectional formula of the constructivist dimension of personal choice, where I will move onto the next section 5.4 'Intersectionality as a Dialogical Self', the last aspect that it would be tackled in this theoretical exploration of intersectionality. In the search of an intersectional formula that would allow for a more nuanced complexity and contradiction, this section will focus on the new approaches towards social categories of gender as both enabling and narrative tools. First, I will draw on Viennese critical and cultural gender theorist Alice Luvig's article "Differences between Women? Intersecting Voices in Female Narrative" (2006). With a strong influence steaming from Butler's performative theory (chapter 3) one of her most interesting points is her emphasis on approaching categories as 'not neutral' since identity or difference are mutually constitutive. To illustrate her point, she problematizes categories by conducting interviews in which she explicitly states that her interest is not a biographical account but rather her goal is to approach and understand subject's own self-

positioning. The outcome of her research would be a subjective dimension of intersectionality. To these regards, a new direction towards narration and life-stories as a research focus will be stressed (already highlighted decades ago in the first edition of *This Bridge*). On this ground, I will put an emphasis on the demand for a more stretched and flexible way in which individuals subjects perceive identity and subjectivity.

Contrary to the more static previous intersectional gender analysis by women of color or systematic perspectives in which individuals are established by socio-political structures, in particular, I will pay special attention to the concept of ‘dialogical self’ proposed by Dutch critical feminist theorist Marjo Buitelaar. Consequently, the last part of this analysis will be centered on this latest approach to intersectionality as those voices within ourselves that speak from the different I-positions, between which subjects are constantly rooting and shifting, switching between various collective voices and sometimes mixing them as they take different positions. It is my intention to foreground what makes the dialogical self so interesting in the study of intersectionality as a new emphasis has been placed on the most micro layers of daily social life. In sum, I seek to transmit how fascinating we find that, after so much and so long, interlocking categories are finally approached as orchestrating voices that display a subjective and performative identity with the consequently result of turning intersectionality into a dynamic site of knowledge. Within this dynamic analytical framework on one side, categories are essential but on the other, they are called and put into question.

With a final note, the celebration of intersectionality will be embraced as a new formula in progress aimed at providing a ‘safer’ theoretical space where differential power relations are acknowledged and addressed rather than overlooked.

Celebrations aside, nonetheless, this section puts forward a very critical reflection in which I interrogate to what extent it can be claimed that intersectionality has been fully integrated and internalized among the very feminists who theorize about it. In answering this question, I move onto the last section of this chapter 5.5 ‘Intersectional case-study 2008 U.S. Presidential Campaign-Sex Pitting Race in Obama vs Hillary’, to provide a brief analysis of its ‘intersectional outcome’ that surprisingly turned that campaign into a new battle of identity politics. Recreating similar clashes that arouse during the suffragist movement at the beginning of the XX century (chapter 1), the question ‘who will Americans choose to be their nominee for president: a Black man or a White woman?’ fiercely divided feminists again. In this last section therefore, I will focus on the most representative voices that took part in it with a particular intention to bring forth the ongoing dimension of this debate. Therefore, I will analyze the e-mails exchanged in favor and against Hillary Clinton which in my opinion, most brilliantly depict how long-standing difficult discussions -about gender, race, and intersectional categories of marginalization and privilege- have been recently reopened again. Therefore, I draw on one side, on Robin Morgan’s (chapter 2) article in *WordPress*<sup>15</sup> and Gloria Steinem’s article in the *New York Times*<sup>16</sup> in defense of Hillary. Their common argument would be that sexual oppression and the institutionalization of sex barriers are not taken as seriously as racism.

On the other side, the counter-intersectional voices that supported Obama be will analyzed as Kimberlé Crenshaw’s (see chapter 3 and 5) article in *The Huffington Post*<sup>17</sup>, Alice

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<sup>16</sup> <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/01/08/opinion/08steinem.html>

<sup>17</sup> See <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/kimberle-crenshaw-and-eve-ensler>

Walker's, in *The Guardian*<sup>18</sup> (chapter 3), Asian-American writer and scholar Jennifer Fang's view on *Racialicious*<sup>19</sup> and Jew-United States feminist writer, activist and scholar (see chapter 2 and 3) Zillah Einstein's controversial article "Hillary is White"<sup>20</sup>. These voices, heirs of the critical mentality that decades ago had exposed that 'race' is always gendered and gender is always racialized, publicly challenged the ancient ghost of an essentialist womanhood. In particular, gender theory will once again be questioned as intersectional and global rather than essentialist.

To conclude, I will pay special attention to the CALL FOR ACTION<sup>21</sup> launched by two Chicago-based white anti-racist feminist scholars, activists and writers, Ann Russo & Melissa Spatz<sup>22</sup>. With the intention to challenge and revoke the racial divides promoted by white feminists like Robin Morgan and Gloria Steinem, as much as the mainstream media, they proclaimed that 'as white feminists' they could not tolerate the racist and divisive manifestations they were seeing in the name of feminism. With an emphasis on the abandonment of feminist commitments to all forms of oppression I will approach it as an intersectional manifesto that represents a legacy of intercultural dialogues that have repeatedly warned of the dangers of an

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<sup>18</sup> See <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2008/apr/01/barackobama.uselections2008> "The Change American Has Tried To Hide" (Tuesday 1 April 2008) A longer version of this article can be found at [theroot.com/id/45469](http://theroot.com/id/45469)

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.racialicious.com/2008/01/09/gloria-steinem-pitting-race-against-gender/>. Originally published at [Reappropriate](http://www.reappropriate.com)

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.commondreams.org/archive/2008/05/18/9031>. Published on Sunday, May 18, 2008 by [CommonDreams.org](http://www.commondreams.org)

<sup>21</sup> See <http://www.thepetitionsite.com/1/stop-the-false-race-gender-divide>

<sup>22</sup> Ann Russo is Director of the Program in Women's & Gender Studies at DePaul University. Melissa Spatz is Director of the Women & Girls Collective Action Network. Together, we are co-authors of *Communities Engaged in Resisting Violence* (available at [www.womenandgirlscan.org](http://www.womenandgirlscan.org))

exclusive gender approach since it destroys the possibility for coalition, alliance and solidarity across differences.

In sum, my main goal throughout the different sections of Chapter 5 is to make visible the tension between theory in the academy and theory applied to activism that connects and separates intersectionality as both an analytical concept and a methodology aimed at provoking social transformation. That is, on one side, its academic excitement and growing consensus; and on the other, the dis-encounter of the presidential campaign to reveal the accountability of its political impact. More specifically, this section aims at sending a strong signal on the dangers of reproducing old paradigms.

Finally, within this spirit, in the last chapter of this dissertation, Chapter 6 ‘Conclusion’, I seek to conclude this journey towards intersectionality foregrounding its potential for an interdisciplinary, ‘Dynamic, Transformative, site of Knowledge’ (section 6.1). At the same time, I also seek to emphasize that what is clear from preceding sections is that intersectional theories of gender identity still remain a very controversial and contested terrain

To further illustrate this point, the theme of NWSA latest annual Conferences will be analyzed: 2009 “Difficult Dialogues”, 2010 “Difficult Dialogues: II; and the upcoming 2011 conference titled “Feminist Transformations”. It is my intention therefore to conclude making visible the ongoing ‘difficult’ nature of intercultural gender dialogues in which four decades of institutionalized gender-oriented scholarship continue to be necessarily rethought.

Always fueled by the need to interrogate the power dynamics implied in the meanings we contest I will provide my reading of intersectionality, highlighting the proximity and indivisibility of gender with other social categories, as well as indicating that they are inextricably linked to other forms of social and cultural knowledge. Indeed, more than

reflecting on the frequently overlooked continuities in gender theory that have persisted across decades, the concluding thoughts of this last chapter applauds the pursuit of a richer and more complex analysis while interrogating and conceptualizing gender identities. That is, developing concepts that can allow us better to understand the real material and symbolic conditions that both link and variously affect our lives. As a final note, seeking to end with the immediacy of a contemporary debate, I present the latest approach to intersectionality as a new social literacy for scholars, a “disciplinary border-crossing concept” (Berger and Guidroz 2009: 7), not necessarily implying that the power dynamics- battle will be ever won, but making it necessary to approach gender identity in a different manner.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS AND GUIDELINES**

During the past forty years, Feminist Studies has developed into a well-established interdisciplinary site on inquiry and academic knowledge production, challenging traditional discipline’s understandings of women’s experiences from a critical perspective. In particular, Gender studies takes up the project at gender and social variables as its overarching concerns. Critical research and teaching on gender/sex, gendered hegemonies, gender relations, gender identity and social categories is today carried out in universities in many countries all over the world. Consequently, is possible to speak of feminist studies as a specific academic field of knowledge production (see Lykee 2010). Interdisciplinary since its very origins, is mostly non-traditional, allowing for new synergies and cross-disciplinary dialogues to emerge between heterogeneous fields of theory and methodology. On this ground, one of the driving forces among diverse viewpoints has been the articulation of the paradigm gender along with other categories such as class, ethnicity and sexuality. Indeed, there is a line of continuity implied in

a strong challenge to traditional sciences on the grounds that the social/cultural/human sciences throughout their history have sustained and legitimized biologically determinist approaches to sexes and culturally essentialist perceptions of gender. Within this framework, I approach Gender/Women's studies as a "vibrant and developing transnational phenomenon and web of activity" (Lykke 2010; foreword)

Unlike multi-disciplinary approaches, interdisciplinary research is characterized by an experiential openness to cross-fertilization between theoretical and methodological tools that were previously separated by disciplinary borders. With this in mind, I attempt to introduce and see if Gender/Women's Studies as a body of knowledge have gained from the cross-over of an interdisciplinary approach in the debates towards social and cultural differences among women. Along these lines, I will focus more specifically in Feminist Cultural Studies as a sub-field that combines semiotic, text and discourse analysis as much as socio-cultural insights to gender. At this point, I would like to note that the broad tradition of feminist Cultural Studies, which emerged in dialogue with the interdisciplinary field of Cultural Studies (initiated in the 1960s by the Center for Cultural Studies in Birmingham, England, later turned into a world-wide endeavor) has been rich in empirical analysis of intersections. Feminists, who for decades have been influential in the field, have critically gendered, for example, understanding of the 'public' and 'private' dimensions as much as key concepts such as 'identity' and 'subjectivity'. It is my intention therefore to give voice and bring recognition to this feminist academic tradition.

Moreover, I shall ground this dissertation in postcolonial theories in order to develop an understanding of power relations. In addition, the analysis of a gendered subjectivity, informed

by poststructuralist/postmodern theories, will complement an approach to intersections as processes rather than structures.

In presenting the main positions in feminist debates on epistemology, I want first to underline a pluralistic approach. Committed to a process of intense interdisciplinary debates, they present differential understandings of and intersections between discourses and gender embodiments. Epistemologically speaking, gender theories have been in critical dialogue with different strands of epistemological thought such as psychology, Marxism/socialism, structuralists and postmodern theories (see chapter 2 and 3). Therefore, epistemological reflections intersect with many different types of postcolonial and anti-racist, postmodern/post-structuralists debates on epistemologies. As a result, my own cartographies encompass a diversity of sub-positions. This plurality is motivated by the heterogeneity and diversity of voices and perspectives that –as it will be emphasized throughout this dissertation- characterize feminist theorizing of gender identity. At the same time, I want to underline that besides this diversity, there are overlaps and shared points between different epistemological positions. With a general overview of Anglo-European feminist methodology, I intend to demonstrate how feminist approaches to methodology have continuously engaged with debates in Western philosophy to raise critical questions about knowledge production. Moreover, I seek to show how gender theories have achieved a distinctive place in academic socio-cultural research. This is in line with an approach to Women's/Gender Studies as a much contested concept, state of mind and location. Indeed, the cartographies of theories that will be presented in the following chapters are understood as produced by critical reflections on re-signification of meanings, constantly in motion and under ongoing negotiation. In the following chapters therefore I shall

look at some of the many theories that feminists have developed in order to comprehend and activate the processes of undoing traditional approaches to gender.

Along these lines, my intention in focusing on the insights of postcolonial, postmodern and poststructuralists theories (chapters 3 and 4) is to highlight a redefinition of cultural practices, generating theoretical and methodological approaches that aim at transgressing disciplinary borders. As the emergence of the concept of intersectionality is closely linked to postcolonial feminist struggles, I seek to establish platforms for the analysis of the intertwining processes of social categories such of genderization, racialization and ethnification that operate in a boundary space between different political discourses of resistance. To achieve this, I first propose a general overview of the first articulation of women's experiences as critical knowledge, with the intention to portray how so-called 'second-wave' Anglo-European feminists' critique of these legitimizing moves engendered an array of epistemological concepts, albeit from an additive perspective rather than interlocking (chapter 2). Secondly, moving away from the historical examples of gender theorizing, I focus on more contemporary ones, from late 1970s to present times. In particular, I center on women of color's vindications. To these regards, *This Bridge Called My Back: Radical Writings by Women of Color* (Anzaldúa and Moraga 1981, 1983) argues critically against white, Western, middle class feminist discourses that tended to leave issues of racism and neo-colonialism out of sight.

In my reading, and being a well-known anthology, I provide a personal interpretation of its most revealing vindications and theoretical path-breaking insights in a general overview of its sections. The selection of extracts and quotes is therefore mediated by the willingness to share what has most impressed me and moved over the course of my research and what I have learnt and has enriched me most both academically and personally along the way.

To further illustrate my point I draw on the most well –known key texts within women of color’s literature. As an example, the highly ironic and telling title of a now classic book *All the Women are White, All the Blacks Are Men and Some of Us are Brave* (Hull, Scott and Smith 1982) underlines this discursive in-between space from which anti-racist and postcolonial feminist analysis of intersections have emerged. The well-recognized Combahee River Collective’s *Black Feminist Statement* (Moraga and Anzaldúa 1981) will be recurrently quoted as the origins of the theorization of interlocking oppressions. Another classic key text that had great impact as a critique of white, Western, middle class feminist is Chandra T. Mohanty’s “Under Western Eyes” (1988). With this article Mohanty helped to establish a critical analysis of intersections of gender providing a critical gaze on middle class feminist slogans about global feminism and universal sisterhood. However, the criticism of hegemonic tendencies to universalize white, Western, middle class feminism has been articulated in many different ways before and after Mohanty’s influential intervention. Therefore, a historical revisionism depicted through the first chapters challenges both ‘postcolonial and anti-racist feminisms’ as much as ‘mainstream gender theories’ as a monolithic unity. It is my intention therefore to portray that theoretically, as well as politically the challenge to an essentialist gender is made up of heterogeneous voices. To these regards, universities are not, of course, the only places where feminist reflection and writing are done. Many non-governmental and non-university organizations foster this work as do alternative media and networking. I therefore rely on other sources that contributed to this intercultural dialogue such as exchanged e-mails and articles published in newspapers. Especially on the last chapter, when I provide an intersectional case-study of the 2008 U.S. Presidential Campaign - Obama vs. Hillary, my discussion will be centered on ex-changed e-mails and *calls for action*. Frankly, I hope that the

kind of mappings I produce will provoke interest in an interdisciplinary viewpoint, so it will make increasingly difficult to use disciplinary labels.

First, *This Bridge We Call Home: Radical Writings for Transformation* (Anzaldúa and Keating, 2002) it will be analyzed on the last chapters (5 and 6), to later focus on theorizing of intersectional gender currently in widespread use within the field. The analysis of the anthology is subjected to the same criteria as its preceding anthologies; however I will not undertake such an in-depth interpretation. Mostly, I intend to establish a line in the continuity of women of color's critical insights on how to name differences among women in a non-hierarchical and exclusionary way. My election of this anthology (in its different editions), as much as the most representatives voices within the women of color literary movement in the U.S., responds to our goal of depicting feminist critical thought negotiating power dynamics in a theoretical stance that goes from radicalization to transformation. The emphasis placed on the very title of this last anthology, it is to highlight that the condemnation undertaken by women of color was not only raised in order to denigrate the naturalistic vision of differences or a de-contextualized feminist theory, but mostly, was aimed at putting into motion a fascinating and crucial reassessment of all aspects of gendering.

Furthermore, what it will be revealed with the insights on current theories of intersectionality such as those exposed in the *European Journal of Women's Studies* 2006 Edition and *Feminist Studies: A Guide to Intersectional Theory, Methodology and Writing* (Lykke 2010) is precisely previous processes of mutual construction and theorization. In line with current theories, intersectionality is thus approached with reference to the entanglement of both socio-cultural processes and structures.

In sum, I seek to map that the introduction of 'intersectionality' created a crucial nodal point and provided a name for the multiplicity of ongoing gender debates, which no doubt accounts for and responds to the success of the concept (see Davis 2008). Moreover, it is for me important to underline that my genealogically based clustering of different feminist theories of intersectionality is just one glimpse into this ongoing intercultural dialogue. Indeed, I do not intend to represent a 'new canon'. Rather they should be approached as situated nodal points; that is as "temporary crystallizations in ongoing feminist negotiations of located theory making" (Lykke 2010: 49). Consequently, I look at the major junctures of tensions within the landscape of gender theory in the borderlands between feminisms and other cultural and literary movements that have given rise to different ways of theorizing intersectionalities between power differentials and normativities based on gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality and so on. My choice of conflicts and discussions of intersections –postcolonial and anti-racist challenges to white, middle-class feminism's belief in a unified women's identity and postmodern and poststructural critiques of hegemonic categories- are intended as examples that will provide some glimpses into this diversity. Developing methodology for such mappings is a need that underlies my formulation of the evolution of differences among women on the concept of intersectionality.

Contemporary so-called 'political realism' tends to suggest that the essentials of the Anglo-European 'feminist battle' have already been won, and the current generation of women entering university have a tendency to see feminism as 'old fashioned', 'extreme' or even 'unrealistic'. Challenging these assumptions, this Anglo-European intercultural dialogue argues for the value of empirical investigations of gendered life. It guides through the fascinating terrain of gender-oriented methodology and explicitly focuses on how intersectional

approaches entail a consideration of the way gender and other social categories depend on one another for meaning. Within this context, mostly from the late 1980s, intersectionality has widely transformed notions of both theory and research. I thus truly believe that such an approach is necessary because failure to consider how social categories depend on one another for meaning renders our knowledge of gender both incomplete and biased.

That being said, it is my intention to provide some key definitions that will help clarify the relationship among our central concepts. Accordantly, it is important to note that, due to the very nature of this research, particular terminology and expressions recurrently used in the explanations such as ‘essentialist womanhood’, ‘(capitalist) patriarchy’, ‘sexualized/racialized gender’, ‘authoritative knowledge’, ‘engendered analysis’, ‘performativity’ ‘mainstream/hegemonic feminism’, ‘interlocking’, ‘hibridity’, etc. are widely spread and well-accepted specific terminology within the field.

## ***GENDER***

Within an Anglo-European feminist framework, the concept of gender was first articulated by so called ‘second-wave feminists’ (late 1960s and 1970s) to provide a term to fight the prevailing biological determinism around sexes prevalent in western canonical knowledge (women were biologically and morally inferior) and to prove that gender identities are socially and culturally constructed around general beliefs about each sex (chapter 1). Interdisciplinary by nature, the concept of gender was taken by Anglo-European feminists as a key paradigm to underscore how individual and collectives’ identities/representations and spaces have social, cultural and political implications. Therefore is closely linked to reflections on how identity is theorized as a concept, it operates in the lives of individuals and how it

functions as a social practice. Understanding therefore the ongoing process of gender formation, it shows us that the very categories of men/woman are constructed (chapter 2).

Women of color in the U.S critical intervention redesigned the epistemological grounds of gender theory by decapitating ‘a universal female gender’ which implied the recognition of a multiple and complex collective feminist subject (chapter 3). The awareness of this multiplicity is deeply rooted in an understanding of the ‘politics of location’ in which a set of differential social variables dynamically intersect according to situated daily interactions. Consequently, the emphasis on power dynamics among women led to an examination of the interrelatedness between authoritative knowledge and the invisibility of alternative theorizing perspectives. As a result, mostly from the late 1980s, the manipulation of power within knowledge began to be the target in gender analyses.

On a second stance, in the decade of the 1990s, mainly through the emphasis on postmodernism and poststructuralism, the destabilization of hegemonic discourses of gender puts into motion the ‘re-articulation of the subject’ as linguistically and discursively constructed (see De Lauretis 1987). Moreover, the politization of marginality opened new avenues toward the des-identification of identity as an unprecedented deconstruction of Western logic. Finally, by the XXI century, the awareness of an intersectional gender will be embraced in the academia.

Consequently, as much as gender relations are subjected to change, so it does its definition. Within this framework, I approach gender as a concept that specifies, marks out and layers together several historical moments. In one meaning, it will be referred to when all women were approached as interchangeably along the lines of sexual difference and essentialist womanhood. In another meaning, it refers to a time when women of color were

increasingly present, with investments in specifying no parallel experiences. In addition, the impact of poststructuralist theories would turn the category of gender into a position of the subject in language that constitutes the subjectivity of the individual. Moreover, for postmodern feminists gender would increasingly mean the collapse of boundaries and fixed categories of meaning. Along these lines, intersectionality would become one term for the freeing of the ideological straitjackets imposed by gender as a static category of identity, enabling the recognition of differences and similarities between women. On that ground, respectful alliances can be formed to learn from each other specific positioning and cultural background.

By the acknowledgement of the reiterative controversial nature of intercultural gender dialogues, I seek to emphasize that institutionalized gender-oriented scholarship urged to be rethought as an ongoing struggle over what constitutes the legitimate terrain of feminist theory and inquiry. In sum, I intend to depict this complexity by challenging both the awareness of multiple intersections in and around gender as much as the cross over between different branches of knowledge.

### ***SUBJECT-SUBJECTIVITY-IDENTITY***

In traditional Western philosophy ‘subject’ is variously defined as a rational, thinking and feeling entity, the mind, the ego, the conscious self whereas ‘subjectivity’ (all of which are important in feminist debates) refers to the conscious thoughts or feeling, of the self. Moreover, in psychoanalysis and post-structuralist theories, encompasses the unconscious meanings and desires, as much as the discursive structures in which subjects are embedded in. In addition, the terms ‘experience’ and ‘identity’ will occur regularly in feminist discussions of gender. As

a concept, 'identity' has been variously deployed across many disciplines. Evident since the work of Fanon (1967) and Foucault (1977, 1980 1981) identity has also led into discussions of agency and resistance. Moreover, in feminist experience-based theories of the subject, a woman's self is both the result of her observation, structural positioning and practical engagement with the world (Weedon 2003:112). It is in this theoretical, methodological and epistemological approach that 'identity' is deployed in these intercultural dialogues as 'the self-naming and awareness of being who you believe to be'.

The terms 'subject', 'subjectivity' and 'identity' have been fiercely contested throughout the evolution of feminist critical thinking. Competing theories of subjectivity, variously derived from humanism (liberal thinking), Marxism, psychoanalysis post-structuralism and post-colonial theory had strongly influenced the way gender theory has evolved in Literary and Cultural studies. Moreover, they have affected and undermined the approach on how critics view identity politics in terms of authorship, production, reception and meaning of texts.

In this line of thinking, I am aware that the very question of identity-subjectivity is so complex that it would deserve a study apart. Consequently, it is also my intention to highlight that the meaning of identity and subjectivity has been and still remains a much contested terrain. In short, identity and subjectivity, made more complicated by the charge of women of color, have shaped feminist critical thought which, in turn, has helped shaped the concepts.

### ***WOMEN OF COLOR IN THE U.S /THIRD WORLD FEMINISM***

The theoretical and literary production of women of color in the U.S, a cohort of women activists and well trained feminists, reaches broad areas of criticism within Women's Studies. As I have previously stated, feminist theory has made a persuasive argument about the

significance of gender, class and other variables of difference. By virtue of its very nature, critical feminist discourse encouraged thinking through the salience of these issues. Indeed, the very nature of feminist vindicative premises created a uniquely strategic position for women of color in the U.S to intervene. Within this context, the historical and continued abandonment of universalistic principles in order to benefit a privileged few emerges as the root of women of color reluctance to see themselves as part of a 'sisterhood' that does not extend beyond racial boundaries. Such alliances were strengthening and enabling for those individuals, and for the voices that they were increasingly able to generate. Arguing for the intercultural implications of the feminist slogan: 'the personal is the political' they created another dimension of knowledge of the complexities of identities and subjectivities in the lives of diverse women in diverse location with the understanding that interconnection of social categories work within every person's life.

On this ground, I present the analysis of *This Bridge Called My Back: Radical Writings by Women of Color* as the starting point of a conversation, albeit continually rewritten and described with new meanings, which continues today. In tracing the origins of an 'on-going conversation' with this anthology I intend to re-historicize its insights, to re-examine their formulations and to map women of color's challenges to mainstream gender theory.

In looking at the particular situation of the experiences of women of color in the U.S as the starting point of an intercultural dialogue in relation to the understanding of social differences, it is my goal to make problematic concepts such 'differences' and 'similarities' not only among women specifically but with a broader scope of social relations in general. With that in mind, I argue that the des-colonization of differences as a source of division and misunderstandings among women was fueled by the development of women of color's

intersectional mindset, a paradigm that began as a radical and defiant gender and that progressively turned into an intersectional identity grid, most brilliantly portrayed in *This Bridge We Call Home: Radical Writings for Transformation* (Anzaldúa and Keating 2002) in which social identities are pushed away to relate inclusively in preciously unexplored ways.

In conclusion, by approaching women of color/Third World Feminism in the U.S I intend to make complex the construction of 'gender identity', and mostly, to challenge a unified history of the 'women's movement' in an Anglo-European academic framework. Indeed, I believe that their most important contribution, embodied in the very concept of 'intersectional gender' is to make visible a 'hegemonic' feminist theory; that is, an ingrained westernized hegemonic analytical paradigms within gender theory that, although it does not mean that is practiced by all, nonetheless, it refers to that powerful center that requires all other forms to define themselves in terms of it (Mohanty 1988; 1991)

## CHAPTER I

### THE ORIGINS OF A CROSS-ATLANTIC DIALOGUE

Our strength lies in shifting perspectives, in our capacity to shift, in our “seeing through” the membrane of the past superimposed on the present  
*Anzaldúa Making Face/Making Soul 1990: xxvii*

*To lift dominant forms of repression and to allows us to remember*  
Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed 2000: note 17.*

#### 1.1 AN INTRODUCTORY HISTORICAL JOURNEY TO DE-COLONIAL LINKAGES

Appeals to the past are one of the most recurrent strategies of interpretation of contemporary present. According to the well-known postcolonial scholar Edward Said, the divergent approaches to the roots of social and cultural differences animates oppositional knowledge as an appeal not only to the disagreement “about what happened in the past and what the past was, but uncertainty whether the past really is past, over and concluded or whether it continues, albeit in different forms” (1994: 1).

Within this line of thought and for the sake of understanding the past that explains and informs the present, “to lift dominant forms of repression and allow us to remember”

(Sandoval 2000: note 17), the point of departure of this research is to outline *the evolution of the logic of difference* in modernity, always limited to an Anglo-European middle-class context, with the intention to prove how dominant feminist theory is born out of the same pretensions of universality which excluded it, in the first place, from the first social declarations of equality in Western metropolis (see Suárez 2008: 42).

Hence, this research is grounded in postcolonial and feminist theory in order to develop an understanding of power relations in the discourse of equality since the first Enlightenment thinkers. It is concerned with a dominant logic as much as its oppositional forms with the aim of mapping out rhetorics of domination, resistance and coalitional consciousness in the evolution of differences among women. Thus, this introductory historical journey, intends to decode the origins of women of color's 'differential form of oppositional consciousness' (Sandoval 1991, 2000) by insisting on the de-colonial linkages that prepared and produced late-twentieth century feminist critical theory.

Born of an engagement between decolonization and multiculturalism, Postcolonial theories started to be taken seriously after Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1979). In his work, Said reveals the implicit ethnocentrism within Western knowledge production. He introduces the concept of 'orientalism' as a complex discursive strategy through which the 'West' has tended to reproduce an exotic imaginary around the 'East'. "the Orient needed first to be known", states Said, "then invaded and possessed, then recreated by scholars, soldiers and judges who disinterred forgotten languages, histories, races, and cultures"(92).

In Said's view, a sharp dichotomy operates by implanting a cognitive dualism based on very well-defined set of cultural differences between both the 'West' and the 'East' which responded to a "nexus of power creating the 'Oriental' as a scholarly product" (27) . That is to

say, unilateral despotic binaries reduced ‘that authoritative voice’ as the ‘West’ and the ‘East’ as the rest, the ‘others’ (45). The thesis that he draws on to justify the colonial enterprise fuses the intellectual with the political in his aim of contributing to “a better understanding of the way cultural denomination has operated” within both a colonial system and mind-set (28). According to Said, Western intellectuals made every endeavor to shape a homogenized image of colonized cultures out of a very complex and heterogeneous collection of traditions. And they did so, because it was politically crucial to legitimize the colonial conquest. As a result of this symbiosis, the basis for a sociological account of non-Western cultures as primitive, retrograde, underdeveloped and in need of indoctrination by the civic aura of European Metropolis, was established. Symptomatic of the centrality given to cultural differences was the exoticism of such differences. In this sense, what summarizes what Said coined as “orientalism” is the construction of an extreme alteration which takes the ‘West’ as the norm by epitomizing the colonial “others” as the alter ego of the Western modern citizen (Aído, 2008: 97). Through these lenses, alteration was experienced in such a way that shaped the language, perception and form of encounter between East and West (58).

In addition to this colonial strategy, the same mechanism of power happened in reverse. Authors such as Walter Mignolo agree with Said’s postcolonial premises but identify the need to highline the anachronism among the different colonial processes. In *Local Histories, Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges and Border Thinking* (1991) he points out that it is necessary to note that Latin America underwent a dissimilar stance in which differences between colonizers and colonized were not constructed as polar opposites but assimilated. In what it’s been coined as a process of ‘westernization’, Latin America was integrated as another part of the western hemisphere with the intention to negate its own

cultural specificity. According to Walter Mignolo, a westernization process would have come out as the artifice of a political discourse in which differences were gobbled in favor of a false equality, a pretended social equity which has only been possible thanks to the silencing of these differences.

In the same line, colonialism, as alleged by Rosalva Aído Fernández (2008), is one of the most relevant historical moments of Anglo-European expansion, in the sense that it designates the genesis and consolidation of the domination of Western knowledge and practices in the political configuration of a colonial capitalist system. This imperialist-capitalist equation is what Edward Said depicted as the progressive “rise of the West” in which Western powers allowed the imperial metropolitan centers to acquire and to accumulate territories and subjects on a truly astonishing scale. The experience of systematic colonial expansion rendered either imperialism or colonialism as a very complex act of accumulation and acquisition. According to Said, both strategies are supported and impelled “by impressive ideological formations that include notions that certain territories and people require and beseech domination” (1994:8). As a result, an ideology of knowledge affiliated with domination spread out within Western cannon. It organized around terms such as ‘inferior’ or ‘subject races’, ‘subordinate peoples’, ‘dependency’, ‘expansion and ‘authority’ (8-9).

For Said, the colonial domination of Western knowledge goes back to a time in which “overlapping territories and intertwined histories”<sup>23</sup> (1-71) were fused at the cost of so much violence and resentment. In this sense, a line of continuity could be established among contrasting colonial processes based on the challenge to bring forth the decolonization of

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<sup>23</sup> Title of chapter I of the book I am referring to and from which this quotations are taken; that is, *Culture and Imperialism*. London: Vintage Books, 1994.

Western mind and thought; a line that, as it will unfold throughout this research, it mostly underscores 'colonial discourse' as an strategic tool which provided a space for so-called 'authority subjects' to articulate and execute its own vision of power. In the assertion of authority discourses, Cultural and Colonial scholar Homi Bhabha depicts colonialism as an "an apparatus of power that turns on the recognition and disavowal of racial/cultural/historical differences" (1983, 23). Indeed, its predominant strategic function is to rely upon the creation of a dominant space 'for subject people' through the production of authority knowledge.

Moreover, what I consider to be most significant about this "apparatus of power" is that it has persistently undermined social and cultural differences. Concerned with the ways in which colonial discourses operate, in *The Nation and its Fragments. Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*, theorist Parth Chattarjee defines the "rule of colonial difference" as the strategic disruption of colonial differences (1993). While his specific examples are drawn from Indian sources, his book is a contribution to the general theoretical discussion on the colonial origins of modern states/nations. Therefore, his perspective has the potential to agglutinate varying Anglo-European empires on the basis that they all shared a common feature: the call for policies that would shape the political nature of cultural differences by turning all 'colonized subjects' into difference no matter which strategy was followed (orientalism or westernization). Examining the paradoxes involved with creating on one hand, uniquely non-western colonies and on the other hand, a universalistic nation-state in the material sense (so-called metropolis) leads to the implementation of an ethno-stratified society composed by authority subjects and marginalized, colonized peoples. According to Chattarjee, with the enforcement of an ethno-stratified society, the 'colonial difference' became the dominant standpoint which characterized and distinguished colonialism in relation

to, and in opposition to, other ideologies of domination.<sup>24</sup> To these regards, in *The Location of Culture*, Homi K. Bhabha stresses how one of the important features of colonial discourse is “its dependence on the concept of ‘fixity’ [which he later develops as the creation of a cultural stereotype] in the ideological construction of otherness”(66). On this ground, to recognize this ‘fixidity’ among women as a lack of recognition of ‘cultural otherness’ it will reveal and unfold ideological misconceptions and repressions, “with the repertoire of positions of power and resistance, domination and dependence that constructs colonial identification subject (both colonizer and the colonized)” (67). In this spirit, I argue on the concept of ‘colonial difference’ as a necessary tool to explore the implicit inheritance of colonial thinking within the early dominant feminisms to calibrate in which ways Anglo-European feminist theory has been accomplice to the governing logic of the colonized.

Even though the dissimilitude of historical and political colonial processes is acknowledged in this research, a materialistic- based methodology takes the risk of leaving out of its analysis the impact of colonization in the production of scholarly knowledge. And it is precisely around the discursive colonization of feminist knowledge within the academia that ‘women of color’ in the U.S. first organized. Thus, the approach in which this research is subscribed in, embraces ‘postcolonial’ or ‘neo-colonial’ thinking (see Lugones 1994) as a ‘global’ enterprise aimed at the discursive decolonization of the canonical knowledge within a Western-oriented imagination. Particularly, it is an attempt to demonstrate how colonial reminiscences have persisted in a discursive manner in the way differences among women were to be named and understood. It is for this reason that I would like to emphasize that my approach aligns with the well-known feminist postcolonial writer Chandra Talpade

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<sup>24</sup> For a further explanation see Liliana Suárez. “Colonialismo, gobernabilidad y feminismos poscoloniales” Liliana Suarez y Rosalva Aída Fernández, eds., 2008: 39

Mohanty's ideas in her article "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses" (1988; 1991), in which she proposes the refusal to engage in a "cultural denounce" about Anglo-European ethnocentricity, and rather reveal how "an ethnocentric universalism is produced and reproduced in the articulation of certain political-philosophical focus in the Anglo-European tradition from the Enlightenment times till nowadays" (1991:55). As an embodiment of the struggles against ethnocentric universalism, in the articulation of gender identity from a feminist standpoint, this diachronic journey takes off in the Enlightenment times for being this period the one mostly characterized by the guidance of reason.

## **1.2 THE LOGIC OF DIFFERENCE IN MODERNITY**

In the evolution of the logic of difference in modernity, the Enlightenment era is an important historical reference within the critical feminist thinking because it is in this period of time when it began to socially sprout the discourse of 'equality and liberty' which culminated in the American and the French Revolutions that would open the path to the creation of a feminist movement. In the XVIII century, in the midst of a colonial enterprise, in the metropolis of the Anglo-European empires, resistance towards absolutisms arose for the first time in Western history. "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 political era: the bonding of modern citizens through social contract. However, this enlightenment thinking was ingrained in a long history of western philosophical and religious tradition that considered women inferior to men., As an illustration to a 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 because of their desires; women depend on men because of their desires and their needs. We would survive more easily without them than they would without us  
(364 cited in Schwartz 1984: 84)

According to Rousseau, men's moral superiority justifies women's subjection either to a man or to any patriarchal judgments to the extent that women are not permitted to put themselves above these judgments. Therefore, "The first and most important quality of a woman is gentleness" affirms Rousseau, since women are believed to be made to obey and "to bear a husband's wrongs without complaining" (Ibid.)

So, as we can see, Emilio embodies the male authority and Sofia personifies the female subjection. In this respect, it is relevant to note how his pledge for equality and liberty, could perfectly resonate in any feminist manifesto. However, Enlightenment feminist revisionism has proven that his discourse is framed within a Western andocentric and sexist tradition in which the sexual and spiritual subjugation of women was the necessary condition which made upper and middle-class men's political participation possible. To these regards, critics such as Rosa Cobo recognizes how his apology of liberty and social justice and his presumed morality and reason collapse completely when he analyses women's subjection, the normalization of

sexual labor and gender roles, “as a natural fact” (1987: 27)<sup>25</sup>. In the same line, Joel Schwartz appeals to *The Sexual Politics of Jean-Jacques Rousseau* and points out that “Rousseau’s insistence on the necessity of female dependence on males is understandably offensive to feminists” (1984: 85). Since the second half of the twentieth century, nonetheless, a great amount of academic research has addressed Rousseau’s class perspective, openly denounced the misogynist tradition in his scope, and a substantial amount of literary production (see Amorós 1985, 2005; Valcárcel 1998; Fraiser 1991) has already demonstrated how the citizen of Rousseau unraveled a bourgeois masculine individual that in contrast to the peasantry, working classes and slaves, could afford to have his wife at home.

Nonetheless, within enlightenment feminisms, little reflection has been brought up on the issue of how one of the main incoherencies of Rousseau was to ignore that the new state in which his new masculine citizens would exercise their freedom, was the result of an imperialist colonial enterprise. For feminist critics such as Celia Amorós (1985, 2005), Luisa Posada (1998) or Rosa Cobo (1987), Sofia, whom he imagines, invents and recreates in his paternal bourgeois demagoguery, it’s not only the portrait of an ‘ideal woman’, perfect wife and mother but the emblem of a normative femininity and patriarchal family inside the limits of the bourgeois European imagination from which Rousseau writes and thinks. However, from a post-colonial perspective, it could be argued that their analyses lack a deeper research on the historical and political conditions that were enabling Emilio to become a new citizen; an approach that would illuminate that what was making possible that Emilio could exercise his political right, was Sofia’s unquestioned imperialist complicity. In these

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<sup>25</sup> See Cobo, Rosa *Fundamentos del Patriarcado moderno*. Madrid, Ediciones Cátedra, 1987.

regards, to understand the future claims of women of color in the U.S. it is necessary to wonder: on behalf of what ‘women’ were Rousseau and other illustrated thinkers speaking about?; that is to say, what was the omniscient subject of the cultural specificity from which these thinkers were positioning themselves?

Heir of a chauvinist and misogynist tradition of well-known thinkers who considered themselves experts on femininity and defended that ‘women’ were made out of a more modest, austere and childish clay than men’s, Rousseau defined and grouped concepts such as reproduction / family / patriarchy / marriage / domesticity/ and used them without bearing in mind or paying attention to the specificity of its cultural and historical contexts. Thus, Rousseau structured an incipient Western citizenship in a hierarchical manner by defining a *dominant norm* over the creation of radical alterations incarnated in social collectives who “were naturalized as essential and unavoidable *different*” (see Suárez 2008: 38, emphasis mine). Therefore, it is necessary to highlight how Rousseau’s defense of the innate characteristics of modern citizens never went on theorizing to what extent these natural features could be applied to the social reality in the Anglo-European colonies. This theoretical and political incongruity is an appellant premise that stands for much of the incoherence implied in the logic of the difference in the modernity that took off with the so-called *Declaration of Independence of United States* from United Kingdom.

Adopted by congress on July 4, 1776, this Declaration<sup>26</sup> symbolizes the first legal document in which illustrated political ideas about equality took shape in new age in which ‘free individuals’ would govern themselves. “.....We hold these Truths to be self-evident” the founding fathers proclaimed:

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<sup>26</sup> As being both Declarations, the American and the French, widely known and established documents, I take the liberty to analyze those extracts most relevant to the purpose of our analysis; that is, to underscore the premises that contain the core ideas from which first Anglo European feminist will revolt against.

that all *Men* are created that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness. That to secure these Rights, Governments are instituted among *Men*, deriving their just Powers from the Consent of the Governed, that whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these Ends; it is the Right of the People to alter or abolish it, and to institute a new Government, laying its Foundations on such Principles and organizing its Powers in such Form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness (italics mine)

England's thirteen rebellious colonies had won their independence, and overcoming rivalries among themselves, joined together as the United States of America, the world's first modern democracy. But as we can see, their assertion of 'self-evident truths' essentializes an exclusive universal generic that is male, white, middle-class biased. The 'founding fathers' did not believe that neither their wives, daughters, mothers nor the native Americans or African slaves should have the same political and civil rights. And they did so because these rights were defined in terms of a division between private and public realms. In the exploration of the impact of this polarization within discourses of knowledge, Carole Pateman elucidates the ways in which such dichotomies have themselves being re-appropriated by authority subjects to banish the 'unsuitable citizens'. In *The Sexual Contract* (1988), she explores how these enlightenment thinkers who wanted to govern themselves, rebelling against the irremovable class privileges of stratum societies, created a division between public and private spheres. This division was meant to deprive of fully autonomy to those social groups considered inferiors on their basis of their natural and innate social and cultural differences, such as women, working-classes, slaves and colonized subjects. The 'others' were sentenced either to domesticity (women) or the need of indoctrination by the civilized. Considered them all to exist at the margins of citizenship, they were expelled out of any social debate or consideration. Based on this rigid dichotomy, the patriarchal lines of stratum societies were reinforced and the 'public' was restored as the kingdom of the autonomous,

supposedly 'equal' individuals in rights; and the 'private' as the destiny of all those dependent subjects, which due to their natural characteristics, required the tutelage of autonomous individuals. "Contract is the specifically modern means of creating relationships", Pateman elucidates:

but because civil subordination originates in contract, it is presented as freedom. Arguments about feudal relics and status overlooked the comparisons and oppositions created by original contract. Contractual relations do not gain meaning from the old world but in contrast to the relations of the private sphere (118)

Disguised nevertheless under the fervent spirit of a social contract, the invoked liberal ideals of liberty, equality and brotherhood were on the march spreading across Europe. Indeed, three years later, revolts by the middle and lower classes overthrew the French monarchy and the French Revolution began. As a result, the 26<sup>th</sup> of July, 1779, the French National Assembly approves *The Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen* and France becomes a Republic." The representatives of the French people", the declaration goes in a tone the unquestionably resembles the American's founding fathers:

..., have determined to set forth in a solemn declaration the natural, unalienable, and sacred rights of *man*, in order that this declaration, being constantly before all the member of the social body, shall remind them continually of their rights and duties; in order that the acts of the legislative power as well as those of the executive power, may be moment with the objects and purposes of all political institutions and may thus be more respected, and, lastly, in order that the grievances of the citizens, base hereafter upon simple and incontestable principles, shall tend to... happiness of all

#### article 1

Men are born and remain free and equal in rights. Social distinctions may be founded only upon the general good

Equality, just as it was happening in the American declaration, had to be safeguarded legislatively, judicially and fiscally by the State. But due to the *rule of colonial difference* in which cultural and social differences were naturalized in favor of a dominant norm, the incongruity relayed on the very impossibility of equality regarding the social utility and the

intellectual capacity of individuals, as we can see in article 1. This idea is of crucial importance for two main reasons. First, because it demonstrates the establishment of different classes of citizens in the very origins of modern citizenship, and therefore, justifies the design of etno-stratified societies. And second, from the logic of Western thought, this affirmation would determine the vision of the contradictions inherent in future feminist manifestos. In this sense, it is important to underscore that what this logic drags on is a displacement of ethical levels in the understandings of both equality and difference at the very core of social and cultural identity. This makes possible the acceptance of a restricted access to social utility and intellectual capacity for 'certain citizens'. As Joan W. Scott explains in *Gender and the politics of History*:

Placing equality and difference in antithetical relationship has, then, a double effect. It denies the way in which difference has long figured in the political notions of equality and it suggests that sameness is the only ground on which equality can be claimed (1999: 174- 75)

To this respect, cultural scholars such as Balibar (1987) point out a very important reflection when assuring that it is not possible to disassociate the treatment of a dominant norm with the process of identity hirarchization. Even further, it is well embraced within this field of knowledge that the greatest mechanisms of power, whether hegemonic, rational or politico-philosophical, are precisely those who have created the dominant, the cannon, the norm, always with the consent of those groups which were getting subdued.

### 1.3. ENLIGHTENMENT PREMISES: FIRST EUROPEAN FEMINIST DECLARATIONS

When applying the same critical gaze towards the roots and development of mainstream feminism, different authoresses, like Amelia Varcárcel (1998) or Celia Amorós (2005) coincide in indicating that the European illustration is this historical stage in which feminism is born as a coherent corpus of vindications and as a political project capable of mobilizing a collective subject. Enlightenment rationale marks the beginning of critical thinking, and by definition, to think critically implies a reason with the ability to question itself and detect its own flaws and contradictions (see Amorós 1992: 139-50). The illustrated premises that affirmed that all the 'men' are born free and equal, and therefore with the same rights, progressively created the necessary social conditions that facilitated the first feminist claim of European women's discrimination. To these regards, even though in both French and American Declarations, the language of equality and 'universal justice' had turned into an imperialist creed, it will be proven that the enlightenment rationale was intrinsically underestimating the power of reason as an innate characteristic in all human beings.

Rebelling against males' preferential treatment and women's exclusion from citizenship, an outstanding woman, way ahead her time, Olimpia de Gouges<sup>27</sup>, wrote in 1791 in France *The Declaration of the Rights of Woman*. Denouncing the exclusive nature of the democracy on which the illustrated project was being built, Olympia's exoneration is against 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.

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<sup>27</sup> Her real name was Marie Gouze. She wrote pamphlets and plays on a variety of issues, including slavery, which she attacked as being founded on greed and blind prejudice. She founded the *société populaire de femmes*. See Puleo, Alicia (1993). *La ilustración olvidada*. Barcelona: Editorial Anthropos/Comunidad de Madrid.

Olympia, as the spokeswoman of a pioneering generation of female critical voices, defied a male-biased liberty and freedom. In doing so, she would open the path in which the same claim of universal rights and duties that the *The Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen* entailed to, it would lead the first Anglo-American feminists to the very appropriation of universality arguing that were equal of reasonable thinking and capable of self-government. Thus, Olympia's defending tactic would be to appeal towards the same reason of equality and liberty with the intention to downplay and criticize its interests and illegitimate purposes. "Mothers, daughters, sisters [and] representatives of the nation demand" precludes Olympia paraphrasing her male counterparts "to be constituted into a national assembly."

Believing that ignorance, omission, or scorn for the rights of Woman are the only causes of public misfortunes and of the corruption of governments, [the women] have resolved to set forth in a solemn declaration the natural, inalienable, and sacred rights of woman in order that this declaration, constantly exposed before all the members of the society, will ceaselessly remind them of their rights and duties; in order that the authoritative acts of women and the authoritative acts of men may be at any moment compared with and respectful of the purpose of all political institutions; and in order that citizens' demands, henceforth based on simple and incontestable principles, will always support the constitution, good morals, and the happiness of all (Puleo 1993: 154)

Having provided gender revisionism of the first premises, Olympia overtly tackles the most compromising aspect of women's subjugation by laying out "the Rights of Woman and of Female Citizens". As it happened with the analysis of previous declarations, for the purpose of limiting the debate to the core of their vindications, the scope of the analysis it will only be delimited to the first article for being the most representative of the ones which compromise the Declaration.

#### article 1

Women are born free and lives equal to man in her Rights. Social distinctions can only be based upon the utility (Ibib.)

As we can see, Olympia is speaking in the name of “Mothers, daughters, sisters [and] representatives of the nation” with the intention to push back a universal equality that was discriminating social and political rights of women. However, 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. Thence, her proclamation is subjected to the judgment of a patriarchal - imperialist governance, that is, *the rule of colonial difference*, that the European ‘Sofías’ had internalized without questioning. Replicating the same logic, article 1 admits “social distinctions based on common utility”. Hence, her claims can be affirmed to be those of a ‘sexual equality’ vindicated from a *cultural neutral gender* which indicates the ethnocentric limitations of the first feminist manifestos: the proclamation of a feminist gender straitjacketed to ‘sexual difference’ as the only constitutive element of this gender.

As it will be analyzed hereafter, this cultural neutral gender was prompted in part by the emergence of an upper-and middle class feminist collective consciousness which envisioned speaking in behalf a ‘universal woman’. Moving back to Britain, one year after Olympia’s statement, Mary Wollstonecraft wrote *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), considered one of the first feminist masterpieces. Her vindications became defiant especially when it comes to western misogynist political and philosophical traditions. To account for, and excuse the tyranny of man,” she declares,

many ingenious arguments have been brought forward to prove, 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)

With the intention to trace back the logic in the misconstruction of sexual differences within western canonical intellectuals, Wollstonecraft categorically attacks women's misconception *from Rousseau to Dr. Gregory*: "I might be accused of arrogance;" she utters to her audience

still I must declare what I firmly believe, that all the writers who have written on the subject of female education and manners, *from Rousseau to Dr. Gregory* have contributed to render women more artificial, weak characters than they would otherwise have been; and consequently, more useless members of society .....but that has no historical context (13-15 emphasis mine)

As her words powerfully deploy, contrary to Rousseau's premises, she strongly criticizes him for failing to consider either men or women as independent moral beings. She argues that women are whole moral beings, who "ought to endeavor to acquire human virtues (or perfections) by the *same* means as men, instead of being educated like a fanciful kind of *half* beings- one of Rousseau's wild chimeras" (68; her emphasis).

To the extent in which Wollstonecraft criticizes that 'Sofia' is an ideal scheme that inhabits in the imagination of Rousseau without any historical reality, her words crowned her as the spokeswoman of a longed public challenge to a world of sexist traditions. However, her words were simultaneously forgetting that the political category of 'woman' she was speaking in behalf of, was part of a colonizing elite that it had internalized 'that we all are equal' by virtue of belonging to a generic human being. "My own sex", states Wollstonecraft without much further scrutiny about the cultural or social scope of the audience she addressing as 'my own sex':

I hope, will excuse me, if I treat them like rational creatures, instead of flattering their FASCINATING graces, and viewing them as if they were in a state of perpetual childhood, unable to stand alone (6, her emphasis)

Although it won't be until the decade of 1960s when the concept of gender burst onto feminist theory, it can be affirmed that Wollstonecraft was the first one in theorizing on 'the

feminine condition' (see Sapiro 1992:323) as the result of a social construction. As it is well-known, most of her work is dedicated to demonstrate her belief that inequality between the male sex and the female sex was socially built and was not corresponding to any natural law. Interestingly, nonetheless, her denial of assimilated social differences is articulated out of a feminine essentialist gender. This strategy of a naturalized gender is articulated along the lines of what Sandra Harding and Uma Narayan in *Decentering the Center* have coined as "gender essentialism":

gender essentialism often proceeds to assume and construct sharp binaries about the qualities, abilities or locations of "men" and "women"(...) the discursive reiteration of such "essential differences" operates in a manner that helps construct the sense of gender identity that shape the self- understandings and subjectivities of different groups of people who inhabit these discursive contexts (2000:82)

This process of 'gender essentialism' becomes very useful when explaining how a dominant social femininity progressively gobbled up the specific struggles, priorities and locations of different cultural and social classes of women. For these first middle class women, their understanding of the need of a collective struggle<sup>28</sup> was trapped in the rule of colonial difference. To these regards, critics such as Rosemary M. George, in "Homes in the Empire, Empires in the Home" exposes how a new imperial subjectivity was performed by the Englishwomen in the colonies due to the fact that "this new authoritative self was defined against the racial Other" (1998:48). The subjugated womanhood turned into masterhood in the presence of the natives, the Others, who were socially represented as not being capable of, due to its childish nature. That gave women the power to place themselves with self-confidence and authority in a world that had socially and politically silenced them. As a result, the colonies, with its stigma of a historical western hunger for power, were the first

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<sup>28</sup> As Virginia Sapiro points out, Wollstonecraft never suggested any kind of collective struggle. To write as a woman was already a very transgressing act at that time (1992: 324).

witnesses of a female authorial voice that emerged “from the assumption of superiority that the Englishwoman has of her status as a woman” (64).

According to Rosemary, “how smoothly the knowledge of the Other is transformed into a means of dismissal of cultural differences” (63) stands for middle-class men’s and women’s vindication of social and political rights by silencing the Others. Sandra Harding and Uma Narayan define this cultural complicity perpetuated by women of privileged social status as an artifice of “cultural imperialism”. Blinded by a privilege status, cultural others are constructed as an extension of their imagination, “taking their particular locations and problems to be those of “All Women”. “This account ignores” Harding and Narayan go on eliciting:

the degree to which cultural imperialism often proceeds by means of an “insistence on difference” by a projection of imaginary “differences” that constitute one’s Others as others, rather than via an insistence of sameness (83)

To the extent that an authority voice was progressively given to women in the context of colonial metropolis, ‘cultural imperialism’ reflects the main features of a collective modern identity in which the memory of any oppression is shed and assimilated. Thus, this overriding paradox in the social construction of identity arises from the recognition that the ‘modern individual’, as much as these first middle-class feminists, were being “first and foremost an imperialist” (M. George 1998: 49). Central to this argument is the understanding of the development of the first feminist ‘notions of the self’ as closely linked to their relationship to power dynamics , falling into the very ahistorical trap or lack of any particular social and cultural context they had being telling men to avoid.

#### 1.4 NORTH-AMERICAN SCENARIO: FIRST FEMININIST MANIFESTO

Despite this social paradox, the liberal ideals of freedom and equality were catching and inspiring, and so was the idea of progress. A new kind of revolution –mass production of goods by machine- was under way...propelled by water and steam: railroads, steamboats and telegraph lines connected people together as never before (Johnston 1995:9). With the coming of the factories, the Industrial Revolution brought about enormous changes in the way people lived, altering family and work patterns for many people. Either in Great Britain or in the northern states of United States, specially fabric and thread mills tried to hire young unmarried women because weaving and spinning were traditional female occupations and also because they fit well the profile of cheap and submissive labour landowners were looking for (11). But other than that, middle-class and upper-class women, ‘the ladies’, did not work unless they were unmarried or well educated. In that case, they usually became school teachers or gave lessons privately in music, art or dancing (Ibid).

But by the decade of 1840s, new scientific discoveries, new philosophies, new inventions progressed, and many idealistic ideals were growing. The great world-wide reform movement of the time was the antislavery movement. And it is in the abolitionist movement as much as in the spirit of social reform of the Quarker movement<sup>29</sup>, that the roots of a feminist consciousness in the United States can be traced. Women settlers joined their voices against slavery and the first analogies arose in the situation of the slaves and the state of servitude that stemmed from the civil and political death of ‘Woman’s Rights’.

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<sup>29</sup> The names *Quarker* or *Friends Church* refer to religious organizations which arose out of a Christian movement in mid-17<sup>TH</sup> England. Their beliefs focused on an individual, non-mediated access to the Divine and were mostly characterized by their emphasis on Christian pacifism.

On this ground, if in 1773 the ‘Boston Tea Party’ marked the beginning of the North American revolution, seventy-five years later, between the sips of a shared tea among five women settlers, a second American revolution was conceived: a revolution of women. On the table, Lucretia Mott, a Quaker priestess<sup>30</sup> and a abolitionist leader, her younger sister Martha Coffin Wright, Mary Ann McClintock, a hicksite activist (the reformist strand of Friends), Jane Master Hunt, the wife of a rich banker and landowner and Elizabeth Cady Stanton<sup>31</sup>, daughter of a prominent judge. Together, they envisioned a convention in which to discuss the rights of woman<sup>32</sup>. In a time where conventions were continuously launched on education, politics and especially slavery, what made this convention revolutionary was that it was organized *by* women, *on* women and *in behalf of* women. It was necessary to do a public call and Elizabeth Cady was in charge of writing an announcement in the newspaper *Seneca County Courier* whose publisher and publicist, Dexter Bloomer, was her acquaintance. The announcement would appear the next morning, saying the following:

### ***Woman’s Rights Convention***

A convention to discuss the social, civil and religious condition and rights of woman will be held in the Wesleyan Chapel, at Seneca Falls, N. Y., on *Wednesday and Thursday*, 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> of July current; commencing at 10 O’clock A M. During the first day the meeting will be exclu-

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<sup>30</sup> One of the most radical innovations of the Quaker religion was a greater, nearly equal, role for women. Apart from the fact that prevailing strong patriarchal constraints were still faced by Quaker women, Friends believed in the spiritual equality of women, who were allowed to take a far more active role than they could have experienced with other Christian movements.

<sup>31</sup> Elizabeth Cady was on her honeymoon with the abolitionist leader Henry Stanton when she met Lucretia Mott for the first time. It was in London, on the 12th of June, 1840 at the International Convention against Slavery, in which both of them had been chosen as delegates of the North-American committee. However, the majority of men voted to exclude women from the convention and they were not allowed to participate as delegates. Enraged by this incident, both women agreed organizing a woman’s Rights Convention once they return to United States. It would take them ten years to make it come true.

<sup>32</sup>As Norma Johnston recalls, the five organizers of the Seneca Falls convention, which was to consider the “Rights of Woman,” called it a “Woman’s Right Convention.” The Plural form, “Women’s Rights” came later, as feminist consciousness developed into a collective subject and its women’s movement. See Johnston, Norma (1995: 1 -2)

sively for women who are earnestly invited to attend. The public generally are invited to be present on the second day, when Lucretia Mott, of Philadelphia, and other ladies and gentlemen, will address the convention (Johnston 1995: 68;emphasis mine)

At this point, I would like to highlight some important aspects to understand the power of call and the participation of ‘the women’ who would come to represent ‘Woman’s Rights’. First, it is necessary to bear in mind that, except the women settlers, the majority of women were illiterate so they could neither read nor write (and this of course includes women’s slaves). And second, as Norm Johnston points out in *Remembering the Ladies: The First Women’s Rights Convention* (1995) there was something subversive about holding the convention midweek if the wish to attract the “mill girls” since factory workers worked 14-hour a day, 6-day week (only Sundays off), so if these women had wanted to take part they would have had to miss work, which was not viable. Nevertheless, it seems that if it had been celebrated on a holy day such as Sunday, in a mentality still dominated by its Puritan heritage “would truly have been offensive and self-defeating” (66); that is, completely counter-productive<sup>33</sup>. My point here is to emphasize the historical background that fostered class and ‘racial’ division among feminists. Furthermore, it is precisely the absence of a class or racial consciousness that concerns me in this first announcement. That is, the lack of inclusive representation of these women who were experiencing oppression in terms of slavery, cultural assimilation, working-class or immigrant stigma. Hence, my intention is to visibilize the ways in which Anglo-European feminist theory originated out of the naturalization of differences among women.

At all odds, however, the Convention took place. And in the same year that Marx’s *Communist Manifesto* was published, the *Declaration of Rights and Sentiments* (1848) was

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<sup>33</sup> In fact, in the announcement, except from Lucretia, who was a well-known Quaker priestess and delegate of anti-slavery committee, no other names appeared.

approved. The model for their convention's statement was once again *The Declaration of Independence*. Being the original text, a well-known document, I take the liberty to mention what I consider to be the most relevant content for the already laid out purposes:

We hold these truths to be self-evident: *that all men and women* are created equal; that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness; ....whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of those who suffer from it to refuse allegiance to it, and to insist upon the institution of a new government, laying its foundation on such principles, and organizing its powers in such form as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness. The history of mankind is a history of repeated injuries usurpations on the part of man toward woman, having in direct object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over her. To prove this, let facts be submitted to a candid world (Cady and B. Anthony, 1889: 70, emphasis mine)

As we can see, the *Declaration* was written in such a way as to link the women's cause directly with the most sacred document of the new republic. Thus, 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. Karen Offen clearly elucidates this logic<sup>34</sup>:

.....a legalistic definition of "equal rights" proposes the standard of male adulthood as the norm. It is a definition expressed in a vocabulary of "rights" common to the western tradition but developed most explicitly in the political theory and practice of Great Britain and United States, which have so long elaborated the rights and privileges of male individuals in the grounds of principle. For women, the vote, the attainment of legal control over property and person and entry of male-dominated professions and institutional hierarchies became the representative issues (1991: 63)

Consequently, the representative issues of this feminist manifesto bore the mark of no critical insight into the conditions of the oppression of other women who live in the outlaw of social structures. It spoke on behalf of a 'universal woman' erected along the lines of the non-

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<sup>34</sup> As Sheila Rowbotham points out in *La mujer ignorada de la historia* (1980) this first proclamation carry and essential ambiguity since the feminist attack towards women subjection did not necessarily implied a refusal of private property, capital and labor conditions

existence of differences among women apart from the sexual difference that made them *all* inferior to men. The blindness to the facts of oppression among women emerged from privilege positions and middle-class vantage points that combined a discursive gender and cultural imperialism in their equity claims. So, the great paradox arises from the fact that the first Anglo European feminists shared the same rationale that was excluding them as citizens in their fully rights. Along these lines, in supplementing previous feminist manifestos, this *Declaration of Sentiments*, ousted an androcentric vision of knowledge which revolted against the incoherencies implied in the new liberal concept of citizenship which was not including 'women' as holders of civil or political rights<sup>35</sup> but as 'beneficiaries' through their roles as mothers, daughters and wives. However, the vision of equality which these first feminists were claiming, was faithfully recreating the same sexist and patriarchal logic to which they were revelling 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 (see Mohanty 1991: 53)

In examining the historical origins of 'women of color' in the U.S claims of visibility, and in order to grasp their path breaking intervention, we find in this *Declaration of Sentiments* the articulation of two basic premises: on one hand, sexual difference remains unquestioned in itself and on the other hand, it is internalized as the very root of women's oppression and the genesis of women's subordination. As Rosalva Aída and Liliana Suárez point out in *Descolonizando el feminismo: teorías y prácticas desde los márgenes* (2008), it is precisely during this historical

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<sup>35</sup> After the Second World War, a social pact between Unions and employers was signed. Framed in a model of male as the main 'bread givers' and women as 'caretakers', women were excluded and discriminated from social rights because these rights were derived from a 'worker-status'. Again, their beneficiary condition reaffirmed a secondary role in the citizenship.

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 (45). Thus, in this twofold approach to sexual difference, the logic of gender and cultural imperialism explains how the analytic category of women becomes the center of an ethocentric feminist political agenda.

For the first time in history, a collective feminist political subject is articulated, but it does so on the basis of an essentialist gender. This ideological position of a-temporal and anti-historical sexual difference overshadowed the very role that cultural differences were playing in the construction of a ‘universal woman’; and in doing so, these first feminist manifestos somehow were undermining the very legitimacy of their vindications. Hence, as it can be observed, the first feminist political subject was reproducing the ‘authentic western self’ from liberal knowledge and politics as an ontological truth.

This duplicitous irony set the context for swirling, contradictory messages regarding social and cultural equality among women. And as we will see, in the evolution of differences within a transnational feminist consciousness, the Anglo-European discourse of equality has covered and uncovered the shifting nature of contradictory politics of equality and difference (see Einstein 1994). Moreover, what this introductory revisionism had sought to map out is how gender, sexuality, ‘race’, nation, class and ethnicity were melted into one sexual politics feminist front which only highlighted sexual difference among women and it restrained gender to the theorizing parameters of public and private realms.

What have emerged in this discussion are the dominant ideological forms that worked against one another to ultimately divide the movement from within. To further elucidate this

strategy, among the women of the organizing committee of Seneca Falls, I would like to focus on Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott. The relationship they both maintained with the abolitionist principles that bonded them together when they first met in London at the World anti-Slavery Convention (1840), developed in a completely different path. This alteration in their militant journey will be analyzed as the beginning of two different ways of understanding oppression, resistance and agency within Anglo European feminist theory and practice.

Lucretia Coffin Mott came from a very wealthy family on the island of Nantucket, Massachusetts; her mother was a relative of Benjamin Franklyn. As Norman Jonston remembers, the Nantucket community was composed of men who went down the sea for months while women were running the families and small business, “so Lucretia grew accustomed to seeing women as intelligent, self reliant beings, equals of their men” (1995: 33). Moreover, her family was a member of the Religious Society of Friends- or Quarkers, as they were normally called. Originally referred to as the ‘Children of the Light’, they did not have any established rituals or doctrines but believed that everyone-regardless of race, class or gender- was able to receive an ‘inner light’ of God. In the Seneca convention, her speech was titled “The Progress of Reform” in which she spoke in favor not only about the needs of the women but about the needs of the world (96). Throughout her entire life she supported with the same dedication the cause of women as she worked for the rights of all the oppressed- the sick, the poor, the insane, factory workers, slaves and Native Americans. She preached non-violence and was active in the pacifist movement. As a Quarker pacifist, she refused to support the Civil war, no matter how righteous the cause of abolition (132). As Norman Johnston recalls, “the primary focus of her life, in the years following Seneca Falls

Convention, was the antislavery movement. Her dedication was to a principle –liberty and equality for all- rather than to anyone particular cause.”(130) Her position could be considered the beginning of the *strategic alliances* within the feminist movement that ‘feminists of color’ will later developed and stand for.

Elizabeth, on the contrary, had a more rational and less spiritual motivation than Lucretia. His father was a prominent lawyer who, after losing her older brothers, overturned in her his education in laws. In spite of fervent abolitionist militancy, she ended up regarding the cause of the women a more important priority than the solidarity with the slaves. She rebelled against other Quaker women’s advice, such as Lucretia’s, that the first thing was that the slaves obtained their freedom, that black men could vote and that women’s moment would come, either for both white or black. But for Elizabeth this was inadmissible. She firmly defended that “society as organized today under the man power, is one grand rape of womanhood” (cited in Griffith 1984:140). Thus, she personified the priority of sexist front in regards to anti-racist claims within feminist theory and practice. As it will unfold in later chapters, her point of view represents a pledge of a neutral gender (as a female sexual difference) whose intersections with other categories such as race o class were still seen as secondary to a feminist struggle. In the same way that Elizabeth would have explained it, Carole Pateman in *Beyond Difference and Equality* (1992) reduces women’s oppression to a gender issue:

The modern concept of equality predicates the undifferentiated and serialized character of those who are considered equal, and in the arbitrariness of this predication has already wiped from the earth races, cultures and ethnic groups. But women are not a race, a culture or an ethnic group. They are primary difference inscribed in human existence, they are and have always been one of the two sexes. It is so an not otherwise (41)

Not having to carry the stigma of racism, Elizabeth and other women alike united to denounce sexism. Therefore, in the midst of the Suffragist Movement, antiracist activists reformulated oppression in sexual terms, even though they considered themselves abolitionists. As events unfold, many of the suffragettes left the abolitionist cause when they realized that this position was strategically reducing the opportunity to obtain the vote for women. The basic premise among suffragists in the 1850s, 1860s and 1870s was that the vote was an intrinsic human right. However, as Chicana Mata Cotera states, when this ideal was abandoned for expediency's sake and restrictions were recommended to cut off the vote from the 'undesirables', minority women were also being excluded (1980: 217)

In the middle of this first misunderstanding among feminists, it emerged an emblematic figure that would open the way towards the decolonization of the feminist conscience, publicly demonstrating how the non-bourgeois, non-western women were the 'alter ego' of an Anglo-European emergent feminist subject: her name was Sojourner Truth. She was a runaway slave who managed to attend a convention of 'white' suffragettes in Akron, Ohio, in 1851. Addressing a 'white' audience of abolitionists, she replicated:

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 Brah ans Ann Phoenix 2004:77)

Due to the invisibility and lack of representation of slave's interests, Sojourner was forced to remind to the assistants of that act that even though she was a slave, her gender was also the 'feminine one', with the rhetorical question of: "Ain't I a Woman?"<sup>36</sup>. Although she neither attended to Seneca Falls Convention nor she did sign the *Declaration*, she became a key figure in the abolitionist movement and took part actively in the beginning of the movement for the

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<sup>36</sup> See also Sojourner Truth, "Ain't I a Woman?" in *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women*, ed., Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar. New York: Norton, 1985. 252.

rights of women. However, the main representatives of the feminist movement such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton, never publicly acknowledged her figure, nor were they 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 such as Sojourner Truth.

Sojourner Truth's intervention insisted on black women's rights and it powerfully demonstrated how the category of 'woman' was cut through by differences of 'race' and the divergent political priorities and struggles of black women as compared to white (see Giddings 1984). As Giddings analyses, her speech 'Ain't I a woman?' deconstructs prevailing ideas of 'womanhood' by showing how those ideas were particular to white, middle and upper class and that encounters between whites and blacks always occurred within relationships of unequal power (gendered and racialized) and class inequality. From the same vantage point, "Truth's speech" affirm Kum-Kum Bhavnani and Meg Coulson "appears to have had little impact *at that time* for as a black woman she was considered peripheral by the leaders of the suffrage and women's movements of the nineteenth century U.S" (2003: 74; her emphasis)

Within the logic of the colonial - patriarchal governance that these first feminist manifestos reproduced, Sojourner's public challenge represented the first friction of a supposedly neutral female gender built around the rationale of the public and private binaries of sexual difference. Her interpellation has been recognized by 'women of color' as the beginning of a new chapter in the history of the feminist critical conscience; a chapter that starts by remembering how her question inaugurated the age of the argumentative gender. Her defiant appellation brought into play the discursive imperialism and cultural complicity operating within the domains of domineering Anglo-European feminist imagination. That is, that in the realms of hegemonic

structures of power, direct or overtly these women were locating gender strictly with the framework of sexual difference, in the dichotomy between the public and the private, thereby enabling the mediation of an abyss of experiences too broadly confronting as to be homogenized in a single category of 'woman'.

### **1.5 THE CRUSADE FOR CIVIL RIGHTS: A JOINT ENTERPRISE**

In U.S, despite the attempts to confront exclusion among women, the potential for inclusion of minority women's voices was further curtailed by the ideological shift by women's leaders such as Elizabeth C. Stanton against immigrants and the working class.

Elizabeth's thought radicalized so much that from 1850 to 1870 she only focused on women's vote, stopped speaking in behalf of women who still had no liberty over their lives<sup>37</sup> and polarized herself in the defense of the moral superiority of women in opposition to men (Johston 1995:139). In 1865, the "the Bill of Rights" ratified the thirteenth amendment that would eradicate slavery<sup>38</sup>. And by 1869, Elizabeth's polarization translated in the split of women's rights movement into two separate organizations: on one side, the *American Woman*

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<sup>37</sup> It is important to bear in mind that the same year of Seneca Declaration, it was signed the Guadalupe Treaty that ended the war between Mexico and United States. As a result, California, Texas, Colorado and Arizona are taken from Mexico and became new North-America States. Consequently, Mexican people acquired the status of illegal immigrants within their own land.

<sup>38</sup>Section 1 "Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction." As this statement depicts, ex-slaves women are considered 'citizens' for the first time. Nonetheless, they remained second-class citizens until way into the Civic Right's Movement in the decade of the 1960s.

*Suffrage Association* led by Lucy Stone in support of the *American Equal Right Association* and the fifteenth amendment in the Constitution that would give black men the right to vote; and on the other side, the *National Women Suffrage Association* (NWSA ) led by Elizabeth and Susan B. Anthony, who defended the right to vote first for women and then for slaves.

In 1889, at the NWSA Convention, Elizabeth Cady Stanton called for literacy tests to abolish the ignorant vote. A resolution passed as early as 1893 at the same convention, depicting a single monolithic representation of women. It read as follows:

Resolved. That without expressing any opinion on the proper qualifications for voting, we call attention to the significant facts that in every State there are more women who can read and write than the whole number of illiterate male voters; so the enfranchisement of such women would settle the vexed question of rule by illiteracy, whether home-grown or foreign-born production (Kraditor 1968:260 cited in Cotera 1980: 226)

By 1903, the majority of NWSA members supported educational requirements for voting. Historian Ailen Kraditor analyses how white middle class women did not feel humiliated when governed by white men but if minority groups governed them, especially if they were from lower classes, that was “unbearable” (1971: 106 cited in Cotera 1980:226).As it can be inferred, it can be claimed that what they were really objecting was the possibility of being governed by their ex-slaves. The promotion of barriers to universal suffrage such as literacy and educational requirements would disenfranchise minority women dramatically (a status that won’t be eradicated until the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965).

However, on a more positive note, there is evidence that numerous attempts were made to bring minority women (especially by Lucy Parsons and Emma Goldman, who were chicana labor organizers) into the fold of women’s movement. These efforts were undertaken by leaders who followed Lucretia Mott’s premise of *strategic alliances*, such as Jane Addams and Florence Kelly. Both women were heavily involved with social work efforts to benefit

working class and immigrant women. They spoke eloquently about the urgent need of these women to gain the vote arguing that these women needed to bring forth changes in their gender roles and job conditions more desperately than did middle-class white women. (see Cotera 1980:219-20). Nonetheless, unfortunately for poor and minority women, there were not enough feminists with a strong social consciousness to shift the mainstream suffragist strand from a narrow human rights and literacy voting rights platform.

By 1889, Native Americans are granted citizenship if only they abandon their tribes and are assimilated into mainstream society<sup>39</sup>. A year later, Amendment XIV allowed black men the right to vote<sup>40</sup>. And it was not until one century later, in 1920 when Amendment XIX granted women the vote<sup>41</sup>.

Bringing Great Britain into perspective, the deputy John Stuart Mill, central figure in the liberal and feminist tradition author of the *Subjection of Women* (1869), appeals to the parliament in 1866 in favor of the feminine vote. Nevertheless, it would not be until 1928 that British women obtained the right to vote on equal political terms. However, although the suffragettes put themselves in hunger strike, enchained themselves to parliament and were even imprisoned, they never spoke on behalf of the colonized subjects of the Commonwealth.

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<sup>39</sup>Four years after women settlers gained the right to vote, and in recognition of the their service during War World II, Native Americans were granted citizenship without losing their tribal rights. However, as it happened with African-American women, Native women are considered 'second-class' citizens .

<sup>40</sup> Amendment XV: Section 1. "The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude".

<sup>41</sup> Amendment XIX: "The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex".

Hence, in regard to women's vote, "the greatest victory for the women's movement was not victory for minority women" (Cotera 1980: 217). The suffrage amendment did not enfranchise them. Minority groups did not benefit from suffrage legislation giving women to vote. If they could not afford the poll tax, they couldn't vote; if they were U.S or U.K citizens but had no papers, they couldn't vote (Cotera 1976: 40). Thus, the relationship of minority groups to the women's movement has been from the very beginning marked by complex factors affecting the development of white women's authority voice and non/white women's invisibility from 1848<sup>42</sup> to the present times.

Throughout the nineteenth century, Feminist consciousness had not moved yet in the direction of setting gender and other categories of oppression such as 'race' or class in collocation with each other. Thus, the division experienced in these first moments would suppose the beginning of two reiterative currents in the history of the feminism. On one side, those who proclaimed that sexual equality was a priority (Elizabeth) and on the other side, those who believed that gender was not neutral and therefore the crusade for the equality needed to cover different fronts (Lucretia).

Either in Great Britain or in the United States, the suffragettes were fighting for sexual equality in all the areas and were appealing to the universalization of democratic and liberal values. In spite of the inter-class nature that abolitionist or proletariat movement was introducing, the colonies and the colonized subjects continued in the rearguard of the feminist critical conscience. In these regards, Sojourner Truth's words were crucial since they showed how in this first feminist take off, 'western middle class women', that is, the first publicly known feminists who mobilized against gender oppression, had in their hands the opportunity

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<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, with all the anti-immigrant, anti-slum, and anti-labor agitation, it is no wonder that the suffrage movement had almost no labor support by the end of the nineteenth century (see Cotera 1980: 221)

to establish strategic alliances (anti-racist and anti-classist coalitions) in the name of the ‘universality of the oppression’: a gender oppression that unfolds in many ways besides those of a sexual difference trapped in the hook of the private and public set. But it didn’t happen quite that way. And *feminism betrayed itself* forgetting that it is not possible to sculpt in the collective imaginary a ‘universal woman’ without all the women of the world being inter-culturally represented.

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.

Giving voice to a displaced ‘universal womanhood’ in a world of sexist cultures and traditions Virginia Woolf augured in *The Three Gineas* a transcultural feminism after declaring that as woman, she did not belong to any country, but to all simultaneously (1938: 81); however, once again, her words made sense because the political category ‘woman’ she was representing to, as much as Mary Wollstonecraft or *The Declaration* of Seneca Falls, was part of a colonizing elite. In her proclamation, the critical intervention of minority women such as Sojour Truth is silenced and the analytical horizons of gender continued to be an ‘outsider’ status within hegemonic feminist critical conscience. Thus, feminist claims that have denounced sexism in the name of a repressed ‘universal woman’, were succeeding in

facing patriarchal oppression but were failing to grasp the real roots of women's discrimination, by making 'oppression' a gender issue. *A Room for one's one* (1945) that Woolf was claiming for 'the women' was leaving Sojourner Truth question's unanswered: how is it possible that some women had the right to claim their own space while others didn't have the right to have a voice?

Nonetheless, in the international scene, the two World Wars would postpone even more the possibility of arguing this issue within an intercultural dialogue among feminists.

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## **CHAPTER 2**

### **WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES AS CRITICAL KNOWLEDGE: 'HER STORIES'**

#### **2.1 THE BEGINNING OF THE DECOLONIZATION OF WESTERN IMAGINATION (60s)**

Continuing with this chronological tracing of the 'differences', after the Second World War, new scientific approaches developed theories that marked the beginning of the age of the decolonization of the Western imagination: from the psychoanalysis, which for the first time generated a speech that delimited the Western psyche and put limits on its ego; to Marxism, understood as a denounce of the capitalist processes that are nowadays the base of the globalization; Semiotics as the linguistic adventure that it managed to circumscribe 'meaning' in itself and uncovered it in all its incoherence. Within this counter-hegemonic mind-set, in an unprecedented historical turn, the independence of many ex-colonies took place and Western cultures began to question the grandiloquence that historically disguised its crimes. Cultural dissatisfaction and political reproach took over as never before in Western history. To this

regard, exactly one century after the Declaration of Seneca Falls, framed in the quest for civil rights, *the Universal Declaration of Human Rights* adopted by the General Assembly of United Nations was signed in San Francisco on December 10, 1948. Out of a compilation of 30 articles, the first two affirm that “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights” (article 1) and that “Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status”<sup>43</sup>.

This historical turn enhanced a more inclusive evolution of the concept of equality within the boundaries of Western logic. Mostly, it provided a referential framework on a global scale which created the arena for movements in favour of the civil and political rights of all the ‘ethnic minorities’ which took off in the United States in the decade of the 60s. Activists of color rallied against the Vietnam War, organized Civil Rights protests, Black power and Chicano March; and women of color became active participants at national level resistance. For the Chicanas, this supposed organizing peasants to be unionized in California; for the Asian-American women, to monitor declarations in the universities protesting the discrimination against third-world students; for the African American women, to organize voters' registrations in the rural south of the USA. Hence, In order to overcome the effects of systematic exclusion and discrimination, minority groups tackled the more imposing institutions in their quest for social justice. And finally, they won their recognition.

In this new international scenario, theorists like Derrida, Barths, and Fanon started to address a new order that would break through a new path within the opposition of binaries that governed Western philosophy. Albert Memmi, W.Q.E. B. Du Bois or M. Foucault began

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<sup>43</sup> “The Universal Declaration of human Rights” in <http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/>

theorizing on a *third space* and a *third world*, both at discursive and a material level. Academic fields blossomed with new disciplines urged at post-traditional standpoints: ‘post-tradition’, ‘post-industrial’, ‘post-colonialism’, ‘post-structuralism’, ‘post-modernism’, etc. And it could be affirmed that all these new disciplines were joined by the need to generate new analytical spaces in which to think and act from new global historical conditions that could finally clean out the illustrated perspective of the domineering Western knowledge. As Sandra Harding points out in “Gender, Development and Post-Enlightenment Philosophies of Science” the problem with the Enlightenment philosophies was not only that women had been excluded, “but that Enlightenment standards of the human, the good, the progress, social welfare, and economic growth, as well as an objectivity, rationality..... They were part of historically varying nonetheless persistent androcentric and class discourses”<sup>44</sup>.

Thinkers such as M. Foucault (1977) began to theorize on the demarcation of ‘power’ in all its social slopes and the limits of the rationality and western power began to be located and analyzed. The advice that Michael Foucault gives to the new subjects - citizens to face the new globalizing cultural dynamics is very clear: the possibility of an emergency of new ‘liberating forces’ could only take place if the western subject is first decomposed and deconstructed. In his view, it is necessary to promote new forms of subjectivity because the emergency of a new generation of subjects - citizens would be ready to emerge when these subjects - citizens are capable of getting rid of the individuality that has been imposed on them for centuries’

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<sup>44</sup>Harding, Sandra and Uma Narayan , eds.(2000) en *Decentering the Center. A Philosophy for a Multicultural, post-colonial and feminist world*. Indiana: Indiana University Press, 243.

## 2.1: THE SUBVERSION OF GENDER

In parallel move with this global stage of deconstruction of the western praxis, in the Anglo-European societies of the over-developed world, a new intensity was given to the reflection of gender relations as feminists tried to produce an account of women's oppression that would resonate as compelling as Marx's. Psychoanalysis was on its rise and another major site of contestation of humanists models of the subject and identity was linguistics. The well-known structuralist Saussure, founder of Semiology (the study of signs) suggested that language is not only used to classify and label pre given meanings of an external reality but it mostly a system of differences. As a result, the constitutive and descriptive nature of language to name reality fiercely broke down by a new stream of critical consciousness within the boundaries of Anglo European rationale and imagination. And since identity is not immune to historical forces, the quest for new analytical spaces, new forms of subjectivity became an imperative in the second half of the XX century.

Within this new fervent momentum of a cascade of new meanings, domineering Anglo-European feminist theory emerged strongly in what has been named the 'second feminist wave' ( see Nicholson 1997) after the work of the French philosopher Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* (1949) 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 nonetheless, is socially and culturally constructed.

Interdisciplinary by nature, the concept of gender was taken by western feminists as a key paradigm to underscore how individual and collectives' identities/representations and spaces have

social, cultural and political implications. The analysis of a gendered subjectivity therefore became a central focus of feminist politics alongside the struggles for equal pay and labor conditions, women's limited access to education and the fight against discriminating patriarchal gender roles. A radical positioning arose determined to free gender from its *Sexual Politics* (Millet [1970] 1979) patriarchal constraints. Thus, when Kate Millet stated that "The personal is the political" (24) both the public and private became the concepts, the states of mind and the locations that needed to be decolonized and rescued, in a trans-national perspective, from its constraining gender stereotypes. Along these lines, Betty Friedan put *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) into question by posing "the problem that has no name" as a widespread emotional pandemic – the lack of happiness and fulfilment of women in the 1950s and early 1960s in the U.S. Despite being surrounded by material comfort and supposed-to-be happy families, the exaltation of a feminine identity crisis, requires a closer look at the dynamics of gender roles. Although her book is being credited to contribute to the beginning of the 'second feminist wave' in the U.S, nonetheless, it should be mentioned that her analysis and focus on the plight of middle-class white women invariably carries the mark of the cultural neutral gender; that is, a feminine essentialist gender, previously discussed in chapter 1. In her book, Friedan discusses a particular profile of women which renders invisible the differing experiences of less privileged women in the U.S. however, circumscribed in an intellectual Western tradition fuelled by the rule of the colonial alterity; Friedan's gender analyses therefore normalize cultural and social differences among women in the U.S. in favour of a dominant norm.

Moreover, the Women's Rights Movement in the U.S (emerging in the 1960s) was mainly composed by professional middle-class white women who began lobbying federal and state

institutions to put and end to labour discrimination. As Linda Nicholson affirms, this political movement drew on the middle class aversion to their housewives roles (1990: Introduction)

Parallel but independent to this movement, was a second important one, The Women's Liberation Movement<sup>45</sup>, related to the New Left. In developing theory that would explain the origins of women's oppression, significantly, many of the early contributors of this movement were influenced by the insights of Marxist theory and his analysis of 'class'. Let's remember that as a critique to Patriarchy, feminist manifestos (see *The Declaration of Sentiments*-chapter 1) coalesced into a social movement at the same time that Marx published his critique of capital. "In fact" assures Rosemary Hennessy, "it is fair to say that both feminism and the socialist and communist struggle Marx was part of, are contemporaneous products of the crisis of democracy spawned by the modern industrial revolutions" (Hennessy 2003: 57). Indeed, the influence on Marxism meant that many feminists brought to their theorizing an awareness of historical change and class position. In Marxist theory, history is governed by specific forms of class relation that correspond to modes of production (slave-owning, feudal, capitalist). 'Class' is therefore an economic category that is defined in terms of whom has access to control of means of production (Weedon 2003: 114)

Within academy circles, a new wave of socialist writing began to circulate. Early second-wave theorist claimed that 'women' as a 'class' were oppressed by the structures of capitalist patriarchy which came to be called as 'dual systems theory' (see Hansen and Philipson 1990). They were 'dual' because there were two mutually connected systems of oppression –patriarchy and capitalism- which they argued to be neither autonomous nor independent. Moreover, they called for analyses that would address both Marx's theories on class and feminist's insights on

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<sup>45</sup> Even though Women's Rights was a more politically widespread movement in the United States, it is from the Women's Liberation Movement that much of the theoretical works of the 'second wave' have emerged

patriarchal oppression. “The argument went” specifies Rosemary Hennessy “that Marxist’s class analysis insufficiently addressed women’s oppressions under capitalism and that they are dimensions of women’s lives that concepts rooted in class analysis could not explain:...rape, ....domestic violence, relations of care,...power dynamics of gender and sexuality” (2003: 57)

Within this context, ‘women’s experiences’ reached a new theoretical dimension and began to be mobilized, approached and analyzed as ‘critical knowledge’. As a result, the initial task of second wave theorists was to generate theories that would account for the fundamentality of women’s oppression. Consequently, a wide variety of critical views regarding the relationship between feminism and traditional social and political thought became progressively institutionalized. The problem, however, was that in the growing tendency to document women’s oppression and the paramount of gender as an organizing principle of social life, many feminist began to create encompassing generalizations about ‘woman’, ‘sisterhood’ and ‘patriarchy’ . Heirs of a collective political feminist subject articulated on the basis of an essentialist gender, these first Anglo European feminist scholars kept on ignoring cultural and social differences among women when analyzing the category of ‘sexual difference’ as opposed to gender construction of social roles. And since the women who were in a position to conceptualize theory tended to be those of privileged social classes, not surprisingly, their theory tended to reflect the patterns most visible to them, that is, ‘white’, ‘middle class’ ‘heterosexual’ standpoints (Nicholson 1990:261) reproducing therefore the “authentic western self”.

In the following, I simply intend to note some broad characteristics that might figure in clarifying what mainstream feminism encapsulated in the 1970s, with the purpose of understanding the parallel critical intervention of women of color in the U.S. In order to do this,

I'll briefly summarize the chief points of their distinctiveness on their different approaches to a 'universal' female identity and subjectivity.

On one side, there were the Liberal feminists. Followers of Enlightenment vindications, held to a view of the subject grounded in humanist ideas of the rational individual, governed by free will. Therefore, approaches to subjectivity are based on an understanding of reason as universal, transcending 'gender' or any other social category. Difference meant that 'women were different from men', so there was a need to abolish culturally produced differences. Their belief was that women and men were basically the same and they drew heavily on this to press for changes in the status quo.

In addition, as previously outlined, there were the Marxist/Socialist feminists. On their view, class is a fundamental dimension of patriarchal forms of oppression; therefore, they look to Marxist theories of ideology and subjectivity in order to better theorize women's subjectivity. They argued that feminist should find inspiration in his 'historical materialism', that is, a method of analysis that focuses on how human beings satisfy their needs within social structures that change over time (Nicholson 1990: Introduction). Hence, the well-known Marxist concept of 'false consciousness' was tailored in order to adapt a gender perspective; that is, to designate the result and effect of internalized patriarchal social relations. In addition, some aspects of his theory were discarded due to its gender limitations since the key concept of 'production' is associated with activities traditionally associated to men rather than women. For this reason, feminists argued that production needed to be understood as including not only the work towards goods and products but also work geared to the creation and care of human beings. However, this was done in an additive way, in which class was added to gender; that is, first there was the gender identity as women and then, the economic class women belong to. As a result, they soon moved beyond false

consciousness to develop more complex theories of subjectivity via appropriations of Althusser (also from Freud and Lacan)<sup>46</sup>. Feminist appropriations of Althusser theory of the subject sought to make the role and functioning of ideology more complex by summing the dimension of gender to that of class.

On a different stance, while socialist feminist were attempting to develop Marxist's theory in practical ways for understanding patriarchy, other theorist were developing a more radical and revolutionary approach that would privilege universal structures of patriarchy as the main source of women's oppression. (Weeden 2003:116) Contrary to Marx's postulates, early Radical theorists argued that women's oppression was prior to and more basic than other forms of oppression, therefore, it demanded a more accurate explanation different from Marxism. In contrast to socialist feminist stress on 'class' inequality, they envisioned a revolution based on the destabilization of universal structures of patriarchy as the primary determinant in women's oppression. North American feminist theorist Robin Morgan's utopian anthology *Sisterhood is Powerful: An Anthology of Writings from the Women's Liberation Movement* (1970)<sup>47</sup> became the anthem of a cutting edge spirit.

Proclaiming ideas of 'sisterhood' based on shared gender oppression their mission was to liberate women from patriarchal control over their bodies, their minds and spirits. To do so, they

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10 The Althusserian model of the subject, sketched in the essay 'On Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses' draws on Lagan's theory of the mirror phase, a process based on misrecognition. Education, religion, the political apparatus, trade unions, the family, culture and the media, "play a central role in the production of a working force and working social strata. Unlike the police or army which operate through "repressive state apparatus", they "function massively and predominately *by ideology*" (Althusser 1971:158; his emphasis)

<sup>47</sup> This collection became one of the first widely available anthologies of second wave radical feminist writings The compilation included classic feminist essays by activists such as Naomi Weisstein, Lucinda Cisler, Kate Millet, Eleanor Holmes Norton, Flo Kennedy, Frances Beale, and Mary Daily, as well as historical documents including the N.O.W (National Organization for Women founded in 1969) Bill of Rights, excerpts from the SCUM Manifesto (written in 1969 by Valeria Solanas), the Redstockings Manifesto (radical feminist group active during the 1970s), and historical documents from W.I.T.C.H (Women's International Conspiracy from Hell, an important socialist platform). Morgan was founding member of W.I.T.C.H and the New York Radical Women.

look at ideas of essential femaleness and femininity as authentic, natural characteristics distorted by patriarchy, seeking the re-appropriation of a universal female essence to revalidate undervalued female attributes. One of the main representatives of this radical movement was Mary Daily and her influential book *Gyn/Ecology, The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (1978). Furthermore, for many radicals, to rescue women's subjectivity from patriarchy "was to uncover a subject who be lesbian in orientation", argues Weedon (2003:117). This meant a turning point within discourses that were not taking into account the impact of sexual orientation of the construction of identity and subjectivity. Advocating an environment free of sexist values, a 'lesbian continuum' (Rich 1984) was articulated with the intention to undo patriarchal heterosexual imposition.

One strong voice against such tendencies was that of Monique Wittig. In an influential essay that challenged the very core of Simone de Beauvoir's claims, "One is not Born a Woman" (1979), Wittig makes a distinction between 'woman' and 'women'. Whereas "women" depicts the content of specific social relations, 'woman' is a political concept. As 'woman' elicits a gender division based on biology, Wittig argues that it is a normative category used in the service of compulsory heterosexuality. In so arguing, what Wittig provides here is a crucial insight into how the refusal to become or remain heterosexual always entails the refusal to be man or woman. Interestingly, following from her claims, feminist theory witnesses the beginning of the academic-political movement that fights for the disappearance of the category of "woman" in essentialist terms. According to Wittig, purely inscribed within the domains of a male/women framework, the category of gender reinforces what she calls the 'heterosexual contract'<sup>48</sup>. In this contract, difference is constructed along male/female lines and it is being female (as opposed being male) which is at the center of the analysis. Disrupting the social categorization of male/female heterosexual/homosexual binary

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<sup>48</sup> She develops this idea in "The Straight Mind" in *Feminist Issues* 1 (1980) 103-10

opposites, Witting therefore became a very influential voice trying to undo sexual orientation as another category of gender.

For both radicals and socialists, there were serious limitations associated with liberals' 'women are the same than men's perspective. Such a politics seemed to push society in the incorporation of women in the same positions than men without altering the social structures that create discrimination on the first place. If feminists were to build politics that would radically alter women's status quo, they argue, they needed to tackle the ways society segregates men and women's psyches and spirits as much as the unequal distribution of private and public spaces and activities.

This new radical impetus to theorize an engendered subjectivity led to many theorists to turn into psychoanalysis. In accordance with psychoanalytic theory, subjectivity is achieved by both the repression of unacceptable desires and entry into language. One of the basic insights of the psychoanalysis that sets it apart from the philosophical tradition of Augustine, Descartes and Locke is that human subjectivity is not simple given. Individuals are not 'ready-made souls inserted into bodies by God' as Augustine assured, nor 'minds which could be mature and whole independent of the physical history of the individual' as Descartes and John Locke's 'reason' dictated, but rather, personhood is achieved by a great emotional cost in which a human baby begins life as a mass of conflicting desires.

Freud models of subjectivity radically de-centered the humanist subject bringing into light its unconscious dimension, where fantasies, desires and the pursuit of pleasure play as important and constructive a role as rational judgment and standard political action. Even though his theories are completely androcentric (the phallus is always at the heart of his analysis) what made him so attractive to feminists was that it rejected any simple biological

determinism. In attempting to re-read Freud, for example Judith Mitchell in *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* (1975), Jane Flax (1980) or Nancy Chodorow (1978) sought to identify the psycho-sexual structures governing masculinity and femininity.

Moreover, the re-reading of Freud by French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan was significantly important in the development of feminist appropriations of psychoanalytic theory. In a famous article entitled “The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience”<sup>49</sup>, and in following writings, Lacan developed his theory of how a baby who in the first months had experienced its body as fragmented or disunited, since its not able to recognize the distinction between itself and its mother, comes to see itself as a ‘whole’. By about six months, if a child is held up to a mirror, it may reach out to touch the ‘other’ child, or experience distress or confusion at recognizing its parent holding another child. According to Lacan, in doing so, the baby begins to make a distinction between itself and his/her parents. Consequently, it is at this stage when it first sees itself as a whole body, a unity. What it can be inferred furthermore, is that individual wholeness is the resulting gift of the ‘unconsciousness’. Indeed, according to Lacan, the subject, far from being an autonomous self, is constituted by a rupture, an internalized otherness. Moreover, human subjectivity is achieved *only* by repression and splitting of the self in the unconscious part of human nature, a process far from being able to be contained within the confines of human rationality, far from being a rational process at all, since the concept of subject is called into question by a recognition of the unconscious and its relationship to language. What psychoanalysis points out then, is that the child’s gain of its ego is not only the result of a subjective process of self-alienation, but also the price of separation from its mother, the loss of its deepest attachment. Lacan makes clear that the separation from the mother is not simply a

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<sup>49</sup> Lacan, Jacques. *Écrits: a Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan, London : Tavistock/Routledge: [1966] (1977). 1-7.

question of the child taking up subjectivity in relation to her, but also, crucially, involves the emerging ego in a fantasy of autonomy and even mastery over its parents.<sup>50</sup> Indeed, the child's repression of its desire for his/her mother is his/her entry into the language and civilization and social world of the father, which Lacan names as 'the symbolic'<sup>51</sup>.

The contribution of psychoanalysis to feminism, then, as Thomas Nagel points out in *The View from Nowhere* (1986) is that it supports how the traditional self-assured universal rational ego, "with its view from nowhere" can no longer be tolerated. This is an important idea that would be developed in depth by post-structuralist feminists in the 1990s and it will be later explored in chapter 4.

Going back to the impact of Lacan in emerging mainstream feminist theories of gender identity and subjectivity, radical theorists such as Luce Irigaray accepted (with key qualifications) the psychoanalytic doctrine that subjectivity is achieved, not given, and that this achievement is socially and historically constructed. However, in her books *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1974-1985) and *This Sex Which is not One* (1977-1985) she demonstrates that when Freud and Lacan talked about gaining subjectivity, they were talking about *male* subjects. For Freud, the female is defined by a lack: a little girl is a little man, only without a penis. Lacan, similarly speaks of woman as the "not all": it is the male for whom subjectivity is possible (see Michelle and Rose 1982). Thus, it was to demonstrate how the concepts of canonical Western 'Masters' can be completely indigestible that Irigaray embarked on rescuing the 'feminine imaginary' (1974).

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<sup>50</sup> Lacan used writings of Freud, especially "On Narcissism" ([1914] 1984) and "The Splitting of the Ego in the Process of Defence" ([1938] 1984) which point to the construction of the self in the mirror stage, and the ambiguity and alienation which emerge out of this construction.

<sup>51</sup> Lacan, Jacques. *Écrits: a Selection*, introduction.

Accordingly with the development and subsequent theorization of women's experiences as a body of critical knowledge, different trends started to offer a diverse viewpoint of what was understood as the constituting nature of feminism. What bounded all together, nonetheless, was a conception of women identity grounded in the liberal approach of a feminist subject which found its roots in Enlightenment feminisms in which gender is defined in relation to 'sexual difference' alone. On this basis, sexual difference (women vs men) was considered to shape not only the definition of gender but, as it had happened in the first feminist vindications and manifestos (chapter 1), was articulated as the fundamental cause of women's subordination. From an a-historical, essentialist analysis, these academic theorists, reproducing an ethnocentric rhetoric that goes back to Enlightenment times, were agglutinating the range variety of women's experiences under the rubric of a de-contextualized 'sisterhood'. Hence, in the seventies, the Anglo-European feminist logic was still faithful to the heredity of the illustrated colonial - patriarchal thought, in which the 'feminine gender' lacks any context or historical perspective despite the fact that economic transnationalization and globalization were on their rise.

Indeed, the restricted emphasis on the sexual difference between women and men was leaving the colonial legacy surrounding gender completely un-theorized in relation to other social categories of oppression and privilege such as 'race', class or sexual orientation. Nonetheless inadvertently, and despite their success in generating new debates about gender roles, old and new hierarchies were maintained within a feminist scholarly production which was not taking into account 'women of color claims of invisibility of their differences.

## 2.2: COLLECTIVE WRATH AND INSIDIUOUS DIFFERENCES: IN THE 70s

During the politically charged era of the 1960s and '70s minority women started to be active within their own nationalist organizations which were fighting for equal rights. However, the sexism they experienced was meant at halting their increasingly emancipation within their own communities. As historian Maythee Rojas (2003) recalls, for women in the Black Panther Party, The Chicano<sup>52</sup> Movement, the American Indian Movement (AIM) or Asian American Communities, their motivation to reconcile their fight for social justice with the male chauvinism they experienced, was an on-going contradiction. Once immersed in the party, women soon found out that the members' responsibilities were segregated and therefore, unequally distributed. There was a rank- and-file system that used to deliver corporal punishment and sexual harassment to the lower-rank members. The highest-ranked female panther, Elaine Brown remembers in her memoir *A Taste of Power* how she was sentenced to ten lashes because she didn't get the Black Panther newspaper out on time. She explains how "she silently took the punishment, which was always an act of violence" (cited in Rojas 2003: 21). In fact, this violence was an inherent part of their organizations' system.

Other prominent female figures such as the Native American Anna Mae Pictou-Aquash (1945-1973) or the chicana Trinidad Morales (1939-1967) held a more fatal fate: they were murdered under unclear circumstances. In such a controversial context, even the very few women who achieved higher rank positions were caught up in a culture of escalating fear and betrayal that

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<sup>52</sup> At the time other minority groups were organizing, many people of Mexican descent who were either born or living in the United States adopted the term "Chicano" as both a form of protest and cultural pride. "Chicano" meant peasant in the Nahuatl language spoken by the Aztecs, the last reigning indigenous culture before the Spanish invasion. As Rojas points out, its pejorative use among many Mexicans themselves deeply reflect the racism and classism that the heirs of indigenous cultures have internalized as a result of colonization (2003:22). Hence, the re-appropriation of the term was meant at highlighting, on one side their second-class status as U.S citizens and residents and on the other hand, the celebration of its indigenous roots within their own community which tended to favor the idea of European ancestry.

eventually forced many women to abandon their nationalist organizations and seek for women-centered associations.

Hence, as a response to both a palpable mainstream feminism's hegemony and sexism within their own nationalist movements, the emphasis on struggle and exploitation, coupled with collective wrath and despair, gave rise to parallel movements which were bound to spark controversies as Anglo-European feminism, in their advocacy of women's rights, continued to base their cause almost solely on female/male role delineations and definitions (Moreno 1980: 1). Misunderstanding and miscommunication among sisters was believed to be endemic and therefore, gender, as a reliable category for analyzing identity and subjectivity, became fiercely contested. Moreover, an ongoing history of divided loyalties prompted questions about the possibility of feminist alliances and the shifting nature of differences among women promised that the feeling of cooperation was going to be a long, tedious process.

Strong critiques undertaken by so-called 'minority groups' in U.S.A, began to revolve around the reductive nature and theoretical rigidity of an *ahistorical* gender. African-Americans, Chicanas<sup>53</sup>, native-Americans and Asian-Americans raised their voices to demand the need to investigate the ways in which power dynamics were operating within differences among women. By the decade of 1970s, it was completely undeniable the fact that a growing number of feminists voices were choosing neither to identify nor to fully integrate within the women's movement. Their writings, denouncing a long history of racism and exclusion within feminism's own ranks, resonated with a strong bitterness, frustration, despair and pessimism. Mostly, they were a clear indicator of their firm believe that key differences existed between themselves and so-called

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<sup>53</sup> The term *chicana* intended to make a clear break from the sexist linguistic practice of erasing the female presence by encompassing men and women under the suffix "o". This shift in language was aimed at illustrating how employing difference can be an effective tool against hegemony.

“white feminists.” (see Alma, M. Garcia 1997: 192) The time for sisterhood utopias was over and a new cultural imaginary leaded by self-proclaimed ‘women of color’ in the U.S.<sup>54</sup> was determined to trouble an essentialist discourse of gender and subvert it to any kind of classification or static codification.

As early as 1972 Marta Cotera, a prominent figure in the Chicana movement, delivered a path breaking speech titled “Feminism as We See It” to the Texas Women’s Political Caucus. She clearly stated that one of the major pitfalls in regards of white women’s movement was their “basic racism of the mind”; that is, a racist cultural myopia which was preventing solidarity among women of different backgrounds (1977: 18). Echoing a long history of colonial unsettled issues, she emphasized the imperative to redirect attention towards racism as a much a stronger oppression than sexism. Speaking not only in behalf of Chicanas but Blacks, minority and poor women, she was directly addressing the racism and classism that these women faced on their daily basis from feminists in the name of feminism. “Anglo women” she proclaimed, “must analyze their emotions and intellect and think clearly on this. Is the women’s movement a move to place just another layer of racist Anglo dominance over minority peoples?”(18).

In her exoneration, a “basic racism of the mind” originates in the act of valuing only one culture, and only race (Anglo) as superior over all. In the same vein, Anna Nieto Gómez accused Anglo-women of being the perpetrators of “sexual racism”; “Sexist racism, she argued, “is manifested by those who consider and recognize only the needs of the single, Anglo and middle class women” (1974: 43). What these accusations were highlighting was the fragile respect women had for each others’ differences and how the issue of classism and racism was hitting mainstream

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<sup>54</sup> At the end of the 70s in the United States, women of Asian, Latin America, Native America and African descendants, began to claim the ‘Women of Color’ term as an expression of political identification that would distinguish themselves from the mainstream racist and classist culture and values. These social and cultural groups have been enlarged throughout the XXI century to include south-Asians and Arabic collectives as a mark of their inclusive nature and to reflect the recent immigration realities

feminist theory square in the face. Speaking up in favor of an approach to differences, 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. Chicanas share with the Blacks and other visible minority women many gaps in benefits enjoyed as a matter of course by white women (in Garcia, 1997:216)

A study conducted at the University of San Diego in 1976 examined the extent to which women of color feminists sympathized with the white feminist movement. The study revealed that the majority of women of color surveyed (mostly Chicanas) found that even though the majority “could relate to certain issues of the women’s movement, for the most part they saw it as being an elitist movement compromised of white middle-class women who [saw] the oppressor as the males” (Orozco 1976: 12)

Enraged by Chicanas’ social invisibility, by the requisite of minority groups to color their voices to disrupt white discourses, Anita Sarah Duarte summarized the essence of women of color vindications through the vision 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).

As her words display, there is an urgency to depict the existence of major philosophical and tactical issues between women of color and white women's liberation groups. Moreover, it expresses a painful sense of alienation, racial oppression, an enraged marginal voice which fiercely proclaims that if feminist theory is ever to espouse the cause of minority women, it would have to recognize the distinctiveness that encompasses gender as separate ethnic groups. In its heart-breaking spirit, her words clarify how after being the recurrent target of racist and classist attitudes, time has come for women of color to explode with rage. "I am bitter? Are we bitter?" claimed Marta Cotera, "Not bitter enough to quit the struggle" (cited in Garcia 1997:219), she firmly stated. On her view, if classism and sexism were bound to disappear, differences among women need to be faced, accepted and dealt with without any further delay.

In the same front, since the publication of Gerda Lerner *Black Women in White America* (1972), Black Women were making important contributions. African-American voices such as Beverly Hawkins made clear that divergent cultural, social and economic experiences were separating ethnic minority women from mainstream feminism. Affirming how *Women is not Just a Female* (Hawkins 1973), her position 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" (3). This historical factor had determined how their stigma as cheap labor source is deeply rooted in a colonial legacy in which either racism or oppression "have traditionally been synonyms with good business practice for America" (2). As a result, accusations that white women practiced class and race

discrimination against women of color were complemented by the charge that they were essentially opportunists and insensitive to their particular history and experiences. Emphasizing how the category of race finds its roots in a capitalist system, African-American Frances Beale, an active activist student in 1969 wrote an essay that became widely reprinted titled “Double Jeopardy: to Be Black and Female” in which she stated that:

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)

What this ‘double jeopardy paradigm brings into light is the historical recognition that black woman in America could justly be described as the ‘slave of a slave.’ Apart from suffering sexism within their own communities for being women, female slaves had suffered the worst kind of economic exploitation, been forced to serve as the white woman's maid and nurse for white offspring while, abandoning theirs, for being black .(4)

In the same line of thought, passionately confronting the irreconcilable mainstream approach to gender theory, seeking to dismantle the ‘culturally dominant logic’ among women, the “Black Feminist Statement” was proclaimed in 1974 by the Combahee River Collective, a group of African-American feminists from Boston. Framed both as a denouncement of the capitalist/economic globalization impact on women, workers and ‘third world’ people, as much as a firm reaction against gender’s additive model and the imperializing nature of hegemonic universals, they affirmed that:

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 mine)

In their words, gender finally emerges out of a grid of interlocking categories of oppression and privilege. Beyond the scope of public and private dimensions, the demand of an “integrated analysis” revoked gender as a non-politically neutral discourse that strongly needed to rethink its universalistic pretensions. Moreover, it was a reminder of a multiplicity of worlds cross-culturally interconnected. As a path-breaking destabilization of gender, this new historical consciousness would change the way differences among women were to be theorized and negotiated and it will plant the seeds of an upcoming women of color anthology: *This Bridge Called My Back: Radical Writings by Women of Color* ( Moragaa and Alzandúa 1981, 1983).

Like Black or Chicana feminists, Asian American feminists have also had strong reservations regarding their white sisters. They also believed that white women and women of color came to feminism under profoundly different circumstances and with dissimilar issues in mind. The most crucial point of their divergence, as it happened with other minority groups, came to synify that what they defined and interpreted as their circumstances were primarily issues to white women.<sup>55</sup> On theorizing this divergence, the general sense was that there were diametrically opposed and contradictory opinions and ideas with what white middle class feminism was attempting to achieve. The ‘defiant’ yellow woman was determined to speak on how white feminism had primarily focused on gender as an analytical category which has lacked a systematic analysis of race and class (see 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,

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<sup>55</sup> Originally published in *Chicanas in the 80s: Unsettled Issues-* (1982) Berkeley: Chicano Studies Library Publication Unit, 1983 and re-edited in Alma García, 1997, 257.

From self expression to action,  
From individuality to community,  
From comprises to demands  
For the right to live as women  
As people? (cited in Moreno 1980: 2)

In 1977, The National Women's Studies Association (NWSA) was formed with the intention to advocate for a pluralist feminism that would address diverse forms of oppression and bias within the academia. Specifically, the organization emphasized a political platform built on the awareness of different forms of discrimination and struggles for freedom that would move beyond the 'racial dominant membership' configuration, which was initially almost entirely white. Taking Robin Morgan utopian anthology *Sisterhood is Powerful* (1970), its impetus became a frequently employed slogan aimed at foregrounding a sense of affinity across cultural lines. Nonetheless, two years later, in its first conference, 93 of the participants were white. (Rojas 2003:27)

This lack of unity and solidarity reached its peak at the beginning of the decade of the 1980s, and it was made most visible at the 1981 National Women's Studies Association Conference titled "Women Respond to Racism". Although the very title was conceived by the NWSA conference organizers as a remedy of these tensions, a sinister division among sisters was clearly depicted and an initial impetus was sadly clouded by the imposition of "the parameters of white women's values" (Sandoval 1990: 55). As a result, two categories were clearly opposed: "third world" and "white" (57). Consequently, what it was aimed to become a bridge ended in painful encounter of clashing ideas, leaving each group frustrated and incapable of working together. Chela Sandoval, the secretary of a 'third world women alliance', acting as a spokeswoman of 'minority women' resumed that, despite its theme, the racist structure of the conference alienated people from each other and from the topic in such a way the "separations between women are being frozen into

place” (56). Accordingly, the Women of color/Third World Women in the U. S participants, left the conference with an infamous and distressing feeling that ‘white women’ had yet to directly address the issue of racism among women.

Furthermore, in spite of its title, the problematic issue of racism was setting women apart from each other as much as highlighting a separation between the analytical dimensions of gender and ‘race’/ethnicity. Therefore, at this stage, what it was made clear was that approaching gender was to grapple with a problem: the loaded concept of identity and the controversial category of ‘woman’. Without the incorporation of ‘race’/ethnicity class and sexuality as multiple sources of oppression, coalition with white feminists would be highly unlikely. Indeed, most critiques of this 1981 effort focus on the inability to build bridges among diverse social groups. As Dorinda Moreno argued:

For a respectful exchange of ideas and energies, a collective leadership based on principles of unity is the *only* bridge which bring any coalition between white and Third World, grassroots and professional, and between straight and gay women and men (cited in García 1997: 248)

Nonetheless, while these conflicts were an indicative of the work to be done, a prophetic bridge was been dreamed by two Chicanas, Gloria Anzaldúa y Cherríe Moraga. As an attempt to establish a line of continuity that could cut across ethnic, social, class lines, they were envisioning a new platform of dialogue in which all women of color voices could critically interact. By April 1979, both women, coeditors 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. We intend to explore *the causes and sources of, and solutions to these divisions*. We want to create a definition that expands what “feminism” means to us” (Moraga and Anzaldúa 1981:iii; my emphasis)

In the analysis of “the experiences that divides as feminists”, as we have seen on this latest section, was a response to earlier writings by women of color to mainstream exclusive focus on relations between sexes. Thus, *This Bridge* was intended to “make a clean break from that phenomenon” (1983:1). With a major stress on white middle-class women, the denial of differences is finally articulated as the source of intolerance and discrimination among women. And since the non-consideration of differences was inseparable in the editors’ mind from the cultural heritage and class oppression of those who they were speaking in behalf of, it brought a historical and sociological dimension to the need to amplify gender’s accountability of their experiences. As we will see in the next chapter, ‘the difference’ among themselves that feminists had feared to mention, as much as the similarities that often went unrecognized, began to be spoken to on these pages.

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## CHAPTER 3

### DIFFERENCES THAT DIVIDE (1980s)

With *This Bridge*... hemos comenzado a salir de las sombras; hemos comenzado a reventar rutina y costumbres opresivas y a aventar tabúes; hemos comenzado a acarrear con orgullo la tarea de deshelar corazones y cambiar conciencias (*we have begun to come out of the shadows; we have begun to break up with routines and oppressive customs and to discard taboos; we have commenced to carry with pride the task of thawing hearts and changing consciousness* (bilingual writing on the text)

*Gloria Anzaldúa. This Bridge's 1981 Foreword*

#### 3.1 WOMEN OF COLOR / THIRD WORLD FEMINISM IN THE U.S.: THE BUILDING OF A BRIDGE

Given the enormous differences among women, this dreamed bridge was an ambitious undertaking. At that time, it was very difficult to imagine that one anthology could appeal to an audience that encompassed such a diversity of women. In order to fuse alliances and prevent collapsing them, It had become “critical to speak directly to the specific issues that separate us”, conveyed Cherríe Moraga (Moraga and Anzaldúa 1983:105). .While the editors acknowledged this challenge, their ideologically motivated desire to build transnational alliances along the multiple axes of gender, took precedence. Moreover, their historical bonds through kinship, culture, and

social struggle precluded them from focusing exclusively on the issue of gender. Hence, they inferred: “the bigger our number, the strongest our impact” (Moraga and Castillo 1988: 2).

As the spokeswomen of U.S women of color/third world feminism, *This Bridge Called My Back: Radical Writings by Women of Color* (1981, 1983) was a confirmation of an-going understanding of how ‘race’/ethnicity, one’s culture, socio-economic status and sexual orientation can deny easy access to any legitimized gender category; that is, how to render possible the interconnectedness of social classifications if they were producing unnamed gender forms within social hierarchy. On this account, longing to unveil other gender perspectives and theoretical horizons, it can be said that this anthology would captivate together the political issues that NWSA sought to explore with the personal experiences and emotions of the women who lived them. Intended to be a “consciousness-raiser for white women meeting together or working alone on the issues of racism” (Moraga and Anzaldúa 1981: IV), within its pages skin pigmentation became a powerful signifier of social and political positioning. Offering a complex perspective on identity formation and alliance making, this multigenre collection brought together twenty-nine U.S. women of color feminists from diverse ethnic, economic, sexual, religious and national backgrounds. Arguing how the category of gender was being wrongly depicted, they considered themselves to be “the veterans of a class and color war that still escalating in the feminist movement” (61). Therefore, the African-Americans, Asian-Americans, Chicana-Latinas and Native-Americans that contributed to this anthology became the hybrid counter-memory of a multiple and new complex gender location.

A new critical disclosure subsumed the major concerns of previous decades and their reaction against the effects of pervasiveness of white middle- class women on the feminist movement became broadly theorized by the new “freedom fighters” (137) of gender. Their

imperative: to publicly address the racism and classism and, as we will see, the heterosexual imposition that shadowed gender effectiveness as an analytical category. To this regards, Barbara Smith, one of the contributors and member of the 'Combahee River Collective' (chapter 2) strongly argued that:

the reason racism is a feminist issue is easily explained by the inherent definition of feminism. Feminism is the political theory and practice to free all women: women of color, working-class women, poor women, physically challenging women, lesbians, old women as well as white economically privileged hetero-sexual women. Anything less than this is not feminism, merely female self-aggrandizement (61)<sup>56</sup>

As Barbara Smith elucidates, combined, their experiences covered so many oppressions still yet untheorized and therefore, a multi-layered dimension of gender dashed into feminist critical consciousness transcending the rigid dichotomy of public and private as never before. With the intention to "wrest power from those who have it and abuse it, to reclaim ancient powers lying dormant with neglect....and create new powers in arenas where they never before existed" (Code 1981: vii) gender analysis was ready for scrutiny.

One guideline through the interweaving arguments of the contributors of this anthology is the testimonial, auto-biographical nature of the 'personal' that is made 'political'. My intention in analyzing the impact of this anthology is to reflect their voices as they spoke to me when I first approached this collection; that is, as an 'open conversation' among women that will continue in the following decades until reaching the concept of 'intersectionality'. What appalled to me the most was how powerfully these women inscribed the personal within theoretical considerations of power dynamics. Indeed, their concern with conceptualizing differences between women with the interconnections between racism, sexism, homophobia and other structural inequalities is articulated through a mode that crosses conventional

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<sup>56</sup> From a talk at the National Women's Studies Association (NWSA) Conference, May 1979; first appeared in *Frontiers*, Vol. V. No. 1, 1980 and cited in *This Bridge*.1983: 61.

boundaries of writing including poetic as well as the political within the feminist theorizing. Moreover, by forcing attention to colonialism, identity and differences, they revealed to me how social categories continuously confront gender theory. For me, it was both a personal and academic awakening; for Women's Studies/Gender theory, as it will be depicted throughout next chapters, it became a theoretical threat that would destabilize feminism's own ranks.

This confrontation not only grounded feminist theorizing but also generated a reshaping of all forms of feminist work, while redesigning related ideas, which would lead to a major reconceptualization of mainstream gender theory. In the following analysis, therefore, I draw on the recognition of story-telling for the access it can give to women's representations of themselves. For the sake of the analysis, the criteria I have followed in gathering what I consider to be the most representative contributors, has been mediated by their focus on theorizing the interlocking nature of social categories. In addition, I have chosen those contributors who more clearly were introducing an intersectional mind-set, albeit not yet named or theorized as such. In a defense of its theoretical and political edge, my quotations seek to reflect how their multigenre approach became a significant means of destabilizing boundaries of difference, to introduce an intersectional mind-set within the academy, of speaking into silences and opening up the possibility of strategic alliances.

Consequently, my point here is to heighten how the recognition of differences among women -in practice, in struggles and theorizing, would prove gender theory as something less solid, more complex and diverse than had appeared to be in the beginnings of the 'second-wave' period. To these regards, it is important to understand, as Mirtha Quintales explains in "I came with no illusions" (Moraga and Anzaldúa 1983: 149), that it was more the personal

need rather than the political analysis what drove these women to take this stand. Mostly, because they were hurt: as Cherrie Moraga explains, “so often the [white] women seemed to feel no loss, no lack, no absence when women of color are not involved; therefore, there is little desire to change the situation” and she concludes by saying: “this has hurt me deeply” (33). What they thus were demanding was that white women, especially those who are speaking in the name of all women, would be accountable for their racism and acknowledge how “white middle class women emerged among feminist ranks as the greatest propagators of racism in the movement” (35) As Moraga explains:

What drew me to politics was my love of women.....the deepest political tragedy I have experienced is how with such grace, such blind faith, this women in the feminist movement grew to be exclusive and reactionary. *I call my white sisters on this* (Moraga and Anzaldúa 1981: xiv; emphasis on the text)

This pain, the African American Audre Lorde argues, is encapsulated in a “deep place of knowledge” from within, that after so much discrimination has turned itself into wrath, “terror and loathing of differences”(Moraga and Anzaldúa 1983:101). In Moraga’s view this source of terror is found in “how deeply separation between women hurts me. How discovering differences, profound differences between myself and women I love has sometimes rendered me helpless and immobilized” (Moraga and Anzaldúa 1981: xvi). This desolate and defendless spirit is also claimed by Native American poet Chrystos: “my bitterness distorts my words” she says ... “I don’t understand those who turned away from me” (70). In an attempt to make sense of the logic of separation, Moraga affirms that “It’s...a calculated system of damage”:

Intended to ensure our separation from other women, but particularly those we learned to see as most different from ourselves, and therefore, most fearful. The Women whose pain we do not want to see as our own. Call it racism, class, oppression, men, dyke-baiting, the system thrives (xvi)

There is an urgency “to name and color the texture of their fear” and to denounce the “painful ignorance” which drives division (xvii). In Mirtha Quintanales’ view only by removing the scales that prevent feminists getting to know each other better, It could be call off “seeing radical differences where they don’t exist and not seeing them where they are crucial”(155). Moraga completely agrees: “ Yes, the failure ...- the betrayal” she says, “How have we turned our backs on each other – the bridge collapsing – whether it be for public power, personal gain, private validation...(xvii). Thus, as stated in the 1981 Preface by Moraga, *This Bridge* was being conceived to capsule a struggle “that is both physical and psychic” in a recreation of their own journey towards “a growing consciousness and a subsequent politization and vision as a woman of color” (xLiv). The urgent need to speak directly “to the deaths and disappointments” (106) of gender was closely linked to their fear of encountering racism.

Motivated to break down all the racial frontiers which were enchaining gender to a mere sexual difference framework, women of color explicitly acknowledged in this anthology their historical bonds with colonized countries, hence awoken to the ‘consciousness of a third world within a first world’ In a radical shift of theorizing racial boundaries, the disruption a new historical gender revolutionized the academy’s domain of subjectivity, identity politics discourse and the effective cultural resistance to patriarchy and neo-colonial globalization forces. On that ground, Third World Women were emphatic in defining the issues based on principal injustice of colonization inflicted on entire peoples. Thereupon, Rosario Morales in “The Other Heritage” stresses how these bonds are originated in 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 won't be neither “Neat, pretty nor quick” since there is a realization and understanding that their oppression “is not simply a question of nationality but that poor and working-class people are oppressed throughout the world by imperialist powers (240).

Their new historic accountability of gender category reinforced a deep-rooted identification in a segregated white-America since they strongly defended that separatism by ethnicity, nation, or gender “will not do the trick for revolution” (239). In the same vein, Judith Muschkovich, self-identified as “Latina, Jewish and Immigrant at once”, (79) appeals to the fact that “Autonomy is not separatism” (83). Barbara Smith, in the introduction of *Home Girls, A Black Feminist Anthology* (1983) reinforces on the distinction between autonomy and separatism. “Whereas autonomy comes from a position of strength”, she argues, “separatism comes from a position of fear. When we're truly autonomous we can deal with other types of people, a multiplicity of issues, and with difference, because we have formed a solid base of strength” (xl). As the Combahee River had already outlined, there was a clear recognition of “the right and necessity of colonized peoples throughout the world, including Third World Women in the U. S., forming independent movements toward self-government” (Moraga and Anzaldúa 1983:196). Hence, as Beverly Smith strongly stated “the strongest politics are coalition politics that cover a broad base of issues. There is no way that one oppressed group is going to topple a system by itself” (127)

Metaphorically conceived as both a political space which questions traditions of domination and for imagining other possible cartographies of resistance, the democratization of cultural specificity was set as a basic premise in order to open up and articulates a non-hierarchical intercultural feminist dialogue. Frustration permeated a historical amnesia in

which the politics of history was an untackled issue that gender theory needed to approximate and bring forward. As analyses of gender essentialism continued to reinforce the dichotomy between equality and difference and consequently, it had become necessary to bring into view how the discourse of gender equality was being articulated at the expense of differences. To do so, as Joan Scott would connote in *Gender and the Politics of History* (1999), the strategy that women of color would follow, situates difference at the focal point of gender theory. Indeed, in order to counteract mainstream discourse of gender, she argues that women of color found that their only alternative was to object and “refuse to oppose equality to difference and insist continually on differences”

differences as the condition of individual -- and collective identities, differences as the constant challenge to the fixing of those identities, history as the repeated illustration of the play of differences, differences as the very meaning of equality itself (174-175)

In enacting this new form of historical consciousness, U. S. third world feminism provided access to a different way of conceptualizing gender beyond its essentialist scope. Most importantly, it comprised a formulation capable of aligning social categories in the specificity of their daily interactions (Sandoval 2000: 42.3). This commitment is reflected in the very titles of the sections of the anthology. Thereby, in order to establish a nexus between their vindications and the articulation of a new subject capable of transformative resistance to mainstream exclusionary mechanisms of gender, I pay especial attention to their motivation of de-privileging the logic that keeps reproducing them. With the intention to examine the chief points women of color addressed, I therefore I intend to summarize its six sections and the voices more representative of their focus:

### 3.2: *THIS BRIDGE: A RADICAL PARADIGM SWIFT*

Hence, In the first section, titled ‘how visibility/invisibility as women of color forms our radicalism’, in contrast to mainstream ‘radical feminists’, it is explicated that they named this anthology ‘radical’, because they were using the term “in its original form- stemming from the word “root”- for our feminist politic emerges from the roots of both our cultural oppression and heritage”, contributors expressed (1981: xxiv). There was a substitution of a “militant mouth” for a “radical politic” asserted Toni Code Bambara, a new generation of “committed, competent and principled combatants” (vii). To this respects, Moraga asks: what is my responsibility to my roots-both white and brown, Spanish-speaking and English? I am a woman with the foot in both worlds; and I refuse the split. I feel the necessity for dialogue”(1983: 34). This is a pivotal idea. The refusal to split their identity in mainstream terms and at the same time, the need to start a dialogue in which gender could evolve to meet their multiple realities, challenges the monolithic nature of gender by making explicit an intercultural stake. Directly addressing mainstream ‘radical feminism’ (chapter 2) Moraga states that:

One voice is not enough, nor two, although this is where dialogue begins. It is essential that radical feminists confront their fear of and resistance to each other, because, without this, there *will* be no bread on the table. Simply, we will not survive [.....]. if we are serious about a revolution, then we need each other (34.; her emphasis)

Moreover, what Moraga is given voice to is the fragility when it comes to connections among women of different backgrounds and sexual orientations, and how fear and wrath are both an indicative of the failure to understand each other. In that sense, the ‘refusal to split’ gender identity aptly symbolizes women of color imperative toward a more serious gender debate, as much as reflecting feminist necessity to acquire an intersectional mind-set. “We

need a new language”, she earnestly affirms, “ better words that can more closely described women’s fears and resistance to one another; words that will not always come out sounding like dogma” (30). This new language that Moraga is referring to seems to be strongly coordinated in Rosalio Morales description of herself. In “I am what I am”, her words are a frank attempt to create an unfolding identity, a multilayered gender which refuting to be unilaterally defined by class and color, does not repudiate its complexity but holds together a unity in many levels. As she alleges:

I am what I am and I am U.S 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 U.S American I am New York Manthattan and the Bronx....I’m Not hiding under no scoop.... I am Boricua as Boricuas come from the Isle of Manthattan....(14)

When Beverly Smith (Barbara Smith’s sister and also member of the ‘Combahee River Collective’) was asked by Gloria and Cherríe how she saw third world feminists in the U. S. forging the leadership in the feminist movement, she replied that “what *I* really feel is radical is trying to make coalitions with people who are different from you. I feel it is radical to be dealing with race and sex and class and sexual identity all at one time. I think *that* is really radical because it has never been done before” (126). Strongly emphasizing the consciousness of a ‘third world in a first world’, what fuels this historical turn of a radical gender is the necessity to understand how this ability to be radical is largely affected by the economic privilege and specific history of colonization in the U.S. ( 105).

As Toni Code Bambara foresaw, the most radical orientation of *This Bridge* was based on the fact that even though the rage of exclusion still made them identify themselves as “creative combatants” (1981:viii), their fight aims at taking off a repressed intercultural dialogue that was preventing them from healing each other into a feminist “wholesomeness”

(viii). Despite the recognition of the separation that differences brought among women, their spirit of change is craving for unity, as this 'gender together-ness' they believe to be in itself the revolution: "The work" would be then, as Toni Code Bambara envisioned, "to make revolution irresistible" (viii).

Continuing to fore seek radical changes in gender theory, the second section is devoted to 'the ways in which Third World Women derive a feminist political theory specifically from our racial/cultural background and experience'. With an emphasis on specificity and the psychic emancipation of gender, Moraga undertook the task of unraveling the theory behind gender's flesh in her 'Theory of the Flesh' to depict how gender has plural meanings that are both context specific and enfleshed in one's identity. Seeking to disrupt the prevailing additive model of gender (chapter 2) by revealing its multiple junctures, "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 our necessity". This fusion was everything but additive. It was precisely meant to provide an interlocking vision of oppression. In an attempt to decode 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)

This 'bridging' was meant to provide a sense of determination and "refusal to an easy explanation to the conditions we live in" (23). To further develop gender's materiality, in '*La Guera*', Moraga remembers that "*The danger lies in attempting to acknowledge the specificity of the oppression. The danger lies in attempting to deal with oppression only from a theoretical*

base” (29; her emphasis). Moraga’s theory of the flesh therefore contends how social layers are marbled and need to be understood coexisting simultaneously under one’s skin. On this vantage point, she would reinforce Barbara Smith’s theory of simultaneity of oppressions; (developed as a member of the ‘Combahee River collective’ and in two anthologies that she co-edited: *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology*(1983) and *All the Women are White, All the Blacks are Male and Some of Us are Brave* (Hull and Bell Scott and Smith 1982), arguing that the simultaneity of the oppressions of ethnicity, economic class, sexual preference, age, etc makes it impossible to choose only one identity. The social categories are integrated and interlocking, not simply added on to each other.

Similarly, 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” (95). To these regards, The Asian-American Mitsuye Yamada affirms that “to finally recognize our invisibility (that she defines as an “unnatural disaster”) is to be in the path towards visibility” (40). Most importantly, by not approaching the social invisibility of minority women through a theoretical base, abstractions endangered dialogue and prevented listening to each other with “raw openness”<sup>57</sup>. As Yamada suggests, “one of the most insidious ways of keeping women and minorities powerless is....to let them speak freely and not listen to them with serious intent” (Ibid) This serious intent, a “type of deep listening that takes tremendous effort and requires a willingness to be altered by the words spoken” (Keating 2009: 92) was precisely what mainstream feminist theory was lacking. Hence, throughout *This Bridge*, contributors asseverate the importance of

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<sup>57</sup> AnaLouise Keating analysis “the importance of listening with raw openness” as the third main lessons of *This Bridge* in “Intersections to Interconnections Lessons for Transformation from This Bridge Called My Back: Radical Writings by Women of Color”. (2009) *The Intersectional Approach. Transforming the Academy Through Race, Class and Gender*: 2009: 92.

listening to each other hearty. Judit Muscovitch, for example, in “- But I know you, American Woman” urges Anglo-American feminists to stop tokenizing Latinas and other women of color as mere “resource people” for their own academic interests. She strongly contends: “I say: *read and listen*. We may, then, have something to share” (80; her emphasis).

In the same vein, Rosario Morales in “We’re All in the same Boat”<sup>58</sup> avers that “I want to be whole.....this society this incredible way of living divides us by class....by color...our race....listen you and listen hard” (91-92) Audre Lorde, as well, in her “Open Letter to Mary Daly” implies that Daly has not read her work with deep attention and the willingness to be reshaped by what she learns. Lorde interrogates Daly: “Do you ever really read the work of black women? Did you ever read my words, or did you merely finger them for quotations?” (95).

As a continuation with “the destructive and demoralizing effects of racism in the women’s movement”, the third section of *This Bridge* elicits how, “under the name of feminism, white women of economic and educational privilege have used that privilege at the expense of Third World Women” (61). Therewith, they were making a clear stand that no dialogue will ever take off if feminist theories continue to ignore the potential privilege positions some ethnicities hold within mainstream society that sets them apart from not so privilege women. As a result, although this section was originally intended to debate this issue of racism to “make a connection with white women” in the end, the overall spirit is that it felt “more like a separation” (61). In the same vein, Mitsuye Yamada affirms that “Asian Pacific American Women will not speak up to say what is in our minds until our white sisters indicate

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<sup>58</sup> Morales expression greatly synthesizes the spirit of inclusion of *This Bridge* in bringing into bear an awareness of ‘working-class’ and lesbian experiences. Speaking in behalf of working class, it is true that working class white women reported more specific problems with early feminism. Their particular demands would stress working class contexts; also the denigration of motherhood by radical strands or the drive for career advancement were points of inflection with mainstream theory.

by their actions that they want to join us in our struggle because it is theirs also” (75). The general feeling therefore was that racism constantly permeated their lives; on the contrary, it is only white women who could “afford” to remain oblivious to these effects. “The rest of us had it breathing or bleeding down our necks”, declares Moraga (62). Most importantly, what it is asserted is how this feeling of separation stemmed out from previous experiences of tokenization. Similarly, Doris Davenport severs in “The Pathology of Racism A Conversation with Third World Wimmin” that if Third World Women weren’t attending mainstream conferences and readings was because of the fear of encountering racism: they don’t enjoy being put down, ignored, not engaged in mutual dialogue, being tokens” (206). In the same front, Moraga affirms that the usual response she has been observing among white women’s groups when the racism issue comes up is “the denial of difference” (32). “I have heard comments like “Well, were open to *all* women;” she recalls, and she stresses on the fact that “they blame women of color for not wanting to be part of their groups”; nonetheless, as she further explains, “there is seldom any analysis on how the very nature and structure of the group itself may be founded on racist or classist assumptions” (33; her emphasis). In the same line of thinking, in her essay, “the Master’s tools would not dismantle the Master’s House” Lorde asks: “What does it mean when the tools of a racist patriarchy are used to examine the fruits of that same patriarchy?”. And she answers,” It means that only the most narrow perimeters of change are possible and allowable” (98).

Hence, as we can see, there were a lot of issues that were making coalition building so difficult. Women of color believed that white women were overlooking the effects of racial

oppression they experienced. Without the incorporation of 'race'/ethnicity<sup>59</sup> and gender as multiple sources of oppression, coalition with white feminists would be implausible, women of color believed.

Apart from focusing on 'race'/ethnicity and class as analytical categories in need of revision by 'white' gender theory, sexual orientation is also revised in the fourth section entitled "the cultural, class and sexuality differences that divide". As we have seen in chapter two, the radical lesbian Monique Witting made a first attempt to undo sexual orientation as a valid analytical category. Her approach, nonetheless, was permeated by her understanding of 'difference' as constructed along male/female lines. What women of color bring into light then is its interlocking nature with other social categories. "One of the biggest sources of separation among women" Moraga alleges ".....has been homophobia (.....) we refuse to make a choice between our cultural identity and our sexual identity, between our race and our femaleness" (216).

Challenging feminists of all colors to examine their internalized 'master's tools' that operate within, Lorde challenged to rethink to what extent the 'personal is the political'. "Racism and homophobia are real conditions of all our lives in this place and this time", powerfully affirms:

*I urge each one of us here to reach down into that deep place of knowledge inside herself and touch that terror and loathing of any differences that lives there. See whose face it wears. Then the personal is the political can begin to illuminate all our choices (101; her emphasis)*

The recognition of this failure to communicate among sisters it is truthfully depicted by Mirtha Quintanales in "I Come with No Illusions". Identifying herself as a Latina lesbian/feminist she questions what did it mean to say to herself that only other Latina,

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<sup>59</sup> Minority women were theorizing beyond the limits of an exclusively racial theory of oppression that tended to overlook gender and also went beyond the limits of a theory of oppression based exclusively on gender that tended to overlook race. See for example, Bell Hooks *Ain't I a woman?: Black Women and Feminism*.(1981) and Angela Davis *Women, Race and Class* (1981)

bicultural lesbian women could satisfy her needs; that is, which ones were the implications of separating herself from mainstream feminists. “It means, for one thing”, she says “that I am admitting failure. The failure to adjust, adapt, change, transcend cultural differences” (148).

This sense of failure is transmuted into a source of empower in the fifth section named ‘Third World Women’s Writing as a Tool for Self-preservation and Revolution’. Here, writing is highlighted as both a tool for self-preservation of identity and a revolution towards gender imperialism. “In editing the anthology” specifies the co-editors Gloria Azaldúa and Cherríe Moraga:

our primary commitment was to retain this diversity, as well as each writer’s especial voice and style. The book is intended to reflect our color loud and clear, not tone it down. As editors, we believe we found non-rethorical, highly personal chronicles that present a political analysis in everyday terms (1981:xxv)

As their words depict, there is a new re-conceptualization of gender women of color were craving for; that is, “the political analysis in everyday terms” that mainstream gender theory was precisely lacking. Thus, when the 21th of May, 1980 Gloria addressed her “companions in writing” as her allies against the racist myopia of the dominant strand of the movement, the implications of “speaking in tones” was meant to preserve and to discover self- identity. “why I am compel to write?”, she questions:

I write to record what others erase when I speak, to rewrite the stories others have miswritten about me, about you....to discover myself, to preserve myself, to make myself, to achieve self-autonomy (1983: 169)

Only by educating one another as how critical issues affect them in their own arenas, misleading theories would stop misrepresenting them. “Writing is dangerous because we are afraid of what the writing reveals”, Anzaldúa argues: “the fears, the angers, the strengths of a woman under a triple o quadruple oppression”. This emphasis on “triple o quadruple

oppression” overtly questions the inherent reliability of gender as an inclusive category, that is, if gender is only theorized in accordance to sexual difference, how could it enable the existence of triple and quadruple oppressions?. At the end of the letter, Gloria compels women of color to use all their creativity to write with “their tongues of fire” against the racism in the movement since it is very clear that they are not “reconciled with oppressors who whet their howl in our grieve” (173).

Finally, in ‘the Ways and Means of a Third World Feminist Future’ a nuanced approach to differences and its inclusionary stance culminates in Anzaldúa’s theory of “el Mundo Zurdo/ the Left-Handed World”<sup>60</sup>. In order to get away from the endless divisiveness that factionalizes gender initiatives, Anzaldúa asks for a new gender and a different approach to differences rather than right-hand (dominant) perspectives. A part from titling the last section of *This Bridge*, she includes a discussion of el mundo zurdo in her essay, “La Prieta”<sup>61</sup>. In Anzaldúa self-positioning in “La Prieta”, an early auto-biographical essay, she examines the numerous forms of alienation she has experienced in her interactions with Mexican Americans, other people of color, white feminists, lesbians and gay men, yet “she refuses to sever her ties to these various groups”. Instead, she locates herself on the division lines. “I am a wind-swayed bridge, a crossroads inhabited by whirlwinds...” she expresses:

Your allegiance is to la Raza, the Chicano movement, say the members of my race “Your allegiance is to the Third World,” say my Black and Asian friends. “Your allegiance is to your gender, to women,” say the feminists. Then there’s my allegiance to the Gay move-

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<sup>60</sup> Anzaldúa’s theory of ‘el mundo zurdo’ originated in the late 1970s when she organized a series of poetry readings called “El Mundo Surdo Reading Stories” in San Francisco. Intended to be extremely inclusive and diverse, it included progressive people of all types: Third World writers, feminists, lesbians and gay men. Contrary to the philosophy of the period that united into identity-specific groups Anzaldúa always worked to facilitate an inclusive environment that promoted critical thinking.

<sup>61</sup> Anzaldúa will continue to develop her theory and practice at various points throughout her career. See for example her *Interview/Entrevistas* (Keating, 2000).

ment, to the socialist revolution, to the New Age, to magic and the occult. And there's my affinity to literature, to the work of the artist. What am I? *A third world feminist with Marxist and mystic leanings*. They would chop me up into little fragments and tag each piece with a label (205; her emphasis)

“Who, me confused? Ambivalent ?” Challenges Anzaldúa. “Not so. Only your labels split me” she firmly answers (Ibid). Its revel language seeks to shake the imposition of analytical categories. Her way of describing herself, both subversive and provocative, longs for the magnification of the accumulation of differences. Nonetheless, far from making them incompatible or viewed them as fragmentation, it confiscates labels and appropriates them in a new identity; as a result, the multidimensional nature of gender unfolds. At this juncture, I would like to heighten that this essay is of crucial importance to grasp the transformational nature of gender that Anzaldúa is proposing. Refusing to self-segregate, she insists on creating alliances among people from a variety of social locations. “Not all of us have the same oppressions” continues Anzaldúa, “but we empathize and identify with each other's oppressions. We do not have the same ideology, nor do we derive similar solutions” (209).

As we can see, Anzaldúa acknowledges that the inhabitants of ‘el mundo zurdo’ are not alike; their specific oppressions, solutions and beliefs differ. However, differences are accepted and used to create commonalities. Thus, she proposes an approach that enables very different people to coexist and live together. “But these different affinities are not opposed to each other” she states, “In el mundo Zurdo I with my own affinities and my people with theirs can live together and transform the planet” (209). By accentuating “different affinities” Anzaldúa replaces conventional definitions of identity making. Despite the many differences among them, there is a mutant-gender experience of discrimination, alienation and oppression. As she elicits, gender theory is ignoring “the people who don't belong in the dominant world”(Ibid.) Moreover, as she affirms, “the overwhelming oppression is the collective fact that we do not

fit, and because we do not fit *we are a threat*.” (Ibid, her emphasis). Significantly, this threat is directed to mainstream gender theory that has not provided enough theoretical space for their collective oppression to be developed. Her gender-specific worlds are both entered by virtue of appearance and birth but also, they entered by personal choice, and therefore, ‘different affinities’ are transformed into new forms of commonality. Nonetheless, these commonalities’ borderlines are still blurred, not yet tackled by dominant feminist theory. Therefore, she acknowledges that the rhetoric of unchanging categories of meaning remains the source of division and separation among women. Despite embodying this threat, she honestly confesses that:

I have been terrified of writing this essay because I will have to own up the fact that I do not exclude whites from the list of people I love...For the political stance we let color, class and gender separate us ....so the walls grow higher gulfs between us wider, the silences more profound (206)

By setting different confronting voices in dialogue within herself she exposes how the emphasis on authenticity (‘political stance that separates’) reinforces the belief in self-contained identities which replicate existing divisions and silences within gender theory. To these regards, in *Women Reading Women Writing* (1996) AnaLouise Keating argues that Anzaldua’s “Left-handed World” speaks of ‘threshold identities’. Borrowing an idea developed in 1969 by Victor Turner (1969), Keating explains how “threshold people elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural spaces” (95 cited in Keating 1996: 2). Neither entirely inside nor fully outside any single community, have they adopted ambivalent insider/outsider positions in relation to a variety of cultural, professional, gender and sexual groups (Keating 1996: 2). “The mixture of blood and affinities” says Anzaldúa, “rather than confusing or unbalanced me, has forced me to achieve a kind of equilibrium” (209). This equilibrium, as her words will display, is achieved through a

differential view of her identity and the understanding that her subject is multiple but not fragmented, based on specific positioning and experiences culturally and historically located: “I span abysses” she explains, “...[but] I belong to myself and no to one people” (209). For Anzaldúa, spanning gender identity in its quality of shifting the gaze, it implies an engagement in “to-and-fro movements between multiple worlds, thus illuminating the limitations in all pre-existing categories” (Keating 1996: 2). Hence, in “La Prieta” Gloria states that: “I believe that travelling El Mundo Zurdo path is the path of a two-way movement- a going deep into the self and expanding out into the world, a simultaneous recreation of the self and a reconstruction of society” (208). This alternation encoded by sex, gender, class, and other social categories mark crisis points, spaces where conflicting values, ideas and beliefs converge, bringing into play unsettling fixed categories of meaning. Positing a dialogic relationship between her self as a woman of color and society as mainstream feminist movement, she enacts a variety of ‘to-and-fro movements’ which enable to combine cultural critique with the invention of new forms of culture. In this sense, Keating’s thesis is that, by locating herself (she applies these insights not only to the work of Anzaldúa but to Audre Lorde and other women of color) at the intersections of seemingly separate groups, she challenges all those who view themselves as insiders (permanent members of a single, unitary group) to re-examine the exclusionary terms used to define their own and social locations. Moreover, her left-handed vision of gender demonstrates the possibility of seeking commonalities without the denial of differences (whether in cultures, experiences, beliefs...).

As women of color inscribed their threshold identities into a multi-faceted gender, they challenged the ontological subject of feminism to rethink the labels used to define each person according to gender, ethnicity, sexuality, class and other systems of difference. More

specifically, they employ what AnaLouise Keating has named as “transformational identity politics” (1996: 5). Unlike conventional identity politics where social actors base their political affiliation and tactics on their personal sense of ethnic, gender, class or sexuality identity, a transformational bias deconstructs any unified, stable notion of identity. In the same line of thought, Sandoval’s argues that Anzaldúa’s differential identity (and by extension, women of color’s) represents an ‘oppositional consciousness’ which creates the opportunity for flexible, dynamic and tactical responses. Moreover, it enabled the articulation of a new critical theory within feminist thought which allowed “no *single* conceptualization of women of color position in society” (Sandoval 1990: 67; her emphasis) The strength of their interlocking vision of ‘different affinities’ did not precisely stemmed out of a ‘natural affinity’ group but however, there were women who had come together “out of political necessity” (Moraga, foreword second edition). On that ground, women of color “mutant gender unity”<sup>62</sup> of interconnecting social categories (see Sandoval 2000:192.2) depended not on a universal identification with a ‘universal female gender category’, but rather relied upon ‘strategic alliances’. This unity, conceived as a continuous process of metamorphosis, emerged out of an intersection of different vectors of oppression/privilege capable of weaving difference, equality and diversity into a coalition of these interactions, utilizing them as political tactics constructed in response to dominating social powers. These social powers are located and refrained as an unfair capitalist patriarchal system that goes back to colonization times (see chapter 1).

Consequently, the focus on the multidimensional nature of their social inequality, while it troubled traditional ways of thinking about social activism, it simultaneously subverted the idea of social passivity of theory, either in form or content. Reclaiming the power dynamics among

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<sup>62</sup> I borrow Sandoval’s expression “mutant unity” adding it gender to its theoretical dimension. See Chela Sandoval in *Methodology of the Oppressed*. Nota 1 p.192.2.

women, *This Bridge's* impact and insights collapsed for the first time traditional boundaries of identity and subjectivity, bringing into play fragmentation and power dissymmetry among feminists of different nationalities and backgrounds. The essays and poems conveyed in this anthology, reflected both the anger and pain women of color felt in their daily lives. Specifically, the contributors described the visibility and invisibility that mainstream culture imposed on them, arguing for a feminism that originated from their cultural background and experiences; addressed the debilitating effects of racism in the women's movement and mostly, it examined the differences that were dividing women. Although daunting, given the many possibilities for conflict, the promise of building bridges across cultures, identities, and politics was a driving force in *This Bridge*. "To come to see each other as sisters", remembered Moraga "This is not a given. I want to repeat over and over again, the pain and shock of difference, the joy of commonness" (33)

### **3.3: THIS BRIDGE: SECOND EDITION AND ITS IMPACT**

In 1983, this anthology launched a second edition which consolidated its growing influence. In 'Foreword to the Second Edition' of *This Bridge* entitled "Refugees of a World on Fire" Moraga, while acknowledging the achievements of the anthology, brought attention to the fact that they had created a book which concentrated on relationships 'between women' (1983: i). Nonetheless, even though the essence and message of *This Bridge* remained the same, she confesses that if it had been conceived in 1983 as opposed to 1979, it "would be

more international in perspective". For that reason, "Although the heart of *Bridge* remains the same" explains Moraga, "the impetus to forge links with women from every region grows more and more urgent as the number of recently immigrated people of color in the U.S. grows in enormous proportions" (iii). Her words thus were a reminder that despite the progress made, they needed to span their strategic alliances so they could build on that progress and rebound gender potentiality. How could the category of gender analyse discrimination of women "in the face of world-wide suffering" if it didn't broaden its borders?. On that account, even though Moraga recognizes that in the last three years she has learned that the idea of a Unified Third World "has proved to be much easier between the covers of a book than between real life women" the need of a movement capable of spanning borders of gender "has never been so strong". If we are interested in building a movement that will not constantly be subverted by internal differences" she calls forth, "then we must build from the inside out not the other way around. Coming to terms with the suffering of others has never meant looking away from our own (v)". Moreover, in an in-depth understanding on the roots of lacks of solidarities and coalitions among women, Moraga reinforces that: "What threatens our movement (...)is the refusal to acknowledge that to change the world, we have to change ourselves – even sometimes our most cherished, block hard convictions"(Ibid.).

Gloria Anzaldúa, on her part, in her "Foreword to the Second Edition 1983", develops a more creative insight onto women of color contributions to feminist theory through a truly revolutionary rhetoric: "Our strength lies in shifting perspectives", she states, "in our capacity to shift, in our "seeing through" the membrane of the past superimposed on the present" (xxvii; her comas). In doing so, that is, in 'shifting perspectives' about gender theory, *This Bridge's* contributors moved beyond the public and private domains that had constrained its analysis for

so long within the academy, offering complex relational perspectives on identity formation and alliance making. This new strategy of ever-changing frameworks begins with the belief in intertwined differences that can alter critical approaches to gender theory. It demands intellectual flexibility and the willingness to embrace uncertainty and contradiction, coupled with the aptness to self-reflection to expand critical views and enhance feminist knowledge. On that ground, in its revealing essay “Third World feminism: Theory and Method of Oppositional Consciousness in the Postmodern World” Chela Sandoval developed her theory of “differential consciousness” (differential consciousness) as a potential tool able to generate emancipatory strategies, bringing attention to how, in contrast to neo-liberal perspectives to differences as the object of study (chapter 1 and chapter 2), for women of color, differences were experienced and theorized as strategies. Moreover, this emphasis on the specificity of differences among women becomes a critical and poetical mechanism to mobilize power. Feminism couldn’t afford to ignore differences any longer, Sandoval argued, since “they provide us the keys to new tactics from confronting oppression” (1998:353)

Trans-coding and collapsing traditional boundaries of identity and subjectivity, social categories that traditionally had been linked to either oppression or privilege started to be theorized not by reversing or revalorizing them but by an explicit acknowledgement of their overlapping nature. The recognition that these categories were multiple and interlocking was a major breakthrough in the attention to difference and specificity which led to an intense investigation on aspects other than gender which generate individual identity. As Lorde recognized, women “have been taught either to ignore our differences or to view them as causes for separation and suspicion” (1984:112). Nonetheless, if that stage could be overcome, it could be finally grasped how “Difference is that raw and powerful connection from which our personal power is forged” (Lorde

1983: 98). This point is worth highlighting: differences are not in themselves divisive. They are not in themselves the problem. Rather, it's was a permanent refusal to openly acknowledge, examine and discuss these differences that were dividing feminists. It was the blindness of colonial legacy that distorted differences of ethnicity, class, sexuality, age, etc. which was making them so problematic.

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. While anger and collective wrath clouded some of the contributors' voices, others as Cherrie Moraga, Gloria Anzaldúa, Andrea Cannan, Mirtha Quinthalés, Audre Lorde or Rosario Morales attempted to forge alliances and coalitions that do not ignore differences but instead use difference as a catalyst for personal and social change. In the explorations of difference between the self and the others, they break in what Helene Lorenz describes as the "unimaginable gulfs of difference" (in Anzaldúa and Keating 2002: 502). As the expression might suggest, differences are seen as incommensurable in the sense that they cannot be fully understood or fully anticipated. Nonetheless, Moraga, Cannan, Quinthalés, Lorde, Morales and Anzaldúa not only gloss over these differences but engage in open conversation about them; hence, they use differences "to create commonalities" (Keating 2009: 85). This two-fold process was driven by a 'conscious rupture' with mainstream U.S women's movement which trumpeted the many differences among women. Foregrounding the need to overcome this failure, Moraga certifies that the decision by women of color to name differences seeks to unearth the truth of their 'seemingly irreconcilable' connection. "Here we begin to fill in the spaces of silence between us", she asseverates,

For it is between these seemingly irreconcilable lines-the class lines, the politically correct, the

daily lines we run down to each other to keep difference and desire at distance- that the truth of our connection lies (106)

To these regards, seeking to name this connection, the very same year that *This Bridge's* Second Edition was launched, the African American Alice Walker developed a more group biased differential identity (black-women) in *Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose* (1984), which she coined as 'Womanism'. Born out as reaction to the realization that feminism did not encompass the Black women's perspectives, womanism addressed the racist and classist aspects of white feminism and actively opposed separatist ideologies. This perspective was often used during the 1980s as a means for analyzing Black Women's literature, as it marked the place where race, class, gender, and sexuality intersect. Because it recognizes that women are survivors in a world that is oppressive on multiple platforms, it seeks to celebrate the ways in which women negotiate these oppressions in their individual lives, longing for connections with other women.

Thereby, this new stream of transformational epistemology led by women of color relied on shifting non dual ways of thinking that destabilize the networks of classification that restricted feminists to immutable notions of personal and collective identity. The titles most representative of women of color fructiferous production speak of interlocking vectors of signification, of oppression, that live in the junctures of social divisions that are normative<sup>63</sup> Accordingly, the new *Sister Outsider* (Lorde, 1984) understood that the oppression of women exceeded all geographical territories but it was by no means experienced in the same manner by all women. Indeed, this new stream of unconventional assumptions about gender, race, class and sexuality were clouding the analysis of gender from a feminist objectivity's standpoint. As a result, a reaction-in chain was

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<sup>63</sup>Among others: *Unequal Sisters: A Multicultural Reader in U.S. Women's History* (Dubois and Ruiz 1990); *Spider Woman's Granddaughters* (Gunn 1989); *Women, Race and Class* (Davis 1983); *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, but Some of Us Are Brave: Black Women's Studies* (Hull, Bell and Smith 1982); *Home Girls* (Smith 1983); *Woman/Native/ Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism* (Minh-ha 1989).

activated towards the study of power dynamics within differences among women from a rhetorical making. Moreover, a central question remained the definition of feminism itself.

The lack of consensus throughout the decade of the 70s had reflected different political ideologies and divergent social-class bases. Now in the 1980s, Chicanas, Blacks, Native Americans and Asian American feminists struggled to gain social equality and end sexist and racist oppression in their own terms. In these divisions, women of color were recognizing that the nature of their social inequality was multidimensional (Cheng 1984; Chow 1987; Hooks 1981). They believed that feminism involved more than an analysis of gender because, as women of color, they were affected by both race and class in their everyday lives.

Tracing a feminist Anglo-European genealogy, the manipulative drive of power within knowledge and academic practices, started to be dismantled as an “asymmetric cosmopolitanism”<sup>64</sup>.

### **3.4 REVEALING GENDER ANALYSES AS AN IMAGINARY LOCATION**

Within academic circles in the U.S, the decade of the 1980s also witnessed the institutionalization of systematic studies on ‘feminist theory’ that resulted in the emergence of Women’s Studies as a field in its own. Scholars coming from privilege backgrounds embarked on the production of a body of knowledge that would represent an official genealogy of the evolution of feminist consciousness. To do so, previous trends were classified and theorized as typologies, cognitive mappings that would become the ‘official stories’ of how mainstream feminist theory understood itself and its interventions in history. Seeking to trace an objective historical account of

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<sup>27</sup>Termed coined by Shu-Mei Shi in “Ethics of Transcultural Encounters”. In Waller, Margarite and Sylvia Marcos, eds., 2005: 23.

feminist consciousness, influential theorists such as Lydia Sargent (1981), Allison Jaggar (1983); Hester Eisenstein (1985), Gayle Greene and Coopelia Kahn (1985) and Elaine Showalter (1985) divided this evolution into 'liberal' 'Marxist' 'radical/cultural' and 'Socialist' stages. Nevertheless, as it had happened with the early theorists of 'second wave' feminism (chapter 2), power dynamics among scholars played an important role in the contesting discursive asymmetry between gender theory as a body of knowledge within the academy and its effectiveness in giving voice and representing inclusively the wide variety of women's experiences. For the women in the margins of this theory, this body of knowledge was an abstract and de-personalized hegemonic feminist inquiry. Their claims and critical viewpoints, as it will be elicited throughout this section, will be by all means justified.

*This Bridge's* postulates, for example, had become an epistemological disobedience, a theoretical dilemma, a mystery to be resolved by mainstream feminism as minority groups maintained the signifiers of their own class, race, sexual background as opposed to the analytical category of gender. As a path breaking collection, it had fore fronted the intersections between race, class, gender and sexuality in ways that would invariably transform traditional paradigms within U. S. feminisms. However, invisibility and appropriation of their insights still permeated a hegemonic feminist logic that curtailed women of color's contributions. To this regards, Allison Jaggar, in *Feminist Politics and Human Nature* (1983), although recognizes that to the extent that it does not take into account women of color's experiences, socialism is not a complete theory (11), she affirms that third world feminism in the U.S "does not exist" (123). That is, the long-standing history of the writings of women of color "has not contributed to a distinctive theory of women's liberation" (123-4). Therefore, discursively colonized and tricked, their insights were reduced to a "mere rhetoric platform" (Radford-Hill 1986:160) a "critic dimension on a descriptive

level” (Jaggar 1983: 123). Consequently, for women of color, working-class feminists and lesbians, the major gender theories failed to provide a voice as did the crucial theoretical discourses in which these scholars were involved or embedded.

Hence, in the following, I would explore women of color’s criticisms to the systematic studies<sup>65</sup> that were carried out when this institutionalized cognitive mapping became the official curricula for Women’s Studies departments in the U.S. As a point of departure I would like to emphasize that within mainstream gender theory two divergent beliefs coexisted. On one side, and streaming from Enlightenment times, was the belief that women and men were basically the same, and, on the other side, the radical standpoint of radical feminists meant that differences between men and women were deep and rooted in nature. Therefore, linked to Liberal Marxist/Socialist feminisms it was employed a notion of ‘sameness’, a proposal of assimilation in male-centered standards, that it assumed that all women and men were the same (see Beasley 1999: 15-16)<sup>66</sup> On the contrary, as a proposal of dissociation and separation from men, radical and psychoanalytic feminisms adhered to the notion of women as distinct, different from men. Moreover, in opposition to traditional thought in which women’s difference is taken as an indicative of their inferiority, sexual difference is celebrated as women’s power. Such an approach has been labeled gynocentric feminism (see Beasley 1999: 15-16). These feminists considered themselves to be morally superior to men; that is, better than men. “Women inherently superiority” Beasley contends, “is viewed as being derived from their special moral-ethical make up, the specific qualities of their bodies” (18). Due to their insistence of being ‘different’ from men, radicals and

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<sup>15</sup> Following Chela Sandoval’s research in *Methodology of the Oppressed* (2000) I mainly focused on the influential Works of Allison Jaggar (1983); Gayle Greene and Coopelia Kahn (1985); Lydia Sargent (1981); Elaine Showalter (1985) and Hester Eisenstein (1985) For a further analysis see Chela Sandoval. *Methodology of the Oppressed*. Chapter 2.

socialists, conveyed what it came to be labelled as ‘feminism of difference’ (Nicholson 1990: 3) In its extreme, when the difference between men and women was elaborated as the only characteristic of women, it became “gynocentric” feminism (see Young 1985)

These methodological incompatibilities were acknowledged by the mainstream theorists above mentioned and it was resolved in two political platforms: On one side, there was what came to be known as ‘equality feminisms’ and on the other hand, the ‘feminism of difference’. However, the notion of the women as the oppressed group and men as the oppressor, albeit approached as ‘being equal’ or ‘being different’, was problematic in many ways. On one particular one, it is that it assumes that all women share the same oppressions. In this sense, the irony remained that as far back at the times when the ex-slave Sojourner Truth powerfully demonstrated the divergent political priorities and struggles of black women in compared to whites, women of color have been making use of a framework of alliance or coalition beyond the restrictiveness of sexual difference. As *This Bridge* depicted, for minority women, the issue of sexual difference –whether women are like men or not- is viewed through the lens of political struggle. Sexual difference is therefore not regarded as a crucial one in itself, rather becomes one identity position among many other to establish potential alliances that would challenge power dynamics not only between sexes but also among women.

Indeed, political struggle and alliance while claiming the revising of social categories that encompass gender is foundational to *This Bridge*. Consequently, both in spite of and because they represented varying internally colonized communities, third world feminists generated a common discourse, a theoretical structure that reinvigorated and refocused the politics and priorities of feminist theory/action in what it was an uneasy alliance of two different ways of living domination, subordination and the nature of effective resistance to patriarchy and economic

globalization: on the one side, what literary critic Gayatri Spivak named as the “hegemonic feminist theory” (1985: 147) and what, on the other side, cultural critic Chela Sandoval in “The Struggle Within: A Report on 1981 N.W.S.A. Conference” coined as ‘the U.S third world feminist theory’ (1990:57)

Hence, According to Hester Eisenstein and Alice Jardine in *The Future of Differences* (1985) for liberals, the primary goal was “to remove obstacles of fully participation in society and to demonstrate that these differences could be *reduced*” (1985: xvi emphasis on the text). However, when liberals defended reason as universal, women of color demanded an approach concerning women and power investigated in specific contexts. As *This Bridge* stated, a serious investigation on “the denial of differences within the feminist movement” (1981: Iii;) was for them both a personal and a political priority. In the same vein, Audre Lorde described as *Sister/Outsider* (1984) this parallel trend that mainstream feminism was ignoring:

As white women ignore their built-in privilege of whiteness and define *woman* in terms of their own experience alone, then women of color become the ‘other’, the outsider whose experience and tradition is ‘too’ alien to comprehend (117)

Moreover, women of color revolted against a binary mode of thinking grounded on the mind as opposed to the body. Disregard for the material dimension of gender, its en fleshed nature, was the chief focus of their critique, since, it as Moraga argued in her ‘Theory of the Flesh’, the danger lied in ranking the oppression and failing to acknowledge the specificity of embodied oppressions (Moraga and Anzaldúa 1983: 28)

In regards to a Marxists/ socialists stage, Lydia Sargent for example, in *Women and Revolution: A Discussion of the Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism* (1981) although she agrees that three previous stages failed to integrate the discussions about racism and classism within the feminist movement, she does not take into account women of color’s accountability for this

progressively awareness. “As the women’s movement grew more diverse “recalls Hester Eisten, “it was being forced [supposedly by women of color but as Chela Sandoval points out, she does not name who (2000: 43)] to confront and to debate issues of difference” (1985: xix), albeit within a sexual difference framework. Additionally, for Jaggar, in this second stage, far from seeking to demolish or minimize women’s difference from men, feminist Marxists were asserting the need to re-structure society in a way that eradicates the subordination that women suffer as a “different class” (1983: 50)

The problem was that in actuality, attempts to address the relationship of class analysis to gender amounted to adding class. Therefore, class was seen as an adjunct to gender inequality besides seen as a fundamental power relation between men and women (Henessy 2003: 58). But as we have previously seen, *the Combahee River Collective* not only had uncovered the relationship between gender and class as interlocking in nature, mostly, it had unfolded many other interlocking systems of oppression/privilege besides that of class. Consequently, in regard to the ‘dual system’ (patriarchy and capitalism) elaborated by socialists in the 1970s, women of color contended that this paradigm did not elaborate further beyond the interface between the two systems as the root of women’s oppression (Harsen and Philipson 1990:19). From this vantage point, as *The Combahee River Collective* have argued, any explanation of women’s lives under capitalist systems needs to begin not with the assessment that there are two systems of oppression but rather with the ways in which capitalism uses the patriarchal structures that precede it and developed alongside. Indeed. the concept of ‘classism’ which features in this approach understands class relations as an oppressive social practice parallel to gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation and other social categories.

For radicals, on their part, sisterhood was so powerful (Morgan 1970) that nothing could cloud the aspirations of a universal womanhood. The influence of radical theories gave rise to a great number of woman-centered scholarship on many disciplines in which women became both the object and the subject of research. Mary Daly's (1978) *Gyn/Ecology: the Metaphysics of Radical Feminism* became a tool to identify female essence and defining patriarchy as the subjugation and colonization of this essence, out of male envy and need. For the ones that followed her, Mary Daly promoted a solution that revolved "around discovering female essence and bonding with other women" (Alcoff 1988:410). Nonetheless, as Radicals increasingly gave more weight to the 'female essence', women of color singled out the 'universal woman' as the primary location of power in a complex manner that encompasses both macro and micro relations. To the extent that Robin Morgan's anthology *Sisterhood is Powerful* was strongly anchored in the quest of a pseudo universal female bond, though critical and liberatory in intent, it was not thereby exempt from inscription within power dynamics among women

To these regards, a great example of unveiled power dynamics can be found in Audre Lorde's letter to Mary Daly after the publication of *Gyn/Ecology*. "This letter has been delayed because of my grave reluctance to reach out to you," Lorde heartily contends:

for I want us To chew upon here is neither easy nor simple. The history of white women, who are unable to hear Black women's words, or maintain a dialogue with us, is long and discouraging. But to assume that you will not hear me represents not only history, perhaps, but an old pattern of relating, sometimes protective and sometimes dysfunctional, which we, as women shaping our future, are in the process of shattering and passing beyond, I hope (1984: 66-7)

While reading through Daly's accounts of the goddess, Lorde recalls, she wondered to herself: "why doesn't Mary deal with Afrekete as an example? Why are her goddess images only white, western European, judeo-christian? (67). She narrates how she first assumed that Daly was dealing only with the tradition of Western European women, "in which case her

choices were valid". Sadly, she pieced together a "white women dealing only out of a patriarchal western European frame of reference" (68). Thus, throughout this "Open letter", she accuses Daly of using tools of patriarchy against non-European women, African women in particular, by applying that all women suffer from the same oppression. While Lorde agrees that "the oppression of women knows no ethnic nor racial boundaries", she insists that "that does not mean it is identical within those differences" (70). Beyond a sisterhood that fails to recognize different forms of patriarchal oppression, Lorde unmasks Eurocentric racism within the so-called radical feminism. "The herstory and myth of white women" she firmly argues "...serves the destructive forces of racism and separation between women" (Lorde 1984:70)

Mary Daly decided not to respond to Lorde.....

Daly's silence and lack of courage to confront Lorde reinforced the stigma of discursive colonization among women. As Amber L. Katherine analyses in "A Too Early Morning: Audre Lorde's "An Open Letter to Mary Daly" and Daly's Decision not to Respond in Kind" (2000) Daly, like other radical feminists at that time, wasn't able to grasp how Lorde's radical black politics and her feminist black complaint were just one voice (290). As a result, Daly was unable to see how the claim for multiplicity in feminist voices was Lorde's challenge of a radical, revolutionary movement. Moreover, by not replying to Lorde, Daly put into question if her 'radical feminism' was nothing more than a eurocentric radical feminism, which against everything that it predicted, was a way of thinking that perpetuated the same patriarchal structures they were revealing against. As Lorde strongly insisted: "assimilation within a solely western european herstory is not acceptable" (Lorde 1984:70)

To these regards, Chela Sandoval in *The Methodology of the Oppressed* (2000) acting as spokeswoman of the women of color- Third World Feminism in the U. S, strongly asked "how did

this systematic repression occur within an academic system that is aimed at recognizing new forms of knowledge?” (46.7) According to Chandra P. Mohanty, an answer to this invisibilization could be found in the rubric of what she calls “third world difference“ and how it was caught up in producing homogenized identities and meanings. Seeking to name the differences that separate women, a discursive colonization of those differences became a resource for understanding this division because it was being articulated *Under Western Eyes* (1991). As she clearly conveyed:

analysis of “sexual difference” in the form of cross-culturally singular, monolithic notion of patriarchy or male dominance leads to the construction of a similarly reductive and homogeneous notion of what I call the “third world difference”- that stable, ahistorical something that apparently oppresses most if not all the women in these countries. And it is in the production of “Third World difference” that Western feminisms appropriate and “colonize” the constitutive complexities which characterized the lives of women in these countries. It is in the process of discursive homogenization and systematization of the oppression of women in the third world that power is exercised in much of recent feminist discourse, and *this power needs to be defined and named* ( 53; emphasis mine)

Bell Hooks defined more accurately this power as going from “Margin to the Center” (Hooks 1984) in which marginal and subaltern voices (see Gayatri Spivak 1988 ) increasingly challenged the exclusive racist practices that were making practically impossible the emergence of new paradigms . Revolving around an additive model of social categories, gender reductionism was perceived as arising out of ethnocentrism, and a product of a discursive cultural imperialism. Consequently, to insist on the primacy of a unified collective feminist subject was to fail to recognize the importance of other dimensions that encompass gender which can throw light on women’s complicity with patriarchal oppression and colonial legacy. As a result, mainstream feminist theory had imposed social categories-blind standards in a way that “the Master’s Tools cannot dismantle the Master’s House” (Lorde 1983: 98-106). “It is a particular academic arrogance”, Lorde had already stated in *This Bridge* “to assume any discussion of feminist theory

in this time ...without examining our many differences, and without a significant input from poor women , black and third world women and lesbians” (98)

What was separating women, Lorde contended, was not only the dissymmetrical power relations implied within gender’s multiple and overlapping axes of signification, but mostly, “the refusal to recognize those differences, and to examine the distortions which result from our misnaming them” (1984:115). This distortion was rooted in an analytical myopia carried out since Enlightenment times that had turned feminist theory into a conceptual fantasy around a flawed gender. It was flawed because it was added to other social categories as if they were layers that could be taken apart from each other. It did not thus stand for how the relations of power implicate one another.

In a way that rephrases Moraga’s theory of the flesh, Chela Sandoval depicts that what lies underneath this official cognitive mapping is a mental chart that responds to a *particular time and specific place*, a cultural territory that women of color had long named “the white movement” (2000: 43). All these accounts have been organized around a common code, a shared hegemonic logic in which gender boundaries were constrained to a sexual difference framework. Therefore, their general orientation suffered from a serious weakness: the lack of emphasis on differences *among* women. In extension, the descriptions of women’ differences from men seemed too often to involve homogeneous visions of womanhood (Nicholson 1990: 3) As Linda Nicholson explains, the tendency to deny differences among women was a “complex” one. Certainly, by late 1970s most second wave theorists were sensitive to the charges of exclusion that women of color, lesbians, working-class were making against many of the demands of the movement. However, “such assertions of differences were often made in conjunction with assertions of commonalities”, specifies Nicholson (4).This combination was made possible mostly because, individual identity is

seen as a composite of separable elements of race, class, sexuality, etc. “Within such metaphysics” argues Nicholson, “gender could be described in singular terms, under the assumption that the effects of race, class, sexuality etc merely “added on” to this commonality in gender” (Ibid) Not surprisingly, when that commonality was exposed and analyzed, it was done through the perspective of those of privilege. Hence, it stemmed out of an understanding of their experiences as normative or universal in which ‘white women’ seemed to theorize their identity and subjectivity as a ‘raceless’ experience.

On this ground, the desire for a universal sisterhood obscured the white, middle class reference point at the center of feminist inquiry in all its political spectrum (from liberal, to socialist, to radical feminist) which all draw, more or less critically, on Enlightenment thinking. While sometimes relationships among women’s lives are acknowledged, it is mostly the less privilege that tend to be seen as having their lives affected by the more privileged. Thus, these theorists tended to see, for example black or chicanas lives as shaped by the lives of white women but not vice versa. This tendency reinforced the idea that the lives of white women represented the norm. However, women of color critical intervention, as it has been depicted in *This Bridge’s* analysis, it argued that to understand the experiences of white women in the United States, is it required to analyze how ‘race’/ethnicity has shaped ‘white-middle class’ women’s lives in relation to women of color. In other words, instead of seeing white women as without race and women of color as similar except from having race, women of color were highlighting race and other social categories as that which constructs the lives of either white or color women in relation to each other. In order to do so, strategic alliances needed to be discussed, negotiated and implemented.

Chela Sandoval’s (1991) notion of the importance of ‘strategic identity’ for women of color represents an importance advance in understanding this process, as does her development of the

notion of 'oppositional consciousness'. In this strategic identity, negotiations among sameness, similarity and difference represent a radical departure from conventional practices. As we have seen in the official cognitive mapping, feminists and other social-theorist have defined differences oppositionally, in binary self-other terms which explained its development into an additive model of gender. However, this additive model inadvertently reinforced and exclusionary, 'invisible' norm that defined gender in simplistic terms. As Lorde explained, women have been trained to define differences "as deviations from a false standard" or what she calls the "*Mythical norm*" which as she elicits, "...is usually defined as white, thin, male, young, heterosexual, Christian and financially secure" (1984: 116; her emphasis). Nonetheless, differences would not disappear by virtue of being hidden or rejected beneath a façade of 'universal sisterhood'. On the contrary, what was at stake in this debate was how often the reverse occurs and differences grow stronger by seeking refuge in stereotypes, static labels and false generalizations.

Along these lines, in her essay "Third World Diva Girls" Bell Hooks claims that "no one really speaks about the way in which class privilege informs feminist notions of social behavior, setting standards that would govern all feminist interaction" (1990:89). And this imaginary location of gender did not only imply an unrealistic theoretical viewpoint but mostly, as Hooks points out, how "radically disempowering it is for people for underprivileged backgrounds" (90). To this regards, "It was only when women of color" argue Kum-Kum Bhavnani and Meg Coulson, "challenge among other things, hierarchies of power within feminism and the ways in which feminism, for all its universal claims, has maintained racist exclusions, theories and practices...that the women's liberation movement was disturbed" (2003: 74)

Thus, the invisibility and lack of recognition of women of color within the systematic studies of the 1970s and 1980s not only reveals the lack of inclusivity of second-wave feminism

to incorporate a long history of on-going challenges but mostly demonstrates a “structure of deficiency” within mainstream feminist praxis and its hegemonic model (Sandoval 2000: 46.7) Hence, “the inability to see further than their own liberation” (Gonzales 1981: 46) illustrates how the feminist theory produced from the decade of the 70s to the end of the 1980s was attacked by women of color as the articulation of an *imaginary space* (Sandoval 2000: 52.3) an ethnocentric collective illusion and theoretical delusion. Indeed, many of these interventions into the generic boundaries of expression came from women who did not conform into the generic identity formation of the conventional identity package of the 1980s. “If white American feminist theory need not deal with the differences between us” challenged Lorde:

and the resulting differences in aspects of our oppression, then what do you do with the fact that the women who clean your houses and tend your children while you attend conferences on feminist theory are, for the most part, poor and third world women? What is theory behind racist feminism? (1983: 100)

As I intended to reflect with this analysis, the absence of these considerations was weakening feminist discussions of the personal and the political. “Community must not mean a shedding of our differences”, Lorde concludes, “nor the pathetic pretence that these differences do not exist” (99)

In conclusion, it can be claimed that the early women’s liberation of the 1960s and 1970s largely lacked a developed theoretical approach to gender complexity. Even though the issue of differences was acknowledged, it was minimally incorporated into the basic threads of the theory. In this aspect, despite the significance of the category of ‘women’ as the subject of feminist inquiry, what was weakening the movement was the assertion of a notion of unity among women without much detailed analysis. As a result, ‘official’ gender theory had become an unreliable relying framework which attempted to reflect an imaginary unity that would bind ‘all women’,

regardless their particular circumstances, together politically. Ironically, as women of color provided a more elaborate critical thought, the tension created by a monolithic approach to sexual difference became evident and gender's supposedly unified front, as we will see on the next chapter, broke openly into disputes. If the epicenter of feminist theory could be de-centered and disentangled as an imaginary space, then, the interlocking social categories of gender could also be finally unthreaded.

*This Bridge Called My back* had been an attempt to do so. In its pages, women of color gathered their experiences to give birth to an unfolding gender that rejected mainstream meanings as much as the conventional reading practices which located and valorized those meanings. As a catalyst of the women of color movement, it addressed the ways in which so-called 'minority groups' reworked and transformed gender to meet its inseparable social layers. As Barbara Smith clearly stated in "Across The Kitchen Table. A Sister-to-Sister Dialogue: Barbara Smith and Beverly Smith":

We are in position to challenge the feminist movement as it stands to date (...)analysis of race and class oppression and our commitment to really dealing with these issues, including homophobia is organic to our very existence (127)

In the examination of a feminist theory as an imaginary location, women of color intervention turned key paradigms (sex vs. gender) into uncertainties. Once identified the limits of gender theory, its social and political boundaries would be shifted and new arenas would come into play. As a result, borders no longer provided an additive meaning but are interpreted as shifting and permeable. This destabilization would reflect a turning point between the political and theoretical priorities of feminist thought in the 1960s and 1970s on one side, and from the end of the 1980s onwards, on the other. Moreover, this range of alternatives implied a number of very different theoretical contents surrounding gender as an established category in feminist struggles,

as well as an array of different sorts of political strategies. Consequently, what was specific to gender theory was finally somehow unclear.

Thus, the women of color *This Bridge's* contributors represented, made clear that it was time for critical consciousness to move beyond the existing gender frameworks by exposing its hidden complexity and multiplicity. Only then, “the political correct stance of color, class and gender” (Moraga 1983: 206) would stop separating women from each other. Only then, the dividing walls and gulfs Anzaldúa is referring to in “La Prieta” would shrink and the profound silences could become a potential intercultural dialogue. As they undertook shifting gender perspectives in its strategic alliances, they enacted the very possibility of a future understanding among feminists.

### **3.5 HYBRIDITY**

On the task of challenging the mechanism of gender as a regulatory force, Gloria Anzaldúa tackled the restrictions which attend the naturalization of any notion of identity, from the perspective of ‘la nueva mestiza’. The ‘sisters outsiders’ of feminist theory claimed a new unnamed territory which Anzaldúa coined as *Borderlands/La Frontera: Mestiza Consciousness* (1987). This new consciousness alleged the awakening of a new psyche state of gender. Rather than essentialist and unitary, a new liberated gender proclaimed a notion of identity multiple and fragmented, partial and strategic, full of vibrancy and diversity fused together. The new gender she envisions becomes the answer to woman of color’s dilemma, which Anzaldúa describes:

by developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity [...] She learns to juggle cultures. She has a plural personality, she operates in a pluralistic mode – nothing is thrust out [...] nothing rejected, nothing is abandoned. Not only does she sustain contradictions, she turns the ambi-valence into something else (101)

This “something else” inverts and resolves ambivalence as empowerment, as capacity for action. In a fluid, plural transformational thinking process, the conflict of differences calls for a new interaction in which “nothing is rejected, nothing is abandoned”. To the extent that “she juggles cultures”...and allows antagonism and collision to cope, she aims at deconstructing the binary structure of gender difference from within. To sustain contradictions of a differential gender, Anzaldúa argued, is both a “struggle of flesh, a struggle of borders” (100) but in this ability to take action, (r)evolution occurs and the “morphogenesis” (103) of gender unfolds. As she explains:

The work of *mestiza* consciousness is to break down the subject-object duality and to show in the flesh and through the images of her work how duality is transcended. The answer to the problem between the white race and the colored, between males and females, lies in *healing the split* that originates in the very foundation of our lives, our culture, our languages, our thoughts (102; emphasis mine)

The struggle, intellectual and political, to heal the split that divides mainstream feminists to those who inhabit the margin of canonical knowledge, that accountability to the social categories of an unmarked gender, becomes the driving force of an interlocking implication. To this end, through the acknowledgement that “the self and the race have been wounded” (109), the struggle against sexism, racism, classism, homophobia and other types of discrimination arose as sites of interpellation against a mainstream logic of domination.

With the ‘mestiza consciousness’, therefore, a new psychic subjectivity developed in such a chameleonic fashion that it did not respect previous boundaries any longer. Able to distinguish between “*lo heredado, lo adquirido, lo impuesto.*” Anzaldúa argues for a “deconstruction-construction process” in which, adopting new perspectives towards minority

groups, “She learns to transform the small “I” into the total Self...*se hace moldadora de su alma*” (104/5; her emphasis).

This constructive aspect of gender is most clearly seen and intended in Anzaldúa’s dialectical tension and amplification of gender boundaries. With the intention to break down the rigid border lines between apparently separate categories of meaning, she synthesizes a multiple dimension of gender in a new value system which questions any criteria of authenticity or cultural purism. Moreover, as it happened with the consciousness of a third world within a first world, boundaries stop being a territorial concept *per se* to become identity positions. As a mutant gender in a continuous process of de-codification, her mestiza gender was setting the basis of an intersectional mind-set as theory and method. As she signals her intention to profoundly altering dualistic western thinking, “la mestiza constantly has to shift out of habitual formations”, she asseverates:

from convergent thinking, analytical reasoning that tends to use rationality to move towards a single goal (a Western mode), to divergent thinking, characterized by moving away from set patterns and goals and toward a more whole perspectives one that includes rather than excludes (429)

If analytical reason needed to be revoked by divergent thinking in order to liberate gender from its appropriative, exploitative or imperialist articulation, one of the first steps toward intersectionality would be the challenge of applying a postcolonial strategy. To the extent that a critical mestiza gender attempts to dismantle the effects of ‘colonized’ knowledge, it positions social categories on the borders of its static meaning in such a way as to challenge their partitioning effects.

This ‘divergent thinking’ therefore was aimed at the breaking down the limitations within feminist theory. AnaLouise Keating, who would later become the co-editor of Anzaldúa in the latest edition of *This Bridge* (2002) analyses this re-colocation of critical theory that the ‘mestiza

consciousness' represents as the liberation of "status-quo stories". On her view, 'status quo' viewpoints correspond to "worldviews that normalize and naturalize the existing social system, values, and standards". Therefore they "contain core beliefs about reality" that people have internalized unquestioned. As she further elucidates:

Status-quo stories train us to believe that the way things are is the way always has been and the way it must be. This belief becomes self-fulfilling: we do not try to make change because we believe that change is impossible to make. Status-quo stories are divisive, teaching us to break the world into parts and label each. We read this label as natural descriptions about reality (Keating 2010: 83)

Let's analyse for example how race functions in mainstream culture. People have become so accustomed to identifying each other based on skin color, physiological features and other external markers that it is assumed racial categories are factually accurate, unchanging and homogenous. As Keating argues, these assumptions –coupled with our daily unthinking references to 'race' "create race, making it more permanent and inflexible". Similar comments could be made about sexuality, gender and other identity categories. "Trapped by labels, we cannot engage fully" says Keating (Ibid). As Andrea Canaan explained in *This Bridge*, the 'real enemy' that prevents the celebration of differences is found in prejudice and prefabricated stereotypes:

The enemy is our urgent need to stereotype and close off people, places and events into isolated categories . Hatred, distrust, irresponsibility, unloving, classism, sexism, and racism, in their myriad of forms, cloud our vision and isolate us. This closed and limited view....we close off avenues of communication and vision so that individual and communal trust, responsibility, loving, and knowing are impossible (1983: 236)

The power of the world to determine reality, or the perception of reality, is both simultaneously poignantly ironic and imaginatively compelling. On this ground, the "urgent need" to label is the result of being trained and indoctrinated to read and judge identity in reference to 'status quo' stories. Since Enlightenment times, a supremacist world view has been based on rational thought and hierarchical binary thinking that has resulted in a restrictive

framework that labels, divides and segregates based on socially defined differences (see Keating 2009: 84). When people get labelled by color, gender, sexuality, religion or by any other politically charged social difference, people isolate themselves from those whom are assumed to be different. As a result, identity perceptions get distorted, creating arbitrary divisions which prevent feminists from recognizing potential commonalities.

In the same line of thinking, in *Living Chicana Theory*, Chela Sandoval in her essay “Mestizaje as a Method: Feminist-of-Color Challenge the Cannon”, analyzes ‘la conciencia de la mestiza’ as a “differential consciousness” (1998: 358) that comes from a “developed subjectivity capable of transformation and relocation” (359). Academically speaking, Sandoval discovers the links that tie the mestiza form of Chicana feminism to U.S. Third World feminist criticism in an effort to demonstrate how “both have inspired and engendered an emerging cross-disciplinary and transnational politics of resistance that is increasingly theorized as “border”, “hybrid” or “*mestiza*” in nature”(353). For Sandoval, the “Mestiza feminism” that Anzaldúa has created is an “unexplored mode of historical consciousness” (355); it’s the “technical aspect” that gives coherence to Third World Feminism as a theory and method that is based on the great global struggles for decolonization and that, above all, dreams to get to signify:

solidarity among new masses of people differentiated by nationality, ethnicity, language, class, race, culture, sex and gender demarcations but who were allied nevertheless by virtue of their similar socio-historical, racial and colonial relationships to dominant powers (355-6)

In the pursuit of recalling Anzaldúa’s new consciousness, Chicana and theorist Maria Lugones invokes ‘mestizaje’ as the curling dimension of gender that calls out the purity of foundational knowledge. “*Mestizaje* defies control” she says, “through simultaneously asserting the impure, curdled multiple state and rejecting fragmentation into pure parts. In this

play of assertion and rejection, the mestiza is unclassifiable, unmanageable she has no pure parts to be “had” controlled” (1994: 160). Thus, ‘mestiza consciousness’ alludes to a critic positioning reached through a political and personal displacement, trespassing the boundaries of embodied identities and knowledge discourses.

As Lugones points out, by challenging standard notions of gender (Im)purity, a new analytical flexibility demands the incorporation of the “unclassifiable, unmanageable” social categories. Additionally, there is a fundamental epistemic challenge, since ‘mestizaje’ enables the production of new knowledge that does not fit within mainstream gender structure. In doing so, women of color were somehow undermining the very legitimacy of the category of gender itself by addressing the imperative of a new body of both knowledge and theory based on the particular positioning and specificity of differences among women.

### **3. 6: THE POLITICS OF LOCATION**

Born out of the fusion between feminist theory and multiculturalism, cultural studies and post-colonial theory, women of color were leading a new look at the ambiguity of an essentialist and unitary gender. Its name: ‘The ‘politics of location’ (Rich 1986: 212) In “Notes toward a Politics of Location”, white feminist Adrienne Rich highlights what Moraga and her theory of gender’s flesh had already depicted as the first material location of the self; that is, the body as source of our nearest and most relying critical knowledge. Acknowledging thus her theoretical indebtedness to women of color, she coins as ‘the politics of location’ the necessary point of departure of any gender analysis. To these regards, Rich wonders how was it possible that white

feminists had educated themselves about such enormous amount of knowledge over the past twenty years that “how come they hadn’t also educated themselves about women of color women when it is the very key of their survival as a movement?” (cited in Lorde 1983: 100)

In a number of essays in her collection, she provocatively writes about the politics of her location as white, lesbian feminist in North America. Attempting to extent women of color critical gaze toward identity, Rich shares their sense of urgency as she targets mainstream feminists to re-examine the politics of their location in North America. “The need to examine not only racial and ethnic identity”, Rich elicits:

but location in the United States of North America. As a feminist in the United States is seemed necessary to examine how we participate in mainstream Cultural chauvinism, the sometimes unconscious belief that white North Americans posses a superior right to judge, select and ransack other cultures, ... we can’t explode into breadth without a conscious grasp on the particular and concrete meaning of our location here and now (162)

By being primarily interested in U. S. white academy becoming more self-reflexive about their location in the world, she has been attacked on the grounds that her argument remains “locked into the conventional opposition of the global-local nexus as well as the binary construction of Western-non Western” (Kaplan 1996:166) in such a way that the issue of accountability gets dramatically reduced to Western-non Western women. While acknowledging its theoretical flaw, I would like to stress, however, that the importance of her intervention far exceeds any punctual critiques. For ever since, the imperative to position gender would change the way feminist theory would be authorized to theorize from, to speak in behalf of. Thus, ‘the politics of location’ summarized women of color major insights into a new gender cross-examination, allowing the unique and genuine character of women’s experiences to finally become both the source and analysis of critical knowledge. Indeed, as Rich asserts, the awareness that, “a place on the map is a place in history” (212) requires engagement with particular locations, specific

experiences and concrete political priorities. Thereby, the emphasis on location potentially became a social variable regulator which denotes a profound understanding that one's story remains inseparable from one's history. The fight against arrogant and privileged theoretical abstractions thus starts by reconciling the idea of attributing gender to the advent of -ahistorical woman experience.

In fact, "a location is not a self-appointed and self-designated subject position" argues theorist Rosi Bradotti "It is a collectively shared and constructed, jointly occupied spatial-temporal territory" (Jaggar and Young 1997: 197) That is, it requires a process of conscious raising that demands a political awakening (see Grewal and Kaplan 1994). "This means", continues Bradotti, "that 'embodied' accounts illuminate and transform our knowledge of ourselves and the world. Thus, black women's texts and experiences make white women see the limitations of our locations, truths and discourses" (198). As the mestiza consciousness depicted, 'the politics of location', as cartographies of power, instead of thinking in oppositional terms, it stressed the simultaneity of axes of oppression. In doing so, it challenged earlier feminisms which locked women into silences and repressions of critical aspects of their subject positioning (non-white, lesbian, working-class).

Decapitating the 'universal woman' as an authority-voice, the paradox of the subject raised and a radical concept of the self highlighted the importance of situating oneself to produce reliable knowledge<sup>67</sup>. A new cognitive mapping of gender and its interlocking social categories meant that feminist struggle was no longer a synonym of resistance to relations of domination (in its broad ahistorical patriarchal sense) but "the capacity for action that specific relations of domination enable and facilitate" (Mahmood 2005: 203). To the extent that certain women are positioned by a

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<sup>67</sup>Later on, Donna Haraway would nuance it as the imperative of "Situated Knowledge" to achieve feminist objectivity (1991: 581).

particular combination of social categories, a situated empowerment, that is, the politics of location, explores the ways in which individuals can formulate themselves in relation to the narratives and representation which characterize their daily axes of oppression/privilege in a particular time and space. As Rich emphasizes, the “white theory of the academy” had yet to comprehend the writings that over decades have formed that political theory of women of color. “White feminists have read and used in class the anthology *This Bridge Called my Back: Radical Writings by Women of color*”, she contends, “however, it’s been mainly reduced as a irritable attack against white women” (222). Undermining the experience of simultaneity and interlocking systems of oppressions/privilege (Combahee River Collective) mainstream gender theory thus was occupying the only space of critique and making it the primary form and content of women’s studies production. As she portrays, this narrow-minded approach to women of color writings situates ‘white feelings’ at the center of the debate at a time when sisterhood’s understandings implied the willingness to integrate all colors to the center of feminism. Bottom line, she wonders: “Who are we?” (Ibid)

Hence, the politics of situating oneself brought the promise of the personal articulating the political; that is, new theories written from the self but able to move beyond the self to the conception of a collective woman, which requires recognizing the diversity of women and their specific contexts of oppression (Eisenstein 1994:484). For Adrienne Rich, the political category “all women” had turned into a faceless, raceless, classless classification (1986: 219). Mostly, what Rich is defending is the beginning of a new feminist theory once the specific positioning of the subject is acknowledged and the material realms of the geographical locations embedded in the body, are finally integrated in critical analysis. That is, when it was brought consciousness to the political, economic and situated nature to all forms of experience and knowledge. This new

theorizing not only meant the re-configuration of precedent discursive boundaries but the transformation of a historical consciousness of gender that had begun with the ‘consciousness of a third world within a first world’ (*This Bridge*)

In conclusion, ‘politics of location’ identified the grounds of socio-cultural specific differences and similarities among women in diverse and asymmetrical relations, creating alternatives gender perspectives that would generate a different receptivity within academic circles toward women of color critical insights.

### **3.7. THE BIRTH OF AN INTERSECTIONAL GENDER**

In the quest for theories of multiple oppressions, once identified gender limits, its social and political boundaries were shifted and hence new arenas for study came into play. The new emphasis on ‘situating experience’ and an interlocking vision of gender involved moving away from a linear, stage gender to an exploration on how a hybrid gender theory emerges, takes root, changes, travels, translates, and transplants in different spacio/temporal contexts.

As we have previously seen, having emerged from a founding act of subversion, *This Bridge*, the mythical cast of Women of Color/ Third World Feminism in the U.S, had critically destabilized the positivist notion of theory as a logically, self-developing entity, bringing into play a two-fold process aimed at simultaneously dismantling and constructing gender. On the dismantling side, it required the contributions to theory of women of color to move Women’s Studies into an intellectual position in which racism, ethnocentrism and all isms, could be effectively challenged. On the constructing process, it gave birth to a new cutting edge

epistemology which was craving to be named. In this section, therefore, I would locate the specific birth of intersectionality as a concept theoretically formulated and validated within women of color academic circles at the end of the decade of the 1980s. As the synthesis of clashing views and methodological awakenings (the politics of location) I argue that its birth, albeit not fully grasped at its time of articulation, summarizes the spirit of an on-going debate that goes back to 1970s: that is, the imperative to theorize identity and subjectivity through an interlocking and intertwined mind-set.

Within this context, a year later after the publication of Alzandua's 'Mestiza consciousness', Deborah King in her essay "Multiple Jeopardy, Multiple Consciousness: The Context of a Black Feminist Ideology" (1988), coined as "triple oppression" the categories of ethnicity, class, and sexuality as the specifiable constituents of gender that are anchored firmly in the material fiber of women of color concrete reality. This term "triple oppression" tied up previous vindications of social and academic invisibility as much as it revolved against the idea of oppression as if it only could come in separate, monolithic forms. However, 'triple' was restricting in itself since it didn't allow for multiple re-conceptualizations of social categories.

At the peak of all these debates, a cascade of new meanings finally originated. In "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics" (1989), the African American Kimberlé Crenshaw coined '*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. More specifically, in "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color" (1991), relaying heavily on the previous work of women of color, Crenshaw developed a more structural and political approach in the

particular context of gender violence against women of color. Her original intention thus was to depict how this group of women was more vulnerable to be victims of domestic violence or rape as in compared to white women. For Crenshaw, echoing *This Bridge's* contributors, the social and cultural subordination of women of color can be located at the margins of both feminist and anti-racist discourses. In her view, both failed to identify the interlocking nature of gender and 'race'/ethnicity and its subsequent impact on their lives. Therefore, what her analysis sought to heighten was an essentialist viewpoint of 'gender violence' that lacked an approach to differences among women. Moreover, anti-racist praxis had historically focused on the stereotype of 'black man' as the rapist of white women, an approach that obscured an analysis of gender violence among people of color (see Davis 2008:70). In sum, to the extent that gender violence was explicitly conceptualized as a 'white issue', women of color were inevitably left out of the analysis.

Hence, bringing into play a well-known case among anti-racist circles "Whose Story is It, Anyway?; Feminist and Antiracist Appropriations of Anita Hill"<sup>68</sup> (Morrison 1992) Crenshaw formulates intersectionality as the necessary condition of women of color's identity in order to give voice to their experiences. 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). On conceptualizing this distinction, Crenshaw aimed at "resisting the conflation of the positional and the discursive" (Yuval-Davis 2006:194) realms. According to her view, then, structural intersectionality is concerned:

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<sup>68</sup> The African-American Anita Faye Hill, professor of social policy, law and Women's Studies, became a public figure after testifying against her former supervisor, the U.S Supreme Court Justice Claire Thomas, alleging that she was continuously exposed to his provocative and harassing sexual statements (1991). Having aroused a great deal of interest in U.S. media, her case is considered to have lifted public awareness of the issue of sexual harassment at work.

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)

Political intersectionality, on its part, helps to unravel how “both feminist and antiracist politics”, Crenshaw argues, “have functioned in tandem to marginalize the issue of violence against women of color” (Ibid.). 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) introduces “the matrix of oppression” as the mechanism that informs a multifaceted gender. In her view, if gender represented the ‘politics of empowerment’ for all women, it would necessary have to derive from the awareness of the intersectional nature and political impact of its social vectors. “Instead of starting with gender and the adding in other variables such as age, social orientation, social class, a religion”, 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. Assuming that each system needs the others in other to function creates a distinct theoretical stance that stimulates the rethinking of basic social sciences concepts (226)

In this process of redesigning social concepts, one of the contributors of *This Bridge* Mitsuye Matsuda, in her essay “Beside My Sister, Facing the Enemy: Legal Theory out of Coalition” (1991) reinforced the imperative of an intersectional analysis through the strategy of making ‘the other question’. “The way I try to understand the interconnection of all forms of subordination”, she explains:

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? (189)

In the attempt to answer ‘the other question’, the concept of intersectionality helps to reveal the complex relationships among categories and their corresponding political implications. In other words, the lack of awareness of the interrelating characterization of gender with other social signifiers makes the analysis of racism, classism, sexism and heterosexism difficult since it obscures their power dynamics across social and cultural boundaries therefore reproducing and producing inequality among women. This codification of difference occurs through the naturalization of analytical categories which are supposed to have cross-cultural validity. Hence, if ‘asking the other question’ what is left unsaid, can potentially unearthed.

With this strategy therefore it can be claimed that intersectionality demonstrates both the proximity and indivisibility of gender with other social categories, as well as indicating that they are inextricably linked to other forms of social and cultural knowledge. Moreover, this new intersectional gaze towards identity and subjectivity would open up the avenue towards the disruption of the prevailing additive model of gender.

To these regards, transcending *The Color of Gender* (1994), Zillah Eistein argues that an intersectional approach to gender illuminates how feminists are better off radicalizing and specifying their differences than speaking only from those differences. “I believe”, she declares, “that feminism must not only recognize the differences between women but nurture those differences”. “This means”, she concludes, “that feminists must stretch beyond themselves”(10). However, even though as a strategy, intersectionality aimed at foregrounding analytical categories which addressed cross-cultural, cross-national differences among women, the magnified target of their particular experiences as women of color, entangled its inclusive potentiality. Despite it aimed not at effacing, but at enhancing differences among women in terms of class, ethnicity, sexual orientation, its articulation was being too specific (women of color biased) to be broadly

embraced. As it will be discussed in the next chapter, due to its strong focus on ‘identity politics’, the potential to formulate more adequate standards of evaluation and judgment of power dynamics currently under way therefore would fade away in the decade of the 1990s.

As stressed by many scholars (MacCall 2005, Yuval-Davis 2006, Davis 2008, Berger and Guidroz 2009, Lykke 2010) even though Crenshaw has been credited to be the first person to introduce ‘intersectionality as a new cutting-edge epistemology, a focus on the interlocking nature of engendered power differentials and normative identity markers, was not a new idea in feminist theory when the notion was first launched into circulation. On one of the many recent articles on intersectionality, British feminists scholars Avtar Brah and Ann Phoenix (2004), trace its genealogies back to the nineteenth century in the tensions between an incipient feminist movement and the anti-slave movement, quoting the famous speech by the former slave Sojourner Truth (chapter 1). In addition, the classic “Black Feminist Statement” of the Combahee River Collective (Chapter 3) stressed an “integrated analysis” to understand that the “major systems of oppression are interlocking”. Moreover, as European theorist Nina Lykke points out, the metaphor of interlocking suggests a vision of power dynamics which unlike, Crenshaw’s roads crossing, cannot be separated (Lykke 2010:79). Indeed, welcomed by many as the refreshing articulation of an insight that had already been put forward by self identified ‘women of color’ (Prins 2006: 277), it heighten the colonial legacy underneath systems of domination that were systematically glossing over the experiences of marginal groups.

Consequently, as a utopian claim, endowed with a remarkable visionary charge, the excessive emphasis on the experiences of women of color, as it will be conveyed in the next chapter, nonetheless clouded an enthusiastic reception on behalf of mainstream gender theory towards an intersectional approach to gender. The exclusive nature of identity politics categories

such as 'women of color' would be therefore attacked by post-structuralist and postmodern feminists on the grounds that reproduce a discourse of division and separation among women.

Nonetheless, not only having revoked dominant gender theory as an imaginary location, women of color movement had already unravelled that gender does not rely on unitary positions but on situated and strategic identity locations. Gender, ethnicity, class and sexual social categories are intersectional to the extent that they respond to specific power dynamics yet undergo continual transformations in complex interactions with other categories of meaning. By the end of the 1980s, no feminist scholar in the U. S could deny any longer that the transgression of pre-established gender boundaries that women of color had long been craving for, it was finally starting to be approached by a diversified feminist standpoint. Gender was finally up to the scrutiny of how is both produced and uncovered in feminist discourses and how "definitions of experience, with attendant notions of unity and difference, form the very basis of this production" (Mohanty 1992:76) A multifaceted self-positioning of gender, once enraged and divisive was now more receptive to an intercultural feminist exchange. Refusing to accept any single, unified self, their 'intersectional gender unity' created a new discourse which sought to incorporate the contradictory aspects of their gender with other social categories. Once the anger was healed through printed words and typed dreams of bridges among women, differences would be progressively transformed into a source of empowerment and knowledge.

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## CHAPTER 4

### DIFFERENCES AS A SOURCE OF EMPOWERMENT AND AGENCY (1990s)

... we need to learn that there is no escape from the multilayered structure of  
own on encoded history and language

Bradotti *Feminist Philosophies* :204

#### 4.1: MAPPING THE GROUNDS FOR THE DEBATE

As we have seen, the challenges that women of color began to raise for Women's Studies in the 1980s was forcing feminist theory to rethink its interwoven vectors of oppression and analysis. (Pryse 2000: 107). Moreover, with the demands of an economic globalization-engine in Anglo-European context, the emerging politics of intersectionality in specific contexts traced new cartographies of power among feminists which compelled feminist theory to become more self-critical. Indeed, the moment that feminists became aware of differences as that specific dimension of women's experiences and not as the universal feminine condition, it can be affirmed that a new era was inaugurated within gender theory (see Lauretis 1990). In the wake of ever-growing doubts about the political and theoretical validity of what the category of

'woman' referred to, the 'politics of location' had made unclear whether an intensification of emphasis on sexual difference as the variable which bonds all women's experiences, was possible to be sustained any longer. As a result, feminist theory had to rethink itself through the recognition and celebration of differences. From the decade of the 90s onwards, therefore, the interlocking systems of oppression, the axes of privilege and discrimination, that is, 'race'/class/ gender/sexual orientation, etc. would become the new 'mantra' within Women's Studies.

Hence, by the beginning of the decade of the 1990s, the concept of gender did not appear to offer more than a merely negative or reactive criticism of mainstream thinking. Indeed, would be a peculiar empty terminology, "a 'critical stance' without a critique" asserts Chris Beasley, "if it were so limitless that it could not be somewhat more specifically characterized" (1999: 21). Gender thus becomes less final and more open, in which its intersectional categories were starting to be viewed as necessarily permanently or intrinsically fixed or subject to variable interpretation.

At this point, I consider important to highlight that besides feminist/gender theory, there had been major unprecedented theoretical changes within western logic, all determined to provide alternative frameworks for conceptualizing signification. As it has been explored in chapter 2, since the 1960s and 1970s, the politization 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 des-articulation of a universal subject. Thus, with an emphasis on linguistic structures, semiotics and deconstruction, in the

questioning of meta-narratives of the West, enlightenment abstractions broke down due to its universalizing and totalizing nature (Oliva 236).

In the reconfiguration undertaken by all these epistemological viewpoints, the concept of the 'subject' turned into a powerful signifier that had plural meanings that were context specific (see Weedon 2003:112). In this sense, the legitimacy of a political subject with rights and duties comparable to those of men had long been a key feminist struggle. To these regards, women of color critical insights brought into bear the power dynamics operating between authority subjects and 'minority groups'. Strategic alliances and an intersectional approach demanded the 'politics of location' of a subject that was gender manifold in nature.

In this radical locateness of the subject, the decade of the 1990s would witness the emergence and institutionalization of 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. On these grounds, since the 1970s the capitalist structure of labor force in over-developed countries had been profoundly reshaped through technological innovation (see chapter 2). Central to this 'post-modern condition', first characterized by the French Philosopher and literary critic Jean-Francois Lyotard (1993) was a revolution of what Marx depicted as 'forces of production'. Hence, in the dawn of economic globalization and a current technological and cyber revolution, postmodernist theories reflected an epistemological problematic within traditional philosophy and social theory aimed at the dis-identification of normative standards (see Suárez 2008: 41. In this new postmodern scenario, "the mind" argues Nancy Fraser, "is conceived as reflecting or mirroring reality, to a discursive problematic, in which culturally constructed social meaning are accorded density and weight" (Fraser1995a: 157). Framed thus in a persistent critique towards Western universalism, the swift carried the

condition diagnosed by Lyotard in which the questioning of modernity standards becomes the new character of capitalist societies.

In addition to its political dimension, the term 'subject' also became ingrained in a grammatical meaning embedded in the linguistic structures and predicates which were central to post-structuralist theories of subjectivity. In these theories, the identification with the position of the subject in language constitutes the subjectivity of the individual. Moreover, 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).

For the purpose of describing the titanic impact of post-structuralist and postmodernist theories<sup>69</sup> unto gender perspectives, I would concisely specify the main points that would determine the fructiferous nature of an interdisciplinary cross-over within the debate of differences among women. Thus, for the sake of the argument, I will summarize the chief theoretical approaches that, apart from women of color insights, most influenced gender theory in the 1990s.

## **4.2: STEPPING INTO POSTMODERN THEORIES**

To begin to map some of nodal points that will conduce to the demarcation of the main theoretical approaches that were involved in the debate of the 1990s, I'll begin with a brief exploration of postmodernism and the main proposals from postmodernist feminists.

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<sup>69</sup> Postmodern, in this sense, is broader than poststructuralism, since encompasses not only F. Derrida, Lacan but also theorists as Habermass, Gramsci, Bakhtin and Bourdieu.

When in 1984 Fredric Jameson wrote his essay, “Postmodernism and Consumer Society”, the transnational nature of his reflections were not completely grasped. However, one year later, “Postmodernism and the Cultural Logic of late Capitalism” became one of the most popular texts within the academic circles at that time. His warnings against the imperialist nature of transnational capital and the imperative need to socially acknowledge its neo-colonial goals resonated with despair and pessimism. The time for social utopias was over and a new cultural imaginary was on the rise: markets that cross all kinds of boundaries, inventing and imposing the rules of their own games, fueled by profitable dreams that feed the consumer’s desire with invisible green-house gases as the contested engine of our economic globalization. In the same way that in *The Communist Manifesto* Marx and Engels warned of systematic social changes that the privatization of capital and its subsequent transnational exchanges would bring, Fredric Jameson theorizes in techno-logistic neo-Marxism view about the danger of this transnational capital in the hands of greedy multinationals which dominate their own capitalist networks and disguise this perversion under the label of ‘globalization’. But in contrast to what Marx postulates, Jameson is not hopeful about the possibility of a new global citizenship able to handle and discharge the subjectivity crisis of the ‘first world’ (he mostly focuses on the U.S.) and to defy its cultural, economic, political and psychic transmutations (see Chela Sandoval 2000). However, Jameson still has faith in the possibility of identifying new paradigms which would mobilize an ‘oppositional consciousnesses’ filled with a new set of ethics and politics. What he defines as the “first world culture” has undergone a radical paradigm-shift in terms of an “explosion of the cultural in the social from a new cultural dominant logic or hegemonic norm” (1984: 87).

At this point, and due to the well-known academic recognition of Fredric's biases and assumptions, I consider a crucial critical engagement to provide a gender perspective of his premises. Frankly, this revisionism is not aimed at discarding or devaluating his theory but rather to make visible the linkage between traditional social/cultural studies and an androcentric perspective in which constituencies of feminists, particularly women of color, are seemingly 'absent' and continually appropriated in academic theory.

For this reason, although Jameson anticipates a revival of radical cultural politics as an alternative to globalization, his analysis is blurred by the androcentric amnesia that prevents him from realizing that feminism, as much as postmodernism, was already one of the leading radical currents of the XXth century. In his postulates, Jameson completely ignores that, one decade prior, emerging Third world feminism in the U.S, was already referring to these 'neo-colonial powers' as interlocking systems of oppression (Combahee River Collective). Moreover, the very same year that he published his article, Jameson might have disregarded the fact that the women of color movement in the U.S, the very new transnational citizens he was foreseeing, were already theorizing a new paradigm-shift: the awareness of a 'third' world within a 'first world' (*This Bridge* 1981, 1983). Indeed, the oppositional otherness that Frederick Jameson invokes, was progressively turning into a differential identity (mestiza consciousness, politics of location, intersectionality)

Nonetheless, and in order to make a virtue of such male-centered theoretical defects, I would defend that his emphasis on economic globalization provided a platform for oppositional, differential consciousness to be more receptive within gender theory, as this oppositional positioning, albeit previously theorized by women of color, would become one of the main characteristics of postmodern feminists. Hence, as Frederick Jameson had predicted,

to combat the transnational forces of the ‘first world’, the western subject would necessary have to take different forms. Thus, a new-epistemology of net-worked complexity began to emerge in different disciplines, a convergence already theorized by Katherine- Hayles in *Chaos Bound* (1990) and George Landow in *Hypertext 2.0* (1997) (see López-Varela 2012)

Postmodern feminists therefore combined a criticism to an andocentric subject of modernity with an emphasis on partial, fragmented identities mediated by highly technological and virtual scenarios (see Zalbidea 2009). Their focus in 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 a fascinating conjuncture between science-technology and gender theory, from the mid 1990s and following on the postmodernist phase, a new brand of ‘materialism’ emerges. One exciting voice in this debate would be Donna Haraway and her proposal of a ‘cyber feminist identity’.

Moving away from a conception of cyberspace as a initially described ‘consensual imagination’ in the fiction of science-fiction writer William Gibson<sup>70</sup>, Haraway redefines it as a tool for analyzing reality and the complex interactions between body and technology. Hence, the figure of the ‘cyborg’ invoked by Haraway emerges from such interactions to call into question the binarisims that have structured Western thought. In a “Manifesto for Cyborgs:

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<sup>70</sup> William Gibson explores the complexity of living in computer-mediated and information-saturated environments in his influential cyberpunk trilogy *Neroromancer* (1984), *Count Zero* (1986) and *Mona Lisa Overdrive* (1988).

Science, Technology and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s” Haraway depicts cyborgs as contradictory boundary creatures who “make very problematic the statuses of man or woman, artefact, member of a race, individual identity, or body” (1990: 220). “The cyborg is resolutely committed to partiality, irony, intimacy, and perversity” Haraway specifies:

It is oppositional, utopian, and completely without innocence. No longer structured by the polarity of public and private, the cyborg defines a technological polis based partly on a revolution of social relations (151)

Its redemptive nature enables “revolutions of social relations” to take place. Precisely, it is at the collision of social interactions where it can be located the potential to destabilize imposing social categories. Her argument goes then that, in the age of globalization, under the impact of technology, social life is marked by a set of technological mediations. There is therefore no unmediated relationship to experience. In this sense, she follows Foucault (1977) and his approach to the discursive construction of bodies within social system<sup>71</sup>.

Thus, she draws on virtual scenarios for the advancement of re-conceptualizing a new understanding of gender and its differences. Moreover, cyberspace offers opportunities to experiment with ‘mutating gender identities’ (women of color, mestiza consciousness) and hybrid bodies in a gesture to destabilize the hegemonic discourses of gender. Hence, cyborgs can be thought of as “promising and dangerous monsters who help redefine the pleasures and politics of embodiment and feminist writing” (1990:221). As a hybrid, body-machine cyborg-gender thus deliberately blurs categorical distinctions (human/machine, nature/culture).

Proposing a middle ground regarding the methodological clashes between women of color and postmodernist feminist, Haraway addresses and couples both the postmodern emphasis on issues of technological change with its subsequent impact on structural

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<sup>71</sup> It could be said that Haraway redesigned Foucault ‘bio-politics’ in a technological era. By mid-late nineties, Foucault’s analysis, framed in post-industrial societies, had become obsolete.

inequalities and women of color's insights on the intersectional matrix of power surrounding gender. "Gender", argues Haraway "is always a relationship, not a preformed category of beings.....differentiated by nation, generation, class, lineage, color and much else" (Haraway, 1997:28). Moreover, in the introduction to *Simians, Cyborgs and Women* (1991) Donna Haraway acknowledges women of color's critical intervention in the fight against Euro-American feminist humanism "in their devastating assumptions of master narratives deeply indebted to racism and colonialism" (21). "White women, including socialist feminists" Haraway recalls:

discovered (that is, were forced kicking and screaming to notice) the non-innocence of the category woman". That consciousness changes the geography of all previous categories; it denatures them as heat denatures a fragile protein. Cyborg feminists have to argue that "we" do not want any natural matrix of unity, and that no construction is whole (157)

Rather than essentialist and unitary, no longer determined by dichotomies and rigid binaries, a cybor gender identity implies the affirmation of partial identities and provisional positions. To the extent that 'the politics of location' embraces the provisional and the contradictory of the postmodern condition, gender thus embodies a more partial location. In "Situated Knowledges: the Science Question and the Privilege of the Partial Perspective" (1988). According to Haraway, fuelled with complexity and provisional meanings, the new postmodern gender has turned into a 'situated knowledge'. Thus, on her view, "identities seem contradictory, partial and strategic" (1991: 155). With this formulation, Haraway attempts to couple postmodern fragmentation with women of color's critical insights. Thus, on one side, it recognizes the 'politics of location' as the specific and always partial positioning on the self. Moreover, it celebrates the interlocking and contradictory nature of gender identity. Additionally, it recognizes a subject able to negotiate 'strategic alliances' on the basis of concrete interactions. Moreover, the dissolution between the physical body and identity

provides an opportunity for the conventions underlying the construction of gender and other social categories to be subverted.

Rosi Bradotti, in her reading of Haraway asserts that her cyborg theory emphasizes that multiplicity does not necessarily has to lead to relativism thus it allows Haraway to think specificity through what Haraway has depicted as situated knowledge (1988). The dualism body-machine is not only “a gesture of separation and of hierarchical coding” but a celebration of intersectional relationship. “Haraway argues” affirms Bradotti “for a multifaceted foundational theory, for an anti-relativistic acceptance of differences, so as to seek for connections and articulations in a non-gender centered and non-ethnocentric perspective” (1998:210).

Despite sharing however a ‘multifaceted, non gender-gender oriented and non-ethnocentric perspective’, women of color remained skeptical towards a ‘cyborg metaphor’ for its tendency to articulate a universal framework of identity. Furthermore, although it made evident a commitment to embodied existence and experience, (see Wolmark 1998: 228) the main clash therefore with women of color came from postmodernist emphasis on ‘fragmentated’ identities. As we have seen in the previous chapter, women of color demanded the recognition of multiplicity and hybridity, but not fragmentation. “Only your labels split me” had defied Gloria Alzandúa in her ‘the left-handed world’ questioning thus whether cybor imaginative space can provide an analytical framework in which the norms and expectations of conventional gender identity can be undermined, thus enabling [or not] gender identity to be re-conceptualized.

Adding on to this debate, critics of cyber-feminism have also focused on the difficulties of dealing with notions of embodiment in the virtual realm and on the construction of

engendered bodies in cyberspace. To this regards, debates have tended to center on whether virtual realities can be a site for the construction of alternative identities or whether cyberspace simply reproduces existing cultural conventions and identities. Therefore, it has been revoked on the grounds that life online remains the privilege of a relatively small number of people. Although the number is increasing, there is still limited access to discussion groups, software engineering and computer science. This has provoked a reaction to make visible the structural inequalities that prevent minority groups for not being able to access the web. Critics such as Dale Spender (1995) Zoe Sofia for example argue that inequalities inherent in society (mostly they focus on the educational system) are predisposed to exclude participation in computer-mediated communication. What this revisionism aims at challenging then, is the interrogation on whether is possible that culturally constructions of gender may disappear in cyberspace or they would end up reproducing the existing ones.

#### **4.3. THE ROLE AND RE-SIGNIFICATION OF POSTSTRUCTURALIST THEORIES**

On the same ground, the analysis of the subject and subjectivity became central to poststructuturalist theories as developed mainly by Derrida, Lacan and Foucault. In the process of using language as either thoughts or speech, thinking subjects position themselves. As a major trait that these theorists shared in common was a critique of autonomous, pre-constituted notions and of theories of language that constructed meaning in representational or essentialist terms. Derrida is best known for his deconstructive approach to language (1973); Lacan for the symbolic order (see chapter 2) and Foucault for his theory of subjectivity power and

discourse (Foucault 1980, 1981). Therefore, as an imaginative and provocative current of French thought situated between the student revolts of 1968 and the turn of the millennium, ‘post-structuralism’ designates not a single approach but a range of overlapping positions.

Both appropriating and dismantling structuralism system of differences (Saussure), post-structuralism proposes deconstruction as both the pervasiveness and non-linear manner of power and the need to destabilize power structures in the same non-linear approach. Thus, in more ‘textualist-stance’, chiefly associated with Derrida (“nothing exists outside the text, no possibility of referring text to world”) deconstruction is celebrated as necessary methodological tool to analyze identity. Moreover, both deconstructing and developing structuralism, it stressed the link between knowledge and ideology (Louis Althusser) by the influence of structural linguistics via lacanian psychoanalysis. Indeed, one of the significant changes with accompanied the reassessment of binary thinking was a new way of thinking about power. As we have previously seen (chapter 1), in major nineteenth and early mid twentieth century social and cultural theory, power was described a characteristic of some particular group. That is, power was hierarchical. For Foucault, nevertheless, language is inscribed within a grid of competing discourses in which power is a relationship, not something held by any particular social group. Consequently, an interlocking vision of power as a grid emerged, “not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere” (Foucault, 1981: 93).

Discourse, as he argues in *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of a Prison* (1977) is about the political implications that are attributed to certain meanings or systems of meanings with the purpose of investing them with scientific legitimacy. Thus, a deconstructive approach to the analysis of power and discourse unravels the links between scientific truth and power relations. On his view, subjects are produced by the power dynamics inherent in each social discourse;

and power is both repressive and enabling. As a result, 'subject positions' within particular discourses allow for different degrees of 'agency' (both compliant and defiant). To the extent that they imply a capacity for action, he argues that discourses tie together power and knowledge. That is, the subject does not exist prior to social structures but is produced through the operations of discourses themselves. It is thus in the negotiation between the different discourses that constitute social relationships that Foucault presents a fluid model of interaction to deploy the way power dynamics operate in the social realm. "An effect of power", he explicates, and at the same time, or precisely to the extent to which it is that effect, it is the element of articulation; the individual which power has constituted is at the same time its vehicle" (1980: 99).

This new approach to power dynamics as always linked to agency and capacity for action is of key relevance. The fluidity of power mechanisms became especially attractive to a post-structuralism-oriented gender theory as it claimed for a subject never in a pure state and always constituted and operated on social codes. All of sudden, a feminist academic audience felt strongly identified with Foucault's theories since they provided insights into the very nature of the social structures that needed to be challenged in order to make gender accountable for its power dynamics. It was particularly interesting to women of color because it meant the recognition that everybody was implicated in the operations of power.

Within this context, once acknowledged that differences between women carried the potential to become as a source of identity and self-empowerment, 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). Human embodiment, therefore, passive for mainstream

gender theory, turned into a dynamic and interactive constructivist ('subject positions') process for post-structuralist gender theory.

Italian philosopher and feminist theoretician Rosi Bradotti, for example, drawing on Foucault, Derrida and Deleuze 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" defends Bradotti, "it is a cultural construction that capitalizes on energies of a heterogeneous, discontinuous and unconscious nature" (1998: 206).

In relation to women of color's insights, Bradotti acknowledges the importance of the 'politics of location' as "an affirmative approach to the issue of subjectivity in so far it looks at the workings of power in terms of the complexity and multiplicity of the relations that structure it" (207). However, she does not welcome intersectionality as the promising epistemology for gender theory, since she calls for the necessity of creating 'figurations' *Patterns of Dissonance* (1991) when it comes to theoretical representations. What she calls figurations differ from classical 'metaphors' precisely in calling into play a sense of accountability for one's location. Hence, she calls for more conceptual creativity in the production of worldviews that can better enable us to behave ethically in a technological and globally mediated world. Making innovative use of Gilles Deleuze postmodern figuration, Bradotti (1991) therefore she elucidates a "nomadic subject" as the political fiction that allows her to rethink, move across and deconstruct pre-established categories. In order to achieve this process, "it necessary the recognition of itself as a Non-I, not- me" Bradotti asserts, "through the acknowledgement of the intersection of vectors of significance which simultaneously imbricate ever-changing identity layers", which she calls "axes of difference" (1994: 169-171). Therefore, on her view:

To nomadize categories of thought means to dislodge them from their often implicit attachment

to the humanistic vision concerning the autonomous, liberal individual so as to open them towards other modes of thinking about structures of the self and the interrelations to others (1998:196)

In the exploration of other structures of the self and identity, the Bengali Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, translator of Derrida's *On Grammatology* (1974) applies a gender perspective to his deconstruction as an analytical tool. Therefore, she deploys deconstruction in the service of anti-imperialism and feminist thought. In her view, it is through the refusal to essentializing discourses and the awareness of a heterogeneous and fragmented subject that they are coupled with what she names as 'strategic essentialism'. In order for gender theory to remain inclusive, Spivack claims that it is required to strategically choose not through universality but through essentialism.

Thus, more specifically, Spivak uses strategic essentialism to characterize the feminist subject as part of 'subaltern consciousness' (1988). It is a subaltern identity since it differs both from mainstream thinking and it locates itself at the margins of global capitalist structures. To this regards, she defends that in order to address 'subaltern identities', it had become necessary not to generalize but to universalize (1990: 11). Supporting her perspective, Bradotti affirms that within gender theory, a theorist speaks as a woman even though the subject 'woman' is never a monolithic essence already defined. Indeed, it is a positing of multiple, a potentially contradictory experiences, defined by overlapped social layers. Therefore, gender theory needs to enable theorists to speak on behalf of women with the purpose of strengthening women's support "and to activate socio-symbolic changes on their condition" (1994: 126).

For Italian feminist film critic Teresa de Lauretis, these 'socio-symbolic changes' would only be value-coding for gender theory if there are analyzed through semiotic lenses. Thus, she draws on the theories of Althusser and mainly Foucault to defend what she called as

'technologies of gender' (1987). On her view, gender is semiotic; is representation. "Displacing aesthetic hierarchies and generic categories" de Lauretis explains, "establishes the semiotic ground for a different production of reference and meaning" (1986: 10) Ingrained in a power system of interrelated discourses (women of color insights), images and signs, she quotes Foucault to describe how gender does not exist outside the bodies (Moraga's 'theory of the flesh') but "it is the set of effects produced in bodies, behaviors and social relations" (1987: 3). Moreover, it is by what Althusser coined as 'ideological state apparatuses' ('no one exists outside ideology') that the technologies of gender operate in the construction and reproduction of gender identity. To grasp the construction of gender thus 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).

Taking all this into account, if the emphasis on semiotics would have been displaced by a closer look to the overlapping nature of experience, de Lauretis shared strong common grounds with women of color insights. More specifically, as Chaldra Mohanty had already described in "Under Western Eyes" (1988), she believed that to effectively approached gender and its interlocking categories would imply a twofold process of dismantling and simultaneously constructing gender. To these regards, de Lauretis questions. "If the deconstruction of gender inevitably effects its (re) construction, the question is in which terms and whose interest is the de-re construction being affected?" (1987: 24)

In an attempt to answer this question, if there was a voice which captured the need to interrogate 'which terms and whose interest' were engendered by power dynamics without any doubt, that was Judith Butler and her theory of performativity. Offering an innovative alternative to describe the deconstruction of subject positions, performativity became one of

the most influential trends among academic circles throughout the 1990s. As we will see in the following, a performative gender (Butler 1990) would temporally cloud intersectional as a potential theory or method.

#### 4.4. PERFORMATIVITY

Judith Butler's, 'performativity' taken from J. L. Austin *How to Do Things with Words* (1962) and read through Derrida's "Signature, Event, Context" in *Limited Inc.*, and Paul de Man's notion of "metalepsis" in *Allegories of Reading*, became the definite revolutionary fusion of feminist insights into linguistic theories. In *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the subversion of Identity* (1990a) Butler denaturalizes gender categories by proposing that they are performative; that is, gender is part of an overall structure of power that can be disrupted by individual agency. To demonstrate so, Butler wants to expand the limits of reflexivity about the self beyond the dichotomy of sex and gender. In her view, gender coherence is a 'mere fiction' (1990: 328). Consequently, there is not such as a normative formula that would disrupt power relations since gender and its intersecting categories are in constant swift of performative positions. Seeking to transcend not only sexual difference but social categories all together, she thus displaced the concept of intersectionality for 'identity positions'<sup>72</sup>.

"Bodies are materialized as sexed" contends Butler, starting from the premise that "bodies only appear, only endure, and only live within the productive constraints of certain

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<sup>72</sup> Her work started off as a critique to heterosexism in which she brought Foucault to bear on feminist theory and queer theory. Radical gender theory and queer theory have emerged through the reworkings of women such as Gayle Rubin and Judith Butler. For the sake of the analysis, the impact on queer theory on the debates of differences among women, its implications would be restricted to Butler's critical insights since her theory of performativity remains at the core of queer theory. Queer theory was one response to the restrictions which attend the naturalization of any notion of identity, whereby identity is no longer a strategy or political practice (women of color) but is naturalized as an attribute of subjects themselves.

highly gendered regulatory schemas” (1993: xi). As a way out of regulatory practices, she proposes the concept of ‘performativity’. In her opinion, gendered subjectivity is the result of a repeated performance of the discourses of gender. On these grounds, she defends that “there is no gender identity behind the expression of gender...identity is performatively constituted by the very expressions that are said to be its results” (1990a: 24-5). As she further depicts:

performativity must be understood not as a singular or deliberate ‘act’, but rather, as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names (1993: 2)

She advocates to the identity shift and its interlocking nature as the “parody of subjectivation” (15). Indeed, she follows Foucault in that practices of subjectivation are also practices of subjection. Let’s remember that throughout Foucault’s well-known work, he largely explored the relationship between subject positions and discursive regimes. Her appropriation of Foucauldian theory involves a decentered notion of both the subject and agency. Highly influenced by Foucauldian premises, in *Bodies that Matter: on the Discursive Limits of Sex* (1993) she further elucidates how the very paradox of subjectivation (*assujettissement*)

...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)

Taking therefore a Foucauldian-oriented perspective, Butler reneges 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, her emphasis)

That is, gender is a set of socio-cultural acts that individuals perform. And because gender is 'performed', it can potentially be disrupted. To the extent that "is established as 'pre-discursive' prior to culture" the concept of 'gender identity' whether intersectional, interlocking, mestiza, or intervowen, for Butler had become an oppressive paradigm that needed to be put into question. Moreover, in her view, to take the construction of the subject as politically problematic is not the same as doing away with the subject, "but it is rather", she alleges, "a way of interrogating its construction as a pre-given or foundationalist premise"(42).

Butler's main point is to unravel how to claim that the subject is constituted by power relations is not the same as to claim that is determined by them; on the contrary, the constituted character of the subject is the very pre-condition for its agency (46). Particularly, it is by a continuous re-signifying process of gender identity that social categories of oppression/privilege can be disturbed. On these grounds, "subject is neither a product or an object but the permanent possibility of a certain resignifying process", she further infers, "one which gets detoured and stalled through other mechanisms of power, but which is power's own possibility of being reworked" (47). Hence, paradoxically, it is only by releasing the category of subject from a fixed referent, by 'doing something not authorized', that something like 'agency' becomes possible (50).

Indeed, Butler defends that if gender theory presupposes that 'women' designates an undesignatable field of differences, one that cannot be totalized or summarized by a descriptive identity category (thus her reaction against 'women of color' as a totalizing identity politics category), then the very terms become "a site of permanent openness and resignifiability" (52). Therefore, on her view, to deconstruct the subject is to release the term into a future of multiple significations, to emancipate it from its constraining ontologies beyond sexual difference. For

this reason, every foundation should carry its contestation because “to refuse that contest is to sacrifice the radical democratic impetus of feminist politics” (51). On this ground, she strongly affirms that:

my sense is that we must begin to think the convergence and reciprocal formation of various imaginaries, and that sexual difference is neither more primary than other forms of social difference, nor its formation understandable outside of a complex mapping of social power (1995a: 142)

It is important to notice that her theories became extremely influential in GLBT<sup>73</sup> circles due to the fact that she heightened how the distinction between sex/gender was untenable. According to Butler, “it is always-already sexualized matter that constructs the possibility of this dichotomy in the first place” (1995a: 143). In this framework, homosexuality is always a synonym of transgression, subversion. To these regards, and in relation to the Witting’s criticism on heterosexual imposition (chapter 2), it can be said that whereas Witting focuses in the disciplinary uses of the concept of ‘woman’ in the service of compulsory heterosexuality, Judith Butler focuses on the disciplinary uses of the concept in the service of constructing identity. The impact of deconstructing performative identities would be especially attractive to the gay, lesbian and queer campaigners who embarked on re-write sexuality by the introduction of queer agendas. “Butler then proceeds” argues Rosi Bradotti “to propose her own theory of performativity as a form of affirmative deconstruction of all identities, even those they taught us to despise” (Benhabib, Butler, Cornell and Fraser 1995: 207).

Thus, performative agency 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

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<sup>73</sup> Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and transgender circles.

women of color could not afford to do. Framed in a context marked by the problematization of language, nonetheless, the increasing impetus by women of color to apply an intersectional gaze was halted by strong criticisms of identity politics and its emphasis on experience.

#### **4.5 METHODOLOGICAL CLASHES**

Within this context of such a cross-fertile interaction, a reaction in chain was activated to subvert exclusive gender norms. Enabling new becomings and new kinds of empowerment, the discussion around gender as normative and universal (see Spelman 1988) led to what became perhaps the major theoretical debate of the 1990s around the issue of ‘essentialism’.

As it has been depicted in previous sections, what many feminist theorists were eager to achieve was an alignment with the most influential ideological trends within Cultural/Literary Studies but at the same time, an opportunity to provide a gender reading to traditional male-centered standards. To those willing to negotiate the demands of the politics of location with certain poststructuralist and postmodern premises, the view of the subject as discursively constructed and manifold in nature accommodated a reconciling middle ground.

In this middle ground, scholars influenced by post-structuralism or post-modernism delineated with the critical thinking of women of color in their reaction against linear patterns of thought within enlightenment narratives of essentialist subjectivities and of absolute meanings (see chapter 1). Concurring thus in the criticism toward the Western, hegemonic authority voice, for all these critical viewpoints, to be positioned as enlightened subjects (white, middle class, heterosexual subject) was a contradiction in terms. Indeed, as it had been

described through *This Bridge's* analysis, women of color had reinforced the critique to ethnocentrism while adding a new death into the postmodern 'assassination' of Western logic: the 'death of a universal woman'.

Differing however in their methodological approaches, for poststructuralists and postmodern feminists their main condemnation 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). On their view, there was no readily accesable uncontaminated or 'authentic' voice of the oppressed that could be contained under any single identity label. This turned first, recalls Rosi Bradotti "into an attack on the essentialism of those who claim fixed identities...It also undercuts, any claim of 'purity' as the basis for epistemological or political alternatives since they assume subject positions that would be unmediated by language and representation" (1994: 83 ) On this ground, 'identity politics' and the 'counter-affirmation' of oppositional identities was opposed on the basis that ended up in reasserting the very dualisms they were trying to undo.

Nonetheless, misreading and misinterpretation of 'women of color/third world feminists' was somehow operating underneath these claims. 'Women of color' as an identity category, as much as 'the politics of location' and 'intersectionality', were concepts that allowed for the recognition of another's specificity; it provided a basis for the simultaneous recognition of similarities and the acknowledgement of difference – one that celebrates rather than suppresses or transcends them. Their emphasis on differences therefore encoded a recognition that universalism was a strategy of the masters, not an egalitarian gesture. Anthologies such as *This Bridge* reworked mainstream gender theory as an 'imaginary location' that had been proven linked to the silencing impulse of the Othering and its refusal to accept the other as autonomous, different. Consequently,

underlying the imperative to color their voices was the pledge of becoming autonomous. Moreover, with a great sensitivity to the historical bounds with colonized cultures, to be ‘women of color’ had become both an identity and a location at the margins of hegemonic gender theory aimed at resisting and struggling the silencing of the ‘color sisters’ of the white feminist movement.

In the overlapping of the personal and the political, speaking from the margins had arisen as a space of radical openness. “Do I dare to speak to you in a language that will move beyond the boundaries of domination” Bell Hooks defiantly asked the post-modern, post-structuralist audience:

– a language that will not bind you, fence you or hold you? ...the oppressed struggle in language to recover ourselves, to reconcile, to reunite, to renew. Our words are not without meaning, they are an action, a resistance. Language is also a place of struggle (2004: 154)

Hence, the politization of marginality starts by naming and visibilizing that they are, that is ‘women of color’. The main challenge therefore implied in this identity politics category is a struggle directed toward ‘experience’ as an unexamined, catch-all category. “feminists of color have rightly charged white feminists” affirmed Zillah Eisenstein “with not imagining far enough beyond themselves”; nonetheless, “recognizing differences, particularly the racial and economic differences between women, can assist in uncovering the way power is distributed among and between women” (1998 : 484). To these regards, to name themselves ‘women of color’ was a pledge to resistance as much as a vindication to theorize experience. As *This Bridge* had proven, more than a static collective identity, it was a mutant gender within interlocking systems of oppression based on strategic alliances; moreover, a hybrid gender had put into motion alliance-making which fueled its strength precisely in revolting against universalizing gender paradigms. Indeed, for those who had approached *This Bridge*, ‘women

of color' as an identity paradigm implied a language struggle for multiplicity and deconstruction of social categories with the intention to redirect power structures either at a concrete, particular location or global context. On the task of bridging differences among women, the new intersectional nature and specific context of gender that women of color were proposing, enabled an intellectual flexibility that was conducive to cross-cultural insights and therefore was aimed at enhancing receptivity to difference in members of dominant groups. In this sense, what women of color were advocating was the extension of gender as inherently part of an equation with diverse variables, axes of signification that shape identity in its daily interactions. Moreover, the fact that they self-identified as 'women of color' was an indicative that gender was viewed as a base-element of subjectivity (Lauretis 1990: 134). "Without thinking and theorizing these connections" argued Zillah R. Eisenstein "we only have disparate moments; we are discrete, disconnected individuals, with no possibility of imagining a common politics" (1998: 484). As a result, women of color in U.S denounced the lack of relevance placed on women's difference and experience as part of the political relativism which characterizes post-modern thought. (Moraga and Anzaldúa 1981, 1983; Hooks 1984; Mohanty 1991). Drawing from their personal experiences, women of color have shown the limitations of identity politics based on authenticity and exclusion criteria. With an emphasis on theorizing experience and the use of 'intersectionality' as an analytical paradigm, their political and epistemological interest was to demonstrate how the point was not how women's lives were not such different from each other but how those differences are in themselves relational. Through *This Bridge* and many other anthologies, articles, novels and essays women of color in the U. S had argued that identity is better understood in a manner suggested by

hibridity, mestiza consciousness and/or intersectionality where multiple social categories are unfold simultaneously and in dialogue with each other.

Highlighting women's experiences as a site of critical knowledge, Anzaldúa defended women of color 'identity position' by explaining how "Our strength lies in shifting perspectives, in our capacity to shift, in our 'seeing through' the membrane of the past superimposed on the present" (1990: xxvii). . In a new anthology edited by her, titled *Making Face, Making Soul/Haciendo Caras: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Women of Color* (1990) she reinforced the articulation of a new epistemological approach to identity. "Necesitamos teorías", she asserted, "that will rewrite history using race, class, gender and ethnicity as categories of analysis; theories that cross borders, that blur boundaries" (xxv; her emphasis).

It was precisely in the jumbling of the boundaries of social categories and the collapse of fixed categories of meaning in which it could be affirmed that Anzaldúa's proposal and Butler's performativity sympathize with each other. They both agreed that social categories are not merely descriptive concepts but constitutive and evaluate terms informing the very practices they try to describe. However, methodological approaches dramatically differed on the grounds that post-structuralist objective was not so much the analysis of how gender shapes identity in relation to other social categories, but rather the possibility of escaping categories altogether (see for instance Brah 1996; Scott 1988; Butler and J. W. Scott 1992; Trinh, M. T 1989; Nicholson, L. and S. Seidman 1995).

For women of color, however, differences between women could not be treated as abstract categories but rather as embedded in the individual personal relationship with a located

experience. In this sense, Butler's statement for example that identity was oppressive and 'gender coherence was a mere fiction' (1990: 328) was completely untenable for women of color since it did not couple with their defense of gender identity as located and situated. As their message had made clear, to 'blur boundaries' not only meant the destabilization of social categories but also foregrounded its accountability for the power dynamics implied in its overlapping nature and its specific locations. Consequently, positioning themselves very differently, women of color firmly opposed to transcend 'gender's politics of location' since the relation of experience to discourse is what they believed to be at issue in the definition of gender theory.

At the other end of the spectrum, however, postmodern/poststructuralists feminists were claiming that there were multiple realities which are knowable only through representations of culture, or deconstructions of language and discourses, and therefore no single truth or accessible reality could be tackled if realities were only what people believe them to be. On the contrary, women of color completely rejected this relativist perspective. They understood nonetheless, that language is a critical element in connecting knowledge and experience, if it is through language that identities, subjectivities and experiences are made, given meaning and remade. But in studying gender and power, language is not all there is to know. Patti Lather for example, following Foucault argues that language can be particularly useful in producing categories (such as classifications of gender) but since reality is heterogeneous, language should not be collapsed into the real (1991: 124 cited in Ramazanoglu, Caroline and Janet Holland 2002 : 153)

Within this spirit of methodological clashes, objections arose on the assumption that to question the enlightenment rational coherence subject was to undermine the very possibility of

articulating a collective feminist subject that would speak in behalf of all women. As a result, theorists coming from different viewpoints started to question that if deconstruction was applied, how “could such ideas be combined with enough notion of gender to allow for feminist politics?”(Nicholson 1990: 5).Anglo-feminist philosophy Nancy Hartsock, for example, asked:

Why is it that just at the moment when so many of us who have been silenced begin to demand the right to name ourselves, to act as subjects rather than objects ...that just when the concept subjecthood becomes problematic?. Just when were are forming our own theories about the world uncertainty emerges whether the world can be theorized (164 in Nicholson 1990)

The challenge to the subject therefore became a site of opposition to post-structuralist feminism on the grounds that it had become a real challenge to identity politics. Hence, the ongoing ‘uneasy alliance’ among feminists continued to be threatened by new theoretical and methodological incompatibilities as new categories of deconstruction and signification dashed in the debates around the existence of a political subject or collective identity.

In regard to the deconstruction of essential identities, Belgian feminist political theorist and deconstructionist Chantal Mouffe for example, highlighted how many believe that a collective political mobilization couldn’t be sustainable if no coherent identity was articulated. Contrary to this, Mouffe argued that for committed radical politics, the deconstruction of identity was a necessary step to an adequate comprehension of variety of social relationships. Only by discrediting the vision of a rational and unified subject with its homogenous set of social positions will be a possibility of theorizing relations of subordination in all its multiplicity. “If the category of women does not respond to any unifying essence”, Mouffe asseverates, “the problem no longer remains to unveil its content” (1999: 45).On her view then, the new requiring approach demanded a response on how the category of women was

constructed in the different discourses that convey knowledge production, especially on the academy.

Within this context, 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 U. S. 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, ‘intersectionality’ would be temporarily emptied out of its potentiality, caught up in an internal theoretical and methodological collision that redirected the focus of the debate into the analysis of the dangers that postmodern approaches posed to the quest of a normative theory of gender identity.

As we have seen in previous sections, at the center of this debate was an ‘identity crisis’ at the very core of feminist theorizing. The magnitude of the controversy would be measured in the very destabilization of the most important pillar of gender theory, that is, the concept of ‘woman’ at a stage when it was impossible to formulate it in a consensual way precisely for feminists themselves.

#### **4. 6: THE PHILADELPHIA DEBATE**

In order to better understand the implications of this controversy for the future articulation of intersectionality, I’m going to refer specifically to the clashing that arose at ‘The Greater Philadelphia Philosophy Consortium’ (September 1990) in which theorist Turkish-United states theorist Seyla Benhabib and American post-structuralist Judith Butler

participated. Behabib's lecture entitled "Feminism and Postmodernism: An Uneasy Alliance" and Butler's "Contingent Foundations" were both published in the journal *Praxis International* in 1991. In this same journal, American critical theorist Nancy Fraser mediated in this academic debate with an article called "False Antithesis".<sup>74</sup> In the following analysis therefore I would like to depict a line of continuity with the most representative academic theorists of this decade, a line that also underscores the fructiferous interdisciplinary cross-over that characterizes gender theory and presupposes a desire to generate communication across theoretical boundaries and political divisions.

Hence, in search of a normative theory of identity, Seyla Benhabib in "Feminism and Postmodernism: An Uneasy Alliance" (Benhabib, Butler, Drucilla and Fraser 1995:17-35) doubts that feminists could adopt postmodernism as a theoretical ally (25). To support her thesis, she begins by summarizing a well-known argument among post-modern gender circles at that time made by American theorist Jane Flax. In *Thinking Fragments: Psychoanalysis, Feminism and Postmodernism in the Contemporary West* she defends the 'death of the subject', 'the death of history' and 'the death of metaphysics' as the main characteristics of the post-modern position. Thus, in Flax words, "the subject is another position in language" (1990:32) to what Benhabib responds that if that it's so, "the post-modern positions take the risk of eliminating the specificity of feminist theory and question its emancipatory ideals" (20). To bridge this incommensurability she thus proposes a weak and a strong version of postmodern postulates in its interaction with gender theory.

Beginning with which she advocates as the 'demystification of the male subject of reason', on her view, 'the *weak* version of the death of the man' would situate the subject in its

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<sup>74</sup> All these articles, in addition to some more written in response among the authors with interventions from other theorists such as Drucilla Cornell were published on the book *Feminist Contentions: A Philosophical Exchange*. New York and London: Routledge, 1995. My analysis of these texts comes from this book

social/discursive/linguistics practices but it would not theorize the need of a less mystified version of subjectivity, so the “traditional attributes of the philosophical subject of the West as self-reflexivity, autonomy and rationality could be re-formulated by taking the radical situatedness of the subject”(Benhabib, Butler, Drucilla and Fraser 1995: 20-21). On the contrary, ‘the *strong* version’ would not be compatible with the goals of feminism (see Bradotti 1991: 108-23). If the subject is a mere position in the language, it therefore implies the dissolution of the subject into a chain of significations. To do so, could only lead to self-incoherence since it would mean the disappearance of intentionality, accountability, self-reflexivity and autonomy (Benhabib, Butler, Drucilla and Fraser 1995: 20) and it would signify the death of a feminist collective subject since there would be no ‘agency’ as Butler proposes. Indeed, she wonders: “how the project of emancipation could ever be ‘thinkable’ without the regulative principle on agency, autonomy and self-hood? (21)

Continuing with her revisionism, Benhabib conveys that the weak version of the death of history’ should be interpreted as the end of the grand narratives which are essentialists and monocausal whereas the strong version implies the end of macro-narratives (22) which are appealing and necessary to feminism. Supporting her argument, in “Social Criticism Without Philosophy: An Encounter Between Feminism and Postmodernism” American critical theorists Nancy Fraser and Linda Nicholson affirm that:

the practice of feminist politics in the 80s generated a new set of pressures which have worked against metanarratives. In recent years, poor, working-class and *women of color*, and lesbians have finally won a wider hearing for their objections to feminist theory which failed to illuminate their lives and address their problems (1990:33; emphasis mine)<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Iris Young makes the same point in “The ideal of Community and the Politics of Difference” in the same volume, that is, Nicholson, Linda (ed.). *Feminism/Postmodernism*. London, New York: 1990. 300.

Therefore, women of color and other minority groups had exposed how quasi-metanarratives hamper rather than promote sisterhood, since they elide differences among women and among the forms of sexism to which different women are differentially subjected. So, if the interest in recovering the macro-narratives is lost, “how can engage feminist theory be produced?” challenges Benhabib (Benhabib, Butler, Drucilla and Fraser 1995: 23).

Finally, justifying the death of metaphysics, Flax asserts that “for postmodernists, the quest for the real conceals the philosopher’s desire which is to master the world” (1990:34). Nonetheless, once it has been de-transcendentalized, contextualized, historized, genderized the subject of knowledge, the context of inquiry and even the methods of justification, “what remains of philosophy?” interrogates Benhabib. On her opinion, the weak version proceeded from a rhetorical construction of the history of philosophy as “a metaphysics of presence”, while the strong version of the thesis would eliminate, she argues, “not only metanarratives of legitimation but the practice of legitimation and criticism altogether” (Benhabib, Butler, Drucilla and Fraser 1995: 28).

Fraser and Nicholson also agree with Benhabib on this point: “how can we conceive a version of criticism without philosophy” they argue “which is robust enough to handle the tough job of analysing sexism in all its endless variety and monotonous similarity? (1990: 34). Social criticism without philosophy is impossible, and “without social criticism the project of emancipatory interests of women is inconceivable” (Benhabib, Butler, Drucilla and Fraser 1995: 25) Consequently, on Benhabib’s view, postmodernism undermines the feminist commitment to women’s agency and sense of selfhood, to the re-appropriation of women’s own history in the name of an emancipated future, and the exercise of radical social criticism. However, without such a regulative principle of hope, “nor only morality but radical

transformation is unthinkable”, strongly affirms Benhabib (30). Thus, when it comes the radical project of a gender-equal society Benhabib shares Lyotard’s concerns that ‘utopias’ can be use as a instrumentalism; that is, ‘the ends justifies the means’ or as an ideal state exempt from critique. Indeed, she certifies that postmodernism has the potential to expose the theoretical and political ‘traps of why utopias and foundational thinking can go wrong’, but she asseverates that this dangerous illusion implied in utopian projects ‘should not lead to a retreat from utopia altogether. For we, as women, have much to lose by giving up the utopian hope in the wholly other” (30-31).

In sum, Benhabib’s argument, in favour of critical theory, calls for the possible integration of ‘weak versions’ of postmodernism whereas strong versions can not be reconciled with the quest of a normative gender theory and thus need to be neglected.

On the other hand, Butler, a self-proclaimed post-structuralist, believes postmodernism to be ‘a joint foundationalist paranoia’ with no possibility of engagement with feminist theory and therefore she is impatient with postmodernism ‘as a weapon of dismissal and de-legitimation’ (1995:105). In response to Benhabib’s proposal of reconciling ‘weak versions’, Butler, in “Contingent Foundations: Feminism and the Question of Postmodernism”, proposes to swift the question not merely on feminism and postmodernism but on the definition of postmodernism itself (1995: 37). “What is postmodernism?” she asks, “A historical characterization, or a kind of theoretical position or an aesthetic practice? And what does it mean to apply it to social theory and to feminist social and political theory in particular?” (35) Defending the need to distinguish it from poststructuralist premises, she recalls how lacanian psychoanalysis in France posited officially against post structuralism, or how kristeva denounced postmodernism, or how Faucaldians rarely relate to Derrideans, so, according to

Butler, to summarize all these different approaches under a single rubric of ‘postmodernism’ can be read as a refusal to grant the specificity of these positions, “the refusal to read, and to read closely” (37). “If Lyotrad is taken as a representative of all these diverse positions”, she affirms, “then we have forced a substitution of the example for the entire field” (38).

On her view, the answer lays on the need to interrogate what is that the premises that function as authorizing grounds ‘authorize’ and what precisely they exclude and foreclosure. Therefore, she states that “to claim that politics require a stable subject is to claim that there can be no *political* opposition to that claim” (36; her emphasis). Additionally, on response to Benhabib’s imperative to a normative gender theory she remembers how, within a postcolonial context (women of color/third world feminism in the U. S) the category of ‘universal’ is under insistent contest and re-signification On these grounds, she powerfully interrogates:

How is it that we might ground a theory or politics in a speech situation that or subject position which is ‘universal’ when the category of universal has only begun to be exposed for its own highly ethnocentric biases? (37)

Butler is thus against articulating a type of ‘comprehensive universality’ because “totalizing notions could only be achieved at the cost of producing new and further exclusions” (40). Nevertheless, Butler makes clear that she is not doing away with the category ‘women’ by trying to relieve it “from its foundationalist weight in order to render as a site of permanent political contest” (41). In order to clarify her point she keeps on asking:

who is its that gets constituted as the feminist theorist whose framing of the debate will get publicity? Is not always the case that power operates in advance, in the very procedures that establish who will be the subject who speaks in the name of feminism and to whom? (Ibid.)

Furthermore, she explains how the critique of the subject is not a negation or repudiation of the subject but rather a way of interrogating its construction as a pre-given or foundationalist

premise (42) “To claim that the subject is constituted”, she adds, “is not the same as to claim that is determined, on the contrary, the constituted character of the subject is the very precondition for its agency” (46). Then, in reaction to ‘the post-modern death of the subject’ she further explains her position by affirming that to perform a kind of Foucauldian critique on the subject it doesn’t mean to pronounce its death, but merely “to claim that certain versions of the subject are politically insidious...; that is who qualifies as “who” (47).

To support her argument, Butler cites Joan Scott in *Gender and the Politics of History* (1988) to defend that once it is understood that subjects are formed through exclusionary operations, it becomes politically necessary to trace the operations of that construction and erasure. To these regards, Butler also brings light to strong criticism by women of color and postcolonial writers to the subject of modernity as an instrument of Western imperialism (48). “Do women want to become subjects on the model which requires and produces an anterior region of abjection”, she therefore challenges “or must feminism become a process which is self-critical about the processes that produce and destabilize identity categories? (48).

Arguing therefore for deconstruction as a necessary viewpoint in order to achieve a theory of identity, she stresses on the fact that to deconstruct “it is not to negate or dismiss but to suspend all the commitments to that to which the term, the subject refers, and to call into question and to open up a term to reusage or deployment that previously not being authorize” (49). On this ground, Butler agrees with Benhabib that demonstrations and legislative efforts and radical movements need to make claims in the name of women as a normative premise, “but the minute the category is invoked as *describing* the constituency for which feminism speaks, an internal debate invariably begins over what the descriptive content of that term will be” (49; her emphasis).

Continuing on the debate, in “Subjectivity, Historiography, and Politics: Reflections on the Feminism/Postmodernism Exchange” Behabib reacts against Butler’s privileging of linguistic metaphors. “What does it mean “to be constituted” by language?” she questions Butler, “are linguistic practices a *primary site* where we should be searching for an explication of gender constitution? (1995a: 108; her emphasis). On her view, it is necessary to distinguish on one hand between ‘structural processes’ (cultural codes that define individuality) and on the other, the ‘dynamics of socialization and individuation’ (study of social processes) (109), a demarcation that Buttler lacks in her ‘gender trouble’ perspective. To these regards, “a speech-act-theory of performative gender constitution” reinforces Benhabbib, “cannot give us sufficiently thick and rich account of gender formation that would explain the capacities of human agents for self-determination” (110) And she concludes by alleging that: “The theory of performativity even if Butler wants to distinguish gender- constitution from identity-constitution still presupposes a deterministic view of individuation and socialization processes” (Ibid). Therefore, for Benhabbib, the dispute with Buttler revolts around an unclear normative vision of agency which follows from or it is implied by her theory of performativity (111).

In conclusion, and as a summary of all previously depicted within this Philadelphia debate, it could be said that Benhabbib defends a feminism rooted in the Critical Theory (autonomy, critique and utopia) whereas Butler rests on poststructuralist conceptions of subjectivity, identity and human agency. Butler claims that Benhabbib’s view implies an authoritarian foundationalism antiethical to the feminist project. For both, either critical theory or a post-structuralist perspective are incompatible and had to be chosen in order to approach gender and its social categories.

To mediate in the debate, Nancy Fraser argued that their arguments have created a series of 'false antithesis' that were clouding current gender theories. In "*A False Antithesis: A Response to Seyla Benhabib and Judith Butler*" she thus claims that it's not needed to choose between both perspectives but to reconstruct each approach as to reconcile with each other. She argues that both theorists posit "false antithesis and unnecessary polarizations" (1995a:60) She therefore wants to preserve the best of both paradigms so there can be integrated into feminist theorizing. For that matter, Fraser proposes to distinguish between meta-narratives (foundational) from large-scale empirical narratives (non-foundational and fallibilistic) (see Fraser and Nicholson 1990: 36). Accordingly, what Benhabib considers as irreconcilable could be potentially reconcilable after all.

In regards to Butler, and for the shake of the debate, Fraser distinguishes in her between the ontological and the normative dimension of her gender-performativity theory. On the 'ontological level' she points out how for Butler is not enough to view the subject as situated (politics of location) but also as constituted in power/discourse formations. Accordingly, in her opinion, the re-signification of gender that Butler is proposing should be displaced for 'critique' since it the term ismconnected to the concepts of warrant and validity whereas her term, that is, 're-signification', doesn't (1995a: 67) "why is resignification good?, she challenges Butler, "Can it be bad resignifications?"

Moreover, on the 'normative level' she finds very disturbing Butler's view of identity as oppressive. Consequently, in relation to her claims that the category of 'woman' is always subject to revision, Fraser affirms that "conflict, uncritical, celebratory talk about women's 'differences' is a mystification" (70). For this reason, the hard questions are the ones that Butler elides; that is, "can 'we'[collective feminist subject] envision future arrangements that

would harmonize present conflicts?” Fraser reflects, “and can ‘we’ articulate our vision in terms that are sufficiently compelling to persuade other women and men? (71). To this respect, Fraser affirms that Butler has an inadequate understanding of liberation. For Butler, if identity is oppressive, then women’s liberation depends on freeing from this identity. Consequently, identity critique is privileged over the need of feminist theorizing on the grounds that a normative, reconstructing critique will turn out to be oppressive, as Butler believes. By generating false antithesis between identity and difference, subjectivation versus reciprocity, desreification versus normative critique, deconstruction versus reconstruction (71-2) the potential of her performative theory of gender is thus clouded by the capacity to formulate normative premises. On that account, Fraser makes a very important point:

we do need to make normative judgments and offer emancipatory alternatives. We are not for ‘anything goes’. The proliferation of identity-deriving, fungible, commodified images and significations constitutes a great threat to women’s liberation.... Feminists need both deconstruction *and* reconstruction, destabilization of meaning *and* projection of utopian hope (71)

As an overall conclusion, Fraser defended Butler important contribution as she brings into focus the performative dimension of gender signification but her approach however, “doesn’t really give us all we need” she contends (1995b: 162). Accordingly, Fraser defends the complementary nature of both views to the feminist theorizing of the subject by saying that Benhabib supplies those aspects underdeveloped in Butler; that is, access to the intersubjective dimension of discourse, an orientation to the social totality, and some resources for normative critique. Conversely, Butler provides what Benhabib lacks: a nuanced view of intrasubjective interplay between creativity and constraint, an orientation to micro-level detail and historical specificity and some resources of denaturalizing critique (164) Along these lines, in “Pragmatism, Feminism and the Linguistic Turn”, she insists that the key is to avoid false antithesis in relation to either post-structuralism or postmodernism and to distinguish those

aspects that can be re-contextualized and articulated with the potential to illuminate a fructiferous gender analyses from those which are inassimilable (158)

#### **4.7: CONCLUSION TO THE PHILADELPHIA DEBATE**

Whether based on postmodernist or post-structuralist feminism, the gender method they were proposing, fundamentally challenged the possibility of speaking in one unified voice about women. Hence, what stemmed out of the Philadelphia debate was a sense of uncertainty and dubiousness. If there were no natural categories of gender, how could feminists begin to talk about experience and how gender is constructed? Bearing this gender distrustfulness in mind, this previous revisionism therefore has been an attempt to offer a glimpse and to make sense of a very critical moment in the history of the evolution of differences among women that changed gender's theory narrative in ways never anticipated.

My intention thus has been to excavate the tectonic changes that lurked below the surface of the most riveting academic exchange of the 1990s in a manner that engaged minority groups and mainstream feminists alike. In a fascinating and much heated dialogue, many voices of disapproval with poststructuralist and postmodern premises revolted around a focus on signification and discourse that displaced the need of a politics of location and an intersectional gender.

As it has been elicited, women of color in the U. S, poststructuralists and post-modernists feminists shared strong motivations, however, theoretical and methodological approaches made them incompatible. One of the biggest clashes came from postmodernist refusal to master

narratives which seek to explain historical power relations since the search of the fundamental causes of oppression was ruled out, something women of color could not tolerate. Whereas post-modernists draw on the project of deconstruction of philosophical traditions of modernity and an emphasis on highly technological virtual scenarios, women of color focused on contemporary politics since they believed that to insist on always deconstructing gender identity ignores political context and the importance of highlighting the power dynamics ingrained in the differences among women. Women of color needed to hold on the concept of ‘interlocking power’ and ‘ideology of domination’ for explaining the production of knowledge because it allowed them to conceptualize the fact that knowledge is produced under certain conditions and that those conditions have a pivoting effect on the forms that gender identity and subjectivity take. And even though some critical theorists such as Nancy Fraser and Linda Nicholson emphasized that there was no place in Lyotard’s universe “for critique of pervasive axes of stratification, for critique of broad-based relations of dominance and subordination along lines like gender, ‘race’, and ‘ class’” (1990: 22), the very term postmodern would become too problematic to be embraced by a broad majority of gender theorists.

In addition, for post-structuralists, the major goal was to unearth the inherent essentialism implied in the category of gender. They were not so much interested in analyzing how gender is shaped by other social vectors in its social and material realms but nonetheless, on the possibility of escaping categories themselves. 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)

In the same vein, women of color clearly opposed to mainstream gender theory of the academy on the basis that it was dominated by post-structuralism, which they believed it to be

exclusive and elitist in the very nature of its discourse. In addition, they were deeply opposed to the expropriation of women of color political literature such as *This Bridge* by a postmodern view that asserts that reality is in itself a collective illusion, a non-existent stance in which everything is relative and partial. Indeed, for African-American activist and feminist Jude Jordan the linguistic turn of poststructuralism and deconstruction explicitly reflected ‘the worshipping of the European fathers at their worst...they express the tyrannies of language that are antidemocratic and proud of it’ (1991:24)

At the core of this confrontation, insights of women of color were dismissed as being only partial, “rather than as a needed corrective to existing views” recalls Jew-United States feminist theorist Zillah Eisenstein (1998: 485). In fact, there was a clear divergence between the postmodern focus and the political focus offered by women of color since late 1960s. “Most women of color focus on difference in order to understand problems of oppression” affirms Zillah “how difference is used to discriminate against people”. As she further elicits:

They struggle to theorize a feminism that is diverse at its core, rather than theorize difference as the end in itself. This differs from poststructural theorizing that inadvertently silences politics, because the connections of similarity are lost (Ibid.)

On the contrary, Postmodernism had forced feminism to defend itself as a political argument whereas women of color specified the different potential meanings of feminism. In the same vein, Indian-United States postcolonial and transnational feminist 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) that this transgression can be achieved. “Theorization of gender identity and locating political agency”, declares Mohanty “is a necessary alternative to formulations of the ‘universality’ of gendered

oppression and struggles”. Furthermore she specifies how “the universality of gender is problematic, based as it is on the assumption that the categories of race and class have to be invisible for gender to be visible” (75).

In relation to the category of class for example American feminist theorist Rosemary Hennessy brought attention to the fact that post-structuralist emphasis on transcending it, results on a lack of analysis of an economic globalization network which has a lot to say about the nature of differences among women. “In academic circles” Hennessy contended, “postmodern knowledge of various sorts had bolstered neoliberalism by aggressively discouraging analysis that reveals links between new cultural forms and changing relations of labor.” (Hennessy 2003: 55-56). To the extent that these values tend to be irrefutable by linguistic paradigms, the possibility of articulating critical concepts for advancing social equity is completely dismissed.

In the same line of thought, Susan Bordo, North American feminist philosopher, in “Feminism, Postmodernism, and Gender-Skepticism”, critical of the excesses of post-structural pluralism argues against the neutralization of differences. On that vantage point she asks, “Could we now speak of the differences that inflect gender if gender had not first been shown to make a difference?” (1990: 141). Her gender skepticism therefore highlights the need of pluralizing the understandings of power (women of color position) without erasing the continuity<sup>76</sup> of power implied in poststructuralist views. To find a middle ground would be not to disrupt power but to clarify the specific contexts in which that continuity persists in its various representations. In that sense, as depicted in the analysis of *This Bridge* (Chapter 3) many women of color like Gloria Alzandúa and Audre Lorde are post-structuralist oriented, not only in their affinity with a Foucaudian approach to power but to the extent that they maintained that language does not simply reflect reality but reshapes it. Indeed, the use of

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<sup>76</sup> Postmodernism rejects any focus on universalism or continuity as being essentialist.

‘women of color’ as an identity politics category reflected their belief that language was a critical element connecting knowledge and experience. Yet they took this belief in language’s performative powers even further by associating it with pre-colonial non-Western traditions. In doing so, they simultaneously exposed the limitations in existing definitions of ethnic, gender, and sexual identity and invented open-ended alternatives.

In the same vein, the work of Vietnamese-American post-colonial scholar Trinh T. Minh-ha is an attempt to assemble poststructuralism with women of color imperative to bring to notice how an intersectional gender, in terms of identity enclosure, both baffles regulation and theorizes experience. Differences, as Trinh T. Minh-ha defends, are powerful strategies in deconstructing binary thinking. Hence, in “Not you/Like you: Post-colonial Women and the Interlocking questions of Identity and Difference” (1989), she argues that to open the debate of identity is to re-open the gap between the “self/other”, the “white/the women of color” and the power dynamics they are ingrained within. To her mind, the linguistic turn would not protect gender against discrimination but it could bring into light how the phrases ‘women of color’ and ‘white’ wrongly homogenise each group and therefore distort the relationships and ties within and between the two. More specifically, its monolithic stereotyping clouded the specifics which define individual women’s lives. Moreover, when gender identity is understood in a context of ideological domination, “a clear dividing line can be made between I and not-I”. “I” is, therefore,” asseverates Trinh T. Minh-ha:

not a unified subject, a fixed identity, or that solid mass covered with layers of superficiality one has gradually to peel off before one can see its true face. “I” is itself *infinite layers*. Its complexity can hardly be conveyed through such typographic conventions as I, (1989: 94; her emphasis)

It was precisely the need to target gender’s complexity which explained women of color’s emphasis on their identity. However, there was a major difference in approaching gender and

power (interlocking social categories) as being constituted by language than agreeing with gender being only 'partly constituted' by language structures. On their view, feminist concerns with unjust power relations required an analysis of the interconnections between language, relationships and the material grounding of power (Ramazanoglu and Holland 2002:154) As it has been depicted throughout *This Bridge's* analysis, 'gender' is seen as just one factor operating in the deconstruction of one's identity, and it needed to be considered in relation to other factors such as class, ethnicity, sexuality and so on.

With an emphasis to not lose sight of the weight of experience in the making of gender identity, women of color were thus eager to place social variables surrounding gender identity back at the center of the debate. "After two decades of engagement" Chandra Talpade Mohanty affirm "in feminist political activism and scholarship in a variety of socio-political and geographical locations, questions of difference (sex, race, class, nation) experience and history remain at the centre of feminist analysis"(1992: 74). In the same vein, Anne MacClinton while reflecting on the *Imperial Leather* (1995) surrounding gender affirmed that:

race, gender and class are not distinct realms of experience, existing in splendid each other; nor can they be simply yoked together retrospective like armatures of Lego. Rather, they came into existence in and through relation to each other- if in contradictory and conflictual ways (5)

So, as debate went on by mid 1990s, beyond the linguistic turn, the politics of location had consequences for theorizing feminism as an epistemological project; that is, a project that can generate knowledge and knowledge practices aimed at enhancing women's individual and collective empowerment. As it has been conveyed in chapter 2, initially, the notion of location referred to the material position that shapes particular experiences and interactions (Marxist-feminism) Throughout the 1990s, this conception of location provided the basis for standpoint epistemology (see chapter 3), which assumed that women use their material location not only

as a resource for knowing what it means to be embodied as a woman in a particular social and cultural context but also as a place from which to construct a critical gender theory for social change.

Another important voice in the bridging of methodological clashes was Sandra Harding and her work on standpoint theory. More specifically, in what she named as “An Epistemology from/for Rainbow Coalition Politics” (1995) she argued for a critical epistemology that respects borders while crossing them and therefore it would help to prevent appropriation and exclusion. “It is thinking from a contradictory social position that generates feminist knowledge” Harding explicates:

So the logic of the directive to ‘start thought from women’s lives requires that we start our thought from multiple lives that in many ways conflict with each other and have multiple and contradictory meanings (125)

In her view, the subject of feminist knowledge therefore needed to validate women of color’s critical insights in order to produce reliable gender knowledge. Hence, in *Whose Science? Whose knowledge?* (1991) she stresses how “not only are gender, ethnicity, class, sexuality, nationality interwoven in the social construction of identity but they are used to construct each other in order to accomplish their goals” (126).

Such a border-crossing required the subject/agent of one particular standpoint epistemology to learn through what Harding calls ‘competency-based’ anti-sexism, anti-racism, anti-class exploitation, etc to see their lives from the standpoint of others. That is, not to speak ‘as or for’ these ‘others’ but to be able to contribute to distinctive forms of liberatory knowledge (1991: 293; 1995: 123-126).

As a consequence, one response to the relativist dilemma surrounding the linguistic turn of gender was to endorse a pragmatic view of language and subjectivity as discursively constituted but to support its multiple nature as capable of reflection and transformation. In a way, this

position brought together the rejection of a liberal reading of gender identity as preconstituted and, at the same time, it recognized the politics of location of a specific socio-historical subject (see Nicholson 1990: 5). On the other hand, it highlighted power relations as a key dynamic in the discursive and social construction of identity. The politics of location, the interlocking systems and the concept of intersectionality that women of color brought to theory it thus allowed that the meaning of 'gender identity' shifted over specific diverse contexts as identity construction continually intersects with other social variables. "It recognizes, therefore", affirms Linda Nicholson "that the political meaning of feminism cannot be derived from any pre-given concept of "womanhood" (8)

Taking everything into account, the discussion as to what constitutes gender identity and, indeed, whether identity politics was an approach that encouraged structural change had been debated hotly. Post-structuralism and postmodernism argued that the reliance on gender identity leads to an individualistic notion of change. For women of color and other minority groups nonetheless, despite acknowledging the relationship between categories and the dynamics of power, their anthologies were a claim, as a much as a demonstration, of how, in specific historical contexts, the use of identity politics had been a crucial mechanism of resistance and a more effective criticism than the semiotic deconstruction of racism and sexism as categories of power. (see Davis 2008: 74).

"The shift within identity politics", argue Indian-American cultural feminist critic Kum-Kum Bhavnani and British cultural feminist critic Meg Coulson "has been to consider the ways in which identities, themselves embedded in axes of inequality, interconnect with each other" (2003: 79). In other words, the charge of interlocking oppressions has led not only to a reflection

of the intersection of axes of oppression/privilege with gender, but also to the reworking of what constitutes gender identity in itself.

All things considered, if the Philadelphia debate had reached any conclusion was the need to articulate frameworks open to both specificity and strategic alliances. As the mediator Nancy Fraser asserted:

we need frameworks open to specificity but ability to think large objects of inquiry; approaches that promote our ability to think various elements of the social totality, casting those elements not merely as “different” from one another as mutually interconnected (1995b:159)

In the quest of theoretical frameworks that would allow the projection of social equity and representation among women, while at the same time being infused with a normative critique of domination and injustice, intersectionality ardently fluctuated again in women of color academic circles. Hence, “In the 1990s”, recalled Mohanty:

the challenges posed by black and Third World feminists can point the way towards a more precise transformative feminists politics. Thus, the juncture of feminists and anti-racist/ Third World/postcolonial studies is of great significance, materially as well as methodologically (1992: 75)

However, the restricted emphasis on ‘women of color experiences’ would conceal its inclusive potential in a moment where disconcertion arose on how to proceed with the gender-identity debate. In the attempt to theorize how social divisions define women, the approaches of the contributors of *This Bridge* and the ones exposed by Crenshaw and Harding had become too restraining for those claiming a more general, inclusive approach than ‘women of color’s experiences’.

#### 4. 8: TRANVERSAL GENDER: ‘ROOTING AND SHIFTING’

One of the strongest voices demanding intersectionality to move beyond a restrictive emphasis on women of color experiences came from British feminists Nora Yuval-Davis and Floya Anthias. In *Racialized Boundaries: Race, Nation, Gender, Colour and Class and Anti-Racist Struggle* (1992) they disagree with the notion of ‘triple oppression’ (as blacks, as women, as members of the working class) that was prevalent among British Black Feminists. In their opinion, it not only restrained the analysis of oppression to three essentializing blocks accessible only to those affiliated with the identity politics category ‘blacks’ or ‘women of color in the U.S/U.K.’, but it homogenized the operating of oppression in such a way that it dismisses the importance played by the symbolic dimension of gender identity construction. On that ground, Anthias and Yuval-Davis brought into question the need to develop an analytical framework that would enable the articulation of both the material and the symbolic dimensions of social divisions in an intercultural way<sup>77</sup>.

For this reason, and in reaction to the constrains posed by identity Politics categories such as ‘women of color’ Yuval-Davis develops in *Gender and Nation* (1997) the idea of “transversal politics” as a democratic practice of alliances that aims to transcend boundaries of difference. It is “transversal”, Yuval-Davis asserts, “to examine the extent to which feminist solidarity is possible given women’s socially and especially national divisions” (117). Without losing sight of the challenge to gender ethnocentrism posed by women of color, she

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<sup>77</sup> This analytical framework was further developed by both authors in other articles such as Anthias, F. “Rethinking Social Divisions: Some Notes Towards a Theoretical Framework”, *Sociological Review* 46(3): 1998. 557-80.; “The material and the Symbolic in Theorizing Social Stratification “, *British Journal of Sociology* 52 (3): 367-90; “Beyond Feminism and Multiculturalism: Locating Difference and the Politics of Location” in *Women’s Studies International Forum* (25) 3: 275-86. On her part, Nira Yuval-Davis wrote “Belonging and the Politics of Belonging” in *Patterns of Prejudice* 40(3): 196-213.

acknowledges and celebrates the “growing sensitivity to issues of difference and multi-positionality...among white western feminists” (118)

However, on her view, strong emphasis on differences has resulted in ‘identity politics’ (women of color, whites, etc) which underscores a strong emphasis on social stratification and mostly, it reinforces the positional boundaries between women rather than making these borderlines more fluid (see Pryse 2000: 108). In this sense, “the problem with identity politics for Yuval-Davis”, adds American Literature Scholar and feminist theorist Marjorie Pryse<sup>78</sup>, “is that it serves as a kind of ideological positioning that assumes essentialist homogeneity within each category” (2006: 108). This essentialist uniformity therefore means that woman of color, or any other identity group it is assumed to share some essentialist bond, albeit potentially contradictory and mutant. As a move away from the identity politics controversy, Yuval-Davis thus proposed an alternative model of what she would convey as ‘transversality’ in which she highlights the different positioning from which different groupings view reality while recognizing that every situated knowledge is always partial (see Hill-Collins 1990:129)

Yuval-Davis credits the term ‘transversal politics’ to a group of Italian feminists who organized a meeting in 1993 in Bologna between Palestinian and Israeli women. In the aftermath of the conference she understood transversality as a potential alternative to identity politics. As a consequence, in order to develop a model that would enable the ability to engage in dialogue across differences Yuval-Davis proclaims the need of ‘rooting’ and ‘shifting’ as a transversal way of approaching the situatedness of the politics of location with an intersectional mind-set. On this account, what would become for her the biggest challenge involved how women could enter in dialogue concerning both their material and political realities but at the

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<sup>78</sup> Marjoire Pryse is the author of the *Norton Anthology of American Literature*. New York: W. W. Norton Publications, 1987.

same time, without requiring the assertion of their collective identity politics “in such a way that they cannot move outside their ideological positioning”, specifies Pryse (2006: 108). To clarify this strategy of ‘rooting’ and ‘shifting’ Yuval-Davis elicits how:

The idea is that each ...in the dialogue brings with her **rooting** in her own membership and identity, but at the same time, tries to **shift** in order to put herself in a situation of exchange with women who have a different membership and identity. They called this form of ‘transversalism’ to differentiate from ‘universalism’ which, by assuming a homogenous point of departure, ends up being exclusive instead of inclusive (1997:130; her bold)

As she further explains, in this two-fold process, “shifting does not involve losing one’s own rooting and set of values” and the process of shifting “should not homogenize the other” (Ibid.)

As Baukje Prins points out, while transversal politics does not assume that the dialogue across differences is boundary-free, Yuval-Davis depicts how “the boundaries of a transversal dialogue are determined by the message, rather than the messenger....their struggle against oppression and discrimination might (and mostly does) have specific categorical focus but is never confined just to that category” (2006:131).

At this point, the debates were centered around two main ways of approaching and interpreting the intersectionality of social divisions: on one side it was the intersectional model developed by Third World feminists in the U.S and on the other side, the constitutive ‘rooting’ and ‘shifting’ model offered by the British transversal feminists. More specifically, and as it will be depicted on the next chapter, the key issue on the debate will be more on how to handle the “conflation or separation of the different analytical levels in which intersectionality is located rather on the relationship of the divisions themselves” (Yuval-Davis 2006: 195).

Despite methodological and theoretical clashes, the point remained that ‘differences’ as a source of empowerment and critical knowledge production, had emerged as a central –albeit contested and paradoxical- concept within gender theory. Accounting for these differences through

open-ended cartographies consequently remarked a crucial priority in the ‘rooting and shifting’ grounds on which gender and its axes of oppression/privilege interact with each other, in a new level of complexity which defies dualistic or oppositional thinking. Within this context of re-articulating more inclusive identity-formulas, and in the midst of this new epistemological impetus, the urgency of the implementation of an ‘intersectional’ vantage point to differences among women will start to vibrate powerfully again.

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## CHAPTER 5

### A NEW SENSITIVITY IN THEORIZING INTERSECTIONALITY -CASE-STUDY: 2008 U.S. PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN-

#### 5.1: FROM RADICALIZATION TO TRANSFORMATION: *THIS BRIDGE WE CALL HOME: RADICAL WRITINGS FOR TRANSFORMATION*<sup>79</sup>

With the turn of the century, and after a serious debate ensued around the intersections between gender and power differentials, it was undeniable that gender-exclusive approaches were not longer feasible. To resist hegemonic discourses on identity, critical analysis on intersectionality had been initiated twenty years ago. As it has been depicted in previous chapters, throughout this time span, the evolution of differences among women encompassed a theory which emerged out of tensions between movements and power-laden debates about which intersections, power differentials and normativities should be given priority in diverse political contexts.

Consequently, in order to address 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 transformation* (2002). In its very

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<sup>79</sup> Hereafter referred as *This Bridge We Call Home*

title this transformation is put forward: the bridge made up by joining backs (1981, 1983) had become a home for many different voices (2002).

Anne Keating explains how she felt compelled in the late 1990s to ask Gloria Anzaldúa if she was willing to revise *This Bridge Called My Back* and co-edit with her, a follow up book. “As we envisioned it” recalls Keating, “our new collection would not just celebrate the twentieth anniversary of *This Bridge Called My Back*. More importantly ...it would invite readers of all colors to build on contributor’s insights by creating new theories and practices designed to enact transformation” (Keating 2009:82)

To facilitate “community building and dialogue” (83) the editors started a listserv for all contributors. The striking outcome was that some people reacted very violently when they learned that Gloria and Anne would include contributions by people who did not identify as people of color. Surprisingly, some expressed their disappointment and reacted very violently that the new anthology would not provide the same type of “safe” women of color only space as that provided by *This Bridge Called My Back*.

At all odds, the listserv conversation took a “strange detour”, retrieves Keating (Ibid.) into a volatile debate between pro-Palestinian and pro-Israeli contributors. And “instead of expressing their anger directly by confronting Gloria and me about our decision to create a radically inclusionary book” recalls Keating, “reactions shifted from sorrow to “aggressive, visceral and shocking” anger. Words of confrontation and exclusion turned illusions into a bitter preliminary stage since surprisingly enough “The rhetoric grew increasingly hateful and hostile; each side treated its “other” with total disdain, dehumanizing anyone who held an opposing view, refusing to listen and understand their other’s perspectives” (90). On this account, Gloria Alzandúa remembers in the introduction of *This Bridge We Call Home*, called

“(Un)natural bridges, (Un) safe spaces” how “the contentious debates....churned a liquid fire in our guts” (2002a: 2).

There was, however, a strong determination on behalf of the editors to project a new discourse of radical connectivity across differences that would not be constrained into the solely ‘women of color/third world feminism in the U.S’ identity politics category. “While *This Bridge Called My Back* displaced whiteness,” In the Foreword “AfterBridge: Technologies of Crossing, Gloria Anzaldúa strongly affirmed:

*This Bridge we call home* carries the displacement further. 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. This book 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 (2002: 2)

The lessons learnt in these twenty years had not been in vein. Intersectionality had changed the very understanding of differences among women. As we have previously seen, when the anthology was first published, differences were a source of division and confrontation (see chapter 2 and chapter 3). Moreover, after decades of discussing these clashes, differences unleashed both as a source of personal and collective empowerment and agency; that is, the capacity to take action and destabilize normative discourses of gender identity. That’s when intersectionality was formulated (see chapter 3). Accordingly, 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 as a source of radical connectivity. The message sent by the editors was that clear: the loosening of previous restrictive labels, while intensely painful, is the only path to create shifts in consciousness and transgressive opportunities for change. As a result, radical writings by women of color could no longer accommodate that change unless it

was transmuted into a radical alteration. Consequently, *This Bridge Called My Back: Radical Writings for Transformation* (1981, 1983) metamorphosed into *This Bridge We Call Home: Radical Writings For Transformation*. And it did so in its entire intersectional splendor.

This Bridge we call home is our attempt to continue the dialogue, rethink the old ideas, and germinate new theories. In these pages we move from what has been done to us (victimhood) to a more extensive level of agency,.... The knowledge that we are in symbiotic relationship to all that exists and co-creators of ideologies- attitudes, beliefs and cultural values- motivates us to act collaboratively (Anzaldúa and Keating 2002: 2)

“Now let us shift” Gloria Anzaldúa calls forth, and this shift is intended to delineate and identify the major impacts that on her view, had occurred throughout this twenty years span between her first anthology and this last one. In favor of an intersectional mind set that has switched from women of color-biased theoretical perspective towards a more inclusive focus, Alzandúa describes conventional identity categories as “obsolete” “outworn” “inaccurate” (2002:2). “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).

As Anzaldúa suggests, we live in a nexus point, or what she calls ‘Nepantla’, the Nahuatl word meaning ‘in-between space’. Moreover, acting as the spokeswomen of a new generation of intersectional scholars, what Alzandúa defends is that the awareness of the overlapping space in-between various social categories surrounding gender, brings light into the “changeability of racial, gender, sexual, and other categories, rendering the conventional labeling obsolete” (3). To these regards, for her co-editor, AnneLouise Keating, Anzaldúa’s repantla represents the unpredictable, the unstable and transitional time/space epistemology lacking clear boundaries, or definitions (2009:94). In her view, the intersectional mindset that is aware of the interconnectivity that Alzandúa is proposing, is what makes status quo stories

and “comfortable self perceptions shattered as a apparently fixed categories – whether based on gender, ethnicity, “race”, sexuality, religion, nationality, or some combination of these categories- unravel” (Ibid.) (see chapter 3). As Anzaldúa examines, the “changeability” in these categories and labels, questions and begins to transform the clear-cut distinction between women “of color” and “white”; consequently, “In our efforts to rethink the borders of race, gender, and identity” she depicts, “we must guard against creating new boundaries” (Anzaldúa and Keating 2002:3)

To these regards, Anzaldúa’s co-editor, AnneLouise Keating underscores how Alzandúa’s provocative claim relays on her emphasis on consciousness, as these shifts are from the external (culturally-imposed and racialized categories) to the internal (self-selected ways of thinking and acting) . And it is precisely at this point, that is, the positioning of ‘radical internal connectivity’ in a stage in which differences among women had evolved to incorporate an intersectional approach to gender identity, in which I would like to stress what in my opinion lays the key to understand the evolution of differences in its journey towards intersectionality. Furthermore, I would like to extent this reasoning to the justification of my choice regarding this anthology in its different editions, in what it was intended to be a ‘metaphorical spine’ guiding the very evolution meant to be depicted throughout these chapters. The threads of gender, race and class- or more precisely sexism, racism and oppression of all sorts thought through in this anthology, have been fundamental to the workings of an intersectional mind set into a new generation of scholars.

Nonetheless, and for the purpose of the very nature of this chapter, I won’t undertake the same in depth analysis of the anthology as it was laid out in chapter 3. My intention is to underscore the drastic shift that is embodied in its latest edition: that is, positioning radical

connectivity through an intersectional mind-set (see Keating 2009). Therefore, I approach it as a testimony of how individual subjects are willing to negotiate the specific power-laden social relations from an intersectional standpoint refusing to keep on clinging into identity politics categories. Looking at what it can be called as the re-codification of the politics of location (chapter 3), foregrounds the rejection of an oppositional critical strategy. “Recognition of our profound interrelatedness has revolutionized my life in ways that I’m still trying to comprehend”... confesses Keating, and she further elucidates:

Given my progressive politics, as well as my status as a women of color in the academy, this oppositionality has seemed vital for survival. However, after living so intimately with *This Bridge Called My Back*, working with Gloria on *This Bridge We Call Home*,...I have come to realize that my oppositional politics have inhibited my growth, damaged my health, threatened my relationships, and harmed me in other ways (2009: 89)

Indeed, while there are significant differences of approach and emphasis, the contributors of this anthology are linked through an interest in analyzing intersectionality without strong identity labels attached to it. “Standing in rigid opposition is a strategy for survival” asserts U.S Latina Irene Lara “ but it has killed us and it will continue to sever our souls and assail our hearts....Western binary oppositions wound us in many ways....these false splits keep us from ourselves, each other (2002: 434). In the same vein, African-American Jacqui Alexander in “Remembering this Bridge, Remembering ourselves: Yearning, Memory and Desire” powerfully insists that “there is a great danger in living lives of segregation.... Our oppositional politic has been necessary, but it will never sustain us” (2002: 99). Keating agrees: “When we examine the world through these binary lens, we assume the differences between our views and those of others are too different – too *other* as it were- to have *anything* (of importance) in common. This assumption keeps us trapped within our own existing ideas

and beliefs”. “After all, she questions, “if we are so busy defending our own views, where is the room for complexity, compromise and exchange?” (2009: 91)

Challenging therefore a static and unchanging notion of ‘women of color’ as the perpetual outsiders, the contributor’s analysis demonstrates how much of the external and internal nature of intersectionality remains unexamined in most current inquires on this issue.

Moreover, in the quest to produce such “complexity, compromise and exchange” by choosing these quotations as the representation of the essence of *This Bridge We Call Home*, my intention has been to highlight the grounds of a new approach towards intersectionality; one that would no longer delimit or distract intercultural dialogues by the means of its identification with women of color’s experiences. In the very character of their vindications and the nature of their dialogue, “there has been a gradual recognition of the inadequacy of analyzing various social divisions” asserts Yuval-Davis, “but especially race and gender, as separate, internally homogenous, social categories resulting from the marginalization of specific effects of these, especially on women of color” (Yuval Davis 2006: 198).

This anthology demonstrates so. Acknowledging, for instance that not all women of color identify being ‘of color’ as their most important social grouping has the potential to avoid exercising counterproductive tokenist identity politics. To these regards, Yuval-Davis defends that is crucial to distinguish between the experimental and the representational dimensions implied within identity politics labels “because identity politics tends to conflate all these different analytical levels and doesn’t differentiate between individual and collective representation” she sustains (199).

By choosing to give voice to the representational dimension of identity over the experimental, *This Bridge We Call Home* represents a momentum within this intercultural

dialogue in which boundaries tear apart, become more permeable and begin breaking down. “I find this shift in Alzandúa’s own thinking” corroborates Keating, “where she transforms the oppositional politics and intersectional identities of *This Bridge Called My Back* into increasing holistic politics and identities in her twenty-first-century writings”(2009: 91).

From a critical feminist perspective, this new emphasis placed on transformation offers a new gender identity viewpoint that addresses the urgency to move into a new era of “post-identity politics” (see Verloo 2006). “We have come so far from the bridge”, affirms U.S Latina Renea Bredin, “only to find that the way home is a return across that same bridge” (2002:330).

In my view, such an approach requires a commitment to a politics of interrelatedness and accountability across differences and commonalities. To these regards, I defend that *This Bridge* whether as bonding women’s backs or as the metaphor of a trans-cultural home, not only it continues to provide a theoretical platform to approach intersectionality, but it displays the very evolution of differences among women by exposing the limitations of status-quo stories about self-enclosed identities, in its most remarkable stance.

Thus, as part of the continual process of democratizing feminism, by enhancing moves toward a more inclusive theory that continually reinvents universal claims by particularizing their meaning, a new stage for intersectionality was bound, to some degree, to entail a new response within the academia. The investigation and diagnose of a new receptivity brings me to the next point that I would like to explore.

## 5.2: THE STATE OF ART: THE RESULT OF A VERY INTENSE DEBATE

As underlined in previous chapters, having mapped the field of intersectional identities, aiming at “undoing” (see Butler 2004) of fixed, essentialized and stereotyped understandings of gender, the general feeling was that collaborative approach to intersectionality would only succeed when it could be a move beyond binary thinking and dualistic self/other identities. Therefore, in this last chapter, in order to unpack the state of art in this intercultural debate, I shall outline the main frames of what it’s been recently named as the “Intersectional Approach” (see Berger and Guidroz 2009). To do so, I would like to start by questioning the general interpretation of the term ‘intersectionality’ in itself.

In the *European Journal of Women’s Studies* 2006 Edition, the editorial section recognized that it was through a very intense debate and political struggle that intersectionality came to be accepted in feminist theory and women’s studies scholarship within the Anglo-European academia. In an overview about the academic journey of intersectionality, the editors remarked that:

it foregrounds a richer and a more complex ontology than approaches that attempt to reduce people to one category at a time. It also points for the need of multiplex epistemologies. In particular, it indicates that fruitful knowledge production must treat social positions as relational (Pattynama and Phoenix 187)

Along similar lines, Swedish Gender and Culture theorist Nina Lykke in a very recent academic guide on intersectionality titled *Feminist Studies: A Guide to Intersectional Theory, Methodology and Writing* (2010) places special emphasis on the heated nature of the theoretical debate that is currently taking place, with both strong advocates and opponents. Nonetheless, Lykke seems very optimistic about its outcome: “the way in which it has become ‘a nodal point of international debates’ Lykke explicates, “indicates a broad consensus among

many different feminist scholars that the phenomenon of intersectional gender/sex and gendered intersections needs to be taken into account and thought through” (187)

In the light of international debates, let’s remember that ‘interlocking’ social categories had been introduced into the Human Rights Discourse as a part of gender mainstreaming (chapter 4). Accordingly, Nira Yuval-Davis in “Intersectionality and Feminist Politics” (2006) recounts how Kimberlé Crenshaw was invited to introduce the notion of intersectionality in the preparatory session to the World Conference against Racism (WCAR) which was going to be held in September 2001 in Durban, South Africa. Its analytical importance was finally reflected into the resolution on the human rights of women at the 58<sup>th</sup> session of the UN Commission on Human Rights. Therefore, it was 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)<sup>80</sup>

In “A Conversation with Founding Scholars of Intersectionality: Kimberlé Crenshaw, Nira Yuval-Davis, and Michelle Fine” (Berger and Guidroz 2009:61-78) Crenshaw, on the issue with the attempt of official and legal discourse to adopt an intersectional approach, highlights the danger of reading intersectionality “as just multiplying identity categories rather than constituting a structural analysis or a political critique” (70). To these regards, Nira Yuval-Davis concurs about the confusion of ‘what to do with it’ that seems to be prevalent among European policymakers. Reinforcing a theory that she’s been elaborating since the late eighties (see chapter 3), intersectionality pitfalls revolve around the application of an additive principle of intersectionality instead of looking at its constituted nature. “They [policymakers] try to make it into identity categories” holds Yuval Davis, “and flatten them and make them as

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<sup>80</sup> Cited in Nira Yuval-Davis, “Intersectionality and Feminist Politics” in *European Journal of Women’s Studies*. SAGE Publications. London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi, 2006, 1350-5068 Vol. 13(3): 194.

if they're all the same without recognizing the different social divisions and the fact that people are positioned in varied places. The fact that you are a black woman or a disabled lesbian or whatever does not make it all the same" (71)

On this account, "what would be then a good way to deal with political intersectionality?" interrogates Dutch Comparative politics and gender issues theorist Mieke Verloo in "Multiple inequalities: Intersectionality and the EU" (2006:223). Her proposal offers a two-fold approach. On one side, she advocates for the expansion of 'gender mainstreaming' to encompass both structural and political intersectionality and on the other side, another option would be to develop forms of comprehensive (or equality) mainstreaming such as race/ethnicity mainstreaming, sexual mainstreaming, etc" (Ibid.).

To further explore its implication for effective policy-making it's beyond the scope of this chapter. As Verloo asseverates, "both options are equally valuable and equally necessary; therefore, it is practical and strategic to start from these two positions simultaneously". Yet, expanding on the notion of the intertwined nature of both political and structural intersectionality, I ascribe to the same reasoning in order to tackle the risk of flattening differences in what it could provoke "unintended consequences to the blanket application of intersectionality" (Luft 2009:100). As Yuval-Davis examines, the analysis and methodology of intersectionality on Human Rights policy discourse is just emerging and "It often suffers from analytical confusions that have already been tackled by feminist scholars who have been working on these issues for longer, outside the specific global feminist networks that developed around the Beijing Forum" (2006:206).

In fact, for the scholars working on intersectional issues, albeit without total consensus, intersectionality was being increasingly perceived as a way to destabilize both structural and political power relations.

On this ground, in her article “Intersectionality as a Buzzword: A Sociology of Science Perspective on What Makes a Feminist Theory Successful”, American feminist sociologist and gender theorist Kathy Davis, defines it as the on-going interaction of multiple identities and experiences of exclusion and subordination.(2008:67).Accordingly, Anne Phoenix in “Editorial: Intersectionality”, celebrates its semantic potential as “a handy catchall phrase that aims to make visible the multiple positioning that constitutes everyday life and the power relations that are central to it” (2006a:187). In the attempt to construct a definition for assessing the complexities of *both* systems of oppression and privilege, other intersectional scholars such as Nina Lykke tend to defend a broader, umbrella-like definition. “Intersectionality is the methodological tool to analyse how historically specific kinds of power differentials and/or constraining normativities” Lykke therefore states:

based on discursively, institutionally and/or structurally constructed socio- cultural sructed categorizations such as gender, ethnicity, class, age/ generation, sexuality, dis/ability, nation- nality mother tongue and so on, *interact*, and in doing so produce different kinds of social inequalities and unjust social relations (2010: 50; her emphasis )

Given the rich and robust theoretical and grounded insights of the intersectional tradition, the question remains how to translate the motivations and assumptions of intersectional theorizing into an applied process of empirical modes of inquiry. Over the last decade and across various disciplines, attempts have been made to reach an intersectional method of research analysis (Hancock 2008). On the whole, nonetheless, there is still no general agreement on how to proceed with it, use it as a method or as a theory. What it is agreed upon, however, is that it represents the unleashed promise gender theory has been longing for so long. Indeed, If

since the 80s, the intersections of gender/class/ “race/ethnicity” became the new mantra within women’s /gender’s studies, what is it about intersectionality that makes it so successful?

For Kathy Davis, the promise of an intersectional approach is that it offers a novel link “between critical feminist theory and the effects of sexism, classism and racism and a critical methodology inspired by postmodern feminist theory, bringing them together in ways that could not have been envisioned before” (2008: 73). The fact that it serves to give voice to one of the most problematic normative concerns; that is, how to name differences among women in a non-hierarchical and exclusionary way, gives it potential to “provide a platform in which feminist theory could be theorized as a joint enterprise in an interdisciplinary way’ (72). As 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 (71) Moreover, it aligns with the commitment of the politics of location, which Haraway re-coined as ‘situated knowledge’ (chapter 4) and it works with Butler’s performative approach to gender and its understanding of power as a dynamic process that can be disrupted by individuals’ agency.

What is more, as depicted by Avtar Brah and Anne Phoenix in “Ain’t I a Woman? Revisiting Intersectionality”, it seems that there is a new spirit governing feminist debates and that the uneasy alliance among different methodological approaches (see chapter 3 and chapter 4) has finally eased.

Either for Davis (2008: 74) or Brah and Phoenix (2004:82) intersectionality has unexpectedly provided a way to overcome incompatibilities between women of color’s theory and post/modern, post-structuralist feminism (see chapter 4). That is, it not only commits itself to make visible the material consequences of these categories unto the daily interactions of

these women, moreover, it applies a methodology compatible with the deconstruction of these categories, the rejection of hegemonic universalism and the investigation of dynamics of power. Even the strategy of asking the other question proposed by Mstayada (chapter 3) it is been embraced as “a handy way of doing research” (Davis 2008: 75). “Intersectionality provides the basis for a mutual beneficial collaboration”, reiterates Davis “between theoretical projects which had previously found themselves in somewhat uneasy footing. Thus,”, she concludes, “ while the idea of Intersectionality may have not been new, it provided a new platform-“a joint nodal point” for disparate theoretical approaches within feminist scholarship” (74)

Indeed, from very different fields (humanities, social sciences, philosophy, economics and law) theoretical perspectives (psychoanalysis, deconstructionist, post-modernism, post-structuralism) and political persuasions (feminisms, anti-racism, multiculturalism, queer and disability studies) are all convinced that intersectionality is exactly what gender studies needs. With respect to this, in *The Intersectional Approach: Transforming the Academy Through Race, Gender and Class*, Elizabeth R. Cole and Natalie J. Sabik’s essay offers three powerful questions that would be quite useful for scholars interested in exploring interlocking systems of oppression and privilege and to employ an intersectional analysis, regardless their methodological vantage point. They ask: “Whose perspective is represented and whose is left out? What role does power play? Where are the similarities? (in Berger and Guidroz 2009: 74)

Nowadays and despite the plurality of ways in which intersectionality is currently being applied, it could be said that what unifies its different strands is the idea that only by treating social categories as relational, can illuminating and fruitful knowledge be produced. However, the unfolding of how these social positions relate is creating a great deal of debate. Recently,

the focus of the debate has been shifted from the relationships among social divisions themselves towards the different analytical levels in which intersectionality is located. “What is at the heart of the debate” Yuval-Davis argues, “is a conflation or separation of different analytic levels in which intersectionality is located, rather than just a debate on the relationship of the divisions themselves” (2009: 46) Some claim that since categories such as ‘race’ or ‘class’ have different organizing logics, social categories cannot be treated at the same level of analysis. (see Staunaes 2003). “Different inequalities are dissimilar because they are differently framed” points out Mieke Verloo. Therefore, she argues that “it’s important to ground policy strategies not in the similarity but in the distinctiveness of inequalities” (2006: 212). Adding on to this debate, Yuval-Davis emphasizes how “social divisions are about macro axes of social power but also involve actual, *concrete people*” (198, italics mine). She stresses the separation of different levels of analysis. “Social divisions have organizational, intersubjective, experiential and representational forms”, she explains, “and this affects the ways we theorize the connections between the different levels” (194). At each level, a particular way of approaching social categories is into play. But most importantly, it cannot be ignored how at every level intersectionality always occurs at the conflation of the material and the symbolic realms<sup>81</sup>. “Social divisions also exist in the ways people experience subjectively their daily lives” reiterates Yuval Davis, “in terms of inclusion and exclusion, discrimination and disadvantage, specific aspirations and specific identities”. Importantly” she goes on, “this includes not only what they think about themselves and their communities but also their attitudes and prejudices towards others” (198).

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<sup>81</sup> For a further analysis on this point see Flora Anthias, “The Material and the Symbolic in Theorizing Social Stratification” in the *British Journal of Sociology* (2001) 52 (3): 367-90.

Another important issue represented, implicitly or explicitly, in much of the literature is how many social divisions should be included and/or which ones should be incorporated into the analysis. That is, are race (or race/ethnicity), gender and class the three major social divisions?

One potential alternative to include additional axes of social divisions is the one proposed by Dutch intersectional theorist Helma Lutz (2002). In her view, they are not axes but “basic dualisms” that challenge the “spaces in between” (as echoing Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Nepatlá*). Her list includes 14 lines of difference: Gender; sexuality; “race”/skin color; ethnicity; nation/state; class; culture; ability; age; sedentariness/origin; wealth; North-South; religion, stage of social development (13 cited in Yuval Davis 2006:202)<sup>82</sup>. The list that Lutz proposes is a boundless approximation, “by no means complete” she explains, “other categories have to be added or re-defined” (Ibid).

In addition, in her lecture on intersectionality to the 2005 World Conference against Racism Charlotte Bunch, American activist, founding director and senior scholar at the Center for Women’s Global Leadership presented two more vectors of difference, indigenous and rural living, which added up to sixteen social variables to be taken into account when applying an intersectional analysis of gender. At the end of her lecture she concluded with the reflection that “if the human rights of any are left unprotected –if we are willing to sacrifice the rights of any group, the human rights of all are undermined” (cited in Yuval Davis 2006: 204). With that being said, Bunch’s words, in short, acknowledge the importance of designing an inclusive set of variables, with the specificity to address the main structural inequalities (class, ethnicity,

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<sup>82</sup> Lutz, Helma. (2002). “Intersectional Analysis: A way out of Multiple Dilemmas?”. Paper presented at the International Sociological Association Conference, Brisbane, July cited at Yuval Davis 2006: 204.

sexual orientation, etc.) but also open enough to illuminate complexity of the particular social phenomenon under study.

To these regards, Yuval- Davis interrogates: “Do we have to be concerned that the list is limitless?” (2006:202). In answering this question, Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble* (1990a) provides an interesting point. Her insight comes from a skeptical discussion of the “ect” which is often used at the end of lists of social and cultural divisions. In her view, its use reflects both an exhaustion to theorize and at the same time, it posits a potential threat of an illimitable process of signification. Yuval-Davis, however, questions Butler’s premise on the grounds that while some social distinctions are important to most people in the majority of locations (class, ethnicity, sexual orientation, etc.), “in specific historical situations and in relation to specific people there are some social divisions which are more important than others in constructing specific positioning” (2006: 202). Consequently, the ‘potential threat’ is always contained by the very nature of the intersectionality and politics of location that it is at play at a given intersectional analysis.

Nonetheless, beyond ontological questions of how many social divisions there are and whether we are dealing with axes of oppression, dualistic lines of difference or specific forms of discrimination, another important discernment to bear in mind is that, from a structural point of view, different social divisions tend to have certain common parameters. This posits a potential jeopardy, points out Yuval- Davis, due to the fact that when social categories are framed as having parameters in common, they tend to be naturalized. To this respect, “any attempt to essentialize “blackness” or “womanhood” or “working classes” as specific forms of concrete oppression in additive ways” she brings forth, “inevitably conflates narratives of identity politics with descriptions of positionality as well as constructing identities within the

terms of specific political projects (2006:195). In fact, argues Mieke Verloo, “it’s important to ground strategies not in the similarity but in the distinctiveness of inequalities”. Yuval-Davis agrees to the emphasis on similarities reproduce hegemonic discourses of identity politics that render invisible the social inequalities between members through a homogenized version of that identity. As a result of these discourses of naturalization, social categories are homogenized and those who belong to particular social groups (such as ‘women of color in the U. S) tend to be treated as sharing certain natural attributes, either positive or negative. “Ironically” Yuval Davis asserts:

this was exactly the reason why ...members of ..marginalized groupings felt the need for what is known today as an intersectional analysis, except that in such identity politics construction what it takes place is actually fragmentation and multiplication of the wider categorical identities rather than more dynamic, shifting and multiplex constructions of intersectionality (195)

At this juncture, I would like to underline that I am aware that there is a wide variety of political and theoretical positions on all these points, but in order to outline why various social categories cannot be treated in equivalent ways, I have intended to map out what are widely recognized positions within the field.

### **5.3: SYSTEMATIC VS. CONSTRUCTIVIST INTERSECTIONALITY**

Dutch feminist and political philosopher Baukje Prin’s article (2006) in *The European Journal of Women’s Studies*’ special edition on intersectionality, focuses on British and North-American trends, albeit both anti-essentialists in its perspective towards identity, and makes a division on what she calls systematic intersectionality” (mostly US-based) from “constructionist intersectionality” (mostly UK-based).

Prin identifies the systematic approaches as those proposed by Crenshaw, who foregrounds structural inequality and focuses on the intersection of power differentials of privilege and oppression. The aim of these approaches, she proceeds, is to reveal “the detrimental effect of the subordinate poles of gender, race and class, and simultaneously to problematize the dominant poles of these binary oppositions, such as masculinity, whiteness or middle classness (279).

Another example of systematic approach can be found in a frequently quoted article, “The Complexities of Intersectionality”, written by US based feminist sociologist Leslie MacCall (2005). Attempting to map the genealogies of existing feminists’ intersectionality studies, MacCall discusses questions of how to study the complex nature of intersectionality and she proposes three approaches towards intersectional theory and analysis: anti-categorical, intra-categorical and inter-categorical.

Hence, according to MacCall, the purpose of the ‘anti-categorical’ approach is to deconstruct categories to prove that social relations are so “irreducibly complex” (1773) that categorization in itself is always constraining and reductive. In a way, this can be claimed to be the remaining of the postmodern critique to categorizations per se. As noted earlier in chapter 4, after deconstruction, gender reveals as the result of certain discourses and therefore, becomes obsolete. The same can be applied to the category of ‘race’ or ‘class’. On the same vein, for those informed by structuralists and Marxist feminist analysis, the focal point continues to emphasize how different power differentials and categorizations are always based on ‘different logics’ (Lykee 2010: 51).

On the other hand, the goal of the ‘intra-categorical’ intersectional analysis would be to make visible those “neglected points of intersection” (1774) that have been obscuring the

specific situation of those social groups located on boundaries of different social categories. That has been the case of women of color, primarily caught between the categories of gender and 'race'. Therefore, what this perspective highlights is that any analysis on identity that only takes into account one variable will miss the complexity of these social groups' situation.

Finally, the 'inter-categorical' perspective, bringing together differences at both structural and political level, "aims at analyzing relationships of inequality among social groups and changing configurations of inequality among multiple and conflicting dimensions", explicates MacCall (1773),

According to other theorist such as Prins, however, through anti-categorical lenses, gender, class, etc, are conceptualized as systems of domination, oppression and marginalization that determine or structure gender identity (2006:279). Under this perception, "the list of identity variables" reinforces Prin, "functions as an indicator of the measure of the oppression suffered: the longer the list, the heavier the burden" (282)

In Prin's view, the constrains of the systematic approach and its limits on representing complexities derive therefore from the fact that the way categories are approached, as implicitly part of a structure of domination and marginization, it translates in a notion of power as "unitateral and absolute". As a result, subjects are conceptualized as the "passive bearers of the meanings of social categories" (280). In the same line of thinking, Anne Phoenix and Pamela Ptynama point out that "in doing so, it disqualifies some of the ways in which people choose to identify because it treats identity as a matter of categorization and naming" (2006:187). Consequently, it can be said that systematic approach falls short when it comes to the role played by agency and subjectivity and the ways individuals form their social identifications. In this sense, just as it is important to think conceptually about intersections as

potentially oppressive, it is important to build intersectionality as a potential capacity for action (agency), that is, how experientially is perceived by the ‘situated gaze’ of each individual.

Thus, some intersectional theorists defend the constructivist approach (process of gender construction) to be more apt to grasp the complexities of intersectional identity formation since defends the relational and diversity-sensitive of identity formation processes. Let’s remember that mainly through the impact of Judith Butler’s performativity (chapter 3), the intersection of social categories of gender is being strongly highlighted by structuralist-oriented feminist scholars, as a process rather than structure. To illustrate this point, I now proceed to provide some poststructuralist examples to show the wide span of theoretical positions within the field.

In this context, poststructuralists approaches have criticized Crewshaw’s metaphor of roads crossing as “too cruel and static as a tool” (Lykke 2010:73), which can be useful to understand power differentials in the legal system but nonetheless, too flatten as to articulate identity construction .As Nina Lykke points out “for feminists structuralists, it is important to be able to carry out intersectional analysis that can grasp the construction of subjectivities in discourses that weave together narratives of gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality and so on.”(Lykke 2010:73). Another poststructuralist theorist who has made such claims forcefully is for example the Danish social psychologist, Dorthe Staunae. In her article “Where Have All the Subjects gone?” makes the point that an excessive systematic approach to axes of social signification, takes the risk of loosing sight of the subjective dimension of identity and agency, what she refers to as the “meaning-making process on a subject level” (Staunae 2003:3 cited in Lykke 2010:73) She thus argues that for intersectionality to be effective, it would necessarily have to take into account the ways individuals engage and experience and negotiate the power dynamics that frame their lives. It is agreed upon constructivist approaches therefore, that the danger of a

systematic viewpoint is that for subjects to be reduced to merely entities caught up in a rigidly predefined grid of interlocking-intersecting categories.

Another interesting nuance is provided by Mierke Verloo who underscores the importance of taking into account the dimension of personal choice. “We can decide to become Catholic or Islamic tomorrow”, she argues (2006:221). In a very interesting analysis, Verloo points out that there are those ‘visible’ categories that go beyond our control or self-selected perceptions, since, for example it is beyond our control to ‘decide’ either to be old or young. In what she theorizes as the “dimension of adscription vs identification”, she calls attention to the ability, to some extent, to hide our sexuality or wealth as opposed to a much more difficult enterprise “to hide poverty or first language.” (Ibid.) Therefore, what it can be inferred, is that there is some degree of potential ‘probability and possibility’ of a change in gender identity and status in connection to either inequalities or privilege positions. That is, there is a fact that all individuals have been young and will –hopefully- become old. But at the same time, there is the possibility that some of us can become disabled and some will change sex and ethnical affiliation over time. This also illustrates”, Verloo derives, “that social categories can be unstable and contested: what counts as race or ethnicity in specific contexts, what counts as young or old, is intertwined with power in many ways” (221).

In the same line of thinking, in an attempt to grasp how power dynamics are negotiated across intersections, American gender intersectional theorist Jennifer Fish and Jennifer Rothchild argue that intersections of social power “operate as a web of countless connections, embodying dialectic of privilege and vulnerability – a “push-pull”. Taking on a personal stance, they asseverate that “as our reflections on our fieldwork experiences illuminate, intersectionality hinges upon social asymmetries at two levels – that which is visible identity

(such as gender or race) and that which we can shift and blur (such as class status)” (2009:270).

And it is precisely at this point, where agency and subjectivity place such a crucial role in the intersectional formula of personal choice, where the most colliding aspect of systematic and constructivist approaches meet. Applied in a systematic way, intersectional categories and its social relations are viewed as a ‘marker of deviance’ construed as static and inheritable. In this discourse, however, intersectionality seems to lose its reference to a site of contestation and instead becomes an indicator of inequalities.

Criticism towards such approach, as Prins suggests, provides a clear point that the systematic approach can limit the possibilities of representing complexity. Thus, Prin argues that constructivist intersectionality allows for a more nuanced complexity and contradiction “since markers of identity are not merely exclusive and limiting forms of categorization but simultaneously provide narrative and enabling resources” (2006:280). This idea of social categorizations as “narrative and enabling resources” brings me to the last aspect I would like to tackle in this exploration of intersectionality.

#### **5.4: INTERSECTIONALITY AS A DIALOGICAL SELF**

In the exploration of the ‘meaning-making process on a subject level’, Viennese critical and cultural gender theorist Alice Luvig in “Differences between Women? Intersecting Voices in Female Narrative” (2006), questions which axes of difference are more relevant to make visible the role played by agency and subjectivity in the particular understanding of intersectional categories. “*Who* defines *when*, *where*, *which* and *why* particular ones are given

recognition while others don't?" interrogates Luvig (2006: 247). To resolve this ambiguity, she proposes to link narrative with identity and difference. Simply put, she further explains: "for the point of view of the individual subject is through narration that the axes of identity and subjectivity become explicit" (249). Her point is that, once acknowledged that subjectivity is the way people make sense of their real world, agency becomes the modality of gender identity, a crucial nodal point to be able to grasp that the way a person perceives and conceives an event (and speaks about it) would therefore be according to how this person is culturally constructed. Furthermore, what it is brought into surface is both what this person identifies with (identity) and what this person differentiates herself/himself from (difference).

In this respect, and with a strong influence steaming from Butler's performative theory (chapter 3) the interesting point is that categories are established as 'not neutral' since identity or difference are mutually constitutive. "Gender identities are constructed when people appeal to differences within such classifications", reinforces Ludvig. To illustrate her point, she problematizes categories by conducting interviews in which she explicitly states that her interest is not a biographical account but rather to approach and understand subject's own self-positioning. On one of them, she conducted an interview with Dora, a 29-year-old university student of law from Bulgaria, who had lived in Austria for several years and therefore had become a migrant. She was legally resident but since she did not hold a work permit she was reduced to low-pay, unskilled jobs. Through her personal account, Ludvig concludes that gender is the less conscious category because since is normative, is rarely questioned. "Dora does not explicitly mentioned gender" Luvig argues "but does so implicitly in connection with 'distinction' from her brother" (2006: 252). As she portrays him as different to her, it is through difference that she constructs herself. Moreover, her analysis also signals that

differences can be used to create either positive or negative insider perceptions about the self and the outside .In Dora’s case, for example, ethnicity is perceived and understood as subjective feelings of belonging to specific collectives highly anchored in how her new status as a ‘migrant Bulgarian’ enhances her subjective recognition of where she comes from. What Ludvig thus defends is that, in order to deal with complexities, the particularities of gender need to be taken into account. To these means, interviews therefore allow analytic insights into intersectionality through the many voices orchestrated in the narrative. Moreover, by the problematization of all significant variables from a subjective perspective, intersectional analysis reveal the specificity of time and place that shapes the particularities of gender; that is, specific positioning prioritize specific spheres of the social relations. For example, class divisions are grounded in relation to economic processes whereas gender relations are not only biological differences between man and women but the discourses that create a division of social roles defined by biological differences. Moreover, ethnic and racial discourses of collectivities tend to be constructed along inclusive /exclusionary boundaries which are subjectively experienced by the individuals

Interestingly, this new direction towards narration and life-stories as a research focus (already highlighted decades ago in the first edition of *This Bridge*) reveals more clearly the long-standing dualistic tension between a more stretched and flexible way in which individuals subjects perceive identity and subjectivity and the more static way they are established by socio-political structures (Ludvig 2006:250); that is, the unchanging systematic perception of categories. To these regards, Dutch critical feminist theorist Marjo Buitelaar proposes what she calls as “the dialogical self” as those voices within ourselves that speak from the different I-positions between which subjects are constantly shifting (261). “What makes the dialogical

self so interesting in the study of intersectionality” she explains “is that it provides tools of how individuals speak from different I-positions within the self, switching between various collective voices and sometimes mixing them as they take different positions “(2006:262).

Therefore, what it can be inferred from this latest viewpoint is a current emphasis on the analysis of how specific positionings and (not necessarily corresponding) identities and political values are constructed and interrelate and effect each other in the most micro layers of daily social life. On these grounds, and as a way of bridging the different stages in the evolution of differences traced throughout these chapters, I find it fascinating that interlocking categories are finally approached as orchestrating voices that display a subjective and performative identity. Moreover, in order to reconcile the theory behind how intersections of power shape both everyday relations and social structures, with the subjective and performative dimension of intersectionality, the dialogical self has the potential to turn theory into practice. As a consequence, what it could seem an empirical analysis of insurmountable complexity transforms into a performative highly informative- act that informs about the organization of intersecting identity categories (262) Most importantly, it puts an emphasis on intersectionality as a dynamic site of knowledge.

On a final note, and having reached this point, I would like to underscore that I have tried to summarize the plurality of ways in which intersectionality is being currently applied as part of an on-going intercultural dialogue. Thus, to the extent that I have stressed the evolution of differences among women, I have also mapped intersectionality’s various stages within the Anglo-European academia, in the light of on-going efforts to theorize intersectional categories of identity as a cross cultural tool.

By all accounts, with such a history of colliding understanding of differences among women, surprisingly, intersectionality, as pivot for tension has transformed (as so brilliantly depicted in *This Bridge We Call Home: Radical Writings for Transformation*) into the creation of a ‘safer’ theoretical space where differential power relations are acknowledged and addressed rather than overlooked. Indeed, being acknowledged that differences cannot be abstracted neither from power relations nor a subjective and performative approach to gender and its categories, it can be said that the current state of affairs it’s more like a balancing act: on one side, categories are essential but on the other, they are called and put into question.

Accordingly, it is noteworthy that if the foregoing analysis holds any validity, specially in the bridging of incompatible disparate theoretical approaches between feminist scholarship and politics, to what extent it can be claimed that intersectionality has been integrated and internalized within its very interlocutors, that is, among the very feminists who theorize about interlocking categories of identity?.

Surprisingly, I was doing research about these issues when an unprecedented historical event came across: the 2008 Democratic primary campaign with Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton as frontrunners. Offering the choice of an African American man or a white woman as the next Democratic candidate for president, the question ‘who should be first?’ signaled both a moment for profound changes—and one that painfully echoed previous struggles that pitted race and gender against each other. More interestingly, in the midst of this electoral turmoil, a heated debate divided feminists fiercely. Many e-mails were exchanged in favor and against Hillary Clinton which reopened some difficult discussions —about gender, race, and intersectional categories of marginalization and privilege. Moreover, these exchanges became a catalytic to the very evolution of understanding of differences among women.

For this reason, I have chosen to conclude this dissertation and therefore, this journey towards intersectionality, with a brief analysis of the ‘intersectional outcome’ of this campaign. For the purpose of depicting the tensions between the dual nature of feminism as both an analytical-critical mindset and a project of social transformation, this last analysis aims at revealing the very backbone of the intersectional approach; that is, how differences are negotiated within the power dynamics that gravitate in the social sphere. With this in mind, my contention is to highlight that despite much academic evidence to the contrary, an intersectional mindset towards identity still divide feminists as much as it did decades ago.

### **5.5: INTERSECTIONAL CASE-STUDY: 2008 U.S. PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN**

In order to provide a context to the following discussion, I will start off by emphasizing that among the many self-identified feminists scholars and activists who took part in this debate, I have selected the most representative voices that have previously resonated in the theories that grappled with differences among women.

When I first encountered the intersectional dimension of such a historical event, what it stroke me most was how such an opportunity of a fruitful public exchange had turned into a battle of identity politics: who will Americans choose to be their nominee for president: a Black man or a White woman?, the media broadcasted in despair.

Within this scenario, and given the highly controversial media reports, a well-recognized institution in the U.S, *The Women’s Media Center (WMC)* fiercely stood up to unconditionally support the female candidate, Hillary Clinton. Founded in 2005 as a non-profit progressive

women's media organization by American writers/activists Jane Fonda, Robin Morgan (see chapter 2) and Gloria Steinem, their goal has been to make women visible and powerful in the media.

Interestingly, on January the 8<sup>th</sup>, 2008 Gloria Steinem published an article in the *New York Times*<sup>83</sup> that would set the whole heated discussion into motion. Her main argument would revolt against the gender obstacles, 'sex-barriers', that Hillary faced along the way as "the most restricting force in American life". In order to support her point, she first presents a 'female version' of Barack Obama's personal and professional journey (that she names Achola Obama), to later interrogate the audience: "Be honest: Do you think this is the biography of someone who could be elected to the United States Senate?"

Her pivotal point therefore, is that "the sex barrier is not taken as seriously as the racial one". Later on the article, in an interesting turn, she goes back to the plight for women's enfranchisement (see chapter 1) to trace back these institutionalized "sex barriers": "Black men were given the vote" she goes on, "a half-century before women of any race were allowed to mark a ballot".

Furthermore, in a contradicting stance that both affirms and dismantles intersectionality, she assures that: "I'm not advocating a competition for who has it toughest. The caste systems of sex and race are *interdependent* and can only be *uprooted together* ....But what worries me is that he is seen as unifying by his race while she is seen as divisive by her sex" (my emphasis).

In an alignment with Steinem's gender exclusive premises, on February 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2008, Morgan posted a very clear message, titled *In Support of Hillary Rodham Clinton*<sup>84</sup>. Intended

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<sup>83</sup> <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/01/08/opinion/08steinem.html>

to shine light into the destructive sexist arguments that were held against Hillary, on the contrary, it turned into a plead of an homogenized notion of womanhood; that is, that all females share an identity, and race and class, and other intersecting categories are not connected issues to be recognized and spoken. “A Vote for Hillary, it’s a vote for ourselves” she strongly stated, “I’m voting for Hillary not because she’s a woman—but because I am”<sup>85</sup>. Surprisingly, her affirmation re-crowned gender as the most important (and the most oppressive for that matter) social category of identity. Suddenly, intersectionality was being wiped away of the articulation of a collective feminist subject. In addition, to the extent that Morgan was assessing that being ‘women’ equaled supporting Hillary, she was re-opening the long fought women of color’s struggle against an exclusive gender analysis of women’s identity.

As a result, reactions did not wait and sprouted from various viewpoints demanding an intersectional delineation that would stop disregarding a range variety of women’s voices and would certainly not impose any personal vision of what-to –be a feminist entitles.

Even among long-standing allies within the movement’s movement, accusations towards ‘traitors’ began circulating. Reflecting on the inability of escaping the ‘traitor-label’ for those who opted to support Obama instead of Hillary, one of the founding scholars of intersectionality, Kimberlé Crenshaw (see chapter 3 and 5) arose her voice to publicly challenge the ancient ghost of essentialist womanhood. In an article written in *The Huffington Post* Crenshaw contended<sup>86</sup>, “Why voting for Clinton is the most sensible thing to do?”. In her

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<sup>85</sup> See *In Support of Hillary Rodham Clinton: Good-bye to All That, Part II*, by Robin Morgan <http://womensspace.wordpress.com/2008/02/03/good-bye-to-all-that-part-ii-by-robin-morgan/>

<sup>86</sup> See <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/kimberle-crenshaw-and-eve-ensler>

view, the core of the issue that kept replicating long standing clashes was the “profound difference in seeing feminism as intersectional and global rather than essentialist” (see previous chapters). “For many of us”, she utters, “feminism is not separate from the struggle against violence, war, racism and economic injustice. Gender hierarchy and race hierarchy are not separate and parallel dynamics. The empowerment of women is contingent upon all these things”.

In this respect, the pervasiveness of a rhetorical narrative that draws boundaries between those who support Hillary and those who find themselves on Obama’s terrain, cast a doubt over feminism as a patriotic site, an “all-emcompassing prism”, denounces Crenshaw, that eliminates all traces of discussion and exchange about whom to vote for and why. Standing therefore in rigid opposition to those who betray the most fundamental premises of an intercultural debate; that is, the inclusive and global commitments of feminisms as a project of social transformation, Crenshaw exercises her right to say no to an exclusive gender-biased mindset. “Because we believe that feminism can be expressed by a broader range of choices than this “either/or” proposition entails”, she calls forth:

we again find ourselves compelled to say “no”—this time to a brand of feminism that betrays its inclusive and global commitments. We believe we stand in unity with many feminists who who will say, “Not in Our Name” will this feminism be deployed

Adding on to this debate, and mostly as a response to Robin Morgan’s statement that as women, ‘a vote for Hillary is a vote for ourselves’, the well-recognized African-American writer and scholar Alice Walker, published an article in *The Guardian*<sup>87</sup> in which she depicts

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<sup>87</sup>“See “The Change that America has tried to Hide” <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2008/apr/01/barackobama.uselections2008> (Tuesday 1 April 2008) A longer version of this article can be found at [theroot.com/id/45469](http://theroot.com/id/45469)

Obama as the embodiment of “real change”, a “unique possibility to convince the rest of the world that we care about people other than our (white) selves”. Along these lines, her main argument is that she is supporting Obama not because he is black but because, in her opinion, he is the “best candidate”. “It is a deep sadness to me”, she confesses, “that many of my feminist white women friends cannot see him, cannot hear the fresh choices toward movement he offers”. Consequently, accusations of alliance based on racial affinity seemed most tragic to her. “When I offered the word “womanism” many years ago” (see chapter 3), Walker explains:

it was to give us a tool to use, as feminist women of colour, in times like these. These are the moments we can see clearly, and must honour devotedly, our singular path as women of color in the U.S. We are not white women and, this truth has been ground into us for centuries. But neither we are inclined to follow a black person, man or woman, unless they demonstrate considerable courage, intelligence, compassion and substance

From an Asian-American standpoint, writer and scholar Jennifer Fang agrees with Walker that much of Obama’s supports steams out of the fact that he’ll be a great president, not because he’s Black but because he is a much more inspiring individual than Hillary. In her article “Gloria Steinem: Pitting Race against Gender”<sup>88</sup> published on *Racialicious*, she invites the audience not to loose sight of the fact that Obama’s speeches had been generally “heralded as rousing and inspiring” whereas Clinton’s have been critized as “too robotic and fake”. “In fact” Fang corroborates, “I suspect that Clinton can’t get away with Obama’s or Clinton’s style of speaking not because she’s a woman, but because she’s simply not that charismatic a speaker”.

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<sup>88</sup> <http://www.racialicious.com/2008/01/09/gloria-steinem-pitting-race-against-gender/>. Originally published at [\*Reappropriate\*](#)

As we can see, all of sudden, this electoral campaign was pitting race against gender in a way that seemed to shatter intersectional theories and rendered invisible foundational structural inequities. “How can one compare racism to sexism” wonders Fang, “and if one tries, where do those of us who are disadvantaged both by our race and by our gender fit in?”. In truth, On Fang’s view, as much as Steinem is correct in observing that women are still oppressed by gender roles, she heartily believes that the “disingenuous, divisive, overly simplistic, and ultimately harmful” gender/race juxtaposition that scholars like Steinem support, can only fuel dissentious attitudes and reopen unhealed wounds. To this respect, Robin Morgan and Gloria Steneim’s discourse draws definitive boundaries between people of colour and women by claiming the “the oppression Olympics gold medal for women”. Despite her creation of Achola Obama, Fang believes it not only renders women of color invisible, by essentially disregarding the everyday racism faced by those not so privileged, but it reaffirms the old Black-White paradigm of ‘race’. Mostly, Fang says, “it creates confrontation when it demands that “women take a side in the epic battle between race and gender”.

As it can be therefore inferred, by this time, the general feeling that was steadily growing among Anglo-European academic circles was that no wonder women of color have long felt alienated by feminists like Steinem! Echoing this uneasiness, another well-know Jew-United States feminist writer, activist and scholar (see chapter 2 and 3) Zillah Einstein took a harder tone and published a controversial article called “Hillary is White”<sup>89</sup> aimed at revealing how for Hillary, gender is as white “as race is black”. On her view, even though Hillary presents herself just as a woman, the underlying truth is that she is a woman whose real power is to be

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<sup>89</sup> <http://www.commondreams.org/archive/2008/05/18/9031>. Published on Sunday, May 18, 2008 by [CommonDreams.org](http://www.commondreams.org)

white. “The very fact that she ignores her own race,” Einstein advocates, “in a way that Obama cannot, is a proof of the normalized privileging of whiteness”. Her argument goes that speaking about race as a separate issue; Hillary speaks on behalf of women as if both gender and her ethnicity were not interlocking categories that she embodied at the same time.

In an attempt to bridge the gap between on one hand, more than three decades of academic intercultural dialogues on intersectional identities and on the other, the mainstream political display of a gender-focus discourse that Hillary Clinton embodied, Einstein highlights the awareness of the interlocking nature of social categories. “Especially women of color” she explains, “but many white women as well, know that race and gender are inseparable and that is why most of these women, whatever their color, are voting for Barack Obama”.

This intersectional blindness in Hillary’s speech is what makes Einstein to accuse Hillary of using her ‘whiteness as her weapon’ while pretending to be speaking about gender: “she never once mentions the unacceptable misogyny of this country” denounces Einstein, “or the sexual hierarchy of the labor force, or any of the great racial and class inequities that define women's lives today”. And with no dubitative premise she asserts: “*This is a misuse and abuse of her gender*” (my emphasis). Recalling how the women of color movement during the 70s and 80s “made sure to break open the race/gender divide and clarify that gender is always racialized and race is always gendered” she strongly vindicates that “Hillary should not be allowed to push feminism backwards for her own political ambition”. Moreover, what Hillary seems to ignore is that being a women “comes in all colors and classes”. For that reason, Einstein goes as far as to affirm that “Hillary has done the unforgivable. She has used race -- the whiteness card -- on behalf of gender”.

Once again, as we can see, the ‘unforgivable’ was dividing women from its own ranks. Without any doubt, this campaign for the presidency was reopening some of the most fraught feminist conversations—difficult discussions that had been left unfinished but nonetheless are crucial to further perfecting a solid women’s movement. Embracing and promoting this spirit, two Chicago-based white anti-racist feminist scholars, activists and writers, Ann Russo & Melissa Spatz<sup>90</sup> launched a CALL FOR ACTION<sup>91</sup>. With the intention to challenge and revoke the racial divides promoted by white feminists like Robin Morgan and Gloria Steinem, as much as the mainstream media, they proclaimed that “as white feminists” they felt the imperative to speak out publicly against the racist and divisive manifestations they were seeing in the name of feminism. Mostly, they wanted to transmit loud and clear how frustrated and deeply sad they felt by witnessing “the abandonment of feminist commitments to the freedom and liberation of all women from all forms of oppression”. Although they strongly disagree with the sexism and misogyny directed against Hillary Clinton, they make clear that “a critique of sexism must not be at the expense of addressing racism and other forms of oppression”.

With the intention to zeal so much distress by joining voices together and take a stand, their statement meant at challenging “the onslaught of reactionary and racist arguments being put forward in the name of feminism and in defense of Hillary Clinton”, they declared.. In addition, they wanted to become the spokeswomen of all the voices that had stepped up in the

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<sup>90</sup> Ann Russo is Director of the Program in Women’s & Gender Studies at DePaul University. Melissa Spatz is Director of the Women & Girls Collective Action Network. Together, we are co-authors of *Communities Engaged in Resisting Violence* (available at [www.womenangirlscan.org](http://www.womenangirlscan.org)).

<sup>91</sup> See <http://www.thepetitionsite.com/1/stop-the-false-race-gender-divide/>

several months that passed since Steinem's article to say no to this kind of feminism. With that in mind, they proclaimed the following:

We need to resist and refuse this exclusive, defensive, and racist politics if we are serious about coalitional, broad-based, interconnected women's solidarity movements. For white women, an exclusive and defensive focus on sexism denies accountability for our racial privilege. It erases our own complicity in the multiple systems of oppression that shape our lives, perspectives, and allegiances. We believe these politics *significantly undermine the efforts of many women, especially women of color*, to create feminisms that are grounded in multiple identities and in struggles against multiple oppressions (emphasis mine)

Although they only met half of their goal of reaching 1,000 signatures, the 556 signatures achieved signaled a strong message of intersectional awareness. In my opinion, it was more than a call for action, it was an intersectional manifesto. It represents a legacy of intercultural dialogues that have repeatedly warned of the dangers of an exclusive gender approach since it destroys the possibility for coalition, alliance and solidarity across differences. A utopia claimed, endowed with a remarkable visionary charge, it mostly points out the need to formulate more adequate standards of evaluation and judgment of power dynamics currently under way.

As the continuous outcomes have revealed in previous chapters, what it was certain back in the 1970s, remained unchanged in this last U.S presidential campaign: unless social categories of identity are approached in an interlocking and intersectional manner, there will continue to be definite boundaries to the possibility of an intercultural sisterhood.

Although the election didn't give the first woman president or vice president in the U.S., the exhilarating campaign was nonetheless revealing of an on-going difficult dialogue among gender-oriented scholars. Interestingly, its discordant detour undermined the current academic impetus of an intersectional approach in ways that no one anticipated. Moreover, it uncovered the on-going existence of a recurrent miscommunication and blindness when it comes to the application of power dynamics among women. To these regards, the main message that it was wanted to come

across, was that Clinton does not share a political identity with women of all classes and colors and nations simply because she has a female body (Zillah Eistein). As we have seen in from chapter 2 onwards, feminists of color had been at the forefront of the criticism of so-called white feminism that seeks and envisions a pseudo universal female bond. This is what really explains the claim that what was really at stake in this campaign was a not a battle of identity politics between a woman candidate vs. the black male candidate. However, it was about the candidate who worked “to dismantle the bomb, rather than drop it;” asseverates Crenshaw on her previously analyzed article, “the candidate who works to abolish the old paradigm of power, rather than covet and rise to its highest point; the candidate who seeks solutions and dialogue”.

Along this spirit, and in pursue of constructive dialogues, I have chosen to conclude this dissertation with this exploration of the meaning of gender in the last U. S presidential election. As unpredictable as it was riveting, these last public exchange of feminist ideas helps to make sense of the current moment in this contested journey towards intersectionality elicited through these chapters. With reference to the inherent tensions within this intercultural exchange “As feminists our freedoms have been hard won” remembers Crenshaw “and we'd like to think that we have learned from our mistakes along the way. The feminism we fought so hard for and benefited from was not to make us blind to the complexity” she brilliantly depicts, “but to help us see beyond simple formulas and body politics”.

Accordantly, more than four decades of feminist scholarship, primarily by women of color, have shown the descriptive, analytic and moral inadequacies of single-issue approaches to gender identity. But most importantly, as I intend to interpret and render visible throughout these chapters, the decolonization of feminist theory and practice did not respond to any intellectual trend to de-contextualize mainstream theoretical frameworks. Nevertheless, it

asserted a willingness to establish constructive intercultural dialogues and to learn from similar experiences that would allow scholars not to reproduce old paradigms. It is thus my view that the main message of an intersectional approach is that, in order to destabilize hegemonic discourses of gender, consciousness towards the interlocking nature of social categories should be deeply harvested within our souls and minds. Furthermore, the transformative potential of an intersectional perspective relies on the awareness that there is an ingrained westernized hegemonic analytical paradigm that, although it does not mean that is practiced by all, nonetheless, it refers to that powerful center that requires all other forms to define themselves in terms of it.

Finally, it can be said that in its journey towards intersectionality, the contested category of gender has been enmeshed in different and contradictory meanings. The very act of resisting an essentialist gender and an imaginary feminist theory was paralyzing and enraging, but also very liberating since it set off one of the most fascinating on-going academic discussion: how to negotiate identity in a way that all parts are included. At its best, it seems that intersectionality pulls together a 'formula in progress' to ease the clashing of ideas that have resulted in so much confrontation and separation. Moreover, it is helping to unknot those long-standing 'difficult dialogues' since it responds to the needs of acknowledging the fact that the utopian encounter of an idyllic zero power dynamics is completely untenable and therefore, it becomes crucial to consciously negotiate the best way in which this power can be relational, in order for this power to be understood and power relations themselves disrupted. In finishing up, it is worth reiterating that the condemnation undertaken by women of color was not only raised in order to denigrate the naturalistic vision of differences or a de-contextualized feminist theory, but mostly, was aimed at putting into motion a fascinating and crucial reassessment of

all aspects of gendering. In order to make the bridging of differences a realizable promise, nonetheless, dialogues need to stop being difficult. Hence, if the inclusiveness of feminist politics is ever to prevail, identity and subjectivity will necessarily live to resist and decode social regulatory forces either as semiotic, representation, performative or intersectional.

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## CONCLUSION

### **INTERSECTIONALITY AS A DYNAMIC, INTER-DISCIPLINARY, TRANSFORMATIVE SITE OF KNOWLEDGE**

Finally, in these last concluding thoughts, I would like to emphasize that what is clear from preceding sections is that intersectional theories of gender identity still remain a very controversial and contested terrain. Paradoxically, it can be affirmed that gender theory has academically moved beyond the premises that mark its beginnings, yet many early vindications by women of color in the U.S. to mainstream feminisms still resonate in despair, unchanged over the centuries. Sadly, inclusionary approaches tend to remain an exception rather than the norm. To these regards, AnaLouise Keating affirms how at the conferences she attends, in the classes she teaches and the publications she reads she still encounters many of the issues exposed in *This Bridge Called My Back*. It exhausts me!, she complains:

Despite the book's status and its impact on some feminists, its theoretical insights have not been adequately explored and applied. Although scholars use *This Bridge Called My Back* to illustrate intersexual identities and issues they do not examine contributor's theoretical contribution to intersectionality ...; nor do they explore intersectionality's theoretical implications (2009: 82)

To further illustrate this point, I would like to highlight that just one year after the presidential campaign took place, 2009 NWSA's annual Conference's theme "Difficult Dialogues" reflected the need to overcome the same lack of unity and solidarity that launched its 1980 Conference titled "Women Respond to Racism"(see chapter 2). By the acknowledgement of the reiterative 'difficult' nature of intercultural gender dialogues, four decades of institutionalized gender-oriented scholarship urged to be rethought. Along these

lines, NWSA main motivation was to unearth how despite widespread changes in Women/Gender Studies curriculum and feminist scholarship, it remains an ongoing struggle over what constitutes the legitimate terrain of feminist theory and inquiry.

With the purpose of continuing with the negotiation of the politics of gender within the academy, long-standing intersectional gender theorists such as the African- Americans Kimberlé Crenshaw, Angela Y. Davis, Jacqui Alexander or Indian-United States postcolonial and transnational feminist theorist Chandra T. Mohanty, among many other participants attending the conference, challenged: “where are we going? Where have we been?”<sup>92</sup>. Placing therefore especial emphasis on ‘thinking, speaking and working margin to margin’, intersectionality was called into question as either ‘theory or method or politics’ (major sub-themes of the conference). “NWSA 2009 will examine” it was posted on their *call for papers*:

how feminist intellectual, political and institutional practices cannot be adequately practiced if the politics of gender are conceptualized (overtly or implicitly) as super- seding or transcending the politics of ‘race’, sexuality, social class, nation and disability

Even though it was a fructiferous encounter filled with insightful critical exchanges, not surprisingly, the next 2010 NWSA annual Conference, ‘Difficult Dialogues II’, continued to reiterate the need to investigate the critical and creative dimension of intersectionality. Pinpointing a reluctance to engage with questions such as ‘race’, ‘sexual orientation’ and class in Gender Studies, consequently, its theme, was intended to be a reminder of the challenges yet to meet. Its name thus underlined how ongoing and new ‘difficult’ intercultural dialogues across differences are urgently needed but frequently avoided, consciously or unconsciously. Indeed, as it is posted in the introduction of the 2009 Conference, despite claims that within the Anglo-European academia, Women/Gender Studies is growingly done from intersectional and

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<sup>92</sup> See [www.nwsa.org/pastconferences](http://www.nwsa.org/pastconferences)

transnational perspectives<sup>93</sup>, it was agreed that the ways in which categories such as ‘race’ or class have been taken up in the field (and as the previous electoral analysis depicts, on the political arena as well) seem to have been more ‘*nominal than transformative*’; more theoretical than an actual change in consciousness. In fact, as it has been shown, it remains a tension between its theoretical abstractions and its day-to-day application. While the concept of intersections deployed within academia, and particularly Women’s/Gender Studies, most often work to highlight multiple axes of dis-advantage and displacement, up to this day, it has not yet been fully utilized and explored.

However, I would not like to conclude with a pessimistic tone. There have been crucial and fundamental changes towards gender analysis since the first Anglo European feminist vindications. Clashes and misconceptions with regard to differences among women have resulted in one of the most fascinating, fructiferous and insightful theoretical journeys the Anglo-European academia has continuously witnessed over the past four decades. Indeed, the consequence if this compelling intercultural dialogue among gender-oriented scholars is a paradigm-shift, the ‘intersectional analysis’, applicable to any discipline that approaches the power dynamics implied in social identities.

Within this spirit, in the attempt to reach a transformative theory of intersectional gender analysis, and as if echoing *This Bridge We Call Home: Radical Writings for Transformation*, the upcoming 2011 NWSA annual Conference envisions “Feminist Transformations” (its title) as the promising outcome of so much difficult dialogues. On this vein, underneath the hope of a successful intercultural dialogue, it seems to me that what is most at stake is the (in)ability to

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<sup>93</sup> As we have seen in chapter 2, established in 1977, National Women Studies Association is a U.S based professional organization devoted to the promotion of gender studies, as well as its teaching, learning, research. As stated in their home page, their core beliefs are: a) Women’s/Gender Studies are vital to education b) Women’s/Gender Studies are comparative, global, intersectional and interdisciplinary. See [www.nwsa.org](http://www.nwsa.org)

listen with 'raw openness' (see chapter 3), that is, with the deep listening that is willing to be changed by the critical insights discussed. This predisposition requires a disengagement from our own expectations and assumptions in order to understand the complexities of the multiple and interwoven layers of social power within diverse settings. Moreover, it demands from us that we rely upon the ability to transcend social status boundaries in order to access asymmetries of power which are central to working across gender differentials. In addition, longing for a way in which every voice gets represented in a non-hierarchical way, intersectionality allows us to look more closely at the multiple layers of contradictions that arise when we situate ourselves within broader levels of social relations.

Under that rubric, theory and accountability must go hand by hand. How we articulate theoretical premises matters, how we measure their impact matters, and what the stakes in it are, also matters. Theory is action, verbal and intellectual action. As American Cultural and Gender theorist Katie King brilliantly depicts in *Theory in its Feminist Travels. Conversations in U.S. Women's Movements* (1994) "It is not opposed to action, a substitution for action, ornamentation on action, or a pale double of action. It is because it *is* action that matters; it has political effects and so is necessarily called to political accountability" (135; her emphasis). Calling theory to accountability requires us to examine its paradigms and the stakes underlying our methodological choices; most importantly, it requires us to delimit the boundaries in our own politics of location and to examine the power dynamics implied in the meanings we contest. In looking at the particular situation of the experiences of women of color in the U.S as the starting point of an intercultural dialogue in relation to the understanding of social differences, I have tried to make problematic concepts such 'differences' and 'similarities' not only among women specifically but with a broader scope of social relations in general. In

addition, I intended to make complex the construction of 'gender identity', and mostly, to challenge a unified history of the 'women's movement' in an Anglo-European academic framework.

Indeed, as it has been traced out in preceding chapters, on the problem of theorizing identity, the emancipation of gender that took off in the late 60s and was most brilliantly depicted in the first women of color anthology *This Bridge Call My Back: Radical Writings by Women of Color* (1981), enacted new forms of alliance-making that went beyond conventional identity-based boundaries. Yes, differences among women have been a source of division; seen as so sharp, profound and so deep that they've been projected as permanent and impossible to span. But, as we have seen, several women of color theorists in the U.S began developing alternatives to the traditional gender theories. They raised their voices very clear and loud against a 'universal female gender' and insisted on the particularity of their experiences and needs from position which combined gender with 'race', class, colonial legacy, sexuality, dis/ability, age and other social categories. Together, they built a metaphorical bridge so large and so wide that first critiques and clashes were replaced by creative alternatives and the invention of a new theoretical tool: intersectionality. The result was a new theory, now recognized as the 'intersectional approach', which caused and continues to cause, heated debate but nonetheless, it is undeniable that it has radically altered the way gender research is conducted. Powerfully, it aims at uniting so-called conflicting methodological perspectives (see chapter 4), that have been turning intercultural dialogues into such a conflicting, controversial and 'difficult' enterprise. Indeed, throughout this journey towards intersectionality, the main challenge to mainstream feminism has been to recognize that individuals are raced, sexed, classed as much as being gendered. Moreover, it has discredited

the 'additive-multiplicative' claims of multiple oppressions (Beal 1970; see chapter2) on the basis that it does not distinguish between different levels of analysis apart from the experiential (Yuval-Davis 2006:197). Furthermore, intersectionality offers a critical alternative to identity politics since it takes into account intra-group differences and calls into question any homogenized or essentialized group-identity category such as 'women of color', or 'whites'. When I first approached intersectionality, it helped me to understand how women of color in the U. S had been left out of mainstream feminist discourse. Nonetheless, this type of analysis is of much broader utility since it is impossible to understand *any* group without explicitly thinking about diversity and how multiple categories of identity, difference (dis)advantage simultaneously shape experience. On this account, if the curse that gender theory has been dragging out it's been an analytic myopia that led to the tensions attending the dual character of feminism both as analytical and political project, intersectionality it definitely carries out the potential of promising new horizons, specially in the bridging of incompatible disparate theoretical approaches between feminist scholarship and politics, in a interdisciplinary fashion.

As I intended to reflect throughout these chapters, due to the very 'critical articulation' of knowledge that explicates the birth of a feminist consciousness in the first place, both women of color and mainstream feminism have found in the intersectional approach a way to reconcile their premises and to come to terms with their own self-criticism. Applied in its fully potential therefore, thinking in terms of intersectional layers requires 'rooting and shifting' along the multiple lines of gender; that is, locating oneself in both structural/political and subjective systems. Dynamically modeled by previously explored scholars who are working on intersectional issues, as in any emerging research paradigm, there can be competing

definitional claims and disagreements in its use an application. Intended to be a general overview that provides a glimpse into an on-going intercultural conversation, I acknowledge that, in the multilayered negotiations among the social categories of gender, many spaces are still critically unexplored. Nevertheless, my intention has been to bridge intersectionality's main premises and parameters of study in order to advance this critical body of literature through new junctures of analysis, so to provoke an interest in a more in-depth research.

Continually changing, interactions shape both everyday relations and social structures by mutually reinforcing interlocking vectors of privilege and marginalization. Hence, as the intersectional scholars previously analyzed shows us, the intersections of social power are evident both as the micro layers of daily social life as well as the broadest layers of global restructuring. In its two-fold nature, it both defines individual identity in connection to one's particular social location and, at the same time, it structures a global system of privilege and exclusion. Consequently, what contemporary theories on intersectionality offer scholars and students who are studying identity is the idea that identities are not fixed but constantly shifting and navigating across social boundaries. Treating social categories as relational and as a dynamic site of knowledge is the main requirement of a transformational mindset. Along these lines, the rich variety of approaches offered by the field today undoubtedly shows that intersectionality has become a very appealing way of doing research. Nonetheless, as we have seen, this seems perhaps easiest to do in the academy or in the pages of an anthology than in day-to-day encounters. With that in mind thus I have approached its controversy as a part of an on-going intercultural debate that has offered and continues to provide, highly sophisticated theoretical insights but nevertheless, needs to be under continuous interrogation. To this end, through the prism of intersectional analyses over the past four decades, this journey towards

intersectionality has intended to give voice to this undergoing reexamination of the central tenets in gender theory.

Moreover, from an interdisciplinary glance, the numerous interrelations of gender with, for example, racialized power, heterosexism, the effects of capitalism, disability, etc, complicate any study that approaches gender as an analytical category. Indeed, gender relations have proven to be difficult to separate in practice from other power relations. For this reason, working out whether gender is a primary focus for a project, a contributory factor or an arena of contradiction may become a shifting arena of decision during the course of a study. Consequently, I strongly defend an intersectional approach as a strong component of any research endeavor. Indeed, the three questions posed by Elizabeth Cole and Natalie Sabik (see chapter 5) “whose perspective is represented and whose is left out? What role does power play? Where are the similarities? (2009: 74) will definitely assist in adopting this analytic strategy and research framework. Moreover, in the quest of the ‘blinding spots’ Maria Matsuda has articulated an important principle for feminist intersectional analysis in ‘asking the other question’ (Matsuda 1991).

The power of intersectionality then, relays on the fact that it has become a new interdisciplinary dynamic site of knowledge that tackles unequal social relations of power, both privileging and/or marginalization, in gender identity formation processes. As a general overview of its fundamental premises, what these chapters aimed at showing was how critical gender scholars are deploying intersectionality to foster new forms of inquiry that challenge traditional disciplinary boundaries. At this point, it can be affirmed that the diverse theories (and methodological approaches) that contribute to the current intersectional approach represent a new social literacy for scholars, a “disciplinary border-crossing concept” (Berger

and Guidroz 2009: 7), not necessarily implying that the power dynamics- battle will be ever won, but making it necessary to read texts differently.

In this sense, while gender-consciousness begins with debunking difference, intersectional education must begin by asserting it. In my classes, for example, when ‘white’ students universalize their race-unconscious experience to all, I find it helpful to respond with intersectional counterexamples to de-center whiteness. However, when the same happens with ‘race’ as a universal category, I emphasize ‘racial hierarchy’ in order to re-center it and so as to denaturalize it. On this ground, the obstacles that social equality faces in the struggle for social justice today are immense, and certainly no single path or concept can effectively challenge it. Attending to intersectional identities, not as a marker of cultural status but a set of social relations embedded in power dynamics, have immense implications for transformative theory from an interdisciplinary vantage point.

Gender, class and ‘race’ were once seen as separate issues for members of both dominant and subordinate groups. Nowadays, however, a growing number of scholars generally agree that these categories (as well as sexuality, age, dis-ability and so on) and how they intersect are a crucial knowledge to understand individual’s position in the grid of social relations. Indeed, social categories play a fundamental role in structuring and representing the social world. Since they are embodied connections of gender, class, ethnicity, sexual orientation and so forth, when approached as interlocking, intersectionality offers us tools for de-legitimizing the negative stereotypes of these categories, as much as the possibility to deconstruct the very mechanisms that maintain gender/class/racial orders.

Within this spirit, I deeply share the belief with this new generation of intersectional scholars that the intersectional approach increasingly constitutes a promising middle ground, in

methodological terms, for interdisciplinary scholars in the application of both their teaching and their knowledge production. Along these lines, I present this work in hopes of deepening the discussion among professors and students about what this dynamic site of knowledge offers us in scholarship, teaching and activism. The breadth of this ongoing intercultural interest in dialoguing differences in an interlocking and non-hierarchical way, it definitely suggests future compelling inquiry and research.

However, in order to successfully institutionalize intersectionality, Women's /Gender Studies departments must incorporate differently situated subjectivities into their faculty, department leadership and educational programming, reflecting the praxis of intersectionality as a conceptual framework. Given the increase in multicultural and global perspective courses it must be asked whether the integration of intersectionality is reflected in the curriculum; that is, for example, is women of color in the U.S ghettoized into ethnic-specific courses?, which has been the common practice among traditional disciplines. Moreover, examinations of intersectionality call for scholars to be self-reflexive of his or her standpoint as it relates to research inquiry. Methodologically, the implementation of an intersectional approach calls upon scholars to examine the extent to which institutions reflect difference and are self-critical about how difference impact knowledge production. Although many scholars carefully situate their own social identities within their work, these disclosures tend not to fully examine the theoretical implications of intersectionality within their analyses. Consequently, by approaching identity and power differentials in isolation and not taking into account how these intersections impact the ultimate production of knowledge prevents researchers from pursuing a richer and more complex analysis. Therefore, to negotiate power dynamics across intersections of social locations must be a primary focus of any cultural or literary research.

Furthermore, it is ultimately necessary to acknowledge that our particular situated perspectives (Western in this case) integrally shape our theories and teaching. As a result, the creation of an environment where faculty can develop institutionally rewarded intersectional scholarly identities would reflect the praxis of doing engaged and accountable theory and research in the twenty-first century.

While this exploration of the evolution of the understanding of differences among women has sought to emphasize the need to study and explicate these differences, it is also based on the assumption that the knowledge we gain in the process will also help enlighten the interlocking nature of social relations. As a white-European, gender-oriented, intersectional scholar I share this understanding of the ongoing, interactive, and productive nature of social forces that shape individual's life, patterns of oppression and privilege and institutions. I believe that my own identifications enable me to understand privilege positions, and therefore it is my ethical responsibility to go beyond privilege discourses of gender, to destabilize them and be more inclusive in my analysis. For this reason, theoretically and methodologically speaking, I dearly support the use of intersectional frameworks while interrogating and conceptualizing gender identities.

In my reading, intersectionality reminds us and demonstrates both the proximity and indivisibility of gender with other social categories, as well as indicating that they are inextricably linked to other forms of social and cultural knowledge. These multiple layers ultimately challenge any notion of universally shared experiences as 'women' or any other gender for that matter. Moreover, it invites us to keep our eyes on the challenge of meeting affinities that collectively binds us to one another over our differences or group identities. Above all, it allows us to join with others from the politics of location (chapter 3) to imagine

and to insist that a more just alternative is possible as long as we continue to challenge and deconstruct the very ways in which power dynamics are being formed and transformed in our daily social encounters, while we passionately pursue this aim. Only then, Social Sciences-Humanities in general and Cultural, Literary and Gender Studies in particular, can hold up a mirror that represents all voices in an accurate, grounded and nuanced way. Along these lines, and resisting the temptation of a utopian closure, I would like to stress the importance of continuing the work on questioning gender, and our situated role, agency and responsibility in the countless webs of social relations.

Finally, in this opportune time for reflection, the challenge for intersectional theory therefore, lies not in finding ways to break out gender constrains so gender theories become more 'inclusive', but rather in developing concepts that can allow us better to understand the real material and symbolic conditions that both link and variously affect our lives. In the end, these concepts are intimately bound to the horizons for change and transformation we envision, the intercultural dialogues that we imagine, the kind of world we dare to dream about and set out to achieve.

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