

## In Dialogue: Postcolonial Theory and Intersectionality

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### Abstract

*Postcolonial theory and intersectionality are the most prominent approaches in current critical social sciences. Surprisingly, both approaches have hardly talked to each other. Influenced by the German academic debate on these, I illustrate the (dis-)connecting relations of both approaches and initiate a dialogue. In a first step, I focus on the work of Chandra T. Mohanty and of Kimberlé Crenshaw. While Mohanty bases her criticism on a discourse analysis of writings about 'Third-World-Women' and develops a postcolonial feminist approach, Crenshaw analyzes the intersection of gender and 'race' and criticizes the blindness of the interconnection in court decisions in the US. I demonstrate the differences and resemblances of both approaches and argue in particular that both approaches follow a constructivist methodology which creates four nodal points for the fruitful dialogue. I illustrate this by analyzing the works of Sojourner Truth and Clara Zetkin. Both feminists focus on different categories in the triangle of 'race', class and gender. Through a close reading of crucial selected works, I show that Truth perceives gender and 'race' as equivalent forms of subordination. Zetkin, however, emphasizes the hierarchical subordination by the specific class position of women. I conclude that a closer dialogue between both theoretical perspectives can help to sharpen the view on multiple discrimination and injustice in times of neoliberal capitalist hegemony.*

**Keywords:** Postcolonial Theory, Intersectionality, Feminism, Sojourner Truth, Clara Zetkin

### Im Gespräch: Postkoloniale Theorie und Intersektionalität

#### Zusammenfassung

*Postkoloniale Theorie und Intersektionalität gehören zu den wichtigsten Ansätzen der gegenwärtigen kritischen Sozialwissenschaften. Überraschenderweise scheint es kaum einen Dialog zwischen beiden Ansätzen zu geben. Ich versuche beide Ansätze in den Dialog zu bringen und analysiere sie vor dem Hintergrund der deutschsprachigen akademischen Debatte auf ihre Gemeinsamkeiten und Unterschiede. Zuerst gehe ich dabei auf die Arbeiten von Chandra Mohanty und Kimberlé Crenshaw ein. Während Erstere diskursanalytisch Arbeiten zu ‚Dritte-Welt-Frauen‘ untersucht und einen feministisch-postkolonialen Ansatz entwickelt, richtet Crenshaw ihren Blick auf die Verbindung von Geschlechter- und ‚race‘-Diskriminierung anhand von Gerichtsurteilen in den USA. Ich argumentiere, dass eine konstruktivistische Methodologie auf vier Knotenpunkten beruht und diese den Boden für den Dialog bereiten. In einem zweiten Schritt nutze ich diese für die intersektionale und postkoloniale Analyse der Arbeiten von Sojourner Truth und Clara Zetkin. Truth problematisiert eine gleichrangige Unterdrückung durch Geschlechter- und ‚race‘-Fragen, während Zetkin die hierarchische Unterdrückung durch die spezifische Klassenposition von Frauen hervorhebt. Eine Verbindung beider Ansätze wird im Fazit befürwortet, um Diskriminierungen und Ungerechtigkeiten in Zeiten neoliberaler kapitalistischer Hegemonie multidimensional zu erfassen.*

**Schlagwörter:** Postkoloniale Theorie, Intersektionalität, Feminismus, Sojourner Truth, Clara Zetkin

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## 1. Introduction

The following text is motivated by two interests. *Firstly*, in the feminist *Missy magazine* the rap musician Sookee refers to Olympe de Gouges, Sojourner Truth and Clara Zetkin as important thinkers of (queer-) feminism (Sookee 2013). Even though I am familiar with de Gouges and Zetkin, I did not know Sojourner Truth. De Gouges was one of the female activists in the French Revolution, claiming the same universal rights for women as for men.<sup>1</sup> Clara Zetkin was one of the famous socialist thinkers in the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) around 1900. She strongly influenced SPD party politics in relation to gender issues and was the chief editor of the women's journal *Gleichheit* from 1892 until 1917. By searching for Sojourner Truth's biography, I discovered that Truth was one of the first 'black'<sup>2</sup> women in the United States who combined the fight for suffrage with anti-slavery demands in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. My knowledge about first-wave feminism as a 'white' European middle-class man symbolizes my situated perspective on feminism. Therefore I would like to scrutinize the boundaries of my present knowledge by analyzing two approaches of first-wave<sup>3</sup> feminists. For my comparison I chose the works of Sojourner Truth and Clara Zetkin since I see them as part of 'first wave' feminism.

My *second interest* lies in the theoretical dialogue between two contemporary and important social scien-

ces approaches: postcolonial theory<sup>4</sup> and intersectionality. For the last two decades it seemed that postcolonial studies and intersectional approaches existed side by side for a long time.<sup>5</sup> I will argue that a dialogue between both approaches is useful to uncover differences and resemblances and to avoid pitfalls. Therefore, my aim is to elaborate and emphasize the (dis-)connecting nodal points between intersectional and postcolonial approach.

Furthermore in a close reading of Truth's and Zetkin's works I can shed (empirical) light on the suggested dialogue between postcolonial theory and intersectionality. Analyzing the writings of Zetkin and Truth helps to situate intersectional and postcolonial perspectives in a historical context. I will demonstrate that both approaches are not only relevant for studies about present, but also for past feminist struggles in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Moreover, both theorists are ignored in introductions to postcolonial theory (e.g. Moore-Gilbert 2000; Ashcroft et al. 2003; Young 2003) which is surprising for the case of Sojourner Truth<sup>6</sup> because of her well-known and researched biography and her presence in the US feminist discourse (see chap. 3.1). Regarding Zetkin only very few researchers still draw their attention to the work of Zetkin. My suggestion is that the 'German Reich'<sup>7</sup> is less perceived as (post-)colonial territory (in comparison to France or USA). One reason is that Germany is perceived as a 'post-fascist society' and not as a post-colonial society. The memory about the Holocaust, the Nazi regime and the Second World War is much more present than the colonial legacy nowadays (Messerschmidt 2008). Thus, Zetkin is not in the focus of postcolonial theory.

1 By exchanging 'man' to 'woman' in her declaration, de Gouges is "pointing to the parallel status of women and blacks as commodities on the market, she [de Gouges, S. W.] returns to the connection between gender and race oppression that characterizes her work from its very beginning, and unveils the limited application of the canonical expression of universal human rights which ignores non-property owning and colonized men as well as all women" (Diamond 1994: 16). The equation of gender and 'race' oppression is problematic, but apparently often used in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century (see below).

2 In the following I do not write 'black' with a capital B. I indicate with the single quotation marks the social-political constructiveness of racialized description such as 'black', 'race' or 'white'. I perceive the spelling 'black' with the capital B as a self-empowerment and resistant practice by people of color, but, because I am white, I do not adopt this practice.

3 The metaphor 'wave' has an implicit meaning as one movement with a common goal and in a certain time period (van der Tuin 2011). My use symbolizes the common interest in feminist questions at this time.

4 In the following, I use the terms postcolonial theory and postcolonial studies interchangeably.

5 The results of a conference concerning both approaches are documented in *Signs* (2013) and a special issue of the journal *Femina Politica* (2009) deals with questions of gender and postcolonial studies.

6 De Gouges is also not mentioned, but I chose Zetkin because of her assumed different social position in comparison to Truth. Moreover I can read Zetkin's work in the original language German.

7 The 'German Reich' was the name of the German nation state between 1871 and 1933. I use this term in reference to the lifetime of Zetkin and therefore it is historically more appropriate to write this than 'Germany'. Moreover, this time period is the main part of the German colonial and imperialistic phase.

Intersectional as well as postcolonial approaches are diverse research fields with different streams and foci (Dietze 2009; Castro Varela/Dhawan 2009b; Carbin/Edenheim 2013). Moreover, it seems that feminist research in postcolonial theory has still not been established and vice versa (Dietze 2009; Wollrad 2009); therefore another reason to promote the dialogue is to emphasize feminist encounters in postcolonial theories and postcolonial approaches in feminist theories. To deal with both ‘theories’ and handle their differences and resemblances consistently, I chose Chandra T. Mohanty and Kimberlé Crenshaw as representatives for each field. Mohanty as well as Crenshaw have had major impacts and have formulated crucial criticisms in their field. Investigating these theorists does not mean that there are no other researchers or new developments, but both are still important reference authors for the particular approach (see for instance Kerner 2009; Fink/Ruppert 2009; Franzki/Aikins 2010; Kerner 2012). My following discussion of postcolonial and intersectionality studies is mostly influenced by the German academic debate; with overlapping to recent developments in Western Europe and North American feminist research.

The aim of the article is, therefore, twofold: on the one hand, to start a dialogue between postcolonial and intersectionality studies by demonstrating that there are shared grounds on which both approaches can build up. On the other hand, to illustrate the suggested dialogue by a close reading of texts from Truth and Zetkin. For this purpose I use insights from the postcolonial and intersectionality studies. It is not about merging both approaches to a single approach, but to demonstrate that they complement each other.

The paper has been organised in the following way: In the first section, I give a short overview on postcolonial studies and the intersectionality approach; focusing on Mohanty for the first and Crenshaw for the last approach. In the last part of this section I show the differences as well as the similarities of both perspectives; in particular, I argue that they share a constructivist methodology. In order to then scrutinize Truth’s and Zetkin’s work from the proposed theoretical dialogue, I formulate two central questions: *Which* women do Zetkin and Truth address when they speak about women in general terms? And *how* do they want to liberate and emancipate women? These questions and terms such as ‘women’ or ‘emancipation’ are contextualized for each part and embedded in the theoretical literature. The last section concludes the findings and

reflects upon the idea of a dialogue between intersectional and postcolonial approaches.

## 2. Postcolonial theory and intersectionality

### 2.1 Situating postcolonial theory

The starting point of postcolonial theory is hard to define. We can look at it from an empirical and a theoretical perspective. *The empirical ground* for postcolonial theory refers mostly to the end of colonialism. However, the idea of un-colonized land as *terra nullius* was widely spread at the beginning of colonialism and theorists like John Locke justified the occupation of ‘empty land’. This occupation in the name of a colonial empire and the following ‘civilizing missions’ created the image of a colonized world which would not exist without European colonialism. It contains, thereby, a clear distinction between the active European civilized colonizer and a passive colonized savage. Colonization is therefore not brutal exploitation and domination, but a chance to civilize the colonized and cultivate the *terra nullius*, so the argument at this time (McClintock 1995: 30-31; Fitzmaurice 2007).

At the end of the colonial age, we have to consider that around 1930, almost 85 per cent of the world was occupied by one of the colonial empires (Gutiérrez Rodríguez 2008: 274). The process of decolonization already started after the First World War and had its highpoint between 1945 and 1975 (Jansen/Osterhammel 2013). More and more parts of the world became sovereign after anti-colonial movements and struggles for independence, and a postcolonial world has emerged. Castro Varela and Dhawan (2005: 11) state that also non-colonized areas and states such as China were (and still are) influenced by postcolonial structures and concepts.

Thus the term ‘postcolonial’ does not refer to the time after colonization. The time of colonization had a lasting impact on the political, economic and cultural spheres of postcolonial states and societies. The colonial period is still part of present time and is influencing the metropolis and the former colonies (e.g. McClintock 1995; Castro Varela/Dhawan 2009b; Hostettler/Vögele 2014). Or as Stuart Hall suggests, the concrete determination of the postcolonial includes both “after colonization” and “beyond colonization” and therefore both descriptions cannot be separated from each other (Hall 2002: 236-237). Concerning Truth’s and Zetkin’s situatedness in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, they lived during the

pivotal age of colonialism, were affected by the political and societal circumstances in the metropolis (USA and 'German Reich' as colonial powers) and therefore their social and political context was also a colonial one; in which Truth as an enslaved, female 'black' person in the US was more strongly subordinated and dominated by a colonial order than Zetkin (see ch. 3). Apart from these differences, their fight for gender equality and suffrage has influenced the later feminist struggle and is thus still relevant for the age of postcolonialism. By drawing on their insights in a colonial world we can better understand the past, illuminate already emerged feminist issues for current problems and enlighten blind spots in recent (postcolonial) developments.

*The theoretical debate* on postcolonial studies has started with the book *Orientalism* by Edward Said (1978), which can be seen as the founding document of postcolonial theory (Castro Varela/Dhawan 2005: 29).<sup>8</sup> Said is perceived as one of the three main protagonists of postcolonial studies, aside from Gayatri C. Spivak and Homi K. Bhabha (Castro Varela/Dhawan 2005). These theorists symbolize on the one hand the strong focus on discourse analytical, poststructuralist and deconstructivist approaches in postcolonial studies. On the other hand, the absence of a gender perspective in Bhabha's and Said's texts demonstrates how contested a postcolonial gender perspective is (Castro Varela/Dhawan 2009c: 69-71; Dietze 2009: 331-338).

The focus on these three theorists disguises the fact that there are earlier references, such as the writings by Franz Fanon (1961/1981). Nevertheless, the academic boom of postcolonial theory has started with Said's book, however, his work has not been without criticism: One criticism is that it is not clear if Said's concept of orientalism refers to a sort of representation mode to reality or should be seen as a mixture of both; as two orientalisms (Young 2004: 168-170). Another important critique by Sara Mills is that Said does not consider women and gender issues in his findings of a discursive production of orientalism as *the other* to Europe. Or to put it differently: *The other is male* in Said's text (Mills 1991: 57-63, also Dietze 2014). By omitting for instance the travel writings of women, Said ignores an impor-

tant part of the imperial and suppressed discursive construction of orientalism (Mills 1991).

## 2.2 Postcolonial critique by Mohanty

Mills' critique is directed against the lack of gender issues or a missing gender sensibility in (early) postcolonial studies.<sup>9</sup> In her article *Under Western Eyes* (1984) Chandra T. Mohanty identifies another crucial problem of postcolonial theory: While 'Western' feminist researchers are sensitive to gender issues, many of them constructed a paternalistic 'Western' perspective on 'Non-Western' issues. Furthermore, these thinkers claimed the 'Non-Western' agencies by themselves. The result is the production of a "composite, singular 'Third-World-Woman'" (Mohanty 1984: 334), who acts apparently as a homogenous social group. Moreover, the universal claim by 'Western' feminists ignores the political, economic, social or cultural circumstances of these women and their specific situated knowledges (see also Haraway 1988). Mohanty states that many researchers do not take notice of the existing contingent power nor of structures of domination. She analyzes the claim of a 'global sisterhood' and criticizes that the 'Western' feminists are – more or less implicitly – the leading activists in the sisterhood and the 'Third World Women' are powerless and are seen as objects and victims (Mohanty 1984: 337-341).

In 2003 Mohanty critically re-read her article "Under Western Eyes" and explained her position. She especially rejects the criticism that she argues from a postmodern view and thus, argues against all forms of generalization. Mohanty also suspects that the label of her arguing from a postmodern viewpoint resulted from her focus on discourses and identity differences instead of materialist analysis and common characteristics (Mohanty 2003: 502; 504-505). Thus, Mohanty tries to point out that a combination of feminist and anti-capitalist approaches is necessary because neoliberal capitalism is currently the most dominant structure which relates to various forms of exclusion and discrimination (Mohanty 2003: 508-510). The recognition of class, gender, nation, sexuality, and 'race' categories for the feminist postcolonial approach is crucial in tackling

8 In this article, I do not refer to the whole area of postcolonial theory. For instance, Gandhi (1998) as well as Moore-Gilbert (2000) give instructive introductions in this field and show the variety and pluralism of postcolonial theory. I concentrate on feminist postcolonial theory to limit and strengthen my view.

9 In a recent interview on how to do "postcolonial studies differently" and crossing the dichotomy of colonizers and colonized, Mohamed Tozy does not refer to gender issues in general or intersectionality in specific (Hibou 2013). So, Mills' criticism contains still valid aspects.

the dominance of capitalist globalization and that is why all women are affected by this – in different ways and to different degrees. Or as Mohanty (2003: 518) states it: “We can put into practice the idea of ‘common differences’ as the basis for deeper solidarity across differences and unequal power relations”. To sum up Mohanty’s approach, she criticizes the absence of gender issues in early postcolonial writings, argues for a stronger reflexivity in ‘Western’ feminism and refers to a criticism of power relations and (neoliberal) capitalist exploitation.

### 2.3 Intersectionality as a new feminist approach

Mohanty has referred to a false universalistic claim of active ‘Western’ women and passive ‘Third-World-Women’, while the feminist legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw took a closer look at the discrimination level of ‘black’ ‘Western’ women at the same time and established the concept of intersectionality. The starting point of thinking about the intersection of different categories was the establishment of Black Feminism and Critical Race Theory in the 1970s which focused on the oppression of ‘black’ women and the lack of ‘race’ sensitivity in ‘Western’ second-wave feminist theory and activism. The anthology *All the Women are White, All the Men are White, but Some of Us Are Brave* edited by Hull, Bell Scott and Smith demonstrates exemplarily this problematic understanding of ‘white’ feminists who ignore the overlapping of ‘race’ and gender issues for women of color. Simultaneously, the authors reclaim a critical race perspective on gender issues and unfold the marginalization of ‘black’ feminists in the women’s movement (Hull et al. 1982/2010). Another prominent ‘black’ feminist statement is expressed by the Combahee River Collective (1978: 210):

*“[W]e [black feminists, S. W.] are actively committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression and see as our particular task the development of integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that the major systems of oppressions are interlocking”.*

These two examples clearly show that Crenshaw did not establish a complete new idea, but built up on these insights and gave them a new turn (Davis 2008). In particular, Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) analyzes court judgments against ‘black’ women in the USA and shows that they were either recognized as ‘black’ or as women. Therefore these women were discriminated twice; racially discriminated as people of color and gender discriminated as women. She concludes that the “intersectional experience [for black women, the author] is

greater than the sum of racism and sexism” (Crenshaw 1989: 140) which makes it necessary to develop a framework for analyzing new forms of discrimination. In a later article about violence against women, Crenshaw analyzes the intersection of sexism and racism for women of color and concludes:

*“Because of their intersectional identity as both women and of color within discourses that are shaped to respond to one or the other, women of color are marginalized within both [emphasized in the original]” (Crenshaw 1991: 1244).*<sup>10</sup>

These intersections of singular categories which lead to discrimination are not separated from each other, but create a new relation of oppression and experienced subordination. Moreover, the intersection in Crenshaw’s analysis of ‘race’ and gender establishes a new form of subjectivity, because these women are confronted with a double marginalization: They are not equally recognized concerning their gender and their ‘race’, for that reason they claim for themselves that they were discriminated because they are ‘black’ women.

In the intersectionality approach ‘race’, class, and gender are well established as categories of analysis and (German) authors of introduction books and articles to feminist research and intersectionality often refer to this triad of category (e.g. Dietze 2001; Knapp 2005; Davis 2008: 71; Rommelspacher 2009). Other categories such as sexuality, nation or north-south-relation are often included in further studies (e.g. Weldon 2008: 212-215; Degele/Winkler 2011; Buckel 2012). In addition, the concept of intersectionality has been elaborated on and discussed (recently between Carbin/Edenheim 2013 and McKibbin et al. 2015).

Leslie McCall introduces the distinction between anti-categorical (rejecting categories), inter-categorical (strategic use of categories) and intra-categorical (‘classic’ intersectional categories) complexity for the empirical study of intersectionality (McCall 2005). In contrast, Ina Kerner (2012) develops a more theory-driven account and indicates that it should ask *what* intersectionality is and which forms are included in this approach and *how* intersections can be understood and conceptualized – apart from the operationalization. Despite the fact that it does not have a fixed methodo-

10 Interestingly Crenshaw did not address the class category in any of her articles. It seems that she does not focus on this because the legal cases did not deal with the category of class; however Crenshaw would have to think about which meaning(s) the class category could have (Crenshaw 1991: 1244-1245, footnote 9).

logy, which is not seen negatively (Davis 2008), intersectionality can be framed as “an analytical sensitivity [which] think[s] about the problem of sameness and difference and its relation to power” (Cho et al. 2013: 795).

After describing and elucidating Mohanty’s feminist postcolonial critique and Crenshaw’s intersectional approach, I present in detail the similarities and differences in both works. This guides my illustrative empirical analysis of Zetkin’s and Truth’s writings in chapter 3.

#### 2.4 Postcolonial theory meets intersectionality<sup>11</sup>

Mohanty and Crenshaw analyze different areas of discrimination and subordination in gender relations. Since I focused on their works in the sections above, it makes sense to reveal their differences as well as resemblances. The following comparison does not claim that every approach, either in postcolonial studies or theories of intersectionality, has the following characteristics. Anyhow, scrutinizing important aspects in works of Mohanty and of Crenshaw helps to understand these crucial texts for both approaches.

First of all, their research material is different. Mohanty uses academic texts concerning postcolonial conditions to show the construction of ‘Western’ and ‘Non-Western’ women by ‘Western’ feminist scholars. The books analyzed by Mohanty were published in the Series “Women in the Third World” by the independent publishing house Zed Books (former Zed Press). By constructing such a paternalistic discourse, so Mohanty, these scholars have silenced postcolonial voices. Crenshaw in contrast uses legal texts and court

decisions from the USA for her analysis of overlapping discriminations.

Secondly, Mohanty and Crenshaw follow slightly different epistemologies. It can be argued that Mohanty’s criticism works rather on a meta-level of representation and discursive construction of women by constructing reality via the production of knowledge in discourse, while Crenshaw bases her approach on the outcome of already happened discrimination. The court decisions are situated in the ‘real world’ and influence the discourse about forms of discrimination. In other words, Mohanty focuses on the Foucauldian power-knowledge nexus which links social phenomena to the production of certain discourses (Mohanty 1984: 333) and is seen as a postmodern account (Fink/Ruppert 2009).<sup>12</sup> In contrast, intersectionality relates to practices and experiences by people through laws or judgments, as Catharine MacKinnon states (2013: 1020). Thus, the epistemological grounds are apparently different. I argue, however, that Mohanty and Crenshaw do not have totally opposite research perspectives, but there are connecting nodal points. Concerning the epistemological question, I argue that Mohanty and Crenshaw are situated in a constructivist methodology.

On the one hand, the *legal dimension* refers to a specific discourse – how to conceptualize certain categories or how intertwined the categories of sex and ‘race’ are – in which laws and judgments are applied and produced. Legal terms are interpretable, conflicting and thus, also changeable (Buckel 2008). How to judge discrimination depends on the social, historical and political circumstances. Especially from a feminist legal perspective, legal decisions are situated in certain political and social contexts and to make the context visible, for instance the discriminating practices against ‘black’ women, the perception of discourses is relevant.

On the other hand, practices and experiences are linked to a dominant discourse and therefore to the *discursive dimension*. Both dimensions – legal and discursive – cannot be clearly separated, because they

<sup>11</sup> By stating that postcolonial theory is an „anti-disciplinary field“ (Castro Varela/Dhawan 2009a: 303), a dialogue with intersectionality might be *impossible* and *possible* at the same time. *Impossible*, because of the tendency that postcolonial approaches could be subsumed under the universalistic umbrella of ‘race-class-gender’ intersections. Moreover the authors claim that the German debate about intersectionality is biased towards eurocentric concepts as well as fails to address transnational inequalities based on colonialism (Castro Varela/Dhawan 2009a: 309-320). But I would also add *possible* because postcolonial theory is beyond every disciplinary boundary and therefore communication seems easy to achieve. Despite the valuable criticism, scholars who use both postcolonial theory as well as intersectionality have to reflect their objects of investigation as well as their perspective in order to evaluate the adequacy of the addressed linkage.

<sup>12</sup> Fink and Ruppert (2009: 66) scrutinize Mohanty’s earlier and later writings and try to demonstrate that Mohanty has changed her perspective from a postmodern approach to a ‘black’ feminist and feminist standpoint theory. Even though I agree with Fink/Ruppert that Mohanty has changed her perspective to some extent, I would situate Mohanty’s early writings also in ‘black’ feminism and Mohanty’s later writings in a Foucauldian-inspired approach. From my perspective, the theoretical change is not as fundamental as Fink and Ruppert argue.

refer to each other. For instance, gender discrimination is not only a discriminating practice in a discursive dimension, but is clearly a part of experienced practices. As Foucault (1982) demonstrates, power structures in discourses shape not only the identity-formation of subjects, but construct subjectivity itself. So, how we perceive people, as 'black' or male, or as female *and* 'black', is affected by (contingent) discursive formations.

In conclusion, postcolonial studies and the approach of intersectionality focus on different aspects in their research, but provide four connecting nodal points. These nodal points are the ground for the dialogue. The first nodal point is that relations of discursive (non-)representation are crucial for establishing subjectivity. The second one is the caution in using universalistic attributions. Universal claims are seen as a construction of the dominant discourse which should be questioned and deconstructed. The third nodal point is the inherent linkage of feminist beliefs and political action. Last but not least the fourth nodal point is the focus on the margins and intertwined categories in a structure of dominance and subordination. These four nodal points form the ground for dialogue and are interpreted as shared constructivist methodology in Mohanty's and Crenshaw's approaches.

Although it seems that intersectional approaches mostly contain the gender category (Kerner 2009: 248-249)<sup>13</sup> while postcolonial studies often include 'race', both approaches are (or should be) sensitive to all contextual information. They have not established a common framework which is seen as an advantage and is one reason why intersectionality is so successful in current feminist research (Davis 2008). In addition, postcolonial theory and intersectionality feature a critical engagement with theoretical and empirical findings, with political struggles and social movements against inequalities and injustices. As explained above, both theorists take their interventions from an explicitly critical 'race' perspective, and strengthen the inherent connections between theory and praxis which is important to note for the following empirical analysis.

In the following chapter I investigate the works by Truth and Zetkin regarding their use and construction

of 'race'<sup>14</sup>, class, and gender by a close reading of central texts of both. Close reading is a method of interpretation and focuses on "contextuality and historicity of any reading" (Lukić/Espinosa 2011: 106). I focus on the categories<sup>15</sup> of 'race', class, and gender, because, in the following research of Crenshaw's intersectional approach these categories were most emphasized in research. Furthermore, I consider that 'race', class, and gender were probably central categories in the historical period and in the works by Zetkin and Truth.

The fight for suffrage and equal rights were the main issues for the women's movement in Europe and North America in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Moreover the 19<sup>th</sup> century was shaped by colonialism and imperialism and although women were also an important factor in colonial practices (Ferguson 1993; Burton 1994; McClintock 1995), abolitionist struggles against slavery became more and more relevant in Western Europe and North America (Geulen 2007: 77-86). Furthermore the industrialization of 'Western' countries and the beginning of capitalist production created class contentions. These class tensions were not only visible in 'Western' countries, but also in the relations between colonizers and colonized people. Since all three conflict relations – 'race', class, gender – can be seen as crucial and interwoven for this time, I focus on these. By analyzing 'first-wave feminists' my intention is to uncover that an intersectional and postcolonial perspective can not only show different relations of discrimination and struggles against it in the present, but also that intersections existed in the past.

### 3. An intersectional and postcolonial perspective on Truth and Zetkin

#### 3.1 Historical and theoretical embedding

The research on Truth and Zetkin varies substantially. Truth's research is still part of the research on anti-slavery movements (Sklar 2000), on 'black' feminism (Zackodnik 2004), on post-secular feminist studies (Smiet 2015) or is found in biographical

<sup>13</sup> Wollrad harshly criticizes the non-recognition of 'race' issues, the construction of gender as 'meta-category' and the invisibility of feminist women of color in the German gender debate (Wollrad 2009).

<sup>14</sup> The following analysis is concentrated on the writings of Zetkin and Truth. This has the consequence that I refer to 'white' and 'black' as racialized categories. However, this does not mean that 'white' respectively 'black' are the only racialized categories for an intersectional and postcolonial approach (Eggers et al. 2009).

<sup>15</sup> For a general criticism and rejection of using categories at all, see Lorey 2008.

works about her (Bernard 1967; Washington 2013). Besides, Brah and Phoenix (2004) use Truth's *Ain't I a Woman?*-speech to analyze it briefly from an intersectional perspective. In contrast, Zetkin has more or less been absent in research since the mid 1970s (Honeycutt 1976; except Ünlüdağ 2002). Zetkin's works were mostly received as an orthodox-Marxist perspective. The reviewers either acknowledge her contribution to a feminist Marxism (e.g. Reetz 1978) or harshly criticize her work (Ünlüdağ 2002). This ambivalence complicates an open-minded reception and adoption of her ideas. Nevertheless, Zetkin was a central figure in the European women's movement. Analyzing her writings can help to understand how a leading European 'white' woman understood the fight for women's rights in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Revealing and making visible the different biographical backgrounds of both women can tell us more about the context in which Truth and Zetkin developed their ideas and thoughts. In 1797 Truth was born into slavery and died as no longer enslaved woman in 1883. As a result of the abolition of slavery in the state of New York, she was freed in 1827 (Washington 2013). She worked as a servant until she was 46 years old. Due to her religious inspiration, she changed her name from Isabella (without a last name) to Sojourner Truth and traveled through the United States advocating the abolition of slavery and arguing for women's rights (Bernard 1967).

I have chosen three of her speeches for my analysis. The first one is her famous *Ain't I a Woman?* from 1851 (Truth 1851), the second speech *What Time of Night It Is* (Truth 1853) was held just two years later and the last speech *Keeping the Thing Going While Things Are Stirring* is from 1867. All three speeches were published without her distinct dialect in an anthology on historical feminism (Schneir 1996). I chose the first text because it is the most popular speech by Truth. The second text was chosen, because it is chronologically close to the first one and can support the intentions of the first text. The last text was chosen on the assumption that the ongoing fight for suffrage for 'black' people changed Truth's perspective and by including this text from 1867, I can scrutinize my assumption. Furthermore, there are not so many recorded speeches held by Truth and the speech *Ain't I a Woman?* exists in different versions. Relying on the anthology by Schneir seems most appropriate for me. Another preliminary remark concerning the speeches is necessary: It has been reported that during her whole life Sojourner Truth was illiterate.

Even Truth herself stated in an interview that her life as a slave had prevented her from learning to read and write (critically discussed in Mabee 1988). Therefore, all her speeches are based on notes by participants.

In 1857 Zetkin was born as Clara Eissner and died in 1933. Her mother was an activist in the women's rights movement and probably influenced her daughter (Honeycutt 1976: 132). Zetkin had a secondary school education and would have gone to university if women had had the opportunity to attend; also the membership in parties was not allowed for women. These experiences as well as her life in exile and in poverty with her partner Ossip Zetkin in Paris affected her later thought (Honeycutt 1976). For my analysis, I chose two texts<sup>16</sup> from Zetkin. The first speech "Toward the Liberation of the Woman" is from 1889 (Zetkin 1889) and is one of the most famous texts in early Marxist-feminist writings. The second text "The Student and the Woman" (Zetkin 1899) is from 1899 and was published in the journal "Gleichheit". It was picked for the same reason as in Truth's case. I expect a different position or a development between the first and the second text and therefore, I can identify possible critical reflections in Zetkin's work. Moreover, I try to have the same page count for both theorists so that the text sample is more representative and that is the reason why I picked three texts from Truth and two from Zetkin.

### 3.2 Women speak for women

The following analysis is taking up nodal point one and two. As I demonstrated in the section above, Crenshaw and Mohanty are questioning universal claims about women and the representation of women. Furthermore, women speaking for women set up a specific discursive logic of representation: Who has the capacity to speak to whom? In addition, my first question relates to the disposition of women in the speeches and as Knapp (2005: 74) states, this question is a key issue in current feminist research. This close reading is therefore guided by the questions: whether women are seen as a homogenous group with identical interest without any relation to different categories or are women seen as a heterogeneous group which is differentiated in various intertwined categories?

<sup>16</sup> I used the German version for my analysis and translated the following quotations. I took Zetkin's texts from the website "Marxists' Internet Archive". Thus, I cannot use page numbers for my citations.

*The linkage of 'race' and gender*

In all three speeches Sojourner Truth speaks about the distinct 'white' and 'black' females' experiences. In her famous speech "Ain't I a Woman?" she shows in a personal way that she has the same physical strength as a 'white' or 'black' man at work and can eat as much as any man; if she had the opportunity to do it. This specific comparison of working and eating of male and female – the man works hard and thus can eat as much as he can while the 'white' woman does housework, cares for the children and does some farm work and therefore a woman is not entitled to eat as much as a man – shows Truth's sensitivity for class aspects between the sexes. Since Truth does not clarify the term 'man' in her speech, I assume that she does not distinguish between 'black' and 'white' men in this quoted paragraph. The gender discrimination which Truth experienced is valid for both 'white' and 'black' men. That is the reason why she harshly criticizes such an account by the 'white' man about 'female weaknesses'. However, male slaves could not eat as much as 'white' men, because they lived under oppressed circumstances and this suggests that Truth referred to 'white' men. Moreover she does not have the privileges of 'white' women which the previous 'white' male addresses when he states that "women need to be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches" (Truth 1851: 94). Therefore, Truth uses the rhetorical question, whether she is not a woman since she does not have these problems. The perspective of 'white' men was obviously influenced by their distinction between women as 'white' and slaves as 'black'. 'Black' women therefore are seen as people of color and not as women. By revealing these construction processes, she expresses clearly the power structures which led to the perception of black women as mainly black (and not as women or as 'black' women).

In another paragraph of her speech, Truth identifies herself with the Virgin Mary and the "first woman", Eva, in the bible. Truth refers to Mary to show that a man did not procreate Jesus, only God and a woman did. Truth emphasizes the position of the woman in this story and questions the Christian justification of different rights for men and women (Truth 1851: 95). She recognizes Eva's failure – picking the forbidden apple in the "Garden Eden" – but she also states that this failure can be reversed by women.

*"If the first woman God ever made was strong enough to turn the world upside down all alone, these women*

*together ought to be able to turn it back, and get it right side up again! And now they is [sic!] asking to do it, the men better let them" (Truth 1851: 95).*

By saying "these women", it seems that she is not part of that group. Truth supports the demand of suffrage for women, but she also knows that the suffrage movement was dominated by 'white' women. In 1851, when she stated this, she was probably the only 'black' woman on the Akron Women's Rights Convention; in 1867 she was still the only 'black' woman who spoke in public about the interests of women of color (Truth 1867: 130). She was confronted with the same situation in 1853. By differentiating between "I" and "these women", recognizing that she is one of the few 'black' women on these conventions who speaks publicly and by explicitly perceiving herself as a "colored woman", she links her skin color to the fight for "woman's rights" (Truth 1853: 96).

The abolishment of slavery with the 13<sup>th</sup> amendment after the US Civil War in 1865 and the agreement that 'black' men received voting rights in 1866 intensified her position on suffrage in her last speech, because women did not, no matter which skin color they had. In her statement she emphasizes that the male brought up a new distinction with the non-implementation of voting rights for all people<sup>17</sup> in the United States; they changed the conflict line from 'black' versus 'white' to men versus women (Truth 1867: 129).

*Class as basic contradiction, gender as sub-contradiction*

In contrast to Truth, Zetkin strongly focuses on class. The gender category is therefore a sub-category in class conflict, which is the basic contradiction.<sup>18</sup> Thus, she identifies no specific question of women's rights but localizes the interests of women in the class struggle (Zetkin 1889). In her speech "Towards the Liberation of the Woman!" the focus is on women's work in industrial factories in West European countries. Since the

17 At that time, it should be mentioned that "all people" did not refer to 'Native Americans'. They did not have the right to vote until 1924.

18 The term 'basic contradiction' is strongly related to Marxist approaches and refers to the central conflict relation between wage labor and capital. However, there is no consistent use of this term because various approaches understand it differently (Haug/Monal 2001). I use this term here to make visible that Zetkin is thinking in a hierarchy in which class conflict is more important than the gender one.

destruction of the feudal family structure, where the woman works in the domestic sphere, women have to work in factories as well. One reason is that they have to financially support the family because the man does not earn enough. The other reason is, and this is more important for Zetkin, that women could be free of “economic dependence [and] political and social slavery” (Zetkin 1889). She speaks in the name of female workers and does not separate the question of women’s rights from the social issue. She states that with the economic independence of women, the subordination of the woman is not over; only the master has changed: “from a slave for the husband to the slave for the capitalist” (Zetkin 1889).<sup>19</sup> With this intention Zetkin constructs a homogenous group of female workers in a capitalist society who face the same oppression: combining the work in the household, the upbringing in the family and their work in the factory (Zetkin 1899).

Moreover – and this is part of her socialist thought – Zetkin has a strong essentialist perspective on women. She disputes the distinction of that time between “just-woman [Nur-Weib]” and “just-human being [Nur-Mensch]”. While in the first category, women are defined by their femininity and their role in the domestic sphere, in the other category women are firstly human beings and have to detach their “female side”. Zetkin, however, sees a false promise in both approaches and emphasizes its combination in her category as a “female complete human being [weiblicher Vollmensch]”<sup>20</sup> (Zetkin 1899); even though this category is only possible in a socialist society.

She does not question the linkage of femininity and domestic sphere. It seems that Zetkin takes the distinction of female domestic sphere and male public sphere as given. Instead of questioning this connection she confirms it. However, she distinguishes between the proletarian and the bourgeois woman. Since the proletarian woman is already aware of the capitalist exploi-

tation structure, she can fight with the man equally against capitalism. The bourgeois woman, whereas, must fight against the bourgeois man to reach equality and recognition. The struggle against capitalism, so Zetkin concluding, has to be led by proletarian woman and man; this means also against a gross of bourgeois women (Zetkin 1899).

Furthermore, the role of women of color is not theorized in her accounts. Either Zetkin sees no difference or specific circumstances in their situation as colored persons because all women face patriarchal and capitalist structures or she seems to believe that the fight for suffrage and further political rights is foremost relevant for women in ‘Western’ industrialized countries. Nonetheless, ‘race’ as a relational category to analyze societal structures seems hardly relevant in Zetkin’s feminist account.

Summarizing the first empirical part, both Truth and Zetkin deal with different discursive (non-)representations. While Truth faces a debate about suffrage among ‘white’ people, she has to question this ‘white’ dominance talking about equal rights and emphasize the intersection of ‘race’ and gender for the struggle for voting rights. By highlighting the non-representation of ‘black’ women Truth also raises doubts about who speaks for whom. She claims that if the women’s movement fights for equal rights, then the women have to consider that it has to include ‘white’ and ‘black’ women. Both deal with the same oppression and the lack of (voting) rights. On the contrary, Zetkin deals with the intersection of family and factory work for women. The discursive logic is based on the image of a child-caring mother and a female worker. She claims that to solve the social issue, the women’s movement has to tackle the rights issue as well as to fight for the economic independence of women. The ‘race’ issue does not concern her. So, while the first nodal point is tackled differently by both feminists, the second nodal point is highlighted by Truth, but not by Zetkin.

### 3.3 Liberation by religion or by revolution?

My second question refers to how Truth and Zetkin conceptualize women’s liberation. Especially in the 19<sup>th</sup> century women were facing multiple kinds of oppression. An inherent motivation in feminist theory is still how to tackle and overcome these. This reveals the combination of feminist thoughts and political action, namely the third nodal point as a guiding aspect for my analysis. Moreover, analyzing existing

19 This terminological use of ‘slave’ is already used as a metaphor by Mary Wollstonecraft (1792/2009) in her texts in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. With such an equation, Ferguson argues (1993) in case of Wollstonecraft’s writings, she negates that a woman could also be slave and vice versa. Moreover, it seems that Wollstonecraft distinguishes between the ‘white’ woman and the ‘black’ slave because the ‘black’ female slave cannot be a married woman.

20 In addition, it is interesting to note that she is also against the adaption of male attributes, because this would lead to the fact that “the woman becomes the ape of the man” (Zetkin 1899).

power structures and looking at the margins is crucial for Truth and Zetkin texts. Examining these relations is also the fourth nodal point. Therefore, the question about liberation and emancipatory concepts in Truth's and Zetkin's writings is crucial.

Truth's source for the liberation of women is her Christian belief which should not be separated from her fight for suffrage (Smiet 2015). She consolidates her convictions with references to the biblical story about Adam and Eva or the Virgin Mary (see above) and sees her life predetermined for fighting for suffrage and the abolition of slavery (Truth 1867: 130). Religious belief was a strong factor in the abolitionist fight against slavery of 'black' people, because of the Christian claims that women and men are equal and that salvation is possible for all people who believe in God; a hope which was also important to overcome slavery. Truth uses these universalistic claims to demand that women have the same capacities as men to handle money, to have rights and to speak for themselves: "I wish women to have their voice there among the pettifoggers. If it is not a fit place for women, it is unfit for men to be there" (Truth 1867: 130).

The result of her idea of liberation is based on both, the idea of natural rights which every human being has and her religious belief that there will be a change in the policy on suffrage. To build up ties is not a matter of class position, but particularly concerning her position as former slave and 'black' woman with a strong Christian belief. Even though the position as a slave refers to a certain class relation, Truth focuses more on 'race', gender, and religion as emancipating relations against power structures. This also shows the tension between the class position, which is mostly perceived secular, and the religious belief. Class does not seem to be a useable category for the emancipatory struggle, because of the absence of the working class and a possible emerging class consciousness among 'black' slaves in the US of the 19th century.

As mentioned above, Zetkin sees women in a double hierarchical relation. They are dominated by the man in the family and by the capitalist in the factory. She argues for a 'classic' Marxist hierarchy that firstly, the domination of capitalism has to be stopped and with this destruction, the other (family) hierarchy would disappear automatically. With the abolishment of private property and the uneven distribution of means of production the class and gender conflict would be dissolved. In general Zetkin is convinced that liberation is reachable in a socialist society, even

though she mentions that women have "surely to fight and struggle, also in a socialist society, [...] about the boundary of her work in domestic and in the world" (Zetkin 1899). So, she questions the general Marxist distinction between labor as work and domestic work as non-work and argues for the perception that every kind of work is work. This reconciliation of domestic and labor work in a socialist society is not structured by capitalist exploitation but by "moral conflicts" [sittlichen Konflikten] which could be handled (and won) by women (Zetkin 1899).

Zetkin emphatically argues against a solely rights-based equality and a foundation of women as "just-human beings" (see above). She indicates that the fight for suffrage did not lead to freedom in several states and thus, only a combination of a fight for voting rights *and* for economic independence leads to the liberation of women (Zetkin 1889). This struggle, so Zetkin further, is not just a fight for women but a fight for the whole working class which should lead to a revolution against bourgeois society (Zetkin 1899). At Zetkin's lifetime only the 'Western' capitalist societies had a broad labor movement and an industrial economy. Consequently, the 'Western' workers would probably lead the revolution, form the avantgarde and would be the active part of this process. The people in the colonized parts of the world would follow and therefore they would take up a more passive part. The universalistic claim that all workers have to fight together for a revolution leads to a social ranking of people in Zetkin's texts.

To sum up this part regarding the nodal points, both feminists want to change political and societal circumstances to make society more just. Truth relates her claims to a united women's movement beyond racial segregation and stand for equal rights. Besides the political struggle, she believes in Christian religion and the moral claim that every human being is equal. Together with the political fight, moral pressure should change society and liberate women, at least on the rights level. Zetkin puts her hope in a socialist revolution by seeing the discriminating intersection of economic oppression and missing rights. Thus, she wants to overcome economic, political and family injustices. With this she dissociates herself from claims which deal only with getting more rights.

#### 4. Conclusion

In this article, I raised attention to the connecting nodal points between intersectionality approaches and

postcolonial studies. Although both approaches are different to some extent, they share certain aspects. By highlighting the four nodal points – establishing subjectivity through discourse, skepticism about universalism, linkage of feminist claims and political action, and finally considering structures of power and dominance – I propose a fruitful dialogue between both, based on the similar constructivist methodology. To illustrate this dialogue empirically, I analyzed speeches and texts by the feminists Sojourner Truth and Clara Zetkin. Linking both approaches allows a more complex understanding of the intersection of constructed categories in dominant discourses. The comparison of Truth and Zetkin demonstrates the resemblances and differences in their thoughts in order to be aware of the situatedness of ‘first wave’ feminist theory. Moreover, emphasizing the historical background was helpful to scrutinize these ‘classical’ feminist readings.

Truth’s and Zetkin’s works are both strongly influenced by their social and political environment. Truth was born in slavery, deeply religious and aware of the double subordination of women as ‘black’ and female. In contrast, Zetkin was born in a lower-middle class family and had a good educational background. She lived in a ‘Western’ capitalist country with an emerging worker’s movement and was aware of the double subordination of women as workers and females. While Truth emphasizes the intertwining of ‘race’ and gender for women in accomplishing suffrage and perceives religion as an emancipating power, Zetkin underlines the linkage of class and gender for women in relation to becoming economically independent. Achieving suffrage was just one step in a longer run for a socialist revolution.

Truth’s focus on gender and ‘race’ clearly demonstrates the different experiences of ‘black’ women to those of ‘white’ women in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. ‘Black’ women are subordinated because of their ‘race’ *and* their gender. In Truth’s work there is an *equivalent subordination* of ‘race’ and gender. Although Sojourner Truth refers to the different class positions of ‘white’ and ‘black’ women regarding their work (‘black’ women as working women and ‘white’ women as non-working, privileged women), class is under-determined in Truth’s work. In contrast to Truth, Zetkin ranks the subordinations relations and sees the main contradiction in the class conflict. Therefore, Zetkin’s work is characterized by a *hierarchical subordination* of women. With the end of class conflicts – in a socialist society – the gender conflict would also end. However, Zetkin also notes a

double subordination of women; to men in the domestic sphere and to the capitalists in the industrial work sphere. She raises doubts about the end of patriarchy after capitalism and demands the necessity to fight for equal rights and economic independence for both genders; also in a socialist era. Zetkin speaks and writes about the international working woman, but she does not stress racial discrimination and is not aware of the colonial interconnections. Zetkin does not perceive the ‘German Reich’ as *both* a colonial empire and the interdependence of the industrialized European country *and* the exploitation of the German colonies. She is more focused on the situation of the ‘white’ working class in Europe.

Regarding the different liberation ideas of Truth and Zetkin, the context is crucial. While arguing from a ‘white’ European woman’s perspective in which the class contradiction plays the crucial role, Zetkin stresses the idea of liberation through economic independence. On the other hand Truth focuses on religious belief as an emancipating power even though she criticizes the Christian system as patriarchal and dominated by a ‘white’ and male agenda.

Zetkin as a socialist feminist understands liberation as emancipating from the capitalist and bourgeois structures whereas Truth as a ‘black’ feminist sees liberation as overcoming slave oppressions and achieving equal (voting) rights for women and especially ‘black’ women. Concerning the claim of equal rights, Truth and Zetkin have the same position even though Zetkin sees this increase of political participation as just one step to a broader concept of economic and social justice.

In my analysis, I demonstrated that different categories are highlighted by 19<sup>th</sup> century feminists. Depending on their social status and political circumstances, Truth and Zetkin emphasize different categories and rank those according to their perceived relevance in the fight for gender equality and suffrage. I focused on ‘race’, class, and gender and considered these as the most relevant categories for my analysis. In the case of Sojourner Truth religion could be added as a fourth category which is interwoven with ‘race’ and gender. A careful contextual analysis from an intersectional and postcolonial perspective is therefore necessary to involve all relevant relations. In further analyses, it would be interesting to investigate the relation of religion, ‘race’ and gender in present struggles, examine the possibility of linking religion and class is possible or not and what does that mean for emancipatory perspectives nowadays.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the age of colonialism, as well as in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the postcolonial époque, the linkage of 'race', class, and gender for discriminating practices and discourses is still present. Truth's and Zetkin's common focus on gender shows the relevance for a more complex approach which does not forget – in regard to Truth – the different experiences of 'black' and 'white' women and – due to Zetkin – the different class positions in a 'Western' capitalist society. Especially in times in which 'Western' feminism and neoliberal thinking seem to initiate a dangerous liaison (Fraser 2009, 2013) and the international division of labor between 'global north' and 'global south' (re)produce a strong subordinated relation (Buckel 2012), a multidimensional analysis is necessary which would bring the class position back in focus – without disregarding gender or 'race' relations. The four suggested nodal points could therefore be used as a preliminary heuristic for further intersectional and postcolonial studies. It could strengthen theoretically as well as empirically the conversation between intersectional and postcolonial approaches and contribute to a "revised race-and-gender-conscious historical materialism" (Mohanty 2003: 509).

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