Intersectionality and Feminist Politics

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Intersectionality and Feminist Politics

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ABSTRACT   This article explores various analytical issues involved in conceptualizing the interrelationships of gender, class, race and ethnicity and other social divisions. It compares the debate on these issues that took place in Britain in the 1980s and around the 2001 UN World Conference Against Racism. It examines issues such as the relative helpfulness of additive or mutually constitutive models of intersectional social divisions; the different analytical levels at which social divisions need to be studied, their ontological base and their relations to each other. The final section of the article attempts critically to assess a specific intersectional methodological approach for engaging in aid and human rights work in the South.

KEY WORDS   identity politics ◆ intersectionality ◆ social divisions ◆ social positionings

In the introduction to her book *Ain't I a Woman*, bell hooks (1981) poured scorn on the then common analogue many feminists used between the situation of women and the situation of Blacks. 'This implies', she argued, 'that all women are White and all Blacks are men.' That was one of the starting points of an analytical and political move by Black and other feminists and social scientists to deconstruct the categories of both 'women' and 'Blacks' and to develop an analysis of the intersectionality of various social divisions, most often – but not exclusively – focusing on gender, race and class (for a more detailed history see, for example, Brah and Phoenix, 2004).

The term 'intersectionality' itself was introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), when she discussed issues of black women's employment in the US. She was eventually invited to introduce the notion of intersectionality before a special session on the subject in Geneva during the preparatory session to the World Conference Against Racism (WCAR) in September 2001 in Durban, South Africa. In her introduction to the session of the Non Governmental Organizations' (NGO) Forum in the

WCAR in which the issue was discussed, Radhika Coomaraswamy, the special rapporteur of the UN Secretariat on violence against women, stated that the term 'intersectionality' had become tremendously popular and was used in various UN and NGO forums. Indeed, on 23 April 2002, at the 58th session of the UN Commission on Human Rights, the resolution on the human rights of women stated in its first paragraph that it:

> . . . recognized the importance of examining the intersection of multiple forms of discrimination, including their root causes from a gender perspective. (Resolution E/CN.4/2002/L.59)

In this article, I examine some of the analytical issues involved in the interrelationships of gender, class, race and ethnicity and other social divisions. The main body of the article examines some 1980s (particularly British) debates and considers how these issues have been represented in ideas about intersecting social divisions used for political, legal and policy purposes, especially in forums discussing UN human rights' discourse. Towards the end of the article, I assess the attempt to develop a specific intersectional methodological approach for engaging in aid and human rights work in the South.

CONTEXTUALIZING FEMINISM: GENDER, ETHNIC AND CLASS DIVISIONS

In a recent paper, Alison Woodward (2005) argues that discussions on issues of diversity and intersectionality have 'arrived' in European equality policies as a result of the influence of consultants and thinkers from the US. This is significant since these issues have been debated by European (especially – but not only – British) feminist scholars since the end of the 1970s but, apparently, without noticeable effect on policymakers.

In 1983, Floya Anthias and I published an article in *Feminist Review*[1] arguing against the notion of 'triple oppression' then prevalent among British Black Feminists (in organizations such as the Organization of Women of African and Asian Descent [OWAAD]; see Bryan et al., 1985). That article also laid the foundations of the analytical framework that we further developed in our book *Racialized Boundaries* (Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1992) and in our separate work since (e.g. Anthias, 1998, 2001, 2002; Yuval-Davis, 1994, 1997, 2005, 2006).

As is shown later in this article, the issues raised by the 1983 paper are no longer limited to the preoccupations of Black and other ethnic minority feminists but continue, in some ways, to be at the heart of feminist theory and practice. To the extent that the debate has not been lost in

postmodernist discussions of 'difference' and has retained its original political importance, the question of whether to interpret the intersectionality of social divisions as an additive or as a constitutive process is still central. This debate can also be constructed as a debate between identity politics and transversal politics[2] (Cockburn and Hunter, 1999; Yuval-Davis, 1994, 1997) or between the recognition and recognition/distribution models of the politics of difference (Benhabib, 2002; Fraser, 1997). However, as demonstrated throughout the article, what is at the heart of the debate is conflation or separation of the different analytic levels in which intersectionality is located, rather than just a debate on the relationship of the divisions themselves.

Before turning to more recent developments, it is useful to sum up the original debate. When it was first presented, the 'triple oppression' notion was basically a claim that Black women suffer from three different oppressions/disadvantages/discriminations/exploitations (the analytical difference between these terms is not clear in the original OWAAD formulations). They suffer oppression as: Blacks, women and members of the working class.

Our argument against the 'triple oppression' approach was that there is no such thing as suffering from oppression 'as Black', 'as a woman', 'as a working-class person'. We argued that each social division has a different ontological basis, which is irreducible to other social divisions (as is elaborated later in the article). However, this does not make it less important to acknowledge that, in concrete experiences of oppression, being oppressed, for example, as 'a Black person' is always constructed and intermeshed in other social divisions (for example, gender, social class, disability status, sexuality, age, nationality, immigration status, geography, etc.). Any attempt to essentialize 'Blackness' or 'womanhood' or 'working classness' as specific forms of concrete oppression in additive ways inevitably conflates narratives of identity politics with descriptions of positionality as well as constructing identities within the terms of specific political projects. Such narratives often reflect hegemonic discourses of identity politics that render invisible experiences of the more marginal members of that specific social category and construct an homogenized 'right way' to be its member. Ironically, this was exactly the reason black women and members of other marginalized groupings felt the need for what is known today as an intersectional analysis, except that in such identity politics constructions what takes place is actually fragmentation and multiplication of the wider categorical identities rather than more dynamic, shifting and multiplex constructions of intersectionality. Sandra Harding (1991) recognized this. Following the critique by Baca Zinn and Stanley (1986) of the ways in which White feminists dealt with issues of race and ethnicity, she claimed:

> . . . the additive approaches to race issues could no more be contained
> within the terrains one might have envisioned for them at the start than
> could the 'add women and stir' approaches to gender issues. (Harding,
> 1991: 212)

However, 20 years later, while the picture is somewhat different, there
is still great confusion about these issues.

INTERSECTIONALITY IN CONTEMPORARY PUBLIC INTERNATIONAL DISCOURSE

Although the use of the term intersectionality did not appear until later,
several discussion documents on intersectionality (such as that of the
Working Group on Women and Human Rights at the Center for Women's
Global Leadership in Rutgers University and of the Women's Inter-
national League for Peace and Freedom UK Section [www.wilpf.org] in
2001) point to the UN Beijing Platform for Action (1995) as including the
core elements of an intersectional approach. They call for governments:

> . . . to intensify efforts to ensure equal enjoyment of all human rights and
> fundamental freedoms for all women and girls who face multiple barriers to
> their empowerment and advancement because of such factors as their race,
> age, language, ethnicity, culture, religion or disability or because they are
> indigenous people. (Center for Women's Global Leadership, 2001)

The UN CERD Committee (2000) adopted General Recommendation 25
on the gender-related dimensions of racial discrimination, which recog-
nizes the need for sessional working methods to analyse the relationship
between gender and racial discrimination.

However, it was in the Expert Meeting on Gender and Racial Discrimi-
nation that took place in Zagreb in November 2000 as part of the prepara-
tory process to the UN WCAR conference that a more specific analysis
and a proposal for a specific methodology for intersectionality were
attempted.

The discussion on the methodological approach attempted in that
forum is presented later. However, the analytic attempts to explain inter-
sectionality in the reports that came out of this meeting are confusing. The
imagery of crossroads and traffic as developed by Crenshaw (2001)
occupies a central space:

> Intersectionality is what occurs when a woman from a minority group . . .
> tries to navigate the main crossing in the city. . . . The main highway is
> 'racism road'. One cross street can be Colonialism, then Patriarchy Street. . . .
> She has to deal not only with one form of oppression but with all forms,
> those named as road signs, which link together to make a double, a triple,
> multiple, a many layered blanket of oppression.[3]

The additive nature of this image, however, is very different from the one that appears in the Australian Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission Issue Paper 2001 that states that:

> An intersectional approach asserts that aspects of identity are indivisible and that speaking of race and gender in isolation from each other results in concrete disadvantage. (Australian Human Rights and EOC, 2001: 2)

The emphasis on identity in this analysis is also different from the structural emphasis in the report of the Working Group on Women and Human Rights of the Center for Women's Global Leadership. According to them, the:

> Intersectional approach to analysing the disempowerment of marginalized women attempts to capture the consequences of the interaction between two or more forms of subordination. It addresses the manner in which racism, patriarchy, class oppression and other discriminatory systems create inequalities that structure the relative positions of women, races, ethnicities, classes and the like. Moreover, intersectionality addresses the way the specific acts and policies operate together to create further empowerment. (Center for Women's Global Leadership, 2001: 1)

And yet in the next paragraph, all these different levels of analysis are conflated together and reduced to 'identities':

> Racially subordinated women and other multiply burdened groups who are located at these intersections by virtue of their specific identities must negotiate the traffic that flows from these intersections in order to obtain the resources for the normal activities of life. (Center for Women's Global Leadership, 2001: 1)

Identities are individual and collective narratives that answer the question 'who am/are I/we?' In contemporary literature they are often required to 'perform' analytical tasks beyond their abilities (Anthias, 2002; Brubaker and Cooper, 2000; Yuval-Davis, 1994, 1997). One of the problematics of the additive intersectionality model is that it often remains on one level of analysis, the experiential, and does not differentiate between different levels. The most sophisticated version of this mode has been that of Philomena Essed (1991, 2001). In introductory courses on intersectionality such as in the University of Washington Transformation Project, studies by Essed and Crenshaw are identified as major influences on the development of the intersectionality approach. Essed (1991) links intersectionality to what she calls 'gendered racism'. She claims that:

> . . . racisms and genderisms are rooted in specific histories designating separate as well as mutually interwoven formations of race, ethnicity and gender. (Essed, 2001: 1)

Unlike Essed, who focuses on incidents of 'everyday racism', Crenshaw (1993) differentiates between structural and political intersectionality and resists the conflation of the positional and the discursive. Structural intersectionality pertains to:

> . . . the ways in which the location of women of colour at the intersection of race and gender makes our actual experience of domestic violence, rape and remedial reform qualitatively different from that of white women. (Crenshaw, 1993: 3)

Political intersectionality relates to the manner in which:

> . . . both feminist and antiracist politics have functioned in tandem to marginalize the issue of violence against women of colour. (Crenshaw, 1993: 3)

Other feminists who have been using intersectional analysis in a constitutive way have generally been even more careful in separating different levels of analysis (e.g. Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1983, 1992). Social divisions are about macro axes of social power but also involve actual, concrete people. Social divisions have organizational, intersubjective, experiential and representational forms, and this affects the ways we theorize them as well as the ways in which we theorize the connections between the different levels. In other words, they are expressed in specific institutions and organizations, such as state laws and state agencies, trade unions, voluntary organizations and the family. In addition, they involve specific power and affective relationships between actual people, acting informally and/or in their roles as agents of specific social institutions and organizations.

Social divisions also exist in the ways people experience subjectively their daily lives in terms of inclusion and exclusion, discrimination and disadvantage, specific aspirations and specific identities. Importantly, this includes not only what they think about themselves and their communities but also their attitudes and prejudices towards others. Finally, they also exist at the level of representation, being expressed in images and symbols, texts and ideologies, including those to do with legislation. Avtar Brah (1996) presents a somewhat similar model of four different levels of analysis for the participation of Asian women in the British labour market.

Unlike Mary Maynard (1994), who suggests that the analytic differentiation of social divisions pivots on a distinction between the material and the representational, our earlier study (Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1983) had warned against such a differentiation, on the grounds that each level of analysis has both material and symbolic production and effects (for an elaboration of this point see Anthias, 2001). Brah (1996) similarly warns

against a binary divide between structure and culture since both are constructed as relational processes and neither is privileged over the other.

DIFFERENT KINDS OF DIFFERENCE

Different social divisions, such as class, race and ethnicity, tend to have certain parameters in common. They tend to be 'naturalized', to be seen as resulting from biological destiny linked to differential genetic pools of intelligence and personal characteristics (Cohen, 1988). This naturalization operates similarly, if not even more so, in relation to gender and sexuality, ability and age. What is important to emphasize here, however, is that in different cultural traditions naturalizing narratives can be different, and certain naturalized categories can be emphasized more than others. For example, in some cultural traditions the elderly are considered to be wise while in others the elderly can be constructed as in 'second childhood'. These naturalizing discourses can also be used as discourses of resistance in which, for example, 'black is beautiful' and 'women are really the stronger sex'.

What is common to all these discourses of naturalization is that they tend to homogenize social categories and to treat all who belong to a particular social category as sharing equally the particular natural attributes (positive or negative) specific to it. Categorical attributes are often used for the construction of inclusionary/exclusionary boundaries that differentiate between self and other, determining what is 'normal' and what is not, who is entitled to certain resources and who is not. In this way the interlinking grids of differential positionings in terms of class, race and ethnicity, gender and sexuality, ability, stage in the life cycle and other social divisions, tend to create, in specific historical situations, hierarchies of differential access to a variety of resources – economic, political and cultural.

However, there is a need to differentiate carefully between different kinds of difference. In her discussion of epistemology, Sandra Harding (1997: 385) commented that in addition to differences relating to differential power positionings, there are also '"mere differences" – the cultural differences that would shape different knowledge projects even where there were no oppressive social relations between different cultures'. In our article on the situated imagination (Stoetzler and Yuval-Davis, 2002), we pointed out that we need to add to the two dimensions Harding posits a third, which is not necessarily implied in either of the other two: Alison Assiter's (1996) notion of 'epistemic communities', in which political values, rather than location across power grids or cultural perspectives, become the unifying factors and shape access to knowledge collectively rather than individually.

By incorporating these different kinds of differences into our analysis we can avoid conflating positionings, identities and values. We can also avoid attributing fixed identity groupings to the dynamic processes of positionality and location on the one hand and the contested and shifting political construction of categorical boundaries on the other (for further elaboration of this point, see Yuval-Davis, 2006). This is a problem that, as shown later, is only partially overcome in Fraser's (1997) recognition/redistribution model and Benhabib's (2002) sponsoring of it.

THE IRREDUCIBILITY OF SOCIAL DIVISIONS

While all social divisions share some features and are concretely constructed by/intermeshed with each other, it is important also to note that they are not reducible to each other. We are not talking here only about a unidimensional differentiation between the powerful and the powerless, nor are some differentiations just a reflection of more profound others. To be Black or a woman is not another way of being working class, or even a particular type of working-class person. This is not to deny that in a specific historical context – or even in most concrete historical situations – people are not scattered randomly along the different axes of power of different social divisions. Often people who are positioned in a specific location along one such axis also tend to concentrate in a specific location of another one (e.g. the majority of Black people in contemporary western countries would be found among the lower socioeconomic classes and women would tend to be poorer than men). This is why Nancy Fraser (1997) can assert that gender and race are what she calls bivalent collectivities that cut across the redistribution and recognition spectrum while class relates to the redistributive model and 'despised sexualities' to the social and cultural recognition one. However, such generalizations are historically specific, are not inherently valid in every situation and are under continuous processes of contestation and change. When people are excluded from specific jobs, like teaching or becoming a bishop, as recently happened in the Anglican Church, because of their sexualities, this concerns not only their social and cultural recognition but also their economic position. What is important is to analyse how specific positionings and (not necessarily corresponding) identities and political values are constructed and interrelate and affect each other in particular locations and contexts. Similarly important would be an examination of the particular ways in which the different divisions are intermeshed. One cannot assume the same effect or constellation each time and, hence, the investigation of the specific social, political and economic processes involved in each historical instance is important.

At the same time, it is important to remember that the ontological basis

of each of these divisions is autonomous, and each prioritizes different spheres of social relations (Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1983, 1992). For example, class divisions are grounded in relation to the economic processes of production and consumption; gender should be understood not as a 'real' social difference between men and women, but as a mode of discourse that relates to groups of subjects whose social roles are defined by their sexual/biological difference while sexuality is yet another related discourse, relating to constructions of the body, sexual pleasure and sexual intercourse. Ethnic and racial divisions relate to discourses of collectivities constructed around exclusionary/inclusionary boundaries (Barth, 1969) that can be constructed as permeable and mutable to different extents and that divide people into 'us' and 'them'. Such boundaries are often organized around myths (whether historically valid or not) of common origin and/or common destiny. Constructions of the body, religious and other cultural codes concerning marriage and divorce are crucial in constructing those boundaries. 'Ability' or, rather, 'disability' involves even vaguer and more heterogeneous discourses than those relating to ethnicity, as people can be 'disabled' in so many different ways. However, they involve discourses of 'normality' from which all disabled people are excluded. Age represents the dimension of time and the life cycle and shows even more clearly than other social divisions how categories and their boundaries are not fixed and how their social and political meanings can vary in different historical contexts as well as being continually challenged and restructured both individually and socially.

WHICH SOCIAL DIVISIONS?

One of the differences among the different approaches to intersectionality that were portrayed in the earlier sections is that while some (especially Essed, Crenshaw and Harding) focus on the particular positions of women of colour, others (such as Brah, Maynard, Anthias and Yuval-Davis) have been constructed in more general terms, applicable to any grouping of people, advantaged as well as disadvantaged. This expands the arena of intersectionality to a major analytical tool that challenges hegemonic approaches to the study of stratification as well as reified forms of identity politics.

   One of the issues represented, implicitly or explicitly, in much of the literature is how many social divisions are involved and/or which ones should be incorporated into the analysis of the intersectionality process. As mentioned earlier, among Black and other minority ethnic feminists, whether or not they adhered to the model of 'triple oppression', race (or race and ethnicity), gender and class are perceived to be the three major social divisions. Other feminist theorists add other dimensions, such as

age (e.g. Bradley, 1996); disability (e.g. Meekosha and Dowse, 1997; Oliver, 1995); sedentarism (e.g. Lentin, 1999) or sexuality (e.g. Kitzinger, 1987). One of the most comprehensive attempts to include additional axes of social divisions is that of Helma Lutz – although in her formulation they are not axes but rather 'basic dualisms'; this is problematic and she herself considers it a 'challenge to consider the spaces in-between' (Lutz, 2002: 13). Her list includes the following 14 'lines of difference': gender; sexuality; 'race'/skin-colour; ethnicity; nation/state; class; culture; ability; age; sedentariness/origin; wealth; North–South; religion; stage of social development. Lutz, however, sees this list as 'by no means complete; other categories have to be added or re-defined' (Lutz, 2002: 13). Indeed, the list is potentially boundless. This is, no doubt, one of the reasons why Crenshaw, when she presented her model of intersectionality at the WCAR conference, produced a visual image of a person standing at a road junction, vehicles coming at her from an indeterminate number of cross-cutting roads.

Do we have to be concerned that the list is limitless? Judith Butler (1990) mocks the 'etc.' that often appears at the end of lists of social divisions mentioned by feminists (e.g. at the beginning of this article) and sees it as an embarrassed admission of a 'sign of exhaustion as well as of the illimitable process of signification itself' (Butler, 1990: 143). As Fraser (1997) and Knapp (1999) make clear, such a critique is valid only within the discourse of identity politics where there is a correspondence between positionings and social groupings. This is the way additive/fragmentation models of social divisions operate. When no such conflation takes place, Knapp finds rightly that Butler's talk:

> . . . 'of an illimitable process of signification' can be reductionist if it is generalized in an unspecified way. An analytical perspective which, in a critical or affirmative fashion, concentrates exclusively on the symbolic modes of construction and representation of 'difference' (as identity) runs the risk of levelling historically constituted 'factual' differences and thereby suppressing 'difference' on its own terms. (Knapp, 1999: 130)

Knapp's critique of Butler clarifies the crucial importance of the separation of the different analytical levels in which social divisions need to be examined (discussed earlier). She calls for 'theory formation and research which accounts for the diverse conditions which gave rise to the constitution of differences as well as their historical interconnectedness' (Knapp, 1999: 130) – or, using the terminology presented here, the ways different social divisions are constructed by, and intermeshed with, each other in specific historical conditions.

There is an important question that needs to be made explicit, however, although it will not necessarily be possible to answer it. Is the issue what Butler calls 'the illimitable process of signification itself' or are there, in

any particular historical condition, specific and limited numbers of social divisions that construct the grid of power relations within which the different members of the society are located? There are two different answers to this question, which are not mutually exclusive. The first is that in specific historical situations and in relation to specific people there are some social divisions that are more important than others in constructing specific positionings. At the same time, there are some social divisions, such as gender, stage in the life cycle, ethnicity and class, that tend to shape most people's lives in most social locations, while other social divisions such as those relating to membership in particular castes or status as indigenous or refugee people tend to affect fewer people globally. At the same time, for those who are affected by these and other social divisions not mentioned here, such social divisions are crucial and necessitate struggle to render them visible. This is, therefore, a case where recognition – of social power axes, not of social identities – is of crucial political importance.

The second answer relates to what Castoriadis (1987) called the 'creative imagination' (see also Stoetzler and Yuval-Davis, 2002) that underlies linguistic and other social categories of signification. Although certain social conditions may facilitate this, the construction of categories of signification is, in the last instance, a product of human creative freedom and autonomy. Without specific social agents who construct and point to certain analytical and political features, the rest of us would not be able to distinguish them. Rainbows include the whole spectrum of different colours, but how many colours we distinguish depends on our specific social and linguistic milieu. It is for this reason that struggles for recognition always include an element of construction and that studying the relationships between positionings, identities and political values is so important (and impossible if they are all reduced to the same ontological level).

INTERSECTIONALITY AS A HUMAN RIGHTS POLICY METHODOLOGY

Beyond ontological questions of how many social divisions there are and whether we are dealing with axes of social divisions, dualistic lines of difference or specific forms of discrimination, it is important to note that there is often a conflation between vectors of discrimination and difference and identity groupings. In her presentation to the WCAR conference on intersectionality, Charlotte Bunch described 16 vectors of difference (from gender and class to indigenousness and rural living), and concluded that 'If the human rights of any are left unprotected – if we are willing to sacrifice the rights of any group, the human rights of all are

undermined' (Center for Women's Global Leadership, 2001: 111). This is problematic both theoretically and politically, as it constructs difference per se as automatic grounds for both discrimination and entitlement for defence from discrimination. It does not attend to the differential positionings of power in which different identity groups can be located in specific historical contexts, let alone the dynamics of power relations within these groups. Nor does it give recognition to the potentially contested nature of the boundaries of these identity groupings and the possibly contested political claims for representation of people located in the same social positionings. These problematics have also affected attempts to construct a methodological approach to intersectionality in development and human rights fieldwork as pursued by Bunch's Center for Women's Global Leadership and presented to the WCAR conference.

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH TO INTERSECTIONAL
POLICY

Intersectional analysis has been introduced to human rights discourse as part of gender mainstreaming, for 'the full diversity of women's experiences' to be considered, and in order 'to enhance women's empowerment' (Center for Women's Global Leadership, 2001). As the background briefing paper on intersectionality of the Working Group on Women and Human Rights of the Center for Women's Global Leadership claims, 'developing of new and augmenting of existing methodologies to uncover the ways multiple identities converge to create and exacerbate women's subordination' is critical.

> These methodologies will not only underline the significance of the intersection of race, ethnicity, caste, citizenship status for marginalized women etc but serve to highlight the full diversity of women's experiences. (Center for Women's Global Leadership, 2001: 1)

The methodology suggested by the working group has four distinct components:

• Data collection, which depends on the availability of desegregated data of various social, legal and identity categories of women. The need for desegregated data was highlighted during the WCAR conference in several forums, including by Mary Robinson, the then UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, who organized the WCAR conference.
• Contextual analysis, which would probe 'beneath the single identity to discover other identities that may be present and contribute to the situation of disadvantage'.

- Intersectional review of policy initiatives and systems of implementation in terms of their efficacy in addressing the problems faced by different intersectional identities.
- Implementation of intersectional policy initiatives based on the above.

This policy methodology seems impressive and a step forward. However, it also raises difficult and complex empirical as well as analytical questions. The construction of categories of desegregated data would, by definition be unambiguous and mutually exclusive, in contrast to the situation generally found in the field. Yet, as Ashish Nandi (1983) points out, even an apparently simple category of ascription as membership in a religious community is often ambiguous and multiplex, as people in many parts of the world may associate with more than one religion at the same time and/or worship in completely different ways and along different lines of religious authority under the same nominal religion. Benedict Anderson (1991) has identified the devastating effects the introduction of mutually exclusive census categories has had on colonial societies in which peaceful coexistence of communities often depended on categorical opaqueness. In addition, there is no differentiation between categories of positionality and social identities. This could render invisible the crucially important political struggles being carried out in many parts of the world that problematize and contest the boundaries of social collectivities. Such boundaries are naturalized by specific hegemonic political projects in order to exclude and marginalize certain people. The point of intersectional analysis is not to find 'several identities under one' – as the methodology described earlier suggests. This would reinscribe the fragmented, additive model of oppression and essentialize specific social identities. Instead, the point is to analyse the differential ways in which different social divisions are concretely enmeshed and constructed by each other and how they relate to political and subjective constructions of identities.

This means that field methodology should carefully separate, and examine separately, the different levels in which social divisions operate in the communities where they work and which were discussed earlier, i.e. institutionally, intersubjectively, representationally as well as in the subjective constructions of identities. Only when such a contextual analysis is carried out can there be an intersectional review of policy initiatives and systems of implementation. Such a review should involve, in addition to the policy-makers, as many people on the ground as possible. The differential positionings and perspectives of the participants in such a dialogue should be acknowledged without treating them as representatives of any fixed social grouping. As in similar feminist dialogues that Italian and other feminists have termed 'transversal'

(Cockburn and Hunter, 1999; Yuval-Davis, 1994, 1997), the boundaries of the dialogue should be determined by common political emancipatory goals while the tactical and strategic priorities should be led by those whose needs are judged by the participants of the dialogue to be the most urgent.

CONCLUSION

Intersectional analysis of social divisions has come to occupy central spaces in both sociological and other analyses of stratification as well as in feminist and other legal, political and policy discourses of international human rights. There has been a gradual recognition of the inadequacy of analysing various social divisions, but especially race and gender, as separate, internally homogeneous, social categories resulting in the marginalization of the specific effects of these, especially on women of colour.

However, the analysis and the methodology of intersectionality, especially in UN-related bodies is just emerging and often suffers from analytical confusions that have already been tackled by feminist scholars who have been working on these issues for longer, outside the specific global feminist networks that developed around the Beijing Forum. Wider dialogue and articulation of problems would be useful to both feminist scholars and global feminist networks.

NOTES

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1.   Reprinted also in Lovell (1990).
2.   Transversal politics is a democratic practice of alliances across boundaries of difference (see Yuval-Davis, 1997).
3.   Report of the WCAR meeting as presented by Indira Patel to a day seminar in London organized by WILPF UK, November 2001.

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