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FROM METHODOLOGY TO CONTEXTUALISATION. THE POLITICS AND EPISTEMOLOGY OF INTERSECTIONALITY
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From Methodology to Contextualisation
The Politics and Epistemology of Intersectionality

Urmila Goel

The first time I heard about intersectionality was in India. In 2004, I was travelling there as a journalist and interviewed queer feminist activists. Most of them were not only involved in feminist and queer struggles, but were also reflecting on their own privileges (class, urbanness, caste, religion, etc.). They were aware of how the different lines of oppression are interwoven as well as the roles these play in nation building. Talking with them opened totally new perspectives to me, since at that time I had not delved into gender and queer studies, let alone intersectionality. Their perspective on the world helped me see the limits of identity politics as well as the importance of questioning one’s own position, i.e. interrogating one’s privileges and biases, in order to think about those who are easily ignored. After coming back to Germany, I started to learn not only more about gender and queer studies but also about intersectionality. Given this starting point, both always belonged together for me. Neither could be pursued without the other.

In the following I will first give a short introduction to the German discussions on intersectionality, then argue for intersectionality as a perspective of analysis, and finally discuss how blind spots and ambivalences can be identified and analysed with the help of the concept of intersectionality.

The German debates

German academia adopted the concept of intersectionality in the context of Gender Studies, mainly borrowing from discussions in the United States. Others, who have been in this field much longer than I,

3 - Jaya Sharma and Dipika Nath, “Through the Prism of intersectionality…”, op. cit.
4 - Arvind Narrain and Gautam Bhan (eds.), Because I Have a Voice..., op. cit.
5 - Kimberlé W. Crenshaw, “Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics and violence against women of color”, In Kimberlé W. Crenshaw [ed.], Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings
have already written about the genealogies of intersectionality in Germany. By now, in German Gender Studies, intersectionality seems to have become part of the mainstream: it is institutionalised in academic positions (at least one professorship in Berlin) and canonised in syllabi. A great deal of literature has been published and an internet portal on intersectionality established. Authors like Winker and Degele give instructions on how to apply intersectionality to research. Increasingly also scholars working primarily on migration, racism, disability studies or classism use the concept of intersectionality.

Although the academic debates focusing around the concept of intersectionality seem to be a feature of the last ten years or so, the fact that different power relations are interwoven has been dealt with much earlier by activists. In particular, women of colour saw the need not just to account for sexism or racism, but rather to analyse how these (and other power relations) worked together and produced specific social positions. Long before I had learned about intersectionality in India, I had thus encountered a similar approach in reading Farbe bekennen, in which Black German women explore their histories. Later I learned about other such collections of texts challenging the assumption of a universal homogeneous sisterhood of women from an anti-racist perspective. But there were also other interventions. Walgenbach, for example, provides an account of those of activists and researchers dealing with aspects of (dis)ability. Thus activists and researchers involved in emancipative political struggles applied an intersectional approach long before the term intersectionality was established.

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7 - E.g. Katharina Walgenbach, Gabriele Dietze, Antje Hornscheidt and Kerstin Palm (eds.), Gender als interdependente Kategorie... op. cit.; Helma Lutz, Maria Theresa Herrera Vivar and Linda Supik (eds.), Fokus Intersektionalität, op. cit.; Sabine Hess, Nikola Langreiter and Elisabeth Timm (eds.), Intersektionalität Revisted, op. cit.
8 - See: http://portal-intersektionalitaet.de.
12 - Katharina Walgenbach, "Gender als interdependente Kategorie", op. cit., pp. 30-33.
These approaches to interwovenness like the early articles on intersectionality were both analytical and political. Their aim was to describe and understand instances of discrimination and in so doing fight against them. They wanted to change the society, make it less unequal and fight for the rights of the multiply oppressed. Much of the newer work seems to have lost this political motivation. Increasingly, intersectionality seems to be used as one more academic tool to analyse data. Researchers increasingly turn to intersectionality not because they see the need to fight inequalities, but because they assume that they need to apply an intersectional framework. Rather than trying to understand the underlying unequal power relations, they attempt to tick off as many categories as possible. Publications like Winker and Degele’s encourage this, since they seem to provide a tool kit that can be applied mechanically without the need to think about power inequalities. One of the current debates in Germany is thus whether intersectionality has been depoliticised. Several questions follow: what is the impact of the hype around intersectionality on the formulation of research questions? Which categories or unequal power relations are included, and which not? How are normative frameworks (de)stabilised by academic intersectionality? Some researchers and many activists fear that intersectionality increasingly becomes a stepping stone for an academic career rather than a perspective to change society.

Linked to this debate is the question of what the focus of intersectionality should be. In its beginning, it was clearly used to describe and analyse unequal power relations in a society (in particular racism and sexism, but also issues of class, ability or homophobia). When categories such as black women were used, these were seen as products of these power relations and were adopted as a strategic essentialism. Much of the newer work, in particular that which uses intersectionality as a tool, is more concerned with including a list of categories without taking account of how these were produced and how they are linked to unequal power relations. Erel et al. among others criticise the arbitrariness of such an approach, which does not take into account the specific contexts and ignores the “differences that matter”, i.e. the need to differentiate the consequences of different social positions. Similarly, Castro Varela, María do Mar and Nikita Dhawan argue that German approaches to intersectionality often do not take into account the specific contexts and postcolonial interdependencies, thus installing a new form of universalism in the triad of race, class and gender.

13 - Gabriele Winker and Nina Degele, Intersektionalität - Zur Analyse sozialer Ungleichheiten, op. cit.
15 - Ibid., pp. 275-276.
This triad is guiding discussions on intersectionality in Germany. However, it does not seem that all three aspects are always included. Many discussions on intersectionality, which are based in Gender Studies and/or studies on migration and racism, de facto only deal with gender and race (or heteronormativity and racism). While class (or classism) might be mentioned, it is often not really part of the analysis. Furthermore, it is seldom that the “etc.” of intersectionality, i.e. factors beyond race, class and gender (or beyond racism, classism and heteronormativity), are truly considered.\(^{17}\) There is some awareness that questions of (dis)ability (or ableism) also affect the social position of persons and are interwoven with those of the other inequalities. But outside of disability studies\(^ {18}\) one can find only little research that includes (dis)ability (or ableism) in the actual analysis. Winker and Degele\(^ {19}\) do include body as a fourth category in addition to the triad. They argue that bodyism describes those power inequalities that are based on notions of the body – in particular ableism, ageism and lookism. This example illustrates that the inclusion in the “etc.” depends on the theoretical approach adopted by a researcher. Is bodyism a power relation on its own, or are normalisations of the body part of heteronormativity, racism, classism, ableism, etc.? Is bodyism a power mechanism that includes ableism, ageism, and lookism, or are the latter distinct power inequalities with specific logics? Similarly, do gender and sexuality belong to interwoven power relations of two kinds (sexism and homophobia), or do they together constitute one power relation (heteronormativity)? Depending on the answers given to these questions the interwovenness of categories or power relations will be defined differently.

In the German theory production, it is generally stated that categories (or power relations) should not be considered additively but always need to be understood as interwoven. Applying the theory to empirical material, however, is more difficult. Most researchers start with notions of differentiated categories (such as race, class and gender) and refer to theories or fields, which analyse these individually (such as gender studies, migration theory, racism theory, etc.). Then they try to apply an intersectional approach to their analysis and attempt to think the different categories and theories together. This is a problematic detour researchers (including myself) pursue: collect data about the complex reality, fit this data into the individual categories and power relations and then try to analyse how these are linked to one another. An article by Wellgraf\(^ {20}\) is a good example of the difficulty of this approach illustrating the

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**Notes**


pitfalls of applying the approach of Winker and Degele. After stressing that the categories always have to be considered as interdependent, Wellgraf goes on to analyse the categories independently one after the other. Rather than analysing the interwovenness, he puts much effort into dealing with the categories separately. While this might seem an extreme example of the difficulties of applying an intersectional approach to empirical data, it seems that most empirical researchers (including myself) still struggle with the problem of how to adequately apply the theory to the data.

Finally, I want to briefly turn to the German debates about terminology. It has become almost standard to claim that the term intersectionality (Intersektionalität), because of its closeness to a street intersection, evokes images of independent categories or power relations that only meet as they intersect. As a consequence, other terms have been used: some researchers prefer to refer to interdependencies (Interdependenzen) or interwovenness (Verflechtungen). Walgenbach et al. developed the concept of the interdependent category (interdependente Kategorie), according to which each category is considered to be heterogeneous in itself. Rommelspacher much earlier coined the term culture of dominance (Dominanzkultur) in order to describe how interwoven power relations determined dominances within a society. Much has been written about the different terms. Some argue that the shift away from the term intersectionality and its origins has depoliticised the concept. Looking at Crenshaw’s (1995) writing, it is clear that she never considered power relations as additive but as interwoven and thus producing specific social positions. The repeated criticism against the term intersectionality thus seems at least to lack knowledge of where the term comes from. In fact the whole debate about the terminology seems rather unproductive. Terms are used rather haphazardly in German language publications. Under the heading of Intersektionalität you can find both texts that explicitly refer to political struggles, and others that simply consider intersectionality as an analytical tool. The other terms like Interdependenzen, interdependente Kategorie or Verflechtungen are not used in a more univocal way. The chosen term is thus no clear indicator of the chosen theoretical approach.

23 - Katharina Walgenbach, Gabriele Dietze, Antje Hornscheidt and Kerstin Palm [eds.], *Gender als interdependente Kategorie...*, op. cit.
A perspective of analysis

Understanding intersectionality as a perspective of analysis means that it has an influence on how research questions are formulated, how the research subject is approached, how data are treated and how the analysis is developed. Thus, even if I decide to concentrate on one particular power relation such as racism or heteronormativity, an intersectional approach requires me to be open to the influence of and interwovenness with other power relations: I must be willing to include them in my analysis and maybe even change my research questions.

In particular, intersectionality implies that social positions can never be explained by the influence of one power relation alone, not even by the addition of the influences of several power relations, but always by the influence of several power relations together. Thus, for example, a woman in a wheelchair cannot be treated as a woman on the one hand and a disabled person on the other. Her womanhood is constructed through her (so-called) disability just as her disability is constructed through her gender. In their interwovenness, these two features produce her particular experiences that differ both from those of other women and from those of other persons in wheelchairs. For example, while walking women tend to be overly sexualised, on the contrary, women in wheelchairs are likely to be constructed as asexual. In both cases, feminism has to fight against the external definition of the female body and desire; however, the strategies must differ. Research has to be aware of the specificities of social positions and avoid classification according to well-defined, a priori categories. Intersectionality as a perspective of analysis implies for me to closely look at what and how social positions are created in order to avoid simple dichotomies.

To illustrate the problems of simple dichotomies, I want to give another example. The situation of racialised economically marginalised young men is a particular one differing not only from racialised economically marginalised older men, but also from marginalised women of different ages, of people of different gender identities, ages and racialisation that are not economically marginalised, or people of different economic statuses, ages and gender identities that are not racialised, etc. The “others” of the racialised economically marginalised young men are thus multiple and very heterogeneous. Some possess more privileges, some fewer, and some have different privileges. To analyse the situation of these racialised economically marginalised young men one needs to analyse how at least racism, classism and heteronormativity interact to produce their particular experiences. Connell, for example, provides an analysis of how masculinity is in itself heterogeneous and how marginalised and hegemonic masculinities are attributed with different codes of behaviour and images.

In my approach to intersectionality, I found in particular Anthias’ concept of translocational positionality\(^\text{28}\) helpful as she uses it to capture the influence of different power relations/categories without essentialising any of them. She defines it as follows:

The concept of translocational positionality addresses issues of identity in terms of locations which are not fixed but are context, meaning and time related and which therefore involve shifts and contradictions. As an intersectional frame it moves away from the idea of given “groups” or “categories” of gender, ethnicity and class, which then intersect [...], and instead pays much more attention to social locations and processes which are broader than those signalled by this.\(^\text{29}\)

Anthias thus argues that researchers always have to look closely at the specific situation and the particular context, so as to analyse what exactly the social locations are and how they were produced. Identities and belonging should not be considered as stable, but as always in a process, which can also produce contradictory positions. Taking into account context, meaning and time specific locations is for me part of understanding intersectionality as a perspective of analysis.

Intersectionality as a perspective of analysis requires the researcher to be open to the complexities of the research topic, while at the same time focusing on a particular research interest and question. It requires her to be willing to expand the scope of the research question, if in the course of research it becomes apparent that the initial question does not fulfil its aim and needs extensions or changes. It also requires the researcher to be on the lookout for blind spots and to address them if necessary.

Such an open approach, however, can easily overstrain the researcher. No researcher is able to identify all blind spots and to address them adequately theoretically. There will always be an identified or unidentified “etc.” that has not or cannot be dealt with sufficiently. Thus intersectionality as a perspective also requires the researcher to be open to ambivalence and imperfection, to acknowledge that the own research has blind spots and weaknesses and to accept criticism with regard to this. In this way she can develop her own work in dealing with new aspects while at the same time other researchers can join in and contribute their particular perspective, knowledge and skills.

A case study: Indian nurses in (West) Germany (I)

I now want to illustrate how discovering intersectionality as a perspective of analysis has influenced my own research. I will explain this in relation to my interest in the migration of Indian nurses to (West) Germany. Rather than


\(^{29}\) Ibid., p. 5 (Emphasis in original).
presenting my results in detail, I will focus on the development of my research questions. To this end a very brief description of the context of the field of research will suffice.  

In the 1960s, West German Catholic institutions recruited young Christian women from South India to work as nurses in West German hospitals and homes for the elderly. Many of these later entered arranged marriages with highly qualified men from South India and brought them to West Germany. However, for the first few years, these husbands were not eligible for a work permit. Due to the legal framework, the men had to stay at home, do housework and look after the children, while their wives earned the family income.

This particular migration history always fascinated me. At the beginning (when I was based mainly in migration studies and had no clue about gender studies) I was interested in the female migrants, who are mostly absent in migration studies, and the forced gender role changes, i.e. the fact that the female nurses were the breadwinners of the families while their husbands were forced to do housework. When I was more rooted in critical racism theory, I began to think more about how the regulations of immigration, residence and work permits influenced the situation of the nurses, their husbands and their families. Rather than considering the changes in gender roles as a family matter, I began to understand them as a result of the legal framework and its exclusionary mechanisms. Learning more about gender and queer studies, I started to question my initial fascination with the female migrants and the supposedly forced gender role changes. I began to think more about how heteronormativity and migration influenced each other. It became apparent to me that my interviewees, the magazines I analysed and the events I observed all were directed to reproduce the notion of (mostly) harmonious heterosexual families. Ruptures in heteronormativity, deviations from heteronormative gender roles or sexuality were mostly not talked about. If they were mentioned, they were framed as unfortunate single events in the course of migration, which were fought against. There was no space left for stories of nurses who actually wanted a change in gender roles. There was no discussion of how fathers formed stronger relationships with their children since they spent much time with them. The ruptures in the heteronormative order were only seen as a problem.

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and not as something opening potentials. This made me interested in looking
more closely at the interwovenness of migration, racism and heteronormativity.32 Here Yuval-Davis’ analysis of the role of women in reproducing the
nation (or in this case a migrant community) both culturally and biologically
was valuable to me.33 If the nurses and their families wanted to build an ethnic
community, in which they could speak their first language, pursue familiar
rituals, etc. as well as create a refuge from the structural racism they faced in
(West) Germany, this required them not to openly oppose the heteronormative
order.

While pursuing these intersections or locations further, I became aware that
I also needed to look more closely at the particular labour migration of the
nurses. The nursing profession has a particular history, in which the exploita-
tion of female labour is fundamental and into which the image of docile and
devoted Asian women fits well. To understand why and how the nurses were
recruited from India, what their working conditions were in West Germany
and how they reacted to the attempt of the West German authorities in 1977
to terminate their stay in West Germany, the particularities of their labour
migration and the image of nurses needs to be taken into account. Further-
more, it might be insightful to deal more with notions of health and ability as
these defined the work and the image of the nurses.

This short account shows how my research interest and approach developed
over time as I discovered more and more factors, which influenced the parti-
cular migration history I was interested in. Each shift in my interest meant
also that I perceived my material in a different way and pursued my fieldwork
with a shift in focus. Intersectionality as a perspective of analysis helped me to
broaden my understanding as well as to look closer at the particularities of the
specific case.

Each shift in my research interest also meant that I had to look more closely
at my material by paying attention to the particular context. It became increa-
singly difficult to make bold generalisations. At the same time, I have the
impression that with each step I came and continue to come closer to unders-
tand aspects of the migration history and discover patterns that can be used
for comparative analysis.

However, the analysis also became increasingly demanding. With each new
factor I included in the analysis came the necessity not only to learn more
about it, but also about the related theories in this field. Thus extending my
research question has been put on a hold for the moment. In particular, I
currently know too little about questions of labour and health to include them
in my analysis.

32 - Urmila Goel, “von unseren Familien finanziell unabhängig und weit weg von der Heimat...”,
op. cit.

Blind spots and ambivalences

Intersectionality guides my research in particular in two ways: It helps me discover blind spots (both in my perspective and in the material) and to understand ambivalences of social positions and in analyses. Anthias captures these two aspects with a different terminology:

On the other hand these may produce highly contradictory and uneven processes of advantage or disadvantage, or exclusion and inclusion [...]. This may help in the understanding of how the intersections of social relations can be both mutually reinforcing (as is the case for those subject to a range of class, gender and racialisation subordinations such as some migrant working class women) and contradictory (for example, racialised men may be in a position of dominance within some of their own forms of ethnic organisations particularly in relation to women or the young).

Where the intersections of social relations are in Anthias’ terms mutually reinforcing, marginalisations in several power relations come together. These, however, are mostly not taken account of in research, identity politics and policies, when the attention is only directed to one particular power relation. Among the group of women, the situation of women of colour is easily ignored, just as in the group of people of colour the situation of women is often ignored. Those within the dominant position in any category tend to take their situation as the universal and either ignore the position of those marginalised within the category or argue that that marginalisation is of lesser importance. Thus social positions created by marginalisations in several power relations tend to become invisible: as blind spots, they receive little attention. For this reason, the queer feminist activists I interviewed in India, attempted to reflect on their privileges in the queer movement and to shift the focus away from their situation to others that are also marginalised by different power relations.

Where the intersections of social relations are in Anthias’ terms contradictory, we can notice not only that people in a marginalised position can be powerful in comparison to others, but also that they might be in ambivalent positions in relation to others. To take Anthias’ example of the racialised men, they might not only be in position of dominance to other racialised persons, but also have certain privileges in comparison to, for example, white women. While the latter are privileged in terms of racism, they are marginalised in those of heteronormativity. Thus, there is no clear power hierarchy between...
these two social positions, which both combine privileges and marginalisations. The privilege can be used in an attempt to offset marginalisations. Thus racia-

lised economically marginalised heterosexual and able-bodied young men might not only try to exert dominance over racialised economically margina-
lised young women, queers and disabled, they might also attempt to use their masculinity to counter the privileges of their white middle-class female tea-
chers. An intersectional approach can help to analyse such a behaviour, which cannot be accounted for by looking only at one power relation and the res-
pective intersubjective power hierarchy between the actors.37

Being aware of the ambivalences in social positions resulting from the inter-
wovenness of power relations can also help to understand why solidarity bet-
ween the marginalised is restricted. Any other, however marginalised in other

pects, can also be perceived as hegemonic to the self at least in one pers-
pective. Thus struggles of the marginalised often are fought not (or not pri-
marily) against the hegemonic position in a society, but rather against other

arginalised actors, when for example feminists or queer activists join in anti-
Muslim activities. Successful divide and rule policies can rely on the antago-
nisms that result from ambivalent social positions.

A Case Study: Indian nurses in (West) Germany (II)

Let me return to the research field of Indian nurses in (West) Germany in
order to illustrate how blind spots develop in the empirical material, how they
can be analysed and the effects ambivalent positions can have. Again, I will
not go into any detail of the empirical material.38

If one follows the narratives of the Indian nurses and their families (in the
interviews, in magazines, etc.), one can discover the image of a community that
is strictly heteronormative and keeps up family values: it is very religious, con-
siders education as important, and is socio-economically successful. From these
narratives and in particular from what is not talked about, one can conclude
which hegemonic positions exist among the nurses and their families, which
social positions are marginalised and where the blind spots are in the material.

So, for example, it seems as if none of the nurses was interested in exploring
her sexuality (whether hetero- or homosexual) before marriage. While this
might be true for many, it is very unlikely that it was true for all and that none
of the nurses had same-sex desires.39 Through narratives of children and friends

38 - For this see Urmila Goel Urmila Goel: “The 70th anniversary of John Matthew - On Indian
Christians in Germany”, op. cit.; “Über das Sprechen über die Religion der Anderen”, op. cit.;
“von unseren Familien finanziell unabhängig und weit weg von der Heimat’ Eine ethnographische
Annäherung an Migration, Geschlecht und Familie”, op. cit.; “Heteronormativity and intersectio-
nality as perspective of analysis of gender and migration: Nurses from India in West Germany”,
op. cit.
of the nurses, I came across stories of pre-marriage intimate relationships with (West German) men, but none about non-heteronormative desire. Similarly, I know of several children of these nurses who live a non-heteronormative life, but this is not talked about openly. Parents of lesbian and gay children do not know of each other. These silences, while often understood to show that non-normative sexuality does not exist, rather show how much non-normative sexuality is made invisible. The silences thus tell us something about the power relations within the community of the nurses and their families and the reproduction of societal exclusion mechanisms. An intersectional perspective helps to discover such silences and provides a framework in which they can be analysed. Deviations from heteronormativity are interwoven with racist marginalisations and the attempts to build a community. They constitute each other and can only be understood in their interdependency.

Similarly, the narratives focus on the socio-economic status the nurses and their families have attained. It is stressed how well they are integrated and how successful they were in (West) Germany. The educational and professional successes of the children are celebrated. The instances of persons not being able to deal so well with the hardships in migration on the other hand are not told so openly. It is difficult to find narratives of persons deciding to pursue a different path, not falling within the norm of success and integration. Thus, for example, the impression arises that all the children studied medicine, indicating a step up in the hierarchy from the nurses. Alternative life decisions such as becoming an artist (with little or no income), not going to a university, etc. are not talked about much, thus invisibilising those who deviate from the neoliberal ideals of socio-economic success. Once again, community building and struggles against racist exclusions are countered by marginalising those who do not fit.

Many more such silences or blind spots in the narratives can be found. If something is not talked about at all, it is a good indicator that this is considered a topic that should not be talked about (rather than that it is not existent). It is an indicator of the power relations that are relevant. An intersectional perspective helps identify these and analyse them.

It, furthermore, provides a framework to understand why marginalised groups actively marginalise other marginalised groups. In the case of the nurses from India and their families in (West) Germany, it can be observed that by stressing socio-economic success and integration they attempt a kind of distinction from other migrant groups in (West) Germany. In the narratives, it is often implicitly or explicitly mentioned that Indian migrants are better migrants, part of a model minority and thus should be treated well in (West) Germany. Among the factors through which they attempt to achieve recognition from the dominant (West) German society are high education levels, industriousness, establishment in the middle class and Christianity. Thus they

40 - Urmila Goel, “Heteronormativity and intersectionality as perspective of analysis of gender and migration: Nurses from India in West Germany”, op. cit., pp. 79-81.
attempt to distinguish themselves from asylum seekers and other labour migrants as well as from those considered Muslims. Many readily join in German anti-Muslim racism, thus reproducing not only German but also Indian exclusion mechanisms. Many of the narratives of nurses from India and their families thus support a divide and rule strategy. They use the privileges that they possess to offset as much as possible the marginalisations they experience. In order to be successful with this, they do not only distinguish themselves from more “unwanted” migrant groups in Germany but also have to construct a homogeneous well-behaved and successful image of their community. The invisibilisation of non-normative behaviour within the community can thus also be understood as part of the attempt to gain recognition in (West) Germany.

Intersectionality as a perspective of analysis thus not only directs me to discover blind spots in the material but also to understand how privileges are used to counter marginalisations. In the case of the nurses from India and their families, intersectionality as a perspective makes it possible to analyse processes of community building, which go along with making the unwanted within the community (in particular those who do not conform to the requirements of heteronormativity and/or socio-economic success) invisible and taking a position against those that are unwanted in society (such as asylum seekers, marginalised labour migrants and those termed as Muslims).

**Conclusion**

Intersectionality can help broaden the perspective of the researcher, make her more open to the complexities of her research field and force her to look more closely at what is happening in particular contexts. It can help her identify where there are gaps in the research, caused by the intersection of several marginalisations. It can also help to understand contradictory behaviour and ambivalences.

However, there are also many challenges linked to such an intersectional approach. First of all, there is no tool kit that can be used to conduct an intersectional analysis. In order to develop this perspective of analysis, the researcher needs to change her mindset and approach to the research field. Developing such a perspective is a process, which can never be brought to an end. It requires a constant openness to question her own approach in order to develop it further. It also requires dealing with the impossibility of including everything relevant in a particular case. Most of all it needs a sound foundation in theoretical and political deliberations that criticise unequal power relations. Only this can prevent an arbitrary inclusion of categories or power relations and treating unequal factors equally.

I am thankful to the Indian queer feminist activists who put me on this path, and all the others who prepared it for me.
AUTEUR


RÉSUMÉ

De la méthodologie à la contextualisation. Politique et épistémologie de l’intersectionnalité

Dans les études de genre allemandes, le concept d’intersectionnalité fait l’objet de nombreuses discussions. Cet article analyse certains de ces débats pour ensuite présenter l’intersectionnalité comme une perspective d’analyse, ce qui peut aider la recherche à rester ouverte à la complexité du sujet, à élargir le champ d’investigation, et à prendre en compte ce à quoi on n’avait pas pensé au départ. En particulier, l’intersectionnalité permet de révéler les points aveugles de sa propre recherche et de conceptualiser les ambiguïtés. Une enquête sur les infirmières indiennes en Allemagne (de l’Ouest) vient illustrer les avantages, et plus largement les conséquences d’une approche intersectionnelle.

ABSTRACT

From methodology to contextualisation. The politics and epistemology of intersectionality

Intersectionality is a much-discussed concept in German Gender Studies. The article describes some of these debates and then proceeds to develop the idea of intersectionality as a perspective of analysis, which can help the researcher to be open to the complexities of the research topic, to be willing to expand the scope of the research question and to deal with aspects not thought about initially. In particular the article describes how intersectionality can help to discover blind spots in the own research and to conceptualise ambivalences. A research project about Indian nurses in (West) Germany is used to illustrate the consequences and advantages of an intersectional approach.