



***“REACH  
EVERYONE  
ON THE  
PLANET...”***

KIMBERLÉ CRENSHAW AND INTERSECTIONALITY

EDITED BY

GUNDA WERNER INSTITUTE IN THE HEINRICH BÖLL FOUNDATION  
AND THE CENTER FOR INTERSECTIONAL JUSTICE



“Reach Everyone on the Planet...”—  
Kimberlé Crenshaw and Intersectionality

The quotes from Kimberlé Crenshaw used in this volume on the photo pages were from the following sources: Interview with Kimberlé Crenshaw published by Columbia Law School, 2016; *New York Times*, 9-27-2018; Podcast, Intersectionality Matters, 2018; #SayHerName: Resisting Police Brutality against Black Women, 2015; Interview for Na TedTalk: Why Intersectionality Can't Wait, 2016; National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS), 6-22-2018. The photos of this book are from the African American Policy Forum and the Center for Intersectional Justice. There are also the photo rights, unless otherwise stated.

“Reach Everyone on the Planet...” —  
Kimberlé Crenshaw and Intersectionality  
Texts by and for Kimberlé Crenshaw  
Edited by Gunda Werner Institut in the Heinrich Böll Foundation  
In cooperation with Center for Intersectional Justice  
First edition Berlin 2019  
Published under the Creative Commons Licence: CC BY-NC-ND 4.0  
Concept: Ines Kappert  
Text editing: Ines Kappert, Peggy Piesche, Emilia Roig,  
Hannah Lichtenthäler  
Design: KALUZA + SCHMID Studio GmbH, Berlin  
Printing: Ruksaldruck, Berlin  
Translations: Bettina von Arps-Aubert; TL TRANSLATIONES  
ISBN 978-3-86928-199-5  
Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung, Schumannstr. 8, D-10117 Berlin,  
[www.boell.de](http://www.boell.de)

***“Reach Everyone on the  
Planet...”—Kimberlé Crenshaw  
and Intersectionality***

*Texts by and for Kimberlé Crenshaw*

Edited by  
Gunda Werner Institute in the Heinrich Böll Foundation  
In cooperation with Center for Intersectional Justice

## *Glossary of terms and font usage*

### **Gender asterisk \***

The \* refers to the constructedness of an engendered category and finds it particularly use in German, visualizing various gender representations (e.g. wom\*an). Some authors also choose to use the gender asterisk in English, with furthermore enables identities and self-positioning to be included in a train of thought that goes beyond the traditional, historical attributions that are still frequently assigned even today.

### **Black—in capital case B**

The capitalisation of the word Black refers to the strategy of self-empowerment. It is used to indicate the symbolic capital of resistance to racism which racialized the people and groups have collectively fought for and obtained.

### **BPOC**

BPOC stands for the political self-identification of Black people and People of Color, which draws on a shared experience of racism and incorporates it into the adoption of a collective stance.

### **Community**

The English term Community used in German refers to the collective and its inscribed resistance potential.

### ***white*—in italics and lower case**

The word *white* is written in italics and lower case to refer to the constructedness of marking differences, with the word *white* typically remaining unmarked. As, in contrast to the concept of Black, there is no self-empowerment or resistance inherent in this marking of differences. Thus, the word *white* is equally not written in capital case.

# Contents

<b>Welcome</b> .....	7
<b>Introduction and foreword</b> .....	9
<b>Why intersectionality can't wait</b> .....	13
<i>By Kimberlé Crenshaw</i>	
<b>Intersectionality is a concept that has never been a concept in my life</b> .....	17
<i>By Mîran Newroz Çelik</i>	
<b>Kimberlé Crenshaw's influence on my thinking with regard to transformative justice</b> .....	21
<i>By Maisha-Maureen Auma</i>	
<b>Ableism and intersectionality</b> .....	27
<i>By Elena Chamorro</i>	
<b>Intersectionality—a weighty concept with history</b> ....	31
<i>By Sabine Hark</i>	
<b>Racial capitalism: hierarchies of belonging</b> .....	35
<i>By Fatima El-Tayeb</i>	
<b>Imagining community: Kimberlé Crenshaw and queer/trans of color politics</b> .....	39
<i>By Jin Haritaworn</i>	
<b>Where are the Black female professors in Europe?</b> ...	43
<i>By Iyiola Solanke</i>	
<b>A flight of butterflies</b> .....	49
<i>By Emilia Roig</i>	
<b>A reflection: on migration, difference and living a feminist life</b> .....	53
<i>By Clementine Ewokolo Burnley</i>	

<b>Kimberlé Crenshaw at the German Federal Constitutional Court: religion at the crossroads between race and gender</b> .....	<b>57</b>
<i>By Nahed Samour</i>	
<b>What's in a word?</b> .....	<b>63</b>
<i>By Amandine Gay</i>	
<b>Kimberlé Crenshaw's influence on my pedagogical action</b> .....	<b>67</b>
<i>By Katja Kinder</i>	
<b>Can we get a witness?</b> .....	<b>71</b>
<i>By Julia Phillips</i>	
<b>The German make-a-wish discourse</b> .....	<b>75</b>
<i>By Dania Thaler</i>	
<b>When Kimberlé Crenshaw came to Paris...</b> .....	<b>79</b>
<i>By Christelle Gomis</i>	
<b>The trouble with the female universalists</b> .....	<b>83</b>
<i>By Rokhaya Diallo</i>	
<b>Language matters</b> .....	<b>87</b>
<i>By Sharon Dodua Otoo</i>	
<b>Reading antidiscrimination law with Crenshaw, but without <i>Rasse</i>?</b> .....	<b>91</b>
<i>By Cengiz Barskanmaz</i>	
<b>Political intersectionality as a healing proposal</b> .....	<b>95</b>
<i>By Peggy Piesche</i>	
<b>Authors</b> .....	<b>99</b>



# Welcome

*“Black women [remain] excluded from feminist theory and antiracist policy discourse because both are predicated on a set of experiences that does not accurately reflect the interaction of race and gender. These problems of exclusion cannot be solved simply by including Black women within an already established analytical structure: (...) any analysis that does not take intersectionality into account cannot sufficiently address the particular manner in which Black women are subordinated.” Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex, 1989*

The Heinrich Böll Foundation perceives its role as a think tank between activism, academia and politics. It took some time before Kimberlé Crenshaw’s concept of intersectionality coined well over 30 years ago was met with a serious reception by us. Anywhere and everywhere, the journey from analysing to overcoming multiple discrimination is a long one. The new and complex theoretical approach seeks, in practice, to pursue new paths, including in social alliances. Hence, we at the Foundation are also on an ongoing quest. It would be presumptuous to maintain that we were already fully implementing intersectionality in all its facets. But we are closing in on this and increasingly facing up to the challenges in our education policy work at home and abroad.

Constructing projects and events on the basis of intersectionality entails turning everything on its head. In concrete terms, this means, for example: Black women or wheelchair users cease to be the exception and thus someone who requires additional consideration and “extra” funding; instead, they and their natural participation quite

simply are part and parcel of such projects or events. They become a part of normality without people having to hide or even disavow their true circumstances.

Yes, mind shifts cause unease and require a wealth of resources, money included. But, in light of the global assault on human rights and the constantly shrinking spaces available to a progressive civil society, we ought to seize the opportunity: only a critical examination of what is commonly deemed to be “normal” for the democratic centre can empower it to forge new and different alliances. Only a multi-layered analysis of power relations can enable existing, tried-and-tested alliances to be enhanced by new ones.

When adopting such an approach, diversity is much more enjoyable, is reassuring, is wealth.

And, so, it gives me great pleasure to see this body of work published, with all its perspectives on intersectionality. My sincerest congratulations to Kimberlé Crenshaw on this 30th anniversary of her groundbreaking concept through which so much has been set in motion: Happy Birthday Intersectionality!

Berlin, April 2019

Barbara Unmüßig

*President of the Heinrich Böll Foundation*

# *Introduction and foreword*

“A truly intersectional feminism can reach everyone on the planet”... This statement was made by Kimberlé Crenshaw during the “Where We Go From Here?” panel discussion during the Women’s Town Hall & Reception held at the National Press Club in Washington D.C. in January 2017. Only when the rights and interests of the most marginalized people are enforced, so her conviction, will feminism reach everyone across the globe. This is the core task of any intersectional approach: not just scratching the surface but specifically tackling social injustices at their very roots.

In searching for a title to this small collection of texts by and for Kimberlé Crenshaw, the *Center for Intersectional Justice* (CIJ) and the *Gunda Werner Institute* were instantly on the same page. This is what it is about: we want to disband the norm that upholds *white* people without impairments as the standard and degrades People of Color, queer and trans people. To our mind, only by doing so can we make any form of contribution towards the grand project of global justice, which truly includes everybody—no matter how different our reality of life—and which strives to overcome patriarchy, capitalism and racism as the key intertwined systems of rule. What therefore could be more obvious than to act on the assumption of a concept that finds its voice in the interaction of various forms of discrimination, and makes people visible and empowers them in all their diversity and political struggles? Intersectionality is more than a theoretical concept. It is a political project.

*Reach Everyone on the Planet. Kimberlé Crenshaw and Intersectionality* is volume II in a series which the GWI always publishes in cooperation with partners. The first volume, titled “Die Freundschaft zur Welt nicht verlieren”

(Not to lose the friendship to the world) was dedicated to Christina Thürmer-Rohr, who, as the first openly lesbian and single-mother professor in West-Berlin, coined the concept of *complicity* in the early 1980s. It came into being in collaboration with Professor Sabine Hark.

2019 marks thirty years since the US professor of law, Kimberlé Crenshaw, published the groundbreaking article “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex”. Even today, it is considered the foundational text of the concept of intersectionality coined by her. In it, Crenshaw criticizes US’ anti-discrimination law by dissecting three court rulings. In each instance, actions brought by Afro-American women were dismissed on the grounds of having been discriminated because of their being Black *and* being women. The dismissal of these actions was built on the grotesque argument that recognizing multiple forms of discrimination would result in the affected women being given preferential treatment. As if interlaced degradations could offset the respective other’s toxic impact!

“To reach everyone on the planet...” Undoubtedly, this vision is massive, and we are not. It was therefore all the more important for us, as editors, to invite outstanding intersectional activists, academics and artists from across Europe to enable them to illuminate how their encounter with Kimberlé Crenshaw, or the concept of intersectionality she has coined—the lens of intersectionality, as she herself phrases it—has inspired and reinforced them in their work and thinking, and what they have done with this up to today. Many, many thanks to everyone who has taken part! Thanks to you, it is becoming visible how spirited the concept of intersectionality is, how it is being further developed also in Europe and Germany and is taking on new facets—without compromising its original intention: that of empowering Black women and supporting their political struggles. On its journey from the USA to Europe,

intersectionality has undergone a process of depoliticization and whitening. Through this volume, we hope that we are doing justice to the subversive essence of the concept and referencing critical race theory analyses that are still all too often delegitimized in Europe.

Our deep gratitude goes out to our colleagues, Peggy Piesche, Miriam Aced and Hannah Lichtenthäler, without whom this volume could never have been completed!

Last but not least, we, once again, extend our gratitude to Kimberlé Crenshaw, who provided the photos for this volume and thus also gives us a very personal insight into her work. We are delighted to have the privilege of referring to you as outstanding feminist personality and look forward to celebrating the 30th anniversary of intersectionality at the Second Feminist Gala at the Heinrich Böll Foundation in Berlin.

Dr. Ines Kappert  
Head of Gunda Werner Institute

Dr. Emilia Roig  
Head of Center for Intersectional Justice

*“Intersectionality is a lens through which you can see where power comes and collides, where it interlocks and intersects. It’s not simply that there’s a race problem here, a gender problem here, and a class or LGBTQ problem there. Many times that framework erases what happens to people who are subject to all of these things.”*



Kimberlé Crenshaw with  
AAPF and CISPS staff at Columbia  
Law School, September 2018  
Photo: Joshua Teng, Aruna  
Vithiananthan

# *Why intersectionality can't wait*

*By Kimberlé Crenshaw*

## *Intersectionality was a lived reality before it became a term*

Today, nearly three decades after I first put a name to the concept, the term seems to be everywhere. But if women and girls of color continue to be left in the shadows, something vital to the understanding of intersectionality has been lost.

In 1976, Emma DeGraffenreid and several other black women sued General Motors for discrimination, arguing that the company segregated its workforce by race and gender: Blacks did one set of jobs and whites did another. According to the plaintiffs' experiences, women were welcome to apply for some jobs, while only men were suitable for others. This was of course a problem in and of itself, but for black women the consequences were compounded. You see, the black jobs were men's jobs, and the women's jobs were only for whites. Thus, while a black applicant might get hired to work on the floor of the factory if he were male; if she were a black female she would not be considered. Similarly, a woman might be hired as a secretary if she were white, but wouldn't have a chance at that job if she were black. Neither the black jobs nor the women's jobs were appropriate for black women, since they were neither male nor white. Wasn't this clearly discrimination, even if some blacks and some women were hired?

Unfortunately for DeGraffenreid and millions of other black women, the court dismissed their claims. Why? Because the court believed that black women should not be permitted to combine their race and gender claims into one. Because they could not prove that what happened to them was just like what happened to white women or black men, the discrimination that happened to these black women fell through the cracks.

It was in thinking about why such a “big miss” could have happened within the complex structure of anti-discrimination law that the term “intersectionality” was born. As a young law professor, I wanted to define this profound invisibility in relation to the law. Racial and gender discrimination overlapped not only in the workplace but in other other arenas of life; equally significant, these burdens were almost completely absent from feminist and anti-racist advocacy. Intersectionality, then, was my attempt to make feminism, anti-racist activism, and anti-discrimination law do what I thought they should—highlight the multiple avenues through which racial and gender oppression were experienced so that the problems would be easier to discuss and understand.

Intersectionality is an analytic sensibility, a way of thinking about identity and its relationship to power. Originally articulated on behalf of black women, the term brought to light the invisibility of many constituents within groups that claim them as members, but often fail to represent them. Intersectional erasures are not exclusive to black women. People of color within LGBTQ movements; girls of color in the fight against the school-to-prison pipeline; women within immigration movements; trans women within feminist movements; and people with disabilities fighting police abuse—all face vulnerabilities that reflect the intersections of racism, sexism, class oppression, transphobia, able-ism and more. Intersectionality has given



many advocates a way to frame their circumstances and to fight for their visibility and inclusion.

Intersectionality has been the banner under which many demands for inclusion have been made, but a term can do no more than those who use it have the power to demand. And not surprisingly, intersectionality has generated its share of debate and controversy.

Conservatives have painted those who practice intersectionality as obsessed with “identity politics.” Of course, as the DeGraffenreid case shows, intersectionality is not just about identities but about the institutions that use identity to exclude and privilege. The better we understand how identities and power work together from one context to another, the less likely our movements for change are to fracture.

Others accuse intersectionality of being too theoretical, of being “all talk and no action.” To that I say we’ve been “talking” about racial equality since the era of slavery and we’re still not even close to realizing it. Instead of blaming the voices that highlight problems, we need to examine the structures of power that so successfully resist change.

Some have argued that intersectional understanding creates an atmosphere of bullying and “privilege checking.” Acknowledging privilege is hard—particularly for those who also experience discrimination and exclusion. While white women and men of color also experience discrimination, all too often their experiences are taken as the only point of departure for all conversations about discrimination. Being front and center in conversations about racism or sexism is a complicated privilege that is often hard to see.

Although the president’s recent call to support black women was commendable, undertaking intersectional work requires concrete action to address the barriers to equality facing women and girls of color in U.S. society.

Intersectionality alone cannot bring invisible bodies into view. Mere words won't change the way that some people—the less-visible members of political constituencies—must continue to wait for leaders, decision-makers and others to see their struggles. In the context of addressing the racial disparities that still plague our nation, activists and stakeholders must raise awareness about the intersectional dimensions of racial injustice that must be addressed to enhance the lives of all youths of color.

This is why we continue the work of the #WhyWeCantWait Campaign, calling for holistic and inclusive approaches to racial justice. It is why “Say Her Name” continues to draw attention to the fact that women too are vulnerable to losing their lives at the hands of police. And it is why thousands have agreed that the tragedy in Charleston, S.C., demonstrates our need to sustain a vision of social justice that recognizes the ways racism, sexism and other inequalities work together to undermine us all. We simply do not have the luxury of building social movements that are not intersectional, nor can we believe we are doing intersectional work just by saying words.

*First published in Washington Post, September 24, 2015  
([https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/in-theory/wp/2015/09/24/why-intersectionality-cant-wait/?noredirect=on&utm\\_term=.cf77d31ed31b](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/in-theory/wp/2015/09/24/why-intersectionality-cant-wait/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.cf77d31ed31b)).*

# ***Intersectionality is a concept that has never been a concept in my life***

*By Miran Newroz Çelik*

There are two stories I need to tell if I want to get even close to doing any justice to the importance of Prof. Kimberlé Crenshaw. For one thing, there is my own personal story, which has to do with Prof. Crenshaw and her importance for Berlin's association and activist scene in which I was actively involved and, sometimes, still am. For another, there are the Critical Race Theory retreats of 2010 and 2012, which have also influenced me.

As a Trans person of color, Prof. Crenshaw influenced me very early on, even before I knew her or her texts: I moved to Berlin from a small West German town in 2004, left school prematurely in the middle of my higher education qualification course to do so, and wanted to start a new life. In 2005, I entered the queer of color circles, including GLADT e. V., where we worked with her theory of multiple discrimination. In 2010, the year we met Prof. Crenshaw for the first time while attending the SUSPECT group (for the most part, a queer BIPOC reading group), I was 25, angry, bursting with energy, and deeply engrossed in my politicization, tightly connected to other queer and trans people of color. Crenshaw's theories as well as the theories of Black feminists from a German context who have lived and experienced these theories in their bodies were and still are one

of the most important sources for our common thinking and actions, and indispensable for me, too, as a non-Black person. I will forever treasure this generous sharing of knowledge.

One of my first recollections directly related to Prof. Crenshaw: She was invited to a conference that was organized by *white* feminists and held in a very *white*, elitist institution. There, her theory was not only called into question but also even “further advanced”. Crenshaw did the best thing she could have—for which I and other queer and Trans BPoCs (loudly) applauded her—: She spontaneously discarded her entire speech and gave an introduction into intersectionality. Moreover, that was absolutely necessary.

To me, it is very sad and, at the same time, awkward to see intersectionality meanwhile being used by *white* (queer) feminists in such an inflationary way. A few years ago, that very same group of people would have burst out in tears when we, or the generations before us had talked about racism or when we had merely mentioned that they are *white*. Today, however, intersectionality is *the* subject in university courses, in social sciences, or in capacity-building courses for professionals. How could this happen? There was a time when talking about racism, being *white*, about given and/or withheld privileges did not carry much weight all that. How then did this discourse reach Germany’s universities and associations? The one I find best is when they pretend that they had always thought this way or—even more annoyingly—that they had come up with the idea themselves.

In my opinion, Prof. Crenshaw’s theories have been established through the Black women’s movement in Germany; indeed, even in the face of resistance from the very same institutions and people that monopolize it today. Without the work of Black feminists and feminists of color,

such as ADEFRA (Black Women in Germany), including Peggy Piesche, Prof. Maisha-Maureen Auma, May Ayim, Prof. Fatima El-Tayeb, or other queer of color thinkers such as Prof. Jin Haritaworn, Noah Sow, Koray Yılmaz-Günay, or migrant self-organizations such as GLADT (Gays and Lesbians from Turkey) and LesMigraS (Lesbian Migrants and Black Lesbians), there would be no intersectionality discourse in Germany whatsoever. After long-enduring, hard-fought battles, discussions, and also losses, which are far from over, as the racist backlash (not only in Germany) illustrates, it is clear that and by whom intersectionality must be fought for and defended.

Later on, at the two Critical Race Theory retreats in 2010 and 2012, I learned a great deal as a young, non-academic person. For one thing, given the person that I used to be, no easy feat, but by the same token, it was all the more important, as a young trans person with no academic background, to occupy a space, be loud and be taken seriously. You trust yourself to address things that other people either do not address or do. That many things and types of behavior are very predictable—and that they repeat time and time again. That our spaces are important and should be defended. That our support for each other is indispensable; that we are not replaceable. Beforehand, I had been active in the scene for a few years but, for the very first time, had seen so many amazing, super intelligent people in one space. They had long since committed to paper and reflected on thousands of times over all the things that I was only now discovering for myself, and were thus influencing generations. However, I also realized that these people are simply people, who (can) make mistakes too. Our end-of-retreat party was legendary, but this is not something that I can talk about in public.

I observed in some “fascination” for Crenshaw’s theories, a temporary allure.

It is interesting that, as I am sitting at home right now writing this article, the course that I should normally be sitting in today is covering a text by Prof. Crenshaw. However, unfortunately only in theory. My decision to stay away was a conscious one. The spaces that have been created are not ones that I share.

Intersectionality is a concept that has never been “a concept” or a fleeting fad in my life. There is no way that this ever could have been, because, to me, intersectionality is a description of life’s realities that is indispensable. It is the practical, the growing benefit that the critical race theory has in my life and in the lives of numerous people like me. Because this theory stems, in large part, from the *practice* of survival and because this practice has proven, in exactly those areas, that it works. Every time that I try to understand how discrimination functions, I can only do so by trying to understand how different forms of discrimination work *together*. To me, intersectionality describes deeply rooted real things, which written and unwritten laws, boundaries and nation-states cannot grasp.

# ***Kimberlé Crenshaw's influence on my thinking with regard to transformative justice***

*By Maisha-Maureen Auma*

I met Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw at the Humboldt University Berlin in 2009. Like many other gender studies scholars who attended her evening lecture, I had studied her work in-depth. That evening, however, I learnt about a significant part of her approach that I was barely familiar with. She presented her theory of intersectionality as a “*travelling concept*”. “*Travelling concept*” here refers to an idea that is conceived in a very specific geopolitical context and at a very specific time, but whose utility can extend far beyond this context and time. Intersectionality has in fact now taken on a distinct significance for all those looking to connect and identify politically significant differences and their associated power structures. Unfortunately however, when this concept was transferred to the German content, the substantial foundation of intersectionality in *critical race theory and the CRT movement* of Black legal scholars was ignored and effectively erased. According to Kimberlé Crenshaw, the *travelling theory of intersectionality* or whatever remains of it, often resembles that alien character E.T. from the eponymous children’s film. E.T. desperately tries to call home is however unable to establish a connection because crucial elements that constitute the specific connection are missing.

## *The CRT movement's understanding of equal justice*

The CRT movement gained its initial impetus from the BPoC (Black people and People of Color) networks of legal scholars in North America. The emergence of this equal-justice-oriented network was shaped by critical examinations of racism using feminist-Marxist critiques of inequality of the uneven distribution of legal remedies in the legal system. *Justice*, was regarded as a social resource primarily oriented towards and thus privileging of the life and work realities of white middle-class able-bodied men. This orientation, if it were only a fraction of a plurality of orientations, would not even be especially problematic. However, if this becomes the norm and thus the *default position*, it must be challenged strategically. This norm-setting, according to Crenshaw, makes it easier for white, middle-class men to mobilise the legal resources necessary to protect and advance their lives, their perspectives on reality and their specific social experiences. For racially marked workers low in resources, on the other hand, this norm-setting, Crenshaw believes, produces significant social barriers when it comes to the mobilisation of effective legal remedies. This causes a protection gap for Black *Women\** workers already confronted very high risks of discrimination. Their discrimination, Crenshaw explains, exists both in the workplace as well as in the routines of the justice system itself.



## *Making visible and debating in public the extensive and multi-layered marginali- sation of Black working class Women\**

The theory of intersectionality is generated from the work-place situation of Black Women\*. In the case of “*Emma DeGraffenreid vs. General Motors (1976)*”, five Black Women\* workers in St. Louis (USA) sued their former employer (GM). Black Women\* as a marginalised group were hired especially late to the GM workforce compared to other social groups. The company policy of “*last hired, first fired*” impacted Black Women\* harshly and disproportionately. They were the main target of mass layoffs for operational reasons. Their discrimination lawsuit was however dismissed as being groundless. The court reasoned that there was no discrimination based on race, after all Black men worked on the assembly line at GM. Discrimination based on sexism was not established either, because several white Women\* were present as office workers at GM. Black Women\* were considered sufficiently represented in the workforce of GM if Women\* in general were employed there or if Black men continued to be employed. The difficulty of substantiating evidence of discrimination was compounded by the fact that the plaintiffs were marginalised as a result of more than one politically significant difference. The plaintiffs were discriminated against not only as Women\* nor only as Black people, but rather very specifically as racially marked female subjects. The innovative and the political force of intersectionality theory lies in its capability to perceive the complex and entangled layers of marginalisation and to make this a subject of debate and contestation. The aim here is to carve out structural similarities between socially constructed differences and their interrelationship and to understand their compounded

power to do harm. Both the gender order and the racist structure at GM made it impossible for Black Women\* to enjoy the benefits of long employment within the company, let alone to advance in it and get promoted.

### *Political intersectionality as a new equal justice infrastructure strategy*

Kimberlé Crenshaw has visited Berlin at least once a year since 2009. Her efforts to set up a *CRT Europe* together with intersectional justice activists aims at reclaiming intersectionality's original context, i. e. drafting and enforcing legal solutions for multiple marginalised groups and for subjects who are at high risk of discrimination. Following parameters are crucial to this endeavour: '*Specific race projects*', the specific way in which racist structures came about and are anchored socio-historically in the German context, must be understood. The way in which the judicial system is involved in the (re-)production of racist conditions must be understood. Example rulings where racist conditions play a decisive role must be obtained or compiled into a database. On the basis of these rulings (as in the key case of "*Emma Degraffenried vs. General Motors*") the intersectional significance of the barriers in the way of a fair ruling must be understood, specifically for the German context. According to Crenshaw, political intersectionality means in effect that legally effective measures can only be judged by the extent to which they are capable of making visible the circumstances of the most marginalised members of dehumanised groups and of alleviating their specific discrimination. The mobilisation of legal resources aims at achieving justice for those who suffer the highest risk of discrimination. I, along with Peggy Piesche and Katja Kinder, am currently employing Crenshaw's notion of *political intersectionality* to structure and consolidate an

intersectional justice perspective using the Berlin-based consultation process *“Making visible the discrimination and social resilience of People of African Descent” as part of the UN Decade for People of African Descent 2015–2024*. Our aim to design effective equal protection strategies for Berliners of African descent is based, following Crenshaw, on the premise of *legal recognition* and the subsequent acknowledgement, implementation and enforcement of equality of access to legal remedies. In a deeper sense, it is based on recognising and making visible the inner diversity including internal patterns of inequality within the Black experience. *Political intersectionality* is a crucial resource and benchmark for the implementation of diversity and equal justice project within and for the Black Communities of Berlin.



Kimberlé Crenshaw at the CIJ Inauguration  
Conference in Berlin, September 2017  
Photo: CIJ

*“It’s not about supplication,  
it’s about power. It’s not  
about asking, it’s about  
demanding. It’s not about  
convincing those who are  
currently in power, it’s  
about changing the very  
face of power itself.”*

# Ableism and intersectionality

*By Elena Chamorro*

To be catapulted into the category of “disabled” from one day to the next, which is what happened to me, is a special and strange experience. Without any prior knowledge of this new identity which is suddenly attached to us, the only frame of reference one has for understanding it is that of the able-bodied man or *Woman*\* one has been up until then. Thus the disability is perceived from the outset as a tragedy that can only lead to an unhappy life; as for the body, it is objectified as being less valuable and having less value. However, there are some people—among whom I include myself—who lovingly reappropriate their body. They change the mainstream interpretation of the experience of disability to see it above all as a set of discrimination, exclusion and oppression experiences.

Although I was aware of the systematic discriminations and oppressions, as I was of the similarity of my experience with those of other marginalised groups, it took me a long time to realise that there was a concept that gave a name to my personal experience. This concept—ableism—provided me with a lens that explained both the dislove of disabled bodies, and the violence of all kinds that they are made to suffer. It was through reading texts by English-speaking activists that I encountered this term, and it was in the same way that I first heard about Kimberlé Crenshaw’s concept of intersectionality. This came to complete the framework needed to analyse my essential experience as a disabled *Woman*\* from a point of view

that was less reductionist than the single approach-angle of ableism.

I am currently an activist in *Collectif Lutte et Handicaps pour l'Égalité et l'Émancipation* (CLHEE), a young action group of disabled men and Women\*, which seeks precisely to interpret and explain our realities in terms of ableism, while placing this in an intersectional context.

In France, the main organisations representing disabled people cannot be regarded as anti-ableism campaigners. In fact their discourses often support ableist ideology. But beyond their discourses, in practice, their main activity is to manage institutions, and in this regard it is useful to remember that institutionalisation has been condemned by the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).

As for French feminist movements, they mention disabled Women\* still too infrequently, often anecdotally, and in almost total ignorance of the specifics of their realities, naming them without managing to make them visible. Some mention them while adopting a clearly ableist perspective. Moreover, there is just one single organisation that exists for the defence of disabled Women\*. However well it takes account of the double discrimination they suffer, it does not claim to represent intersectional feminism.

Thus the anti-ableist dimension of our struggle, even more so with an intersectional perspective, is both unusual and novel in the landscape of movements for the defence of human rights in France.

However, if we take a look for example at two recent measures by the current government, we can see the extent to which the plasticity of the concept created by Kimberlé Crenshaw enables a fine-tuned and necessary analysis of the impacts of policies which concern us.

The government of *La République en Marche* recently passed a law known as the *loi Elan*, which relates back to

an obligation imposed in the so-called 2005 law stating that all newly built homes situated on the ground floor or served by a lift have to meet accessibility standards. With the passing of the *loi Elan*, only 20% of new-build apartments will be accessible. Some disabled people's organisations have criticised the discriminatory effects of this law: the difficulty of finding an accessible apartment will force many of them to live in institutions. Yet the consequences resulting from the interaction between class, gender and disability have not been sufficiently pointed out. The poorest disabled men and Women\*, those who are unable to pay for the work needed to make a home accessible, much less buy a plot of land to build a house on, will often have only the (non-)choice of living in an institution. There are those who defend institutions, in their own interests, as places of protection. But actually because of their closed nature and the inadequacy of external controls, they are places that encourage abuse, including sexual abuse, as is regularly revealed by the media. And this mainly affects Women\*.

Apart from the *loi Elan*, it has just been decided that the spouses' income will continue to be taken into account in order to reduce or even stop benefit payments to disabled adults. Financial dependency on spouses, which is often coupled with physical dependency, also will not affect all disabled people in the same way. It will put the most dependent among them at risk, and particularly Women\*, who are almost twice as likely to be subjected to physical and sexual violence by their partner as able-bodied Women\*. Moreover, they are less well provided for—reasons include the accessibility of shelters for victims.

Though this illustration is only brief, it demonstrates the advantage of an intersectional approach in highlighting the different effects of the same measure within our community (discriminations within discriminations). It also shows how the vulnerability of disabled Women\*

is politically constructed, while commonly presented as something inherent in their condition.

So the concept of intersectionality seems to me to be an interpretative framework that rightly takes account of the specific features that arise from the intersection of discriminatory situations, and sheds light on ways of combating them. But above all, in my view, because of its porosity, it is a valuable tool for breaking down boundaries in social struggles, and is likely to encourage empathy and convergence that is of benefit to all.



# Intersectionality— a weighty concept with history

*By Sabine Hark*

When you say Kimberlé Crenshaw, you mean intersectionality—and vice versa. It's a bit like Einstein and the Theory of Relativity or Newton and the Law of Gravity. Two sides of the same coin. Inseparable. And of considerable weight. After all, the concept of intersectionality has shaped our understanding of the complexity of discrimination and the diverse and often contradictory interrelationships and overlappings of power structures, beyond feminist thought, like no other, in recent years. The fact that we have been talking of “multiple discrimination” ever since the UN World Conference against Racism in 2001 in South Africa is just one piece of evidence among many. Intersectionality is a response to the great challenge that, on the one hand, you can understand the living conditions and subjectivities of all sexes only if you do not confine yourself to sex or *gender*, and on the other, that these conditions cannot be understood without a comprehensive understanding of gender relations and *gender*. Gender relations, just like racial, ethnic and class relations, collaborate with other dimensions of social division; they are mediated and ruptured by them and they mediate and rupture them. “Race”, as Judith Butler once said, is ‘lived in the modality of sexuality’ and ‘the social gender is lived in the modality of ‘race’’. Marginalizations thus do not occur successively or side by side, rather they amalgamate, overlap, and appear in the guise

of the other. Intersectionality, according to Kimberlé Crenshaw, does not mean that I am first knocked down by racism and then by sexism, but by both simultaneously. The extent to which this continues to be exciting and challenging in equal measure when it comes to thinking about the interweaving of power relations becomes clear when we consider how long we have been trying to think this way. It goes back much further than Crenshaw's metaphor of the crossroads. In her biography *A Colored Woman in a White World* from the year 1940, the African American journalist, civil rights activist, feminist and pioneer in the universal suffrage movement, Mary Church Terrell (who in 1904 at the International Women's Congress in Berlin together with Susan B. Anthony represented the US women's rights associations, where she was the only Black speaker) described her own story as that of a "*colored woman living in a white world. It cannot possibly be like a story written by a white woman. A white woman has only one handicap to overcome—that of sex. I have two—both sex and race*". And another half a century earlier, in 1892, the African American writer, sociologist, mathematician, educationalist and activist Anna J. Cooper (who in 1925, at the age of 65, was only the fourth Black woman in the history of the United States to earn a doctorate in philosophy) explained: "*The colored woman of to-day occupies a unique position in this country. She is confronted by both a woman question and a race problem, and is as yet an unknown or an unacknowledged factor in both.*"

Mary Church Terrell and Anna J. Cooper themselves are yet to be discovered—certainly in German-speaking academic and activist contexts; however, their thought lives on unbeknownst to many in the concept of intersectionality. 100 years after Anna Cooper's reflections, Kimberlé Crenshaw indirectly built on this figure of the unknown or unacknowledged position of the Black wom\*n when she

spoke of intersectional invisibility, the invisibility of intersectionally structured positions and relations. Crenshaw referred to a systematic cross-fading, which render invisible both the gender-specific aspects of racial discrimination and the racial implications of gender discrimination. To remember Mary Church Terrell or Anna J. Cooper is not mere nostalgia, rather, it constitutes an active intervention in a peculiar historical amnesia that is often manifested in discussions of intersectionality; this in turn itself actively contributes to the rendering invisible of the rich and varied history of feminist thought and feminist activism and to the interweaving of sexism and racism. And this is perhaps even more valid for the history of the German-speaking reception of her work than for Crenshaw herself. Because long before the transatlantic journey and the arrival of the metaphor of the crossing of repression relations in the 1990s, feminist, lesbian-feminist and women's movement circles wrestled with the question of how sexism, racism and class-based power relations are linked to one another.

I will just mention one example: In the call to the first joint wom\*n's congress of foreign and German wom\*n, which took place in March 1984 in Frankfurt am Main, the wom\*n (calling themselves "foreign" at the time) described their situation thus: "Being a female foreigner means direct disenfranchisement and oppression in three respects: as foreigner, as wage-dependent worker, and as woman". It is "high time", they said, to step out of the "isolation and loneliness in the daily struggle against oppression by the law, by men, by the conditions at the workplace", and to "break the silence in exchange with each other, but also in exchange with German women". The idea for the congress came about after the wom\*n at the "Tribunal against xenophobia and human rights violations", which had taken place the year before yet again, found "that the 'question of women's rights' was treated as marginal", for which a discussion in

a working group was adequate, as they write in the congress documentation. The congress itself, which was held under the motto of “Are we really so alien to ourselves?” and which was attended by more than 1000 wom\*n, included several talks and working groups intensely examining and discussing the relationship between racism and sexism. I vividly remember to this day the passionate discussions, the intense attempts to become intelligible to each other, and the irrepressible will to make a difference.

This “1st joint women’s congress of foreign and German women” vividly illustrated what the social scientist Gudrun Axeli Knapp called the “hot epistemic culture” of feminism: that feminists and wom\*n in the wom\*n’s movement (not always the same) produce feminist—and, yes, also intersectional—theories that are close to the conditions and constellations of their specific lives and experiences. It is events like these—and many more could be named—that are part of a yet-to-be-told feminist genealogy of intersectional knowledge production. And to understand and to politicise the work of the “foreign women” at the congress in Frankfurt, their aspirations, and the “disenfranchisement and oppression in three respects” which they experienced is part of this story. It is the story of knowledge production which starts at the very point at which mere programmatic pronouncements on intersectionality stop: at the exploration of the specific and ultimately coincidental constellations of dominance and submission, empowerment and confinement. To think in terms of intersectionality and intersectional policy-making therefore also means to work against the rendering of this history as invisible.

# Racial capitalism: hierarchies of belonging

*By Fatima El-Tayeb*

Intersectionality to me is the single most meaningful form of practical theory and theorizing practice. It is descriptive, in the sense that it helps make my own life experiences legible to me, and it is prescriptive, in giving me guidelines how to approach my academic work, my activism and my personal relationships. In all three areas, it boils down to approaching differences as a source of possibility rather than fear and as seeing coalitions as works in progress, as relationships that can be great, even transformative, but do not have to last forever.

Intersectionality to me also references the profound and necessary connection between movements and theorists. Intersectionality is a shorthand, a term developed and elaborated by Kimberlé Crenshaw in unique ways, but it is also the culmination of decades of Black women organizing against their own marginalization and for universal liberation, from Anna Julia Cooper to Frances Beal to the Combahee River Collective to Audre Lorde to the National Welfare Rights Organization. Intersectionality is a brilliant political theory that has spawned uncounted responses and additions, inspired new fields of inquiry like queer of color critique and has fundamentally changed academic disciplines. It has also been coopted by the neoliberal university, by a superficial multiculturalism that replaces a serious engagement with difference and the power imbalance it creates with shallow lip service to “diversity.”

Some think intersectionality is finally played out, thirty years after “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex” was published. Others, including myself, believe that we still desperately need its insights. Especially now in the face of a successful alliance between neo-nationalism and neoliberalism that uses the same old divide-and-conquer strategies through demonizing difference. Collective resistance to this global threat is mandatory but is often hindered by the demand to deny differences and to unite behind a common, single goal—any critique of which is characterized as harmful and egotistical “identity politics”—leading to the same divisions and exclusions that gave rise to intersectional activism by women of color in the first place. As Audre Lorde observed in 1982: “There is no such thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives.” She did this in a talk titled “Learning from the 60s” and I would suggest that this is an ongoing learning process.

The resistance to “identity politics” and intersectionality extends far into the (*white*) Left, which continues to characterize the naming of hierarchized difference and its consequences as an act of divisiveness, of “playing the race card,” playing the victim, denying that *white* men can be oppressed, too... If I identify as a Black lesbian migrant, I am doing neither of these things, I am merely claiming my positionality in a world in which race, gender, sexuality and nationality are used to produce hierarchies of belonging. Lesbians and trans\*people of color in particular have to not only deal with structural racism, sexism, queer- and transphobia in society in general, but simultaneously with these issues within activist communities. They do not ever have the luxury to take it for granted that their voices will be heard and their interests included, the solidarity that they are asked to provide to feminist, LGBT, Black, Muslim communities is often not granted to them in return,

because they remain deviant even in these communities. Nonetheless, lesbians and trans\*people of color remain key to anti-racist, feminist and queer movements, often doing the least valued work while being faced with constant ignorance and aggression. This is no coincidence, neither is the origin of intersectionality in the activism of Black women who needed to take their liberation into their own hands.

Intersectionality also means however, the need to remain attentive to new constellations, shifts in interconnected power structures and in one's own positionality vis-à-vis allies and antagonists. It demands honest assessments of diverging experiences (as Crenshaw wrote in *Mapping the Margins*: "The problem with identity politics is not that it fails to transcend difference,... but rather the opposite—that it frequently conflates or ignores intra-group differences... ignoring difference within groups contributes to tension among groups..."), but it does not allow for self-righteous victimhood. One of the most important insights intersectionality has to offer is the need to remain attentive to our own complex positionalities in the various networks we move in, to not only acknowledge when we have privilege but to use it towards the ultimate dismantling of the intersectional system of racial capitalism.

*“Twenty-seven years after Anita Hill testified in front of the Senate Judiciary Committee that Clarence Thomas sexually harassed her (...), we still have not learned our mistakes from that mess in 1991. We are still ignoring the unique vulnerability of black women.”*



Kimberlé Crenshaw  
with Luke Harris,  
co-founder of AAFE,  
2018  
Photo: Julia  
Sharpe-Levine



# Imagining community: Kimberlé Crenshaw and queer/trans of color politics

*By Jin Haritaworn*

I live in a place where I can be trans, queer, kinky, poly, left wing, a person of color, parent, activist, academic, and artist and, with all these traits, find or make community that, by and large, understands me. Here, intersectionality is not an academic term but a concept that is used and understood, even by people who never went to university. Community like this did not always exist for me.

Being queer, trans and of color often means being all on your own. Especially for people like me, who came out in the 1990s and early 2000s. Back then, people-of-color spaces were largely straight or violently cis, and adopted a defensive attitude to trans identities, which they often treated as just white. This is easily forgotten in today's discussions on archives, ancestors and inter-generational relationships. We were simply a very small group with very few allies. Queer spaces presented no alternative, as they were unabashedly *white* and busy building their media and political careers on racism. It was often better, therefore, to keep your circles small. In London, I had exactly two friends who were also trans and of color. In Berlin, one. Our relationships were exposed to constantly been fetishized and divided and to rule maneuvers. I sometimes wonder how our friendships even lasted this long.

Finding community involved having to do a lot of traveling, and we all did that. Either upping and leaving completely—as I did, from North Rhine-Westphalia to London, Berlin and, ultimately, Toronto. Or in our minds, deeply engrossed in books, zines and, later on, blogs. Books like *This Bridge Called My Back*, *Entfernte Verbindungen*, *Sister/Outsider*, *Showing Our Colors: Afro-German Women Speak Out*, *Women, Race and Class*, *Miscegenation Blues* and *Q&A: Queer and Asian in America* opened up worlds to me that did not exist around me and, in part, still don't. Finding community often requires imagination. Most of these authors I have never met in real life, and meeting heroes in real life can be disappointing. Yet for a while, at least, their words gave me companionship and nourished fibers and facets of me that they could likely not foresee.

I only once had the honor of meeting Kimberlé Crenshaw in person. In 2012, Cengiz Barskanmanz organized the *Critical Race Theory Europe* symposium where I also spoke. She had already become part of my 'imagined community' (a concept coined by Ben Anderson in an entirely different context), back in the late 1990s in London. A fellow woman of color student mentioned her name while we were in the elevator. Crenshaw was not on the reading list of the only gender-themed course of our program, which we were both taking. In fact, her name was rarely mentioned in the other gender studies classrooms in London that I later attended as a masters and PhD student, too. Odd, when you consider how famous she already was at the time! Yet, not surprising. This was the turn of the millennium, and the backlash against Black feminism in the name of post-structuralism and post-modernism was in full swing. Audre Lorde was still on the curriculum, but with the addendum: 'We do things differently now.' A week later, Butler and other white queer theorists would be on the syllabus, who discredited concepts such as intersectionality and

positionality as outdated, essentialist, static, binary and identitarian. Queers of color would be paraded as examples of how every identity ‘inherently’ produces exclusions (as if white and cis people’s complicity and inability to share had nothing to do with these exclusions!). Few, on the other hand, were interested in the theoretical and political interventions of multiply marginalized people, especially in Europe. We, too, needed a while to learn to appreciate each other. In addition, the white queer female editor of one of the first articles written on intersectionality in Germany in the early 2000s, written by myself, claimed that the word did not exist in German. A few years later, the same word appeared on her homepage.

I ultimately found Crenshaw’s writings on my own. Her comeback below on the ‘vulgar constructionism’ of dominant anti-identitarians had my heart beat faster:

*At this point in history, a strong case can be made that the most critical resistance strategy for dis-empowered groups is to occupy and defend a politics of social location rather than to vacate and destroy it.*

Later on, Crenshaw gave me and my students community with her thoughts on violence. Her texts on domestic violence against cis women of color and migrant women included arguments that we were able to build on and extend to homophobic and transphobic violence against people of color. Indeed, Crenshaw’s texts were the first I read that criticized the recourse to therapeutic and police measures in the white-dominated women’s movement. Above all, she gave us confirmation that people whose residence status depends on their partner, as well as Black people whose communities are exposed to ongoing police violence, have good reason not to call the police—and that

many victims of violence experience further violence when the police is called. Crenshaw thus also nourished our search for alternatives to the racist state and the white-dominated movements that support it. The experiences and theories of Black trans women such as CeCe MacDonald, who was imprisoned after she defended herself against her assailants and became a leading prison abolitionist behind bars, demonstrate that our understanding of intersectionality and the politics of queer and transgender Black, Indigenous and people of color urgently need each other.

As a non-Black person, I am indebted to Kimberlé Crenshaw and other Black feminists who have given us intersectionality and other concepts. I also appreciate how strongly and consistently Crenshaw has supported intersectional knowledge formations in the German-speaking world. Unlike some other North American theorists, she is not a fly-in academic who spends her holidays in Berlin and then just leaves again. Her presence at the Center for Intersectional Justice, a key venue founded by Emilia Roig in Berlin, which serves people of color of all sexualities and gender identities, is testimony to this.

# Where are the Black female professors in Europe?

*By Iyiola Solanke*

When she penned her now infamous article on intersectionality for the Harvard Civil Rights-Civil Liberties Law Review in 1989, it is unlikely that Kim Crenshaw imagined the impact that her words would have around the world. Since then, the idea of intersectionality has crossed territorial borders and disciplinary boundaries to become one of the most successful and well-travelled theories exported from the USA. Crenshaw will forever be linked with this powerful and evocative idea, making her also one of the most influential black academics in the world and no doubt in history. The ideas of black women rarely spread so far and wide, although recent films such as ‘Hidden Figures’ are revealing that ideas which have changed history do in fact emanate from black women more regularly than may be imagined.

My engagement with the theory of intersectionality began when I was a junior academic, the only black woman teaching in a regional university in the UK, a country that in 2018 has fewer than 30 female professors of African-Caribbean heritage out of a total of 18,000. In my precarious position—Black, British, female, junior, visible yet invisible—her article had a significant impact. From my location in the overwhelmingly white and male environment of the legal academy in Britain, it was inspiring to know that this theory, articulated by somebody who looked like me, had

been so well received and applied by academics in diverse fields around the world.

However, while I was overjoyed by the reception of intersectionality in Europe, the more I read, the more I became dismayed by its evident transformation. Here was a concept—developed by black women to improve the legal situation of black women—and yet this origin and objective were hardly visible in the works on the concept written by European scholars and researchers. Much was written about ‘multiple discrimination’ but nothing on critical race theory or critical race feminism. I found little on the role of black women workers in global capitalism, and missed any appreciation of the idea of synergy central to the theory.

The lack of depth afforded to the theory in its European formulation taught me two very important lessons: first, on the power of the Academy in its role as creator of contemporary knowledge, and second—related to the first—on the dangers of homogeneity in the Academy as it fulfils this important public service. Universities and research institutions have an important role to play not only in education but also in creation of the knowledge and theories that inform everyday life. This is true of intersectionality: the theory was created by academics in the USA to highlight a social and legal phenomenon and has travelled through institutions of higher education to exert its influence on the world. Bilge has argued that the silence on its origins was the key to its success—it is why intersectionality was so widely accepted. However, the transformation was a high price to pay: the lack of deep engagement with the theory took it towards becoming the ‘many headed hydra’ mentioned in *Degraffenreid*. It was reduced to another theory of identity and dismissed, instead of raised as a philosophy of global inequality. Black women were de-centred as it was brought within the fold of anti-discrimination law.

Re-marginalisation of black women in intersectionality theory in Europe can be attributed to the absence of black scholars in higher education. There are few black professors or post-graduate researchers in the UK, and even fewer in the rest of Europe. This made a difference to the understanding and development of intersectionality in Europe. The hollowing out of intersectionality was only possible because of the absence of a critical mass of Black professors conducting research from the perspective of and on the experiences of Black Europeans in the places where the theory took root—universities and research institutions across Europe. Sadly, in the UK and Europe we are yet to fully appreciate the need for critical mass in academia.

Coupled with this is the fact that the idea of race remains a taboo in many European countries. Discussion of race is treated as racism, even though the objectification of the black female body—for example as a bare-breasted cake filled with a blood-red sponge<sup>1</sup>—is acceptable. Where race is rejected as a meaningful socio-political category, black women workers remain marginalised and their specific experiences are invisible in law and politics. To remove race from intersectionality is therefore to re-marginalize the very voices and experiences that the concept was created to centralize. Prevention of a public discussion of race both creates the conditions for perpetuation of racism and prevents an effective remedy for intersectionality.

Identification of this re-marginalisation in intersectionality theory in Europe and understanding why it was possible had a profound impact: from doubting my position

---

1 <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/apr/17/sweden-europe-news>; <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-17749533> [accessed Nov 24<sup>th</sup> 2018]. See also Ruble, Kayla, 2014. Sweden Plans to Thwart Racism By Eliminating the Mention of Race From Its Laws. Online at <https://news.vice.com/article/sweden-plans-to-thwart-racism-by-eliminating-the-mention-of-race-from-its-laws> [accessed Nov 24<sup>th</sup> 2018]

and value as an academic, I saw that as one of few black female academics in the UK, I had an important role—to ensure that plural worldviews are given voice and visibility in the Academy. I channelled this into a responsibility to retrieve intersectionality from the discourse of identity into which it had been casually thrown. I wanted to liberate it from the mis-understandings which seemed to surround it, locate it in the history and thought of black women from slavery onwards and operationalise it so that it could provide a legal remedy for all caught in situations at the blind spots of anti-discrimination law. I was determined that the world would know and appreciate the full value of intersectionality and the important intellectual contribution of black female scholars to knowledge and understanding.

This determination culminated in a piece accepted for publication by a prestigious legal journal, the *Modern Law Review*, entitled ‘Putting Race and Gender Together: A New Approach to Intersectionality’. As a result of that piece, I was invited to write another, for the highly regarded *Industrial Law Journal*, on the intersectional provision inserted into the Equality Act 2010. Over the years, I have tried to make a contribution to the theory of intersectionality and raise awareness of the social dangers of homogeneity in higher education. I now regularly speak about the need to nurture black female and male academics in the UK, not only those already working as academics but also those currently in doctoral programmes.

So, although the theory of intersectionality is not about identity, it helped me to find and assert my academic identity. Without Crenshaw’s work, I may never have fully understood the value of my presence in academia. While others gave me the tools to enter academia, she gave me the courage to stay in the profession and assert my presence in both research and teaching, regardless of the extent to which the academic environment welcomes this.





Kimberlé Crenshaw with Eve Ensler at the  
2017 Women's March on Washington  
Photo: AAPF

*“To our distress, Anita Hill was not defended by the most influential Democrats on the Judiciary Committee or by a majority of African-Americans. Inside the hearing room, committee members painted her as an angry and sexually deranged woman. Outside, Republican senators described her as having nefarious motives and a dubious background.”*

*“Donald Trump’s path to power was littered with attacks on Muslims, women, immigrants, people of color, people with disabilities, people who are undocumented, and people who are queer. And these communities have suffered under his administration. The November 6th election presents an opportunity to put significant checks on Trumpism.”*



Kimberlé Crenshaw in Washington DC, March 2018  
Photo: Janet E. Dandridge

# A flight of butterflies

By Emilia Roig

I met Prof. Kimberlé Crenshaw at Columbia University in 2012. She was introduced to me by a friend and colleague who had previously studied with her shortly before I flew to New York to embark on a research stay as Visiting Scholar. I planned my project meticulously: I had already registered for the courses I would take, the conceptual and analytical framework of my PhD thesis had already been drafted, and I had confirmed the timeline with my supervisor at Columbia University. All my plans were turned upside down after meeting with Kimberlé Crenshaw. I instantly decided to dive in head first in the new theoretical path that was opening up to me.

Prof. Crenshaw accepted to become my supervisor and I dropped all the other classes I had registered for to devote my full time and attention—and heart and soul—to the two courses taught by her in the Fall Semester of 2012: “Intersectionalities” and “Critical Race Theory”. I was immediately spellbound by the readings and my curiosity transformed into an insatiable urge to untangle, uncover, and unravel all the knots and puzzles that my mind had been grappling with. The *white* Eurocentric curriculum I had been studying in German, British and French universities had not provided the answers I was looking for, at best making me feel inappropriate, at worst triggering deep discomfort. As a student of law and public policy, I hadn’t been exposed to postcolonial, feminist and other critical studies. The several months leading up to the research stay had paved the way for Prof. Crenshaw’s classes. I had started to get acquainted with decolonial thought, queer

feminism and critical legal studies. I had read the seminal works of Prof. Crenshaw prior to my stay at Columbia but I could not have anticipated the profound impact it would have on my personal and professional life. This decision fundamentally changed the course of my research and enriched it to an extent I could not have imagined. It enhanced my critical thinking, strengthened my theoretical arguments, deepened my academic knowledge on feminism, anti-racism, intersectionality and—most importantly—provided an analytical framework to understand and articulate my political identity. Born in the suburbs of Paris to a Sephardic and Ashkenazi Jew from Algeria and a Martinican mother, and adding my queerness to the mix, my ambiguous identity has never neatly fitted anywhere. Finally, there was a word for it: intersectionality. Beyond the individual level, the concept unleashed tremendous possibilities on a political-structural level: all of us located at the intersections of several systems of inequality and oppression could be made visible and finally emerge from a legal and discursive vacuum.

I had religiously studied the syllabus and entered the classroom eager to discuss the introductory text, when, for the first time in my life, I sat across a majority of other women of color and we were taught by an incredibly charismatic and inspiring Black woman. I have a hard time describing the strong empowering effect it had on me, but Rupri Kaur does it well:

*“representation  
is vital  
otherwise the butterfly  
surrounded by a group of moths  
unable to see itself  
will keep trying to become the moth—representation”  
— Rupri Kaur, The Sun and Her Flowers*

I was surrounded by butterflies and the experience was powerful. Beyond the content of the classes, which—needless to say—were fascinating, the atmosphere, where the lines between the personal and the political were blurred, allowed for eye-opening and mind-expanding conversations between people living at the intersections of multiple identities.

The research stay at Columbia marked a decisive shift in my dissertation and in my life. I had stepped out of the matrix and stepping back in had become impossible. Though uncomfortable it may be, my position at the margins also carries its gifts: the privilege to deconstruct the tightly knit fabric of imperialist, capitalist, white supremacist patriarchy—to borrow from bell hooks—; the capacity to articulate a different narrative that reflects my existence and perspective; the ability to rethink existing frameworks and create new ones; and the sheer luck of belonging to a global community of activists, thinkers, artists and believers in a world free of systemic oppression.

Four years after having met Kimberlé Crenshaw for the first time, we met again in Paris in November 2016. As fate has it, we were speaking at the same conference at Sciences Po Paris. A seed had been planted in my head a few weeks before: I was going to found an advocacy organization meant to bring the concept of intersectionality forward in Europe. Over dinner, I brought up the idea and bluntly asked Kimberlé Crenshaw if she would accept to become the President of this yet-to-be organization, whose name hadn't been found at the time. She said yes.

Aware of the incredible privilege it was to have Kimberlé Crenshaw on board, I quit my job and launched myself passionately into it. Six months later, the Center for Intersectional Justice (CIJ) was born. It was an instinctive and easy birth, the natural outcome of my political awakening. A place to assert our vision of intersectionality was

created, where it would be possible to reinvest the concept, rebuild its subversive potential through insurgent practice, and refill the gaping holes that have weakened intersectionality on its way from North America to Europe. And maybe we'll be audacious enough to reinvent parts of the concept. Therein lies the gift of Kimberlé Crenshaw: giving people at the margins a tool that can be collectively nurtured, adapted, remodeled, and imagined.

Through her complete trust, sensible advice and subtle guidance, Kim has been a mentor and an incredible source of inspiration since the beginning.

# A reflection: on migration, difference and living a feminist life

By Clementine Ewokolo Burnley

*'So intersectionality just put a framework on a set of experiences that conventional approaches had overlooked.'*

*Kimberlé Crenshaw*

My practice of intersectionality relates directly to my experiences as a Black African migrant feminist, who moves between specific locations in Cameroon and Germany, where racial capitalism functions differently. Intersectionality reminds us feminists are not all the same. Our differences as Black feminists are important to explain how we “do” feminist political resistance and why sometimes coalitions are hard to sustain.

*'If we aren't intersectional some of us, the most vulnerable are going to fall through the cracks.'*

*Kimberlé Crenshaw*

I reflect on cracks in Germany; On how border politics, precarity, body politics, native language competence, and class are compounded; on N'deye Marieme Sarr (she), Christy Schwundek (she) Oury Jalloh (he), and Ousmane Sey (he), vulnerable people who all died in contact with German police.

I reflect on spaces for radical change, which are small and threatened; on the most vulnerable in Cameroon; On poor, Trans, Non-binary and Queer folks active, in fragile alliance and open conflict. On competing and organizing in Cameroon around basic access to roads, water, electricity, schools, and hospitals. On Trans, Non-binary and Queer folks forced to hide, excluded from jobs and homes. Bodies and histories fragmented.

Differences silence. In reality, nothing moves in Cameroon without—. Reflect on the work of unacknowledged Trans, Non-binary and Queer folks. On racism as consequence, not cause. On sexism and cissexism as choice. Dominance as choice.

I also reflect on emancipatory possibilities; for collective healing in community, giving up and taking power in community, shifting positions in community. On giving up dominance in our communities. An intersectional view helps hold difference with spaciousness, shows examples of people who thrive, interdependent folks, full-spectrum body, sexual, gender and relationship expressions.

What if I returned to the spacious self, was able to see I'd done wrong without collapsing or demanding to be forgiven, able to take responsibility for harm and repair, perhaps even in a way that maintains relationship if the person harmed wants this.

I might be able to reflect the writer, Valerie Brown, in not being strong, embracing the full range of emotions, relearning '... what it is to be human; how to rest, how to pause, how to listen, how to speak to each other, how to take turns speaking, how to nourish ourselves, and how to hold what is uncomfortable.'

I might reflect the most radical, cared for self; remember in raising my voice, other voices mute. Shut up, get really present, listen with heart, be glad we are not the



same. I might be glad we can endure each other, can be a mosaic of changing and reforming collectives, and come into community with our different bodies, needs and emotions. Cross movements.

*'... social power attaches to people,  
because of who they are in a society that has  
determined that certain groups, over the  
course of history, deserve less, are less valuable,  
and are expendable.'*

*Kimberlé Crenshaw*

Migration is a produced difference. The migrant is stranded and fractured, an in-between identity, defined by a hyphen.

Many migrants seek belonging; to a powerful country, community, group or movement. I prefer to release the stable, go down a different road and consider fluid forms of belonging outside fixed categories. Here I do not mean the global expatriate lifestyle. Instead of seeking to overcome deliberately created differences, I prefer to focus on what pushes people into migration; on bodies that for more than five hundred years have been darkened, confined, reproduced, silenced, and consumed. What if by considering the local specific and transnational, we can renegotiate our relationship to nation states?

What if we turned inwards, towards each other, towards the full difference of experiences we hold? That's scary. We hurt each other in community. Differences irritate. No community holds the whole truth of a single individual member. Between gender expression, skin, sexual expression, class, citizenship it seems impossible to be truthful, whole and in community. To be Black Queer feminist in the right way. To be perfect. In activist relationships, as in all relationships there are moments of togetherness, and then I feel we miss each other, disconnect. So I stop

speaking because I am afraid, leave because I can't speak without fear. Although words are only one violence. Differences isolate.

Most people have had at least one painful experience while negotiating difference in community. It's possible to be held hostage by a singular hurt, forgetting the collective.

What if we focused holding relationships. On coalition with Non-binary, Trans and Queer folks.

Knowing what violences arise in defining 'others,' I don't expect everyone to use exactly the same words. Still, can I be more specific? Can I learn to own my part in oppressing others? Yes. Differences liberate.

I am not at risk of dying while escaping the gender binary, poverty or war. We are not all equal. Most marginalized, mutates. Differences complicate.

Intersectionality shows where codes in culture, language (s), body presentation, help deflect harm. A job, a home, friends, agency, mobility, power. Limited, contested, threatened; I still have some power. A close look reveals hierarchies, harm to those more marginalized, how I benefit in one place; which influence I exert in another. How I don't stand in a theoretical space outside racial capitalism. I fuck up. I don't always avoid harm to myself or others. The practice is to reflect, do better and demand that others do the same.

Reflection: throwing back by a body or surface, of light, heat or sound, without scattering. Belonging joy complex, evolving, painful and true.

# **Kimberlé Crenshaw at the German Federal Constitutional Court: religion at the crossroads between race and gender**

*By Nahed Samour*

Kimberlé Crenshaw takes the legal definition of *race* and the force of its legal impact seriously. She centralizes race as a category in intersectional thinking. It is her work on critical race theory that brought her to intersectional law. As with every attribute of discrimination, race on its own frequently does not tip the scale but, as historically shown, has always been linked to other attributes. Crenshaw has, above all, highlighted the categories of race and gender as examples of interlaced attributes of exclusion and translated them, in legal terms, as a violation of equal rights legislation. On the strength of her seminal research into critical race theory and intersectionality, we are now in a position to bring to light such overlapping and interdependent attributes as a legally tangible exclusion, to give it a name, and to more precisely describe the demands for equality.

In Germany, intersectionality thinking in jurisprudence is slowly but gradually meeting with approval. In jurisdiction, this was perhaps most prominently reflected in a ruling passed by the German Federal Constitutional Court in 2015. The Court pointed to the fact that banning instructors from making political, religious, ideological or

similar symbolic visual statements in school might not only represent religious but equally gender discrimination. In terms of the purpose of such a regulation, these bans target headscarf-wearing Muslim women, as chronologically speaking, the bans were issued and applied as an immediate response to the first headscarf ruling of the German Federal Constitutional Court in 2003. In this ruling, the Court had put forward the option to the state legislators to pass the headscarf ban into parliamentary law. In this constellation, the ban crucially illustrates that the group of headscarf-wearing women is especially impacted at the interface of two typical attributes of discrimination, namely religion and gender.

Not only is a woman wearing a headscarf discriminated against “as a woman” (as male Muslims and females not wearing scarfs are employed), and not only “as religious Muslims” (as only non-headscarf-wearing women are employed) but most certainly two categories converge: religion plus gender. The legal significance of arguably the first-ever juridical linkage between religion and gender in the decision of the German Federal Constitutional Court in 2015 is not to be underestimated and encourages an accentuation of forms of intersectional discrimination also in different constellations before the courts.

Yet, the headscarf case should have been read with Crenshaw: The constellation of religion and gender cannot be read without race. The “race-religion constellation” (A. Topolski, 2018) or “the entanglement of race and religion” (Aguilar/Ahmad, 2017) has a tradition: with “Arabs as Muslims” in mind, and vice-versa, Edward Said described this as orientalism (1979). Even though he did not work with the race category, he did illustrate the Orientalizing and racializing European view of the hierarchization of people. The long-lasting European hierarchy between Christian and non-Christian has, today, given way to the

modern understanding of the secular and religious, but frequently produces the same exclusions. These, above all, become influential and visible when the religious element comes to the fore, in particular based on clothing and lived or legally demanded practices.

What religion and race have in common is that both are used as discourse on “difference” and presented as different, threatening and “naturally” backward. Religion is therefore racialized and, at the same time, thus risks being warranted a lower level of state protection—because Germany still does not talk about race. Whilst many areas in Europe have put race as a biological concept behind them, it can be observed that, when referencing religion, especially Islam, an exclusion argument is accepted that is racially charged.

By way of example, during her final submission on the Achbita case in 2017, the Advocate General at the European Court of Justice, Juliane Kokott, requested that one can turn in their headscarf, unlike the color of their skin, at the cloakroom. This undercuts the looming potential for violence of such enforced, violent and top-down inclusion, which, in and of itself, would only be possible if those concerned were to rescind their constitutive practice. Such a stance clearly also reveals that it only acknowledges the other, the Muslim identity if being different no longer remains visible or must not be acknowledged.

In terms of research into the relationship between religion, race and gender as legal categories, Crenshaw’s works are essential—not solely but also in order to comprehend the legal situation facing Muslim women wearing a headscarf in Germany and Europe, or even to comprehend what overlaps exist between racial profiling and religious profiling, which includes the male gender specifically. Crenshaw’s research has given me the possibility to play a part in the “Critical Race Theory Europe” and

“Intersectional Justice” fields and to elaborate on how legal contexts in the United States of America could be relevant for legal issues in Europe. It also gives me the opportunity, together with Kimberlé—as a scholar and, above all, a sister—to invite my German colleagues to collectively adopt a more explicit focus on religion, race and gender in our research activities.



Kimberlé Crenshaw at CIJ Inauguration Conference  
in Berlin, September 2017  
Photo: CIJ

*“If you look at women of color, especially blacks and Latinas, their economic well-being has been most impacted by deindustrialization, and by the de-funding of the public sector. So if any group had a reason to respond to scapegoat politics, you would think it might be those workers (...) Yet they were least likely to vote for someone not of the establishment.”*



Kimberlé Crenshaw with AAFP and CISPS staff in New York, January 2019  
Photo: Julia Sharpe-Levine

*“Throughout history, black feminist frameworks have been doing the hard work of building the social justice movements that race-only or gender-only frames cannot.”*



# What's in a word?

*By Amandine Gay*

I was introduced to sociology when I was 16. Our teacher used an example from Pierre Bourdieu's book on social mobility (or lack thereof) in France, quoting the extreme low statistics of factory workers' children who wouldn't become factory workers themselves. Having never been trained to think outside the exceptionalism box, I immediately told him that my mom's father was a factory worker and she'd become a teacher so he could keep his social determinism theory for himself. It took me a couple of classes but in the end I managed to understand what my teacher's (and Bourdieu's) point was. Even though they were old white men whose focus was solely on class, they taught me to use social sciences to understand what was happening in my life. Bourdieu did one last thing for me, he's responsible for a quote that would take all its meaning later in my life: "Words are important".

When my English level finally got me to the magical Black Feminist theory realm, I discovered thanks to Audre Lorde that if we were to "dismantle our masters' houses", we would have to be able to redefine, if not altogether reinvent, our language (amongst other tools). Words are important when you're in the margins and constantly defined by others, by a history of violence, forced migrations and cultural dispossession. So when someone comes along with a new word and/or a new concept that perfectly encompasses your own experience, that makes that experience intelligible to you when it was hard getting past the weight of the consequences of who you are. When someone brings you the gift of a new understanding of the world and

of yourself, you'll never forget how they made you feel (like Maya Angelou said). This is why writing about "intersectionality" immediately brings back ghosts of scholars and artists who changed my life.

Receiving this new word and concept from Kimberlé Crenshaw was a defining moment in my life such as when "heteronormativity"; "creolization" or "ableism" entered my world. It made me feel powerful, it made me feel like what I experienced was indeed happening and could be addressed in an empowering way. It made me feel the way films by Sembene Ousmane, Dee Rees or Agnès Varda have made me feel. And as a filmmaker who uses the power of cinema to create empathy, awareness and a sense of belonging, I too have been aspiring to create works that would make people—and Black women in particular—feel. What could I do, then? I could create a language of my own, accessible to the widest audience possible. So I decided that my first film would be the film I needed to see when I was a teenager, but didn't exist yet.

My initial idea was that *Speak Up* should create a sense of a community through a collection of individual testimonies and make young black women feel less isolated. I wanted them to feel empowered, by hearing and sharing collective tales of discrimination and resilience told by other black women. To tell this story, the narrative arch of the film and the questionnaire it is based on are built on an intersectional canvas—even if the word "intersectionality" is not once spoken in the film. I've chosen to make the audience understand intersectionality by witnessing it: listening to 24 black women who address racism, sexism, classism, depression, religion, sexual orientation, maternity and discrimination at work or in school orientation and hearing them speak out about the consequences of these multi-layered discriminations in France and Belgium.

*Speak Up* has also been a way of addressing an issue that has always bothered me in French scholar and activists' circles: the idea that anyone can join the struggle, while as a matter of fact most people (especially in black communities) are way too busy just trying to survive and they don't have the time or the means to organize—or even to acknowledge the scope of what's affecting their lives. I grew tired of the fact that “intersectionality”, a concept created to account for concrete cases of intersecting discriminations, was not made intelligible for the very people who needed it the most. To me, cinema is the perfect way to remind ourselves that existence is already a form of resistance and that breaking the silence is a subversive act in and of itself. As an indie director I intend to tell, document and preserve the stories and contemporary realities of those who are usually spoken for, or spoken of, while creating my own Afro-diasporic aesthetics.

Time and again cinema has been the birthplace of new languages. To me, filmmaking is a way to reclaim the notion of universality from a black feminist standpoint. Guerilla filmmaking gave me the ultimate creative freedom (and the ultimate ulcers that come with the hassle of self-financing. This freedom allowed me to assert myself through aesthetics: I was free to push the talking heads documentary genre to its limits (with a 2-hour film with no music and extreme close up interviews). I was free to envision documentary filmmaking not only as oral history and archival work but also as an opportunity to create a new visual language. Thanks to Kimberlé Crenshaw, other scholars and artists' conceptual innovation and language creativity, I was able to gather strength and inspiration to allow myself complete creative freedom.

So, what's in a word?

A word can be the first step towards emancipation, it can mean endless possibilities to reclaim the narrative and it can inspire others to follow in your footsteps.

*“Throughout history, black feminist frameworks have been doing the hard work of building the social justice movements that race-only or gender-only frames cannot.”*



Kimberlé Crenshaw with aunt Dorcas Parham  
in Washington DC, March 2018  
Photo: Janet E. Dandridge

# Kimberlé Crenshaw's influence on my pedagogical action

By Katja Kinder

As educationalists, we tend to continue traditional norms through our pedagogical action. Our university educational programs offer us established tools for the implementation of such work. These are detailed, finely dissected, theoretically grounded, verbalized, yet in many areas subtle and, overall, reinforcing the existing power structures. I've been working in adult education for over 20 years, above all focusing on conflict mediation and as a consultant to various organizations, teams and companies on the subject of diversity-oriented and discrimination-critical development. In this time, I have particularly learned that during our learning processes, we receive underlying messages how the idealized human and the normative subject of humanity is understood to be; namely, *white*, male, heterosexual and middle-class. Our entire knowledge of education and upbringing is founded on this "quadrinity". Through this doxic-canonist knowledge, pedagogy as a forceful normative science is more a violent "act" or instance of power than a liberating system of actions. The work I do, however, centers on action learning as a means of raising self-enactment. For Black and POC learners, this means having to repeatedly overcome this "quadrinity" and/or constantly being aware of the potential for conflict that lies in this concept-steeped knowledge. Here, the political intersectionality approach is an empowering strategy

for Black and POC learners, which helps to cast the focus on the problematic nature of “quadrinity”. I was introduced to Kimberlé Crenshaw by Maisha Auma, and thus also to her theory of intersectionality. I understand Crenshaw’s work on intersectionality as grounds to the need of learning how to understand and concretize to what extent the systems of power and exploitation are intertwined. This entwined perception of interlaced power relations and axes of power brings systematically dehumanized groups into visibility. It makes their multi-barriered paths more tangible, thus enables them to become the subject of public debate and discussion. Crenshaw’s work has helped me to systematize my knowledge of difference-driven messages and to illustrate this knowledge for my pedagogical practices.

Especially in my work with Black and POC learners, it is important for me to grasp our own entanglements. As children, we are impacted by difference-driven messages; our own entanglements predestine us to actively participate in this differentiation work, and thus to bias. For me especially as a non-jurist, Crenshaw’s work represents a significant translation of legal, discrimination-critical target perspectives. Equity is established when legislation also provides protection to those who have to live their lives ‘*on the margins*’. For me, strikingly simple, accessible, and, at the same time, complex. As Black, queer, gender-independent feminists, there is no mention of us in the pedagogical “quadrinity”. Consequently, we have, de facto, no implementable entitlement to recognition, equity, or opportunities to develop. Complex, because we have consistently had to accommodate this “quadrinity” in us since our very first breath. With its canonically enforced knowledge, and its coloniality, “quadrinity” is inescapably intertwined with us. It has become our second skin. As a result, we internalize a destructive potential from early on to combat against ourselves and act in a (self-) destructive

manner. Through constant reflection—emotionally driven and cognitive—which is always geared to self-determination (as no outside perspective is possible), we are nevertheless in a position to destroy “quadrinity” in ourselves and thus to gradually allow it to die. A newly formulated, self-determined-transgressive Black pedagogy<sup>2</sup> presents us with new spaces of opportunity. In these new solidarity spaces, we constantly challenge the extent to which our pedagogical action advances the required destabilization of *white*, male, heteronormative and middle-class, i. e. a standardization process. In these spaces of self-reflection, we also examine the extent to which our actions makes it possible for us to breathe and creates a space for all realities of life located outside the realms of “quadrinity”.

Through Kimberlé Crenshaw’s work, my personal pedagogical practices are guided by the fact that our actions makes the multi-marginalized, dehumanized, identity-defining sections of our lives visible and perceptible. In doing so, a deeply empathetic pedagogical action is possible. In its implicitness, Black Afro-diasporic pedagogical action is radically geared to the well-being of the We. Its impact is radically aligned to recognition, equity and the realization of development opportunities.

---

2 The term ‘Black pedagogy’ was coined and disseminated by Katharina Rutschky (popularized through Alice Miller). In its construct of ideas, Black refers to something negative. As Black educationalists, we are reclaiming this term because it entails a need for pedagogical action that is indispensable for us.



Kimberlé Crenshaw with staff in New York, January 2019  
Photo: Rebecca Scheckman

*“The ‘othering’ of black women’s sexuality has long been a part of American history. (...) This stereotype has rationalized sexual abuse as culturally-sanctioned byplay between male predators of all races and black female victims.”*



# Can we get a witness?

By Julia Phillips

Discrimination is often experienced on a personal level, in sometimes private, even intimate settings. What the subjects to discrimination in these moments might share is the wish for a witness, a third party, an observer. Borrowing from a vernacular expression rooted in the history of American police profiling of all Black bodies, and in reference to Charles P. Gause's book from 2014 "Can *we* get a witness?" is what we ask ourselves, and the world around us.

Dr. Kimberlé Crenshaw's work empowers those racialized and gendered subjects, who need a witness. She defines the complexity of discrimination, with the rhetoric wit of a legal scholar, and helps those who need to make "the personal political" to borrow a phrase from the Women's Liberation Movement of the 1960/70s. Her work helps to raise attention to discrimination and injustice beyond the personal sentiment, but actually embeds our experiences in a recognized scholarly discourse.

The intellectual framework my art originates from lies at the intersection of Black Feminist, Postcolonial, and Psychoanalytic Thought. My sculptural work thinks about relations and relationships. The ideas in my work can be applied to the small scale of interpersonal relationships, up to a larger scale of social relations. What is common throughout my works are depictions of subject-object relationships: the agent who performs an action, and the agent who experiences the performed action. Titles underline the doer and done-to dynamic: *Fixator*, *Objectifier*, *Exoticizer*, *Manipulator*, *Positioner*.

In my work, I try to create both positions as ambivalent and complex as they are in lived reality. And I try to create work where viewers are asked to position themselves on either side of the subject-object dynamic, and grapple with that complexity.

The term holds the complexity and psychological depth that the subjects to intersectional discrimination face. Dr. Crenshaw's work generates a vocabulary that helps us digest these experiences, by giving them language and validity. She, alongside numerous powerful thinkers in her field, provides validity in a society where certain stories and experiences seem only be accounted for on an institutional level, once they have reached the visibility of academic discourses and university presses.

Being a Witness and making struggles visible by creating a language for them is a crucial tool for the struggling agent to be understood and the agent outside, and potentially causing the struggle, to grow empathy. Empathy with an experience that is not our own is a human value that several political gestures like solidarity are based on, and is therefore a highly productive value.

Intersectionality is not only useful in its original attempt to tie Feminist- and Critical Race Theory together, but it is useful to think of the intersection of any form of discrimination. The inclusive aspect of the term Intersectionality is where I find the great potential of it being an ageless term that will grow with time as more struggles rise to the surface of public discussions; as it already grew including struggles like LGBTQ and gender non-binary, religious minorities, ableism, sizeism, colorism, class, and mental health issues.

During a time where "Diversity" has become an enterprise for numerous kinds of institutions, rethinking and applying the term Intersectionality to the challenge of "strategic" new hiring seems very urgent. Urgent for those

who hire to diversify, and for those hired to embody diversity. The way these questions relate to Intersectionality in my view is, that institutions often strategically target more than one minority marker in one prospective employee. This makes us intersectional diversifiers, so to speak.

Great potential outcomes can come of that, one might think. Since our approaches as intersectional diversifiers do not target one struggle, in ideal instances we can build a more cross-compatible mass. And at the same time we can “on paper” be read as door openers for larger pools of minorities, given our multi-faceted identities.

Where I see the greatest challenge is in going beyond a mere embodiment of diversity, but actually challenging the institutional structure with the politics that are attached to our respective diversity markers, and by our respective intersectional lenses. We don’t just come in a body, but we come with politics.

Diversity can be more than a politically correct gesture. In my mind, it can be a sincere attempt to structural change. And the more intersectional diversity, the greater the chance that all columns of the structure, the house, the institution get thoroughly and collectively destabilized, reconsidered, updated, and freshly installed—for it to be done again and again.

*“We use art and other projects to show how people are experiencing intersectional harms (...) We work directly with advocates and communities to develop ways they can better see these problems and better intervene in advocacy.”*



Kimberlé Crenshaw at the annual Her Dream Deferred series in Washington DC, March 2018  
Photo: Janet E. Dandridge

# The German make-a-wish discourse

By Dania Thaler

10 years ago, at the 20th anniversary of intersectionality theory, Kimberlé Crenshaw was invited to participate in a lecture series in Berlin. She was to give a lecture entitled, *The Curious Resurrection of First Wave Feminism in the US Presidential Elections: An Intersectional Critique of the Rhetoric of Solidarity and Betrayal* in a large lecture hall. Afterwards, a fancy dinner with Crenshaw and a small group of people was on the internal agenda. This was a great opportunity for a hand-picked group of doctoral students and professors to chat with the “inventor” of intersectionality in private. I, and a small BPoC group who had gotten together to form a kind of “activist reading group” some time before, were of course not invited. But we had a plan, an “inside man”, and we were determined to get Kimberlé to join our BPoC group.

2009 was also the year in which I completed my sociology degree. I never fully warmed to the social sciences, even though I was not always quite sure why. We were such a good match after all! But still, it always let me know unequivocally: none of this has anything to do with you.

On the day of her guest lecture, the lecture hall was jam-packed. Many high-profile lawyers, sociologists and professors of gender studies, who had all contributed to the expansion, supplementation, distancing and potentiation of the intersectionality concept in their publications, were present. I expected a lecture peppered with legal terms, multi-level dilemmas and internal constitutional matters.

Looking back, I can say with certainty that on that evening I listened to one of the most entertaining and informative lectures of my time at university. It was one of a few lectures that I understood in its entirety, even though it was held in English and it was not a sociological topic, but a juridical one.

To see Kimberlé Crenshaw live was a great highlight for me, because her work provided a solid foundation to our political, academic and activist battles. And that was what was needed in 2009, when the already tense situation between queer autonomous migrant organizations (and allied ASOs) and white, primarily gay associations in Berlin further boiled up. The latter regularly organized demonstrations, kiss-ins and press campaigns to point to a supposedly inherent conflict between migrants and homosexuals. Their demands, in addition to marriage equality, above all included harsher penalties for “homophobic assaults” in the context of hate crime legislation and stronger cooperation between the police and LGBTI organizations. Needless to say, the attempt to introduce a queer BPOC perspective failed due to a lack of intersectional awareness.

Crenshaw’s talk, which was renamed *Historicizing Intersectionality. A Disciplinary Tale* on relatively short notice, started at the primordial soup. She shared with us her famous crossroad analogy, where race and gender are thought of as roads each with their own structures and isms. If an accident occurs at the point at which the two roads intersect, rescue attempts often fail. The ambulance only sets off if the injury clearly occurred either on the race or on the gender road.

Crenshaw illustrated her analogy using the real-life legal battle of *DeGraffenreid v. General Motors*. Then there were a few questions from the audience and that was it.

Bam. What was that? Had she just explained the periodic table at a quantum physics conference? Yes.

Around the year 2009, white power of definition defended with tooth and nail, not only at the activist level, but especially in the context of university. At my university, too, the concept of intersectionality had taken hold, but people were not quite sure how to use it for their own benefit.

My diploma thesis on intersectional approaches in the political work of FLTI\* of color only just survived the advice of the professors to also examine the “critical sides” of internationality and to juxtapose it with the supposedly more comprehensive multi-level analysis of two *white* German academics. The unhelpful comments about the structure of my lead questions were as follows: “Who chooses the relevant categories?” “Is racism even relevant in Germany?”

The oral part of my final exam was a major disaster as well. In the field of cultural sociology I wanted to examine the term “community”. According to the examiner, however, the term was not sociological enough, and should have been “ethnic segregation”. The content, he promised me, was the same. As a tidbit aside: my oral exam exceeded by 60 minutes because the secretary experienced a total breakdown when I proposed whiteness as a relevant category within the discourse on privilege.

By starting at the primordial soup, Kimberlé Crenshaw staged an intervention that was urgently needed in the German discourse on intersectionality in 2009. She unambiguously shifted the focus to the position of Black wom\*n. She highlighted the untenable, contradictory ongoing reality of Black FLTI and FLTI of color. By speaking so clearly, she took intersectionality away from the “German make-a-wish Discourse” and forced her audience to confront racism and Black people at the center of the theory formation.

And finally, our intervention did not quite go as planned. In any case, Kimberlé did not let us take her to a different restaurant, as we had intended. Instead, we crashed the elite bubble with a surprise performance and later “kidnapped” her and took her to Kreuzberg to drink Tequila.



# When Kimberlé Crenshaw came to Paris...

*By Christelle Gomis*

... it was like watching an oasis rise in my desert. For so long, I had lacked the language to break apart the shackles of French universalism that had imprisoned my sense of self as a Black woman. I was elated not only to see a Black woman give a lecture for the first time but also to hear about intersectionality in the midst of the French academic sphere where air quotes are still used around the word race. The suppression of the R-word is aggressively promoted as a kind of moral imperative. Her regular interventions were awash with so many fresh ideas that opened me to the Black radical tradition I did not know existed and connected me to Black feminists all over the world. I learned about my foremothers and met many other sisters. Intersectionality theory enabled me to access transformative educational experiences that are rarely made possible in French universities. Thanks to this community of judgement, I felt validated in my intellectual pursuits like never before.

Professor Crenshaw unapologetically anchored intersectionality in her personal experiences. She weaved her personal narratives into critical explanations for the persistence of injustice in a post-civil rights society and highlighted how contemporary inequalities are connected to historical practices of marginalization. When she legitimized this way of knowing, I discovered how putting my own voice at the centre of analysis could be a powerful instrument to resolve contradictions between my reality and my own hope in liberal positivist narratives. To me,

social progress seemed irresistible. Everyday brought its share of stories and anecdotes that countered this belief and made it hard to sustain on the long term. By lending credence to marginalised narratives, including my own, I recognized how acting on dominant discourses upholds the status quo, and thus contributes to the systematic disempowerment of a large population. Intersectionality theory helped me acknowledge and frame what I perceived to be only prejudice. I shifted away from liberal narratives to finally understand the structural aspect of discrimination. It was about discarding the narrow paradigm that sees discrimination as an isolated occurrence caused by a bad actor at best and at worst as oversensitivity. Looking for racist intent was not a requisite anymore. The moment I understood oppression was not unusual but ubiquitous, the scope of my actions irrevocably changed.

Thanks to intersectionality, I realized how much I had tamed myself to fit in places where I was never expected nor wanted. Liberal narratives define inequalities as defects of the oppressed and put the onus on them to change. When locating injustice in the room, I observed how the controlling image of the angry Black woman could be used to police my tone and my views anywhere anytime by almost anybody. Speaking up, staying quiet, smiling to death, I tried to cope the best I could. But time and again, I dwelled on what I thought were missed opportunities to teach, I dwelled on what I should have said or not. Most times, I had to face the visceral dismissal rejection of my words, I was 'un-heard', despised. I understood better why my analyses had been characterized as essentialist, overly passionate, and theoretically unsophisticated. Intersectionality kept me from further internalizing my presumed incompetence and shielded me from the mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical suffering caused by the ubiquity of discrimination.

Kimberlé Crenshaw's daring stances have encouraged me to question "accepted" positivist approaches that objectify the oppressed, leaving them voiceless and ensuring the liberal status quo. Their historical conditions of emergence are linked to colonialism which is often framed as a past phenomenon and not as a continuing process that still influence methodologies repeatedly reinvented as traditional. Intersectionality sharpened my sight to track the ever-changing coordinates of power and make these exclusions visible. Positivist approaches can hardly account for the intersecting character of oppression. When I relied solely on them, I used to treat racism and sexism separately. After reading "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex", I started to grasp how gender and race are intrinsically tethered to each other and to class, sexuality, disability. I could never distinguish between these axes of oppression in my mind nor in my lived reality. They structure inequality together at the same time. Intersectionality led me to the path where I could historically elucidate the stereotyping of Black people in the French public sphere. It made me able to excavate the intertwinement of gender, capital, white supremacy, and empire. I eventually reconsidered concepts like colorblindness or migration. I understood how the French ideal of a universal citizen was rooted in colonialism and still shapes these guiding principles for policies that routinely place people of African descent outside the scope of France's imagined community.

Intersectionality work became a precious route to the contemporary Black diaspora. When in Europe, Professor Crenshaw acknowledges the need for coalitions between Black women globally. I remember her asking the audience "When did you know you were Black?" and offered us the space to hear our different voices across the diaspora on common issues such as institutionalized racism, structural inequalities and violence. Intersectionality helped

us find the histories of our anger and pain. Although we felt linked in some sort of kinship and solidarity, probably mediated by the transnational influence of North America, we became aware of how being Black differed from place to place. Intersecting oppressions driven by colonialism led to various ways of organizing and resisting that sometimes seem at odds. Local specificities can mask commonalities while making divergences visible is a necessary condition for any lasting alliance. Coalitions are never obvious; they need to be built day after day. This is how intersectionality inspires courage to fight for just futures.

# The trouble with the female universalists

By Rokhaya Diallo

I am a feminist. I can't say when it started. I think I've always had this conviction in me. As long as I can remember, I feel I've always been conscious of the existence of sexism, and what's more it always seemed to me to be more prevalent than racism in my environment.

However in 2003, when the debate erupted in France over whether Muslim pupils had the right or not to wear the hijab in school, I was stunned to see it was mainly *Women\** who favoured a ban. *Women\** claiming to be feminists rallied together to deprive young girls of the right to attend a public school simply because of their religion. *Women\**.

The evidence was there before my eyes, that you can be a feminist and explicitly promote the negation of other women's rights. Because with the same beliefs, Muslim boys had access to normal schooling.

Without realising it, I discovered intersectionality. I understood that not all Muslims are in the same boat, that the fact of being a visibly Muslim *Woman\** could expose you to specific treatment.

Some feminists think there is only one path towards emancipation—the western path. And that feminists have a duty to “liberate” Muslim *Women\** who wear a headscarf, which is viewed as a form of oppression regardless of the context it is worn in. As if these *Women\** could not have a will of their own. As if this headscarf was the sole marker of gender in our societies.

So in the years that follow demonstrations for women's rights, some feminist groups prevent veiled *Women\**—who were no doubt outraged—from marching by their side. They expel them *manu militari* from processions, thus taking away their right to express themselves since their clothing does not suit their paternalist feminist doxa. Yet “my body belongs to me” said the feminists in the 1970s...

These feminists, who call themselves “universalists” while the majority of them are white, refuse to see that they are just defending a particularism, that of the mainstream.

I understood this when I first discovered the work of Kimberlé Crenshaw. I use words to describe a deeply held belief: *Women\** are located at the intersection of multiple oppressions. Invisibilised *Women\**. *Women\** subject to the injunctions of mainstream *Women\**. *Women\** whose specific circumstances are only rarely taken into consideration. *Women\** of whom I am one, as a Black *Woman\**.

Some years later, in 2009, I distinctly remember a “call to action for women's rights”—at the initiative of the *Collectif national pour les droits des femmes* and *Femmes solidaires*—calling for a demonstration on 17 October. Apart from the unfortunate choice of date, obviously ignorant of an historic event dear to children of immigrants, the commemoration of the death of hundreds of Algerian men and *Women\** killed by the French police (17 October 1961), the text referred to the “*danger of seeing the struggle for gender equality become sidelined in favour of the struggle against discrimination and for diversity.*”

One thing was immediately clear to me: a statement like that could only come from a group of *Women\** who were uniformly white. Otherwise it is impossible not to know that you can be affected both by the inequalities and violence inherent in sexism, and by racism. Personally it would be impossible for me to complain about stepping up the fight against racism, or to feel that the struggle

for women's rights must take precedence over all other struggles. It seemed evident to me that intersectionality, which implies simultaneously taking all of these battles into account, should permeate the French feminist movement. Because of their rather monochromatic composition, French feminist movements tend to voice their demands while completely ignoring the views of *Women\** who are non-white, non-French, poor, disabled, trans or lesbian.

These movements therefore tend to ignore a section of the population.

Sexism co-exists with other forms of exclusion, such as racism, homophobia, ableism, transphobia, classism and many others. If you are a feminist, how can you not take account of the fact that the interaction of two, three or four forms of exclusion produces new effects?

You often hear feminists explain that *Women\** are not a "minority" since they make up more than half of the population, unlike true "minorities" (ethnic, religious, etc.). This assertion lies behind the idea that *Women\** should be given priority treatment relative to groups who are numerically less significant. That would be fair if these groups were distinct and separate. Yet there are *Women\** who are non-white, homosexual, disabled or poor. Should they have to distinguish the aspects of their identity that are to receive priority treatment, and give secondary importance to that which reflects a minority preoccupation? No, never. And I thank Kimberlé Crenshaw for having put words to these denied thoughts.



Kimberlé Crenshaw  
with Duncan Kennedy  
at the AAPF's  
20th Anniversary Gala,  
July 2017  
Photo: Mia Ferminadoza

*“Identity is not simply a self-content unite. It is a relationship between people and history, people and communities, people and institutions. So schools do a good job, when they understand that.”*



# Language matters

*By Sharon Dodua Otoo*

Intersectionality has never been an academic term to me. Like many Black girls and women, I have repeatedly experienced intersectional failure long before I had the term to describe it. My school curriculum regularly featured Emily Pankhurst and Florence Nightingale as examples of strong female role models. And whenever we were taught about racism, the sole Black leader mentioned was always Dr. Martin Luther King. Of course, we did learn about Rosa Parks, but she was typically presented in a passive way, as if she ignited the Montgomery Bus Boycott by accident, not as the highly competent and experienced civil rights activist that she was. I had no examples at all of Black female leaders while I was growing up.

While I was in university, feminist debates on whether women could combine having a family while having a career always struck me as missing the point. It never occurred to me that I wouldn't do both, as female members of my Ghanaian family have always earned their own money while raising their children. Black Students' organizations typically ran on female labour, but were always led by men. Intersectional failure has meant that my specific needs and priorities have too often been low priority.

I have lost count of the number of times I have received a request to write an article, appear on panel discussions or make myself available for interview, with no mention of payment. A Black male colleague and I were once invited to a meeting hosted by a working group of the Green Party. We were to represent the Initiative *Black People in Germany* (ISD) and the meeting was specifically

about renaming streets in Berlin to honor Black women. I was uninvited again after I asked if there would be a budget to at least cover childcare. My male colleague attended the meeting without me. On another occasion, a different male ISD colleague and I were interviewed at length for an article on racism in Germany. All of my quotes were cut and my presence was not mentioned in the final text at all. Interestingly however the expert opinion of a *white* man was included.

No matter how much I reformulate or soften my sentences, it is seldom possible for me to criticize racism or sexism without being dismissed, implicitly or explicitly, as an angry Black woman. The lack of empathy, even in so-called progressive contexts, is astounding.

I first heard the term “intersectionality” when it was falsely introduced to me as a concept to describe the combination of marginalization and privilege that everyone will experience at some point in their lifetime. I was unsatisfied with this complicated-sounding academic term that I understood to be effectively saying: everyone is a victim. In *white* German contexts, it is often used in this way and is another example of appropriation. Once I learnt that the concept had been developed specifically from a Black feminist perspective to highlight and analyze Black women’s unique experience of oppression, I lost any tolerance for those who would mention “intersectionality” without crediting Kimberlé Crenshaw in the same breath.

Crenshaw provides us with an analysis that names, theorizes and contextualizes the structural discrimination that Black women experience. Intersectionality enables us to understand why “anti-racism” policies will not necessarily increase Black female participation in the workforce, or why “women’s movements” will often be overwhelmingly *white*. The specific discrimination experienced by Black women at the intersection of sexism and racism will not be

addressed, so long as feminist organizations continue to center the experiences of *white* women and Black organizations fail to challenge male dominance.

How could this look like? On a practical level, it is vital that we learn to consider representation in all areas of an organization, including at the decision-making level. Campaigns like “Equal Pay Day” strive to achieve wage equality between women and men. Which begs the question—which men? Black women know that the campaign is not focused on marginalized men. A campaign based on the teachings of Black feminism would look instead to dismantle sexist oppression (see bell hooks)—a demand which, taken to its radical conclusion, would benefit everyone across and outside of the gender spectrum.

Intersectionality as a tool has not only provided a clearer focus for my work, it has also sharpened my awareness of other forms of discrimination, which will necessarily arise, for example due to my cis- and hetero-sexist socialization. I am grateful to all Black feminists who continue to teach us the importance of coining words to spotlight, critique and challenge dominance.

*“If we can’t see a problem,  
we can’t fix the problem.”*



Kimberlé Crenshaw speaking  
at the AAPF 20th Anniversary Gala  
in New York, July 2017  
Photo: Mia Ferminadoza

# Reading antidiscrimination law with Crenshaw, but without *Rasse*?

By Cengiz Barskanmaz

Thirty years since the publication of her groundbreaking article “Race, Reform, and Retrenchment: Transformation and Legitimation in Antidiscrimination Law” (1988) Kimberlé W. Crenshaw’s legacy continues to be powerful, particularly in Germany. In this article—listed in the top ten of the most influential writings of American legal thought—Crenshaw gives a compelling account of the ambiguities of a specific antidiscrimination law. She concludes that neither the neoconservative nor the liberal understandings of antidiscrimination law are accurate, and therefore not really useful for the reality of oppressed groups—in her case the Blacks. Whereas the ideology of colorblindness of the neoconservatives obscures lingering racial disparities, she argues, the so-called Crits (critical legal theory) fail to acknowledge the inherent legal agency of minorities. Even though Crenshaw principally agrees with the Crits’ claim that law substantially is a tool of domination, she advocates for a pragmatic use of legal rights.

Crenshaw in her next article “Demarginalizing” (1989) pursues and couples her critique of antidiscrimination doctrine with a Black feminist perspective. In this highly cited article, the subjects of her criticism are the courts, particularly the white feminists, and the male-oriented

antiracist identity politics for their single-axis conception of antidiscrimination law. Here as well, Crenshaw's main thread is to develop an empirically and historically informed understanding of antidiscrimination law in order to mobilize the law to fight symbolic and material discrimination of Blacks, in particular of Black women. In both articles, Crenshaw shows us the necessity of reading antidiscrimination law as the result and part of a long history of intersectional oppression and liberation.

It is this critical engagement towards the conservative and liberal politics on the one hand, and the contextual nexus of law and power on the other hand, that has been formative for critical race scholars in Europe. My comparative research of Crenshaw's race critique and the many activist insights in Germany and elsewhere sharpened my observations towards a specific politico-legal ideology, which I have called 'German exceptionalism'. This ideology is a set of ideas and practices in the post-holocaust space and time, which constructs the German context as an exceptional racial context, where there is no place for any reference to *Rasse*. "Because of our past, we can not use *Rasse*..." goes the argument. For an antidiscrimination lawyer who knows that *Rasse* is omnipresent in German, European and International laws, then the ideology of German exceptionalism becomes highly problematic, not to say counterproductive.

While there was a necessity of investigating the doctrinal meaning of race in German antidiscrimination law, a true anti-race discourse emerged around 2010. Proluded and strongly advocated by the German Institute for Human Rights, the goal of this campaign was and still is to remove the term '*Rasse*' from the constitution and other relevant norms. Some minority and anti-racist organizations have endorsed this anti-*Rasse* position as well. The similarities between the US and German discursive and doctrinal

contestations are quite striking. Like Crenshaw's color-blind conservatives who believed racism has been overcome, also in Germany there are legal scholars, judges and practitioners who think racism belongs to the past: "Racism is what the Nazis did". Therefore, the race equality clause in Article 3 of the German Basic Law, for example, is basically interpreted with the goal "to prevent Nazi-like policies". Hence, it is no coincidence that until today, there is only one decision of the German Constitutional Court regarding race discrimination in Article 3 of the Basic Law. This decision is from 1968 and concerns the unconstitutional expatriation a Jewish German Citizen. So here, for a critical race scholar, it becomes crucial to advocate for a broader understanding of race and structural discrimination within contemporary German constitutional doctrine. Legal issues such as racial profiling, disparate impact or indirect discrimination and affirmative action inherently rely on the legal category *Rasse*. These issues make the importance of race in constitutional doctrine visible. After 60 years of obscuring *Rasse* in the law, it is time to start conversations about *Rasse*.

Some green and leftist politicians, institutions, (feminist) legal scholars, and anti-racism activists, however, sabotage this necessary critical race intervention for an emancipatory doctrine of *Rasse*. According to this anti-*Rasse* position, there cannot be a single reference to *Rasse* in the law because "there are no biological races". Like Crenshaw's liberals who were skeptical towards the use of antidiscrimination law, today we see that the (predominantly "liberal") anti-*Rasse* position is reluctant to use *Rasse*. In both contexts, it seems to be that there is structural failure to understand the true meaning of racial legal thinking in the context of anti-discrimination law. As for the German context, all share the same outcome: There is no need for *Rasse*. For some, *Rasse* belongs to the past, and

for others there shall be no future for *Rasse* in Germany. A careful reading and translation of Crenshaw's work to Germany and Europe makes it possible to deconstruct the ambiguities of these contested ideologies of antidiscrimination legislation.

Those who oppose *Rasse* in the German context would be advised to delve into the deeper meanings of race generally and *Rasse* in Germany more specifically. This is also essential for a proper understanding of intersectionality, because there is no race without intersectionality and no intersectionality without race. A short look at Crenshaw's intellectual path makes this "constitutive role of race in intersectionality" (Crenshaw, Post-script, 224) illuminating: She is not only the co-founder of Critical Race Theory but also the co-mother of the critique of intersectionality. Therefore, future scholarship on racism and intersectionality in Europe should aspire to develop a contextual understanding of race, in the German context of *Rasse*. Like gender, class, religion, sexuality, disability and age also race is a social category to be included in the conceptualization of intersectionality. Admittedly, race is constitutive for racism but not every reference to race implies racism, e. g. emancipatory racial identities such as Blackness. Hence, without a profound understanding of *Rasse* as a social (and legal) construction, every work on intersectionality and racism—and thus of anti-racism—in Germany is deemed to be limited. If *Geschlecht*, for example, is a valid (legal) category of analysis, then so should be *Rasse*. I believe—and based on the many Critical Race Theory Europe events Crenshaw and I co-organized from 2010 until today—this would be Crenshaw's message to her white and/or German feminist colleagues.



# Political intersectionality as a healing proposal

*By Peggy Piesche*

Upon recently receiving an inquiry for an event, I was, once again, reminded, of how I came to know Kimberlé Crenshaw and what significance her work has (had) for me. The inquiry cast my memory back to the early 1990s, to the year 1993 to be precise. During an exhibition in the Ruhr area, young *white* artists were engaged in various forms of feminist struggles in the 80s and 90s. Along a student journal titled “*Emanzenexpress*”, the aim was to create an inter-generational feminist space for encounters. So far, so contemporary. By all accounts, one 1993 edition, which had ‘racism’ as its overriding theme, included a letter penned by me in which I reported on an example of racial police violence committed at the Tübingen train station. In their inquiry, the event organizers express their desire to use this letter as the starting point for a discussion. There is also mention of ‘fascinating articles’ on the tightening of asylum law and on the attacks in Solingen. This immediately evokes an awareness in me of the continuities and ruptures, and the everyday racism I felt 30 years ago resurfaces in my body. I am especially disturbed by the feeling of helplessness in me, which had held me captive for weeks in view of the legal repercussions of police racial profiling at the time that I had experienced. Spurred by this helplessness, I penned the open letter which ended up in the journal mentioned above. The letter restored my course of action. Yet, the feeling of helplessness remained. Despite the solidarity from my queer feminist Black community

back then, I was not able to verbalize the structures behind the various power mechanisms that operated entangled in (this) racial profiling. My helplessness stemmed from the fact that these collective experiences of racism remained structurally invisible. In the social perception, my experience, too, remained a singular, isolated case. The collective knowledge, which is anything but that, was not yet able to pave a structured way.

Almost 20 years later, I then got to know Kimberlé Crenshaw in 2011 at a community event in the Berlin district of Kreuzberg. Organized by Cengiz Barskanmaz, Maisha Auma and others, the aim of the event was to entrench the concept of intersectionality also in Germany and Europe. A vital and long overdue matter. All of us were aware that this meant to not only engage in academic but especially in activist work. As activists/scholars, we embraced the subject, and Kimberlé accompanied this work. However, it was only during my work as a trans-cultural trainer for critical race studies and critical whiteness together with Katja Kinder and Maisha Auma that I learned that political intersectionality means more to us than intersectional understanding of racialization, class, gender attributions and (access to) education. Above all, it means that, in the collective experience of my particular position as a Black (German) lesbian activist coming from the East and from the proletariat, I am receiving an offer to heal, indeed to reconcile with myself. I was also aware of the impact of the various dimensions of inequality inscribed in my body back in 1993. After all, they led me to clash with the police and the law. I was not aware, however, that the singularization of my experience of racism was systematic in every sense of the word. The realities of life encountered by BPOCs are often characterized by the fact that they are accused of being 'too much' in something or, at the other end of the scale, 'too little'. In my case, the attributions assigned to

me were 'too loud', 'too undiplomatic', 'too aggressive', and 'lacking sufficient empathy'—the list could easily be extended. I have carried these attributions in me for a long time and they have taken hold of me for far too long. They have made me angry, have doubts, and, above all, made me doubt myself. They have repeatedly held me back where it would have done me good to march forward. In my work on political intersectionality, it became increasingly clear to me what these attributions truly mean. They disguise the real power and keep us occupied, as Toni Morrison has so aptly described when speaking of systemic racism. Recognizing my compartments that the 'angry Black woman\*' label has brought me, gave me the opportunity to learn and appreciate my/a complex background. This has now made it possible for me to positively engage in the various dimensions of my being. It also decreased the (my) struggle over the years and I was able to begin celebrating my Black, queer-feminist, gender non-conforming identity and to reconcile myself with my 'angry' and despairing/doubting self of 1993. From a BPOC perspective, there is a healing proposal to be derived. But, in healing, political intersectionality also gives us an opportunity to liberate ourselves. Power not only obscures (itself), it also operates in division dynamics. If we aren't being addressed by the 'too much' or 'too little', the proposal of a selective or, rather, momentarily 'exactly right' is all too gladly made. I call these the dubious proposals we get. Language, education, a canon of knowledge, and presumed habitual security, are all too gladly extracted from our complex backgrounds to offer us temporary legitimacy. It is not uncommon for this legitimacy to be readily granted to the detriment of other BPOCs (in the room). It is also toxic, because it offers the opportunity to 'overlook' and/or not see the 'too much' or 'too little' in us, i. e. our multi-dimensional experiences of inequality. This proposal can be revoked at any time, and

we would once again revert to simply being 'too much' or 'too little'. Even today, I'm occasionally addressed as the 'angry Black woman', but, through the years, the grey hair, and, above all, the understanding of political intersectionality entrenched in me, I can now also feel it: It's not me, it's you, system... And this is precisely how I have been able to return to action and disengage from the helplessness.

## *Authors*

**Prof. Dr. Maisha-Maureen Auma**, Professor for Childhood and Difference (Diversity Studies) at the University of Applied Sciences at Magdeburg-Stendal and Visiting Professor at Humboldt University in Berlin. Since 1993 she is a member of the collective “Generation ADEFRA, Black Women in Germany”, and the academic group “Diversifying Matters”, which in 2018 carried out the Berlin consultation process “Making Discrimination and the Social Resilience of People of African Descent Visible in Berlin”.

**Dr. Cengiz Barskanmaz**, Post-doc researcher of the Max-Planck-Institute for Social Anthropology, Department ‘Law & Anthropology’; research fields: Constitutional and International Law, Human Rights, Race, Intersectionality, Legal Ethnography. Publications include *Framing Race and Law in Europe* (Völkerrechtsblog, 2017), *Rasse—Unwort des Antidiskriminierungsrechts?* (Kritische Justiz, 2011).

**Clementine Ewokolo Burnley**, mother, writer, and activist. Her work focuses on Intersectionality, Power and Elite Feminism in West Africa. In 2018, she published *One Day for the Owner* with Sharon Otoo and Manuela Bauchle for the magazine *Die Neue Rundschau* (S. Fischer Verlag).

**Mîran Newroz Çelik**, living and breathing in queer and trans of color communities and is a wannabe writer.

**Elena Chamorro**, Associate Teacher at Aix-Marseille Université, teaches language and translation. Disability rights activist, co-founder of the CLHEE, *Collectif Luttés et Handicaps pour l’Egalité et l’Emancipation* (Fight and Disabilities for Emancipation and Equality group), which issues she discusses on her blog at Médiapart.fr.

**Rokhaya Diallo**, French journalist, writer, and award-winning filmmaker is widely recognized for her work, which dismantles the barricades of racism and sexism through the promotion of equality and pluralism. She directed several documentaries including *Steps to Liberty*. Her writing appeared on several newspapers, magazines, and books including her graphic novel *Pari(s) d'Amis*. She has curated and co-authored the exhibition *Afro!* with the photographer Brigitte Sombié.

**Prof. Dr. Fatima El-Tayeb**, Professor of Literature and Ethnic Studies at the University of California, San Diego. Her work deconstructs structural racism in “colorblind” Europe and centers strategies of resistance among racialized communities. In addition to numerous articles, she is the author of *UnGerman. The Construction of Otherness in the Postmigrant Society* (Transcript 2016), *European Others. Queering Ethnicity in Postnational Europe* (University of Minnesota Press 2011) and *Black Germans. Race and National Identity, 1890–1933* (Campus 2001).

**Amandine Gay**, Filmmaker and scholar, who defines herself as a political author. Research and creation means for her reclaiming the narrative as an act of emancipation. In 2015, she authored the preface of the first French translation of bell hooks’ seminal, *Ain’t I A Woman* and her first feature-length documentary, *Speak Up*, was released in 2017.

**Christelle Gomis**, PhD Researcher in History at the European University Institute (EUI), with a focus on Comparative Colonialisms, Social Histories of Education, Black and Decolonial Feminisms, published “Dismantling Eurocentrism in the French History of Chattel Slavery and Racism” in *Unsettling Eurocentrism in the Westernized University* (Routledge, 2018).

**Prof. Dr. Jin Haritaworn**, Associate Professor of Gender, Race and Environment at York University in Toronto, Canada. Focus on Gender, Sexuality and Transgender Studies, Critical Race and Ethnic Studies, and Urban Studies. Gentrification, Homonationalism, Intersectionality, Queer Space and Transnational Sexuality Studies. Published *Queer Lovers and Hateful Others: Regenerating Violent Times and Places* (Pluto 2015), and *Queering Urban Justice* (University of Toronto Press, 2018, edited with G. Moussa and S.M. Ware).

**Prof. Dr. Sabine Hark**, Professor for Interdisciplinary Women and Gender Studies and Director of the Center for Interdisciplinary Women and Gender Studies (ZIFG) at TU Berlin. Her recent publications include *Unterscheiden und herrschen. Ein Essay zu den ambivalenten Verflechtungen von Rassismus, Sexismus und Feminismus in der Gegenwart* (transcript, 2017) (under the title *Other and Rule. Racism, Sexism and Feminism Today* forthcoming with Verso Press) and *Vermessene Räume, gespannte Beziehungen. Unternehmerische Universitäten und Geschlechterdynamiken* (Suhrkamp, 2018).

**Dr. Ines Kappert**, Head of Gunda-Werner-Institute for Feminism and Gender Democracy at the Heinrich Böll Foundation, with a focus on feminism for an immigration society, refugees and women, peace and security. In 2008, she received her Ph.D. with her monograph entitled *Der Mann in der Krise. Oder: Konservative Kapitalismuskritik im kulturellen Mainstream* (transcript, 2008). From 2007–2015 she has been the head of the opinion-desk of the German daily newspaper *taz*. As guest professor she teaches Gender Studies at University St. Gallen (Switzerland).

**Katja Kinder**, Black German Educator. She works as vice executive manager at the RAA Berlin, an agency

for Educational Justice and is co-founder of ADEFRA (Schwarze Frauen in Deutschland, founded in 1986). She is also a freelance empowerment trainer and conflict mediator, working with a Black intersectional feminist and critical race framework for over 20 years.

**Sharon Otoo**, Black British, mother, activist, and author. Editor of the English book series *Witnessed*, published by edition assemblage. Her first short stories *the things I think while smiling politely* and *Synchronicity* were published in 2017 by S. Fischer Verlag. With “Herr Gröttrup setzt sich hin” she won the Ingeborg Bachmann Prize in 2016.

**Julia Phillips**, visual artist and faculty at University of Chicago, Department of Visual Arts. Her intellectual interest lies in psycho-analytical and Black feminist thought, as well as postcolonial questions and issues of social belonging. Her most recent exhibitions are her first institutional solo exhibition ‘Failure Detection’ at MoMA PS1 and her participation in the 10th Berlin Biennial ‘We don’t need another hero’. Her next upcoming project is a solo exhibition at Kunstverein Braunschweig in September 2019 titled *Fake Truth*. Phillips’ work has recently been reviewed in *Art Forum* and *The New Yorker* amongst others.

**Peggy Piesche**, Literary and Cultural Studies scholar whose work is centered in Black European Studies, Critical Race and Whiteness Studies, Black Feminist Studies, Diaspora and Translocality, and the Performativity of Memory Cultures (Spatiality and Coloniality of Memories and Future Studies). She is a transcultural trainer for Critical Whiteness in academia, politics and education. Since 1990, she is a member of the Black (German) movement, including ADEFRA e.V. (Black Women in Germany) and Diversifying Matters. Since 2016, she is an executive board



member of ASWAD (Association for the Study of the Worldwide African Diaspora).

**Dr. Emilia Roig**, Founder and Executive Director of the Center for Intersectional Justice (CIJ). Faculty member of the Social Justice Program of DePaul University of Chicago. Taught European and International Law, Critical Race Theory, Intersectionality in Germany and France. Worked at Amnesty International, the International Labor Organisation (ILO) and GIZ in Kenya, Tanzania and Cambodia.

**Dr. Nahed Samour**, lawyer and Islamic studies scholar. Early Career Fellow at Lichtenberg-Kolleg, Göttingen Institute for Advanced Study, and at the Humboldt University Berlin, Faculty of Law, with a research focus on religion, race and gender in law. Since 2015, she is Junior Faculty at the Harvard Law School, Institute for Global Law and Policy.

**Prof. Dr. Iyiola Solanke**, Professor, Chair in EU Law and Social Justice, School of Law, University of Leeds. Her focus lies within the EU Law and Anti-Discrimination Law, Intersectional Discrimination, Judicial Diversity, EU citizenship. She published *Discrimination as Stigma* (Hart, 2017) and *EU Law* (Pearson, 2015). She is Academic Bencher of the Inner Temple.

**Dania Thaler**, certified sociologist, veterinarian, and elementary school teacher in training. #geek #looser #freed-education #racismdestroyeverything #stayflexible #been-there-donethat #overqualified #noviceforever



Kimberlé Crenshaw, distinguished Professor of Law at UCLA and Professor of Law at Columbia Law School, is a leading authority on Civil Rights, Black Feminist legal theory, and race, racism and the law. Crenshaw's groundbreaking work has been foundational in two fields of study that have come to be known by terms that she coined – critical race theory and intersectionality. A specialist on race and gender equality, she gave workshops for human rights activists in Brazil and India, and for constitutional court judges in South Africa. Her work on intersectionality has been globally recognized and was influential in the drafting of the equality clause in the South African Constitution. Crenshaw also authored the background paper on gender and racial discrimination for the United Nations' World Conference on Racism (WCAR), served as rapporteur for the conference's Expert Group on Gender and Race Discrimination, and coordinated non-governmental organizations' efforts to ensure the inclusion of gender in the WCAR conference declaration. She is the co-founder and Executive Director of AAPF (African American Policy Forum), the founder and Executive Director of the Center for Intersectionality and Social Policy Studies at Columbia Law School, and the president of Center for Intersectional Justice (CIJ).



**HEINRICH BÖLL STIFTUNG**  
**GUNDA WERNER INSTITUTE**

Coverfoto ©: Annabel Clark

“For feminist theory and antiracist policy discourse to embrace the experiences and concerns of Black women, the entire framework that has been used as a basis for translating ‘women’s experience’ or ‘the Black experience’ into concrete policy demands must be rethought and recast.”

Kimberlé Crenshaw

Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung  
Schumannstr. 8  
10117 Berlin  
[www.boell.de](http://www.boell.de)

ISBN 978-3-86928-199-5