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An introduction to postcolonial feminism and postcolonial feminist theory

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1.0 Introduction

“These are important areas for us Black women, for our experience is the shared experience of Black people, but it is also the shared experience of women within different class contexts. Our political responses have been and will continue to be shaped by that duality, the range of political options to us will depend on the social context in which we experience that dualism.” (Amor & Parmar 2005, 46)

This paper aims to give an introduction to postcolonial feminism; its history, theories and some central activists. It is a complex topic, and after much research I still only consider myself to be at the surface of understanding. This paper therefore focuses on width, and not depth of information. During my study I have worked with the topic of feminism many times, including writing my bachelor thesis on the women’s rights movement in Germany, but have not learned a great deal about feminism for women of colour. It was important for me to change this so I can give my future pupils a more inclusive view into feminism when I have finished my study and am a teacher.

The paper is split into three major parts; “Feminism: tendencies of exclusion”, “Cultural identity for black women: layers of exclusion” and lastly, “The fight for equality for woman of colour”. The first part presents theories on the history of exclusion in feminism; how it happened and what the consequences were and are. Critique of aspects from the whole history of the women’s movement is presented, from the beginning to today. Following this, the difficulty of creating and defining cultural identity for women of colour will be described. In addition, the many layers of exclusion for black women in general, and not just in the feminist movement, will be presented. The last part introduces seven women and two organisations which have played a big role in the feminist movement by women of colour. Through the description and discussion of their achievements and works of literature, the already mentioned aspects of feminism will be further discussed and new ones will be introduced.

At the end of this paper, I hope to have created a basic understanding of postcolonial feminism and to have awoken interest for it and the work of its activists.

2.0 Feminism: tendencies of exclusion

In the following parts I will discuss some ways feminism has excluded women of colour. For this I have chosen five texts about different aspects of this topic which will be the focus of the

next paragraphs. The first is about the third wave feminism; what it is and if it is as inclusive as often portrayed. Following this, I will present an article about the remains and results of imperialism in feminism. The next topic explores how women of colour perceived white women in the feminist movement as racist, although the white women considered themselves antiracist. Following this, the term “intersectionality” will be discussed; its origin, meaning and why it has attracted so much attention. Lastly, some newer critique of the women’s movement will be portrayed.

2.1 A third wave of feminism?

In this paragraph, the third wave of feminism will be discussed. The main article for this discussion is written by Coleen Mack-Canty (2004) and is called “Third-Wave Feminism and the Need to Reweave the Nature/Culture Duality”. Feminist development is often split into waves. The first wave is usually defined as the suffrage movement, which started in the 1840s. The second wave was in the 1960s and 1970s. Many say that the first wave was inspired by the abolition movement and the second by the civil rights movement. A third wave of feminism emerged in the mid-1990s. Amongst others, the third wave is influenced by the postmodernist movement and seeks to question and redefine ideas about womanhood, gender, beauty, sexuality, femininity, and masculinity. Some also claim that a fourth wave of feminism began in 2012 with focus on sexual harassment, body shaming and rape culture. A key component to address concerns was social media. (cf. Brunell & Burkett 2020)

On the other hand, the concept of “waves of feminism” can be criticized as it considers the first wave to be the suffrage movement while disregarding many race-based movements which served as precursors before them. Black women involved themselves politically and expressed the ways they were oppressed as People of Colour *and* women (cf. Springer, 2002). An example is Sojourner Truth, which will be written about more in-depth later in this paper, who delivered a speech about women’s rights in 1851. The reason this is not considered part of the beginning of the first wave is explained in Britannica’s article on feminism; “(...) but Truth did not dedicate her life to women’s rights. Instead, she promoted abolitionism and a land-distribution program for other former slaves.” (Brunell & Burkett 2020) To follow this logic, Truth would have had to choose to focus solely on women’s rights to be considered part of the beginning of the first wave of feminism. She was a woman of colour and former slave, so of course she would also want to dedicate her life to abolitionism. Also, that the women’s movement was inspired or at least positively affected by the abolition movement and the civil rights movement is not often greatly discussed.

During the second wave of feminism the motto “the personal is political” became key, and feminists worked to make areas of women’s life previously considered personal to become political. The second wave feminists also worked to burst the bubble of the idea that politics, economics and the public in general was a male sphere. Like previously mentioned, many believe in the idea that a third wave of feminism started in the 1990s. Some state that the third wave is building on ideas and theories from the second wave and developing a broader conceptual framework. Second wave feminists usually worked within the foundation of Western political theories, and these are being questioned during the third wave. Feminism in the third wave has many directions, three of which are “generational/ youth feminism”, “postcolonial feminism” and “ecofeminism”. The focus of this paper is on postcolonial feminism, but all these branches of feminisms have similarities and work for more perspectives and inclusivity. (cf. Mack-Canty 2004) Colleen Mack-Canty explains the reasoning behind these feminisms in the following quote:

These feminisms, in their current stage of theoretical development, together with important feminisms not discussed here because of space limitation (most notably queer theory), all broaden the explanatory power of feminist theory, allowing feminism to deal more adequately with the complex and myriad issues we face today, issues not yet quite so compellingly evident during much second-wave feminism, such as globalism, multiculturalism, and environmentalism. (Mack-Canty 2004, 156)

In postcolonial feminism it is important to discover, analyse and make aware of continuing negative effects of colonialism in the feminist movement. It also aims to recognize that feminism is not just for the western world, but also women from developing nations who have often not been heard. Furthermore, postcolonial feminists search to explore the intersection of sexism and multicultural identity. (cf. Mack-Canty 2004)

At the beginning of the 1990s, feminism experienced a growing legitimization of racism as part of the movement. For a long time, power dynamics were explained exclusively through gender, and other aspects like race were left out of the discourse. Feminism often presented an essential womanhood, which typically was a white middle-class woman. These ideas made it seem like disadvantages as a result of e.g. race or class, were burdens women could carry, which had nothing to do with their “womanhood” or feminism. In reality, these different “axes of Dominance” (Wollrad 2005, 101) cannot be separated from each other and work simultaneously which creates multiple layers of discrimination and disadvantages for example for women of colour. (cf. Wollrad 2005, 101-110) This development is what many call the third wave of feminism. During the second wave there was mainly a portrayal of one universal experience of womanhood, but as the movement progressed, lesbians, women of colour and women from

developing nations (often previously referred to as “third-world women”) entered the debate and argued with different views the different conceptions of themselves (cf. Mack-Canty 2004).

Important characteristics of postcolonial feminism is the critique of universal knowledge claims and of the western scientific paradigm. Feminists work to analyse and portray the negative effects of western colonialism that still exist today. They also make aware of the fact that particularly women and children in the developing world are strongly affected by “insufficient food, the rising cost of living, declining services, and eroding economic and environmental conditions.” (Mack-Canty 2004, 165) There is also more focus on local movements in other parts of the world than the western, like the Chipko Movement in India. The movement consisted of women from Himalayan India who organized and peacefully protested to protect their trees. This developed into civil disobedience by local Indian women to call attention to the destruction of forests, watersheds and soils which are their livelihoods and culture. Women relocated to the United States by colonialism or by severe economic problems in their home countries also raise issues for western feminism like immigrant women in domestic service. They question the notion that western women are gaining more equality, while poor immigrant women must perform domestic sphere labour. The greater rate of poor women of colour and/or immigrant women who perform labour in the domestic sphere supports the growing equality and privilege of Western women (cf. Mack-Canty 2004).

2.2 Gains for white middle-class women at the expense of coloured and working-class women
The following parts is mainly based on the article called “Challenging Imperial Feminism” by Valeria Amos and Pratibha Parmar (2005). They illuminate the results of imperialism within feminism and strongly criticise “white, mainstream feminist theory” trying to speak for women of colour.

Amos and Parmar (2005) write that “white, mainstream feminist theory” from either the socialist or the radical perspective do not speak to the experiences of women of colour. Limitations of the mainstream feminist movement are made clear through what is identified as priorities. Amos and Parmar are of the opinion that short-term gains for white middle-class women which often are received at the expense of coloured and working-class women, are preferred. At the same time, they feel white women have condemned coloured women for not engaging in the movement, which they find problematic. (cf. Amor & Parmar 2005) Amos and Parmar also highlight the problem of supporting women organizing as positive regardless of the context:

An example of such reasoning taken to its extreme is when some white feminists have applauded Maggie Thatcher as Prime Minister as a positive female image. Such uncritical acceptance of the virtues of strong female images serves only to further alienate Black women whose experience at the hands of the British state demands a more responsible political response. (Amor & Parmar 2005, 45)

Furthermore, they express that there is little recognition in feminism of the ways gains for white women have affected women of colour negatively or how oppression of coloured people has benefitted white women. Because of the lack of understanding and information in the feminist movement, what white middle-class feminists need liberating from has little relevance to the life of women of colour. The writers bring forward a tendency in feminist scholarship which is for women of colour either to be invisible or seen purely as women without putting any significance on to e.g. colour or race (cf. Amor & Parmar 2005). Amor and Parmar challenge much of the research which has been done on the topic because they find it insufficient as the following quote explains: “By adopting the research methods and frameworks of white male academics much academic feminist writing fails to challenge their assumptions, repeats their racial chauvinism and is consequently of less use to us.” (Amor & Parmar 2005, 48) About the topic of academia and feminism they also write that to not recognize difference as a strength is a “failure to reach beyond the first patriarchal lesson.” (Amor & Parmar 2005, 48) They also discuss how Western feminists often see women of colour as immature and unknowing. A text called “Common Differences” by Jill Lewis is discussed to show this phenomenon in depth. Lewis does not attempt to create a dialogue, but rather reveals a patronizing and condescending understanding of women of colour and goes on to teach them about feminism. She does not acknowledge the activism and work for feminism by many women of colour and not the struggles they face in the movement and outside. To summarize this, Amor and Parmar write: “In not acknowledging the involvement of Black women’s movement in its early days, Jill Lewis not only distorts history and renders Black women activists invisible, she also ends up by appropriating feminism for white women.” (Amor & Parmar 2005, 50) In addition, they summarize the problem of many feminist authors and academics in the following quote:

Because they are not acquainted with traditions outside of their own cultures and histories, the ideological and the theoretical legacies that they write from inevitably deny as valid any modes of struggle and organization which have their origins in non-European philosophical traditions. The historical and cultural traditions from which they write are qualitatively and in essence so different that their analysis, interpretations and conclusions are of necessity going to produce ‘naïve and perverse’ accounts steeped in white chauvinism. (Amor & Parmar 2005, 50)

In conclusion to their work, Amor and Parmar write that true feminist theory needs to include an understanding of imperialism and that it needs to challenge racism (cf. Amor & Parmar 2005). One cannot prioritize only one aspect of oppression as reality shows the importance of considering the simultaneous nature of it: “Only a synthesis of class, race, gender and sexuality

can lead us forward, as these form the matrix of Black women's lives." (Amor & Parmar 2005, 62)

2.3 Overt racism was not the motivating issue for black women's feminist organizing

The next part will explore an article by Wini Breines which explores the contrasting opinions of white and black women concerning racism in the feminist movement. Her experience as a white woman in the feminist movement was that she did not believe herself or the movement to be racist or exclusive to women of colour, while women of colour did not share the same view. Breines tries to convey the reason for this with her understanding of the movement some decades later.

Breines explores her own experience with the feminist movement as a white woman who was a socialist feminist in the group "Bread and Roses" in Boston and how she knew she and her fellow white feminists were not racist, but in later time discovered the romanticised and naïve view of the movement. Breines started to work with this topic as she was confused about the charge that white feminists were racist. The author feels that many white feminists, herself included, romanticised the feminist movement and were also ignorant to the perspective of women of colour although they were in favour of integration and interracial harmony. To this the author also writes:

Such idealism, a romanticization of interracial harmony in the civil rights movement, is not common among African Americans. Most did not see it that way. They wanted to be free; they wanted equal opportunity, justice, and peace, to be able to live any life they chose. Integration was not necessarily the goal; neither was building community with whites. Equality was. (Breines 2002, 1099)

As mentioned, Breines was part of the organization "Bread and Roses". The group was formed in 1969 and largely consisted of highly educated white socialist women. They included the aspect of race and imperialism in their statement of purpose: "We believe that capitalism has to be overthrown to create a socialist society, which means one free of all forms of exploitation, racism, imperialism and male supremacy." (Rosenthal 1972, 59, quoted in Breines 2002, 1102). Furthermore, Breines mentions several examples of texts where issues of racism were highlighted. She also brings up Lise Vogel and how she and many other white feminists "especially resented the common assertion that issues of race and class were not of interest to feminists until the 1980s" (Breines 2002, 1105). Breines also quotes documents which show the feminist movement supporting the Black Panther Party, e.g. a Panther rally flyer signed by feminist organizations from New Haven, Boston and New York. Interestingly, Breines notes that it seems like much of the focus on race took the form of Black Panther Party support (cf.

Breines 2002) Short introduction to the Black Panther Party: “The Black Panther Party was an African American revolutionary organization that was founded in 1966 (...). Its initial purpose was to patrol black neighbourhoods to protect residents from police brutality. (...)” (Duncan) As the Panther movement mostly consisted of men, it meant that feminists primarily worked with black men and not women. Breines also writes that they utilized the Black Power movement as a model to develop the woman’s movement. Black Power inspired white feminism. (cf. Breines 2002) About the Black Power Movement: “The Black Power Movement of the 1960s and 1970s was a political and social movement whose advocates believed in racial pride, self-sufficiency, and equality for all people of Black and African descent.” (Odlum) The Black Panther Party developed from this movement, as some no longer saw nonviolent protests as enough to fight racism. (Odlum)

At the end of her text, Wini Breines discusses how the white feminist movement was racist without her noticing at the time: “an abstract antiracism characterized much of the theorizing and politics of feminism.” (Breines 2002, 1122) White women did not consider themselves racist, because they were not actively acting racist. In reality, the abstract understanding of the lives of women of colour and the theories this resulted in, were racist. The author reveals that most Bread and Roses members did not know any Black women, which meant the personal understanding of racism for women of colour was lacking. Breines summarises the phenomena in the following quote:

Overt racism was not the motivating issue for black women’s feminist organizing or rejection of white feminism. The critical charge against white feminists was their analysis, the focus on gender as the sole explanatory factor in the subordination of women, their apparent ignorance of and insensitivity to the intersection of gender, class and race in African-American women’s lives. While some white women felt that black women dismissed feminism by calling it white, that they were called racist when they considered themselves allies, black women understood racism to revolve around their own invisibility. (Breines 2002, 1123)

As white women in the feminist movement largely considered themselves antiracist, many became resentful when they were no longer welcome in the freedom movement by black feminists, as they did not understand why. The accusations of racism combined with lack of understanding also made some white women “weary and bitter” (Breines 2002, 1123). Breines finishes her text by writing that it seems obvious now, but not at the time, and she concludes more humbled by race than she was in her youth. (cf. Breines 2002)

2.4 Intersectionality: a wide reach, but not a very deep one

The next topic is the term “intersectionality”, its origin, meaning and development. The following part is largely based on an article by Anna Carastathis (2014).

Intersectionality is a term which is commonly used within feminist theory to describe the intersecting systems of oppression of women's lives. It is seen by many as an important addition to feminism to help the problem of exclusion. One problem with the term is that it often is celebrated as a great *new* addition to feminism, but indeed this conceals its origin in Black feminist theory. In her text about this topic, Anna Carastathis calls it appropriation. The term "intersectionality" was introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989 but the concept has a long history, as previously discussed. The history will also be discussed further in a later part of the paper. Crenshaw used the term as a metaphor:

[c]onsider an analogy to traffic in an intersection, coming and going in all four directions. Discrimination, like traffic through an intersection, may flow in one direction, and it may flow in another. If an accident happens in an intersection, it can be caused by cars travelling from any number of directions and, sometimes, from all of them. Similarly, if a Black woman is harmed because she is in an intersection, her injury could result from sex discrimination [...] But it is not always easy to reconstruct an accident: Sometimes the skid marks and the injuries simply indicate that they occurred simultaneously, frustrating efforts to determine which driver caused the harm. (...) (Crenshaw 1989, 149, quoted in: Carastathis 2014, 306)

Intersectionality highlights the different simultaneous layers of oppression or discrimination. It makes those who face multiple forms of oppression visible and does not aim to separate the categories. It recognizes the experience as an interlocking structure. One difficulty about this theory is how to go about researching without reducing into categories. Some are of the opinion that it is necessary to analyse the structure separately as well as simultaneously. (cf. Carastathis 2014) With Crenshaw's work, the concept has become popular and also unclear: "(...) common usage makes it acceptable, in certain circles, for one to refer to 'intersectionality' as a synonym for oppression, without specifying what, in particular, is intersecting, or how." (Carastathis 2014, 305) It is also speculated that the reason for the success is its vagueness. Therefore, Crenshaw reflects that the term has had a wide, but not deep reach (Carastathis 2014, 305). In addition to this, Carastathis writes:

Moreover, very few (particularly white feminist) authors contextualize intersectionality in a philosophical trajectory of Black feminist thought, constructing it, instead, as a historically novel intervention in an ostensibly primary white feminist narrative on oppression. (...), some deployments of 'intersectionality' may serve to obscure and thereby reproduce the very phenomena intersectionality was conceived to illuminate and overcome. (Carastathis 2014, 312)

This shows that the history of Black feminism is still not widely spread or perhaps ignored or overseen. Even the concept of intersectionality, which has a long history, is treated as something new and ground-breaking by many feminists.

2.5 “Being Scared Since 2016 Is Privilege”

The following is a short description of reactions to the Women’s Marches in 2017 based on an article by Sierra Brewer and Lauren Dundes (2018).

A very new example of what can be seen as exclusion of women of colour in feminism are the Women’s Marches which were a reaction of the US election of Donald Trump. The first March was on January 21st in 2017. In their text about this topic, Brewer and Dundes write: “These events raise the question of whether a diverse group of women can unite and prioritize goals without making oppression specific to African American women invisible.” Especially Trumps comment from 2005 about male celebrities being able to do anything they want to women, including to “Grab them by the pussy”, sparked outrage and after his election, Women’s Marches with over two million participants around the globe occurred. Other sexist comments he had made on the other hand, like one body shaming Latina Alicia Machado, were mostly overlooked. In addition, his many racist comments about and descriptions of for example immigrants and Mexicans were also not taken up by the feminist movement. This led to some women of colour holding signs at the marches with statements like “Being Scared Since 2016 Is Privilege” and “I’ll see you nice white ladies at the next #BlackLivesMatter march, right?”. Iljeoma Olou (editor of *The Establishment*) asked the question, “Where was that need to get out and say something when we were being shot?”. (cf. Brewer & Dundes 2018)

3.0 Cultural identity for black women: layers of exclusion

This part of the paper deals with some ways in which women of colour deal with layers of exclusion.

In her text *Third Wave Black Feminism?* Kimberly Springer (2002) analyses three texts by Lisa Jones, Joan Morgan and Veronica Chambers. These Authors and their texts were chosen because they are women of colour who speak from or about a young feminist perspective in the 1990s. Springer goes on to look at similarities between these texts. They all write about beauty standards set by the western society which strongly affects the self-esteem of women of colour. (cf. Springer, 2002) The women also all discuss possible solutions which are summarized in the following quote: “The solutions they offer all involve, to some degree, letting go of the past and opening up to a future as fallible human beings and not women of mythical proportions.” (Springer, 2002, p. 1069). Another concept discussed is the standard of the “strongblackwoman” which goes back to the history of slavery when women of colour were expected to persevere

under any circumstances. Morgan is of the opinion that this mythical woman has morphed into how women of colour should be and act today. She also felt suffocated by the burden of trying to appear in control and strong in every situation in her life. Morgan writes “strongblackwoman” as one word which solidifies the idea that they are inseparable parts. The goal is explained in the following quote: “Morgan wants to take apart the strongblackwoman image for what it is: a way for Black women to deny emotional, psychic, and even physical pain, all the while appearing to keep it together (...).” (Springer, 2002, p. 1070). Furthermore, Morgan claims the right to imperfection and vulnerability as women of colour are taught to hide imperfections to not be discredited or vilified. (cf. Springer, 2002) Women of colour need to deal with stereotypes of being a woman *and* of being coloured. They are told by society to meet certain beauty standards women “should” meet, which are difficult for any woman to begin with, but even more for a black woman when the standards are to be white. They are also told to behave in a certain way because they are coloured, for example to stay strong and in control in every situation.

A further layer of exclusion for feminist women of colour was in the Black Power Movement. Breines writes: “The black nationalist movement utilized images of black masculinity as the epitome of freedom. Slavery and racism had destroyed black manhood, they argued, and overcoming racism meant achieving manhood.” (Breines 2002, 1120) The Combahee River Collective (a feminist organisation by women of colour) declared racial solidarity with Black men while also pointing out the sexism of the Black Power Movement: “We struggle together with Black men against racism, while we also struggle with Black men about sexism” (Combahee River Collective 1982, 13, quoted in: Breines 2002, 1117) The Black Power Movement used images of Black masculinity as the epitome of freedom and women were often seen as subordinate and placed with the task of producing babies for a revolution. The art of the movement often was in addition to the previously described, heterosexist and homophobic. Some women tried to change this view in the Black Power Movement, but it was largely not a hospitable space for women (cf. Breines 2002, 1120). In the book *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman*, Michele Wallace summarizes the situation:

Those years from 1966 to 1970 during which Black Power and Women’s Liberation flowered were also the years in which the political and philosophical weight of the black woman was either erased or divided between black men and white women, who then proceeded to go their separate ways, pulling her apart in the process. (Wallace 1990b, 170-71, quoted in: Breines 2002, 1120-1121)

Kimberle Crenshaw (1991) outlines three categories of intersectionality in her paper “Mapping the Margins”; structural, political and representational intersectionality. These show different ways and reasons for why women of colour are being oppressed and excluded. Structural intersectionality refers to “(...) the ways in which the local experience of women of colour at the intersection of race and gender makes our actual experience of domestic violence, rape, and remedial reform qualitatively different than that of white women.” (Crenshaw 1991, 1245) Political intersectionality is “(...) how both feminist and antiracist politics have, paradoxically, often helped to marginalize the issue of violence against women of colour.” (Crenshaw 1991, 1245) Lastly, by representational intersectionality Crenshaw means “(...) the cultural construction of women of colour.” (Crenshaw 1991, 1245). Representational intersectionality links the way women of colour are devalued to how they are represented in cultural imagery (cf. Crenshaw 1991) Crenshaw concludes that the categories many consider natural or representational are socially constructed, but this does not mean that the categories have no significance. It “(...) is not the existence of the categories, but rather the particular values attached to them and the way those values foster and create social hierarchies.” (Crenshaw 1991, 1297)

Concerning exclusion and building a cultural identity while “between” two cultures, Salman Rushdie stated: “Our identity is at once plural and partial. Sometimes we feel that we straddle two cultures; at other times, that we fall between two stools.” (von Rosenberg 2008, 227) In the face of xenophobia, racism and attempts at social exclusion, many are forced to negotiate between cultures. For women it can be even more difficult than for men:

For black and Asian British women identity construction has been even more pressing task than for men, for they have to cope not only with positioning themselves in relation to the hegemonic culture and with marginalisation as ethnic Others, but also with discrimination as women in a male-dominated society, and this includes black as well as white men. (von Rosenberg 2008, 228)

4.0 The fight for equality for women of colour

In the following part of this paper, several women of colour and two organizations, who were part of the women’s movement will be introduced. Naturally, it is far from everyone and these women were not chosen because they made a greater impact than other women of colour, but because their names were mentioned often in the previously described texts.

4.1 Mary Shadd Cary

One example of early Black feminism is Mary Shadd Cary in the 1850s. She was the first black woman newspaper editor in North American and published an abolitionist paper called

“Provincial Freeman” which had the motto “Self-Reliance is the True Road to Independence” (cf. Springer, 2002).

4.2 Sojourner Truth

Another example is the African-American activist Sojourner Truth who asked the question “Ain’t I a woman?” during a speech at a gathering for women’s vote in Ohio 1851. (cf. Wollrad, 2005). She was a former slave who became an advocate for abolition and civil- and women’s rights. She was born with the name Isabella Bomfree, but in 1843 she declared that the Spirit called her to preach the truth and so she renamed herself Sojourner Truth. She was a charismatic speaker and held many speeches and had a long and impressive political and social (e.g. she helped slaves escape to freedom) career, although she never learned to read or write. In her famous speech “Ain’t I a Woman”, she challenges notions of racial and gender inferiority while reminding listeners of her strength and womanhood (cf. Michals 2015). There is some controversy regarding Truth’s speech. One written version was published about a month after by Marius Robinson, and this version did not contain the “Ain’t I a Woman” phrase. The most popular version was published by Frances Gage 12 years after Truth held her speech. The following is from the latter:

(...) Dat man ober dar say dat women needs to be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhar. Nobody eber helps me into carriages, or ober mud-puddles, or gives me any best place! And ar’n’t I a woman? Look at me! Look at my arm! I have plowed and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me! And ar’n’t I a woman? (...) (The Soujourner Truth Project)

Interestingly, it was documented that Marius Robinson and Sojourner Truth were good friends and that they went over his transcript of the speech with her before publishing. Still, Gage’s version is more famous. (cf. The Soujourner Truth Project) The following quote is from Robinson’s version of Truth’s speech:

(...) I have as much muscle as any man, and can do as much work as any man. (...) I have plowed and reaped and husked and chopped and mowed, and can any man do more than that? I have heard much about the sexes being equal; I can carry as much as any man, and can (...) eat as much too, if (...) I can get it. (...) Why children, if you have woman’s rights, give it to her and you will feel better. You will have your own rights, and they wont be so much trouble. (...) (The Soujourner Truth Project)

4.3 Anna Julia Cooper

Anna Julia Cooper was born into slavery in North Carolina but became a feminist educator, activist and scholar (she was the first black woman to earn a Ph.D. at the Sorbonne). She is well known for her book published 1892, called *A Voice from the South by a Black Woman of the South*. This is the first book about black feminism in the US. Vivian M. May wrote the following about Cooper’s work in the text *Writing the Self into Being: Anna Julia Cooper’s Textual Politics*: “(...) across her body of work she exposes how power conspires to erase dissent,

silence the marginalized, and render alternative views unthinkable. (...) Cooper offers alternative ways to think about history, power, and liberation.” (May 2009, 17) Cooper draws from her personal experience as a woman of colour from the south of the USA, and also her academic career. She switches between the first- and third- person perspective and demonstrates how the third person often is used to mask bias by presenting the narrator as a neutral observer. Cooper also combines the genres of experimental writing, the expository essay, theoretical analysis, and political discourse. In her book, she discusses, analyses and critiques other well-known work and writes about politics and racism. Amongst many other topics, she writes about violent crimes committed towards women of colour and how black men are accused of being violent rapists while in fact white men have been far more threatening to women’s lives and bodies. (cf. May 2009) She also highlights how women of colour have been violently silenced and, that “the black woman, doubly enslaved, could but suffer and struggle and be silent” (Cooper 1893, 202, quoted in: May 2009, 22) May summarizes the idea behind Cooper’s way of writing and combining both genres and narration perspectives in the following part:

Though Cooper appears at first glance to be rather humble and self-effacing in such passages, she in fact seeks to both disarm her audience and put it on notice, thus challenging those who might be resistant to instead become open to what she has to say and to what she knows. (...) In the end, it becomes apparent that Cooper is not really all that concerned about appearing biased or misguided: her apologetic tone serves as a foil allowing her both to focus on her readers’ potential prejudices and also to document African American women’s legacies of struggle. (May 2009, 23)

Cooper also refuses to rank or separate race and gender within the system of domination and highlights how multifaceted the system is. She emphasizes that this view is essential to any feminist vision of liberation. One of the aims of Cooper’s work can be said to be to educate readers and confront ignorance. (cf. May 2009)

4.4 The National Black Feminist Organization

The National Black Feminist Organization (NBFO) was an important and large feminist organization which lasted from 1973 to 1975. This was the first national Black woman’s organization. They aimed to eliminated dual oppression and to free black women from racism and sexism. The organization grew quickly, and within a year they had two thousand members. The original chapter of the organization founded in New York, only lasted two years, but other chapters lasted for a longer time. The founders wanted to define the relationship of women of colour to feminism. Some criticised the organization, claiming it was “too middle class (...), of emulating white women, of dividing the race, of lesbianism, and of not supporting black men.” (Breines, 2002, p. 1116).

4.5 The Combahee River Collective

The Combahee River Collective was a group of African-American women who started meeting in Boston in 1974. Their name has historical meaning as it refers to a campaign led by Harriet Tubman in 1863 when she freed 750 slaves near the Combahee River in South Carolina. (cf. Breines 2002) The difference between NBFO and the Combahee River Collective is described in the following quote: “The Combahee women came together out of the NBFO meeting in New York. Combahee was more radical and less mainstream than the NBFO in their anticapitalist position and their explicit concern about class and homophobia.” (Breines 2002, p. 1116) The Collective was involved with the feminist movement and were socialist. Barbara and Beverly Smith were key founders. They felt that the feminist movement did not look close enough at the issues of race and class. The Combahee River Collective was built on Toni Cade’s book called “The Black Woman” and also many other works by women writers, e.g. Ella Baker, Fannie Lou Hamer, Lorraine Hansberry and Pauli Murray. Furthermore, the “Black Arts movement” and e.g. Alice Walker, Angela Davis and Audre Lorde also greatly influenced the collective. It was important to not have to give up any part of their identity, being female or coloured. They created the Collective to have a synthesis. (cf, Breines 2002) It was difficult to reach black women because by calling themselves feminists they risked “(...) the disdain of men and the black community, of losing intimate relationships with men, of marginalizing themselves (...)” (Breines, 2002, p. 1113) The Combahee River Collective did retreats where attendees could discuss feminist works and plan how to actively spread “Black feminism” to women of colour. Another important aspect of the work of the Collective was the “Combahee River Collective Statement” which was published in 1977. This statement is “one of the most widely cited and influential documents of radical black feminism.” (Breines, 2002, p. 1114) This is a part of their statement:

We are actively committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression and see as our particular task the development of integrated analysis and practise based upon the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking. The synthesis of these oppressions create the conditions of our lives. As Black women we see Black feminism as the logical political movement to combat the manifold and simultaneous oppressions that all women of color face” (Combahee River Collective 1982, 13, quoted in: Breines 2002, 1116)

4.6 bell hooks

Bell hooks is a pseudonym used by Gloria Jean Watkins. She is an American activist and scholar and in the postcolonial feminist movement she is well known for her many books about feminism and women of colour. Some of the titles are; *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism* (1981), *Feminist Theory from Margin to Center* (1984) and *Talking Back: Thinking*

Feminism, Thinking Black (1989). She chose to use a pseudonym to honour female legacy, as Bell Blair Hooks was the name of her great-grandmother. Watkins spelled the name in lowercase to draw the attention to her ideas and not identity (cf. Encyclopaedia Britannica 1998). Watkins wrote *Ain't I a Woman* when she was 19 years old and published it 10 years later. About the significance of the book:

(...) 'Ain't I A Woman' remains a radical and relevant work of political theory. hooks lays the groundwork of her feminist theory by giving historical evidence of the specific sexism that black female slaves endured and how that legacy affects black womanhood today. She writes, 'A devaluation of black womanhood occurred as a result of the sexual exploitation of black women during slavery that has not altered in the course of hundreds of years.' The economics of slavery, which commodified human lives and the breeding of more enslaved people, encouraged the systematic practice of rape against black women, and this system established an enduring 'social hierarchy based on race and sex.' (Lee 2019)

In her text about teaching bell hooks *Killing Rage* to college students, Terri A. Hasseler writes that this collection of essays changed everything in the classroom. She reports that the overwhelmingly white and middle class students were "engaged and deeply sympathetic with the experiences of communities facing economic injustice, racial prejudice, environmental disaster, and war-themes" (Hasseler 1999, 213) to begin with, but when they read *Killing Rage*, they were enraged and led the most heated discussion of the seminar. The following quote from Hasseler's text contains a short summary of *Killing Rage*:

hooks and her friend 'K' purchase airline tickets for first class seats, but somewhere in the process of getting their tickets, getting their boarding passes, and getting on the plane, a mistake is made on K's boarding pass; she is given a coach class seat. hooks makes very clear to her readers that she understands that this mistake on K's boarding pass is no 'mistake', but a willful expression of prejudice (...) On the plane, K is publicly abused by a white female flight attendant as K attempts to explain that some mistake must have happened. K is finally forced to leave the first class (...) so that a white businessman can take her place. As he sits down, he apologizes to hooks, but he had failed to speak up during K's humiliation, (...) For hooks, it is not so much that she had trusted that the white man would speak up; rather, it is the maddening frustration she feels when faced with his absolute obliviousness to his role in the drama. hooks writes, 'I am writing this essay sitting beside an anonymous white male that I long to murder'. (Hasseler 1999, 213-214)

The rage displayed by hooks in this text enraged the students because they were placed in an oppositional relationship to her in the text. The sentence about hooks wanting to kill the man was spoken about a great deal and the students seemed to forget that she did actually not kill him. They stated that she was being unreasonable and paranoid as they rather believed what happened to her was an accident and not to do with race. In her essay, bell hooks writes about several events on the way to the airport and there, which she sees as racially charged. The students in the course state that hooks did not suffer and is not worthy of empathy, and they dismiss her rage. The subject of rage is discussed within postcolonial feminism, because the colonizers did (do) not want to see the colonized express rage. Therefore, it is interesting to look into how a colonized subject articulates rage and which responses this evokes in the

colonizer. Hooks' essay and the students response to reading it is an interesting example of this. It is often argued that anger is improper in an academic setting. (cf. Hasseler 1999) To this, Hasseler quotes Julia Lesage in *Women's Rage* (1988); "On the individual level, rage functions as a form of cleansing, as Lesage argues, freeing 'the woman from her inferiority complex and from despair; and in action, it makes her fearless and restores her self-respect'" (Hasseler 1999, 218). Furthermore, Hasseler quotes Deidre Lashgari in *Introduction: To Speak the Unspeakable* (1995); "In this sense, anger is awareness amplified so it can be spoken, speech amplified so it can be heard" (Hasseler 1999, 218). Hooks does not try to understand the readers perspective so she can speak to that and create a sympathetic bond between them and she does not modify her approach. To conclude, Hasseler writes that empathy is "at best a cliché (...) and at worst disingenuous, especially when the situation demands argument and respect." (Hasseler 1999, 219)

4.7 Barbara Smith

Barbara Smith is an activist, educator and author and she is a co-founder of the Combahee River Collective. She also co-founded a black owned and run publishing house called "Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press" in 1980. During an interview with Dianca London Potts in 2018, Smith speaks about her experiences. She begins by stressing how difficult it was to announce oneself as a black feminist in the 1970s. She describes the Collective as a lifeline for those who created it. (cf. Potts 2018) Furthermore, Smith states that they were not just feminists because they believed in equality, but; "We were black feminists because we believed we had to work to make change in the actual world, as opposed to just embracing a set of ideas." (Potts 2018) When asked the importance of intersectionality, Smith answers that the intersection of people's identities defines what types of discrimination they experience. She also mentions that the statement of the Combahee River Collective describes a very similar topic which they then called "interlocking oppressions" or "the simultaneity of oppression". (cf. Potts 2018) As an example, she highlights violence against women of colour and how it is different because people of colour "have been terrorized by the state and by the police." (Potts 2018) When Potts asks Smith about Kitchen Table and the effect and change it has had, Smith reflects about how few authors were women of colour as they started and how little interest there was in their work. Now there are many more, and she says: "We are just tearing it up, and it's so exciting because I think Kitchen Table was a catalyst for getting the work out and asserting that this work is of great value." (Potts 2018)

4.8 Angela Yvonne Davis

Angela Yvonne Davis is a “militant American black activist”, a professor and an author (cf. Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica 2020). She championed the cause of black prisoners in the 60s and 70s and because of her relationship to an inmate called George Jackson, she became a suspect for attempted kidnapping and murder. Jackson’s brother had tried to free him at the Hall of Justice in Marin County in 1970 and it led to four persons being killed. She was also arrested but found innocent by the jury. (cf. Britannica 2020) She was associated with the Black Panthers, although she was never a member. Because of her politics and association with communists, she was refused a renewal of her position as lecturer at the University of California in 1970. (cf. Duncan 2020) She took the case to the California Supreme Court and was rehired but was fired again later for “inflammatory language” (cf. Davis & Platt 2014). Some of her books are *Women, Race & Class* (1981) and *Women, Culture, and Politics* (1989). (Britannica 2020) In an interview with Tony Platt, Davis explains she was involved with the Los Angeles Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) (a political organization which played an important role in the civil rights movement in the 1960s) and the Black Panther Party (BPP), but chose to leave them and join the Communist Party in the late 1960s until 1991. The reason she left was because of a problem of sexism in SNCC and BPP and she says “(...) also because I felt the need to be a part of an organization that addressed class as well as race and gender.” (Davis & Platt 2014, 41)

4.9 Chandra T. Mohanty

Chandra T. Mohanty grew up in India studied English there, she continued her degree in the USA and has been a professor at many Universities in Africa, Asia, America and Europe. She has contributed greatly to the theory of postcolonial feminism. Two especially famous works she has written is *Under Western Eyes* and *Feminism without borders*. (cf. Goisauf 2019)

In *Under Western Eyes* (1984), Mohanty discusses the view of women from the so-called developing world (in her text: third world women) by western feminists. The last sentence of the text is “It is time to move beyond the Marx who found it possible to say: They cannot represent themselves; they must be represented.” Mohanty argues that privilege, ethnocentric universality and inadequate self-consciousness about the effect of western scholarship characterizes much of western feminist work on women in developing countries. Her paper focuses on critique of three principles present in western feminist discourse on women in developing countries. The first principle is the “assumption of women as an already constituted,

coherent group with identical interests and desires, regardless of class, ethnic or racial location or contradictions or even patriarchy (...) which can be applied universally and cross-culturally.” (Mohanty 1984, 337) The second principle refers to an uncritical use of methodologies and the third is a political principle underlying the methodologies and analytic strategies. These problems in turn create the stereotype of the “average third world woman”. Mohanty describes her in the following way: “This average third world woman leads an essentially truncated life based on her feminine gender (read: sexually constrained) and being ‘third world’ (read: ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domestic family-oriented, victimized, etc.)” (Mohanty 1984, 337) To conclude, Mohanty suggests that one definition enables and sustains the other. What she means is that western women need to define women from the developing world in the negative way they often do, to be able to define themselves as western women (secular, liberated, with control over their lives). Mohanty gives the opinion that without a “third world”, there would be no “first world”. Western women self-present themselves as secular, liberated and in charge of their own lives, but if that was the case, they would have no need for the women’s movement. Therefore, Mohanty suggests, that western women need the “third world woman” to justify their self-definition. (cf. Mohanty 1984)

5.0 Conclusion

This paper has given an introduction and overview of the history of postcolonial feminism and feminism by women of colour. The history of feminism by women of colour is important to portray within this topic, because the aim of postcolonial feminism is to show the parts of the movement which were ignored or overseen. Women of colour have a long history with the movement, and were part of it from the very beginning, although much literature about feminism paints a different picture and shows the western perspective of white women to a much greater degree than the perspective of women of colour. Some of the first women were Sojourner Truth, Mary Shadd Cary and Anna Julia Cooper. Also of great importance was the Combahee River Collective during the second wave of feminism. It is clear to see that these women always spoke and wrote about the layers of exclusion and oppression they were dealing with, from the very beginning of the movement. They were trying to create understanding and better their position. Still, “postcolonial feminism” and the recognition of the importance and truth of this became “mainstream” in the feminist movement with the third wave around the 1990s.

This paper also aimed to introduce the theories of postcolonial feminism. One very important aspect is to observe, analyse and deal with the stereotypes, standards of academia and the point of view in general created by imperialism. It is important to recognise these aspects and to deal with them because if they are used for research, the result will be misleading or wrong. A problem in the feminist movement was that standards set by white imperialist men for academia were used for feminist academia as well, which led them to live on and not be questioned by a majority. The concept of intersectionality has also shown itself very important to understand. It is necessary to understand the different, simultaneous layers of oppression of women and to make them visible and not try to separate them but rather look at how they work together and at the same time. When it comes to the many layers of exclusion of women of colour, it is important to note that for a long time, they were excluded from feminism because of racism, and from the Black Freedom Movement because of sexism. This is the reason why organizations like the Combahee River Collective were created. They were excluded because of ignorance and lack of understanding by many white women, because they often believed they were inclusive and antiracist, when in reality they were just not actively racist. Women of colour have also been told to meet many standards because of their gender and the colour of their skin.

Lastly, this paper aimed to introduce some of the movement's activists. Mary Shadd Cary and Sojourner Truth shows the early start. Anna Julia Cooper combined personal with academic experiences and wrote the first book on feminism and women of colour. She wrote about being "doubly enslaved", because of the colour of her skin and her gender and refusing to rank or separate race and gender. The Combahee River Collective also wrote about interlocking systems of oppression. Their goal was to combat the manifold and simultaneous oppression of women of colour. Bell hooks wrote about and made aware of the importance of rage. She made many question how the colonizers did not want the colonized to show that they were enraged, and that this still stays with us today. Through hooks text one was made aware that rage sheds women's inferiority complex and simultaneously amplifies the voice of women of colour who were often not heard. Barbara Smith was not only part of the founding members of the Combahee River Collective, but also the Kitchen Table printing press. The Kitchen Table catapulted black women writers and created more opportunities for them to be published and heard. Angela Yvonne Davis' history shows the sexism she experiences in the Black Panther Party, and her radical fight to be heard and its consequences (like being fired several times). Chandra T. Mohanty wrote about the importance of accurate representation and being able to

represent oneself, especially in the case of women from the developing world. She also confronts assumptions and theorizes about how they came to be.

I now believe that I have a much better understanding of feminism and women of colour, although it is still probably on the surface level. I am excited to learn more and read more of the literature by the women presented in this paper and many more.

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