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## Unsafe travel: experiencing intersectionality and feminist displacements

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## Unsafe Travel: Experiencing Intersectionality and Feminist Displacements

**I**ntersectionality has assumed a central place in European feminists' tool kit of knowledge production. It has led to a burgeoning of a feminist archive that traces the multiple and complex constellations of alterity and their implications for the social structures, institutional forms and processes, differentiated identities, and lived realities of contemporary European societies.[1] Indeed, the reach of intersectionality as an organizing category for feminist inquiry has meant that almost no disciplinary field within the social sciences and humanities has been untouched by it. Emily Grabham and her colleagues (2009) identify economics, political science, political geography, sociology, sociolegal studies, postcolonial studies, and even critical psychotherapy as among the areas of scholarship where intersectionality has made its mark. To that list we could add social policy (Lewis 2000, 2005), feminist science and technology studies (Lykke 2010), and education (Ringrose 2007; Yang 2010). Intersectionality, then—whether conceived as theory, concept, methodology, heuristic, or all four—has been extraordinarily generative and has unleashed a burgeoning archive of feminist critical inquiry.

As might be expected, there is a range of orientations to the term intersectionality and a range of ideas about its implications for feminist scholarship within this archive. Thus, within the European feminist constituency, as in the United States, the concept of intersectionality and its theoretical and methodological implications are the subject of debate over analytical priorities. This debate turns on "which intersections, power differentials and normativities should be given priority in which political contexts" (Lykke 2010, 67). It includes negotiations over the "proper" intersectional analysis, specifically whether it is modes and processes of inequality, subject and identity formation, a deconstructive mode of analy-

[1] See, e.g., Lewis (2000), Cooper (2004), Prins (2006), Verloo (2006), Yuval-Davis (2006), Kantola and Nousiainen (2009), and Nash (2009).

sis, or all of the above that point to the indeterminacy and deferral of all categories and the fictions of identity that they produce.

It is profoundly paradoxical, then, that this burgeoning arena of feminist inquiry has also redirected attention away from the relational dynamic that emerges among diverse constituencies of feminists and women's studies scholars in feminist gatherings such as conferences. This inquiry has neglected some of the very issues of inequality and differentiated subjectivities constituted in intersectional matrices as they are played out in the spaces of feminist infrastructure. In this article I address the (albeit muted) dynamic of racialized difference that arises within feminist constituencies even as these constituencies are committed to deepening intersectionality scholarship and widening its political traction and influence. I begin with Kathy Davis's (2008) consideration of how and why intersectionality has been so successful. I then situate my concerns in a wider context by briefly outlining some of the contours of race in Europe before going on to explore some of the dynamics of racialized difference as they emerge in the context of feminist institutional sites. My argument is twofold. First, even while elite and popular discourses across Europe are saturated with processes of racialization, there is a disavowal of the relevance and toxicity of the social relations of race as a pan-European phenomenon, with a corresponding displacement of its relevance to a series of "elsewheres." Second, this process of unconscious and unwitting disavowal and displacement enters into feminist discourse and infrastructure, helping to pattern the experiences and social relations among feminists differentially constituted as raced subjects.

## Intersectionality's success

Why has intersectionality been so successful in capturing the feminist imagination and in generating an enormous swath of feminist scholarship on both sides of the Atlantic? In attempting to address this question, Davis (2008) has argued that its success turns on four key characteristics required of any successful social theory.[2] First, it addresses a fundamental concern of feminism, that is, differences among women; and second, it does so in new and surprising ways (offering a "new twist" [73]) by carving a pathway between concerns about the impact of multiple modes of discrimination and oppression and a critical deconstructionist methodology that

[2] Here, Kathy Davis draws on the work of Murray S. Davis who, writing in the 1970s and 1980s, delineated what he felt to be the characteristics of successful theories. See Davis (1971, 1986).

subverts the categorical imperatives of modernist practices of governance and knowledge. In other words it has the capacity to avoid falling prey to the simplistic and divisive categorizations referred to above. Third, it appeals simultaneously to generalists and specialists. And finally it is inherently ambiguous and incomplete or open, such that it "allows endless constellations of intersecting lines of difference to be explored. With each new intersection, new connections emerge and previously hidden exclusions come to light. . . . Intersectionality offers endless opportunities for interrogating one's own blind spots and transforming them into analytic resources for further critical analysis" (Davis 2008, 77).

Davis is not alone in pointing to and applauding the extraordinary contribution to feminist scholarship that intersectionality has made (see, e.g., McCall 2005; Knudsen 2006; Ringrose 2007). To cast intersectionality as such a powerful and creative concept, theory, and analytic is perhaps to bear witness to the generative capacity of theory making that comes from the margins. It is to acknowledge that black women and other women of color produce knowledge and that this knowledge can be applied to social and cultural research beyond the issues and processes deemed specific to women racialized as minority, that it can become part of a more generalizable theoretical, methodological, and conceptual tool kit in ways indicated by, among others, Ange-Marie Hancock (2007), S. Laurel Weldon (2008), and Jennifer Nash (2009).

### Tensions in movement

Attached to the idea of a successful theory is its capacity to travel, to shift across space and parachute down into specific geographical, cultural, and social formations and adequately orientate inquiry and enable analysis. But as Clare Hemmings (2011) has reminded us, unexpected things can occur in the slipstream of travel when concepts and theories are on the move. Not only are there the limits of language and translation, but closely related is the issue of whether the content and integrity of the concept or theory can remain stable in the aftermath of travel and arrival. To this we can add the issue of due recognition and valorization of the concept or theory's sites and subjects of origin. Of course, the idea that any concept or theory has a single point, moment, or subject of origin is fallacious since developments such as these are always contingent on the conditions of possibility existing in a given time and space. For intersectionality, it is by now a well-rehearsed story that locates Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw's (1989, 1991) naming and defining (and indeed deployment) of intersectionality in the wider context of African American and other women-of-color ac-

tivism and critical writing practice. Similarly, feminist scholars have pointed to the precursors of intersectional thinking in the centuries-long legacies of feminist, antiracist, and class-based activisms.[3]

Yet in the context of global circuits of knowledge production, and when inequalities of opportunity and recognition tied to structures of race, class, and gender remain, questions of provenance also remain central to the politics of knowledge production. This is perhaps especially pertinent in the contemporary globalized world, which includes the making, remaking, and unmaking of race and racism in both historically laden and locally specific ways (Barbacan, Gopalkrishnan, and Babacan 2009). Numerous writers (e.g., Brah 1996; Winant 2006) have noted that the making, remaking, and unmaking of race and racism are precisely entangled in dynamic intersection with gender, class, and sexuality and with the complex interrelations among the political constituencies convened under the sign of these categories. Howard Winant (2006) points to a second process directly connected to my concerns here when he suggests that the reconfigurations of race and racism as meaning-making and organizing devices in societies structured in dominance take place in a context where the question of how to take account of, and go beyond, race has assumed ideological prominence. For my concerns this translates into a question of what would happen if intersectionality as concept, theory, or methodology gathered ever greater momentum, proliferating a growing intersectionality literature with ever greater distance from the birthplace where the concept was explicitly named. How would that knowledge be treated, and would its provenance or sites of origin be recognized as the effect of that knowledge and its associated tools spread far and wide across boundaries of geography, social constituency, scholarly discipline, intellectual preoccupation, and modes and objects of inquiry? Could the site of emergence—and the social and political significance of those subjects most closely associated with the site of emergence—be continually recognized and valorized by the inheritors and users of that knowledge? In other words, what happens when intersectionality as theory, concept, or method travels?

This relation between provenance and the travel of theory brings to the fore a question of the relation between theory as object and the empirical subjects it conjures and whose lived realities it seeks to make intelligible and bring into the field of knowledge. At the same time, the relation between a theory's provenance and its travels also foregrounds the relation between diverse constituencies of users who stand in differentiated

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[3] See Thornton-Dill (1994), Brah and Phoenix (2004), Jordan-Zachery (2007), and Lykke (2010).

relation to it. In other words, provenance and travel speak to a complex relational field and the shifting dynamics of power. In the case of intersectionality, there is a close proximity between its original theoretical subjects and the embodied-sentient (living and breathing), multiply inscribed empirical subjects it sought to bring to visibility—black women and other women of color in the United States (Collins 1998, 2000), women with whom a strong identification was evoked among women of the African, Asian, and other diasporas in Europe. Intersectionality was greeted with hope and applause because of both its theoretical scope and its empirical inclusivity. This response was and is as profoundly emotional and experiential as it is analytic. Such a simultaneously emotional and analytic reception was aroused because it helped to erode the epistemological boundaries between those who "know" and those who "experience," which had caused feminists so much strife and pain. As an approach to both feminist advocacy and academic inquiry, intersectionality welcomed the margins to the table of theory making by reconciling the split between theory and experience—or, more precisely, by suggesting that experience could be the ground of theory making.

The proliferation of intersectional studies seemingly meant that any constellation of intersecting processes and dynamics had to include race since the effects of racial discourses and processes contributed so significantly to the material and representational realities of gendered subjects— both white and of color. On both sides of the Atlantic, the archive of feminist scholarship produced by women of color testifies to the significance of race as one of the categories within any intersectional constellation, whether inter-, intra-, or indeed anticategorical dynamics are under investigation (McCall 2005).

That this is so means that there is much at stake in feminist debates about intersectionality, especially when these debates occur at a great distance from the imperatives at work in the originary sites. For it is in such a cauldron that the issue arises: how valued and recognized do the women who might claim to be among intersectionality's central empirical subjects feel themselves to be in the circumstances of the debate?

The focus of my concern, then, is not intersectionality per se—as an analytic, theory, or mode of inquiry—but rather the social and affective relations among feminists, differentiated across numerous axes, when we (and I am using "we" deliberately) convene for the purpose of theoretical development and practical accounting. Within this, my first aim is to suggest that there is a deep anxiety traceable in the reception of, and debates about, intersectionality that have arisen as it has traveled from the feminism that black women and other women of color have fashioned

in the United States, via the feminism forged by black women and other women of color in Europe, and into the wider community of feminist scholarship. In a move that is both unintended and paradoxical, this anxiety is entangled with the anxieties about multiculturalism expressed by elites across the European landscape. At the same time this anxiety resonates with some of the old tensions between white feminists and feminists of color on both sides of the Atlantic, but in its new theoretical clothes it is no longer explicit. Instead it is coded both in private exchanges among women of color and in debates about the term "race" and its usability in some European national contexts. That such tensions are spoken among women of color in privatized ways rather than openly articulated and worked through in debates among feminists across ethnic or ethnoreligious divides makes scholarly analysis hard in that there is no archive of published material through which to trace and substantiate analytic claims. Yet it is this that provides the second aim of my article: to bring this very privatization out into the open and place it on the table of transatlantic feminist inquiry and debate. I hope to achieve this by pursuing my third aim, which is to situate examples of the lived experience of intersectionality debates within the arena of feminist infrastructure in the form of a conference. It is these issues that I consider in what follows.

In order to further delineate the terrain in which such unexplored anxieties and tensions arise, in the next section I move briefly beyond the field of intersectionality and consider the question of race (and racialization) in Europe. The focus here is on the discourses of race—and its cognates such as ethnicity, culture, and even religion—that circulate among members of the political elite. In so doing I indicate that race, one of the concepts so central to colonial modernity, remains a key organizing principle in Europe (Ghosh and Chakrabarty 2002), albeit in multiple and shifting constellations as it is entangled with other axes of differentiation in particular geopolitical contexts. I then turn my attention to ways in which intersectionality may be experienced as a traveling theory or concept and consider the processes of displacement that may occur when feminists (white and of color) in Europe meet to discuss the categorical units of inquiry and when they debate whether and in what ways specific categorical constellations are applicable across diverse contexts and geohistorical sites. My concern is to foreground the implications of these debates when the terminological category of race is disavowed as unspeakable in parts of Europe. I argue that the consequence of this is a double displacement. On one hand there is a spatial displacement of race as a category of experience and analysis to Britain and the United States, with the inference that questions of race, either historically or in the here and now, only have

analytic legitimacy and traction in those national formations. This connects to a second displacement whereby specific constituencies of European feminists of color are unwittingly positioned outside the boundaries of individual European nations, outside Europe as a multinational formation, and indeed outside the community of feminist scholars and theory makers who reside in or take Europe as their object of inquiry. I suggest that this is directly linked to debates about the geographical utility of terminological categories and feminist hospitality within the infrastructures of international conversation. It is, then, a profoundly paradoxical effect given that this can occur within the context of debates about a category, theory, and methodology that was borne out of the need for a more inclusive and complex understanding of gender formations and processes and where the debate is precisely aimed at enriching and extending this capacity. But then all political work—including that of politically inflected scholarship—is without guarantees.

### Race in Europe

In 2011 Anders Behring Breivik exploded a powerful bomb outside the headquarters of the governing Norwegian Labour Party and killed seven people, injuring many more. Two hours later, after a series of sickening acts of duplicity, he arrived wearing a policeman's uniform on Utoya Island, where the next generation of Labour Party leaders were to spend a week at an annual camping event organized by their party of membership and allegiance. There he calmly walked the ground and began shooting every person he came across. As the assembled campers realized what was happening, panic and alarm began to erupt, a panic and alarm that turned to total and terrifying despair as they became victims of or witnesses to his sadistic practice of pretending to offer protection, only to gun them down one by one by one.

In Britain news of this abomination was first greeted with certainty that this was the work of radical Islamists or Al Qaeda. "'Al Qaeda' Massacre: Norway's 9/11" was the *Sun's* headline two days later, offering one example among many on both sides of the Atlantic that automatically assumed the outrage to be the work of "organized jihadists" (Flynn and Hughes 2011, 1).[4]

When people began to report that they had seen a white, blond, blue-eyed man shooting people, acceptance that this could be and indeed was an act more akin to that of Oklahoma City bomber Timothy McVeigh

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[4] This high-circulation British tabloid is part of the Murdoch stable.

set in, but not before suggestions that this was nevertheless the work of Muslims, this time in the form of a "native" converted to Islamic extremism (Brooker 2011). As Jennifer Rubin of the *Washington Post* was to write in apparent retraction of her initial designation of this act as the work of jihadists, "There are many more jihadists than blond Norwegians out to kill Americans, and we should keep our eye on the systemic and far more potent threats that stem from an ideological war on the West" (Rubin 2011).

While the common sense (in the Gramscian sense) might say this is true, to descend for a moment into an obscene comparison, Rubin and others might do well to remember that even when the number who died in Breivik's slaughter was revised down to sixty-nine from the original eighty-five, this is greater than the number of those who perished in the slaughter that occurred on the London transit system in 2005. More significantly, black British, US-residing journalist Gary Younge (2011a), has alerted readers on both sides of the Atlantic that Europol data say exactly the reverse of the common sense, indicating that less than 1 percent of terrorist plots in Europe between 2006 and 2008 were linked to Islamists, while 85 percent were related to separatism, such as that of the Basques.

As the shock, disgust, and sadness at the calculated sadism and hatred segued into mourning and resolve not to engage in counter-violence, Brevik's links with the far-right, jingoistic, and Europhobic English Defence League and similar organizations became clear. Through these links, the Breivik case hints at the fact that his hatred of Muslims is a sentiment shared by many across Europe and also shades into a broader compact of nationalistic hatred and fear of a range of racialized others.

In Germany, Thilo Sarrazin, a Social Democrat and board member of the German Central Bank (the Bundesbank) published a book called *Deutschland Schafft Sich Ab* (Germany is doing away with itself; 2010). In this book he claimed that the presence of people from Turkey or with Turkish descent (who at 5 percent of the population make up Germany's largest racialized community) is "dumbing down" Germany because they purportedly have a genetically determined inferiority. According to Sarrazin, they, along with Kurds and Middle Eastern people, are a "genetic minus," but this "fact" is not allowed to be publically discussed (Younge 2011b). That these statements came from a senior figure in the political and financial elite is alarming (and telling) enough, but this is magnified when we learn that 31 percent of those polled in a survey conducted to track the public reception of Sarrazin's comments agree that Germany is becoming dumber because of immigrants, and 62 percent thought Sarrazin's comments were justified (Younge 2011b).

Meanwhile, in France the far-right Front National, headed by Marine Le Pen, daughter of former party leader Jean-Marie Le Pen, aims to transform the popular perception of the party as anti-Semitic and Holocaust denying while comparing public expressions of Muslim prayer to Nazi occupation and condemning halal fast-food restaurants, all in the name of defending "republican values," secularism, and feminism (Chrisafis 2011). Le Pen decries the purported degradations, cultural and moral erosions, and security vulnerabilities that have supposedly resulted from the multiculturalism that has spread across Europe over the past forty years. In so doing she is merely singing from the same hymnal as the bastions of government, policy, and media voices across the political spectrum and the landmass of Europe.

These events capture something of the tenor, ideological patterns, and anxieties with which sections of Europe's media and elites respond to the presence of cultural others who are deemed to threaten not only individual national formations but Europe as a whole. The result, according to the commentators discussed above, is a corrosive attack upon and destabilization of the values, moralities, ways of life, institutional forms, boundaries (between public and private—think of the banning of the veil and burka in France) and borders (national borders of the state—think of the moral panic about economic migrants and undocumented asylum seekers) that demarcate Europe as Europe.

Significantly, a persistent pattern in these declarations is the designation of the problem via a conjunction of race/culture, gender/sexuality, and welfare abuse. Thus in Britain, Ann Cryer, a former Labour member of Parliament, has consistently demonized Asian (read Muslim) men as embodying a despotic, racist, and misogynistic masculinity. As Farzana Shain (2011) has shown, Cryer and others, including former British Home Secretary Jack Straw, configure the problem of organized sexual grooming and abuse of girls and young women in cultural and racial terms.

That elite figures operate in this way indicates that racialization is alive and well and that it is consistently deployed in the discourse of politicians and media commentators across the European landscape. What this also shows is that this racialization is a compound process that gathers into itself and is inseparable from discourses of gender and sexuality. Simultaneously it is a racialization grounded in old notions of race as a biological characteristic ("white girls") and new notions of culture as the marker of difference ("Pakistani heritage"). In other words, this is a racism that carries both a racial logic of inferiority and a cultural logic of essentialized difference (Wieviorka 1998).

Meanwhile, in Central and Eastern Europe it is in relation to the Roma population that an explicit mobilization of racial discourse occurs. This discourse intersects with gender, sexuality, and reproduction, as Kristina Koldinská (2009) has shown in relation to the involuntary sterilization of Roma women in Slovakia, Hungary, and the Czech Republic, as well as other postcommunist states. She cites research from the European Roma Rights Centre that shows how Roma women are sterilized through a kind of cesarean section that makes future pregnancy impossible. This sits alongside other forms of sterilization without informed consent (Koldinská 2009, 560). Such direct racialized-gendered human rights abuse is mapped onto other processes of systematic structural and symbolic oppression and denigration in all aspects of life for Roma populations in general, making the Roma "the most prominent poverty risk group in the region of Central and Eastern Europe" (Koldinská 2009, 557).

Despite this wealth of evidence, the contemporary relevance of race as an analytic and a legitimate term of feminist and other critical social and cultural inquiry is denied across much of Europe, especially in the German-speaking and Scandinavian countries (Gingrich 2004; Hervik 2004; Hubinette and Tigervall 2009). This denial—or more accurately this disavowal—of race, racism, and the anxieties that follow from them has been traced to a convergence of three factors. First, there is the memory of the Holocaust; second, there is the existence of a politically correct discourse of multiculturalism that some say makes it impossible to challenge the cultural practices of immigrants (similar to the claims of Cryer and Sarrazin) for fear of being called racist. The third factor is the investment in a national self-image of egalitarianism, especially in Scandinavia and the Netherlands but to a lesser extent in Austria, Britain, and even France, with its strong self-image as a bastion of republican values. Such an investment makes acknowledging that racializing and racist meaning-making practices are pervasive and yet ordinary (as well as extraordinary, of course) almost impossible (Gullestad 2002; Hervik 2004).

In addition to illustrating the aliveness and toxicity of race thinking, these very recent examples of elite racism, entangled as it is with discourses of gender and sexuality, derive their power and pertinence from the historical sediments of colonial modernity that was so central to the formation of Europe as an idea and a collective identity (Hall 2002). In this sense their character as "recent" is something to be discerned through the future work of historians. More pertinently these recent events draw their power from proclamations of the failure or death of multiculturalism. In this discourse not only are ethnicity, culture, and religion made meaningful

through discourses of class, sexuality, and gender, but culture, ethnicity, and religion are also profoundly racialized. In other words, there is a discursive circuitry in which the signifiers "race," "religion" (read: Islam and, less prolifically but no less profoundly, forms of African spirituality demonized as witchcraft), "ethnicity," and "culture" are not only linked together through processes of racialization but are also metonymically tied to crime, gender despotism, homophobia, cultural invasion, and erosion of "European values" (Pred 2000; Seymour 2010). This is what is illustrated in the examples cited above. The language of culturalism and religion is a "modality of race-thinking [that] has become unremarkable, and is particularly resurgent in contemporary Europe" (Lentin and Titley 2011, 51). It is neither innocent nor post-race, since "race and culture have always been intertwined" (Lentin and Titley 2011, 51; see also Goldberg 2009).

If race and culture have been intertwined in the discourses and practices of colonial modernity, there has also always been a narrative of sexualized difference (Brah 1996). This continues to be so, particularly in the ideological and discursive entanglements around representations of Muslim women. For example, in a recent special section of the *European Journal of Women's Studies*, Jin Haritaworn (2012), Fatima El-Tayeb (2012), and Jennifer Petzen (2012) trace the multiple facets, contours, and effects of the ways, in a context of securitization, the war on terror, and a discourse of sexual (LGBT) and gender human rights, European states construct the category "Muslim woman" and then racialize and make abject the embodied-sentient subjects deemed to correspond to this state- and media-defined figure. They also point to the ways in which certain sections of feminist and queer constituency are conscripted to, and align with, this racializing discursive and institutionalized violence in the name of secularism and "European values": "The framing of the inability to belong as an individual/cultural failure rather than as the outcome of structural and discursive exclusions works to disempower and alienate groups who threaten the . . . identifications on which Europeanness continues to be built. . . . Through the postulation of the 'failure of multiculturalism' the discourse of Europe's universalist, secular identity as threatened by the particularist politics of the continent's Muslim minorities not only seemingly confirms the impossibility of multiculturalism, but also characterizes racialised minorities as inhibiting the inevitable progress toward a postnational 21st-century Europe" (El-Tayeb 2012, 91).

I have taken space to indicate some of the ways in which racializing discourse and practice circulate among European elites and configure the terrain in which feminist scholarship and debate occurs because it is

against this backdrop that racialized subjects are both spatially and on-tologically displaced.[5] As I indicate above, these racialized subjects are both terminological categories and embodied-sentient beings—women of color residing in Europe, alongside and in complex relation to their *compañeras* who are racialized as white.

It is in this context that I want to suggest that feminist debates about intersectionality that occur within the infrastructure of transnational feminism, such as at conferences, are complex intersubjective and relational fields in which historical memory, dominant ideological and discursive con-figurations, and here-and-now experience collide. In this way, feminist in-frastructural sites are fragile terrains that may generate conflict-filled and difficult experiences. They are also cauldrons that potentially expose the paradoxical situation where, on the one hand, Europe is a multisited zone bursting with feminist intersectional scholarship and, on the other hand, this scholarship fails to recognize or pay attention to the potential for old tensions that have their roots in multiple, albeit shifting, constellations of difference to erupt within its very sites of practice. This then raises the question of the relation between the theoretical and empirical subjects of intersectionality.

## Zones of discomfort: Experiencing traveling theory in a temporary institution

One example of the centrality that intersectionality studies occupies in European feminist and women's studies praxis occurred at a conference on intersectionality that was held in Frankfurt in early 2009. This was a vitally important event dedicated to debating where feminist scholarly practice had gotten in its use of intersectionality and encouraging its further de-velopment as a theoretical and methodological tool.[6] I have written else-where about the conference (see Lewis 2009b) and noted that I felt un-comfortable when certain issues were under discussion, and I want to revisit that here. It is also important to point out that I had been invited as one of the speakers (although I was ultimately unable to speak) and had planned to explore the issue of intersectionality as subjectivity and lived

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[5] There is a wide-ranging literature on how such discourses are taken up in diverse areas of social and interpersonal life, for example, in the realm of social policy and processes of racialization that shape the terms of access to public goods, family formation, parenting, and legitimate belonging and personal life; see Lewis (2000, 2009a), Keskinen et al. (2009), and Yang (2010). See also *Feminist Legal Studies* 19, no. 2 (2011) and the *European Journal of Women's Studies* 19, no. 1 (2012) for queer critiques of race and racialization in Europe.

[6] See Lutz et al. (2011) for a published version of the proceedings.

practice. As a participant at the conference I am therefore also implicated in what follows.

Before returning to some of the issues of discomfort, I need to outline my conceptual approach to conferences as an organizational space. Conferences can be regarded as temporary institutions, and like all forms of organization, temporary or otherwise (e.g., a university or factory or office), conferences are relational sites that involve the "punctuation of interpersonal space" (Armstrong 2005, 52).[7] The tools with which that interpersonal space is punctuated are the allocation of task, role, activity, and status, all of which are not only directed to the effective and smooth running of the temporary (or permanent) institution but also structure the relational field in which participants interact. In feminist conferences, even where there is an explicit attempt to constitute a space of relative equality and openness, this punctuation of interpersonal space takes the form of divisions among invited speakers and speakers from the floor (divided by status in the academy, length of career, etc.), as well as among organizers, funders, helpers, booksellers, conference pack assemblers, and so forth, interwoven, perhaps, with all the usual markers of social difference. A rich intersectional field indeed!

Central to the notion of organization as the punctuation of interpersonal space, which itself is rooted in a theoretical approach known as systems psychodynamics, is the idea that organization also constitutes a zone of intense emotional experience. This is an approach to and understanding of organizational and group process influenced by the Tavistock Institute, the psychoanalytic theory of Wilfred Bion (1961), and those who have developed Bion's ideas over the past four decades. Of equal importance, in this approach, is the idea that if the psychic or emotional truth of the experience of organization can be faced and explored, then it will offer a fertile site for learning about the quality of the lived relationality operating both within the zone of organization and in the social world beyond it (see, e.g., McRae, Kwong, and Short 2007; Lewis 2010). Indeed, as Mary McRae, Agnes Kwong, and Ellen Short, writing about the dynamics among a multiracial group of women, point out, "Group relations conferences are intensive experiential laboratories that allow the observing and studying of intergroups in action, creating a microcosm

[7] The notion of a temporary institution is linked to the theory and practice of group relations. Group relations conferences are set up with the specific task of exploring unconscious dynamics in relation to a given theme, for example, gender, authority, and leadership in a globalized and precarious world. The best known of such conferences is the Leicester Conference, held for a fortnight every year in Leicester, England, but involving many international participants, including those from the United States.

group to demonstrate the relations among groups" (2007, 216). While the play and effects of unconscious dynamics and emotional experience is the explicit object of inquiry in a group relations conference, within other forms of conferences such dynamics lie beneath the surface but are no less in operation. This means that any conference—as a space of feminist infra-structure—is a palimpsest of individual and collective histories, here-and-now agendas, aims, tasks, dynamics, expectations, and a range of individual and collective subjectivities, identities, and experiences that are both created by and collide within the intersubjective encounters that occur during the conference. Needless to say there will be dissonances as well as consonances among any of these elements at any point.

With this understanding of conferences as interpersonal spaces that are subject to the vicissitudes of numerous registers of encounter, I do not explore whether, why, and with what effect intersectionality as either a constellation of categorical units or as an analytic (theoretical, conceptual, methodological) needs to undergo transformation as it travels. Rather, I want to explore some of the displacements that occur in the debates about the transformations intersectionality undergoes as it travels and the experiences these displacements provide. In part this relates to what happens when intersectionality travels across state borders and sociocultural formations, and its reception, as I have noted above, is closely linked to questions of provenance and the continuing inequalities in knowledge production.

At the Frankfurt conference there was discussion as to whether the category of race had any real traction in European contexts, outside of Britain and the United States, where it has palpably been used as a category of feminist activism and scholarship. In this regard attention was paid to Germany where, because of its history of the practice of racial genocide, there is a profound reluctance to work with that category, even in a politics of claim making or through theories of opposition and critique. Nor is Germany alone in rejecting the category of race as meaningful, substituting the preferred and apparently less anxiety-provoking terms "ethnicity," "culture," and "religion."

Of course, investigation of which categories are deemed to intersect, or what happens when intersectionality travels, is vital for socially relevant, politically inflected feminist scholarship. It is a question of which differences make a difference in situated contexts of time and space. Indeed, feminists' continuing debate helps to avoid premature foreclosure on possible inter- and intracategorical constellations required to make sense of the complex articulations that produce gender as a condition of what it means to be human. Yet in this context of openness two directions can be

taken. Attention can be focused on exploring which categories speak to the differences that matter in any given context and even what might be achieved by using intersectionality conceptually or procedurally. Or the focus might be on what ground the integrity of the term "intersectional" might be achieved: is it as a political and methodological tool, a theory, or less grandly, a heuristic device? In Frankfurt, as in the published literature, no agreement was reached.[8] Thus, the debates and opinions about the power and utility of thinking and working intersectionally ranged quite broadly. For example, participants identified several strengths of the intersectional lens, including the necessary reorientation in perspective that follows a requirement to think simultaneously at the level of structures, dynamics, and subjectivities. Similarly, tribute was paid to intersectionality's capacity to conjoin rhetorics of voice and presence, and rhetorics of discourse and institutional form; tribute was also paid to intersectionality's capacity to facilitate a form of feminist inquiry that captures the complexity and multiplicity of axes of oppression in diverse contexts.

Why, then, was I left troubled by some of this debate? Perhaps it was that many of the substantive topics addressed seemed to me too distanced from the lived circumstances of women in all their diversity across Europe. On a more emotional register, my being troubled was related to the displacements contained in these debates, particularly around the question of race. First an atmosphere was evoked in which it felt impermissible to talk about race, or perhaps more accurately the toxic effects of racialization were emotionally alive in the here-and-now of the conference as temporary organization in which women of diverse nationalities, ethnicities, and races had convened to talk about how and why intersectionality might be celebrated. It was as though moving from discussions of the historical legacy of race and racism or the context of race-making across contemporary Europe outside the boundaries of the conference and bringing those issues right into the relational space of the room was impossible. This is profoundly paradoxical because it suggests that, even in the midst of theoretical and historically inflected debates about race and its impact on people's lives, about how and in what ways its meaning might change at different times and in different places, about whether it is a useful as an analytic concept (and these debates were occurring; see Lutz, Herrera Vivar, and Supik 2011), those who cannot avoid knowing they are raced subjects might have felt uncomfortable and silenced. In such circumstances speaking from that location—as an embodied-sentient subject who knows

[8] See, for example, the special issue of the *European Journal of Women's Studies* (Phoenix and Pattynama 2006), as well as McCall (2005) and Grabham et al. (2009).

she is raced—felt risky because it might expose one to the risk of being deemed too emotional or of being reinscribed as knowing only about race.

This relates to a second element in the subterranean affective flow that I felt to be circulating in the conference: the projection of race as only meaningful in relation to women racialized as minority. The racialization of whiteness and white womanhood was seemingly unthinkable. In this sense race and race talk was, for me at least, a key aspect of the way that interpersonal space was punctuated. It rendered unspeakable and even unimaginable an emotionally alive and politically potent development of the role, place, and effects of race as a category in the theoretical, methodological, and socially engaged tool kit intersectionality provides. Had we, as participants in a temporary organization, been more attuned to the ways our interactions were punctuated by numerous social and organizational differentiations and thus to the multiplicity of emotional undercurrents at play, we might have been able to harness any feelings of discomfort and put them in the service of the theoretical assessment and development that was among the aims of the conference. In this regard the conference represented a missed opportunity to deny racial discourse its toxic power to categorize and subordinate.

This also has a line of filiation to the workings of race in Europe and the rhetorics that proclaim the death of multiculturalism. Not only do these rhetorics invoke a Europe that is exclusively white, they also represent what Édouard Glissant (2011) calls atavistic culture, a culture that is premised on and longs to return to a myth of origin and imagined purity and so cannot withstand contact with and migrations from the world beyond its mythical boundaries. It is a culture that cannot cope with the disturbances of entanglement. Might such a cultural orientation have been unconsciously and unwittingly evoked in the boundaries of this temporary institution such that the messiness of race had to be kept outside? In such contexts an additional form of displacement involved a geographical displacement to an elsewhere that was Britain and the United States. Within the European context such displacement is common, sometimes taking the form of a disavowal of the realities or relevance of race because of the absence or denial of involvement in plantation enslavement or because a given nation-state deludes itself into thinking that it had no deep connection to colonization and its barbarisms since it had only a small number of (or no) formal colonial possessions (e.g., Germany and Sweden). At other times it is that a legacy of colonialism is now "made good" by an immigration policy that favors migrants from former colonies because they are presumed to be culturally and linguistically similar (e.g., Spain and Por-

tugal). Sometimes, especially in a process of displacement to Great Britain, it takes the form of a denial or disavowal premised on the assumed failures of multiculturalism. While the discourse of failed multiculturalism traverses a wide spectrum of Europe, in some spaces this displacement turns on a form of national self-congratulation that a given nation-state never "succumbed" to the perceived pernicious logics of multiculturalism, holding instead to its own civic or republican ethos (France is the obvious candidate here).

Starting from a very different premise but with unexpected effects, I felt there was a similar process of displacement at work in the Frankfurt conference. Moreover, I was troubled by what, at times, felt like the production of a hard binary divide between a place called the United States and a place called Europe. I accept that this hearing was that of a black woman living in Britain, with the particular British vagaries of race discourse enmeshed with my own psychosocial biographical narrative (see Lewis 2009a). But while this may have inflected my listening, it remains that this binary divide seemed to be constructed on the ground of race. It was as though race were only an issue of pertinence to women's studies scholarship and feminist inquiry in the United States (and perhaps Britain) and that the conference as a relational space had bought into the discourse the notion that race and racism did not really matter in the wider European context. It was as though the anxieties about what constitutes the European in the wake of diverse and by now long-standing immigrant and diasporic populations across European national spaces were not also anxieties about race alongside or enfolded into anxieties and discourses about ethnicity, culture, and religion. It was as though race as a category of "real" biological difference was believed and thus unspeakable rather than understood as an ideological category that becomes filled with specific content in situated contexts, including the context of the temporary institution of a feminist conference.

In relation to the United States this had something of the effect of ghettoizing (the word is consciously chosen) intersectionality as theory or concept, driving it back into the particular of African American and other women-of-color material, representational realities and theory making. A constellation of the intersectional that included race belonged "there" but not "here." In addition, "here" seemed to be constituted as the site of conceptual and theoretical improvement, or even the site where "real" theory work was done. In this regard I was at times made slightly anxious in discussions about whether or not intersectionality was a theory at all or "simply" a heuristic device. My anxiety here was not premised on differences of opinion about this per se but rather that it seemed as if any-

thing that emerged from within the structural experience of marginalized women (in this case African American and other US women of color) was always already incapable of being understood as theory, always only a category describing experience or mobilizing inquiry, not explaining it. Yet both in the Frankfurt conference and within the vast feminist archive of intersectional scholarship, we have demonstrations of the capacity of intersectional modes of inquiry to deliver subtle, nuanced, and sensitive analyses of the material and representational realities that constitute the lived reality for diverse, geographically disparate constituencies: analyses that do not displace race or its categorical cognates to an elsewhere, or only onto those racialized as of color/minority, but explore the specifics of the constitution, operation, and effects of race in particular intersectional constellations and geo-political-social locations.

Pondering my anxieties in silence, I was unaware that other women of color were also experiencing these debates as unsettling. I learned of this only later, at a conference to celebrate the work and legacy of Audre Lorde held in 2011 in London.[9] There, a German woman of color spoke of feeling marginalized at best and invisible at worst, of being rendered inarticulate and unthinking, devoid of any potential to contribute to the debates about intersectionality in general and its relevance and modes of deployment in Germany in particular (see Vogt-William 2010).

How to think about this experience of being invisible and silenced? I suggest that it relates to processes of displacement and disavowal. On the one hand was the fact that there were contributions from women of color living and working outside Germany (in the United States, Britain, and the Netherlands), and I was among them, but none of their German counterparts were involved. The practice of giving space and voice to women of color from locations outside that in which a given event is taking place while excluding local women of color (often by omission rather than by design) has a long history in European contexts, as Lorde's account of the Feminist Book Fair held in London in 1984 testifies (Lorde 1988, 63). It is a practice that produces a paradoxical moment premised on a displacement to an elsewhere in which race is deemed to reside in meaningful ways (Britain and the United States). Through this displacement these elsewheres become the locations from which race can be spoken and known. Representatives from these elsewheres and the knowledge they embody can then be invited to the table of transnational feminist inquiry.

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[9] The event was held at Goldsmith's College, University of London, and was organized by three women of color on the faculty.

On the other hand, when knowledge of race and racialization is displaced to circumscribed locales, a gesture of ghettoization is enacted. In this enactment race knowledge becomes minoritized as belonging to "them" and "there" (instead of being fundamental to colonial modernity and formative of any subjectivity within it) and treated as alien to "us" and "here," including in the production of white subjectivities. The displacement of forms of expertise and knowledge is located precisely in those locations previously ghettoized, for example Britain and the United States, while continuing to deny or disavow the workings of race across Europe.

This process of displacement and disavowal is precisely enacted in the debate among European feminists and other critical scholars on the use of the term "race" (or *rasse* in contemporary German, Scandinavian, and other European contexts). *Rasse* is an unspeakable, unknowable, and by implication unlived process, while race is lived "over there" or treated as an import into "here." This constructs a binary divide of Britain and the United States versus Europe while failing to engage the lived quality of these terms in the here and now of the situated context, including that of the temporary institution of a feminist conference. Yet the affective force with which debates about these terms, their social relevance, and analytic utility is felt shows that such debates have much at stake beyond abstract rationalities and analytic utilities of the terminological corpus with which we conduct social inquiry. Thus, for feminists in some parts of Europe to seemingly uncritically reproduce the position that race is unutterable and without analytic utility in the contemporary European context can be experienced as an act of epistemological and social erasure—erasure both of contemporary realities of intersectional subjects (including racialization of whiteness) and of the history of racial categories and racializing processes across the whole of Europe.

## Conclusion

The foregoing has been an act of recall in the context of the toxic and escalating manifestations of race in Europe, and in this it is painful but thought-provoking material. I am aware of the paradox that the argument is firmly located in a hated category called race, and yet this category and its toxicity cannot be wished away. Rather, this has to be faced in all its feltness and livedness so that its structural, relational, and experiential constitutive power might be undone. This has been a call to feminists of color and white feminists to take account of the social and affective relations of encounter and engagement when we meet. A call to pay attention

to the political and emotional investments inscribed in and constituted by theoretical work, development, and debate. A vast and flexible array of theoretical subjects are conjured in our discussions of intersectionality, and in the temporary institutions we set up to further refine intesectional inquiry and to make it more relevant to feminist scholarship. But alongside these theoretical subjects are the embodied-sentient, living and breathing, thinking and feeling subjects who are intersectionality's empirical subjects, in all their categorical variety and situated specificity. Our temporary institutions, along with all the other elements in the transnational feminist infrastructure (including journals), are the locations where these two categories of subject collide. Our duty to each other and ourselves is to remember the distinction and not proceed as if all the old tensions connected to unequal and differential positionalities are resolved or as if our commitment to intersectional work absolves any of us from taking care. What's more, taking care involves attending to that which we displace and disavow—and consideration of why this occurs.

Finally, the stakes involve more than how a transnational feminism might be fashioned around a conception that is as inclusive and ambitious as was originally imagined and desired. Of equal concern is the possible foreclosure of the vitally important work of divesting Europe of its claim to moral and social superiority, often articulated as European values. Part of this involves precisely unmasking the diverse ways in which race, in intersection with other categories, works in Europe. Foreclosure on this will only make it harder to establish as true, socially and experientially, that race is a constructed category.

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