

Chapter 2

Intersectional-Gender and the Locationality of Women “in Transit”

MariaCaterina La Barbera

2.1 Introduction

Catherine MacKinnon (2000, p. 690) states that “feminism did call for rethinking everything.” As a crucial concept within feminist theory, gender is used as a tool to subvert the male-centered epistemology and admit women’s perspective in the public discourse. Questioning the established structures of male power, feminism goes back to the family and its structure, rethinking the relations between the so-called public and private spheres (Okin 1989). Feminism reveals that the historically established sexual roles are socially constructed, rather than normative and natural. Over the past decades, feminism adopted gender as a category of analysis (Scott 1986) for interpreting the relationship between knowledge and normativity, and subverting the male-centric perspective in law and politics (MacKinnon 1989). Critically reflecting on sexuality and the societal construction of biological difference, feminism re-explores the meaning of equality and its inextricable links with diversity (Scott 1988; Minow 1990). In so doing, feminism focuses on the political relevance of identity (Young 1990) and challenges the usefulness of the categories of neutrality and impartiality of the state to address the issue of difference (Rawls 1971; Nozick 1974; Walzer 1983). Since thinking about gender implies a re-conceptualization of power and difference, some feminist scholars have recently interrogated the idea of secularism of the State. They raised the issue of how to find reasonable accommodations for the different religions and cultures that cohabit in the global contemporary society (Shachar 2001; Benhabib 2004; Phillips 2007; Scott 2007).

This work has been supported by MICINN grant n. FFI2009-08762 and by Instituto de la Mujer and ESF grant n. 06/10.

M. La Barbera, Ph.D. (✉)
Centre for Political and Constitutional Studies,
Plaza de la Marina Española 9, 28013 Madrid, Spain
e-mail: mc.labarbera@cepc.es

Since the end of the 1970s, many feminist scholars (English 1977; Pateman 1983; Kearns 1983; Olsen 1985; Green 1986; Matsuda 1986; McClain 1992; Okin 1994; Lloyd 1995; Scott 1998) recurred to gender as a conceptual tool to criticize the purported universality and gender blindness of classical political theory, and claim the necessity to adopt theories of justice that incorporate women and their body (Okin 1994). Questioning the assumption that the theories of justice should be populated by un-unbodied individuals (Okin 1979; Bell 1983; Kennedy and Mendus 1987), feminist scholars contested the categories of universality, generality, and abstraction. They move away from the idea of atomistic and auto-sufficient subject, and conceive individuals as formed by a complex of interactions with others and society. Locatedness becomes a crucial concept to criticize the idea of abstract and disembodied subject who “viewing from nowhere” (Nagel 1986) gets objective, neutral and universal concepts. In contrast, purportedly neutral concepts are meant as tools for those in power to shape reality.

This chapter analyzes the privileges and power within feminist scholarship as a crucial issue for gender and migration studies. The starting point is that, when feminism defines itself from the Western perspective, and excludes any other vision of gender equality, other women’s perspectives are inevitably silenced and negated. In this respect, it is interesting to recall the words of Catherine MacKinnon describing how male/state control over women works by eliminating the capability of women’s self-definition. The state authoritatively creates the social order, and ensures the “male” control over women by qualifying, regulating, or prohibiting female sexuality at every level (Mackinnon 1983, pp. 636–644). In MacKinnon’s analysis, “male” means “those in power,” that is, those who define the conditions of possibility for the others, establishing their living space, constraining their body, distorting their voices, and speaking out for them. The dominant perspective is by nature exclusive: there is no space for other points of view.

By replacing “male” for “dominant,” this analysis perfectly describes also how “Western liberal feminism¹” silences the voices of “Third-world” feminists. To ignore differences among women permits the relatively more privileged women to claim a special authority to speak for all women (Minow 1988, p. 52). Yet, by reproducing male power, Western feminism has been converted into a caricature of the very establishment it intended to challenge (Lazreg 1988, p. 97). The point is, how can Western feminists pretend to speak for all women while not listening

¹ When in 1988 Chandra Talpade Mohanty used the expression “Western feminism” for the first time, she explained that the reference to “Western feminism” does not imply that it is a monolith. The categories Western and Third-world feminist are not meant as embodied or geographically defined categories. Rather, they refer to political and analytic sites and methodologies. From this perspective, a woman coming from the Third-world can be a Western feminist in orientation or a European feminist can use a Third-world feminist analytic perspective (Mohanty 2003, p. 4). Western vs. Third World is thus used to distinguish between powerful and privileged communities, on the one hand, and economically and politically marginalized communities, on the other. Yet, while these terms are meant to distinguish the northern and southern hemispheres, power and marginalization obviously do not line up only with geographical space (ibid.).

to other women’s voices? Since the 1980s, this asymmetry of power has created many divides within feminism and posed West/white women against Third-world/black women.

This chapter challenges the West vs. Third-world binarism within feminist theory and the related dichotomy that opposes gender equality to cultural difference. The goal is perplexing the core of feminism itself by posing the question of whether the only path toward gender equality is the Western one. To this end, feminism is represented as a multicentered and multifaceted thought. “Multicentered feminism” is described as a theoretical frame that incorporates the perspectives of women from the “margin” and stresses out the interrelatedness of different social categories that together create women’s subordination. To this end, intersectionality is embraced to address the complex locationality of women who stake at the cross-road of interconnecting conditions of subordination. The concept of “intersectional-gender” is finally proposed as an analytical category useful to conceptualize the formation and transformation of gender identities of women “in transit.” Approaching gender as situated and particular, this chapter also aims to approach gender identity in relation to the factors of social identification and discrimination, such as race/ethnicity, culture/religion, sexuality/body-ability, and educational/occupational levels. The goal is to contribute to the examination of the relationship between feminism and migration.

2.2 Challenging the West vs. “Third-world” Binarism

Within the “West vs. the Rest” divide of which the Western public discourse has been nurtured in the last decade (Scruton 2002), the so-called “Third-world” is too often imagined as related to fixity, rituality, and barbarity. In particular, “Third-world people” are imagined as constrained to adapt their preferences to the unjust conditions of their situation, and motivated by their a-critically accepted and unchanging culture (Okin 1999, p. 126; *contra* Narayan 2000, p. 88). Along this way Third-world is set as the traditional and exotic *par excellence*. According to the orientalist discourse, “Third-world” is depicted as a place where women are subjugated by the patriarchal society, their preferences are “adaptive,” and their culture a cage. As a consequence, “Third-world women” are usually imagined as sexually oppressed, poor, illiterate, religion or tradition bounded, and domesticated; in a word, as backward (Mohanty 1988, p. 65). The very term “Third-world women” turned out to stand for “inability to assert their own voice” and “necessity to be represented” (Alarcón 1990, p. 356). Within this frame, many feminist scholars conceive gender equality as opposed to cultural difference. In the context of international migration, the dichotomy of gender equality versus cultural differences has often set Western feminists in speaking out for migrant women without listening to their need of maintaining their culture while, at the same time, catching Western societal opportunities.

Yet, many postcolonial feminist scholars point out that the insistent focus on “Third-world women” as passive victims of their culture leads to deny their agency

and ignores the social changes that they are promoting in their own ways (Spivak 1988; Mohanty 1988; Narayan 1997). They argue that the improvement of women's status has always been an inherent component of colonial powers, and it is still used to discriminate between "Western civilization" and the rest of "underdeveloped or developing countries" (Mani 1987; Ahmed 1992; Shaheed 1995; Yegenoglu 1998; Grande 2004). The category of "colonization" has been used to describe how the discourse on the so-called "Third-world" exploits their experiences as women. Postcolonial feminists represent women's difficulties in emerging both in national narratives and in minority group rights revindication in the diaspora. At the same time, they reveal how paternalistic Western feminist attitude toward "Third-world women" is. In this respect, postcolonial feminism aims at dismantling the discursive "othering" (Spivak 1988, p. 306) that places women as inert material within immutable social structures, and claims for analyzing how women's gender identity is molded through and within the complexity of social structures in which they live in postcolonial nation as well as in diaspora (Mohanty 1988, p. 80).

After the 9/11 Al-Qaeda attacks on the USA and the 2005 London bombings, within the "West vs. the Rest" discourse, Islam has been represented as the "Other" by definition (Scruton 2002). Since then, the whole debate about cultural differences in Europe focuses on Muslim minorities and their integration (Abbas 2005; Modood et al. 2006; Joppke 2009). As a part of this larger discourse, many feminist scholars express their concerns for the condition of migrant women in Muslim minorities, which are consistently represented as subjugated and passive victims of their patriarchal religion (Cohen et al. 1999). In particular, women wearing the hijab are at center of the discourse on migration and cultural integration (McGoldrick 2006; Scott 2007; Winter 2008; Joppke 2009). Many Europeans feel disturbed, sometimes even threatened, by the presence of Muslim women in the public sphere when they can be identified by their outfit (Henkel 2009). Although many Muslim women wearing the hijab show how it is possible to actively and strategically reinvent the traditional dress code without abandoning their tradition and religion (Droogsma 2007; Kejanlio lu and Ta 2009; Jouili 2009; Moors and Salih 2009; Sandikci and Ger 2010), the image of veiled Muslim women is mostly linked to gender subordination in the European public discourse. As a reification of Islam itself, the hijab has been turned into evidence of the conflict between cultures, and many liberal feminists strongly oppose to it. Yet, Muslim women very often declare that they do not feel represented by Western liberal feminists, which misunderstand their needs, requests and values, and consider their culture and religion as oppressive and discriminatory (Fernea 1998).

The whole political debate about hijab in Europe is constructed on the assumption that, as a condition to achieve the Western standards of gender equality, migrant women from the "Third-world" would be better off giving up their own culture, religion, and tradition (Okin 1999). This argument ignores that the aspects of identity cannot be analyzed as an isolated phenomena. Individuals can neither set aside their gender nor ignore their race, class, and religion as factors that shape their lives (La Barbera 2007). Indeed, to set gender equality against culture, religion, and tradition means to assume that they are uniform, homogeneous, and fixed. Such an

approach ignores that all cultures are multiple and contradictory as well as in constant transformation and reshaping. Rather, cultures are animated by internal dissent, differently negotiating new meanings in relation to gender, age, class, race/ethnicity, religion, disability status, and sexual orientation (Sunder 2002, p. 498). Hence, without questioning the political uses of culture, and without asking who the beneficiaries of “culture” are, it is difficult to understand the way in which women are exploited at the political, economic, and discursive levels. If we do not place the very notion of culture into context and analyze the strategic use of it, the risk is that the effort of “saving women from their backward cultures” could cause them the same damages we are supposedly preventing (Rao 1995, p. 174).

By assuming that gender is a transcultural category—regardless of ethnicity, religion, race, class, sexuality, and age—“Western liberal feminists” tend to neglect that identity is complex, plural, and situated. *Being gendered* is always particular and contexted. If gender is defined as the basic and cross-sectional difference of humankind, it should also be considered that we became women and men through different processes of socialization involving culture, social structures, and power relationships (Butler 1990). When Western feminists wave the flag of the universality of “women’s rights as human rights” (Bunch 1990), they impose their own particular model as the norm. The fact that Western feminism represents itself as a universal model, rather than as a culturally specific one, engenders the risk of falling into the same fallacy reproached to liberal political theory (Schutte 2000, p. 59).

If feminism wants to establish alliances that cross over the boundaries of Western countries without exporting/imposing its own models, it is pivotal to recognize that each community is modeled not only by patriarchal structures, but also by internal forms of resistance and subversion. To say it in Michael Foucault’s (1990, p. 95) words, “where there is the power there is resistance.” In order to bypass the unfruitful dichotomy, such as West vs. Third-world and gender vs. culture, we should leave aside the oppositional construction of feminism as standing for women’s good and culture as standing for women’s oppression (Volpp 2001; Song 2007; Freedman 2007), and rather ask: what can feminists around the world offer in terms of concepts and strategies of intervention to make the cohabitation of differences possible?

2.3 Multicentering Feminism and Locationality of Women “in Transit”

Feminism is both a social and theoretical movement. As a social movement, feminism aims towards local and global social transformation of the existing structures of power that shape gender subordination in the different social contexts. As a theoretical movement, its goal is to question the relationships of power that cause women’s subordination. In this respect, all feminist theories share a main concern: the analysis of women’s subordination in gendered relations and the elaboration of conceptual tools and strategies of subversion. Yet, it is impossible to describe feminism as theoretically unitary. Many different epistemological arguments, theoretical or practical

approaches, and ethical or political backgrounds have been adopted, ranging from critical theory, political liberalism, analytic philosophy, hermeneutics, structuralism, existentialism, phenomenology, deconstructivism, genealogy, poststructuralism, postcolonial theory, psychoanalysis, semiotics, cultural studies, language analysis, pragmatism, neo-Marxism, and post-Marxism (Dietz 2003, p. 400).

In spite of the evident theoretical and operational diversity within feminism, the idea that not a single feminism but different feminisms exist, has been received by many scholars as a weakening of the feminist movement (Alcoff 1988; Bordo 1990; Benhabib 1995; Mackinnon 2000). Notwithstanding, Judith Butler asserts that the endless debate among feminists on the meaning of “gender” should be recognized as the very heart of feminism (1994, p. 50). From this perspective, the connections and links between women are not innate but built. It is rather the effort to recognize and examine the differences among women—which founds the constructions of coalitions, networks, and alliances for shared goals—that can join women and reinforce feminism as a global and local movement (Harris 1990, p. 615; Davis and Martínez 1994).

Challenging the assumption that variety and diversity are incompatible with unity (Nicholson 1992; Fraser 1995), and taking into account the different voices of feminism, I question here the idea of feminism as a singular and unified theory. I rather describe it as a movement that is, at the same time, coherent and heterogeneous, and that has as many propulsive centers as women concerned with gender justice around the world. To this end, I offer the idea of “multicentered feminism” as a conceptual frame that offers those analytical tools needed to understand diversities among women and, thus, challenge the dichotomy of gender versus culture. Multicentering feminism is here proposed as a strategy to understand the locationality of women “in transit.”

Multicentered feminism is an adaptive set of conceptual tools and strategies of action that creates a framework to understand women’s locationality within the multiple interlocking systems of subordination in which they live (Jaggar 1983; Sandoval 2000; Baca Zinn and Thornton Dill 2003). The expression *multicentered*— as it is inclusive of different race, culture, and national belongings— points to the idea of multiplicity without placing one aspect above the others. Multicentered feminism includes the emergent perspectives and experiences of women from different national, cultural, religious, and ethnic groups, whose marginalized locationality provide them with vivid insights on selves and society (Baca Zinn and Thornton Dill 2003).

Multicentered feminism takes into account the risks of essentializing gender that has been warned by Black feminists since the late 1970s (Combahee River Collective 1986). Black feminist scholars claim not only that race, culture, and religion are as many foundational elements of identity as gender, but also that all of these are inseparably interconnected (Lorde 1984; Spelman 1988). They argue that the concept of gender is conceptualized from the privileged position of the white, middle-class, heterosexual, Christian-formed, and able-bodied experience, which is assumed as the norm. Insofar as liberal feminists claim that gender is not a negligible aspect of identity, Black feminists assert that their color, economic level, sexuality, education, and body-ability form many crucial elements of gender identity.

Gender essentialism is meant as a form of reductionism that views in gender the only form of women’s subordination, minimizing all the other factors of identification and discrimination. Gender essentialism reduces the multiple kinds of discrimination into a problem of arithmetical sum, as if adding racism to sexism could describe the experience of Black women, or juxtaposing racism to sexism and homophobia could explain the experience of lesbian Black women (Lorde 1982; Spelman 1988). Along this way, the experiences of Black women have been fragmented among those that analyze race and those that analyze gender discrimination in a way that compelled them to isolate one single aspect of their identity and offer it as it was a “meaningful whole” (Lorde 1984, p. 120).

Multicentered feminism adopts a de-essentialized notion of gender. Gender de-essentialization allows representing women as a map of interconnecting similarities and differences, in which the body does not fade away, but rather bears a situated social significance that, nonetheless, varies in the different contexts (Nicholson 1994, p. 102). Through this way, multicentered feminism recognizes the causes of discrimination as linked to an inextricable web made up of race/ethnicity, religion/culture, sexuality/body-ability and economic/educational level. Multicentered feminism embraces the concept of being *within/out* and of *intersectional-gender* as conceptual tools for approaching the locationality of women “in transit.”

2.4 Locationality of Women “in Transit” as Being *Within/out*

The “politics of location” is considered one of the most important epistemological foundations of contemporary feminist thought (Braidotti 2003). Introduced by Adrienne Rich in the mid-1980s, the politics of location claims for not transcending the corporality, but reconnecting the abstract thinking with particular living bodies. Since patriarchy does not exist in a “pure state,” the politics of location addresses when, where, and under which conditions women struggle against discrimination in the specific and different socio-cultural contexts in which they live (Rich 1986, pp. 213–218). The politics of location aims at using all the different socio-cultural conditions of each specific context as conceptual resources to interpret and represent the mechanisms of social interaction and subordination.

Over the last 20 years, the concept of politics of location has undergone several specifications, reformulations, and modifications, and turned out to be extremely fruitful to address the complex subjectivity of migrant women in Western countries (Brah 1996). Is an upper class, British educated woman residing in a city of India, an insider or outsider to rural poverty that affect women in India? Is a second generation migrant woman living in Europe, interacting only with her own ethnic group, an insider or outsider to her culture of origin (Okin 2000, pp. 40–41)? The either/or approach assumes social groups and identities as if they were rigid and static, and seems inadequate for explaining the subjectivities “in transit” that inhabit the post-colonial and globalized societies. To address the social location of being at the border space between groups, Patricia Hill Collins (1998, p. 8) introduced the

concept of “outsider-within location” to describe the marginalized condition of Black women who no longer belong to any group and live at the interweaving of multiple systems of subordination.

Neither “insider” nor “outsider,” the new social identities that populate the global society, particularly the psycho-socio-political locations of migrant women, come out from the hybridism, multiple belonging, and “borderline-ness.” I adopt the term *within/out* to define the particular locationality of women who move across different nation-states and communities and belong to several groups at the same time. Being *within/out* is the borderline locationality of women “in transit.” With this term I address their simultaneous inclusion/exclusion in displaced communities as a new social condition in the diaspora, without defining them just as “outsiders.” Their “in transit” subjectivity is understandable through the multiple and interacting socio-psycho-political belongings, and the constant negotiation between their cultural minority group and the society at large (La Barbera 2010, p. 70).

In particular, migrant Black women in the West are part of the visible minorities, which simultaneous processes of racialization, genderization, and social classification locate within complicated matrixes of social relationships (Ang-Lygate 1996, p. 152). Black, Muslim women from Third-world countries living in the West represent the culmination of what is being “in transit,” *within/out* the borderline between the displaced communities and the host society. They live at the crossroad of intersecting conditions of subordination and represent the ultimate position of social exclusion for being migrant, black, Muslim, and women. For this reason, migrant women from the “Third-world” represent the maximum fragility of the condition of being “in transit.” Women “in transit” have to face multiple forms of social exclusion within their community of origin as well as in the host society. They have to fight against internal and external forms of discrimination. They share the culture of their group while fighting against its forms of gender subordination. Indeed, women “in transit” also represent the maximum potential of subversion. They tune their gender identity in the migratory process while reinterpreting their tradition. They do not abandon their religion and culture when searching for gender equality.

As a migrant feminist scholar, I depict the new subjectivity of women “in transit” as a suffered but fruitful locationality, which openness and constant becoming provide a productive space for developing a new political thought. The “in transit” locationality implies the deprivation of the “home protection”—meant as family, town, social network, or nation-state—and the search for new psychological and concrete spaces to settle down. Through a conceptual and emotional re-elaboration of multiple belongings, the existential, psychic, and social condition of being at the borderline is transformed from a marginalized condition of exclusion into a fruitful epistemological position from which to interrogate and theorize individual and group’s mechanisms of social exclusion and identification. Through this way, the fragile position of cultural hybridism produces a ground for a strong impulse towards social change. More than a site of discrimination and exclusion, the marginality of being *within/out* is reinterpreted as a speculative space as well as a site of oppositional agency (hooks 1990; Sandoval 2000; Mohanty 2003, p. 106).

Multicentered feminism embraces the concept of “multiple consciousness,” welcoming a conception of identity as a compound, developing, and possibly contradictory individual and social process (Harris 1990, p. 584). Understanding multiple identities as “oppositional” (Sandoval 1991, p. 14), it is possible to transform the initial condition of discrimination into a site of emancipation and self-affirmation. The goal is to include and develop the dislocated and dispersed, albeit cogent, discourse produced from the borderline locationality of women “in transit.” Thinking about the distinctive locationality of migrant women leads to elaborate new interrelated concepts of what gender and cultural differences mean in the global society, how do they work together, and how do they may be reconceived.

2.5 *Intersectional-Gender*

Within the frame of multicentered feminism, I propose the concept of *intersectional-gender*. Starting from the idea that gender is a transversal category, although not identical over time and across cultures, I regard it convenient to analyze the very concept of gender through the intersectional approach. The aim is to avoid an ethnocentric essentialization when approaching the mechanism of gender formation and transformation in different contexts in which women live. To this end, the concept of *intersectional-gender* is elaborated as an analytical tool (La Barbera 2009).

In 1989, as a result of the vivid debate on both sides of the Atlantic on the interrelatedness of race, class, and gender in shaping women’s subordination (Yuval-Davis 2006), Kimberlee Crenshaw (1989) coined the term “intersectionality.” Intersectionality is a useful approach to understand the structural and dynamic effects of the interactions between the different forms of discrimination. It specifically addresses how sexism, racism, and classism, along with other discriminatory systems, contribute all together to create and reinforce women’s social inequality. Intersectionality recognizes that race and class are always interconnected with gender in a way that makes not only senseless, but also counterproductive to disconnect the analysis of different forms of discrimination. It reveals how policies that separately address discrimination based on race, gender, and class cause the paradoxical effect of creating ulterior and ultimate dynamics of disempowerment (Crenshaw 1989).

Intersectionality refers to the complex, irreducible, varied, and variable effects produced by the interaction of social, economic, political, cultural, and symbolic factors intersecting in each context (Brah and Phoenix 2004, p. 76). For these reasons, it is a crucial concept in order to examine the different dimensions of social life, which are distorted by the single-axis analysis (Hill Collins 2000; Anthias 2002; Brah and Phoenix 2004; Yuval-Davis 2006). Intersectionality offers to social science research a methodology to deconstruct essentialist notions of identity, de-center dominant discourses, and produce situated and critically reflexive knowledge toward a more integrated approach for policy making (Davis 2008). This methodology is well captured by “asking the other question” approach described by Mary Matsuda (1991). Assuming that no form of discrimination stands alone, Matsuda (1991, p. 1189)

argues that “asking the other question” promotes awareness of the intersectional dimension of both the evident and hidden structures of discrimination. When dealing with racism, one should ask: “Where is the patriarchy in this?;” when dealing with sexism, one should ask: “Where is the heterosexism in this?;” and, when dealing with homophobia, one should ask: “Where is the classism in this?”

I deem it fruitful to examine not only how race and class *inter-act* with gender and produce multiple interlocking forms of subordination, but also how all the factors of identification/discrimination *intra-act* shaping gender identity. Moreover, the factors shaping identity are not reducible just to gender, race, and class, since culture, religion, ethnicity, sexual identity, body-ability, and economical or educational levels also matter. Yet, placing gender within an endless list of other social categories involves the risk of neglecting that gender crosses all of them. In this respect, the term *intersectional-gender* recognizes the importance of focusing on gender as a determinant aspect of identity, and stressing out its intersectionality as an inherent and constitutive feature (La Barbera 2009). *Intersectional-gender* is an interdependent category that is originated at the interweaving of gender with other categories of social identification. To conceptualize gender as intersectional by itself means that it is connected, *inter-acting* and *intra-acting* with race/ethnicity, sexuality/body-ability, culture/religion, and economical/educational level. I, thus, address the intersectionality of gender as a constitutive rather than an additive process.

The inherent intersectionality of gender is well described by the renowned image of the birdcage used by Marilyn Frye (1983) to describe the intertwined aspect that set women’s subordination. When one looks too closely at just one wire of a birdcage, it is impossible to see it as a whole. One can carefully examine the structure of one wire and, notwithstanding, be unable to see why the bird cannot just fly free. Indeed, Frye alerts that, by methodically but separately inspecting each wire, one will still be unable to understand how the birdcage is structured. Only by stepping back, it is possible to see the whole intersections of wires and understand how the bird is trapped (Frye 1983, p. 4).

Although the notion of interrelatedness of gender has been used for a long time in feminist theory, I claim here the strategic importance to coin a new term for a concept that was already in use. Naming creates realities, conjoins and disjoins things by identifying them as distinct or recognizing them as connected (Dewey and Bentley 1949, p. 133). Assuming that words are the tools to create concepts, and concepts are the tools to understand, analyze, interpret, and shape social reality, I argue that the use of *intersectional-gender* strongly and unequivocally asserts the complexity of gender and sheds light on how it is originated and interconnected along with other conditions of social identification/discrimination. The adjectivation of gender as intersectional is intended as a part of a discursive strategy stressing that gender, as an analytical category, is meaningless if it does not take into account all the *inter-acting* and *intra-acting* factors that differentiate and transform women’s identities. *Intersectional-gender* recalls that women are subordinated in global and local systems of patriarchy, but they are also involved in the mechanisms of production and reproduction of those systems (Butler 1990). The active and dynamic role of women in perpetuating their own subordination recognizes them as active agents

that both reproduce and subvert their subordination. This perspective leads to the awareness that an integrated approach is required for understanding the intertwined factors of discrimination that—as a web of dis/em-powering conditions strictly interconnected—oppress, discriminate, and silence women “in transit.”

2.6 Conclusion

Multicentering feminism and welcoming *intersectional-gender* as a conceptual tool challenge the gender versus culture dichotomy that grounds the Western liberal feminist discourse. Listening to the voices of multicentered feminism redeems feminism as a movement capable of offering useful tools for understanding international migration of women and, above all, the tuning of gender identity of women “in transit.” The recognition of the situatedness, multiplicity, and inherent intersectionality of gender allows conceiving the issues involving women from non-Western cultures in a way that avoids the risk of ethnocentrism. Abandoning the white, middle class, and Western perspective as the standard would allow to reach a goal that is crucial for the future of feminism, that is, to articulate, negotiate, and recognize the negated identities of women “in transit.” Multicentered feminism stresses the importance of shifting our attention towards the marginalized perspectives within feminism. The strategy of moving towards the peripheries—as emotional, physical, and theoretical loci—recognizes the coexistent and conflicting cores of feminism, and converts it into “the very house of difference” where all diversity among women can find their place (Lorde 1982, p. 226).

References

- Abbas, T. (Ed.). (2005). *Muslim Britain: Communities under pressure*. London: Zed Books.
- Ahmed, L. (1992). *Women and gender in Islam: Historical roots of a modern debate*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Alarcón, N. (1990). The theoretical subject(s) of this bridge called my back and Anglo-American feminism. In G. Anzaldúa (Ed.), *Making face, making soul/haciendo caras: Creative and critical perspectives by women of color* (pp. 356–369). San Francisco: Aunt Lute Foundation.
- Alcoff, L. (1988). Cultural feminism versus poststructuralism: The identity crisis in feminist theory. *Signs*, 13(3), 417–418.
- Ang-Lygate, M. (1996). Women who move: Experiences of diaspora. In M. Maynard & J. Purvis (Eds.), *New frontiers in women's studies: Knowledge, identity, and nationalism* (pp. 151–163). London: Taylor & Francis.
- Anthias, F. (2002). Beyond feminism and multiculturalism: Locating difference and the politics of location. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 25(3), 275–286.
- Baca Zinn, M., & Thornton Dill, B. (2003). Theorizing difference from multiracial feminism. In C. McCann & K. Seung-Kyung (Eds.), *Feminist theory reader: Local and global perspectives* (pp. 353–363). New York: Routledge.
- Bell, L. (1983). *Vision of women*. Clifton: Humana Press.

- Benhabib, S. (1995). Feminism and postmodernism: An uneasy alliance. In S. Benhabib, J. Butler, D. Cornell, & N. Fraser (Eds.), *Feminist contentions: A philosophical exchange* (pp. 17–34). New York: Routledge.
- Benhabib, S. (2004). *The rights of others: Aliens, residents, and citizens*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bordo, S. (1990). Feminism, postmodernism, and gender-skepticism. In L. Nicholson (Ed.), *Feminism/postmodernism* (pp. 133–157). New York: Routledge.
- Brah, A. (1996). *Cartographies of diaspora: Contesting identities*. London: Routledge.
- Brah, A., & Phoenix, A. (2004). Ain't I a woman? Revisiting intersectionality. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 5(3), 75–86.
- Braidotti, R. (2003). *The return of the masters' narratives*. <http://www.e-quality.nl/assets/e-quality/publicaties/2003/e-quality.final.rosi%20braidotti.pdf>. Accessed March 19, 2010.
- Bunch, C. (1990). Women's rights as human rights: Towards a re-vision of human rights. *Human Rights Quarterly*, 12(4), 486–498.
- Butler, J. (1990). *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. New York: Routledge.
- Butler, J. (1994). Contingent foundations: Feminism and the question of “postmodernism.” In S. Benhabib, J. Butler, D. Cornell, & N. Fraser (Eds.), *Feminist contentions: A philosophical exchange* (pp. 35–57). New York: Routledge.
- Cohen, J., Nussbaum, M., & Howard, M. (Eds.). (1999). *Is multiculturalism bad for women?* Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Combahee River Collective. (1986). *Combahee river collective statement. Black feminist organizing in the seventies and eighties* (1977). Albany: Women of Color Press
- Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics. *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 14, 139–167.
- Davis, K. (2008). Intersectionality in transatlantic perspective. In C. Klinger & A. Knapp (Eds.), *ÜberKreuzungen. Fremdheit, ungleichheit, differenz* (pp. 19–35). Münster: Westfälisches Dampfboot.
- Davis, A., & Martínez, E. (1994). Coalition building among people of color. *Inscriptions*, 7, 42–53.
- Dewey, J., & Bentley, A. (1949). *Knowing and the known*. Boston: The Beacon Press.
- Dietz, M. (2003). Current controversies in feminist theory. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 6, 399–431.
- Droogsma, R. (2007). Redefining hijab: American Muslim women's standpoints on veiling. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 35(3), 294–319.
- English, J. (1977). Justice between generations. *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition*, 31(2), 91–104.
- Fernea, E. (1998). *In search of Islamic feminism: One woman's global journey*. New York: Doubleday.
- Foucault, M. (1990). *The history of sexuality: An introduction*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Fraser, N. (1995). False antithesis. In S. Benhabib, J. Butler, D. Cornell, & N. Fraser (Eds.), *Feminist contentions: A philosophical exchange* (pp. 59–74). New York: Routledge.
- Freedman, J. (2007). Women, Islam and rights in Europe: Beyond a universalist/culturalist dichotomy. *Review of International Studies*, 33, 29–44.
- Frye, M. (1983). *The politics of reality: Essay in feminist theory*. Berkeley: The Crossing Press.
- Grande, E. (2004). Hegemonic human rights and African resistance: Female circumcision in a broader comparative perspective. *Global Jurist Frontiers*, 4(2), 1–21.
- Green, K. (1986). Rawls, women and the priority of liberty. *Australasian Journal of Philosophy Supplement*, 64, 26–36.
- Harris, A. (1990). Race and essentialism in feminist legal theory. *Stanford Law Review*, 42(3), 581–616.
- Henkel, H. (2009). Are Muslim women in Europe threatening the secular public sphere? *Social Anthropology*, 17(4), 471–473.

- Hill Collins, P. (1998). *Fighting words: Black women and the search for justice*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Hill Collins, P. (2000). Gender, black feminism, and black political economy. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 568, 41–53.
- hooks, b. (1990). *Yearning: Race, gender, and cultural politics*. Boston: South End Press.
- Jaggar, A. (1983). *Feminist politics and human nature*. Totowa: Rowman & Allanheld.
- Joppke, C. (2009). Limits of integration policy: Britain and her Muslim. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 35(3), 453–472.
- Jouili, J. (2009). Negotiating secular boundaries: Pious micro-practices of Muslim women in French and German public spheres. *Social Anthropology*, 17(4), 455–470.
- Kearns, D. (1983). A theory of justice and love: Rawls on the family. *Australian Journal of Political Science*, 8(1), 36–42.
- Kejanlioğlu, B., & Taş, O. (2009). Regimes of un/veiling and body control: Turkish students wearing wigs. *Social Anthropology*, 17(4), 424–438.
- Kennedy, E., & Mendus, S. (Eds.). (1987). *Women in western political philosophy: Kant to Nietzsche*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- La Barbera, M. C. (2007). Una reflexión crítica a través del pensamiento de Susan Okin sobre género y justicia. *Cuadernos Electrónicos de Filosofía del Derecho*, 16, 1–15. <http://www.uv.es/CEFD/16/Barbera.pdf>. Accessed June 1, 2011.
- La Barbera, M. C. (2009). Intersectionalgender. Thinking about gender and cultural difference in the global society. *Global Studies Journal*, 2(2), 1–8.
- La Barbera, M. C. (2010). Género y diversidad entre mujeres. *Cuadernos Koré. Revista de historia y pensamiento de género*, 1(2), 55–72. <http://kusan.uc3m.es/CIAN/index.php/CK/articleview-File/%201039/480>. Accessed June 1, 2011.
- Lazreg, M. (1988). Feminism and difference: The perils of writings as a woman on women in Algeria. *Feminist Studies*, 14(1), 81–107.
- Lloyd, S. (1995). Situating a feminist criticism of John Rawls's political liberalism. *Loyola L.A. Law Review*, 28(4), 1319–1344.
- Lorde, A. (1982). *Zami: A new spelling of my name*. Watertown: Persephone Press.
- Lorde, A. (1984). *Sister outsider: Essays and speeches*. Trumansburg: The Crossing Press.
- MacKinnon, C. (1983). Feminism, Marxism, method and state: Toward feminist jurisprudence. *Signs*, 8(4), 635–658.
- MacKinnon, C. (1989). *Toward a feminist theory of the state*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- MacKinnon, C. (2000). Points against postmodernism. *Chicago-Kent Law Review*, 75(3), 687–712.
- Mani, L. (1987). Contentious traditions: The debate on sati in colonial India. *Cultural Critique*, 7, 119–156.
- Matsuda, M. (1986). Liberal jurisprudence and abstracted visions of human nature: A feminist critique of Rawls' theory of justice. *New Mexico Law Review*, 16, 613–630.
- Matsuda, M. (1991). Beside my sister, facing the enemy: Legal theory out of coalition. *Stanford Law Review*, 43(6), 1183–1192.
- McClain, L. (1992). Atomistic man revisited: Liberalism, connection and feminist jurisprudence. *Southern California Law Review*, 65(3), 1171–1264.
- McGoldrick, D. (2006). *Human rights and religion: The Islamic headscarf debate in Europe*. Oxford: Hart Publishing.
- Minow, M. (1988). Feminist reason: Getting it and losing it. *Journal of Legal Education*, 38, 47–60.
- Minow, M. (1990). *Making all the differences: Inclusion, exclusion and American law*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Modood, T., Triandafyllidou, A., & Zapata-Barrero, R. (Eds.). (2006). *Multiculturalism, Muslims and citizenship: A European approach*. London: Routledge.
- Mohanty, C. (1988). Under western eyes: Feminist scholarship and colonial discourse. *Feminist Review*, 30, 61–88.

- Mohanty, C. (2003). *Feminism without borders: Decolonizing theory, practicing solidarity*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Moors, A., & Salih, R. (2009). "Muslim women" in Europe: Secular normativities, bodily performances and multiple publics. *Social Anthropology*, 17(4), 375–378.
- Nagel, T. (1986). *The view from nowhere*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Narayan, U. (1997). *Dislocating cultures: Identities, traditions, and third-world feminism*. New York: Routledge.
- Narayan, U. (2000). Essence of culture and a sense of history: A feminist critique of cultural essentialism. In U. Narayan & S. Harding (Eds.), *Decentering the center: Philosophy for a multicultural, postcolonial, and feminist world* (pp. 80–100). Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Nicholson, L. (1992). Feminism and the politics of postmodernism. *Boundary*, 19(2), 53–69.
- Nicholson, L. (1994). Interpreting gender. *Signs*, 20, 79–105.
- Nozick, R. (1974). *Anarchy, state, and utopia*. New York: Basic Book.
- Okin, S. (1979). *Women in western political thought*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Okin, S. (1989). *Justice, gender, and the family*. New York: Basic Books.
- Okin, S. (1994). The politics of liberalism, justice, and gender. *Ethics*, 105(1), 23–43.
- Okin, S. (1999). Is multiculturalism bad for women? In J. Cohen, M. C. Nussbaum, & M. Howard (Eds.), *Is multiculturalism bad for women?* (pp. 7–24). Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Okin, S. (2000). Feminism, women's human rights, and cultural difference. In U. Narayan & S. Harding (Eds.), *Decentering the center: Philosophy for a multicultural, postcolonial and feminist world* (pp. 26–46). Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Olsen, F. (1985). The myth of state intervention in the family. *University of Michigan Journal of Law Reform*, 18(4), 835–864.
- Pateman, C. (1983). Feminist critiques of the public/private dichotomy. In S. Benn & G. Gaus (Eds.), *Public and private in social life* (pp. 281–303). New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Phillips, A. (2007). *Multiculturalism without culture*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Rao, A. (1995). The politics of gender and culture in international human rights discourse. In J. Peters & A. Wolper (Eds.), *Women's rights, human rights: International feminist perspective* (pp. 167–175). New York: Routledge.
- Rawls, J. (1971). *A theory of justice*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Rich, A. (1986). *Of woman born: Motherhood as experience and institution [1976]*. London: Virago.
- Sandikci, O., & Ger, G. (2010). Veiling in style: How does a stigmatized practice become fashionable? *Journal of Consumer Research*, 37(1), 15–36.
- Sandoval, C. (1991). US third world feminism: The theory and method of oppositional consciousness in the postmodern world. *Genders*, 10, 1–24.
- Sandoval, C. (2000). *Methodology of the oppressed*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Schutte, O. (2000). Cultural alterity: Cross-cultural communication and feminist theory in North-South contexts. In U. Narayan & S. Harding (Eds.), *Decentering the center: Philosophy for a multicultural, postcolonial and feminist world* (pp. 47–66). Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Scott, J. W. (1986). Gender: A useful category of historical analysis. *The American Historical Review*, 91, 1053–1075.
- Scott, J. W. (1988). Deconstructing equality-versus-difference: Or, the uses of poststructuralist theory for feminism. *Feminist Studies*, 14(1), 32–50.
- Scott, J. W. (1998). "La Querelle Des Femmes" in the late twentieth century. *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, 9, 70–90.
- Scott, J. W. (2007). *The politics of veil*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Scruton, R. (2002). *The west and the rest: Globalization and the terrorist threat*. London: Continuum.
- Shachar, A. (2001). *Multicultural jurisdictions: Cultural differences and women's rights*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Shaheed, F. (1995). Networking for change: The role of women's groups in initiating dialogue on women's issues. In M. Afkhami (Ed.), *Faith and freedom: Women's human rights in the Muslim world* (pp. 78–103). Syracuse: Syracuse University Press.

- Song, S. (2007). *Justice, gender, and the politics of multiculturalism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Spelman, E. (1988). *Inessential woman: Problems of exclusion in feminist thought*. Boston: Beacon.
- Spivak, C. (1988). Can the subaltern speak? In C. Nelson & L. Grossberg (Eds.), *Marxism and the interpretation of culture* (pp. 271–313). Chicago: University of Illinois Press.
- Sunder, M. (2002). Cultural dissent. *Stanford Law Review*, 54, 495–567.
- Volpp, L. (2001). Feminism versus multiculturalism. *Columbia Law Review*, 101, 1181–1218.
- Walzer, M. (1983). *Spheres of justice: A defense of pluralism and equality*. New York: Basic Books.
- Winter, B. (2008). *The hijab & the republic: Uncovering the French headscarf debate*. New York: Syracuse University Press.
- Yegenoglu, M. (1998). *Colonial fantasies: Towards a feminist reading of orientalism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Young, I. (1990). *Justice and the politics of difference*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Yuval-Davis, N. (2006). Intersectionality and feminist politics. *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 13(3), 193–209.