

Intersectionality, More or Less: A Review Essay

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Black Feminism Reimagined: After Intersectionality

By Jennifer C. Nash
Duke University Press, 2019

Me Not You: The Trouble with Mainstream Feminism

By Alison Phipps
Manchester University Press, 2020

Feminism Interrupted: Disrupting Power

By Lola Olufemi
Pluto Press, 2020

THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND THE RESURGENCE AND SPREAD OF THE #BlackLivesMatter movement and protests within the US and beyond have drawn fresh attention to the usefulness of intersectionality as an analytic and political lens through which to comprehend the world. Intersectionality demands we notice and address structural inequality and its effects on particular groups and individuals and eschews a universalist approach that glosses over—for example—the fact that some people are much more likely to die of disease or at the hands of police or in prison than others, or indeed to protest about it. Its

champions argue an intersectional approach should inform everything from humanitarianism to health policy to protest movements to arts funding to domestic violence services, all of which have been recalibrated in 2020 as COVID-19 exacerbates and creates social inequalities. These advocates include intersectionality's central theorist Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, a Professor of Law at Columbia University and UCLA, who through her Intersectionality Matters! podcast and #SayHerName campaign has provided cogent analysis and activism around both the pandemic and #Black Lives Matter.¹

Intersectionality, a term with origins in black feminist thought in the United States, is clearly not going away despite decades now of persistent backlash, misrepresentation and critique. The ongoing and contested success of intersectionality has sometimes been narrated in terms of loss, co-option, dilution and erasure—especially in relation to black feminism—however the events of 2020 have arguably facilitated a return to, or refocus on, intersectionality's radicalism. This includes what some see—contrary to a particular reading of intersectionality as a judicial intervention—as its affinity with the prison abolition movement, a cause which has become increasingly visible in recent years, especially so in 2020, including in mainstream media outlets and as part of intersectional feminism. In June 2020, when an estimated 15,000 people marched through Brooklyn, New York City, to protest violence against black transgender people, long-time black feminist and prison abolitionist Angela Davis thrilled the crowd—and many on social media—by making links between intersectionality, trans activism and prison abolition. By challenging the gender binary, argued Davis, the trans community had modelled an 'intersectional perspective', challenged 'the very foundation of our sense of normalcy', and shown it was possible to 'effectively resist prisons and jails and police.'² In a feature article in *The Guardian* in the same month, the author noted that 'until recently' Davis had been 'considered too radical for mainstream political thinking' (Bakare).

Whether the momentum around #BlackLivesMatter and abolition is maintained remains to be seen, including in Australia where historic turnouts for the first wave of protests organised by Aboriginal activists were followed by declining numbers, intensified policing and media beat-ups linking protests with COVID-19. Still, it was against this backdrop of global and local resistance that I read three recent books by feminists, all of whom engage with intersectionality as integral to their feminist politics.

¹ <<https://soundcloud.com/intersectionality-matters/ep-9-under-the-blacklight-the-intersectional-vulnerabilities-that-covid-lays-bare>>.

² Angela Davis speech quoted verbatim at 'Black Trans Lives Matter: Movement Pushes for Justice and Visibility Amid "Epidemic" of Violence', *Democracy Now*, 16 June 2020, <https://www.democracynow.org/2020/6/16/imara_jones_black_trans_lives_matter>.

The books are, in the order I will review them, *Black Feminism Reimagined: After Intersectionality* by Jennifer C. Nash (2019), *Me Not You: The Trouble with Mainstream Feminism* by Alison Phipps (2020), and Lola Olufemi's *Feminism Interrupted: Disrupting Power* (2020). Each was written before these 'unprecedented times', but nevertheless speak to them in illuminating and/or prescient ways. Collectively, they have inspired this review essay, which also doubles as a history and reflection on intersectionality and intersectional feminism—the latter a product of the former. Yet as Nash rightly insists, intersectionality cannot be parsed as a critique or response to mainstream/white feminism. Indeed, she questions the notion of intersectionality as 'an unqualified ethical good, and "more intersectionality" as an even better ethical good' (16), a provocation which also prompted the title of this essay. It flows from Nash's earlier theorising on feminist tendencies to locate intersectionality in time: '*feminism-future*' and '*feminism-past*', with the first campaigning for 'more' intersectionality, the second for less, with each temporality marked by a racialised logic situating black women as an obstruction to feminism's apotheosis (Nash, 'Institutionalizing the Margins').

In *Black Feminism Reimagined*, Nash urges black feminists to 'let go' of intersectionality to enable a 'vision of black feminist theory that is not invested in making property of knowledge' (3). Phipps and Olufemi, meanwhile, advocate for 'more' intersectionality, and in doing so, ostensibly at least, demonstrate some of the phenomena Nash questions, including the ethical investment in intersectionality as an antidote to the problems of white/mainstream feminism. Yet, as I shall return to in the conclusion, both Phipps's and Olufemi's books do complement Nash's in key respects, including a shared capacious and dynamic understanding of the plurality and diversity of black feminisms, which in their case includes Black British feminism and abolitionist feminism. And while Nash, in some contrast, argues for reimagining black feminism through 'an archive black feminist theorists have largely disavowed: law' (113), reading these books in tandem affirms the enduring and nimble capacity of intersectionality to animate past, present and future feminisms, including beyond the United States.

First, a recap of sorts. Contrary to Nash's subtitle *After Intersectionality*, her task of reimagining black feminisms via the judicial involves a reappraisal, of, or return to, the foundational theorising of Crenshaw. In two path-breaking articles, published in 1989 and 1991, Crenshaw, a legal and critical race scholar, theorised intersectionality. In the first, 'Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex', she challenged the 'single-axis framework' of legal doctrine in the United States in which 'race and gender [are treated as] mutually exclusive categories of experience and analysis'. Using the metaphor of the traffic intersection, Crenshaw illuminated how the 'intersectional experience' of black women 'is greater than the sum of racism and sexism'. She argued that 'any analysis that does not take

intersectionality into account cannot sufficiently address the particular manner in which black women are subordinated' (140). In the next, 'Mapping the Margins', Crenshaw elaborated further, identifying and distinguishing between 'structural intersectionality', referring to 'race, gender and class domination' via social institutions and interventions (1246), and 'political intersectionality' in which 'women of colour are situated within at least two subordinated groups that frequently pursue conflicting political agendas' (1252). Crenshaw encouraged wider applications to issues of 'class, sexual orientation, age, and color' (1276), but also clarified that she was not advancing a 'new totalizing theory of identity' (1244). This work was clearly indebted to black feminist thought which had long insisted on recognising 'interlocking' systems of oppression, as articulated by the Combahee River Collective. Crenshaw explicitly referenced the Collective's 1977 Statement, which is now considered a 'touchstone for black feminist engagement with intersectionality's histories' (Nash 7). Intersectionality's origins in black feminism and Crenshaw's focus on black and Latina women's interaction with the law has been the source of critiques of the theory as insufficiently universal, multi-dimensional and/or attentive to power or hybridity (among other perceived limitations). Such critiques argue for a 'post-intersectionality' able to incorporate these pluralities. Nevertheless, intersectionality has confirmed itself as a concept with infinite applications (Cho 389).

Far more than merely 'coining' the term, Crenshaw translated understandings of intersectionality from black feminism and related social movements to the academy, facilitating its growing acceptance there and reconfiguring it as a form of critical inquiry and praxis (Collins and Bilge 81). With 'impeccable' (Cho 387) timing, her publications appeared when institutions like the legal profession and the academy were diversifying, via women's studies, black studies, ethnic studies and similar programs. In this context, intersectionality received a 'rapid reception' (Collins and Bilge 85), while such incorporation of minority knowledges, including intersectionality, into the neo-liberal university also, inevitably, had depoliticising and disciplinary effects (Bilge, 'Whitening Intersectionality'). Intersectionality became a 'travelling theory', and what was lost, gained or transformed in these 'travels' would become one popular way of narrating and critiquing the story of its various receptions. Yet, as Nash notes, some aspects of intersectionality's migrations have been less analysed and deserve more discussion, including how the global circulation of intersectionality has been enabled by US hegemony (68). By the early 21st century, intersectionality had been 'widely taken up by scholars, policy advocates, practitioners, and activists in many places and locations', from the highest levels of global policy to grassroots activism, for 'diverse intellectual and political projects' (Collins and Bilge 1).

Intersectional frameworks and approaches proliferated across the humanities and social sciences (and beyond), but nowhere was its institutionalisation and

influence as apparent as in women's and gender studies, particularly in the US. Indeed, in 2005, intersectionality was declared by Leslie McCall to be 'the most important theoretical contribution that women's studies... has made so far' (1171). Intersectionality's incorporation into women's studies instantiated an entire field of feminist studies, in both the US and Europe, in which intersectionality was often recast as the 'brainchild' of feminism, arguably 'undoing' and whitening it as white feminists built careers on what Sirma Bilge has called 'metatheoretical contemplation' ('Intersectionality Undone', 405).

For Nash, the institutionalisation of intersectionality in women's studies in the US is the culmination of a long trend of constructing 'black feminism as a form of discipline on the field' and black feminists as 'a set of disciplinarians who quite literally whip the field into shape with their demands for a feminism that accounts for race generally, and for black women specifically' (13). Yet once this kind of feminist 'progress' had been achieved, continues Nash, intersectionality was problematised on various grounds—including as evidence of the incoherence of the field by Wendy Brown (Brown)—with black feminists held to account for 'fracturing' feminism and left burdened with the task of defending intersectionality (15). Drawing here on Nash's term, the 'intersectionality wars'—a deliberate nod to the feminist sex wars of the 1980s—another front opened up. Black feminists and other feminist scholars advocated for an explicitly political and 'un-disciplined' intersectionality, including by historicising it, re-reading key texts including Crenshaw, re-emphasising race as central to the analytic, and 'opening up intersectionality to decoloniality' (Bilge, 'Whitening Intersectionality' 176).

As various scholars raised, rejected and/or pondered the question about whether intersectionality had already reached and passed its peak in the academy, intersectionality migrated further into popular culture and discourse, including online feminism. In 2011, Flavia Dzodan posted her jeremiad 'My Feminism Will be Intersectional or It Will Be Bullshit!' on the blog Tiger Beat Down, provoked by a widely circulated image of a white feminist at that year's New York City Slut Walk protest, holding aloft a sign which read 'woman is the N* of the world'. Dzodan was hardly the first to call out feminism's long history of problematic analogies between women and other categories of person (for example, slaves), or to question expressions of 'sisterhood', or indeed to promote 'intersectional feminism' as a counterpoint to mainstream feminism. But her catchy mantra had a galvanising effect and helped to popularise the term and to affirm a distinction between intersectional (or black) feminism and mainstream (or white) feminism. In 2014, Dzodan noted the phenomenon of white feminists publicly 'rejecting [intersectionality] the term, but not the concept', on the spurious grounds that the term was alienating and academic. For Dzodan, such disavowals were ultimately a 'rejection of knowledge produced and developed by Black women and other

women on colour'. However, in an ironic twist, 'intersectional feminism' was soon also critiqued as primarily benefitting white women or as a form of white feminist performativity. In Australia, Aboriginal writers Celeste Liddle and Chelsea Bond, as well as Ruby Hamad, have all made compelling arguments to this effect, raising further questions about intersectionality's capacity (or not) to address Indigenous women and non-US contexts. Meanwhile, in the US, the role of white women in the shock election of Donald Trump in November 2016, and the flawed expressions of solidarity and inclusivity during the women's marches that followed, raised further doubts for black feminists and feminists of colour about the possibilities of 'intersectional feminism'. In Nash's analysis, the role black women were invited or expected to perform in the wake of Trump's election, 'made hypervisible what has long been a prevailing account in academic feminism: black women are the beginning and end of politics, the figures that will salvage feminism, even as that salvation might rupture the project of feminism altogether' (135).

For those unfamiliar with Nash's work, it should be obvious by now that she is a key thinker on intersectionality, and an innovative feminist theorist. Her scholarship, like that of Clare Hemmings and Robyn Weigman, interrogates the 'affective pull of prevailing stories' about feminism and women's and gender studies (13). Hers however has a sharper focus on how racialised these stories are and a more specific investment in the generative capacities of black feminisms. As part of this work, Nash has for over a decade now offered what she calls a 'kind of loving critique' of intersectionality (Falcón and Nash 7). In a series of agenda-setting articles and now her second book, published in the influential 'Next Wave: New Directions in Women's Studies' series by Duke University Press, Nash makes some of the most thought-provoking and stimulating contributions so far. These include attending to 'unresolved paradoxes' in intersectional theorising, including the use of black women as 'prototypical intersectional subjects' ('Re-thinking Intersectionality'); starting necessary conversations about how anti-racist feminists are variously 'attached' to intersectionality *or* transnational feminism and why it is that these two analytics are more often than not separated (Falcón and Nash); and theorising 'intersectional originalism' as a reading practice in intersectionality studies ('Feminist Originalism'). Since at least 2013, with her beautiful essay in *Meridians* on 'black feminism's love-politics', Nash has also advocated for 'post-intersectionality', insofar as black feminisms—past and present—would no longer be synonymous with, or reduced to, intersectionality. All of these inter-related interventions and concerns are gathered and extended in *Black Feminism Reimagined*, a title that succinctly describes Nash's scholarship and politics to date. This includes her first book *The Black Body in Ecstasy: Reading Race, Reading Pornography* (2014) in which she boldly advanced a new method of analysing racialised pornography focussed on the 'paradoxes of pleasure', presented as a 'utopian wish' for black feminist theory to move beyond the logic of injury.

As she outlines in the introduction, Nash is concerned with ‘what it has meant for black feminism—and black feminists—to have intersectionality come to occupy the centre of women’s studies and to migrate across disciplinary boundaries, to be both filled with promise and empty of specific meaning’ (2). Here her focus is emphatically on the US academy, and women’s studies in particular, though the crucial issue of black women’s intellectual, political and affective service work obviously extends beyond this arena, as Sara Ahmed has so cogently examined in recent years. Provocatively, Nash contends that ‘there is a single affect that has come to mark contemporary black feminist practice: *defensiveness*’. Black feminists are called on to defend intersectionality as black feminist ‘property’, against its institutional dilution and co-option, and while Nash understands the ‘proprietary impulses’ as a ‘political response to ongoing violence’, she also seeks to ‘reveal how the defensiveness affect traps black feminism, hindering its visionary world-making capacities’. (3) By urging black feminists to ‘let go’, rather than ‘hold on’ to intersectionality, Nash simultaneously stakes a claim for a black feminism that is not the ‘exclusive property of black women’, and that welcomes ‘anyone with an investment in black women’s humanity, intellectual labour, and political visionary work, anyone interested in theorizing black genders in complex and nuanced ways’ (5). It’s an argument Nash makes with necessary qualifications, building purposefully across four chapters, each of which can also stand alone as a distinct intervention. So too can the wide-ranging introduction which brings together a number of histories of intersectionality: as intellectual history; within academic institutions and programs (including black studies, on which I wish she’d written more); as part of the ‘diversity and inclusion complex’; and as its own metatheoretical field.

Nash’s work is always invigorating to read, especially when it enlarges earlier theorising about the ‘politics of reading’ in the intersectionality wars. Here, she skilfully identifies and analyses key interpretative practices such as genealogical accounts of intersectionality’s origins in black feminist activism and thought (sometimes dating back to Sojourner Truth and Anna Julia Cooper in the nineteenth-century) and close readings of Crenshaw, which recuperate, for instance, the ‘basement’ metaphor to stress intersectionality’s capacity to offer structural analysis. Nash argues these are forms of care which nevertheless can confine black feminism to narrow histories that unnecessarily aim to shield or defend intersectionality from potentially transformative critiques. In comparing how her own critiques, as a recognised black feminist, have been positively received and interpreted, in contrast to those of ‘queer theorist’ Jasbir Puar, now the archetypal ‘outsider’ critic of intersectionality, Nash then takes her analyses to the next level. In the first and strongest chapter in the book, ‘love letter from a critic’, Nash models a form of ‘black feminism that can love the critic and can interpret the critic as engaged in a loving practice’ (58). As a sustained

engagement with the politics, emotions and potential of critique, it is a chapter that resonates beyond the terrain Nash covers and it deserves to be widely read.

Nash's commitment to 'reimagining' black feminism (including but not only intersectionality) is never in doubt, and in the generative and loving spirit she so strongly endorses, Nash makes two compelling and optimistic proposals. Firstly, she makes a case for 'reanimating the notion of "women of colour"', by 'reinvigorating connections between transnationalism and intersectionality' she says were undone in the 1990s, at least in US women's studies. Next, she 'encourages a deep embrace and return to intersectionality's judicial orientation' (131) via Crenshaw but also Patricia J. Williams, black feminist lawyer and author of *The Alchemy of Race and Rights* (1992). In making the latter case, in particular, Nash is aware she is going against the tide in black feminism and black studies, both of which, she notes, have become understandably 'preoccupied with death' in the face of unrelenting police violence and state sanctioned racism (110). And while her passing glance at black feminism's major contributions to abolitionist and anti-carceral feminisms on her way to a counter-history verges on dismissive (and in 2020, reads as outdated), Nash's larger point that black feminism exists and circulates in multiple sites and forms stands. It is an audacious yet thoughtful and well-supported conclusion to a book which is at once genuinely provocative and remarkably generous, opening spaces for thoughts and feelings not discussed often enough in relation to both feminism and the academy. In the latter sense, *Black Feminism Reimagined* shares a similar spirit to Aileen Moreton-Robinson's now-classic text *Talkin' Up to the White Woman* (2000), recently re-released in Australia to mark the twentieth anniversary of its publication. Both books are powerful indictments on white feminists and on institutions that proclaim anti-racism while maintaining their privilege and existing power dynamics, including by, among other things, exploiting the labour of black women and women of colour.

On the other hand, there are obvious limits to the comparison, apart from their distance in time and place. As a Goenpul woman of the Quandamooka people, Moreton-Robinson sees feminism as incommensurable with Indigenous sovereignty, whereas Nash offers an explicitly black feminist standpoint, drawing on a long and diverse tradition of black feminism. Moreton-Robinson's theorisation of Indigenous woman's standpoint points to the influence of black feminism—and intersectionality—but also ultimately its limits. And while Moreton-Robinson in 2000 critiqued white feminists as unable or unwilling to comprehend their own whiteness or to properly relinquish power, Nash's emphasis in 2019 is elsewhere—she urges her fellow black feminists to 'let go' of intersectionality and their defensive attachment to it. This call is the most unsettling feature of *Black Feminism Reimagined*, as Nash is well aware, but she makes it because she sees defensiveness as 'a form of obstructed agency,

something that hinders black feminism's theoretical and political agency rather than unleashing it' (137). Yet *Black Feminism Reimagined* is also overflowing with examples that suggest otherwise, raising the question of why it is that 'defending' intersectionality is primarily addressed as an obstacle to the 'visionary genius of black feminism' rather than intrinsic to it. Indeed, in a response to Nash, Tiffany King—one of intersectionality's 'defenders'—persuasively argues for defensiveness as a rich and potentially coalitional form of feminist praxis, while also suggesting 'white women's aggression remains face down in the water throughout the book' (King). These reservations aside, in *Black Feminism Reimagined*—as in her other work—Nash models what she wishes for black feminism and in the process, demonstrates that 'letting go' of intersectionality is hardly the same as abandoning it altogether.

Nash concludes her book with a wish 'for black feminist theory that refuses to do service work for women's studies, and instead compels the field to reckon with its own racially saturated fantasies and attachments' (138). In her new book, *Me Not You: The Trouble with Mainstream Feminism*, Alison Phipps, a Professor of Gender Studies at the University of Sussex, appears to heed such a call, drawing extensively and productively on a wide range of scholarship and activism from black feminists, among others, to identify and critique the 'political whiteness' at the heart of mainstream feminism. Phipps's long-standing research and activist focus has been sexual violence and, from the outset, she acknowledges her debts to 'Black feminists and other feminists of colour, trans women and sex workers (and women who fit two or more of those categories) (4)' who have catalysed her intersectional analysis of it. But though she dedicates her book to them, this is not her audience. Rather, Phipps hopes her 'text might be a companion for other white women who', like her, 'are interested in doing their feminism differently' (11). To this end, she analyses the #MeToo movement—or at least the pop culture, US-centric version of it—as emblematic of wider problems with mainstream—or white—feminism. Like the global women's marches which marked the beginning of Donald Trump's Presidency, the #MeToo movement has revealed the possibilities and limitations of feminist mobilisations. In taking a critical view, Phipps joins a growing field of scholarship similarly focussed on the problematic aspects of a movement which has mostly prioritised the experiences of privileged women and pursued individualised and carceral forms of justice. Her wider critique of mainstream feminism also aligns her book with others which have covered similar terrain—including Sarah Banet-Wieser's *Empowered: Popular Feminism and Popular Misogyny* (2018)—but Phipps also distinguishes her intervention early on by pointing out that 'the mainstream Anglo-American movement is often taken to represent feminism when in fact it does not' (6). It's a deceptively simple point, but one not made often enough.

In defining ‘mainstream feminism’, Phipps notes a series of approximate terms— neo-liberal, institutional, popular, feminism for the 1 percent— which, while not interchangeable, nevertheless share overlapping features, including high visibility, reformist rather than radical agendas and a predominantly (and/or assumed) white, bourgeois constituency. Phipps centres race in her critique of mainstream feminism, and its current exemplar the #MeToo movement, but stops short of making her explicit object of inquiry ‘white feminism’, which she writes is ‘used to denote a feminism which ignores the ideas and struggles of black women’. Many recent and historical references to ‘white feminism’ extend far beyond this basic definition (and by the end Phipps herself aggregates white feminism into its mainstream and reactionary forms), but her use of the concept of ‘political whiteness’ does similar, effective and distinctive work in any case. ‘Political whiteness’ is not exclusive to privileged white people or to mainstream feminism, and is not an ‘identity *per se*’, but describes ‘a set of values, orientations and behaviours’, including ‘narcissism, alertness and an accompanying will to power’. A paradigmatic expression of these tendencies is a type of ‘victimhood’ (real and imagined) which reinforces white privilege and supremacy. In these ways, political whiteness links #MeToo with the backlashes against them, and ‘more reactionary forms of white feminism with the far right’. (6) The challenges that Phipps presents to mainstream feminism are to recognise that ‘acts, threats *and allegations* of sexual violence are all tools of oppression’ and that ‘being a victim and a perpetrator are not mutually exclusive’ (10).

Phipps’s concept of ‘political whiteness’, and her analytic grounding in intersectionality, allows for some fresh analysis of #MeToo. This is an admirable achievement given that the extensive coverage included astute commentary, some of which covered similar ground—such as pointing out that ‘#MeToo is the latest in a long list of feminist movements in which white bourgeois women have co-opted the ideas and resistance of women of colour’ (38), including by erasing or marginalising founder Tarana Burke. She has a knack for deftly weaving together emblematic examples, historical precedents and related phenomena (for example, Anita Hill and Christine Blasey Ford) in new and interesting ways and is careful to qualify that a critique of #MeToo is not the same as discrediting or undermining survivors. Phipps accords #MeToo due recognition for reshaping ‘public understandings of sexual violence’ and for rejuvenating ‘many pre-existing sexual violence projects’ (33). But what is most illuminating are the larger historical and contemporary contexts in which Phipps locates and explains the problems with #MeToo and by extension, mainstream feminism. For a notably compact book, Phipps traverses a lot of ground, joining the dots not only between #MeToo and its first-and-second wave antecedents (or colonial and carceral feminisms), but also between wider intersecting systems which produce sexual violence— heteropatriarchy, racial capitalism and colonialism. Of these systems, Phipps writes, mainstream feminism ‘fails to interrogate two of the three’ (161). While

Phipps—as she respectfully traces throughout—is hardly the first to argue this, her summation is a useful one.

Book-ended by chapters on global right-wing attacks on so-called ‘gender ideology’ and reactionary feminists and their ‘(un)holy alliances’ (for example, trans-exclusionary feminists and Republican lawmakers), *Me Not You* is emphatically current, but also holds promise as a text which will be useful beyond the current moment, or at least as long as seemingly intractable tendencies in mainstream feminism endure. It helps too that UK-based Phipps is not confined to US examples, though there are plenty of those. I read it in the weeks in which the news was dominated first by #BlackLivesMatter then by J. K. Rowling’s transphobia, and while Phipps’s book pre-dated these developments, it nevertheless provided relevant insights. With the rise of the anti-racist reading list, *Me Not You* is preferable to Robin D’Angelo’s best-selling *White Fragility* (2018)—which also purports to explain whiteness to an assumed white audience, but with minimal references to decades of scholarship and activism from people of colour—not least of all because Phipps’s has clearly taken great care to foreground the work of black feminists in particular across a whole range of social justice projects including and especially abolition politics. By the end, she advocates for the abolition of the ‘structures that sustain’ sexual violence and asks the reader to imagine a world without it. Smuggled inside the hot pink cover then is a case for abolition (including abolitionist feminism), a cause which has also moved to the forefront of public debate since *Me Not You* was published. Yet it’s important also not to overstate the prescience of Phipps’s book which after all would not be possible without the ground-breaking activism and writing from Angela Davis, Ruth Wilson Gilmore and others who are cited throughout.

Lola Olufemi too is an abolitionist—and intersectional—feminist, and makes an appearance in Phipps’ book as a Cambridge University student who in 2017 petitioned for more authors of colour to be included on the syllabus, a move that was recast as ‘drop white authors’ by the British tabloid press (24). At Cambridge, Olufemi was heavily involved in the Times Up campaign to address and eradicate sexual violence, and co-founded FLY, the university’s network for women and non-binary people of colour. FLY rallied around Olufemi during the predictable and intense trolling backlash which followed the tabloid treatment of their calls to decolonise the curriculum, linking it to historic and enduring racism in elite higher education and right-wing attacks on black student activists. FLY alumni Odelia Younge, Suhaiymah Manzoor-Khan and Waithera Sebatindira were Olufemi’s co-authors on their first book *A Fly Girl’s Guide to University*, published by Verve Poetry Press in 2019 and pitched at students of colour who have to navigate majority-white institutions of extraordinary privilege and power. In promoting *A Fly Girl’s Guide*, Olufemi urged prospective readers to ‘oppose the idea that the university [is] the only valuable site of knowledge production’ (Frazer-Carroll

2019). It is a philosophy carried over into Olufemi's activism, art (she is a member of bare minimum, an inter-disciplinary, anti-work arts collective), scholarship (she has an MA in Gender Studies from SOAS at the University of London, a rare pocket of higher education that has 'decolonised' to a discernible extent) and now her first sole-authored book, *Feminism Interrupted: Disrupting Power*, published by Pluto Press.

As Olufemi's activism and work to date suggest, she is adept at communicating to and across multiple audiences and in numerous forms. *Feminism Interrupted* falls into the broad genre of a feminist primer, with a distinctly left-radical bent. By largely eschewing the first person, experientially-based authorial mode common to this format, Olufemi models an alternative to liberal feminism's unrelenting focus on the self. Instead she aims not so much to convince readers of the necessity of feminism, as to guide them through the issues she sees as most urgent in contemporary feminism. These include challenging the 'sexist state' (in this case in the UK, but the examples are transferable); exposing the wider, insidious effects of 'transmisogyny' (especially pressing in Britain, where Trans Exclusionary Feminists—or TERFs—are most visible and influential); and re-invigorating the concept of 'consent' by supporting sex workers' rights rather than seeking to abolish sex work on the grounds sex workers 'have no other choice' and therefore can 'not consent' (100). The chapter titled 'The answer to sexual violence is not more prisons' is bracing in its clarity and purpose, cinching the abiding argument that 'feminist work is justice work'. Elsewhere, Olufemi pans out to argue 'solidarity is a doing word' and to advocate for 'insurrectionary artistic practice' (90) as integral to feminism. These chapters too are solidly anchored in well-chosen examples and radical politics. 'The question of who gets to make art', writes Olufemi in opposition to the enduring mantra *arts for art's sake*, 'is inseparable from questions of liberation and freedom' (88).

Occasionally, inevitably, the tone tips over into didacticism, but more remarkable is how accessibly Olufemi makes her case for a radical feminist politics of solidarity. If, as with Phipps's book, some of the themes and arguments might be familiar to the initiated—including that reproductive justice is different to reproductive rights and that Muslim women do not need saving—they are no less engaging for this. The pleasure is in how Olufemi refreshes this material. Similarly, mainstream feminism is critiqued as a necessity and for the usual range of reasons, but Olufemi also sees popular feminism as a potential route to more radical politics. Interestingly, the examples of mainstream feminism in the introduction are the Nigerian writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adiche and her superfan Beyoncé, a terrific example of her gateway feminism argument, plus a reminder that popular feminism is not always, or even no longer, mostly white. Nor are popular and more radical feminisms necessarily antithetical, as examined in Omise'eke Tinsley's 2018 book *Beyoncé in Formation: Remixing Black Feminism. Feminism Interrupted*

is an outward-looking book, in which Olufemi shares the page with grassroots activists and iconic feminist theorists alike, building the case that feminism is work (in the best sense) and future-oriented, with deep histories to draw on.

On this last point—that contemporary feminism has a rich and instructive archive and relatedly that older feminists, particularly black feminists and feminists of colour, are important teachers—*Feminism Interrupted* exemplifies how intersectionality has inspired new and/or revised narratives of feminist history. Olufemi's arguments that black feminism challenges the three-waves model of feminist history and that intersectionality did not originate with Crenshaw but rather with black and other minority feminisms are key to this historical turn. Nash, as mentioned, is concerned that the various genealogies focussed on intersectionality's 'origins' have had a constrictive effect, but Olufemi suggests otherwise, through the kind of transnational lens Nash also advocates. By locating her own activism in the British context, in organisations like the Brixton Black Women's Group (BBWG) and the Organisation of Women of African and Asian Descent (OWAAD) and with activists like Beverly Bryan, Stella Dadzie and Suzanne Scarf (co-authors of the 1985 book *The Heart of the Race: Black Women's Lives in Britain*), Olufemi at once enlarges the historical origins of intersectionality beyond, and in relation to, the usual US examples (for example, Combahee River Collective, whose socialist roots have clear parallels with the British organisations). Olufemi thus reiterates the specificity of Black British feminism, including its local and global orientations. Also included is Claudia Jones, author of the 1949 essay 'An End to the Neglect of the Problems of the Negro Woman!' and an integral member of multiple social movements in both the US and the UK, who is often neglected in the canon of intersectionality's trailblazers. Jones theorised the triple oppression endured by black working-class women as a member of the National Committee of the Communist Party of America. After being deported from the US in the mid-1950s, Jones became a leading activist in the British African-Caribbean community and after her untimely death in 1964, aged only 49, she was buried to the left of Karl Marx in Highgate Cemetery. Like Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge (2016), Olufemi credits the influence of multiple social movements with developing intersectionality, including socialism and communism, which continue to be downplayed in, or airbrushed out of, progress narrative versions of feminist history.

This essay began with the observation that in 2020 intersectionality remains as salient as it has ever been. In relation to feminism, this somewhat obvious statement does not do justice to intersectionality's ongoing dynamic effects. As all three books canvassed in this essay attest, intersectionality clearly continues to inform feminist thought and debate, to offer a bridge between scholarship and activism and to inspire new solidarities and conversations. In Australia, we saw this up close in early 2020 when Patricia Hill Collins—a black feminist theorist and

activist on par with Crenshaw—was a guest of the Australian Critical Race and Whiteness Studies Association. Intersectionality was common ground for Collins and local activists and scholars, but also a generative point of difference. The discussions that took place, especially about intersectionality and its capacity (or not) to address Indigenous women and Indigenous sovereignty, were the kind of dialogues Nash advocates in *Black feminism reimaged*. In her book, Nash’s focus remains almost exclusively on the US and the US academy in particular, but her hopes for intersectionality, and for black feminism and black feminists, are bigger than her immediate context. Meanwhile, as UK-based feminists committed to intersectionality as part of a wider, radical feminist politics, Phipps and Olufemi demonstrate that intersectionality can ‘travel’ without erasing US black feminism or reducing its contribution to intersectionality. Indeed, Olufemi—activist, artist and writer—locates herself in the tradition of Black British feminism, another originating source, she argues, of intersectionality. In this spirit, I encourage Australian readers to seek out any of the titles just reviewed, but to also read (or re-read) the new edition of Moreton Robinson’s *Talkin’ Up to the White Woman* (2020) and/or the work of other Aboriginal women, who think with intersectionality, but also beyond it.³

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³ For example, see Tess Ryan, ‘This Black Body is Not Yours for the Taking’ in *#MeToo and the Politics of Social Change*, edited by Bianca Fileborn and Rachel Loney-Howes, Palgrave Macmillan, 2019, 117-32.

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