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HANDE BIRKALAN-GEDIK

## INTERSECTIONALITY AND DIFFERENCES

Not all women's movements call themselves feminist, and, respectively, not all women's museums are conceptually feminist. But, where does the difference lie between feminist women's museums and museums otherwise? For understanding this difference, we must begin with taking intersectionality as an integral concept of feminist theory. As someone who has been working on intersectionality since the 2000s, leaning on it as an analytical tool in my own feminist research, my statement today builds on what is now a little old, but still a valid argument I shared in 2011 in print (Birkalan-Gedik 2011a).

Theories are products of specific contexts, time lines, and events. Thus, I turn briefly to the context in which I initially wrote about intersectionality. I was hearing arguments in some feminist circles that the women's movement of the 1990s in Turkey presents a fragmented character and that there was not a single "glue" to tie them into one compact movement (Birkalan-Gedik 2011a: 344).

True, the post-1990s feminist movement has been developed based on "difference" and it became even more multifarious. My article was intended to be a response to this "diagnosis", where I pointed out to three possible

avenues through which we can maintain an "inclusive" feminism for women, while recognizing the existence of their differences, which would be possible only through the application of intersectionality, considering intersections such as ethnicity, nation and class (example: Kurdish women); of religion, nation and class: (example: Alevi women); and of sexual identity, ethnicity, and class (example, LGBTTT)[+] (Birkalan-Gedik 2011a: 344).

My positionality was that of a feminist anthropologist who worked with Alevi and Kurdish women in Turkey and in transnational space as early as late 1990s. All that said, my article argued that although we have different feminisms today, there should not be any discordances among them. More importantly, years after the publication of my article, solidarity groups at the Gezi Park<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The events started out as an ecological demonstration against the Turkey's governing party AKP's decision on building barracks where Gezi Park was located in Taksim and lasted between 28 May–30 August 2013. Shortly after the beginning, peaceful protests were interrupted by the police attacks and the intensive use of pepper gas against the civilians who gathered in Taksim. The Gezi events went beyond an ecological resistance, as civilians demonstrated against violence against women, banning of freedom of expression and organizing and peaceful protests. In short, the Gezi Park demonstrations drew many different groups together who stood against infamy.

showed that they were indeed coming from different backgrounds and standing strongly against oppression, or as Patricia Hill Collins calls it, the "matrix of domination," (Hill Collins 1990) recognizing the interconnectivity of all different social classifications (Birkalan-Gedik 2017).

### **Learning from the theories of race and gender**

What is, then, "intersectionality"—a concept that achieved many things? Among many intersectionality scholars, there are particularly two African-American women who had inspired my thinking on the concept. First is Kimberlé Crenshaw, Professor of Law at Columbia University (Crenshaw 1989), and the second one is Patricia Hill Collins, Professor of Sociology at the University of Maryland, College Park (Hill Collins 1990).

Crenshaw was concerned to bring light to the experiences of women and girls of color in the US. Recently, she gave concrete examples about her efforts (Crenshaw 2015): In 1976, Emma De Graffenreid and several other black women sued General Motors for discrimination, arguing that the company segregated its workforce by race and gender: Blacks did one set of jobs and whites did another. By presenting the incident, Crenshaw tried to put an end to a continuing structural problem and saw intersectionality as a possible way to fight with racism at the work place. But at the end, as Crenshaw reminds, the case was declined. The court believed that black women *should not be permitted to combine their race and gender claims into one* [emphasis is mine].<sup>2</sup>

The argument of the court was exactly the opposite of Crenshaw's point on intersectionality! She had underlined the limitation of single-identity politics and the failure to recognize the differences among one identity group. She argued that within identity politics, in advocating an improvement in the lives of all women, we should consider how the lived experiences of women from different racial, class, and geographic locations can vary and require different kinds of improvements (Crenshaw 1991). Her formulation of intersectionality came from real life evidence. So, if you are with me, you should understand that the source of intersectional analysis presents the experiences of women in real life. With this intrinsically applied component it carries, the concept becomes more important for inclusive women's museums.

### **An inclusive women's museum: a new domain for intersectionality**

Inclusive museums should see to the women's differences-intersections of their ethnic, class, religious and other gender identities. Each one of these intersections can rightfully claim their space in a women's museum, but only inclusive museums can manage different women's experiences at once. All these categories, rather than being divisive, could perfectly work for overcoming the varying degrees of domination and power.

Although writing "herstory" belongs to one of the earlier attempts in feminist thought, the idea of a "feminist museum" is relatively young. Nonetheless, museum curators have been grappling with the issue of representation. Nicole Robert, for example, directs our attention to the fact that museum professionals have dealt with the issue of identity-based exclusion and that the plurality of a certain women's community poses challenges to representation in museums (Rob-

<sup>2</sup> Crenshaw, alluding to her work in 1989, "Demarginalizing the Race and Sex,"

ert 2014). Similarly, Meral Akkent considers museums as "mirrors of change," underlying that women's museums create women's memory, by offering new models of museums for women as actors of change and visibility (Akkent 2010).

But we know that neither all women's museums are feminist nor inclusive. However, when a museum takes on an intersectional approach in its conceptualization—from choosing the curator for installation to the organization of the exhibit, or in implementing educational programs, they can achieve many things all at once. In our case, they can bring light to women's own narratives, let them tell their "herstories," as Women's Museum Istanbul (IKM) says. In this way, they can challenge the patriarchal narratives, of both *History* and the *Museum*. Considered from a post-colonial perspective, they can challenge the Eurocentric views on museums, which are both tools and products of colonialism.<sup>3</sup> If they internalize intersectionality, for example, they can have space for sexual identity and sexual orientation. In this way, they can challenge the *heteronormative* narratives of the mainstream museums.

I would further argue that this should be done not in an "additive" fashion. We should possess a deep interest in the epistemic habitus and consider the notion of power from a structural perspective (Yeon Choo/Ferree 2010: 129–149). For example, we should have an awareness in how different intersections have created different forms and degrees of oppression.

We are here, because we are aware that there is still today an absence of women's

creativity in museums. We are here, because know that this poses us with a problem and we want to overcome it. A "women-all-inclusive" museum, in my opinion, should display a consciousness about the discovery and representation of women's experiences and their stories. Last, but not least, an inclusive museum should engage with the feminist organizations and feminist activists, for bridging the gap between feminist theory, praxis, and activism. The fact that identities intersect, rather in dynamic and complex ways presents us new possibilities for solving the challenges of identity-based inclusion (Robert, *ibid*). However, we should avoid the simplistic prioritizing of one identity over others, for example ethnicity over gender, or gender over class. Instead, our focus should be how class and ethnicity can affect gender, age, or being handicapped. We can call this "applied intersectional theory" in the museum context, which invites us to a critical reflection on the existing power dynamics. This is very important, as it will influence the selection who to be represented in the museum. Such a museum should represent not always the first ones, or the stronger ones, but also the ordinary women who have struggled through these different systems of power themselves.

Now, how can we maintain intersectionality? Where should we look at in rebuilding a variety of women's experiences in the museums? We should begin to accept that women are the sources of their own history and that they do have power. As such, they offer a more democratic version of history.

On the other hand, we should be aware that museums are places of encounter-encountering with the other. They are also *lieux de memoir/sites of memory* (Pierre 2006) and sites of *commemoration*, remembering women [emphasis is mine]. With the same to-

<sup>3</sup> I would like to point out to the self-reflexive attempts of ICOM (International Council of Museums) in creating a consciousness for the mainstream museums to criticize their own Eurocentric views.

ken, we cannot deny that museums are also infused with power, as much as they can foster inclusion, they can fall into the trap of exclusion (Birkalan-Gedik 2013). Here and now today, we face a different context of "struggle" than that of Crenshaw.

Take for example, Maryam Şahinyan (Turkey's first professional Armenian woman photographer) is in the IKM.<sup>4</sup> I think she is there, not only because she is the "first" in her branch—this is a matter of chronology. But, as a scholar of intersectionality, I am interested in how she made it from Sivas, when she was 4, to Istanbul during Armenian Genocide and became a photographer, taking thousands of pictures, but leaving only a handful of her own.<sup>5</sup> How did she operate in a context of patriarchal, heteronormative society and in a context of violence? We should be sensitive about the different intersection of religion, class, and ethnicity.

I find every woman represented at the IKM, as signs of victory: They are, in fact, *revolutionary* women in their branches, in their own rights. They are Armenian, Greek, Byzantine, Turkish, Alevi, and Kurdish. They stand together and demonstrate that their course of life—their *curriculum vitae*—have not been easy. They have been honored in an inclusive museum, in the *lieu de memoir*. There is even a transnational component, when you peruse the IKM internet site. I find Şah Turna Ağdaşan<sup>6</sup> as a perfect example of that. As someone who heard many stories of Kurdish and Alevi women, artists and of ordinary women, I would like to meet more of them in the IKM.

4 [www.istanbulkadinmuzesi.org/en/maryam-sahinyan](http://www.istanbulkadinmuzesi.org/en/maryam-sahinyan) (Accessed: 10 August 2017).

5 [www.massispost.com/2017/03/maryam-sahinyan-first-female-photographer-turkey](http://www.massispost.com/2017/03/maryam-sahinyan-first-female-photographer-turkey) (Accessed 10 August 2017).

6 [www.istanbulkadinmuzesi.org/en/asik\\_sah\\_turna\\_agdasan\\_ozan\\_sahturna](http://www.istanbulkadinmuzesi.org/en/asik_sah_turna_agdasan_ozan_sahturna) (Accessed: 10 August 2017).

## Conclusion

I am an anthropologist—with many years spent in dealing with its own disciplinary history and praxis, I am often asked what anthropology is about (Birkalan-Gedik 2009a). To me, Anthropology is about two things: first, it is an epistemic voyage to the "other" (I am using the term in the Sartrean, in an existentialist way, as we grant the right to the other to be the "other," so that we get to know her). Second, and relatedly, it is about self-reflexivity, that begins with getting to know the "Self" to understand the "Other." In fact, both holds truth for intersectional feminist thinking as well.

Crenshaw considers intersectionality as "analytic sensibility," a way of thinking about identity and its relationship to power. She asserts that "intersectional erasures are not exclusive to black women." Following her words, we should think about the experiences of immigrant women—not only in the final locale but during their whole journey as an integral part of gendered migration, as de-territorialization is the order of day. When the homophobic murders in Turkey are in the headlines every day in various media, we should think about trans-women. How about women with disabilities, despite their disabilities fighting terror of the police—remember the Gezi Park, for example. They all face vulnerabilities that reflect the intersections of racism, sexism, class oppression, homophobia, and more.

While recognizing women's differences, intersectionality proposes inclusion. And recognizing the immediacy of intersectionality for feminist work is the first step in a long journey.



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Kadın tarihi odaklı çalışan tarihçi, Renanya Sanayi Müzeleri gönüllüsü. 1995 yılından itibaren Köln Kadın Tarihi Derneği bünyesinde Köln kadın tarihi konulu kent turları konseptleri geliştiriyor ve uyguluyor; 2000 yılından beri Bonn Kadın Müzesi'nde küratör. Tarih sergileri tasarlıyor, uyguluyor ve sergilerin kataloglarını yayınlıyor. Uluslararası Kadın Müzeleri Birliği'nin (International Association of Women's Museums, IAWM) kurucu üyesi (2012) ve ilk başkanı (2012-2014).

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Birkalan-Gedik received her Ph.D. in the USA on folklore, anthropology and gender. Her books and numerous articles appeared in Turkish, English and German. She taught at Yeditepe University Department of Anthropology on gender, nationalism, narrative and place, feminist theories and methods, research methods, folklore and culture. Her research projects were supported by DFG, TUBITAK, and DAAD. She had taught in many universities in Europe, the USA, and Central Asia upon invitations. She was recently the Aigner-Rollet Gastprofessorin at the Graz University, and gave seminars on women, Islam, and migration. At the moment, she is working on two manuscripts on anthropology and feminism and wrapping up her research findings on her recently concluded TUBITAK project on fathers and fatherhood in Germany. She was president of the Anthropology Association in Turkey (2010-2014), served as a member of the UNESCO National Committee. She serves at the Pertev Naili Boratav Archive of Turkish History Foundation, and at the editorial board of many international journals.

Birkalan-Gedik doktora çalışmasını ABD'de halkbilim, antropoloji ve toplumsal cinsiyet konularında yaptı. Bilimsel makaleleri ve kitapları İngilizce, Almanca ve Türkçe yayımlandı. Yeditepe Üniversitesi Antropoloji Bölümü'nde toplumsal cinsiyet, milliyetçilik, mekân ve anlatı, feminist teori ve metotlar, araştırma yöntemleri, folklor ve kültür konularında ders verdi. Yurt içinde ve dışında yürüttüğü araştırma projeleri DFG, TUBITAK ve DAAD gibi kurumlarınca desteklendi. Avrupa, Amerika ve Orta Asya'da birçok üniversitede davetli olarak ders verdi. Graz Üniversitesi'nde Aigner-Rollet Misafir Profesör Programı çerçevesinde İslam, kadın ve göç konulu seminerler yaptı. Antropoloji ve feminizm konulu iki kitabı üzerinde çalışıyor ve TUBITAK desteğiyle Almanya'da babalar ve babalık konusunda tamamladığı projesini yayına hazırlıyor. Türkiye Antropoloji Derneği'nin başkanlığını yaptı (2010-2014). UNESCO Türkiye Milli Komitesi'nde yer aldı. Türk Tarih Vakfı Pertev Naili Boratav Arşivi'nin yönetim kurulu üyesidir. Birçok uluslararası derginin yayın kurulunda görevlidir.