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# Thinking Beyond the Categories: On the Diasporisation of Gender Studies

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**Abstract:** This article examines the potential of the concept of diaspora for a feminist methodology. The point of departure for our investigation is the observation that the majority of the research on gender and intersectionality done in Germany remains inside a national framework. Moreover, it lacks the perspective of global entanglements and migration as constitutive for European societies since the time of colonisation and the slave trade. There is, then, a tendency in gender studies to essentialise differences, even though its purported aim is to analyse social inequalities. After a cursory overview of the concepts that view society from the perspective of movement and diasporisation—such as Édouard Glissant's 'créolisation', Paul Gilroy's 'black Atlantic' as well as Peter Linebaugh's and Markus Rediker's 'red Atlantic'—this article revisits three analytic feminist approaches of the 1980s and 1990s that offer elements of what we call a diasporic feminist method: these are Angela Davis' analytic method of perspectivity, Avtar Brah's notion of 'diaspora space' and Gloria Anzaldúa's 'border thinking'. The last section of the article shows how these conceptual tools contribute to a better understanding of interdependent and globalised social inequalities through the work of diasporised gender and intersectionality studies.

## 1. Introduction

<sup>1</sup> This paper discusses the potential of the concept of diaspora for a feminist methodology, its possible contribution to the internationalisation of gender studies, as well as offering a political intervention in this field. The aim is to incorporate notions of diaspora into a methodology that we see as necessary for the analysis of gender in postcolonial migration societies. The article argues that applying the paradigm of diaspora contributes to overcoming the limits of a national perspective in current gender and intersectionality studies. It does so by including the realities and histories of movements as well as structures of systemic racism and the struggles against racist and sexist violence in an analysis of contemporary gender relations.

<sup>2</sup> Over the past thirty years, the notion of diaspora has become an increasingly popular concept in social research on postcoloniality, migration and globalisation. However, it was scholars and intellectuals who came from or were living in Latin America or the Caribbean who were the first to point out that colonisation and the slave trade had long ago led to diasporic societies. Stuart Hall, for instance, once commented that "Colonisation [...] had turned the 'colonies' and even more large areas of the 'postcolonial' world [...] into eternally and perpetually diasporic societies" (Hall 2002: 232).

<sup>3</sup> The present paper makes a case for this conception of diasporic societies as the foundation for situating research in gender and intersectionality studies. We outline several concepts that view society from the perspective of diasporisation—such as Édouard Glissant's 'créolisation' and archipelago thinking, Paul Gilroy's 'black Atlantic' as well as Peter Linebaugh's/Markus Rediker's 'red Atlantic'. Next, we revisit three feminist approaches of the 1980s and 1990s that provide elements of what the authors call a diasporic feminist method: Angela Davis' analytic method of 'perspectivity', Avtar

Brah's notion of 'diaspora space', as well as Gloria Anzaldúa's and Chéla Sandoval's 'border thinking'. The last section of the article is devoted to a discussion of how these conceptual tools contribute to the diasporisation of gender and intersectionality studies.

## 1.1. Positioning: Experiences from Latin American and Caribbean Studies

<sup>4</sup> The above-mentioned selection of postcolonial approaches to diaspora and gender is based on the authors' own experiences with research on gender and migration in the Americas and the various entanglements of migration processes with Europe (see Kron et al. 2010; Kron 2011; zur Nieden 2010). Thus, the perception of history, society and subjectivity employed in this paper has been influenced by such concepts as Fernando Ortiz' 'transculturación' (2002 [1940]), Édouard Glissant's 'créolisation' (1981) and Néstor Canclini's 'culturas híbridas' (1990). All three of these authors have aptly demonstrated that cultural dynamics in Latin America and the Caribbean cannot be understood without an examination of the historical entanglements with European and African history. Moreover, complex (post-)colonial power relations have also influenced the structure of these dynamics. The 'diasporic'—in the sense of dislocation, displacement and decentredness, rupture and fragmentation—is deeply inscribed in the histories of Latin American and Caribbean societies. These social and cultural phenomena have their historical roots in colonialism and the transatlantic slave trade and are wholly entangled with the histories of Europe, Africa and Latin America. Therefore, it is crucial to recognise European societies, too, as postcolonial and diasporised spaces.

<sup>5</sup> As we shall endeavour to show, unlike other concepts used to analyse the social and cultural effects of migration, such as transculturalisation, diversity or hybridity, the concept of diaspora and our idea of diasporisation places movements, migrations, routes and, therefore, change at the centre of analysis. Diasporisation, therefore, also means a constant change in perspective and the ability to de-essentialise social categories. At the same time, the term diaspora stores the memories of violence that have set people into motion: eviction, the transatlantic slave trade and racism. Additionally, the concept contains the histories and memories of social and cultural struggles, of alternative identities and ways of life that run counter to those envisaged by the nation-state and capitalism.

<sup>6</sup> However, mainstream gender and intersectionality studies as well as dominant accounts in postcolonial, migration and diaspora studies, particularly in Germany, tend to mask these historic, transnational entanglements and the complexity of (post-)colonial power relations between the countries of the Global North and South. One reason for this omission is the use of analytic frameworks that are still shaped by methodological nationalism (Glick Schiller and Wimmer, 2003). The works of Maria do Mar Castro Varela and Nikita Dhawan (2009) constitute notable exceptions. These two feminist scholars have shown how methodological nationalism has led many scholars in Germany to view the living conditions of women of colour and migrant women of the Global South living in the European 'metropolis' as *the* paradigm of accumulated social inequalities. Moreover, the German scholarship in this field rarely links the living conditions or the statements of women of colour and female migrants in Europe back to the histories, cultural productions and the political and social struggles of people in the Global South. In addition, Encarnación Gutiérrez Rodríguez (1999, 2011) and Sedef Gümen (2003) have noted that ignoring the aspect of transnational entanglements leads scholars to perceive women of colour and migrant women exclusively as victims of capitalism, patriarchy and/or transnational crime rather than as subjects and agents of their own lives. Consequently, there is still a tendency in German mainstream academia to exclude the voices, experiences and knowledge production of these women.

<sup>7</sup> We intend to argue that a methodology of diasporisation creates theoretical spaces and discovers social struggles in which oppressive categories of race, class and gender are blurred, and thus reveals the interdependent genealogies of racist, sexist and class relations. Instead of structuring research in accordance with pre-assigned categorisations—e.g., the migrant woman, the Muslim, the white woman—, we claim that a diasporised feminism influenced by postcolonial Latin American and Caribbean Studies places the emphasis on social relations, (migration) movements, social and political struggles as well as constant shifts in social positionings and settings. Furthermore, it focuses on an analysis of the violent social settings and powerful inequalities inside which subjectivities are created.

## 2. Diaspora as an Alternative Narrative to the Nation

<sup>8</sup> The notion of diaspora itself has been on the move over the past three decades. The term was first used to describe the situation of Jewish communities living outside Palestine. Hence, religious minorities are still referred to as 'diasporas'. In social theory

the concept usually includes reference to a home territory from which one has been displaced. It also refers to a sense of community and collective homelessness of those living in the diaspora. The notion of diaspora we are deploying and describing here was created in the violent context of the transatlantic slave trade in the sixteenth century and the so-called 'middle passage' which brought Africans to the Americas, the Caribbean and to a lesser extent Europe (see Braziel/Mannur 2003).<sup>[1]</sup> However, the African slaves' experiences of displacement, violence and exploitation as well as their social struggles and cultural productions have been all but ignored in the official colonial and postcolonial histories of American, Caribbean and European countries.

<sup>9</sup> In contrast, scholars like Paul Gilroy, Édouard Glissant, Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker view these very experiences as the paradigmatic starting point for any analysis of the formation of modern society. The works of these scholars show that the development of modern capitalist states and societies, starting in the sixteenth century with European colonialism in the Americas, occurred alongside the transatlantic mass movements of people. These movements often transpired under the most violent of circumstances as in the case of slavery and indentured work, and led, according to Gilroy, to the diasporic constitution of modern societies. Thus the histories and memories of routes of migration and displacement, of colonial and racist violence, but also of struggles, resistances and of home-making, are deeply inscribed in modern postcolonial societies, just as much as the histories of territoriality and settledness. However, as mentioned above, this marginalised perspective on history and society is commonly omitted from the formal national narratives in and of Europe.

<sup>10</sup> The concepts of the black and red Atlantic as well as *créolisation* analyse in turn the diasporic conditions as constitutive of American, African and European histories, societies and processes of nation building. Thus, in contrast to the traditional notion of diaspora, which describes the conditions of marginalised religious or ethnic minorities, Gilroy, Glissant, Linebaugh and Rediker understand all modern societies as diasporic societies based on memories, cultures, politics of movements and setting people in motion.

## 2.1. Édouard Glissant: *Créolisation* and Archipelago Thinking

<sup>11</sup> Édouard Glissant was one of the first thinkers to squarely place such experiences at the centre of a new, culture-oriented and philosophical concept of diaspora. Glissant (2005 [1996]) views the specific transcultural condition of the Caribbean as a model for all contemporary societies in which human mobility, cultural exchange and global entanglements are common phenomena. In the archipelago realm of the Caribbean (or Antillan), nationality and identity are not constructed through narrations of a long tradition and a genealogy of a homogeneous people that has supposedly lived in a certain territory for centuries. This would be what Glissant calls a roots genealogy, invented mainly by "continental societies" (Glissant 2005: 42).

<sup>12</sup> The Antillic societies, in contrast, have a rhizomatic structure rather than a lineage of one single root. That is, the ancestry of the people and cultures of the islands is diverse and multiple, deriving from the experiences of human movements, dislocations, displacements and dispersions, but also from multiple branches, interactions and connections. The island people come from different places and thus have diverse histories and experiences that led them to the Caribbean, including slavery, indentured labour and colonisation. Yet migration, struggles and insurrections can also be found in their genealogies, narratives and memories. *Créolisation*, then, is the process that results from the relations that were, and are, being established between these different peoples (Glissant 2005: 39ff.). Central to Glissant's notion of *créolisation* is that the different cultures, languages and elements involved should be valued equally (Glissant 2005: 13).

<sup>13</sup> Glissant's style of writing is more poetic than theoretical and his way of thinking is marked by what we call *perspectivity*, corresponding to what Glissant himself describes as a diverse and relational *créolised* culture. In contrast to European continental thinking, archipelago thinking is fragmented, without systemic closure. Even though Glissant seems to set up an essentialist distinction between the conditions of islands and those of the continental mainlands, his ideas are to be read as metaphorical images of society in which the *créolised* Caribbean societies of the Atlantic are the key to understanding all societies as constituted by diversified voices, languages, cultures, histories and memories. Properly acknowledging this polyphony and diversity, as well as the relations and cohabitations, allows for a nuanced understanding of contemporary postcolonial societies.

## 2.2. Paul Gilroy: Black Atlantic and African Diaspora

<sup>14</sup> Glissant's work established a notion of the Atlantic as both a memory of the historical trauma of the slave trade and colonialism as well as a heterogeneous postcolonial social

space of constant movements and cultural exchanges between different sites and temporalities. This double notion of the Atlantic is re-articulated in Paul Gilroy's idea and term, the "black Atlantic" (1993), a concept that is, much like Glissant's, characterised by a change in the dominant historical perspective. Indeed, the term "black Atlantic" refers to the critique of the slave trade, colonialism and imperialism, as well as the idea of a black history and a black future of the Atlantic region as articulated by William E. Dubois and others within the context of the Fifth Pan-African Congress between 1935 and 1945 (see Linebaugh/Rediker 2009: 33). But Gilroy adopted the term "black Atlantic" and developed it even further, using it to analyse the history of the transatlantic slave trade as a paradigmatic condition of modernity, while at the same time reconstructing the Atlantic both as a zone of movements and as a counter-concept to territorial and nation-bound ideas of culture and history.<sup>[2]</sup>

<sup>15</sup> His concept demonstrates that the history of modernity is not a linear and one-sided one, but rather a history of multiple interdependencies, entanglements and perspectives, containing the narratives of European Enlightenment, universal rights and infinite progress. It also includes African and American experiences of the slave trade, colonialism, racism and exploitation, upon which European modernity was built (see also Coronil 1996, Randeria 2002). Hence, Gilroy's notion of "black Atlantic" calls attention to collective narratives of flight and exile, to the heterogeneity of the identities and experiences of resistance, as well as the cultural productions of the African diaspora at different sites of their displacement and dispersal. This conceptualisation of a sort of counter-hegemonic space of history and memory therefore also includes the articulation of historical subjects and political subjectivities.

### 2.3. Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker: Atlantic Labour History

<sup>16</sup> Along similar lines, but from an explicitly post-Marxist perspective, the historians Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker (2001, 2009) write an Atlantic labour history 'from below', focusing on members of a global proletariat as the historical subjects and actors of social struggles. Linebaugh and Rediker are especially interested in histories and memories regarding collective forms of lifestyles and resistance (see also Mlot/Tsianos 2010). These scholars argue that memories of collective resistance practices and alternative modes of life—for example, the so-called maroon camps of slaves who escaped in the eighteenth century from conditions of forced labour were evoked and re-articulated in nineteenth-century uprisings and other forms of resistance organised by workers of different national and cultural backgrounds against the labour conditions of American agricultural plantations.

<sup>17</sup> The proletariat consisted of all people who were without private property, and who had been severed from their common lands and ways of living, much like the African populations shipped over the Atlantic to be slaves, or the Scottish and Irish commoners whose land was privatised and expropriated, forcing them to leave their country and become indentured labourers. To avoid the limitations of traditional labour history as well as those of traditional black history or women's history, Linebaugh and Rediker think before and beyond a fixed perception of social categories such as race, class and gender. Like Glissant and Gilroy, the authors develop a kind of diasporic thinking marked by perspectivity. They criticise the way in which commonly used social categories narrow the research perspective to a certain social group and thus tend to be blind to the processes of constructing social groups as well as to the interconnections between people and groups. (Linebaugh/Rediker 2009: 46) Hence, in their examination of the red Atlantic Linebaugh and Rediker begin their analysis in the early sixteenth century with the rise of capitalism and the simultaneous colonisation of the Americas. The authors locate the creation of a global and mobile proletariat *before* the emergence of the working class in industrial capitalism. The focus is on people who were on the move, that is, working on ships, or being shipped from one part of the world to another. The authors maintain that slaves and sailors are a part of the history of the working classes, and have been excluded in national historical narratives.

<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, Linebaugh and Rediker stress the fact that people did not join forces or fight together because of a common cultural or social identity that went back to a place of home; rather, it was the common experience of being dispossessed, the harsh conditions on a slave ship or the brutal working conditions on the plantations that created common struggles—not necessarily communities—between very different diasporised peoples.

<sup>19</sup> Linebaugh and Rediker emphasise the experiences of collectiveness and the desires for freedom that can be found in the struggles against oppression, racist exclusion, and exploitation of peoples who fought together beyond the constraints of race and lineage. Thus their work provides an inspiring example of how to analyse historical situations and political subjectivity from the perspective of migrations, movements, social conflicts, and struggles for rights instead of working inside the categorical framework of hegemonic narratives of nation building and capitalism. Thus, Linebaugh and Rediker's version of an anti-essentialist labour history based on experiences of displacements and

migrations offers an insightful post-Marxist approach to diaspora and diasporisation.

## 2.4. Postcolonial Notions of Diaspora: Perspective, Transnationality and Mobility

<sup>20</sup> The concepts of *créolisation*, archipelago thinking, and black and red Atlantic outline a postcolonial notion of diaspora as an alternative historical narrative to those of the nation and capitalism. This notion includes *by definition* histories of transnational movements as well as the struggles of (ex-)slaves, indentured labourers, colonised people and migrants for identity, subjectivity and 'making homes' in the context of dispersion. It also includes the loss of homes and social relations as well as histories of struggles and appropriations in the context of migration, alienation and racism.

<sup>21</sup> And as we have shown, these concepts even go one step further: diaspora describes an entirely different understanding of sociality. In other words, society becomes diasporised in that movements and the histories of people on the move—including those created through the politics of migration control and racism, as well as the struggles against it—become the perspective from which these postcolonial societies are analysed. So, when we speak of diasporisation as a method we draw on this specific understanding of society, an understanding that examines movements and migrations not in opposition to (national) societies but as constitutive of them. This includes a questioning of naturalised social categories used to describe our social realities, such as "migrant" and "national", but which in many cases have the effect of essentialising differences and supposed identities instead of analysing social inequalities.

<sup>22</sup> Hence, diasporisation includes strong notions of relationality and what we call perspective, that is, multiple modes of perceiving a specific situation that is a result of emphasising migrations and different social positions in society, whether historical or contemporary. The emphasis on perspective, transnational (post-)colonial entanglements and power relations produces important contributions to the internationalisation and 'diasporisation' of gender studies.

## 3. Diasporisation as a Feminist Methodology

<sup>23</sup> Many feminist approaches of the 1980s and 1990s, especially those emanating from the U.S. and Great Britain concerning women of colour, were influenced by postcolonial diasporic thinking. These feminisms place in question social categories that tend to essentialise differences instead of dismantling the power relations that create inequalities. However, based on our experiences as metropolitan researchers of Latin American Studies, we consider it important to be aware of a tendency to idealise migrant women and women of colour. We are thus in agreement with As Aihwa Ong (1999), who has pointed out—with respect to American postcolonial diaspora studies—that ascribing a sort of subaltern and militant cosmopolitanism to people of colour and migrants serves the self-affirmation of the scholar's cosmopolitan commitment rather than accurately examining the violent effects that capitalism and the nation-state have on trans-migrant communities and individuals. With these critical remarks in mind, in the following section we draw on several feminist approaches that implicitly or explicitly work with postcolonial notions of diaspora and diasporisation, but that also take into account the racist and violent structures inside which migration takes place and 'diasporised' subjects often live.

### 3.1 Perspective and Entangled History in German Feminist and Gender Studies

<sup>24</sup> Already at the beginning of the twentieth century, the work of socialist thinkers and activists like Rosa Luxemburg (1913) and Clara Zetkin (1932) featured a kind of early interdependent or intersectional feminist thinking. Though imperialism and colonialism were widely accepted in bourgeois women's movements and some traditional working-class organisations, Luxemburg and Zetkin pointed out that internationalism, anti-imperialism and anti-colonialism could not be separated from European class struggles and women's activism against gender-specific discrimination. Luxemburg, for instance, referred to the international entanglement of social inequalities when she made clear that the liberation of working-class women and men in Germany and Europe could only be achieved if they thought and acted internationally, against war and for the liberation of colonised people on other continents.

<sup>25</sup> However, it was only in the late 1990s and early 2000s that mainstream feminism in Germany—at that stage, a largely white and middle-class dominated phenomenon—(re-)discovered interdependent thinking. This was due to the work of Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991) and Patricia Hill Collins (1991) on intersectionality, a concept that captures the interdependency of different categories of inequality. In this process, an earlier debate

on the interdependency of different power relations, one led by woman of colour in Germany in the 1980s and 1990s, had been widely overlooked. The publications of Oguntoye et al. (1986), Hügel et al. (1993), Piesche et al. (1999) advanced a perspective that linked gender discrimination with racism and (post-)colonial legacies (see also Kron 1996). Among the more recent and somewhat more widely-read publications in this 'tradition' are "Spricht die Subalterne Deutsch?" (Steyerl/Gutiérrez Rodríguez 2003), "Re/visionen. Postkoloniale Perspektiven von people of color auf Rassismus, Kulturpolitik und Widerstand in Deutschland" (Nghì Ha et al. 2007) and "Mythen, Masken und Subjekte. Kritische Weißseinforschung in Deutschland" (Eggers et al. 2005).<sup>[3]</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Since then, scholars have increasingly perceived gender relations as inextricably linked to other inequalities and power asymmetries such as class, ethnicity or race.<sup>[4]</sup> However, mainstream research on intersectionality in Germany continues to separate the contemporary national setting of intersectional social inequalities from its temporal and spatial context, in other words, from its transnational and (post-)colonial entanglements. Research in Germany also shows a tendency to reduce the complexity of social life to manageable patterns of categories (such as race, class, gender, etc.) and levels of inequality (such as objective structures, modes of representation, and subjective experiences).

<sup>27</sup> Nina Degele and Gabriele Winker (2009), for example, build on different approaches and critiques in the field of intersectionality in order to present a comprehensive framework of analysis that aims to cover four distinct categories of inequality (gender, class, race, and body) as well as the levels of their construction (social structures, symbolic representations, and identity). However, they end up simply adding and counting categories and levels in their tabulations. Degele's and Winker's approach is often criticised for its tendency to reduce the complexity of social life to four analytical categories of social inequality, thereby contributing to the construction and naturalisation of these categories as attributes of social groups (see e.g., Langreiter/Timm 2011: 68f).

<sup>28</sup> In contrast to the perception of intersectionality as a sort of diversity management tool which views social categories as fixed attributes of social groups or as a tool to characterise identities, we deploy Tove Soiland's (2008) understanding of intersectionality and social categories as tools to describe and make visible the production and reproduction of (power) relations and asymmetries, as well as their interdependencies and (post-)colonial entanglements. We also want to emphasise the tradition of positioned feminist politics against racism, sexism, and class oppression, which constitutes the genealogy of interdependency and intersectional approaches in the U.S. as well as in Germany (see Gutiérrez Rodríguez 2011).

### 3.2 Diaspora and Intersectionality in the Feminisms of Women of Colour

<sup>29</sup> Feminist postcolonial approaches that focus on the interdependencies or intersectionalities of gender relations have a much richer history in the Americas and in Great Britain. Thus, feminist theorists of colour in these countries have been influential in the knowledge production of women of colour in Germany. They have made clear that whiteness or blackness as well as the related social or class positionings are not just intrinsic categories of analysis, but rather power relations inscribed into human bodies, cultural representations and productions, as well as in all social relations.

<sup>30</sup> Intellectuals and activists like Avtar Brah (1996, 2003), Audre Lorde (1984), Angela Davis (1982 [1981]), bell hooks (1992), Gloria Anzaldúa (1987), Chéla Sandoval (1998) and others, whose publications are situated within the tradition of political and social struggles against racism, sexism, colonial heritage, and exclusion from civil rights, have long understood and analysed the entanglement of different power relations.

<sup>31</sup> In the works of these scholars, social categories are explicitly understood as politically constructed—whether as an instrument to analyse positionings within power relations and to name their discriminatory effects (see Crenshaw, 1991 & Hill Collins, 1991) or as a political counter-strategy in a 'politics of location' (Rich, 1986). Thus the categories that are productive to work with are the very categories that are politically contested, like 'black' or 'queer'. These categories reveal a subversive power in that they are discriminatory appellations turned into powerful self-descriptions (Crenshaw, 1991: 1297; see also Lorde, 1984: 110ff).<sup>[5]</sup>

<sup>32</sup> The following section describes more precisely the three feminist approaches of Angelas Davis, Avtar Brah, Gloria Anzaldúa and Chéla Sandoval, which we find useful as methodological tools to construct postcolonial intersectional thinking beyond fixed analytical categories. These approaches analyse the political production of social categories and classifications rather than using them to set up a framework of analysis.

In this way, and also in the sense of viewing society from the point of view of movements, we consider them important diasporising approaches to examining inequalities.

### 3.3. Angela Davis: Perspectivity as Method for Re-reading Black Women's History

<sup>33</sup> In her book on women, race, and class in the U.S., Angela Davis (1981) wrote a historical analysis of struggles for abolition, education and other socio-political rights. Davis highlights the alliances as well as the conflicts and disavowals between the women's and Afro-American movements of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. By linking the practices and strategies of political, cultural and social movements of different historical periods, different sites, and social positions, Davis seeks to reconstruct the modes and logics of what can be called a 'global sociality'.

<sup>34</sup> Davis employs a diasporising methodology in the sense that her analytical approach is always on the move, ever mobile, and can thus be considered 'perspectival'. She transmits a very complex understanding of a phenomenon by considering it from a plurality of views—especially from the different perspectives of social and political struggles. Davis' historical analysis of the suffragette movement in the U.S. (1981: 110–126 and 137–148), for example, shows that white bourgeois women had at some point in history very different political interests from those of black women and black men. These differences between political interests led to racist tendencies within the white women's movement, even though at an earlier time these same women had worked toward the abolition of slavery.

<sup>35</sup> In the case of the suffragette movement, racism only became a tool for white women to defend certain interests and achieve privileges, while in other instances coalitions between women of different classes and colours were indeed possible. Thus, according to Davis, it is not the categories, such as black or white women, that formed the basis of political struggles and entities, but the context of specific political or economic interests that transcended or accentuated categories such as race, class or gender (ibid. 99ff).

<sup>36</sup> Another example is Davis' plea for the collectivisation of housework. Here, she points out that the issue of wages for housework in the Italian women's movement of the 1970s would not change the character of the individually specific, tiring and boring work. One just needed to look at the claims of domestic workers—e.g., black and immigrant women in the U.S.—throughout history (ibid. 222ff) to see this was not the case. By confronting the different demands of women concerning housework and analysing the character of this work at different times and in different geopolitical spaces, Davis shows that the question of the conditions of reproductive work touch on one core aspect of the organisation of society and social relations marked by sexism, racism and class discrimination.

<sup>37</sup> Hence, a comprehensive critique of the phenomenon of 'housework' cannot be furthered by starting with a pre-categorised group that is simply assumed to do the housework in society, such as white middle-class women or, in a more contemporary analysis, migrant women. Limiting the analysis to pre-determined groups leads to a homogenisation of these groups, to a reduction of these subjects to a single aspect of their lives, as well as to blindness to an alternative organisation of society. [\[6\]](#)

<sup>38</sup> Davis' method of permanently questioning supposed social truths and certainties—such as the unity of all women in the suffragette movements or the feminine and private character of housework—and her confrontation of these truths with their dependence on specific temporal, spatial or social perspectives, serves to provoke the reader to reflect on her/his own unexamined assumptions. We call this diasporic because Davis creatively looks at different times, places and settings, with their respective conditions, and especially at the political and cultural statements of the people involved. In doing so, Davis is continually aware of the histories of movements, colonialism, slavery and racism as well as the political articulations and organisations that have shaped the situation at the centre of her analysis. Like Linebaugh and Rediker and Gilroy, Davis questions the national and territorial frame of the topic with which she is dealing. She encourages the reader (and researcher) to acknowledge perspectives from another time and location, which help to better understand and nuance any given problem.

### 3.4. Avtar Brah: Gendering Diaspora Spaces

<sup>39</sup> Avtar Brah also uses the concept of diaspora, deploying it as an alternative framework for the analysis of social relations and sociality more generally. For Brah, diaspora space (1996, 2003) is highly gendered and racialised, and is placed within the context of colonial and postcolonial power relations. However, Brah distinguishes her concept of diaspora space from notions of diaspora that include an idea of territorial 'homeland': "the concept of diaspora offers a critique of discourses of field origins, while

taking account of a homing desire which is not the same thing as desire for a homeland” (Brah 2003: 614).

<sup>40</sup> Based on these considerations, Brah views the diaspora space as a framework for the analysis of societal contexts characterised by migration and cultural exchange. By introducing a spatial notion of diaspora as taking place within a given society, the concept allows not only for the experiences of mobile subjects but also the transcultural processes that affect anyone inhabiting the diaspora space. Like the creolised societies that Glissant has outlined, the concept is therefore open to the most plural and de-territorialised manifestations of a desire for ‘homing’. These manifestations point to the entangled histories and memories of transnational movements and trans-regional dynamics. Thus, the concept of diaspora space enables one analytically to link genealogies of movement with those of sedentariness.

<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, in her early book “Cartographies of Diaspora” (1996), Brah explored, among other things, the question of gendered and racialised diasporic spaces by taking as an example the social and economic positions, the ‘situated identities’ and the forms of self-organisation of South Asian women in British society. Brah questioned the supposition of global sisterhood and argued that notions of social categories are not static, but always contextual, situated, embedded in specific historical, social, and cultural contexts. Thus it is her anti-essentialism as well as notions of interdependency, relationality, and mobility that make Brah’s understanding of diaspora space a useful approach for the development of a diasporic feminist methodology.

### 3.5. Gloria Anzaldúa and Chéla Sandoval: Designing Diasporic Subjectivities

<sup>42</sup> Brah describes her concept of diaspora space as a framework for the analysis of power relations and constructions of difference that result from “the creolisation of theory” (1996: 208f), the conflation of diaspora studies, postcolonial studies and border studies. This brings us to our discussion of border feminism, another ‘tradition’ of knowledge production on diaspora. Border feminism (or *Mestiza* feminism) emerged in the 1980s and committed itself to feminist postcolonial struggles. It was strongly influenced by the *Chicana* movement in the U.S. and was theoretically conceptualised by the *Chicana* activist and intellectual Gloria Anzaldúa.<sup>[7]</sup> In her book “Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza” (1987), Anzaldúa defines the term ‘borderland’ in the following way: “A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants” (Anzaldúa, 1987: 3). This notion of the border as a transit zone also implies the potential for ‘radical political subjectivity’ that, according to Nancy Naples (2008: 7), can be considered the hallmark of “Borderlands/La Frontera”. She states that “Anzaldúa and other scholars influenced by her work view borderlands as sites that can enable those dwelling there to be able to negotiate the contradictions and tensions found in diverse settings.”

<sup>43</sup> According to Chéla Sandoval (1998), Anzaldúa’s conception of political subjectivity highlights the appropriation of agency through border crossings—that is, through negotiations and movements “between races, genders, sexualities, cultures, languages and academic disciplines” (Sandoval 1998: 360). Sandoval calls this strategy of difference a “diasporic strategy of consciousness and politics” (ibid.).

<sup>44</sup> Thus, border feminism claims that radical subjectivities and radical forms of consciousness are formed less by an individual or collective search for a clear positioning within ascribed identity categories than by experiences of transgression, negotiation, and dislocation of political borders and symbolic boundaries, including those of social categories. The radical and powerful subjectivities that emerge from border experiences, such as Anzaldúa’s figure of the *Mestiza*, can also be called ‘diasporic subjectivities’.

<sup>45</sup> According to Anzaldúa, the *Mestiza* draws her special power and productivity from different identifications and positionings on the borders/margins of identity categories. This power and productivity includes the knowledge of the historical processes of the emergence of these categories, as well as the memories of the struggles and violence that have led to the implementation of contemporary hegemonic—albeit contested—categories and order of things. It is from these genealogies, decidedly different to official narratives, that border creatures such as the *Mestiza* derive their strength. As Anzaldúa and Sandoval point out, in spite of the silencing, discrimination and violence experienced by Indian-Mexican women in U.S. society, they possess a powerful subjectivity: they are not simply victims of discrimination and violence but also utopian new beings who cannot be classified by simple patterns of identity.

## 4. Diasporising Gender Studies? A Conclusion

<sup>46</sup> Taking as its point of departure our research on gender and migration in Latin America and our expertise in Latin American and Caribbean Studies, this paper began with the claim that formerly colonised countries in (Latin) America, Africa and Asia are not the only diasporic societies: European societies are also marked by (post-)colonial entanglements, power relations and transnational migration. We then questioned a tendency in the mainstream knowledge production on gender and intersectionality in Germany to overlook these aspects as constitutive parts of history, society and, thus, constitutive of the interdependency of social inequalities. In order to contribute to the development of a more comprehensive and non-Eurocentric understanding of how gender relates to other social inequalities in history, society, and culture, and how it constructs identities and subjectivities, we suggest a diasporisation of gender and intersectionality studies by drawing on postcolonial and feminist notions of diaspora.

<sup>47</sup> Analytical concepts such as *créolisation*, archipelago and the red and black Atlantic show how postcolonial diaspora thinking can be understood as a methodology to rethink society and sociality as fundamentally shaped by human movements, dislocations, and displacements, by transnational entanglements of history and culture, by (post-)colonial power relations as well as by cultural heterogeneity. These genealogies of human movements and the social struggles that accompany them over time and space are analysed as key motors of social and cultural change. At the same time they challenge normative notions of social categories.

<sup>48</sup> We then revisited feminist approaches which have included these various aspects of postcolonial diaspora thought. Angela Davis demonstrates how taking into account different and multiple perspectives can result in a diasporic form of alternative and non-essentialised history writing. This kind of 'perspectivity' can benefit social science research in contemporary postcolonial societies, given the importance of considering the different conceptualisations and understandings of social phenomena that arise due to the different perspectives, histories and experiences in such diaspora spaces.

<sup>49</sup> Gloria Anzaldúa's and Chéla Sandoval's border feminism emphasises the negotiating subject and enables one to rethink border crossings as the primary social and cultural experiences for subject constitution and agency formation. Like the other concepts of diaspora discussed in this article, border feminists are proposing a change of perspective. They do this by viewing dominant categories of identification from the margins and borders of supposedly fixed entities, where the latter in turn becomes de-centred and dissolves into relations. Chicana thinking is grounded heavily in the politics of subjectivity. The affirmation of multiple identifications and subjectivities of 'border creatures' such as the *Mestiza* contest the violence implicit in fixed categories of identity, but also point beyond mere subjects, since the conditions of subjectivity are clearly embedded in social structures and histories.

<sup>50</sup> Finally, Avtar Brah's diaspora space focuses less on subjects and subjectivities than on the concept of sociality. The gendered and racialised diaspora spaces become a paradigmatic framework for the analysis of postcolonial societies that describe the cohabitation of (currently) sedentary and migrated persons. By applying the perspective of diasporic cohabitation and accentuating social relations (not categories), Brah's concept also challenges the supposed borders between 'migrants' and 'not-migrants,' and opens the way for a diasporised perception of society more generally.

<sup>51</sup> In conclusion, if we understand gender and intersectionality studies as part of a broader framework of interdisciplinary research on social inequalities and agency formation in a transnationalised world, the idea of diasporisation delivers a non-Eurocentric and de-essentialised approach to this field. It does so by including historical and contemporary forms of (post-)colonial human mobility and transnational migration as well as often marginalised memories, knowledges and subjectivities, seeing them all as constitutive parts of all societies, rather than as exceptions. By using the approach of diasporisation Birgit zur Nieden (2010), for instance, questions the ahistorical and repressive logics of the current migration regime of the European Union. She confronts the Spanish implementation of immigration regulation in the 1990s and 2000s with a change of perspective, taking the example of Argentina, a country that, as a result of economic and political crisis, has experienced broad emigration movements to Europe. In zur Nieden's work, these ongoing migrations from Argentina to Europe are understood as part of relations and transnational settings formed by the postcolonial migration histories between Europe and Latin America. This provides us with a broader understanding of what constitutes contemporary European migration societies: their genealogies are located not just within the geographical territory of Europe but can only be understood by conceptualising the transatlantic space of Europe and the Americas as a diaspora space, in order to include visions of sociality that are characterised by the historical and ongoing movements of people. By applying diasporisation as (feminist) methodology, we can also analyse the transformative and transgressive potential of migrant women's self-representations with respect to political subjectivity, concepts of citizenship or gendered and racialised power relations (see also Erel 2009, Kron 2008). These examples of diasporisation show how 'the migrant' is transformed into a powerful

agent of social change, no longer predominantly perceived as an exceptional subject or as a victim.

## Notes

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1. The term 'middle passage' refers to the slave trade route to the North American mainland that was part of the Atlantic triangle slave trade that linked Europe, Africa and America (see Linebaugh/Rediker 2009: 38).
2. Gilroy refers to a notion of modernity that can also be found in Walter Dignolo's term 'modern/colonial world system' (2000), in Anibal Quijano's idea of colonialism as *the* element of modernity (1993), and in Enrique Dussel's concept of 'transmodernity' (1993). The decolonial studies carried out by Dignolo, Quijano, Dussel and others focus on the macro structures and continuities of global coloniality, placing racism at the centre of analysis. However, according to our diaspora approach, firstly we see racism as a form of oppression and discrimination that depends on specific political, social, cultural and economic contexts and interests and thus changes its forms, meanings and 'objects' over time and in space. Secondly, most decolonial studies rarely analyse empirically the micro level of the constitution of the subject. Thus, little research has been done on the negotiations, transgressions, and struggles of subaltern subjects in dealing deal with situations of coloniality.
3. For a more detailed discussion of feminist works on racism and anti-semitism by "diasporic" and anti-racist feminists in Germany in the 1980s and 1990s, see Gutiérrez Rodríguez 2011.
4. See e.g., Becker-Schmidt (2007), Knapp/Wetterer (2007), Hardmeier/Vinz (2007), Winker/Degele (2009), Klinger (2007), Lutz/Wenning (2001), Walgenbach et al. (2007).
5. For a version of this subversive political strategy of a politics of location and naming discriminatory power-relations by acquiring the categories that are used to describe one's assumed identity see FeMigra 1994.
6. The sociologist Umut Erel is one of a number of researchers currently working on the development of an alternative framework of analysis, in order to foreground the agency and subjectivity of migrant women without reducing them to the attribute 'migrant' (Erel 2009). By applying a biographical method and analysing the experiences of women with migratory histories using Bourdieu's theory of social capital, she shows how the different abilities and social capitals of these women can serve them in certain contexts and exclude them in others. By understanding the lives of these women as transnational, Umut Erel's research contributes to an understanding of society beyond a national frame as the basis for gender research. Her analytic framework overcomes the confrontation of society and the migrant.
7. *Chicano/a* is another term for Mexican Americans, which was appropriated by an anti-racist political movement.

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