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Conversations with Mara Viveros-Vigoya on Intersectionality from *Amefrica Ladina*

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Abstract

This presentation analyses the multifaceted concept of intersectionality, tracing its origins from Black feminist thought to its contemporary applications and challenges. This comes at a time when the intersectionality of hate is being strongly expressed. It highlights how intersectionality, coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw, emerged and finds its own paths in multiple regions of the world to address the compounded discrimination faced by Black women due to intersecting racial and gender oppressions, moving beyond singular categories of analysis. The text discusses the concept's journey from marginal academic discourse to global recognition and its subsequent institutionalisation within human rights frameworks. It also critically examines the risks of decontextualisation and neutralisation when the concept is adopted without its original political and activist intent. Viveros-Vigoya shows how intersectionality illuminates complex social realities by considering the interplay of race, class, gender, and other inequality markers. The author emphasises that intersectionality is not merely an additive model of oppression but a dynamic tool for understanding power relations and advocating for social justice, particularly in contexts where narratives like *mestizaje* have historically obscured systemic inequalities. Ultimately, the author argues for reclaiming intersectionality as a vital political instrument in ongoing struggles against various forms of discrimination.

Keywords

Intersectionality, decoloniality, Latin America, Amefrica Ladina

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Introduction

Good afternoon, everyone. It's an honour to be here with you today. I would like to thank Dr. Ernesto Vasquez del Aguila and Dr. Krisna Ruette-Orihuela, two close colleagues and friends, who invited me, made this event possible, and who trusted me to deliver this conference in English, my third language. Let me begin with a fundamental question: Why talk about intersectionality—why now?

This very word has landed on a blacklist circulating around universities and institutions across the United States, along with phrases such as anti-racism, discrimination, feminism, gender, LGBT+ and mental health. These topics have been deemed controversial or even dangerous since the Trump administration issued a decree eliminating policies in support of diversity, equity, and inclusion this year. Reading about events like this in the news gives me pause. It pushes me to reflect on the themes I work with—topics I care deeply about. The current context demands that they be revisited. It gives them new meaning, new urgency.

Today, we're witnessing a linguistic crusade. Words like woke are weaponised to attack anything that sounds progressive, feminist, environmentalist or queer. The language war goes hand in hand with the banning of books across the US since 2021. Many of the over 16,000 banned books deal with slavery, gender inequality, and stories about LGBT+ or racialised characters.

In the wake of this, the concept of an intersectionality of hate has emerged, which helps us understand how various forms of rejection and violence intersect and reinforce one another. In 2016, African American writer Rembert Browne observed that Trump had successfully united diverse groups such as sexists and racists, not through ideas, but through shared hate. French historian Christine Bard built on this in 2017 during a conference on anti-feminism, using the term to describe how racism, sexism, antisemitism, and homophobia intersect in far-right media discourse in France.

Intersectionality has become central in contemporary feminist studies and movements, expanding to include other forms of oppression such as age, disability, and sexual orientation. However, anti-feminism has also become intersectional… in its hatred. We saw this clearly in Bolsonaro's Brazil, where sociologist Éric Fassin (2019) described a 'neoliberal intersectional laboratory' in which the emancipatory goal of intersectionality was reversed.

In my 2023 book *Intersectionalidad, Giro Decolonial y Comunitario*, I analyse how this concept was key to the candidacy of Francia Márquez in Colombia's 2022 presidential election. Her life story—marked by social, racial, and gender marginalisation—stood in stark contrast to those who

have traditionally held power in the country. In a society where race functions as a marker of class, and where racism reinforces gender hierarchies, her presence made visible how racism, sexism, and classism operate jointly. From that position, she used the word intersectionality to name the multiple forms of violence she sought to eliminate.

Her message resonated deeply with feminists, with LGBTQ+ people, with Indigenous and Afro-descendant movements, and with all those who felt historically excluded. With the nobodies, as Eduardo Galeano would say; those who have always been denied dignity and rights. That is why I believe it's more important now than ever to talk about intersectionality. To understand its history. To explore its potential and to claim it as a political tool to resist the times we're living in. Having offered this reflection, I now allow myself to begin a presentation that draws on and builds upon my previous research on intersectionality.

In this talk I will reflect on the journey intersectionality has made, as a theoretical, methodological and political perspective. Intersectionality has travelled in two directions, from the margins to the centre and back again. It started on its winding course from the moment the term was coined in 1991 by Kimberle Crenshaw. It was then popularised in academic circles after the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, held in South Africa in 2001, and its relevance has endured to the present day. Reflecting on this journey, I intend to describe and analyse the different stages through which intersectionality has passed. This includes the intensification of its use over the last decade, in which we have seen the massification of feminism as a political movement. These more recent events have redefined the concept of 'the margins'.

Genealogies of intersectional thinking

For some years now, the term intersectionality has been used to describe the theoretical and methodological perspective that perceives power relations as overlapping and interlocking. This approach is not new within feminism. In fact, it has been agreed that, on the one hand, feminist theories had addressed this problem before it was given a name. On the other, the idea that theoretical frameworks that ignored the overlapping of power relations excluded certain groups had been circulating for a long time in diverse historical and geopolitical contexts.

The failure to acknowledge these exclusions was challenged by Black women in the United States through organisations that fought for the abolition of Slavery, the right to vote for Black people, and against racial segregation and lynching. In the last quarter of the 20th century, proposals such as those of the Combahee River Collective (1983/1977) emerged, this being one of the most active Black Feminist groups of the 1970s. In their document *Black Feminist Declaration*, they put forward an extraordinary

framing of the question of intersectionality. They also centre their political action on an active commitment to struggle 'against racial, sexual, heterosexual and class oppression' and the 'development of integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking' (ibidem: 15). This notion of 'interlocking' systems of oppression clearly prefigures intersectionality.

Intersectionality came of age towards the end of the second half of the 20th century, during a period of immense social change. It recalls anti-colonial struggles in Africa and Asia, and anti-imperialist struggles in Latin America; those of the global women's movement; and of civil rights movements in multicultural democracies; the end of the Cold War; and the defeat of apartheid in South Africa. In this context of social change, it is worth highlighting thinkers such as Angela Davis, Audre Lorde, bell hooks, and June Jordan who spoke out against the hegemony of 'white' feminism in U.S. academia (Vivers Vigoya, 2024). They showed that the category of woman and the political representation proposed by many feminist theories had been constituted based on the experience of women who were privileged in terms of their class, race and sexuality, ignoring the realities of women whose social situation was different in those same terms.

Meanwhile, in 1980s Brazil, a Black women's movement was consolidating, cementing the intersection of race and gender as the centre of their political program. Since the 1960s, the issues affecting Black women had been posited as topics of political debate within the Brazilian Communist Party (Barroso and Costa, 1983). Several activists and intellectuals promoted the theory of the 'race-class-gender' triad of oppressions to explain the differences among Brazilian women that the dominant feminist discourse had endeavoured to ignore. These writers were pioneers in pointing out that if feminism wanted to emancipate *all* women it had to confront *all* forms of oppression and not only those on grounds of gender. It is worth emphasising these developments because the Brazilian contribution to the genealogy of intersectionality is almost never acknowledged.

At the Second Meeting of Latin American and Caribbean Feminists held in 1983 in Lima, Brazilian thinkers, alongside Uruguayan and Caribbean Black feminists, managed, with difficulty, to draw attention to the fact that the feminist agenda needed to include the issue of racism (Curiel, 2007). They also proposed the setting up of a regional coordination mechanism (Alvarez 1997). It was not until 1992 that 350 Black women from 32 countries attended the First Meeting of Latin American and Caribbean Black Women in the Dominican Republic, a country with a long tradition of feminism. They were to discuss the agenda for the Fourth World Conference on Women which would be held in Beijing in 1995. At this meeting they created their own agenda that highlighted the region's specific ethnic and racial inequalities. They wanted to draw attention to the fact that Latin American societies had devalued Black women's contributions to their development. At the same time, they denounced the racist subtext of the new

development models and structural adjustment policies and the negative impact these had on the lives of Black women (Galván, 1995).

By relating the contributions of these women, we can observe that the precepts that today we call intersectionality have been used for decades in the Global South. What *is* new is the way in which intersectionality has more recently started to circulate in different academic and political contexts, as one of the key approaches to contemporary discussions and struggles around 'difference,' diversity and plurality. This has had multiple effects, which I will now explore.

The journey made by intersectionality, from the margins to the Centre

The concept of intersectionality as such was coined by U.S. lawyer Kimberle Crenshaw in 1989, as a tool designed to overcome the legal invisibility of the multiple dimensions of oppression experienced at that time by Black women in the labour market. Intersectionality, she wrote, designates 'the various ways in which race and gender interact to shape the multiple dimensions of Black women's work experiences'. With this understanding, Crenshaw hoped to highlight the fact that Black women in the United States were exposed to violence and discrimination based on both race and gender. Above all, she sought to create concrete legal categories to address discrimination on multiple and varied levels. The court had rejected a claim made by five Black female workers that the General Motors seniority system had discriminated against them. Crenshaw argued that the court's refusal to recognise 'combined race and sex discrimination' was because 'the boundaries of sex and race discrimination [were] defined respectively by white women's and Black men's experiences' (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 143). The interplay of these boundaries obscured the specific subjective experience of Black women workers.

On numerous occasions, Kimberle Crenshaw has made it clear that her use of intersectionality has been and continues to be contextual and practical. Her aim was never to create a general theory of oppression, but rather a concept that would allow for the analysis of specific legal omissions and inequalities. As she explained:

> Intersectionality [...] was my attempt to make feminism, anti-racist activism, and antidiscrimination law do what I thought they should—highlight the multiple avenues through which racial and gender oppression were experienced so that the problems would be easier to discuss and understand' (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 18).

A decade after coining the term, Kimberle Crenshaw participated in the preparations for the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance in Durban. This event

became a turning point in the world's understanding of the historical functioning of racism across the globe. It was also notable due to the broad participation of women. Like the other UN conferences, Durban was also preceded by a series of preparatory activities in different regions of the world. The aim of these was to map different forms of racism, identify the ethnic and racial groups most exposed to the effects of these different forms, as well as to propose actions to member states and UN bodies in charge of international treaties.

The III Conference was a turning point in the growing protagonism of Black women in the fight against racism and racial discrimination, both nationally and internationally. The Pro-Durban Articulation of Brazilian Black Women's Organizations stands out among the various initiatives launched there. The case put forward by Black women on their specific place in the systems of production and reproduction contributed greatly to making the problems of racially discriminated women visible. In this context, Crenshaw gave a seminar on Intersectionality at the Geneva Preparatory Committee in the year 2000 in which she emphasised the possibilities of thinking about the racial dimensions of gender discrimination without losing sight of the gender dimensions of racial discrimination. Crenshaw assessed the limited interpretations of the human rights discourses of the time. She outlined a methodology for analysing intersectional subordination as a means of eliminating the gaps in these discourses through which the rights of women who suffer multiple oppressions tend to fall (Bairros and Costa, 2002).

At this point in the story, the concept of intersectionality had begun to be used in these institutional settings. At the 2001 Durban World Conference, more than ten thousand delegates shared the complexity of their political challenges and life experiences with each other. They adopted the term intersectionality at the conference's NGO Forum. Since then, the intersectional perspective began to take hold and expand globally (del Aquila, 2021)—whether the word 'intersectionality' or other equivalent terms are used. This definition was used in the Gender section of the document:

> An intersectional approach to discrimination acknowledges that every person exists in a framework of multiple identities […] [which determine] one's experiences of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerances. An intersectional approach highlights the way in which there is a simultaneous interaction of discrimination because of multiple identities (UN WCAR, 2001, p. 21, para 119).

After this World Conference, Crenshaw's work influenced the formulation of the Equality Clause in the South African Constitution, became institutionalised in international diplomacy, and gained academic popularity (Crenshaw, 2012). Thus, the concept of intersectionality, born from a

marginal and contested context, gradually became a broad and widely used concept in these different fields. It is important to point out the way the United Nations has used this approach to refer to women's rights as human rights, and to the diversity of women in very heterogeneous geographical, social and cultural contexts, such as those of Latin America and the Caribbean.

It is also important to emphasise that the same thing has happened with intersectionality as occurred with the gender approach during the 1990s, the decade of Major International Conferences in the 20th century. On the one hand, there has been an undeniable recognition of Intersectionality in the academic world. We have also seen greater commitment in government agencies to the fight against multiple discriminations, which has allowed important advances in the formulation of their public policies. On the other, the institutionalisation of the concept has paradoxically emptied out and neutralised the category. It has started to be used as a standard academic reference that decontextualises and separates it from its original political imprint. If, while using intersectionality, the feminist discourse remains intact; if the intersectional argument, analysis and approach consists of applying 'from above' a new feminist truth to the world of those 'from below;' if that world is understood to be a place where all inequalities are exacerbated by adding one on top of another, we are *seriously* misunderstanding what intersectionality is all about (Espinosa Miñoso, 2020).

Intersectionality forges a new interpretation that abandons the feminist perspective focusing solely on gender. It embraces a more comprehensive outlook that seeks to reflect on and fight against sexism, classism, and racism at the same time. The mistake made by other major critical systems that interpret the social order—like Marxism, feminism, or critical race theory—consists of the fact that each has claimed to offer an interpretation of societies from what they assume to be the primary axis of inequality from which the others are derived. Moreover, they assume that each axis is independent of the other, ignoring that the interrelatedness of inequalities is part of their makeup (Viveros Vigoya 2023).

Behind the academic category of intersectionality lies a rich history of Black women's activism from different parts of the world. Because of this, the analytical and political potential of intersectionality depends entirely on how the concept is used and for what purpose. One of the first gender theorists, historian Joan Scott (2010), has asserted that gender is only useful as a question, and that as such, can only be answered in specific contexts and through specific research. Just as the concept of gender raises theoretical questions applicable to different contexts, the same is true for intersectionality, as I will now illustrate.

Applications of intersectionality as a category for analysis

The adoption of intersectionality as a framework for understanding social experiences as enmeshed within a fabric of multiple oppressions (rather than the sum of oppressions), and deriving that understanding from the corresponding epistemologies, has been rather slow. There are various reasons for this, but one reason lies in the fact that there has been a difficultly in accepting that an intersectional approach applies to all of us. Intersectionality can help us understand the daily lives of the people we study. But it can also shed light on power relations present within the social and educational organisations using intersectionality to study others. Often, despite the good intentions of those within these organisation's power structure, there is a perpetuation of gender, class and race hierarchies.

Moreover, in Latin America, a persistent obstacle to the widespread take-up of an intersectional political-theoretical approach, in which race plays a central role, is the continuing adherence in Latin America to the narrative of *mestizaje* to prove the absence of racism. This narrative describes these societies as fundamentally mixed race. It has been so powerful in the cementing of Latin American national identities that it has hindered acknowledgement of the existence of racism. Furthermore, it and subjected those who point to its presence to moral delegitimisation as racists. and dismissed those who maintain its existence as the 'real' racists. In Latin America, racism is minimised, denied or seen as something anachronistic or 'extraordinary'. Racism is so naturalised that it is largely overlooked, to the point that it is only applied to circumstances of another time or place: in the United States, Nazi Germany or South Africa. If there has been racism in Latin America, goes the argument, it is a relic of the past, from colonial or pre-revolutionary times. People only perceive racism when confronted with explicit or violent acts of racial discrimination (Viveros Vigoya, 2007).

Given this context, criticisms of this foundational narrative are very welcome. Lélia Gonzalez (1984), for example, has asserted that Latin American societies have always prioritised the 'Latin,' in other words, a connection with Europe, and have silenced the importance of the historical existence and (past, present and future) political agency of their Black and indigenous peoples. Gonzalez renamed the region Améfrica Ladina, to evoke the fact that Central and South America have always been more Amerindian and African than 'Latin'. Her political-cultural concept of *amefricanidad* was meant as a counterpoint to the U.S. discourse on Black identity in the Americas which had become hegemonic across the two continents.

It is also important to acknowledge that most intersectional studies undertaken in the region have focused on subjects who face oppression and exclusion. In this sense, the oppressed and excluded individual, the embodiment of otherness, crushed by systems and domination and inequality, has paradoxically become the privileged subject of analysis.

Many studies invoke a stacking of triple and multiple oppressions, giving strength to the idea that there are some women who are devoid of any possibility of agency and some men who are all-powerful. The problem with this stance is that it ignores the fact that both women and men can occupy different positions at the same time, some of subordination and others of domination. Moreover, the most 'disadvantaged' position in classist, racist and sexist societies such as ours is not necessarily that of a poor Black or indigenous woman (Viveros Vigoya 2016). We could compare their position, for example, with the situation of young men of the same ethnic and social group, who are more exposed to certain forms of arbitrariness, such as those associated with police controls. Common-sense perceptions of the functioning of domination can be enhanced by the analysis of particular social configurations.

Furthermore, a mathematical model of domination that paints its effects as cumulative does not allow us any insight into, for example, the way marriage and status interact in racialised contexts. There is a big difference between an interracial marriage and one that unites two people of the same race. In the Colombian context, my past research has allowed me to identify, for example, certain consequences of a marriage between a Black man and a white woman. The white woman not only loses social status generally, but also her reputation is damaged, as she is seen to have sexual tastes undesirable in a woman of her ethnicity or race. I began to understand that marriage, a patriarchal institution that should normally protect a woman against accusations of sexual promiscuity, lost its power when her spouse was racialised as a Black man. I also saw that the gender, class and race relations in which couples deciding to get married were embedded could not be analysed separately. This, because they were constructed and existed simultaneously in particular historical circumstances which imbued these relations with significance.

Along similar lines, my research on masculinities in Colombia has challenged the homogenous way that masculinity is thought about in the country. I have shown that a man's class and race affect the way their gender works for or against them. This means that men's masculinity is experienced and represented in different ways. Thus, there is a great difference between men who benefit from patriarchal - and racial - advantages and those who suffer most from the imposition of hegemonic masculinity and norms of white supremacy. The former generally hold positions of authority in the state, control powerful institutions, and are recognised by the media. At the other end of the social spectrum, racialised and impoverished men perform the least-skilled, lowest-paid and least-recognised jobs, and are among the groups most exposed to police control. The interlocking of classism and racism has shaped Latin American institutions since their inception in such a way that today they all share the same project of brutality, typified by police violence meted out on racialised and impoverished young men. That police violence is connected to the continuous growth of the prison population and a long history of humiliation, dehumanisation, and terror

inflicted on these bodies has been made visible thanks to intersectionality (Viveros Vigoya 2018).

Migration as a process involves various axes of inequalities, which is why it is a suitable field for theoretical and empirical analysis with intersectionality. In international migration, different classifications (such as gender, class, country of origin, race, ethnicity, age, migratory status, etc.) all have a determining influence on migrants' access to rights and opportunities, as well as on the situations of privilege or exclusion that derive from these classifications. The complexity and diversity of migrants' experiences depend largely on the continuous interaction between the different hierarchical structures of gender, ethnicity, class and other axes of inequality at the local, national, transnational and global levels.

Among the studies from Latin America that have incorporated this perspective into their analysis, the work of Adriana Piscitelli is especially pioneering. Piscitelli (2008) examines the experiences of Brazilian migrants involved in the sex industry. Her research shows that the experiences of Brazilian women who have migrated (or who are simply travelling) is affected by factors that cannot be understood based on just one or two categories of differentiation, such as gender and nationality, but by the interweaving of notions around sexuality, gender, race, ethnicity and nationality. The interaction between different axes of inequality explains why Brazil has become a stop on the world circuit of sex tourism, why Brazilian women have gained visibility in the sex industry in European countries, and why sexist and racist stereotypes about Brazilian women come into play regardless of whether the women are involved in the sex industry. Assumptions about Brazilian women include the idea that they are naturally inclined to engage in sex and have a propensity for prostitution, combined with ambiguous notions about their styles of femininity, seen as submissive and at the same time joyful. These stereotypes tend to indiscriminately affect these migrants in varying proportions according to migratory contexts, social class and, in some cases, skin colour. For Piscitelli, the transformation of the subordinate position that Brazil occupies in transnational relations into culture is one of the main factors influencing these women’s experiences. This, because the transformation stems from the connections between the different axes of inequality mentioned above.

I would also like to mention the research of Maria José Magliano (2015), who explores the working lives of Peruvian migrant women in paid domestic employment in Argentina. Magliano’s work discusses the issue of the segmentation and hierarchisation of the labour market across ethnic/national and gender lines. She detects the partitions created between native and migrant workers and between men and women, and the differentiations within these same groups. Her research reconstructs the career paths of Peruvian migrant women from an intersectional perspective, revealing the differences in these women’s work and migration experiences stemming from their class (linked especially to job qualifications and level

of schooling), their migration status, and their family dynamics. An intersectional perspective provides tools to understand the different 'ways of being' a migrant and domestic worker according to the specificities of gender, social class, ethno-national origin and migratory condition. In other words, it produces a narrative that goes against a homogeneous view of migrants, showing that the intersecting of these social relations configures the different possibilities for finding different types of jobs, vertical and horizontal mobility, and differentiated access to rights as workers.

Recent research by Miriam Shakow (2022) has used the potential offered by intersectionality to analyse the effects of socio-political changes on the everyday experience of the new indigenous middle classes in Bolivia. Shakow identifies the dilemmas posed by two opposing narratives of social mobility for women who have experienced recent processes of upward mobility in this context of change. The first narrative urges young Bolivians to leave behind the indigenous and *campesino* and become 'professionals' or successful mestizo entrepreneurs. It does away with the *chola*'s pollera and braids for her to achieve social progress, since for a long time it was impossible to dress and style one's hair in this way and aspire to access higher education. The second model, promoted by the political project of Evo Morales between 2005 and 2019, emphasised a change in values, the affirmation of indigenous cultural pride, and a woman's right to professional and business achievements. This search for greater equity included the appointment of male and female ministers of Quechua and campesino origin in such a way that identifying as middle class and dressing in a chola style ceased to be a contradiction and instead communicated a political message. The chola has been converted into a gendered symbol of the imperatives of the two competing models of social mobility. It has meant that the cholas themselves – torn between different political, community and family commitments – have faced particularly challenging and costly personal quandaries.

This case illustrates the fact that interactions between gender, race and class always operate in specific social, spatial and temporal contexts (Viveros Vigoya 2023) Understanding social relations in this way keeps us from seeing femininity, indigeneity and social ascent as given, fixed and immutable. Meanwhile, the relational underpinnings of intersectionality show that the oppression of certain social groups is always interconnected with the opportunity and privilege of other groups. Privilege is never isolated; it is directly linked to the disadvantage of another group.

Having outlined the uses of intersectionality as an analytical category, I will conclude this lecture by looking at the political dimensions of intersectionality. I want to examine what is at stake in the current context which sees feminist issues gradually displaced from within the borders of the feminist movement to its edges and beyond. This encourages the forging of alliances and solidarities with other social movements that defend the interests of other socially minoritised groups (hooks, 2008).

Back to the Margins: decolonising the application of intersectionality

Latin America has seen numerous changes over the last decade. The reasons for this are related to the political shortcomings and lack of autonomy of the multicultural state project launched in the 1990s, the rollback of social and political processes and achievements gained within the framework of this project, and the exacerbation of social and racial inequalities and violence linked to the neoliberal model (Hale 2002). One of the effects of the failure of the multicultural project was a renewal of public interest throughout Latin America in the issue of racism, which had repercussions on the anti-racist work of many social movements, including feminism. In this new context, Latin American feminist ideas have been more clearly connected to the critique of racism, this in great part due to the rapid circulation and growing acceptance of the intersectional perspective (Viveros, 2016).

Certainly, the socio-political context of recent years and aspects of intersectionality's itinerant nature have brought about a certain re-politicisation of the concept. Intersectionality has acquired new meanings and, in a way, even reinvented itself outside the bounds of universities, in the streets and in the struggles of social movements. In Argentina and Brazil, 'the notion of intersectionality is used to articulate and connect the movements and claims of indigenous and black women, rural and metropolitan communities, sexual minorities and women living in slums, without losing sight of their specificity' (Mezzadra, 2021, p. 3).

In *Améfrica Ladina*, a region defined by multidimensional heterogeneity—and marked by lengthy historical processes that have produced social exclusion—intersectional political thinking and action has entered into relationship with other disruptive political thinking and action. This means that intersectionality has been used to acknowledge and address the multiple and complex discriminations that characterise the experience of Ladino-Améfrican women, and at the same time has been applied to pursue understanding of the historical origins of this discrimination and combat its source.

This appropriation and application of intersectionality has prompted a re-politicisation of the concept, where what is at stake, to quote Angela Davis, is 'not so much intersectionality of identities, but intersectionality of struggles' (Davis, 2016, p. 144). Research such as that undertaken by the Brazilian researchers Flavia Rios, Olívia Perez and Arlene Ricoldi (2018) point to the emergence of a new generation of Brazilian activism. More forthright language has started to be used to illustrate more clearly the connections between feminism and anti-racism in the public sphere with a view to problematise the multiple forms of social oppression. The adoption of a language of intersectionality goes beyond an understanding of how this

tool can aid social and political interpretation. This, because the term has become a category of collective political identity that has emerged amid a transforming public sphere and the dynamics of feminist and anti-racist movements, especially among feminists who have drawn attention to the limits of more traditional political activism.

This new interpretation changes the term's meaning, where it is now not only a category for analysis but also a category that shapes the contemporary language of political activism. It holds the terminology and the values that guide the collective action of those who engage in politics on the streets and online. Thus, the term has gone from a noun to an adjective that describes a new type of feminist belonging and, above all, indicates a new way of conceiving feminism itself. Intersectionality is, therefore, a reinvention of feminist thought and practice. It has created new solidarities that apply intersectionality as a method to increase encounters between different social movements and to counteract any 'hardening' of identity politics. While identity politics has played an influential role in opening up new fields of struggle, there is always a risk of it becoming an obstacle to building a more effective basis for struggles against exploitation and oppression.

However, the reinvention of intersectionality as an 'intersectionality of struggles,' as Angela Davis puts it, seems to foreshadow a new politics of solidarity. Rather than being based on vague notions of sisterhood or the idea that some women unreservedly identify with others, this new solidarity is anchored in shared political and ethical goals. It allows for the construction of imagined communities, not around sex or colour as inherent or natural characteristics, but around ways of thinking about race, class and gender.

The return to the margin of intersectional political thought and action—in the words of bell hooks (1989, p. 23)—chooses the margin as a space of radical openness. hooks draws a clear distinction between marginality imposed by oppressive structures and marginality chosen as a place of resistance, as a place of radical openness and possibility. This place of resistance is a critical response to domination and a space forged through struggle. We know that struggle is difficult, challenging and tough, but we also know that struggle is what pleases, delights and satisfies. Taking inspiration from bell hooks, we can imagine the space of intersectional struggles as a radical creative space that affirms and sustains our subjectivity and grants us a new place from which to articulate our sense of the world (Viveros Vigoya, 2023a).

Closing remarks

Today, one of the most pressing debates in intersectionality revolves around whether intersecting inequalities should be understood in *additive* or

constitutive terms. That is, are different forms of oppression simply layered on top of each other, or do they fundamentally shape and produce one another in inseparable ways?

A growing body of critical scholarship challenges how intersectionality has been institutionalised—particularly within white-led feminist organisations. These critiques point to the widespread appropriation of Black feminist thought by mainstream feminist spaces that often centre gender in isolation, while marginalising or erasing race, class, disability, sexuality, and migration status. In many cases, gender is treated as the default lens, with other inequalities seen as secondary or optional 'add-ons'. This instrumental use of intersectionality—often labelled as 'diversity within'—risks reinforcing the very systems of domination it seeks to dismantle. For example, some feminist NGOs in Europe are seen as upholding whiteness, ableism, and cisnormativity, even as they claim to represent all women. In doing so, they obscure the structural and political nature of intersectionality, reducing it to a checklist rather than a radical framework for justice (Christofersen and Emelju, 2022).

Another key debate concerns *representation and authority*: Who gets to speak for whom in intersectional advocacy? Whose knowledge counts? Often, organisations that claim intersectional expertise fail to centre the voices and leadership of those most affected by overlapping oppressions. Feminist theory, movements, and organisations have long been marked by internal tensions, particularly as marginalised groups articulate their own experiences and call not simply for inclusion, but for a fundamental reimagining of feminist politics. Their demands go beyond representation; they seek a transformation of feminism itself into a worldview and social practice grounded in care for diverse lives, one capable of radically reshaping both present realities and future possibilities (Christoffersen and Emejulu, 2022). Ultimately, these debates push us to ask whether intersectionality is being used to truly transform power structures, or whether it is being co-opted into institutional practices that leave systems of exclusion intact. As intersectionality becomes more mainstream, the challenge remains to ensure it retains its critical edge and remains accountable to its radical, activist roots.

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