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**Entangled Inequalities as Intersectionalities  
Towards an Epistemic Sensibilization**

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# Entangled Inequalities as Intersectionalities

## Towards an Epistemic Sensibilization

Julia Roth

“Intersectionality is what is done by people who are doing the doing”  
(Kimberlé Crenshaw 2009).<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

This paper examines the ways in which the concept discussed under the term “intersectionality” can provide a productive framing for entangled inequalities, as both concepts have a lot in common. The paper argues that an intersectional sensibilization to conceptualizations of inequalities helps capture inequalities in their entangled historical, micro and macro level dimensions and avoid one-dimensional reductions. However, this concept which is itself deeply Euro- and U.S.-centric must be improved for use in transnational contexts and for other locations of knowledge production. As such, an intersectional epistemic sensibilization can prove useful for contextualizing and situating multiple knowledges and modes of knowledge production and provide a frame for an implicit critique of hegemony. This conceptual work is a necessary step towards developing ways to overcome asymmetrical social power structures as expressed in unequal circulations of knowledge.

**Keywords:** intersectionality and/as inequalities | methodological/epistemic  
Occidentalism | critique of hegemony

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<sup>1</sup> Notes taken by the author at Crenshaw’s lecture on “Historicizing Intersectionality: A Disciplinary Tale” at the Graduate School “Gender as a Category of Knowledge” of the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, November 25, 2009

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## Prelude: Economies of Desire

The film “Paradies: Liebe” [Paradise: Love] (2012) by Austrian director Ulrich Seidl narrates the story of Teresa, an Austrian who is fifty years old and seriously overweight. Teresa is a social worker and single mother and decides to spend her birthday in a tourism resort in Kenya, where her friend usually spends her holidays. When Teresa arrives in the resort, her friend raves about the sexual adventures offered in this paradisiacal place, where young and fit beautiful Kenyan men seem to be crazy about conquering a white, European older woman. Teresa soon makes the acquaintance of local men and gets involved in sexual relations with several of them, who give her confidence about her looks and body, and she seemingly falls in love with Munga. When she finds out that her lover is only keen on her money, Teresa is deeply disappointed. The informal character of the encounter had made it possible for her to blind out the commercial motivation of the local men’s approaches.

Why use this film as an introduction to the topic of intersectionalities and interdependent inequalities? “Paradies: Liebe” arguably provides a very illustrative example of intersectionalities of different axes of stratification and, particularly, how they are entangled and transferred in transnational contexts and spaces. From an intersectional perspective, the encounter between Teresa and Munga and his colleagues addresses unequal stratifications on the macro level: income, access to mobility, citizenship and gender regimes. On the micro level, the encounter is marked by hierarchizations with regard to race, gender and class positions in a transnational dimension. That is, the female sex tourist Teresa’s disadvantageous age, gender and class position in her home country Austria is criss-crossed and transformed through her “‘cultural/racial capital’ of whiteness” (Shohat and Stam 2012: 191) as expressed in her class and citizenship privilege when a tourist to a poorer country. The male “beach boys”/sex workers, in turn, can transfer their class and citizenship disadvantage into erotic capital rooted in colonial and racialized erotic imaginations of the black body and thereby gain financial advantage in a structurally unequal encounter by selling these erotic fantasies to older European women. All these interrelations are deeply imbedded in the structures of an unequal world system.

This paper argues that an intersectional sensibilization of inequalities helps capturing these phenomena in their entangled dimension. However, in order to fulfill the original function as a critical and political tool, the deeply Euro- and U.S.-centric concept needs to be de-linked from certain traps of re-inscribing, a process which I label as epistemic Occidentalism.

## 1. Introduction: Intersectionalities *and* Inequalities

In Europe and the United States, intersectionality has recently become a widespread and celebrated concept in feminist and gender studies, and ultimately also in the social sciences in general. The website <[www.intersectionality.org](http://www.intersectionality.org)> states that “intersectionality booms”, Kathy Davis (2008) speaks of intersectionality as a “buzzword”, Ina Kerner even identifies an “intersectional turn” (2012a) in feminist critique, and the growing number and frequency of conferences and publications seem to demonstrate this trend.<sup>2</sup> Rather than examining gender, race, class, nation, etc. as distinct social hierarchies, approaches dedicated to an intersectionality perspective examine how various axes of stratification mutually construct one another and how inequalities are articulated through and connected with differences. An intersectional perspective always takes the multidimensional character, the entanglements, the analogies and simultaneities of various axis of stratification into account.<sup>3</sup> Accordingly, research carried out in that field considers every constellation as “always already” marked by various factors, for example, race and racial hierarchization/racist exclusion as “always also” and “always already” defined by other dimensions of inequality such as gender, sexuality, social class, citizenship, religion and furthermore differing from locality to locality and from context to context. An intersectional perspectivization hence aims at giving respect to the structural and simultaneous entanglement(s) of different axes of inequality.<sup>4</sup>

This paper aims at presenting a selection of key approaches on intersectionality with regard to the potential relevance of the concept for the analysis of the interrelations of different social classifications and interdependent inequalities in a globalized context. The paper argues that an intersectional sensibilization of a transnational approach to inequalities might prove productive in order to avoid the one-dimensional concept of inequalities turning into simply a kind of “class struggle on a global scale” or a “global version of class” without accounting for the numerous feminist and postcolonial interventions that have happened since Marx, which are often rendered invisible or marginal in classical social science approaches to inequality. An intersectional perspectivization might accordingly serve in order to provide a more power-sensitive

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2 See, for example, the 8th European Conference on Feminist Research “The Politics of Location Revisited: Gender@2012”, May 17-20, 2012 at Central European University in Budapest or the conference “Feminism and Migration. Social Intervention and Political Action (FEMIGRA)”, February 9-11, 2012 at the Universidad Autónoma Barcelona or the conference “Indicadores Interseccionales y medidas de inclusión social en las Instituciones de Educación Superior” of the EU-funded network „Medidas para la inclusión social y equidad en instituciones de educación superior en América Latina - MISEAL“, November 23-26, 2012 at the Lateinamerika-Institut of the Freie Universität Berlin.

3 For example, Ina Kerner (2012b) elaborates on the analogy between sexism and racism.

4 For an elaborate overview on the concept of intersectionality in different disciplines, times and spaces, see Elahe Haschemi Yekani et al. (2008).

approach to interdependent inequalities, including a critique on the considerable and often uncritically accepted asymmetries of knowledge production and circulation.

For the interest of this paper it is important to stress that intersectionality – as every theory or concept – is itself embedded in processes of knowledge circulation and “travelling theories”<sup>5</sup> and the related asymmetrical power hierarchies that define what counts as “legitimate” (scientific/academic) knowledge and who can speak as an expert and are authorized to produce and define such “legitimate” knowledge. An analysis of interdependent inequalities dedicated to an intersectional understanding must thus reflect its own positionality and situatedness within the dynamics of global knowledge circulations in an unequal world system. Martha Zapata Galindo (2011)<sup>6</sup> argues that intersectionality has become a hegemonic concept (within gender studies) to which it is primarily important to cater for career advancement. And Mara Viveros Vigoya (2012) warns of the use of intersectionality in an inflationary and depoliticized manner:

[S]i bien la interseccionalidad ha mostrado ser hasta ahora una buena teoría feminista no debemos adoptar frente a ella una actitud prescriptiva, convirtiéndola en la teoría que debe ser utilizada obligatoriamente en cualquier investigación que pretenda dar cuenta de la complejidad de las relaciones de género y ser políticamente relevante (Viveros Vigoya 2012: 14).

[Even if intersectionality has until now proven to be a good feminist theory, we shouldn't develop a prescriptive attitude towards it and thereby convert it into the theory that has compulsorily be utilized in any investigation that pretends to take into account the complexity of gender relations and be politically relevant (own translation).]

What Zapata Galindo (2011) claims is to “include Latin America in the cartography of intersectionality” in order to pay credit to a hegemony-critical approach to interdependent inequalities and/as intersectionality in order to avoid or overcome the concept's current exclusivity, the predominant methodological nationalism (reducing the scale to a nation-state frame or a comparison among different countries) and moreover its embeddedness into what I term “methodological Occidentalism” or “epistemic Occidentalism”. Occidentalism according to Fernando Coronil (1996), is a locus of enunciation constituted through:

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5 The concept of “travelling theories” was coined by postcolonial critic Edward Said (1983), expressing that concepts and theories have no fixed, pre-discursive or non-contextual meaning.

6 Notes taken by the author at Zapata's lecture “El paradigma de la interseccionalidad en América Latina” at the Lateinamerika-Institut of the Freie Universität Berlin, November 17, 2011.



[T]he expression of a constitutive relationship between Western representations of cultural difference and worldwide Western dominance [...] the ensemble of representational practices that participate in the production of conceptions of the world, which (1) separate the world's components into bounded units; (2) disaggregate their relational histories; (3) turn difference into hierarchy; (4) naturalize these representations; and thus (5) intervene, however unwittingly, in the reproduction of existing asymmetrical power relations" (Coronil 1996: 57).<sup>7</sup>

By "epistemic Occidentalism", then, I refer specifically to the related asymmetrical production and circulation of knowledge and the related regimes of what counts as "relevant" knowledge and as "theory" and what does not and from where the respective parameters are defined and upheld. Why it is important to embed an intersectional perspectivization of inequalities in a critique of Occidentalism will be elaborated on in the course of this paper.

Respectively, the paper asks in how far and under which conditions intersectionality provides a research perspective in contexts of globalization and the interdependencies of different axes of stratification and exclusion (specifically in Latin American contexts) and for the entanglements between structures of inequality in different regions. Before elaborating on the concept, its genealogy and its usefulness, it seems important to clarify two assumptions that are conventionally associated with "intersectionality": firstly, it is held that intersectionality is predominantly a feminist/gender studies approach and hence limited to this field and related "identity categories". Secondly, it is often assumed that intersectionality provides – or should/is meant to provide – a concrete method, which could be applied as a sort of ready-made "design" to empirical research. In turn, this paper argues that an intersectional approach pays credit to a diversified, multi-layered and fragmented understanding of identities and experiences and hence promises to capture the complexity of power regimes. This framework is based on a concept of identity as shaped by various factors and experiences, which are context-specific and variable, and thus never neither ever fully graspable nor solely defined by one level of stratification such as "class" or "race" alone.<sup>8</sup> The paper hence maintains that even if originally stemming from feminist and anti-racist contexts, an intersectional

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7 Santiago Castro-Gómez (2007: 22) has coined the phrase of the "hybris of the zero point and the dialogue of knowledges" in this respect, Donna Haraway (1988) reminds us of the "situated" character of knowledge, and Anne McClintock (1995) speaks of race, class, and gender as "articulated categories" (e.g. 1995: 61) deeply coined by colonial legacies.

8 See Judith Butler's elaborations "Against Proper Objects" (1997).



sensibilization is of value especially for the examination of interdependent inequalities.<sup>9</sup> While it is not its central aim, intersectionality also poses a useful correction within classical social science approaches by presenting theoretical and empirical information that makes it difficult even in the classical context to justify the further application of contexts that do not have the fixed, independent meanings assigned or assumed for them. For that matter, an intersectional approach cannot provide a universally applicable method, but rather a context-specific methodology or framing. Rather, an intersectional approach provides a methodology, a “perspectivization”, a research framework or a “tactics” dedicated to a critical self-understanding of doing research.

## 2. Intersectional Interventions: Genealogies and Trajectories

Marxist theorists and Frankfurt School critical theorists have for a long time been examining the interplay of various axes of social stratification.<sup>10</sup> The African-American philosopher W.E.B. Du Bois for instance elaborated on the interrelations between race, class and nation, when he stated “to be a poor man is hard, but to be a poor race in a land of dollars is the bottom of hardships” (Du Bois 1903: 16). However, like most of his male contemporaries, he did so without taking gender into account as structurally relevant category. In Latin America the links between race, ethnicity and class have been researched already since the 1930s, when researchers on social relations on Brazil have started to problematize the interdependencies of race and class oppressions (Costa 2011, cf. the study by Pierson 1942). However, Costa emphasizes that in a similar manner as “the gender question” has been considered as a *Nebenwiderspruch* (side contradiction) in hegemonic leftwing discourses, racist discrimination has been treated as an “afterthought [...], an individual ‘deformation’ without sociological relevance” (Costa 2011: 10). In turn, Gudrun-Axeli Knapp argues that, for example, gender relations have hardly been integrated into theories of inequality (Knapp 2005: 260, 263).

9 Various external commentators at the “Jornada interna de balance” of desiguALdades.net (Berlin, June 2012), have for instance seen as problematic the absence of an intersectionality sensitivity in many projects that do not explicitly deal with gender inequalities and the tendency to use a rather generalized and “outdated” gender concept (such as “indigenous women” or even “the indigenous woman” or refer to the “number of female bloggers” without taking into account other dimensions of intersectional gender inequalities or consider their projects to not be affected by structural hierarchizations such as race and gender if they do not examine them outspokenly). An epistemic sensibilization in the sense of intersectional approaches would help to address such concerns.

10 Floya Anthias (2012) sees an intersectional perspective as part of a traditional Social Science framework: she considers the way Marx related the economy and the social as intersectional, as well as how Weber brought together social action, subjectivities and social-economic class or Durkheim’s examinations of the relations between the state and the individual as early and constitutive forms of interdependent analyses of social stratifications. Anthias points out, however, that these approaches still largely reduce their perspective to class issues.

This is exactly where intersectionality comes in, as the concept insists on the simultaneous articulations and entanglements of inequalities. The concept of intersectionality as it is widely understood today originally stems from critical race studies and gender studies and goes back to the aim to grasp – and finally overcome – “interlocking systems of oppression” as articulated by political groups such as the Combahee River Collective (1970) at the height of the civil rights movement in the United States as an intervention in hegemonic feminist discourses and by Chicana feminists like Gloria Anzaldúa. Rather than of intersecting categories, Anzaldúa spoke of the “Borderlands” of identities and experiences not considered normative according to dominating regimes of knowledge and power. Moreover, she highlighted the colonial legacy of the related inequalities, but also the agency deriving from being in this in-between position:

The U.S.-Mexican border *es una herida abierta* where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds. And before a scab forms it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country – a border culture. Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish *us* from *them*. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition. The prohibited are its inhabitants (Anzaldúa 1987: 3, original emphasis).

The multi-dimensional character of domination and exclusion had been pointed out by activists way earlier: right after the French Revolution, feminists like Olympe de Gouges (1791) in her “Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Female Citizen” and Mary Wollstonecraft (1792) in her “A Vindication on the Rights of Women” highlighted that the presumed newly introduced “human rights” were limited to white males.<sup>11</sup> So did the revolutionaries in Haiti around the same time, who pointed at the contradiction between ideas of human rights and freedom and the system of institutionalized enslavement in the Caribbean and elsewhere.<sup>12</sup> Former slave and feminist activist Sojourner Truth finally indicated how sexist oppression is closely intertwined with other regimes of dominance such as colonialism, enslavement, racism and social status. At the Women’s’ Rights Convention in Akron, Ohio, in 1851, Truth questioned the universality of white bourgeois feminism by pointing at her experience as a black (and formerly enslaved) female worker:

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11 Both du Gouge and Wollstonecraft draw the problematic parallel between the situation of white women in Europe and slavery in the colonies. The Mexican nun Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (1700) wrote against the exclusion of women from education already in the 17th century.

12 On the omission of the Haitian revolution in Occidental discourse see Susan Buck-Morss’ (2009) study *Hegel, Haiti and Universal History*.

Well, children, where there is so much racket there must be something out of kilter. I think that 'twixt the negroes of the South and the women at the North, all talking about rights, the white men will be in a fix pretty soon. But what's all this here talking about?

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 ever helps me into carriages, or over mud-puddles, or gives me any best place! And ain't I a woman? Look at me! Look at my arm! [...] I could work as much and eat as much as a man – when I could get it – and bear the lash as well! And ain't I a woman? I have borne thirteen children, and seen most all sold off to slavery, and when I cried out with my mother's grief, none but Jesus heard me! And ain't I a woman? (Truth 1851).

By asking “Ain't I a Woman?”, Truth insisted on the differences between women and the experience of being discriminated as woman by referring to her completely different position as a Black and (formerly) enslaved and thereby “de-gendered” woman.

As such, Truth had been structurally excluded from the patriarchal institutions of motherhood/housewifization (exclusion from physical work on the bases of presumed physical deficiencies) and bourgeois matrimony universalized by white feminists. At the peak of black (masculinist) and (white) feminist social movements in the United States, the 1977 statement of the black (lesbian) Combahee River Collective focused on confronting and fighting the “interlocking systems of oppression”, and in 1971 now Nobel Prize-winning author Toni Morrison published her essay “What the Black Woman Thinks about Women's Lib”. Already in 1983, Nira Yuval-Davis and Floya Anthias contributed their work on “Contextualising Feminism – Ethnic and Class Divisions”, and Angela Davis referred to the interrelated hierarchies of *Women, Race and Class* (1981), as historically constituted through enslavement/the transatlantic slave trade. Non-hegemonic feminists such as Patricia Hill Collins, bell hooks, Audre Lorde, June Jordan, Norma Alarcón, Cherrie Moraga, Chela Sandoval, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Anne McClintock, Gloria Anzaldúa, Sylvia Wynter or María Lugones and many more followed a similar agenda and have from early on insisted and elaborated on entangled dimensions of oppression and inequality (see Roth 2004). Lugones (2008) insists on the colonial dimension of gender in itself, as certain Western patriarchal gender norms and relations have been rendered universal and hegemonic through Occidental discourse without paying credit to other paradigms. Likewise, Sylvia Wynter (2003) rejects the category “gender” for (formerly) enslaved and black women, as their de-humanization also excluded them being “gendered” in a comparable way to white

women. Hence, the idea of multiple and interrelated scales or levels of oppression is not new: Brah and Phoenix (2004), Hearn (2011), Zapata Galindo (2011) and Viveros Vigoya (2012), for instance remind us that black feminists and anti-slavery movements already in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century claimed the recognition of racist discrimination, and “probably before then too” (Hearn 2011: 90).

### 3. Kimberlé Crenshaw’s Juridical Origin of the Term “Intersectionality”

The term “intersectionality” was coined by African-American lawyer Kimberlé Crenshaw (2011 [1989]) for a concrete law case, in order to point at the juridical invisibility of the multiple dimensions of oppression experienced by African-American female workers at the US-American car company General Motors. Crenshaw’s concept is clearly rooted in a tradition of black-feminist and anti-racist social movements. In her 1989 article, Crenshaw applied the metaphor of the intersection of different forms of discrimination for the concrete juridical case of black female employees at the car company General Motors (GM) in order to create concrete juridical categories to address discriminations at multiple and varying levels. GM had hired no black women until 1964. In turn, the black women hired after 1970 lost their jobs, after the court had rejected the plaintiff’s sex discrimination claim (GM did hire women, although all of them were white) as well as the plaintiff’s race discrimination claim (GM did hire blacks, but all of them were male). The multi-level exclusion of black women had been addressed by black feminists already a decade earlier, most illustratively expressed in the title of the 1982 volume *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, But Some of US Are Brave* (Hull, Bell-Scott and Smith 1982). Based on this observation, Crenshaw claims to take into account that:

Black women’s experiences are much broader than the general categories that discrimination discourse provides. Yet the continued insistence that black women’s demands and needs be filtered through categorical analyses that completely obscure their experiences guarantees that their needs will seldom be addressed (Crenshaw 2011 [1989]: 30).

Crenshaw’s text has provided an important intervention into juridical discourse and further forced feminists to reflect on their claims of a universal sisterhood based on the shared experience of sexist oppression. Today, Crenshaw works as an advisor for a number of international (e.g. the United Nations) institutions and operates her own think tank (The African American Policy Forum; see also Morrison 1992). Since Crenshaw first coined the term, the concept of intersectionality has traveled to distinct

locations and by now means different things in different contexts. There are hence manifold versions of what is understood by it.

Patricia Hill Collins' essay 1998 "It's all in the Family: Intersections of Gender, Race, and Nation" examines how the traditional family ideal (in the United States) functions as a privileged exemplary case of intersectionality. She investigates how the metaphor of the family illuminates the roles played by space and territory, ideas of naturalized hierarchy, normative justifications for distributions of social wealth that reproduce class hierarchies. This "matrix of domination" according to Hill Collins idealizes representations of rights and responsibilities that define family membership along racialized and gendered lines with regard to the micro level (personal) as well as the macro level (national/international standards). Cornelia Klinger assumes that in the face of current trends of illegalized transnational care work that isolated considerations of welfare regimes, gender regimes and migration regimes will no longer suffice, as a sufficient analysis of the institutional level requires considering the entanglements of these three regimes (Klinger 2007: 210, 229/30).

Elaborating on Crenshaw' notion, Leslie McCall (2005: 1774) proposed the distinctions among intersectional approaches into anticategorical complexities, intercategorical complexities and intracategorical complexities. The anticategorical approach is related to a deconstructive understanding and rejects categories, the intracategorical approach is named as such "because authors working in this vein tend to focus on particular social groups at neglected points of intersection [...] in order to reveal the complexity of lived experience within such groups" (McCall 2005: 1774). The intercategorical approach, which McCall herself follows, is associated with "scholars [who] provisionally adopt existing analytical categories to document relationships of inequality among social groups and changing configurations of inequality along multiple and conflicting dimensions" (McCall 2005: 1773).

Nira Yuval-Davis' 2011 text seems to be the most insightful contribution for the analysis and discussion of interdependent inequalities, her main argument being that the politics of intersectionality can encompass and transcend the dichotomy of recognition and redistribution politics (Yuval-Davis 2011: 155). Yuval-Davis thus considers intersectionality the most valid contemporary sociological theoretical approach to stratification (Yuval-Davis 2011: 156). She points out, however, that other than the usual attention to those marginalized, an intersectional analysis should not be limited to the ones that are on the multiple margins of society, but that the boundaries of intersectional analysis should encompass all members of society. Only then can an intersectional approach serve as a theoretical framework for analyzing social stratification (Yuval-

Davis 2011: 159). Arguing that Nancy Fraser's differentiation between recognition and redistribution needs to be encompassed by an intersectional analysis in order to take into account the shifting and contested nature of different axes of power, she hence promotes discussion of the construction and differentiation between politics of recognition and politics of redistribution.

For Yuval-Davis, recognition further plays an important role with regard to social power axes and – as she underscores – not of social identities (Yuval-Davis 2011: 160). Yuval-Davis further critiques Pierre Bourdieu's findings for insisting on class as foundational stratification analysis. As a "case study approach to stratification" (Yuval-Davis 2011: 165), taking into account the contextual and shifting nature of stratifications, however, Bourdieu's approach might be useful as a "stratification theoretical analysis": "[A]n intersectional approach to stratification would require a mode of analysis which combines case and variable analyses that would be sensitive to situated contexts, but which would also not fall into the relativist trap that prevents comparative judgment" (Yuval-Davis 2011: 166). With this in mind, Yuval-Davis advocates moving beyond the recognition/redistribution paradigm as introduced by moral philosophy and embracing an intersectional perspective when it comes to analyzing social inequalities and their interrelatedness:

[A]n intersectional mode of analysis which differentiates between the different analytical facets of social divisions and explores their connectivity in different historical contexts is a much more systematic and generally applicable mode of analysis than the recognition/redistribution model. Such a genuinely sociological perspective – instead of a moral philosopher's – also makes it easier to deconstruct and analyse the inner dynamics of collective identity groupings (Yuval-Davis 2011: 162).

Yuval-Davis emphasizes that an intersectional perspective always needs to be context specific and aware of the concrete historical situation in which it is applied and which defines the relevance of the varying social divisions for each context. She also warns of a depoliticizing reduction of the concept to "identity categories". To avoid such a reduction, an understanding of intersectionalities as inequalities might be helpful:

[I]n specific historical situations and in relation to specific people there are some social divisions which are more important than others in constructing their specific positionings, there are some social divisions such as gender, stage in the life cycle, ethnicity and class which tend to shape most people's lives in most social locations while other social divisions such as disability or



statelessness tend to affect fewer people globally. At the same time, for those who are affected by these and other social divisions not mentioned here, such divisions are crucial and one needs to fight to render them visible, as this is the case where recognition – of social power axes, not of social identities – is of crucial importance. Therefore, the question of how many social divisions exist in every historical context is not necessarily fixed and is a product of political struggle as well as of analytical process (Yuval-Davis 2011: 160).

#### 4. The Coloniality of Intersectionality

Current trends in theorizing on intersectionality have tended to be produced in European and Anglo-American white feminist contexts. One of the most recent publications on intersectionality (from the German context) is the collection *Framing Intersectionality. Debates on a Multi-Faceted Concept in Gender Studies*, edited by Helma Lutz, Maria Teresa Herrera Vivar and Linda Supik published by Ashgate in 2011 in the series “The Feminist Imagination – Europe and Beyond”. All editors of the volume are based at the Faculty of Social Sciences at Goethe University Frankfurt. Besides several merits regarding the discussion in intersectionality, the volume provides a showcase example for the pitfalls of theorizing against the backdrop of asymmetrical conditions of knowledge circulation.<sup>13</sup> I will therefore in the following discuss the volume in some length in order to point out in an exemplary manner the pitfalls of a travelling concept such as intersectionality against the backdrop of highly asymmetrical regimes of knowledge circulation marked by epistemic Occidentalism. It seems noteworthy that almost all authors included are located within German and central-European academic contexts, so the overall framing limits the discourse largely to these discursive spaces. The inclusion of the book in the series “The Feminist Imagination – Europe and Beyond” therefore appears to be slightly misleading. The “beyond” refers only to the US and there only to Kimberlé Crenshaw’s conceptualization – this Eurocentric stance points us at one of the core problems of the discourse on intersectionality as practiced so far. Moreover, the editors state in the introduction that the concept of intersectionality has largely been limited to the scholarly literature in Northern European and Anglo-American contexts and not found considerable resonance in France or Spain. They are thus blinding out important contributions such as, for example, the book *Feminismos periféricos* edited by Pilar Rodríguez Martínez, even within Europe, not to mention

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13 The contributions are based on the presentations of the conference “Celebrating Intersectionality: Debates on a Multi-Faceted Concept in Gender Studies”, held at Goethe University in Frankfurt in 2009. The book is divided into three parts: 1. “Intersectionality’s Transatlantic Travels: Geographies of the Debate”, 2. “Emerging Fields in Intersectionality: Masculinities, Heteronormativity and Transnationality”, and, 3. “Advancing Intersectionality: Potentials, Limits, and Critical Queries”.



respective transnational and North-South asymmetries.<sup>14</sup> Besides the volume's limited spectrum, the contributions by Kimberlé Crenshaw, Nira Yuval-Davis and Jeff Hearn appear to be useful for elaborating on an intersectional approach to entangled inequalities in transnational contexts.

However, subsequent to the editors' introduction, the collection opens with an abbreviated reprint of Kimberlé Crenshaw's 1989 article "Demarginalising the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Anti-discrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Anti-Racist Politics", which counts as the founding text of the term and concept of intersectionality. Moreover, the volume closes with a postscript by Crenshaw who was invited to speak at the conference and was seemingly surprised at how extensively her concept had been discussed and applied in the discourse in Germany. In her post-script to the volume, Crenshaw gives an outline of her very practical understanding of an intersectional approach, which she clearly situates in the realm of jurisprudence for which she had first coined the term. Crenshaw clarifies that her appliance of intersectionality has been and continues to be clearly context-bound and practical, while she never intended to create an overarching theory of oppression, but of very practical use for analyzing concrete juridical omissions and inequalities and as a critical intervention. She hence defines intersectionality as a form of insurgent knowledge valid for altering hegemonic asymmetries. For Crenshaw (2011 [1989]), then, empirical questions on what intersectionality can do or has done and which concrete analytical functions it can fulfill are of relevance, rather than categorical definitions of what intersectionality is or is not. Rather than to call for grand theories, she proposes to find forms of intervention beyond disciplines and to include regions that have formerly been excluded from the discourse (Crenshaw 2011 [1989]: 232, 233). Crenshaw (2011 [1989]) describes intersectionality as a valid framework of research questions for empirical analysis, above all with regard to the conditions under which intersectionality can contribute to the formation of collectivities and enhance transformative action.

My short outline of a genealogy of intersectional interventions and conceptualizations already stresses two of the major problematic points related to the concept and the way it has been travelling: Firstly, recent theorizing of intersectionality – under that

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14 Even though this conference took place after the publication of the volume edited by Lutz et al., it built on a wide discussion of intersectionality in Spain and included protagonists of the debate as keynote speakers. It would have been desirable to find more contributions, which discuss current transnational processes of migration, politics of citizenship and inequalities and refer to concrete examples rather than abstract theorizations and to find major intersectional theorists such as Floya Anthias' and Carmen Gregorio Gil's notions on intersectionality and citizenship in the volume of such a prestigious and representative publishing house. See the 2012 conference "Feminism and Migration. Social Intervention and Political Action (FEMIGRA)", February 9-11 at the Universidad Autónoma Barcelona.

term or “label” – is predominantly a phenomenon of the so-called Global North, or, more concretely, Europe and the US. Against the backdrop of continuing asymmetrical circulations of knowledge, this phenomenon has to be problematized. Secondly, the phenomena that would today be termed intersectional are held as new and as a sort of ready-made theory, whereas the intersectional or entangled character of inequalities has been problematized especially by activists for a long time.

The triad “race-class-gender” (or triple oppression theory) had originally been promoted by Black and Chicana feminists in the US (see e.g. Anzaldúa 1987; Davis 1981; Hill Collins 1998; Morrison 1971; Truth 1851) in order to address differences among women based on their socio-economic, sexual or racial status, which dominant feminist discourses had ignored in the name of a presumed universal sisterhood based on sexist oppression by women. Likewise, social studies focusing on “class” or “strata” as major defining category of inequalities have been blinding out other categories of exclusion and the interrelated character of different levels of stratification. Gudrun-Axeli Knapp has consequently elaborated on the travel of the triad race-class-gender from its original Anglo-American contexts to Europe. Knapp warns of the danger that travelling theories might on the way become part and parcel of what Jacques Derrida has referred to as “doxographic discourse”. “Doxographic discourse”<sup>15</sup> is based on “academic capitalism” and a “quotation market” (cf. Derrida 1990), and reigned by the secrete underlying imperative ‘don’t use that concept, only mention it’ (cf. Derrida 1990; Knapp 2005: 254), thus serving in order to be politically correct while keeping received power hierarchies and privileges and one’s own conscience intact:

Doxographic discourses are second-order or meta-theoretical discourses in which theories tend to move as taxonomic entities [...] a formula merely to be mentioned, being largely stripped of the baggage of concretion, of context and history [...]. It is the interplay between mechanisms of delegation and respective claims of competence, authority and authenticity that also keeps the mantra going: mention differences – and continue doing what you’ve always done (Knapp 2005: 255).

Knapp importantly argues that theorizing along the lines suggested as the described doxographic discourses often blinds out the activist and the implicitly critical and political impetus of the concept of intersectionality. A number of the publications and conferences on intersectionality mentioned above and its “market-value” in neoliberal academic contexts indicate the danger of the concept turning into precisely such a

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<sup>15</sup> Doxography (Greek: “an opinion, a point of view” and “to write, to describe”) is a term used especially for the works of classical historians, describing the points of view of past philosophers and scientists.

de-politicized discourse. Isabel Lorey has therefore harshly critiqued the depoliticizing effect of using “categories” in certain strands of intersectionality and Critical Whiteness discourses and claims to move towards a paradigm of political practice (see Lorey 2008). Intersectionality could in this point “learn” from an understanding of entangled or interdependent inequalities, as the concept of inequalities already implies an asymmetry and names it as what it is: sexist, racist, homophobic and social oppression (other than presumably “neutral” categories such as “race, class, gender”).

In a Foucauldian sense, knowledge and power are always marked by hierarchical differences. In globalized transnational contexts, such asymmetries with regard to knowledge and representation go back to a long history of silencing and colonizing knowledges. Research on interdependent inequalities in Latin America is hence always also and always already related to the question of which knowledge (and which forms of representation, theorization and participation, respectively) counts as relevant knowledge – and who has the power to decide and define the respective parameters. Stemming from feminist and civil rights activist contexts, an intersectional approach is originally a “dominance-sensitive” approach aiming at naming power asymmetries and thinking ways to overcome them; these asymmetries are closely related to structural asymmetries with regard to the access to knowledge production and circulation, to representation and political participation. In this sense, an intersectional perspective (or option) might serve as a sort of “corrective methodology” to sensitize researchers with regard to the simultaneous and entangled articulation of different power regimes and axes of stratification as well as for a critical reflection on the researchers’ own positionality and situatedness within a structurally unequal system of knowledge production and circulation (e.g. privileges). An intersectionalities approach functions as critical intervention and implicit critique on hegemony – hence in this sense draws an important connection to the project of the examination of interdependent inequalities and to Latin America (as a formerly theoretically excluded space). Knowing why certain categories (and the concept of categories itself) do not correspond at all to complex reality will help all kinds of researchers formulate better research questions and pursue more informed investigations than they would have developed in ignorance of the principles of intersectionality.

Moreover, for intersectional analyses on a translocational scale, the situatedness of different differences in different spaces and locations has to be taken into account.<sup>16</sup> That is, that “race” might articulate and relate to other differences very differently in Brazil or Colombia than in the U.S., in the UK, in Kenya, in Japan, or in Germany. The same holds true for gender relations or concepts of sexuality. Against this backdrop, and

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16 On the concept of “situated knowledges”, see Donna Haraway (1988).

since intersectionality has become a highly established term in various academic fields, it seems necessary to find a way of contextualizing and decolonizing the discourse on intersectionality for researching interdependent inequalities in Latin America, rather than doing away with the concept as “Eurocentric” from the beginning. This means, for instance, to take different meanings, concepts and workings of “race” (and racialization and racism respectively) in Latin America into account.

## 5. Putting Latin America on the “Cartography of Intersectionality”

Existing theorizations on intersectionality predominantly stem from U.S. American and European academic contexts and elaborate on the respective hegemonic conceptualizations of gender and racial inequalities, which thereby tend to be treated as universal. It is thus all the more important to understand intersectionality as a positioned and locally and context specific tool. In this sense, British scholar Peter Wade’s analysis is especially useful for considering specific Latin American contexts and discourses and their internal differentiations as well as for taking into account the often neglected dimension of sexuality implicit in the related processes of racialization (see also: Wade 2000, 2003; Rubiera Castillo 2011; Zurbano 2012). Wade considers sexual and racial categories as closely related domains, which are mutually constitutive of one another. He calls to mind the specific ‘foundational fictions’ for nations in the region, for example the celebration of ‘mixed origins’ (*mestizaje*) in Brazil and Mexico. He is interested in how racial hierarchy shapes sexuality and how patriarchal and racial dominations relate to each other (Wade 2009: 12) in Latin American contexts, considering *mestizaje* as a colonial practice, which produced racially intermediate *mestizos* through sexual interactions.<sup>17</sup> His analysis takes into account the role of both markets and hierarchies in a national and transnational dimension, and he comes to the conclusion that racism and racial democracy operate simultaneously. Moreover, he situates these hierarchies’ interrelatedness and the power structures involved as rooted in colonial history (cf. McClintock et al. 1998):

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17 This becomes clear by the thematic foci of the sub-chapters of Wade’s study (2009), which all provide showcase examples of analyses from an intersectional perspective: “Racism, Racial Democracy and *Mestizaje*”, “Interracial Sex: *Cholas* and *Mestizaje*”, “Interracial Marriage Patterns and Racial Hierarchy”, “Interracial Marriage Patterns and the Simultaneity of Racism and Racial Democracy”, “Ambivalence and Anxiety”, “Interracial Homosexuality and the Figure of the Black Male”, “Beauty and Eroticism”, “Sex Tourism and Sex Migration”. In his chapter on “Race, Sex and the Politics of Citizenship” Wade elaborates explicitly on how the concept *mestizaje* provides the articulation of an intersection of race and sex. In the chapter “The Political Economy of Race and Sex in Contemporary Latin America”, Wade focuses on how race and sex intersect in the fields of identity, citizenship, the state and social movements by looking at public policies on sexual and reproductive health, the way gender and sexuality influence ethnic and racial movements, and the politics of identity and *mestizaje* among Latinos in the US (2008: 156).

[The theoretical point is that] race, class and gender are able to work together and shape each other *because* they can all operate through images and practices around sexuality [...] a sex/gender hierarchy is maintained through racial hierarchy, and vice versa. Images of sexual property and immorality constitute whiteness and blackness and provide a mechanism whereby both racial hierarchy (white or black) and sex/gender hierarchy (men over women, hetero over homo) are enacted. The emphasis on the regulation of sexuality also gives a good basis on which to encompass non-hetero sexualities (Wade 2009: 25, original emphasis).

Wade concludes: “it is clear that there is a good deal of internal variation in how *mestizaje* has operated and in how racial dynamics work in different [Latin American] countries [...] [which] is still an underdeveloped area” (Wade 2009: 179, original emphasis). The intersectional relation between race and homosexuality has according to Wade attained little analytical attention, as being black and male is associated with being heterosexually powerful, hence homosexuality is associated with non-blackness. Studies on sex tourism in the cause of the increasing mobility of a small elite provide an insightful showcase example of the revival of intersectional inequalities based on colonial power and knowledge structures on a global scale as expressed in the sexualized and racialized erotized coding and exploitation in an unequal world system.<sup>18</sup> Wade maintains that this fact “is probably linked with ‘Latin America’ as a category of knowledge production, with its roots in postcolonial area studies programs driven by US and other metropolitan concerns and linked to a basic logic of geopolitical control” (Wade 2009: 246). In order to be able to grasp current global interrelations and transnational entanglements, Floya Anthias (2005) in a similar vein sees a necessity to historicize the idea of an intersectional approach towards social inequalities and to take the concept’s various genealogies into account.

In her study *El Gran Caribe: Umbral de la geopolítica mundial* (2010) Ana Esther Ceceña draws an illuminating genealogy of the geo-strategic position of the Caribbean and the related colonial entanglements of domination, impunity and violence the region has been objected to by various imperial powers from the European Conquest until today (see also Mignolo 2005 and Coronil 1996). For that matter, a look at current publications by Afro-Cuban feminists is quite fruitful. The Cuban case provides an especially illustrative example in this respect. Feminist and anti-racist interventions on the island always have to locate their struggle within the narrative of the “glorious” revolution, that is, as incomplete aspects of an otherwise successfully emancipated and

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<sup>18</sup> Peter Chow-White’s study (2001) on sex tourism blogs in cyber space also provides an illustrative example of the simultaneous articulation of numerous forms of oppression in transnational contexts. See also O’Connell Davidson 2001, Kampadoo 1999 and 2004.



classless society.<sup>19</sup> Related events and publications hence usually start by emphasizing their indebtedness to the revolutionary cause and are then able to express quite harsh criticism. Yulexis Almeida Junco in her contribution to the 2011 volume *Afrocubanas. Historia, pensamiento y prácticas culturales* for instance admonishes the neglect of racial stratifications in a post-revolutionary Cuban society too overwhelmed by doing away with class antagonisms: “Desde sus inicios la sociedad cubana se caracterizó por una estratificación de clases que se correspondía con una filiación racial” (Junco 2011: 137). Cuba’s hegemonic self-narration as a classless society, however, blinded out the continuing racial hierarchizations, as Junco further observes:

Las garantías universales de los derechos sociales de la ciudadanía en todas las esferas de la sociedad crearon la ilusión de un problema resuelto. El acceso de todos los sectores de la población al estudio y el empleo, sin distinción de clase y color de piel, permitió cambiar viejas concepciones racistas, por lo que el tema racial perdió visibilidad y quedó fuera de los locus de interés de las ciencias sociales en Cuba. [...] Se hizo un silencio que propició del desplazamiento del racismo – que estaba latente en la conciencia social – al ámbito de la vida cotidiana y las relaciones interpersonales. Según una tesis marxista, los cambios que tienen lugar en la base económica, no se reflejan al mismo tiempo en la superestructura. El racismo no solo es un problema de desigual distribución de recursos de todo tipo, también constituye un sistema de ideas, valores y representaciones sociales de gran arraigo en nuestra cultura (Junco 2011: 141).

Junco here emphasizes the macro-level (geopolitics, colonial legacies such as structural racism or the transnational slave trade), which has a decisive impact on inequalities on the micro-level such as income inequalities or everyday racism, especially in a historically transnational space like the Caribbean. On the transnational scale, these inequalities are re-invoked in the recent growth of the *jineterismo* phenomenon. *Jineteros* or *jineteras* are predominantly Cubans of African descent from the lower social strata of Cuban society who are illegally involved in a variety of “businesses” with tourists, ranging from selling souvenirs and tourist services to prostitution and so-

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19 In September 2012, the author was able to attend a “Corte de mujeres” [Women’s Court] organized by feminist academics, activists and public figures to bring violence against women and women’s rights on the agenda. All the speakers of this event embedded their narrative within the discourse of the “glorious” revolution. The author owes her gratitude to Yohanka León del Río (Universidad de la Habana) for the invitation to the event as foreign representative and desiguALdades.net for financial support for the trip. Many thanks also to Norma Vasallo for productive dialogues on Cuban feminisms. A second visit to Cuba in March 2013 was made possible in the course of a student excursion organized by Manuela Boatcă and Claudia Rauhut from the Lateinamerika-Institut of the Freie Universität Berlin, and the author owes her heartfelt thanks to this outstanding experience and the possibility to meet further protagonists and deepen her research on the topic.

called “romance tourism” (especially when the tourists are female). All these exchanges are deeply marked along structurally colonial lines of gendering, (hetero)sexism and racialization as expressed in exoticized phantasies of more “natural” bodies, sensualities and sexualities. María Ileana Faguaga Iglesias hence rightly observes that:

Mujeres negras que [...] pudieron alcanzar estudios medios y universitarios, que con iguales aspiraciones educaron a hijos y quizás nietos, ven hoy, en mayor medida que sus congéneres blancas frustradas sus aspiraciones. Los problemas raciales ya parcialmente reconocidos, que existen en toda la sociedad y abundan en las áreas recaudadoras de divisas, afectan en mayor proporción a las mujeres negras, lo que se corresponde con el hecho de que en estos sectores, además de la discriminación racial antinegra, le afecta el de género, y, en gran medida, el de clase (Faguaga Iglesias 2011: 156-7, on racism in Cuba see also Zurbarano 2012).

While the mentioned Cuban feminist discourses currently focus predominantly on neglected racist structures (see also the essays by Afro-Cuban feminists Zuleica Romay and Nancy Morejón, who were both awarded with the prestigious Casa de las Américas prize in 2012 for their essays as first black women), a number of Mexican feminist thinkers have recently re-emphasized the necessity to bind discourses on (structurally racialized) gender inequality once again stronger to social inequalities.<sup>20</sup> Mexican feminist critic Gabriela Espinosa Damián (2011) argues that Mexican (as most probably, many Latin American) feminists have for a long time had to address multiple scales of exclusion due to their specifically “limited citizenship” – and might hence contribute valuable experiences and theorizations for a transnational debate on intersectionality and possible ways of overcoming of the persisting methodological Occidentalism:

Las tensiones o fracturas entre estas posiciones (lucha feminista o lucha de clases, lucha de género o lucha indígena, derechos individuales o derechos colectivos etcetera.) podrían repensarse a la luz de nuestras realidades, pues mientras el feminismo europeo y el norteamericano surgen en sociedades postindustriales donde los derechos políticos, económicos y sociales son una realidad asequible para las mayorías, permitiendo al feminismo concentrarse

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<sup>20</sup> The author wishes to thank Marisa Belausteguigoitia for an inspiring dialogue and valuable references and for reminding me of the necessity of my own self-positioning within the unequal circuits of knowledge and Gabriela Espinosa Damián for spontaneously taking the time for intensive exchange and for worthy contacts – above all regarding outer-academic feminisms. The author is further very grateful to the Institute for Gender Studies at the University of Guadalajara (especially Marisa Martínez Moscoso) for providing access to their archive and to [desiguALdades.net](http://desiguALdades.net) for financing the research trip.



en reivindicaciones de género, en nuestro país, desde 1910 y hasta la fecha, no se cumplen ni ejercen plenamente estos derechos. La ciudadanía restringida o incompleta es realidad nacional y los movimientos feministas no pueden desentenderse del conjunto de problemas sociales (Espinosa Damián 2011: 18).

Numerous current Mexican feminist studies address inequalities and tensions between differently positioned women and the entanglements of different axes of difference (see e.g. Belausteguigoitia 2009) and/or attempt collaborations between established feminists in the academy and political activists from diverse social spheres, from radical queer thinkers to Zapatista feminists (see e.g. Suárez Návaz and Aída Hernández 2008, Espinosa Damián 2009, Espinosa Damián, Dircio Chautla and Sánchez Nestor 2010, Espinosa Damián and Lau Jaiven 2011).<sup>21</sup> Representatives of indigenous feminist and other social movements outside the academy have especially emphasized institutionalized feminism's lack of intersectional thinking as related to the social realities of other disenfranchised groups, however, dedicated to a radical feminist agenda, as Gabriela Espinosa Damián points out:

(H)oy más que nunca articular las reivindicaciones feministas a otras agendas emancipatorias y a otros sectores sociales no solo sigue siendo válido, sino indispensable para lograr una democracia radical, que construya simultáneamente la equidad de género y la equidad social (Espinosa Damián 2011: 306).

Espinosa here brings up the discourse on the necessity of “decolonizing feminism” (see e.g. Mohanty 2003a, Lugones 2008 and 2010) – referring to those strands and locations of feminist discourse, which have become canonical and hegemonic. In a similar vein, one might ask whether the “decolonization of intersectionality” is not also a strong necessity in order to avoid further knowledge asymmetries and methodological nationalism(s)/Occidentalism(s).

## **6. Knowledge Asymmetries: Intersectionality as a Travelling Concept**

While, as Gabriele Dietze (2009) argues, hegemonic feminist approaches are only slowly adopting a postcolonial perspective, most decolonial approaches lack an integral gender perspective, stating that “the treatment of gender by the MC [Modernity/

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<sup>21</sup> Zapatista feminist Comandante Ester in her speech “Leyes revolucionarias de la mujer” held in Mexico City, confronted the triple discrimination experienced by women of the *pueblos originarios* as “indian”, woman and poor (see Escobar 2007: 196)

Coloniality] group so far has been inadequate in the best of cases” (see Escobar 2007: 192). A perspectivization that goes beyond what Ella Shohat and Robert Stam term the “Anglo-Saxon/Latinist cultural dichotomy [...] that still haunts the race/colonialism debates” (Shohat and Stam 2012: xv) is hence highly desirable in order to counter this hegemony. The same holds true with regard to the taking into account of theorizations by Queer of Diaspora scholars and marginalized feminist thinkers and the inclusion of invisibilized knowledge produced on the topic, even if not specified in the same terms. For example, feminists in many Latin American countries prefer not to use the terminology provided – and, not unproblematically rendered hegemonic – by predominantly Eurocentric feminists. It is necessary to take into account the fact that feminist and anti-racist scholars and activist from other spaces are often not familiar with these theorizations and the respective Anglo/Euro-American-dominated canon of English-language texts. We are here confronted with a serious translation problem (what is not published in English does not become visible on an international scale, and vice versa English texts are often not accessible for Spanish or other language speakers). Numerous experts on intersectional axes of oppression also consciously reject inscribing their work in such hegemonic lines. In order to avoid the colonial dichotomy of theorizing of the so-called Global North being uncritically applied to objects of research from the so-called Global South a respective sensibilization for a Europe-based research network like *desiguALdades.net* implies to take into account and critically reflect one’s own position as a researcher.

To this end, a postcolonial or decolonial perspectivization of intersectional thinking seems to be required. Avtar Brah and Ann Phoenix in their 2004 article “Ain’t I A Woman? Revisiting Intersectionality” aim at historicizing interventions based on ‘intersectional’ oppressions *avant la lettre*. Brah and Phoenix promote a historically-rooted and forward-looking consideration of intersectionality and argue that feminist dialogues and dialogic imaginations provide powerful tools for challenging the power games currently played out on the world stage (Brah and Phoenix 2004: 84), which are based on prevalent historically constituted asymmetries. They hence revisit debates on intersectionality in order to “shed new light on current issues” (Brah and Phoenix 2004: 75). They discuss 19<sup>th</sup> century contestations by feminists involved in anti-slavery struggles and campaigns for women’s suffrage and examine autobiographies and empirical studies arguing that the focus on intersections provides a more complex and dynamic understanding than social class alone. The text especially considers poststructural and postcolonial feminist contributions and diaspora studies approaches as valuable framings for that aim.

Zapata Galindo (2011) argues respectively with regard to Latin America that while *interseccionalidad* or the notion of an *intersección* is nearly absent as a concept in Latin

American feminist discourses, the notion of *interrelaciones* does exist and is being discussed. Underscoring the importance of the concept's genealogy, Zapata Galindo especially points out how the concept travels and which contributions fall into oblivion: While in the US and in Europe intersectionality has reached the status of a hegemonic concept from special theoretical positions, there is no such positional hegemony in Latin America. The phenomenon has been discussed rather under the heading of either "inequalities" (*desigualdades*), which is more frequent in Latin American gender studies or "multiculturalism" (*multiculturalismo*), a concept coined in social sciences contexts (such as CLACSO). Lugones (2007 and 2008), who elaborates on "The Coloniality of Gender" and "Heterosexualism and the Modern/Colonial World System" and Anne McClintock (1995) who coined the concept of "articulated categories" in order to examine "race, class and sexuality in the colonial contest" provide important contributions of an intersectional perspective on the entanglements of gender and coloniality. Zapata Galindo (2011) explains this in-simultaneity or asymmetry in terms of the circulation of knowledge between the Global North and the Global South and proposes to ask why some concepts become fundamental concepts and others not (and do so in some places, in others not). She hence calls for a critical examination of the political epistemology of circulations of knowledge. Many Latin American feminists contradict this paradigm, as they claim that the concept does not provide anything new to them: their specific experiences have forced them to take into account and deal with various simultaneous and intersecting forms of oppressions on a very practical level already for a long time.

Drawing on a decolonial world-system approach, Manuela Boatcă (2012) underlines that transnational inequalities have been existing for more than five-hundred years – that is, at least since the European colonization in 1492 and thus also the first contact with a capitalist logic of exploitation. These early colonial processes initiated by European colonial expansion are usually omitted (or naturalized) in Eurocentric self-narrations, which take transnationalization and globalization as relatively new phenomena. Boatcă argues that transnational inequalities have been shaping inequalities within Europe as well as between Europe and other world regions at least for five centuries by virtue of colonial entanglements. Her text thus provides an important contribution for the historicization of the concept of intersectionality/the interdependent levels of social stratification from a transnational perspective and regarding global entanglements as Boatcă claims that, on a global scale, it is important to take historical and continuing structural colonial asymmetries – or the "Coloniality of Power" (Quijano 2000) – into account. The text further contributes to the understanding of the inherent interdependency between colonizing and colonized actors as elaborated on in the Modernity/Coloniality paradigm. According to this paradigm, European progress narrated as 'modernity'

relied heavily on the subordination, exploitation and dependency of its colonial other. The resulting ongoing structural coloniality of bodies, spaces and knowledges provides a decisive framework for analyzing current interdependent articulations of inequality.<sup>22</sup> Intersectionality thus not only needs to be contextualized and decolonized as concept, but also understood in a contextual and power-sensitive way. An intersectional perspective then also provides a mode of epistemic sensibilization, as the concept points at the interrelatedness of axes of stratification and the dialogic and dynamic character of social and transnational encounters. Knapp has respectively emphasized the potential of an intersectional approach to “shake up the common matrix for understanding European modernity” (Knapp 2005: 60), as the triad “race-class-gender” not only contributed to taking into account the fact of diversity, but also pointed at the “dark sides of European modernity” and the simultaneity or dialectics of progress and barbarity. An intersectional framing in this sense moreover calls for a re-inspection of such understandings:

Posed as a systematic perspective of study and research, the triad of race-class-gender’ necessitates calls for a radical transdisciplinary re-inspection of European modernity in its historical interdependency with an emerging capitalist economy, including specific androcentric forms of rationality and rationalization it presupposes and enforces (Knapp 2005: 261)

Understood this way, an intersectional perspectivization might provide a useful frame also for a critical examination of prevailing forms of methodological (and epistemic) Occidentalism.

Gabriele Dietze, Elahe Haschemi Yekani and Beatrice Michaelis (2010) in their essay “‘Try Again. Fail Again. Fail Better.’ Queer Interdependencies as Corrective Methodologies”, promote a conceptualization especially aiming at taking into account critical impulses of Queer of Diaspora critique for a queer intersectional perspective.<sup>23</sup> An intersectional perspective according to the authors can serve as a “corrective methodology” (in combination of deconstructive approaches) to address systemic modes of inequality across class, locality and the ability to work, and in this way “situate power not only in the spheres of representation but link deconstructive thinking with material concerns, while holding on to the dynamic understanding of power” (Dietze et al. 90). Here, their approach becomes specifically valid for thinking about interdependent

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22 On the coloniality/modernity paradigm and the concept of the “coloniality of power”, see Quijano 2000; Mignolo 2007; Schiwy 2007.

23 See also Encarnación Gutiérrez-Rodríguez with Umut Erel, Jin Haritaworn and Christian Kleese (2008); John C. Hawley (2001a and 2001b); Esteban Muñoz (1999); Cindy Patton and Benigno Sánchez-Eppler (2000).

translocational inequalities: The authors underline the necessity of a stronger focus on the conditions of inequality or power relations rather than on categories (Dietze et al. 2010: 79) and plead for combining an awareness of the instability of categories with a critique of relations of inequality. Escobar respectively underscores the value that a queer perspective for decolonial thinking, as:

[T]his theory has eloquently shown that the constitutive elements of gender and sexual identities are never monolithic, but more the result of weavings, overlaps, dissonances, gaps and possibilities. 'Queer' names the radical contestation of the norm [...] of heterosexism, patriarchy, modernity, and coloniality (Escobar 2007: 195).

Decolonial thinking as it were draws the attention of persistent inequalities to their structurally colonial character as expressed, for example, in citizenship entitlements and racialized hierarchies of knowledge, power and mobility. An intersectional sensibilization can help pointing at the "entangled histories of uneven modernities" (see Randeria 2006) in their structurally raced, gendered, sexualized and classed manner.

## 7. Intersections of Race/Racializations and Citizenship

In all global/transnational contexts citizenship entitlements play a decisive role with regard to access to participation, representation and mobility. As Kreckel underscores, passport and visa count as some of the most important institutions of social inequality and so does the place one is born (see Kreckel 2004: 5). Further elaborations on the role of citizenship as an axis of social stratification not only, but especially in transnational contexts beyond the topic of migration seem to be a gainful task with regard to conceptualizations of inequalities from an intersectional perspective. Ayelet Schachar's (2009) proposal of citizenship as an inherited "birthright property" provides a promising approach for capturing the current social stratifications on a global scale via highly asymmetrical citizenship entitlements.<sup>24</sup> Calling to mind that despite current notions of mobility and globalization, still only a very small percentage of the world population ever leaves their country of origin, Schachar (2009) insists on the power of citizenship. She gives the example of a girl born in Mali who regardless of her family's socio-economic status will most probably have less life chances with regard to education, participation and mobility than a girl born at the same time to a family of the lowest social spectrum in Canada. Schachar (2009) speaks of *The Birthright Lottery*, which is not only valid for inequalities concerning income disparities between poor and rich countries, but

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<sup>24</sup> Notes taken by the author at Schachar's talk "The Birthright Lottery: Citizenship and Inequality" at the Mosse Lecture series Humboldt University, December 1, 2011.

also concerning the access to resources, education or medical care, which is highly dependent on the coincidence of being born in a rich country (or a country that offers, for example, corresponding levels of healthcare or social welfare systems). Bearing structural resemblances to feudal privileges, citizenship today, according to Schachar, functions as an inherited and institutionally supported set of entitlements, rights and privileges maintaining global inequalities with regard to “the valuable good of *political membership*” (Schachar 2009: 3, original emphasis). Against this backdrop, Schachar speaks of the “gate-keeping function” of citizenship on a global scale, catering to the “wealth-preserving function” for a selected minority of wealthy states (Schachar 2009: 33f.).<sup>25</sup> Shohat and Stam (2012: 298) furthermore pinpoint the role of racialization, which also applies to citizenship in the form of the cultural/racial capital of whiteness when they discuss “the inherited advantages [...] to be born white”. Expanding on Pierre Bourdieu’s different forms of capital, they argue that, “white ‘racial capital’ [is] inherited and passed on from generation to generation” (Shohat and Stam 2012: 298). Racial inequalities play a role in a parallel manner to citizenship entitlements, but at the same time cross and transcend them in interdependent ways.<sup>26</sup>

Sérgio Costa’s (2011) concept of entangled inequalities refers to the global linkages between social categorizations that determine social inequalities that create asymmetries between positions of certain individuals or groups of individuals in a relationally (not spatially) determined context (such as economic positions and/or political and legal entitlements). Costa considers it thus important to link social and transregional aspects with historical ones as relevant factors for inequalities. A categorization can be advantageous in one context (e.g. quota) and disadvantageous in another (e.g. discourse, patterns of conviviality). Costa sees a strong necessity of relational units of analysis that are dynamically defined in the process of inquiry itself. However, Costa argues, the interplay of social categorizations cannot be articulated *ex ante* in a formula, but only be examined in the respective specific context. The conceptualization of entangled inequalities can serve as a dynamic unit of analysis, enabling to take up the interdependencies between social categorizations and between different regions of the world. Further, Costa emphasizes that the examination of interrelated regimes of inequality over time allows considering the historical construction of inequalities. Intersectional phenomena are thus not bound to national or nation-state contexts.

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25 Shohat and Stam’s analysis of “the circulation of the race/colonial debates in terms of multiple chromatic Atlantics” (2012: 298) provides an insightful example of an inherently intersectional analysis of transnational constellations and flows, proposing a concept of nation states that resembles former re-definitions of linear, supposedly unified identity concepts: “Nation states are poly-perspectival and multichronotopic, forming dissonant polyphonies of partially discordant voices” (Shohat and Stam 2012: 299). See also Roberto Patricio Korzeniewicz (2011).

26 On intersectionality and citizenship, see also: Susan B. Rottmann and Myra Marx Ferree (2008), and Nira Yuval-Davis and P. Werbner (1999).



In their study *Race in Translation*, Shohat and Stam hence propose the use of an “intercolonial” framing to cope with the “multiple dimensions of these transnational/translational intersections” (2012: xv), as they are interested in “the ‘transversalities,’ or the hierarchical and lateral syncretism and dialogism taking place across national spaces” (2012: xx). Shohat and Stam further pinpoint the significance of power asymmetries inscribed in every act of translation or transnational exchange – including the translations of the travelling concept of intersectionality: “Each act of translation is situated, inevitably shadowed by the architectonics of inequality” (Shohat and Stam 2012: 300) Here, an intersectional perspectivization of examination of inequalities makes sense in order to take the micro levels as well as the macro levels into account and avoid concepts of inequality from turning into another Eurocentric concepts of “class gone global” in the sense of a *Hauptwiderspruch* (main contradiction).

As we have seen, the discourses on “interlocking systems of oppression” as discussed under the term “intersectionality” are deeply embedded in asymmetrical regimes of knowledge production and circulation in an unequal world system. As long as phenomena such as sex tourism to poorer countries along racialized hierarchies as illustrated in the film example occur, a sensibilization dedicated to a politics of “intersectionality” as practiced in early interventions seems highly recommended for any hegemony-sensitive notion of inequalities. Julia O’Connell Davidson and Jacqueline Sánchez Taylor, in their study on male and female sex tourism to the Caribbean maintain respectively:

The demand for sex tourism is inextricably linked to discourses that naturalize and celebrate inequalities structured along lines of class, gender and race/ Otherness; in other words, discourses that reflect and help to reproduce a profoundly hierarchical model of human society. [...] That the Western sex tourists pocket can contain sufficient power to transform others into Others, mere players on a pornographic stage, is a testament to the enormity of the imbalance of economic, social, and political power between rich and poor nations. That so many Westerners *wish* to use their power in that way is a measure of the bleakness of the prevailing model of human nature and the human sociality that their societies offer them (O’Connell Davidson and Sánchez Taylor 1999: 52, 53, original emphasis).

The same holds true for as long as in a similar manner, “biodiversity” in Latin America is advertised via images of scantily-dressed indigenous women (see Ulloa 2004), and internationalized care work migration and welfare regimes enable Western women to lead more emancipated lives on the backs of their oftentimes illegalized, underpaid



and disempowered nursemaids, cleaning women or elderly care nurses from a poorer country who remain structurally excluded from enjoying the very merits of Western feminist emancipation her unequally-treated work enables. As a coloniality/modernity analysis of inequalities illustrates, such persistent inequalities are based on a colonial logic.<sup>27</sup> An intersectional sensibilization of entangled inequalities could contribute to the overcoming or avoidance of methodological nationalism (which could be considered as based on this colonial logic) by strengthening institutions such as citizenship in their transnationally stratifying dimension also beyond scenarios of migration, but as a structuring principle.

## 8. Intersectionalities as Inequalities: Some Preliminary Results

As we have seen, conceptualizations of intersectionalities and inequalities have more in common than often assumed, as intersectionality deals with the relation of inequalities and difference(s). Against this backdrop, it has been one of the working theses of this paper that inequalities and intersectionalities shape and mutually constitute each other. Intersectional axes of oppression indeed shape and constitute global inequalities (and vice versa). The entangled inequalities approach constructed by [desiguLAdades.net](http://desiguLAdades.net) is based on a similar understanding of different forms, axes or categories of inequality as intersectionality. An interdependent inequalities approach seeking to problematize the underlying exploitative logic of inequalities (present also in other fields of consumption and commodification) requires a sensibilization in the sense of intersectional politics. Both conceptualizations might thus enrich one another and widen the horizon towards thinking ways to overcome persisting regimes of inequality and injustice on closely entangled global and local scales.

Both concepts consider various forms of subjectification or social stratification (or discrimination) such as race, class, gender, ethnicity, location, sexuality, belief as always already (and context-specifically) intersecting in a synchronic and diachronic way, that is, historically constituted and effective contemporarily. Understood as a conceptualization of “translocational relationality” (Anthias 2008), intersectionality can help developing better theories of stratification, which take into account the multiple and varying interconnections between social divisions, especially with regard to transnational processes. Such a sensibilization accounts for the complexity of systems of oppression and exclusion. According to Yuval-Davis (2011), an intersectional framing can further provide an important tool for stratification also beyond the paradigm of

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<sup>27</sup> A Berlin-based exposition from 10/2010-01/2011 at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt, curated by Max Jorge Hinderer, Alice Creischer and Andreas Siekmann has termed this logic “The Potosí Principle” referring to the exploitation of indigenous labor by colonizers in the silver mine in Potosí, Bolivia as a starting point for global scale capitalist accumulation.

“redistribution and recognition”, which still dominates social sciences debates especially also in Latin American academic contexts (particularly in Brazil). In numerous Latin American countries, the successful reduction of poverty through the (re)distribution of resources has not reduced inequalities with regard to power asymmetries.<sup>28</sup> An intersectional perspective might help pointing at power asymmetries which are neither addressed by a politics of material redistribution, nor by a politics of symbolic recognition on the basis of empty and undertheorized categories, as both do not contribute to a “redistribution” of power. It hence seems to be productive to link intersectional analyses as mutually complementary to debates about inequality as held especially in Latin America (see Zapata Galindo 2011) with a focus on “entangled inequalities” (see Costa 2011) to grasp multi-level and transregional interactions of social divisions. Moreover, an intersectional perspective focusing on queer interdependencies may serve as ‘corrective methodology’ by taking into account often omitted levels such as sexuality/heteronormativity (Dietze et al. 2010).

Whether this sensibilization has to be realized under the very term “intersectionality” requires further discussion. As shown, discourses on intersectionality are deeply coined by what I call methodological Occidentalism and the related knowledge asymmetries and exclusions. It thus seems to make sense to speak of “intersectionalities” in plural form and open up the discourse towards knowledges produced with the same aim, but from different locations and positions, hence understanding the concept as a “problem oriented” one in the spirit of the ones that have coined the concept and the term, rather than the abstract and exclusive academic theory for which some Occidental discourses hold it. More important than how to term the necessary sensitization “intersectionality” describes, however, is an intersectional awareness of the simultaneity of articulations of inequalities and a (self-)critique on hegemony – “the researcher too is a subject of desire, and this too needs to be acknowledged” (Escobar 2007: 195). As illustrated, an intersectional understanding of power relations and asymmetries is neither limited to feminism or narrow “identity categories,” nor does it provide a fixed method. Rather, intersectionalities provide an important epistemic sensibilization for the analysis of inequalities, a “Thinking Technology” and a way or self-understanding of doing research. To sum up, the following functions seem to be most important for an intersectional sensibilization of interdependent inequalities approaches. Future studies could elaborate on the respective dimensions:

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<sup>28</sup> Following a wider understanding of inequalities as elaborated on, for example, by Kreckel (in English 2010) and Therborn (2006 and 2011).

### **(1) Intersectionality as Historicized and “Situated Knowledge”**

Each intersectional analysis is case-specific and hence requires the researcher to clearly define her or his choice of relevant dimensions for each specific case. “Intersectionalities” can and should not provide a ready-made research design defining in advance which categories are relevant and/or to be taken into account when and how. The questions have to be developed from case to case “out of the material” at hand. An intersectional sensibilization helps to avoid one-dimensional analyses of, for example, “class” without justifying this choice and be aware of the inherent multi-faceted character of this category and requires to take the “Where, When and How” of its subject(s) into account (see Haschemi Yekani et al. 2008). Put differently: class oppression (or privilege) means something different in Caracas than in Berlin, it means something different for women and men, white women and black women and something different for a rich and educated heterosexual black woman than for a poor black woman or a poor homosexual woman or a rich homosexual woman or a homosexual white man. It is not the same if one is discriminated against because one is positioned a “woman” or because one is positioned as a “black lesbian”, neither if positioned as female care worker within transnational migration regimes or female recipient/client of care work. It also means something differently to be born poor in Mali or Haiti than in the United States and to be in possession of the respective passport as far as educational opportunities and social mobility are concerned. At different locations, different axes of stratification might mean different things (e.g. “race” in Brazil vs. “race” in the U.S. or in Germany and the related juridical or citizenship regimes, see e.g. Costa 2006), and, in transnational contexts, where different regimes or perceptions might combine or clash. Escobar respectively argues for a “Politics of Place (2007: 199) and a notion of “place-based practices of identity, nature, and economy” (2007: 199) as an epistemic perspective that “can be occupied by many subjects”, and de Sousa Santos pleads for moving from a “monoculture of knowledge” towards what he terms an “ecology of knowledge” (in Dalea and Robertson 2010: 158), while Haschemi et al. (2008) underscore the “productive instability” an intersectional perspectivization might provide.

Moreover, as the sex tourism example has illustrated, categories and positions change their meaning and significance in transnational contexts. Thus, whenever concepts of inequality are evoked – be they social, racial, sexual, labor-related, educational, fiscal, juridical or other – it is necessary to be very concrete about the subject(s) at hand. For example, an intersectional perspectivization makes it impossible to say gender and talk only about women or say race and speak about not nearer defined racialized

people (usually non-whites). With regard to interdependent inequalities in transnational contexts especially, this particularity might more often than not refer to a macro level (such as colonial legacies stemming from enslavement and migration like racism, or citizenship and migration regimes inscribed in national or international law) as well as to a micro level of stratification. Both levels constantly intertwine and intersect (for example, racism is structurally gendered, sexism is structurally racialized, both are marked by homophobia, citizenship concerns all, but is at the same time often related to racialized or ethnicized categories, asymmetries between colonized and colonizing actors and at the same time within and between both groups etc.).

A further decisive function of an intersectional approach with a decolonial perspectivization is hence necessarily its potential as a self-critical tool. As such, intersectionality can prove useful for an implicit critique on hegemony, necessary for thinking ways to overcome asymmetrical social power structures as expressed in unequal circulations of knowledge. An intersectional framing of interdependent inequalities might contribute to a critique and consequently the overcoming of methodological Occidentalism.

## **(2) Beyond Methodological Occidentalism: Towards an Epistemic Sensibilization**

Understood as a frame for epistemic sensibilization, an intersectional approach might serve for taking into account the respective varying and context-specific interlocking dimensions of stratification and inequality, and serve as a valid tool for processes of transnationality, migration, citizenship, and, more generally, changing conceptualizations of nationhood, as well as the dynamics by which these dimensions mutually intertwine and constitute each other. Transnational interdependent feminist approaches taking into account the interrelations and structural analogies of gender hierarchies with colonial and racial hierarchies and their structural entanglements in the global economy might provide a useful complementary framing, including their insistence on the need to embed feminist struggles within critique on capitalism (see e.g. Anzaldúa 1987, Mies 1986, Mohanty 2003a and 2003b). Moreover, it seems necessary to strengthen categories/axes of social stratification, which are especially relevant for transnational processes, such as citizenship entitlements and think further transversal ones. Most importantly, intersectionality – if taken back to its emancipatory origins – contextualizes knowledge and requires a re-thinking of dominating regimes of knowledge production, circulation and evaluation. An intersectional option hence in an ideal case leads to a critical self-positioning (including supposedly “unmarked norms” or privileges such as whiteness or heterosexuality) also of the (own) locus of knowledge production and the choice of categories or axes chosen has to be explained – also in relation to the categories not set center stage. Moreover, an intersectional sensibilization renders the

oftentimes unquestioned position of the researcher problematic and points at the danger of re-inscribing knowledge asymmetries. As indebted to the explicitly political paradigm of African-American, Indígena and Chicana feminisms and feminist thinking produced in other languages and locations, Critical Race and Critical Whiteness approaches and Queer of Diaspora interventions, intersectionality can function as a hegemony or power sensible tool. As such an intersectional sensibilization can frame and enrich the research of interdependent inequalities on various levels. An intersectional approach also sensitizes in a manner dedicated to power sensible thinking and forces researchers to 1) render their own position problematic, include the invisibilized (white/Occidental) norm and the related paradigms of what counts as theory/knowledge in their reflections, and, 2) consider contributions which have been excluded by this very logic.

Latin America is especially characterized by persistent colonial inequalities and their revival under neo-liberal circumstances as well as a persistent logic of epistemic Occidentalism. Postcolonial and transnational World System approaches are relevant framings for an intersectional approach to interdependent inequalities in order to take into account the respective locally-specific constellations and discourses, as locally/contextually specific contributions to the “cartography of intersectionality” (Zapata Galindo 2011). An intersectional lens with regard to Latin American contexts, according to Zapata Galindo is nothing new in Latin America (but has always been an implicit part of examinations of inequalities). However, in Latin America intersectional/interlocking systems of oppression are not considered as theory, but they are rather experienced as everyday realities. In order to count as a critical tool, a “decolonization” of the methodological Occidentalism inherent to lots of theorizing on intersectionality thus requires a radical rethinking of what counts as knowledge. According to Zapata Galindo, then, (a cartography) of intersectionality in Latin America would/should be included in postcolonial debates as well as consider the overlaps with debates on (social) inequalities. Such a cartography should take into account the alliances (of skin/voice) between gender studies and activism and hence also consider knowledge as valid, which does not necessarily fit the neat forms of the academy. A glance at the Caribbean – and many other Latin American locations as well – would help to open the horizon towards a “creolized theory” with a long tradition (see Boatcă 2011).<sup>29</sup>

Understood this way, an intersectional framing of conceptualizations of interdependent inequalities aims at thinking ways of the “decolonization of knowledge” – and of

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<sup>29</sup> Representatives of Afro-Cuban feminist thinking or Queer of Diaspora HipHop such as the performances and lyrics of the Afro-Cuban band Las Krudas might provide important contributions to discourses on intersectionality in the Caribbean against the backdrop of persisting colonial inequalities and a deeply unequal world system coined by racism, sexism, nationalism, Occidentalism and patriarchy.

hegemonic conceptualizations of intersectionality respectively. An intersectional sensibilization can in this regard serve as a constant reminder of the necessity to avoid conceptualizations of inequalities from becoming a new *Hauptwiderspruch* on a global scale rendering other axes of stratification into neglectable *Nebenwidersprüche* (minor antagonisms). Furthermore, framing things according to what is held to be an intersectional paradigm directs the focus towards the important interdependent (or entangled) and pluralistic character of examinations of inequalities. To pay credit to the political impetus implicit in the concept as a tool originally coined in order to grasp and fight “interlocking systems of oppressions”, however, intersectional analyses should not remain limited to methodological Occidentalism(s) and must not remain confined to merely analytical descriptions. Rather, an intersectionally sensitized approach to interdependent inequalities dedicated to the emancipatory origins of the concepts would embrace possibilities of change.



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