Justus-Liebig-Universität

Virtual International Programme

'Woman'/Feminisms/Queer/Trans and Nonbinary/Race/Nation/Ability –
Decolonizing Knowledge, Introducing Diversity Studies and Inclusion

Final Portfolio

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Introduction

Although my studies have mostly focused on multi-culturalism, diversity, and human rights, it has always been surprisingly difficult for me to find courses that would provide an encompassing array of knowledge on topics connected to feminism(s), queer studies, and critical race theory. The lack of academic offer in this respect made it so that, upon starting classes at JLU, it was immediately clear to me that this course was going to be extremely relevant and important for both my studies and my future as a human rights worker. Most importantly, I felt like it was going to be important for my life in my journey of becoming a more conscious citizen, more so as Europe is becoming a much more diverse region characterised by a heterogenous range of identities which, when they differ from what we know as the 'norm', are often discriminated against. With discrimination has also come a stark rise in the incidence of extremism and hate speech, which also tend to lead to more instances of violence and hate crimes. Knowing the problem and understanding its roots is the first step towards positive change, hence why courses like *'Woman'/Feminisms/Queer/Trans and Nonbinary/Race/Nation/Ability – Decolonizing Knowledge, Introducing Diversity Studies and Inclusion* are powerful tools to deal with today's diversity issues.

The present portfolio seeks to analyse the core themes tackled during the course, with a particular focus on feminism, racism, queerness, and disability. The work will be divided into eight sections, each delving into one of the key topics from the lectures, namely intersectionality, feminisms, Black feminisms, Queer Theory and LGBTQIA+ advocacy, transnational and post-colonial feminisms, Trans Studies and activism, racisms, and Disability Studies. The methodology follows a common structure of providing key information on the topic, giving my perspective on the issues, and presenting relevant examples in relation to the matter at hand. The occasional writing box will then contain some personal reflections and observations that generally correspond to internal questions I have felt the need to ponder on throughout the course. Lastly, the portfolio will use infographics, photos, poems, maps, and tweets to complement the written work in order to make the reading more interactive, as well as to either support what is said in the chapter or to show additional information on the issues tackled in the corresponding section.

1. Intersectionality

The ways that we are seen by others and the society we live in tends to determine how we are going to be treated, which is why the 'categories' we are regarded as heavily influence how we are perceived by the world and, ultimately, how we see ourselves. We cannot escape the categories we are identified as, at least for the most part, which is why they have such a profound impact on how we experience the world around us.

As human beings, we are often identified and categorised on the basis of a multitude of factors such as gender, race, nationality, religion, social class, disability, sexual and romantic orientation, age, or ethnicity. These categories often correspond to power structures in society, with some categories being privileged over others, thus creating the structural inequalities that mark today's societies. Such power imbalances lead to different forms of discrimination and dimensions of oppression, namely racism, sexism, transphobia, ableism, or classism. These systems of marginalisation might also coexist and intersect in those cases where people might be discriminated against because of multiple factors, which has led to the coinage of concepts such as multiple and intersectional discrimination.

Although multiple discrimination and intersectional discrimination are terms which are often used interchangeably, it is relevant to draw a distinction. On the one hand, multiple discrimination refers to the experience of marginalisation or disadvantage based on two or more characteristics, therefore acknowledging that individuals can experience discrimination on multiple fronts. Unlike the concept of intersectional discrimination, it does not necessarily account for the ways in which these characteristics intersect and interact with each other. On the other hand, intersectional discrimination refers to the ways in which different forms of oppression coexist and are linked to each other to shape an individual's experiences of marginalisation and overall disadvantage.

Am I defined by the discrimination I suffer from?

While reflecting on the issue of intersectionality, the question of whether the discriminatory systems I am subjected to define my life and who I am popped into my mind, particularly considering that my identity is made up of both privileged and unprivileged 'categories'. I realised that identities are not a monolith and that different factors can coexist: while having an advantage as a person with white skin, I risk discrimination when people find out that I am a Jew; while not having to worry about transphobic attacks as a cisgender-passing person, I do face oppression as a queer and feminine-presenting individual.

In terms of intersectional discrimination, I will never not be a queer and feminine-presenting person, or a feminine-presenting Jewish person, or a queer feminine-presenting Jewish person. This has and will continue to affect my life, how I see myself, and the way I experience the world. The biases that arise from some of the intersections of my identity are not something I can change but, nevertheless, they exist, and I cannot ignore them. Whether they define me or not remains an intricate question I am not sure I have a clear answer to. After all, having white skin and living in a non-disabled body also define aspects of how I am perceived by others, even though such impacts are sometimes harder to recognise since I do not face discrimination because of these factors.

> Hence, although it might feel heavier, the discriminations I face are not all there is to who I am, and my privileges also inevitably shape my life, as well as the way I interact with the world.

Intersectionality as a notion in its own right was coined by legal scholar and civil rights advocate Kimberlé Crenshaw in the late 1980s, and it initially sought to address the experiences of Black women in the United States, who faced unique forms of discrimination that were not adequately addressed by existing anti-discrimination laws. Crenshaw argued that existing legal frameworks tended to focus on individual forms of discrimination, such as racism or sexism, rather than acknowledging the ways in which these forms of oppression intersected and compounded each other.
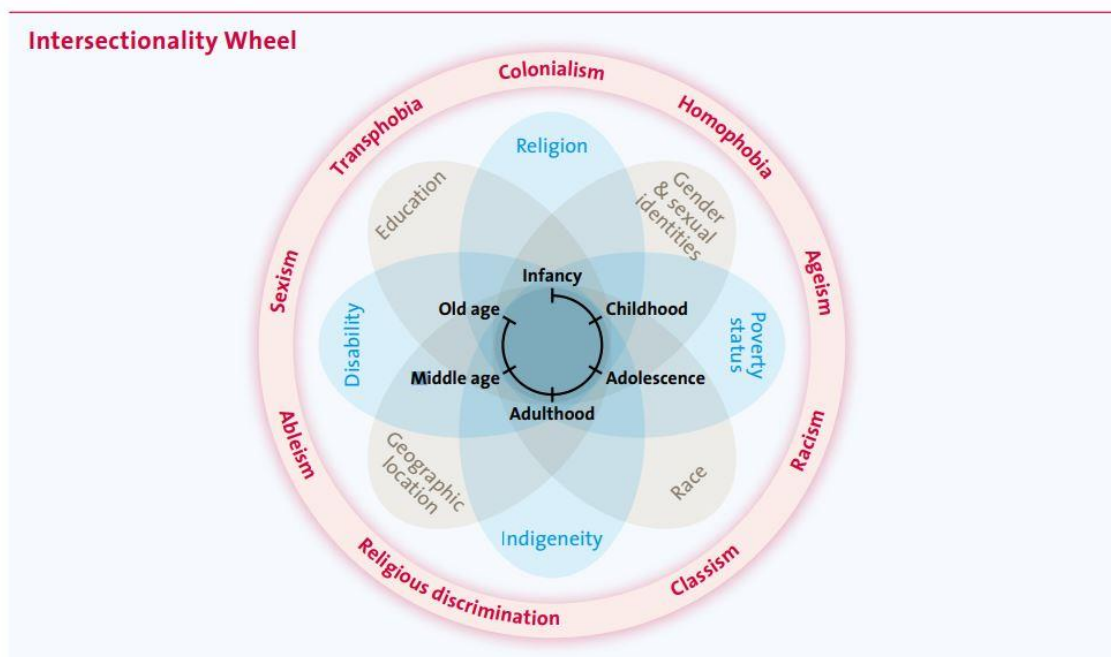

Image 1: Intersectional identities and intersectional discrimination (UNPRPD & UN Women, 2022).

Intersectionality highlights the ways in which social identities and structures are interconnected, and how different forms of oppression are mutually reinforcing. As it was highlighted during the class, for instance, Black women and girls face distinct forms of oppressions if compared to white women or Black men. Issues such as adultification, the 'angry Black woman' trope, or the invisibilisation of female police violence victims are just some of the most evident examples. In her 2016 TED Talk *The Urgency of Intersectionality*, Crenshaw underlines the importance of recognising the overlapping levels of social injustice Black women are subjected to, for if the problem goes unnoticed, a solution cannot be found (Crenshaw, 2016). As a society, especially when we are in a position of privilege, we thus have the opportunity and responsibility to correctly frame the problem, often recognised as misogynoir, and make an effort to collectively bear witness to such violence.

Image 2: Kimberlé Crenshaw on intersectionality and activism (UN Women Australia, 2022).

2. Feminisms

One thing that became clear during the course is that feminism is not a one-size-fits-all* movement and that it cannot be approached by following a simplistic cookie-cutter** approach. Whether feminism is compared to a t-shirt* or a dessert**, it is quite evident that there is no point in talking about just one feminism, as that would likely do a disservice to the cause. What we have witnessed and are still witnessing today, in fact, is the development of multiple waves and configurations of feminism, which is far from a monolithic entity and, most importantly, is far from perfect, especially in its whiter and more classist forms. This is why feminism has evolved through the years and, in its different shapes, has often sought to be more inclusive. Ultimately, it has been mostly marginalised communities that have taken matters into their own hand to criticise mainstream feminism and create movements of their own. Overall, the diversity of different feminisms reflects the multiple historical, social, cultural, and economic conditions of each of us, hence why 'feminism' should be conjugated in the plural.

Indeed, 'feminism' has always been made up of a diverse range of currents, theories and ideas, sometimes in agreement, often in opposition (Amelia Viguier, 2020). In particular, the history of mainstream feminism sees a stark tension between the focus on the discrimination which feminine-presenting people suffer at surface level, and the vast intersectional differences that lie below the surface, namely queer fem struggle, black fem struggle, disabled fem struggle, etc. The first feminist movements, for instance, have been repeatedly criticised because of their (overt or covert) racism and classism, thus leading to the conclusion that dominant feminisms can often be about a privileged few rather than foreseeing a more inclusive fight.

Feminism in the singular has tried to talk of a commonality of women and has sought to unequivocally define what a 'woman' is for far too long. Although we could talk about its good intensions, this homogeneous approach does more harm than good, especially because mainstream feminism(s) have almost always failed to represent everyone. We need to start talking about feminisms in the plural precisely to indicate that there is no one definition of woman to whom feminism speaks and, therefore, there is no one definition of feminism either. As a matter of fact, eco-feminism is different than trans-national feminism, or post-colonial feminism, or Marxist feminism, or liberal feminism.

These distinctions are quite relevant and evident in cities like Madrid, Spain, where I am currently studying on Erasmus. For International Women's Day (8M), for instance, different demonstrations were organised in order to cater to as much people as possible, mainly because the municipality knew very well that a single march would have created problems in terms of contrasting views and possibly opposing signs or chants. Thus, the demonstration was divided into two sections, one lead by trans-inclusive movement *Comisión 8M*, and the other by trans-exclusionary and abolitionist collective *Movimiento Feminista de Madrid* (Pedreño, 2023). This division made me realise that although social media and public opinion tend to call out certain versions of feminism, often claiming that they are not 'real feminism' or that they do not have a right to use that term, it is actually quite reductive to say so. It is far too easy to disregard a whole movement, which has 'feminism' in its own name, and claim that its followers are not 'real feminists'. The more constructive option would be to analyse such movements, which are feminist in nature, and question them from the perspective of different schools of thought. This is not to say that we cannot disagree with certain feminist movements, but it is simplistic, at best, to just refuse acknowledging them instead of working on the analysis of different feminisms, exploring for ourselves which one(s) we do agree with the most.

Image 3: Thousands of women during the demonstration called by the Comisión 8M in Madrid (Público, 2023).

3. Black Feminisms

Many women of colour have felt excluded from mainstream feminist theory, which has traditionally elevated gender at the expense of race, ethnic, or class identity. By making white women's experience the standard, in fact, both liberal and radical feminisms have had a tendency to overlook the perspectives of BIWOC, who have had and still have to undergo specific (intersectional) struggles. During class, the concept was exemplified through the approach of feminist activist Betty Friedan who, when calling for the liberation of women from the domestic sphere by means of finding employment, overlooked the fact that women of colour – who were also not new to the working sphere because of their racial and economic condition – were still going to encounter discrimination on the job because of their race.

Overall, the discrimination faced by BIWOC is unique, and it is the product of what bell hooks calls the «imperialist, white-supremacist, capitalist patriarchy» (hooks, 2015), which underlines how race and gender are congenially intertwined when delineating inequalities, thus posing a series of targeted co-existing barriers and obstacles. As a result of both sexism and racism, Black women have therefore often been reduced to invisibility and silence over the centuries, particularly in those contexts like the North American one, where chattel enslavement has left a painful and racist legacy. In the words of Alice Walker, in fact, the very essence of Black women has since then been kept «mute as a great stone», and their stories of suffering and endurance have largely gone unrecognised (Walker, 2002).

In those rare cases where Black women are not rendered invisible, then, they are often portrayed by means of harmful tropes and stigmatisations, such as the 'promiscuous Black woman' or the 'angry Black woman'. In her poem *The Black Unicorn*, for instance, Audre Lorde highlights the double standard society holds against Black women, who have been «mistaken / for a shadow or symbol», by juxtaposing how they are seen and perceived as, «greedy» and «impatient», and how they really are as a result of their struggles, «restless» and «unrelenting» (Lorde, 1978). Overall, it is clear that BIWOC have been living an unjust struggle between their true identity and how they are perceived by the world around them. It is thus our job as a society to provide full recognition of the misogynoir dynamics that permeate our system, while also celebrating the women of colour of the past and the present, acknowledging their struggle and, most importantly, relentless fight for justice.

The Black Unicorn

AUDRE LORDE

The black unicorn is greedy.
The black unicorn is impatient.
The black unicorn was mistaken
for a shadow
or symbol
and taken
through a cold country
where mist painted mockeries
of my fury.
It is not on her lap where the horn rests
but deep in her moonpit
growing.

The black unicorn is restless
the black unicorn is unrelenting
the black unicorn is not
free.

Image 4: The Black Unicorn (Lorde, 1978).

Black feminism(s) are particularly needed to contrast the harmful dominant feminist forces which have existed for a very long time, and which are mainly characterised by being both white and bourgeoise. Black feminisms are thus relevant to critique and contrast such models which, albeit within feminism, still largely rest on systems of oppression, namely racism and classism. In her book *Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People About Race*, for instance, Reni Eddo-Lodge rightfully points out how white feminism is inherently exclusionary and fails to address the unique experiences and challenges faced by BIWOC. In particular, she notes that while white women in the (liberal) suffragette movement fought for the right to vote, they often purposely excluded women of colour from their campaigns and failed to address the ways in which race and gender intersect to create specific forms of oppression (Eddo-Lodge, 2018).

4. Queer Theory and LGBTQIA+ Advocacy

The term 'queer' is often used as a political and cultural label to describe individuals and communities who reject traditional categories of gender and sexuality, namely people who are lesbian, gay, bi, trans, non-binary, ace, etc. Queer Theory, which emerged as an academic movement in its own right in the 1990s, seeks to challenge and deconstruct the traditional binary categories of identity that Western society has always taken for granted, such as the simplistic dichotomies male/female and

heterosexual/homosexual. Instead of upholding normative and harmful dynamics, then, Queer Theory advocates for embracing fluid and non-traditional expressions of gender and sexuality, seeking to change the stigma that emerges with respect to the LGBTQIA+ community.

One of the central tenets of Queer Theory is the idea that identities and practices are not simply individual decisions, but rather are shaped and constructed by social and cultural forces, thus delineating what scholars define a 'performance'. These norms and expectations are often used to marginalise and exclude queer individuals, and to reinforce traditional gender and sexual hierarchies. In this sense, queerness therefore emerges as an «interpellation that raises the question of the status of force and opposition, of stability and variability, within performativity» (Butler, 2003). Overall, Queer Theory seeks to challenge and disrupt traditional norms and categories of identity, and to promote a more inclusive and diverse understanding of gender and sexuality.

As it was pointed out during class, one cannot talk about Queer Theory without mentioning philosopher and gender theorist Judith Butler who, in their works, has deconstructed a number of widely accepted concepts, including the very idea of 'woman'. I believe this is central to the course, particularly as, just like previously stated in chapters 2 and 3, 'woman' cannot and does not mean only one thing. Along this line of thought, Butler argues that the idea of 'woman' is not a natural or essential category, as it is largely believed to be, but it is rather a social construct that is created and maintained through cultural practices and discourses (Butler, 2011). The very concept of woman can therefore turn out to be problematic because it assumes that there is a stable and coherent category of people who share certain biological, psychological, or cultural traits that make them 'women', which is not actually the case.

Butler's critique of the concept of woman is part of a broader effort to deconstruct gender categories and create more inclusive and fluid ways of thinking about gender and sexuality, questioning the binary notions we are taught since childhood. 'Feminine' and 'masculine', for instance, only exist through a constant performance, a way of acting that we deem as 'correct' because it meets society's expectation of who we should be. Nonetheless, gender is not binary and it has not been since the beginning of time, even though Western cultures often refuse to acknowledge it. As a matter of fact, there have been quite a few, mostly indigenous, communities around the world that have recognized and valued non-binary gender identities, including the Hijra in South Asia, the Fa'afafine in Samoa, and the Waria in Indonesia (Balirano, 2017). In addition, Two-Spirit individuals in North America have also had a long history of enjoying special ranks in their communities, as they are thought to have a unique spiritual perspective, as well as the ability to bridge the gap between male and female roles.

Image 5: A person holding up a 'Break the Binary' sign at a protest in the US (McDermid, 2022).

The critique to gender and the gender binary proposed by Queer Theory is paralleled by the questioning of heteronormativity as an imposed cultural and social system of oppression which assumes and privileges heterosexuality as the normative and default sexual orientation. Within this framework, then, compulsory heterosexuality refers to all of the social expectations and pressure that individuals should indeed be heterosexual and engage in heterosexual relationships. The term was first introduced by feminist scholar Adrienne Rich in her 1980 essay *Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence*, which argues that heterosexuality is not just a personal preference or choice, but rather a social and cultural expectation that is enforced through various forms of institutional and interpersonal coercion. Compulsory heterosexuality is thus often used to justify and maintain patriarchal power structures and gender inequalities, as it reinforces traditional gender roles and reiterates binary dynamics (Rich, 1980).

Is the personal political?

Throughout the course, this question has kept me wondering, especially because I understand that it is quite central to both feminist and queer activism. What has been the hardest is probably wrapping my head around the fact that our individual experiences and personal struggles are not just our own, but rather belong to much broader political and social structures. Hence, what we might believe to be an isolated incident is actually most probably part of a systemic reality which includes a series of similar 'isolated' incidents. This is particularly true when analysing what minorities and marginalised individuals have to go through: individual experiences of oppression

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and marginalization are not just personal problems, but are connected to larger social and political systems of inequality.

I have come to understand that queerness, in itself, is a form of radical activism. Echoing a slogan often used in the LGBTQIA+ movement, «we are not gay as in happy, we are queer as in we want to change the system». Queer is not just an identity, it is an ideal, a theory, a way of existing in a world that would rather us not existing at all. Being queer is a form of activism and political fight in and of itself, it is a slap in the face to those who have called and still call us 'queer' to diminish us and dim our light. As long as being queer remains dangerous, in some places more than others, queerness will therefore be a battle ground and a political fight. As long as our lives will be policed and thought of as unnatural and wrong, being ourselves will have to be a revolution, whether we like it or not.

5. Transnational and Post-Colonial Feminisms

Going into the seminar, the topic of transnational and post-colonial feminisms was perhaps the one I had less previous knowledge about, especially because such forms of feminist theory and thought are rarely taught in school and university, at least in Italy. The reasons for this overall neglect of such feminist movements might be connected to a number of factors, including Western bias and language barriers. As a matter of fact, since feminism has historically been associated with the experiences of white, middle-class women in the Global North, particularly the West, perspectives that break out of this box are likely to be regarded as less relevant or important. In addition, dominant feminisms have traditionally been studies and theorised in Western languages, namely English and French, which might constitute an extra challenge for the work of translational and postcolonial feminisms, which are often produced in non-Western language. Nonetheless, it is our responsibility to educate ourselves, decolonise our previous knowledge, and learn from the critiques of those feminisms that we might not be used to hearing about, especially when they recount the experiences of marginalised communities of the Global South, whose fight often goes unnoticed.

Transnational feminism is a branch of feminism that focuses on the ways in which gender, race, class, sexuality, and other identities intersect and operate within a global context. It seeks to understand the ways in which systems of oppression, such as patriarchy and capitalism, function across borders, and how these systems impact the lives of women and marginalized groups around the world. The origins of transnational feminist theories can be traced back to the 1960s and 1970s, when feminist activists in the Global South began to challenge the assumption that the experiences of women in the Global North were universal. Transnational feminism, in fact, argue that feminist struggles must take into

account the ways in which systems of oppression operate on a worldwide scale, and it focuses on issues such as international human rights and global economic justice.

Transnational feminism emphasizes the importance of solidarity and collaboration among women across national borders, and it recognizes that the struggles of women in different parts of the world are interconnected, indicating that meaningful social change requires a global perspective. The transnational feminist approach has thus been applied to a wide range of issues, including gender-based violence, reproductive rights, labour exploitation, and environmental justice. Transnational feminist activists and scholars have worked to create networks and coalitions across borders, and to develop strategies for addressing global issues through local organizing and advocacy.
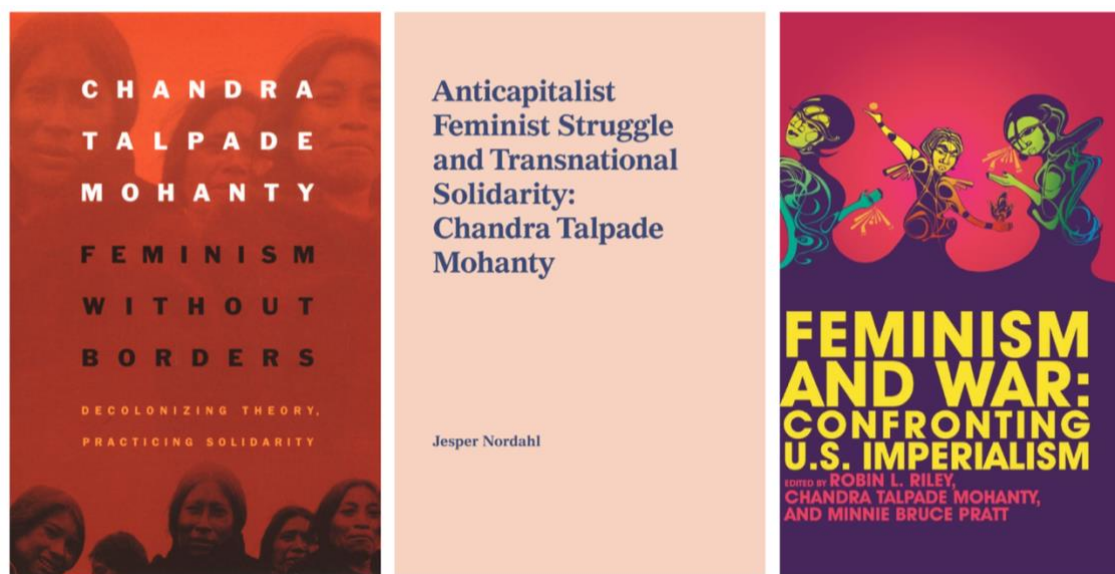

Image 6: A series of transnational feminist books by Chandra Talpade Mohanty (image edited by me).

Similarly to transnational feminism, post-colonial feminism also provides an intersectional analysis, emphasizing the complex ways in which different identities shape experiences of the world, as well as denouncing how Western feminisms have historically ignored the circumstances of women from non-Western countries. The framework of post-colonial feminism is, nonetheless, distinct from that of transnational feminism, and it mainly focuses on the impact that colonialism and imperialism have had, and sometimes still have, on the lives of women and gender-diverse folk in the Global South.

As a movement, post-colonial feminism emerged in the late 20th century, mainly in response to the dynamics of stark inequality that resulted from globalization processes around the world, which gave rise to neo-colonialist power structures. In point of fact, post-colonial feminism argues that feminist theory and practice must take into account the historical and ongoing impacts of colonialism and imperialism on the lives of women from the Global South, pointing out the significant impact that such systems have on the ways in which gender and sexuality are understood and experienced in non-Western societies. Moreover, the importance of recognizing the diversity of experiences and

perspectives within the Global South itself is also emphasized, and post-colonial feminists argue that there is no singular, homogeneous experience of gender and sexuality. Feminist movements must therefore take into account the complex and varied ways in which women from different cultural, ethnic, and religious backgrounds suffer oppression and consequently organise resistance.

As academics and citizens in the Global North, we have a responsibility to contrast Western bias and, above all, the whitewashing that often still happens in activist spaces. Like Nigerian author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie states in her TED talk *The Dangers of the Single Story*, we should be aware of and try to fight the negative consequences that arise from only having one perspective of the world and its people. This is particularly relevant in the context of marginalized groups from the Global South, who are often subjected to harmful stereotypes that limit their opportunities and perpetuate stigmatization. To overcome the dangers of the single story, then, it is important to seek out diverse perspectives and narratives, and to actively challenge our knowledge. We have done so during the course, and I hope to be able to keep doing it in years to come.

The danger of a single story
33,616,019 views | Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie • TEDGlobal 2009

Image 7: Adichie's TED talk on hegemonic perspectives and how to challenge them (Adichie, 2009).

6. Trans Studies and Activism

Trans Theory is, in a way, the evolution of proto-feminism and Queer Theory and, just like the non-dominant feminisms discussed so far sought to do, it represents a challenge to the mainstream and essentialist ideas that pervade activism and academia. Trans Studies, in fact, largely reject the systemic gender binary and call into question the very notions of 'manhood' and 'womanhood',

affirming that they are mostly rooted in slavery-adjacent dynamics and, overall, may lead to the political and social repression of those who live outside the traditional boundaries of what being a man and a woman means. Indeed, Trans Theory acknowledges that gender is not binary, but rather exists on a spectrum, and that individuals may experience their gender in a way that does not align with imposed societal norms. Gender identity is also not fixed, but can be fluid and can evolve over time, which as a concept defies the essentialist ideals that sometimes characterise dominant feminisms.

One of the key concepts that Trans Studies introduce is then the idea of 'transmisogyny', which refers to the specific forms of discrimination and violence that are directed towards trans women and femmes. Transmisogyny is rooted in the intersections between transphobia and misogyny, and can manifest in a variety of ways, including physical violence, employment discrimination, and exclusion from certain (sometimes feminist) spaces. The biggest indicator that transmisogyny is one of the gravest issues of our time is exemplified by the disproportionate rates of violence and murder experienced by trans women and femmes, particularly trans women of colour. In this respect, journalism often does not help, and the trans community is subjected to double the violence when instances of transphobic attacks are recounted by means of misgendering, exploitation of transphobic tropes, or even minimisation of the aggression.
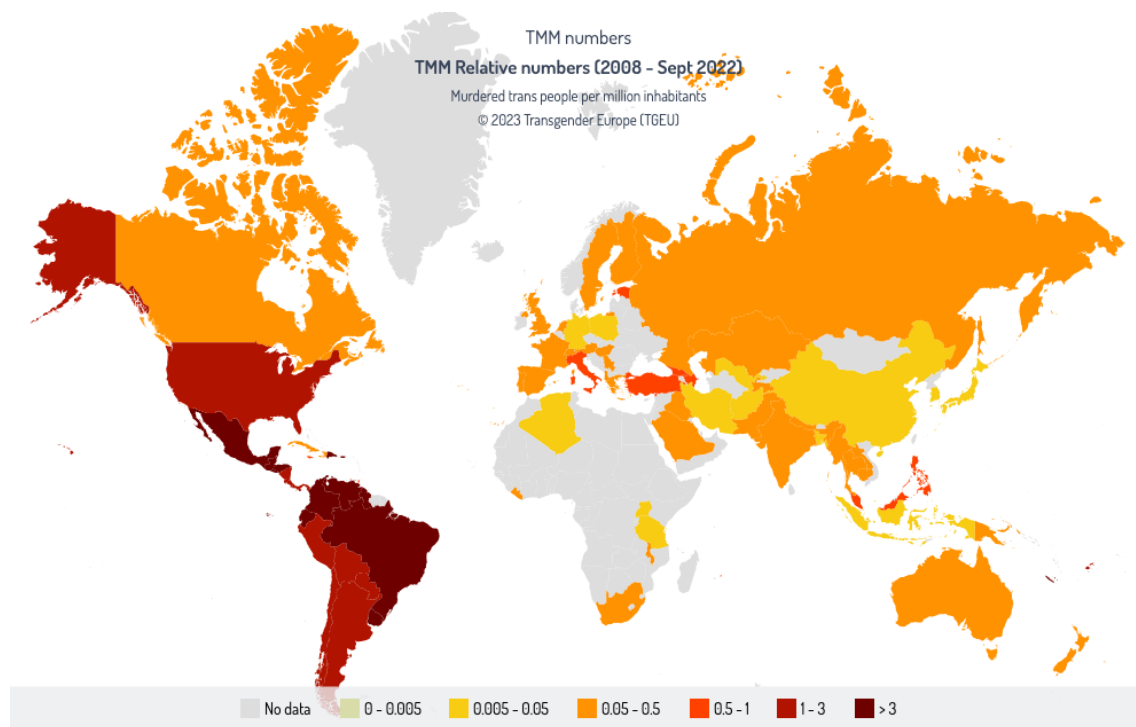

Image 8: Trans Murder Monitoring Map showing the relative rate of transphobic murders between 2008 and 2022. In absolute numbers, it is estimated that there have been 375 reported transphobic murders between 2008 and 2022 in the United States alone (Transgender Europe, 2023).

Although in recent years, particularly among younger generations, there has been a positive uplift of the trans community which has resulted in increased visibility, trans and non-binary individuals still

face a great deal of hate and violence. The United States is perhaps the most visible world country in this sense, and it has negatively distinguished itself for its numerous pieces of anti-trans and anti-LGBTQIA+ legislation on matters such as trans people in sports, gender neutral bathrooms, inclusive and diverse education, access to gender affirming healthcare, etc. Key matters such as hormones and surgery have also been vilified by conservatives around the world, including in the UK, where minors no longer enjoy full access to gender affirming care. Arguments such as the one which claims that 'we are mutilating our children' are both insensitive and ignorant, mostly because they fail to acknowledge the long and tedious process that trans and non-binary people go through in order to access the care that they need and find more suitable, both at a social and medical level. Such anti-trans arguments also completely disregard the fact that not every trans person (let alone child) wants to have surgery, and they largely overlook the existence of puberty blockers, which are what trans and non-binary teens usually take instead of going on HRT, and which are reversible.

Does representation matter?

Representation tends to be a rather important issue when it comes to the rights of minority groups, particularly because being visible in different forms of media has the potential of shaping knowledge and understanding. When it comes to trans and non-binary people, though, mere representation or visibility is not enough. Trans people deserve representation but, above all, they should be entitled to good and educated representation. This concept is very well explained in Laverne Cox's documentary *Disclosure*, which addresses the lack of positive and accurate representation of trans people in media and shows how they have too often been portrayed as villains, freaks, or objects of ridicule in movies and television shows. These negative representations have perpetuated harmful stereotypes and contributed to the discrimination and marginalization of trans people in society.

Positive and accurate portrayals, on the other hand, can help to empower trans individuals and promote understanding and empathy, which are necessary elements in order to create a more just and educated society with decreased levels of discrimination. Positive measures can start from the very basics, such as investing in trans-inclusive casting and, above all, avoiding the casting of cisgender people to play transgender roles. In a utopic society this would not be an issue, but in ours it can further support the harmful idea that trans people are not who they say and know they are, but are instead just 'acting'.

Lastly, good representation in media can also help to address the intersections of trans identities with other marginalized identities, namely in terms of race, class, and disability. When trans people of colour, trans disabled people, and other underrepresented groups are represented, in fact, it helps

to highlight the ways in which transphobia intersects with other forms of oppression. This, in turn, positively contributes to the advocacy work towards a more inclusive, diverse, and accepting society for all.

Image 9: Cox's documentary on trans representation in media (Disclosure Film, 2023).

7. Racisms

Although many claim that racism is a thing of the past and that, as such, we should 'move on', it is quite clear that this is not the case, and that racism is very much still present and still represents a harmful force in today's society. In point of fact, the impact of historical and institutional racism cannot go unnoticed, and systemic issues such as the targeting of Black people by police in the United States, or the ongoing discrimination that BIPOC suffer on the workplace cannot be ignored. To address such issues, it is important to identify power dynamics and mark a distinction between those who own privilege, and those who do not. Practices such as redlining, for instance, do not concern white people at a structural level, and it is Black Americans who have to worry about banks and other financial institutions systematically denying them loans on the basis of race. Racial biases of this kind further contribute to the already existing (wealth) gap between white and Black people in the US, a situation which is then exacerbated by other harmful racist structures, such as the over-policing and mass incarceration of people of colour which has led to the disenfranchisement of many communities.

Image 10: Protesters at a Black Lives Matter Protest in 2020 (Said, 2020).

Within the different racist dynamics that were studied and analysed during the lectures, perhaps the most covert and yet quite insidious one was colourblind racism, particularly because it silently permeates several aspects of society, from media coverage to the educational system. Overall, colourblind racism can be defined as a form of racism that is often difficult to detect because it hides behind the guise of being 'race-neutral' and, as such, it creates a phenomenon where people claim to treat everyone equally but, in reality, they are just perpetuating the same racial inequalities that are inherent to the system.

One of the key features of colourblind racism is the use of euphemisms or coded language, which is often employed by the press when overt racist remarks want to be avoided. For example, phrases like 'we don't see colour' or 'we treat everyone equally' can sound like positive statements, but they ignore the reality of structural racism and the ways in which it shapes people's experiences. Other coded language expressions can include the use of terms like 'inner-city' or 'urban' to refer to Black and Brown communities, which are often used to imply that they are inherently violent or dangerous. Using such expressions – frequently employed in colourblind journalism, for instance – associates, albeit indirectly, negative aspects with non-Western or BIPOC cultures, which means that white supremacy is in turn allowed to thrive. In this sense, colourblind racism also allows people to avoid taking responsibility for addressing issues related to race and racism within their own society, culture, and general surroundings. By denying the existence of racism or pretending not to see race, in fact, individuals fail to acknowledge the ways in which racism does impact different communities, namely in education, employment, and housing contexts.

Image 11: Saying 'I don't see colour' disregards the existence of anti-blackness (Moffie, 2020).

8. Disability Studies

Going into the course, the only previous academic knowledge I had on disability rights came from my own university human rights background, while the remaining broader understanding I had of people with disabilities and the discrimination they are subjected to came from my peers and, mostly, social media. Thus, it felt relatively new, and rather interesting, to learn about Disability Studies and the scholarly literature behind it it, particularly because this field presents a high level of interdisciplinary and is able to tackle the issue of disability through multiple lenses.

The origins of disability studies can be traced back to the Disability Rights Movement in the United States, which emerged between the 1960s and 1970s, and sought to challenge traditional medical and psychological models that viewed disability from the mere individual perspective. Disability scholars, then, chose to focus on the societal analysis of disability issues, and started to emphasize the systemic and cultural factors that contributed to the marginalization of people with disabilities. In order to carry out such study, the field of disability academia was quite interdisciplinary from the start, and it drew on a wide range of disciplines, including sociology, anthropology, history, philosophy, psychology, and literature, among others (Johnstone, 2012).

Image 12: Disability Rights Movement protest for the Rehabilitation Act 1973 (Barton, 2017).

Key themes in disability studies include the social construction of disability, the history of disability, disability rights and activism, disability identity and culture, disability and the body, disability and technology, and disability in literature and the arts. The focus is, clearly, not necessarily on the medical aspects of disability, but it rather rests on a so-called 'social model', which emphasizes the ways in which social and environmental barriers, such as inaccessible buildings or discriminatory attitudes, create disability. This is in contrast to the pathological model of disability, which views disability as a medical condition to be treated or cured.

Another important concept in Disability Studies is, then, the idea of ableism and ableist system(s), which refers to the discrimination and prejudice structures that exist against disabled people[1]. Just like other systems of oppression, ableism can be overt or covert, and it can take many forms, including physical barriers, stereotyping, lack of accessibility, and institutional discrimination. As pointed out during class, ableism can also be perpetuated in the case of 'unintentional' micro-aggressions, which often relate to language use or to so-called inspiration porn. Other ableist actions, then, stand on a fine line between being a micro-aggression and actually constituting an infringement of a person's integrity. For instance, I was shocked to notice that most of the people around me do not know that you are not supposed to touch a person's wheelchair without their permission, as that constitutes a violation of their personal space and is incredibly disrespectful.

Image 13: Tweet in response to a video that shows two men pushing an empty wheelchair down the stairs (Acess For All Ireland, 2023).

Conclusion

Overall, the present portfolio is intended to be a tool to deal with today's diversity and inclusion issues, mainly by providing insight and analysis on important topics that are often overlooked or ignored. As I move forward in my academic and personal journey, I will cherish the course and the lectures as essential milestones in my understanding of complex social issues such as intersectionality, race theory, queerness and transness, decolonial perspectives, and disability. I believe that by committing ourselves to these causes, we can create positive change and a more just and equitable society for all.

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[1] Throughout the portfolio, I have chosen to use the expressions 'people with disability' and 'disabled people' interchangeably in order to show that the disabled community has not reached a consensus on which term is more 'correct': some people prefer 'disabled' because it places their identity first and emphasizes the social and structural barriers that prevent them from participating fully in society; others prefer 'people with disabilities' because it prioritises the personhood of the individual and emphasises that their disability is only one aspect of their identity. Ultimately, the most important thing is to respect the preferences of the individual we are communicating with.

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