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Paulina de los Reyes & Diana Mulinari

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ABSTRACT

Intersectional studies are expanding and generating vital and much-needed theoretical debate in the discipline of feminist/gender studies. The aim of this article is to contribute to the debate through a critical reflection over the process of translation through which the concept has been introduced, interpreted and acted upon in Swedish gender studies. The purpose is also to bridge the concept of intersectionality and the notion of scholarships of hope, searching for forms of scholarly production that will fruitfully articulate academic knowledge with a political vision. The analysis acknowledges the relevance of an intersectional approach to understanding (and acting upon) the operations of power and the precarisation of life in these dangerous times of global exploitation and the multiplication of borders.

Background, purpose and structure

The introduction of intersectionality into Swedish debates started with the edited collection The different fashions of power. Gender, class and ethnicity in postcolonial Sweden (de los Reyes, Molina, & Mulinari, 2002). The point of departure of the book was a critical reading of current understandings of inequality, developing an approach that considered the simultaneous impact of power relations based on gender, sexuality, class and racism. In addition, the collection provided a multiplicity of analytical lenses to grasp the blindness to racism in Swedish gender studies and its location in a (post)colonial world. We developed this perspective further in our book Intersectionality. Critical reflections on a landscape of inequality (2005), in order to clarify the theoretical premises of our earlier analysis.

The purpose of the book was to present a reading of the operations of power on the basis of inequality relations constructed along lines of gender, class, sexuality and race. Departing from a constructivist ontology, we explored the conditions that make these social relations and the classification systems evolving from them markers of power and privilege in a Swedish context. While stressing the articulation of class, gender, race and sexuality to analyse differentiation processes that generate social subordination, oppression and economic exploitation, we argued for an understanding of intersectionality that included not only social categories but also social relations, social formations and epistemological premises. We used the concept of hegemonic feminism, inspired by a Gramscian understanding of power (or rather of power struggles) aiming to challenge what was recognized as (normal and right) “Swedish feminism”, but also to acknowledge the existence of other kinds of subversive feminism knowledge that has remained at the margins, as indigenous, anti-racist and trans* feminism (Andersen, Hvenegård-Lassen, &
The term hegemonic Swedish feminism identifies forms of femo-nationalism framed through a feminism agenda of gender equality as a Swedish value (Liinason, 2011). Thus, a central argument of the book was that intersectionality allows us to contest established barriers between academic knowledge and political engagement and to understand how power operates through the production of classification systems and social divisions that render inequality invisible and normal while making it appear necessary. In the aftermath of the consolidation of a fortress Europe and in a neoliberal context, we were particularly interested in exploring how perceptions of time and space act upon the erasure of Sweden’s colonial past and racial formation. According to our view, an intersectional perspective opens up approaches that challenge methodological nationalism and problematize teleological readings of historical events. The introduction of intersectionality responded thus not only to question differentiation processes that transcended binary perceptions of (gender) power but also expressed political and epistemological challenges to hegemonic Swedish feminist knowledge production in a context of neoliberal transformations, global restructuring of borders and transnational migration.

Against this background, it is worth noting that intersectionality has had a long journey before landing in feminist debates in Sweden. The origins of the concept can be traced to theoretical developments within Black feminism and the publication of Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989, 1991) and Patricia Hill Collins’s (1989, 2000) seminal works (See also Amos & Parmar 1984; Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1983; Carby, 1982; Spelman, 1988; Young, 1994). Intersectionality had, however, gone unattended for over a decade until we brought the term into our critique of the shortages of feminist thinking in a Swedish context. This reticence in an era of globalization and of rapid circulation of people, knowledge and cultural production says something about the character of the epistemological regimes within Swedish gender studies. Why did it take so long? As already known, the spaces of travelling in a postcolonial world are not neutral. They are sites of power constructed through bordering processes and inhabited by exclusion, norms and hierarchies. This applies also to the circulation of knowledge. The introduction of new terms and new theoretical perspectives constitutes a challenge to intellectual and political investments accumulated over decades. In Sweden, the idea of a gender system based on a dichotomous and hierarchical understanding of femininity and masculinity had for many years been a dominant perspective within the social sciences and the humanities, and was also ground for political intervention and institutional investment. In this model, the fixed and preordained existence of women and men acquires an ontological character that premises any understanding of social conflict.

Analysing feminist debates on intersectionality, cultural theorist Barbara Tomlinson (2013) focuses on “the scene of argument” as a field of power where feminist knowledge production takes place. According to Tomlinson, rhetorical devices, metaphors and tropes work simultaneously so as to re-signify intersectionality and depoliticize its genealogy. Sirma Bilge (2013) develops a similar argument, identifying a “disciplinary feminism” more concerned with academic success than with the production of counterhegemonic knowledge. Stressing the centrality of Black feminist contributions to the development of intersectionality, cultural theorist Gail Lewis (2013) links the silence about racism in European gender studies to geopolitical imaginaries that confine the impact of the race to particular places or historical periods.

In line with Tomlinson, Bilge and Lewis, we see a need to examine the theoretical and political circumstances that form the contexts where intersectionality is adopted as a relevant perspective in Sweden in order to identify conflicts, antagonism and tensions emerging after its introduction (Brah & Phoenix, 2004; Cho, Crenshaw, & McCall, 2013; Lutz, Herrera Vivar, & Supik, 2011; Phoenix & Pattynama, 2006).

The aim of this article is to contribute to the debates through a critical account of the processes of translation through which intersectionality has taken root in Swedish gender studies, taking as a point of departure the introduction of the concept at the beginning of the new millennium. The purpose is to elucidate our own theoretical frame, our political, social and epistemological location.
when reading and “translating” the concept into a Swedish context. In so doing the article intends to open up new avenues of thinking that can contribute to developing a scholarship of hope that speaks for a future beyond the precarity imposed by racist, capitalist, heteropatriarchal models of exploitation. The purpose is also to bridge the concept of intersectionality and the notion of scholarships of hope, searching for traditions that will fruitfully articulate academic knowledge with political visions.

In line with our approach, the first section of this article presents a short account of the politics of gendered and racialized divides that preceded our interpretation, drawing principally on two central political interventions that installed an institutionalized understanding of three terms: gender, ethnicity and gender equality. The first one is the Inquiry on the distribution of economic power between women and men (SOU 1998:6), and the second is the Integration Inquiry (SOU 1995:76). In the next section, we discuss some critical aspects that characterize the reception of the concept in a Swedish context, focusing in the first instance on scholarly interventions that explicitly addressed the significance of intersectionality for Swedish gender studies. In the third and final section, we elaborate on the relevance of intersectionality, in dialogue with researchers, who in a global context of normalized racism, homophobia and neoliberal fundamentalism work towards the formulation of research agendas of hope. Going beyond academic category debates and inspired by feminist mobilization, our deep conviction is that the relevance of intersectionality lies not only in analysing the social divisions which make inequality possible, but rather in its ability to politicize inequalities, which is its transformative, emancipatory character.

The politics of gendered and racialized divides

An analysis of the reception of intersectionality in Sweden has to consider the institutional investments and the knowledge production installed by what we previously conceptualize as hegemonic feminism (de los Reyes & Mulinari, 2005). Hegemonic feminism refers to an institutionalized understanding of power articulated around a binary perception of gender relations and its implementation in projects, indicators and expert knowledge. This perception is premised on a theoretical understanding of power as a system of domination based on the hierarchical divisions between the category of women and the category of men. The Swedish Committee on the distribution of power between women and men (SOU 1998:6) is a clear example of this stance. Following the tradition of Swedish official reports that provide empirical evidence for political decisions, this Inquiry gathered significant academic knowledge in order to formulate political measures to address gender imbalances and promote gender equality. The Inquiry represented a considerable intellectual effort; it was based on 14 research reports and engaged more than a hundred scholars in the period between 1997 and 1998.

The focus of the Inquiry is on the unequal distribution of power, influence and economic resources between women and men. Theoretically, the Inquiry is inspired by the idea of a gender system that assigns different positions to women and men and constitutes a fundamental axis of power in society (Directive: 1994:102). Even though the idea of a gender system suggests a structural understanding of power, the Inquiry focuses mostly on institutional power and on rules, norms and practices that promote women’s economic autonomy. According to this view, participation in the labour market increases both women’s freedom of choice and their possibility to negotiate within what is assumed to be a heterosexual family. Labour market participation on equal terms is thus established as an important political goal for all women, while economic independence is assumed to strengthen their position within the family. Having a gender system theoretical frame as a point of departure, the numerous reports of the Inquiry convey an understanding of power as a relation between women and men. Unequal living conditions among women are not conceptualized as relations of power, but rather as an expression of existing variations between different groups.

The idea of a gender system was not exclusive to the Inquiry; rather, it had been a common understanding among feminist researchers since the establishment of the field. The importance of the Inquiry lies in providing an institutional framework and a political strategy to instal a discourse on the
primacy of gender over other relations of power. Furthermore, it also established an idea of gender equality as a political goal possible to achieve through institutional transformation and state regulation. Accordingly, the proposals of the Inquiry deal with reforms aimed at promoting equal gender representation in working life and society (SOU 1998:6, pp. 190–215). A central premise was that gender equality is achieved through labour market participation; remarkably, though, the Inquiry is silent about the relationship between labour and capital. Instead, the state is expected to carry out necessary reforms to achieve gender equality. In the few items where the eventual participation of the labour market parties is touched upon, the state is assigned an intermediating role (SOU 1998:6, pp. 190–215). While the agency of women’s mobilization as workers becomes superfluous and the state becomes the principal actor to implement feminist demands in working life, the challenges of gender equality are framed outside a capitalist social order and within heteronormative family forms.

The Swedish Committee on the distribution of power between women and men illustrates the emergence of a hegemonic feminism based on the institutionalization of gender policies and the construction of a unified feminist subject. Parallel to this process, new racialized divides took the form of integration politics, established inter alia in the proposals of the government bill Sweden, the future and diversity—from immigration policy to integration policy 1997/98:16. A background to the launching of the politics of integration was the contradiction that marks the perception of Sweden as a diverse society and the disparity in living conditions and possibilities between immigrants and Swedish-born citizens (2001/02:129). In spite of formal equal rights, the existence of disparity in several areas in society indicates the necessity for political efforts to achieve full integration. Integration was defined as a mutual commitment by both natives and migrants, and as a process that demands the involvement of all society.

The launching of integration policies during the 1990s must be seen in a context of neoliberal reforms, increased precarisation and high unemployment rates among migrant workers. Despite its societal ambition, integration was principally applied to labour market participation: “Paid work is the key to integration in society” has been a mantra (de los Reyes, 2016). Against this backdrop, the “employability” of migrants became a central issue during the 1990s. To become employable (and integrated), immigrants were expected to not only reskill and learn a new language but also adapt to ways of thinking, norms and values coded as Swedish and hence as modern and superior (de los Reyes, 2017; Mulinari & Lundqvist, 2017). The prominence of Swedishness as a norm of working life as well as the formulation of targeted programmes to increase the employability of the migrants contributed in this context to particularize the newcomers as inferior, unskilled and deviant.

A point of departure of the integration policy is the idea of diversity and the existence of cultural values potentially deviant from the Swedish norms. To the extent that this policy was premised by an idea of ethnic differences, it also reified national divides and reinforced the supremacy of Swedish (democratic) values with respect to other (potentially undemocratic) values in working life, family and society. While we now witness more intransient (and louder) assimilation demands in the name of integration, it can be argued that the principal problem with this political frame is not only the scope and character of these demands but also the borders it naturalizes. Integration policies have established a vision where the divisions between we who integrate and they who have to be integrated turned into a governmental instrument to deal with racialized inequalities.

The politics of gender equality and integration share several (and problematic) commonalities. Both reinforce an understanding of social antagonism that at the same time naturalizes homogeneous, hierarchical and dichotomous subject positions: male/female, migrant/native. An impressive bureaucratic apparatus is created to register, assess and follow how gender and racialized divisions are expressed in different social areas. A myriad of methodologies, toolkits, concepts and expert knowledge have developed to deal with these categories. The emergence of this apparatus is linked not only to a hegemonic understanding of gender and migrant status but also to institutionalized practices and academic knowledge production. Even though working life is the main arena where gender equality and integration policies are expected to be achieved, the
conflicting lines between work and capital are seldom problematized. Inequality, whether gendered or racialized, becomes in this way a concern of state bureaucracy or expert knowledge.

In this context, the introduction of intersectionality in Sweden can be read as an urgent call to understand the dynamics of power in a situation where the logic of capitalist accumulation was expressed in the atomization of social relations and the emergence of new forms of governmentality. Binary perceptions of inequality on the basis of racialized and gendered categories concealed the operations of capital upon a fragmented working class. The criticism that we formulated at the beginning of this new millennium had as its genesis this binary conception. At the same time, the silence on racism, as well as the lack of interest in global inequalities, had reached a tipping point. The legitimacy of gender as a progressive academic field in times of neoliberal transformation was severely questioned, when gender equality became an arena to deploy nationalistic ideas of Swedish supremacy (Mulinari, 2016). Our intervention was guided not only by a criticism of the knowledge practices of hegemonic feminism but also by a recognition of the transformative power of knowledge speaking from the margins (hooks, 1989). Intersectionality is according to Collins Hill and Bilge (2016, p. 147) a tool to think about inequalities within an ethos of social justice.

Thus, inspired by Black feminist theories and in line with the critical tradition of postcolonial feminism, we proposed a conversation that could critically engage with a transformative feminist agenda.

Our interest in the silences and erasures implied in both gender and integration policies is mainly to understand how categorization processes are linked to exploitation in the Swedish racial formation. Also, we identified a need for an examination of social processes and ongoing struggles that not only accounts for the operation of power but also how it is challenged.

**Resisting intersectionality**

Intersectionality has become an established concept among feminist intellectuals and activists in Sweden; however, its position in academia and its contribution to gender studies have generated different interpretations and also heated debates. An exhaustive account of these cerebrations or of the many contributions to the field of intersectional studies is beyond the scope of this paper. In analysing the reception of the concept, we intend rather to identify rhetorical strategies, metaphors and interpretations that can tell about the tensions, challenges and contradictions following the introduction of the concept in a Swedish context. In line with Barbara Tomlinson’s call to explore the scene of argument where intersectionality is managed, we focus in this section on interventions that intend to re-inscribe the concept in a feminist tradition. In tales about what intersectionality “is” or how it should be interpreted, we identify constituencies, fractures and silences calculated to reinstall a hegemonic understanding of feminism. Reading this discourse as a resistance strategy, we follow Cynthia Cockburn’s pioneering analysis, *In the way of women, men’s resistance to gender equality in organizations* (1991), to highlight how resistance against certain bodies, experiences and voices can be interpreted not only as the struggle for the construction of the discipline and its canon but also as resistance to unlearning privileges. In the analysis that follows, we identify different forms of resistance expressed in the location of intersectionality in gender studies.

*“We” have always been intersectional*

The introduction of intersectionality in Sweden mobilized varying and contradictory reactions. On the one hand, it is possible to identify an almost immediate incorporation of the concept into an established feminist canon. On the other hand, the critical content of the concept and its transformative potential remained considerably less highlighted. Rather, we identify positions that question the novelty of intersectional perspectives and postulate that a recognition of differences between women had always been at the core of feminist analysis.
For instance, gender scholar Nina Lykke illustrates this position when she relates the origins of the concept to the women’s movement in the 1970s and to socialist and abolitionist movements during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Lykke, 2003). Lykke sees these movements as examples of interactions between gender and class and between race and gender and underlines the differences between European and US feminism, an emphasis that projects racism into other places and other bodies. What kind of political economy of knowledge is hidden behind labelling some theories as “European” or “American”? Eurocentric narratives of a feminist intersectional (European) past have other important pitfalls, too. In the first place, they devalue the theoretical contribution of Black feminist thought and the specific historical conditions in which it has emerged. Suggesting that intersectionality has been central to feminist theorizing and practice from its origins also reinstates the question, who is the doer of (feminist) theory? To be sure, this is not only a problem of the invisibility of certain groups or the ignorance of particular “axes of power”. More important perhaps is the obfuscation of conflicts and antagonism that conceals the operations of power that (re)construct gender and sexuality as the most central category of analysis within gender studies.

Angela Davis’s (1981) pioneering work explores the inability of the US women’s movement to relate to slavery and to the experience of racism. Tales of intersectional continuity instal in this way a narrative of feminist theory as a story where knowledge production is inclusive, collaborative and pursues common goals. From this perspective, practices such as exclusion, appropriation and invisibilisation do not exist. It is needless to stress that this is a story Black, Chicana and Indigenous feminists have systematically challenged, not only in the US but also in every other region of the world.

Finally, the term “interaction” that suggests a connection between separate “categories” shaped the Swedish debate on intersectionality. The introduction of the notion of categories took place without addressing what logics of domination and/or exploitation construct these categories as specific social relations within specific social formations (Collins, 2017a). The category of race is created and reproduced through a social relation constitutive of modern capitalism, tied to social structures of the nation-state, the global division of labour and the divisions between core and periphery. A focus on social categories, not only untheorized racism but also disconnects the concept of intersectionality from a conceptualization of racism as inscribed within specific racial formations or within racialized social systems.

Dislocation and translation

Inscribing intersectionality into the feminist canon demands subtle (and blatant) academic bordering practices. While frequently quoting the work of scholars like Kimberlé Crenshaw and Patricia Hill Collins, the Black radical tradition that provided the historical, political and epistemological space for the understanding of their theoretical work is often neglected (see for instance Delgado & Stefancic, 2006; Winant & Omi, 1994). The epistemological violence involved in such practice has serious consequences for the development of intersectional perspectives in the Swedish context.

When dislocated from the richness and heterogeneity of the Black radical tradition, the concept of intersectionality provides a successful nodal, as Bilge (2013) suggests, towards the construction of gender studies as a specific discipline with clear boundaries against its (critical) others. Dislocation has also proved to be useful to bordering practices, especially regarding the use of conceptual frames that transform antagonistic social relations such as class into social categories. In Swedish gender studies, the use and concern with the term “social category” (without an exploration of the term as an analytical tool and its relation to the social order or to a historically contextualized specific matrix of domination) not only opened up an endless discussion about how to put categories together and what categories matter but also established a silence on how the social order was structured. In this context, it is possible today in the field of Swedish gender studies to speak of
intersectionality without naming the role of nation-states in the operations of power, and to separate gender and racism from historically specific models of capitalist accumulation.

Considerable effort has been dedicated to defining (and criticizing) the ambiguities regarding which categories matter and what are the priorities of an intersectional research agenda. Questions that contribute to clarifying how the logic of inequality is linked to racialized capitalism on national and global levels have attracted significantly less attention.

Generally, the translation process implies productive moments that influence the meaning, rules and frames of understanding (Knapp, 2005). In Swedish academia in general, and gender studies in particular, translation operates often through a selective inclusion of the works of internationally recognized feminist scholars, separating these authors’ theories from the contexts where they lived and acted. Thus, Laclau and Mouffe are often quoted while silencing the commitment of these intellectuals to the everyday struggles for social justice in Latin America. Mohanty and Butler are also identified as radical postcolonial and queer scholars, but without naming their engagement in political movements and struggles for global justice that would make their work be read alongside contingent political mobilizations. This de-identification from the social and the political is strongly cultivated, no matter how fundamental the involvement of Swedish academic knowledge, through (gender and integration) experts has been in the development of (highly problematic) gender equality and integration policies.

We have argued for an understanding of intersectionality that overcomes boundaries between academic work and political engagement. Academisation, or the dissociation of academic knowledge production from everyday life, involves a depoliticization of knowledge. Intersectional debates that take place in Swedish academia are often far from the theoretical inheritance from Black feminist and postcolonial scholars developed in contexts of struggle against the precarity of life in an era of unfettered capitalism. In this context, we are well aware, of the risk that intersectionality (now embodied in the power of the West) also may constitute itself as “Theory” and colonize other knowledge systems/traditions, notions and concepts.

Our call to develop an intersectional analysis on inequality processes and power dynamics in Sweden have had a different aim. As we have already emphasized, an important stimulus was the fragmentation of the social and the implementation of politics that promised emancipation and integration through the naturalization of a capitalist order based on (precarious) wage work and the nuclear heterosexual family. Our analysis did not start either in theoretical debates or in conceptual struggles but was impelled by the acute social transformation that has eroded the life conditions of millions of people, depending on how they were defined, classified and managed.

Following Tomlinson’s argument on the category of anxiety that dominates (and paralyses) European debates on intersectionality, we see the need for recognizing such anxiety as a manifestation of a position of power that decides how and when to deal with precarious bodies and social antagonism. When Carbin and Edenheim (2013) suggest an “anxiety from white feminists about how to handle these non-white feminists with strange accents and non-European pasts that ‘suddenly’ started to talk to them”, it becomes clear that this anxiety can be deployed (and interpreted) only within privileged academic spaces where the boundaries between differing knowledge and different bodies are already internalized.

We have used the term de-politicization, a description that we are well-aware risks concealing processes of re-politicization towards notions of diversity within a neoliberal academia. In these contexts, diversity suggests flexibility, fractures and “complexities”, but expelled (and we are consciously using the term expelled to describe the epistemic violence of this practice) terms as capitalism and also visions of social justice, solidarity and systemic transformations.

**Our differences and theirs. Time and space**

Asking why the categories of race and sexuality have been so invisible and wondering what happened when these perspectives were incorporated into Nordic feminist research, gender
scholars Ulrika Dahl, Marianne Liljeström and Ulla Manns (Widerberg, 2017) identify important edges. Their account of the geopolitics of the field in the Nordic countries suggest that, while masculinity studies were warmly welcomed into Nordic gender studies, intersectionality was introduced as a perspective particularly used in the “American” context.

Intersectionality opens up different readings of the conformation of Nordic spaces and reveals at the same time how established perceptions of gender are deployed territorially. Dahl (2017) questions the lack of debate on racism and sexuality in Nordic gender studies, and points to the risks of an imaginary (and exclusionary) Nordic “we” within the field. A reviewer of the work of Dahl, Liljeström and Manns, gender scholar Karin Widerberg (2017), maintains that this “Nordic” “we”, imaginary or not, represents a central point of departure for understanding women’s different strategies and priorities in the region. Wideberg is clear in rejecting the relevance of racism in Nordic gender studies, a topic she suggests should be located in a US context: “we searched after our own differences to show that there are many ways to be a woman” (Widerberg, 2017, p. 88, our translation). This searching for “our own” differences leaves the reader wondering why this search never “found” the exploitation of female migrant workers in the Nordic countries or considered the expropriation of land and water of indigenous communities as relevant differences to explore. It is interesting to note how notions of Nordic exceptionalism are deployed in Wideberg’s review. As argued by Gail Lewis (2013), the location of racism in other places and in other times has been a commonly used rhetorical tool to avoid a serious discussion of racism and its consequences.

To the extent that the idea of a gendered Nordic “we” is consistent with the bordering practices of hegemonic feminism, it can also be seen as the expression of the fortresses of the powerful (Massey, 1999, p. 42); a fortress that not only prevents the entrance of the barbarians but also normalizes the narratives of a white, heterosexual Nordic-space “we”.

As a result, racism is constructed by Wideberg as a peripheral issue in “Nordic” narratives of gender. In line with feminist geographer Doreen Massey (1999), we have been particularly interested in developing an intersectional understanding of the spatial construction of power through discourses that bind certain social relations to specific territories. According to this understanding, the significance of intersectionality lies not only in a critical interrogation of national imaginaries but also in the incorporation of global inequalities in the construction of scholarships of hope.

**A scholarship of hope and struggle**

Inspired by the work done on intersectionality by scholars engaged in what Patricia Hill Collins (2017b) names as intellectual activism, we are deeply committed to producing knowledge that can contribute to transforming the precariousness of life that dominates the world we inhabit. This article is thus inspired by the shift in the social sciences and humanities of analysing hope both as a political practice and as an epistemological understanding of human agency (see also Martinsson & Mulinari, 2018). According to Crapanzano (2008), the category of hope explores and names the openness of society towards an alternative future and realistic utopias (Levitas, 2007; Wright, 2012). While a rereading of the works on hope by Ernest Bloch (1986) and Paulo Freire (1994) is fundamental to the re-inscription of hope as both an object of study (Green, 2018) and an epistemological point of departure (Duggan & Munoz, 2009), their contribution should be translated to a time of global neoliberal despair and intensified intersectional struggles against the precariousness of life.

Today, the urgency of imagining and naming other possible futures is engaging not only social movements but also an increasing number of scholars. Cultural theorist Gilroy (2004) speaks about the need to think about humanity beyond a European concept of humanism, and queer scholar Sedgwick Kosofsky (2002) argues the need for an understanding of the social that emphasizes multiplicity, surprise and divergence. Finally, Spivak (Sharpe & Spivak, 2003) speaks of the need to develop a politics of the imagination to counter the power of the imagination through which corporate capitalism expands all forms of domination. Collective organization and human agency
emerge thus as an expression of hope and also as an urgent call in times of devastating neoliberal transformations.

Praxis is at the core of theories of hope (Eagleton, 2015). It is human (political) agency that creates the possibility both of challenging the naturalization of oppressive social relations and the ability to imagine other worlds. Our understanding of intersectionality is thus closely linked to the urgency of thinking other futures outside the ones provided by hegemonic social relations. What would a society beyond racism, patriarchy, heteronormativity and capitalism look like? What forms of care or interdependency between human and non-human life would evolve?

We would like to suggest that scholarships of hope entangle the black feminist tradition of intersectionality in a number of ways. What follows are four frames through which the doing of intersectionality creates possible futures.

**Intersectionality as theory in the flesh**

Thus, our first pathway reading intersectionality today is through notions and practices of hope and collective agency that draw the political to the core of intellectual work. For instance, the intersectional edge is powerfully present in the work of queer scholar José Muñoz’s *Cruising Utopia*, that bridges the work of Bloch, particularly the concept of utopia as a collective longing that is relational to historically situated struggles “we have to continue to seek “a ‘not-yet’ where queer youths of color actually get to grow up” (2009, p. 96). To imagine other future (s) urgently demands according to Muñoz a move (for the survival of racialized kids, queer kids) from the here and now; to a then and there (2009, p. 190).

Muñoz highlights the notion of survival, a notion that is highly relevant for intersectional analysis in Sweden. A notion that poses the question of who the “we” whose lives are considered valuable and those whose lives are considered ungrievable (Butler, 2015).

The work of Black feminist scholar Nash (2015, 2018) points in a similar direction. Nash explores the paradox that intersectionality is at the centre of women´s studies in the US. At the same time, that gender scholarship remains uninterested in the lives of Black women. Inspired by Toni Morrison´s well-known quote “The very serious function of racism is distraction. It keeps you from doing your work. It keeps you explaining, over and over again, your reason for being” (Morrison, 1975/2019), Nash elaborates further on some of the arguments touched upon in this article. While acknowledging the epistemic racism at the core of the journey of intersectionality in academia, Nash argues that responses shaped by what are often defensives strategies among Black feminist scholars risk paralysing and narrowing the tradition into issues of ownership and debates about fidelity to the roots. This defensiveness, the author asserts, is based in what we see as a double-bind which on the one side calls intersectionality and black feminist scholars to perform intellectual, political and affective labour as well as diversity within the organizations and, on the other hand, allows for a sanctioned ignorance (Spivak, 1985) lack of interests in the conditions of live of black women and in the heterogeneity of black women´s intellectual production.

According to Nash, rethinking intersectionality implies to reinstate the richness and originality of the traditions of Black Feminism. The author argues for a theoretical, conceptual and political development, framed at the core of feminist black tradition exploring and located in vulnerability and intimacy and acted upon through practices of transnationality, politics of love (Nash, 2011) and an ethical practice of witness (Benjamin, 2018).

The intervention of Black feminist scholar Barbara Christian in her path-breaking article “The Race for Theory” (Christian, 1988) names and acts upon the black radical tradition when describing how the notion of labour as human practice has been transformed into the concept of text. The author challenges this dehumanizing move in the search for monolithic theories with a big T, illuminating the ways people of colour through the integration of feeling and knowledge engage in the practice of the doing of theory, thus emphasizing the verb theorizing as substantive, rather than Theory. By transcending the theory-experience binary, so central for Western philosophical
traditions, Black feminism creates a space where the “theoretical” is embodied in both the lives and the struggles of those who we are accountable to for our intellectual work (and our survival). When Christian poses the question: For whom are we doing what we are doing when we do literary criticism? (Christian, 1988, p. xxx), she illuminates the ways intellectual practices are thought within the tradition of Black feminism as both labouring with and commitment to others. In other words, the doing of theory in the flesh, as Moraga & Anzaldua (1986) would have it, the Chicano feminist search for new kinds of theories with new theorizing methods (Alarcón, 1991; Anzaldúa, 1987; Yarbro-Bejarano, 2001) is a collective process of intellectual labour where the boundaries between academy and activism are challenged, where the materiality—the forms of labour and the struggles of the thinking and feeling bodies—creates the space where we learn from others and where we learn as equals.

**Intersectionality against the precarity of life**

The second way in which we read intersectionality through scholarships of hope is through our learning experiences of Latin American feminism (Palmeiro, 2018). Recent mobilizations identify the heterogeneity of the subject of feminism (women, lesbians, transvestites, trans*) and create coalitions through slogans such as the Argentinean “Defend feminist bodies, defend feminist territories” or the Chilenean “Against the precarity of life”. These slogans bridge agendas evolving from the urban struggles for abortion rights and urban experiences of occupied factories and work cooperatives with the rural and indigenous struggles for control over land and water and food production. Mobilization against the precarity of life includes not only all bodies threatened by patriarchy, racism, capitalism and heteronormativity, but also implies the defence of the already existent feminists’ territories created and protected by these bodies. The experiences accumulated in these mobilizations point to the shift in focus from the classification systems that locate specific bodies in specific places to the collective process through which these classification systems and social categories are politicized (or rather politicize themselves), given new meaning, challenged or transcended.

What we see in these mobilizations and forms of organization is a further development of intersectionality forged in feminist political struggle, through a practice of listening and learning from others; what Nira Yuval Davis (2011) would identify as an epistemic community of belonging, forged in feminist political struggle. We conceptualize intersectional feminist communities not as essential and fixed belonging, but rather as formative spaces where different positions can be articulated and common futures can be envisioned. The community is thus forged in political mobilizations and emancipatory narratives of hope which can construct other houses to occupy than those constructed with the master tools.

Intersectionality in these feminist-inspired practices names shared inequalities, specific historical locations and forms of suffering affecting the diversified bodies building feminist territories and feminist futures. These political feminist practices transform intersectionality from an isolated academic societal concept to an everyday doing of political coalitions and dialogues, towards strategies to organize hope creating spaces of resisting and living against and beyond the existing social order (Dinerstein, 2015).

**Intersectionality and racial capitalism**

The third way through which we read intersectionality and scholarships of hope emphasizes the centrality of capitalism as a fundamental social formation, at the same time that it acknowledges the role of gender, sexuality and racism as constitutive of how social relations in capitalist economies are established and acted upon. We read the concept of intersectionality within a Black radical tradition and through the depth of the theoretical traditions in the Global South that for decades resisted the epistemic violence of Western dominance and unveiled the links between colonial
expansion and capitalist exploitation (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Fanon, 1967; Grosfoguel, 2003; Gutiérrez, Boatca, & Costa, 2010; Rivera Cusicanqui, 2010; Rodney, 1972).

In a context where extractivism turns into a central model of capital accumulation and the exploitation of bodies and territories reaches planetary dimensions, this tradition offers new ways to think about the contradiction between current economic models and human and non-human reproduction. According to feminist researcher Veronica Child, the linkages between feminist struggles and anticapitalism are central to feminism movements in Latin America today. In her own words: “feminists are weaving together different struggles into an intersectional movement explicitly linking gender demands to the end of a neoliberal capitalist model of development and its devastating social, economic and ecological effects on Latin America’s overwhelming majority” (Schild, 2019, p. 24).

The relevance of intersectionality is thus closely connected to the efforts evolving from anti-colonial and anti-imperialist struggles to expand, challenge and further develop an understanding of capitalism in a context of globalization and growing precarisation of life.

The logic of capital is, as expressed by current feminist struggles demanding a new social order in Latin America, a logic of exploitation of life that differentiates bodies and subordinates air, water and soil to the demands of capital accumulation.

Intersectional mobilizations in Latin America are showing that the promises of endless consumption and continuous growth cannot be separated from current forms of exploitation based not only on cheap labour and differentiated labour market regimes but also on disposable bodies and zones of sacrifice where all forms of human and non-human life are no longer viable. In this context, scholarships of hope talk of the urgency of articulating many forms of knowledge in order to construct other futures.

**Intersectionality and pluriversity in knowledge production**

The fourth angle from which we understand the connections between intersectionality and scholarships of hope relates to an epistemological position that challenges the desire for monolithic, exclusionary and closed system of thought, while emphasizing the need of a plurality of knowledge and practices (de Souza Santos, 2007; Rivera Cusicanqui, 2010). Mbembe (2001) defines this position as “epistemic diversity”, understood as a stance that does not necessarily abandon the notion of the universal, but which challenges Eurocentric universalism and embraces a horizontal strategy of openness to dialogue among many epistemic traditions. Decolonial scholars would define this call as the need of “pluriversity” in knowledge production (Dussel, 2013). Thus, we would argue for the need to think intersectionally, outside the academic compulsion to know and classify, developing with caution and humbleness collective intellectual work towards scholarships of hope, that will challenge the desire of academic monumental, monolithic theoretical frames and simple, often superficial solutions.

Finally, we want to conclude by stressing that the concept also had transitted through avenues outside the university and been discussed among social movements struggling for social justice. As for these emerging political subjects, intersectionality (and the concept of structural racism) speaks to unnamed experiences and visions more generally, and to political agendas of hope more specifically. Patricia Hill Collins’s and Sirma Bilge’s volume Intersectionality (2016) emphasizes the centrality of the concept for those engaged in the doing of everyday utopias. The authors explore and provide several illustrations of the ways through which the term has inspired diverse forms of resistance to exploitation and oppression. Their analysis inscribes intersectionality as an analytical tool aiming to contribute to social transformation and social justice. Inspired by the authors, we conceptualize feminist struggles against the precarity of life through Latin America as theoretically and politically inspired by an intersectional frame, even if other terms are used to identify, acknowledge and challenge multiple inequalities.

These perspectives of a scholarship of hope and our own experience of dialogue with social movements promise productive, empowering translations. We can agree or disagree with these
translations, but there is no doubt that thinking social justice through intersectionality has provided political tools to new generations. It is in their hands, hearts and minds that the concept of intersectionality speaks, to create and nurture feminist communities forged in and through political struggles.

**Note**

1. Note to the reader, in Sweden and despite decades of debates of intersectionality and postcolonial and decolonial theory, “America” still means the United States of America, mirroring once more the relationship between territoriality and knowledge claims.

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**Notes on contributors**

**Paulina de los Reyes** is Professor of Economic History at the Department of Economic History, Stockholm University. Her work analyses the relationship between labour and diverse forms of exploitation, locally and globally. She has published extensively on topics such as industrial relations, labour market, gender, migration and racism.

**Diana Mulinari** is Professor of Gender Studies at the Department of Gender Studies, University of Lund. Her work explores the entanglements between gender and the field of political studies with a special focus on racism, migration and local and transnational forms of resistance.

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