



# Intersectional Directions in Working Life Research—a Proposal

■ **Paula Mulinari**<sup>1</sup>

*PhD in Gender Studies, Researcher and Lecturer at the Department of Social work, Malmö University, Sweden*

■ **Rebecca Selberg**

*PhD in Sociology, Researcher at the Department of Gender Studies, Lund University, Sweden*

## ABSTRACT

A central challenge to gender studies during the last 15 years has been the expanding field of intersectionality. The use of intersectional perspectives within working life research has explored how class, sexuality, and race difference affected women's position in the labor market. The aim of this article is to argue for the need of including an intersectional perspective in the field of working life research. By taking our point of departure in the work of feminist scholars Joan Acker, Miriam Glucksmann, and Chandra Talpade Mohanty, we argue that an intersectional perspective can expand as well as challenge working life research. But we also argue that working life research in many ways can contribute to the field of intersectional studies, especially by placing issues of exploitation, distribution, and production at the core of intersectional analyses.

## KEY WORDS

*Intersectionality / gender research / inequality / class / racialization*

## Introduction

The contribution of gender studies and its impact on the field of working life research in Sweden cannot be stressed enough (Knocke 1981; Gonäs 1989; Baude 1992; Sommestad 1992; Abrahamsson 2000; Christensson 2000). Pioneering work on behalf of feminist and gender researchers<sup>1</sup> drew attention to and explored women's reproductive work and specifically the relationship between paid and unpaid work. Scholarship such as this forced a reconsideration of the concepts of "work" and "economy," and challenged labor analyses at its core by leading the way in terms of developing new methods, new analytical tools, and theoretical perspectives in order to understand the many features and facets of labor and its meaning in people's lives. These contributions expanded the field of working life research, in Sweden as well as in other countries (cf. Bradley 1989, p. 33ff; Thompson 1989, p. 184ff).

Taking our point of departure in this successful dialogue between the fields of feminist and gender studies and working life studies, we argue that much could be gained from a continual exchange and a reciprocal openness between gender research

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<sup>1</sup> E-mail: paula.mulinari@mah.se



and working life studies toward its respective developments, traditions, and themes. Based on our experiences from participating in the last three (2011–2013) of the major annual working life research conferences in Sweden, organized by the Swedish Forum for Working Life Research, and an overview of the abstracts presented at two of these conferences,<sup>2</sup> we see the need for a renewed discussion on the benefits of a reinvigorated dialogue between gender studies and working life studies. This is not so because gender is ignored in working life studies in Sweden, especially not in terms of awareness of gender segregation and differences in, i.e., working conditions between men and women in the Swedish labor market, but because major developments in gender studies—including the aim of moving beyond categorical thinking that takes gendered binaries for granted, challenging heteronormativity, and explore complex inequalities and the mutual reinforcement of different power relations—seem to be missing from what one could call the current interest formation in Swedish working life research.

The aim of this paper is to discuss how the concept of intersectionality can be used within working life research, and indeed how it has been used successfully by a number of scholars who may not be considered part of the mainstream Swedish working life research community, if such a community could be said to exist. We argue that intersectional perspectives provide researchers with productive analytical tools that could both deepen and broaden the field of Swedish and Nordic working life studies and strengthen the field of working life studies as a central interlocutor of emancipatory/critical perspectives within the social sciences. We will also argue that while Nordic working life research needs to open up for feminist intersectional approaches in order to capture complex inequalities in times of globalization, the growing interest in intersectional perspectives within gender studies also need to include an interest in and recognition of the vast body of research and theoretical advancements produced within the field of working life studies.

The first section of the article will introduce and locate the concept of intersectionality, specifically understandings and conceptualizations of intersectionality developed within a materialist sociological tradition. In the second part of the article, the shift in gender studies toward a poststructuralist understanding of intersectionality will be discussed briefly. The central focus of this article, however, is on three feminist scholars who we argue provide especially relevant theoretical frames and who can be used as sources of inspiration in bridging feminist intersectional research with working life studies.

### **The concept of intersectionality**

Intersectionality is at the core of today's agenda in gender studies (Davies 2011). According to McCall (2005, p. 117), "one could even say that intersectionality is the most important theoretical contribution that women's studies, in conjunction with related fields, have made so far." The concept was introduced by what has been defined as Black feminist scholarship in the United States, and the term first appeared in Kimberley W. Crenshaw's text "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Anti-discrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Anti-racist Politics" (1989), in which the author critically examined white feminists' understanding of rape and

anti-discrimination politics. Crenshaw argued that in the United States, Black women were excluded from both feminist theory and anti-racist policies, as neither considered the *intersections* of gender and race. In her own words, “because the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism, any analysis that does not take intersectionality into account cannot sufficiently address the particular manner in which black women are subordinated” (ibid., p. 140). Taking the experience of Black women as their point of departure, authors such as Angela Davis (1981), Moraga and Anzaldúa (1981), bell hooks (1984), and Patricia Hill Collins (1990) critically examined the knowledge production and political implications of dominant mainstream feminist theory and feminist activism, all the while developing analytical concepts that made visible the lives of Black and Chicana women.

A similar process took place in the United Kingdom, where scholars such as Nira Yuval-Davis and Floya Anthias (1992) and Avtar Brah (1996) explored the tensions between gender, the colonial experience, and racism in terms of intersectionality. Like Black feminists in the United States, these authors stressed the importance of integrating other power relations besides gender into feminist theories. Almost two decades later, intersectionality (in all its various meanings and implementations) has in many ways transformed the ways in which gender studies, and to some extent also feminist politics, is produced and enacted. Even though the perspective has been questioned<sup>3</sup> and further developed (McCall 2005; Yuval-Davis 2006; Anthias 2012; Cho et al. 2013), most authors agree that the introduction of an intersectional perspective has had a profound impact on gender studies:

Intersectional analysis of social divisions has come to occupy central spaces in both sociological and other analyses of stratification as well as in feminist and other legal, political and policy discourses of international human rights. There has been a gradual recognition of the inadequacy of analyzing various social divisions, but especially race and gender, as separate, internally homogeneous, social categories resulting in the marginalization of the specific effects of these, especially on women of color. (Yuval-Davis 2006, p. 206)

In Sweden, gender researchers in the fields of ethnic and migration studies, as well as postcolonial studies, introduced the term intersectionality. Paulina de los Reyes (1998, 2001, and together with Mulinari 2005), Irene Molina (2005, 2006), and Diana Mulinari (2002) were among those who challenged the hegemony in Swedish gender studies and its focus on the category of gender by calling attention to social relations that up until then had been mostly excluded from the gaze of research, and the complex relationship between “the woman-friendly” welfare state, its gender regime, and its migration and ethnic regime.

Intersectionality also opened up for a critical re-thinking of the tensions between gender and (hetero-)sexuality (Dahl 2011), as well as for the analysis of the production of specific forms of femininity and masculinity, in working life (Robertsson 2002; Nehls 2003; Hearn & Heiskanen 2004; Nilsson 2006) as well as in other spheres of life (cf. Gottzén & Jonsson 2012). The introduction and use of intersectionality within a Swedish context in some ways has led to an increased interest in and grasping of the webs of inequalities and identity formations, and it is because of this that we argue that analyses of working life in many ways have a lot to contribute to the debate on how to conceptualize and operationalize intersectionality in research.



## Intersectionality and work

Issues of work have been important in shaping intersectional perspectives. Women's different positions within the globalized economy and its transformations of both production and reproduction made visible the need for an intersectional perspective in analyses of work (Cavendish 1982; Phizacklea 1990; Crompton 1993; Glenn 2002; McCall 2005). Feminist researchers such as Miriam Glucksmann (aka Ruth Cavendish) and Annie Phizacklea grasped through their research the racialized, gendered, and classed processes that shape the organization of work. In looking back at her ethnography from Smiths Industries in London, Glucksmann identifies that a key theme of the book was

[t]he organisation of production and of the factory, the hierarchical occupational structure, and how it was experienced, responded to and resisted. Central to this were the criss-crossing and intersecting divisions between women and men, and between different groups of male and female workers. Ethnicity and nationality are highlighted as fundamental to this, and also the shifting alliances between groups of women at good and low times. (Glucksmann 2009, p. xvi)

As has been pointed out (Hemmings 2005), the dominant story of the genealogy of gender studies claims that 1970s and 1980s gender research, specifically if it was produced in dialogue with Marxist theory, constructed women as a homogenous group and failed to recognize power differences between women, specifically power differences rooted in race/ethnicity and sexuality. Glucksmann and Phizacklea's (1990) worksite ethnographies show that this "feminist story-telling" excludes important and pioneering work of that time, which today can be conceptualized as intersectional in its approaches and careful analyses of what Glucksmann later named "intersecting divisions." These studies explored processes of work to illustrate some of the ways in which class, gender, and race/ethnicity, as active and ongoing practices (Acker 2006a, p. 45), constitute each other. This type of working life research thus highlighted how women privileged by their class, race, and sexuality held power over other women's bodies and labor force. This insight has been central in furthering the understanding of new international divisions of labor in the wake of neoliberal globalization. What feminist working life studies did, then, was illuminating both the complex inequalities that shape women's lives, and the problematic assumptions made in other cases of gender studies that *all* women face the same forms of oppression in relation to paid and unpaid work.

Another important development in intersectional analysis has been the exploration of the effects of national economies' interdependence of women and men's lives in a postcolonial world (Inowlocki & Lutz 2000). The labor market and the economy, both at the micro- and the macro-level, do not only play out on the national arena, but instead depend on the flow of money, goods, and humans locally and globally. These flows are gendered and racialized. Linda McDowell et al. (2009) illustrated this through an ethnographic study of the working conditions at a hotel and a hospital in London. The authors showed that local developments, such as the increasing use of "exploitative, non-standard labor contracts" in the expanding service economy in the London area, used to "meet peaks and demands for workers," correspond to new migratory flows across Europe and the world. Migrant workers are more likely to work for agencies and on non-standard labor contracts, putting them in an especially precarious situation.

However, as the McDowell et al. study illustrates, there are differences among migrant workers as well:

Economic migrants from outside the expanded European Community, especially those who have no automatic right to remain and those without work permits, are exceptionally vulnerable. These migrants are trapped in the most precarious positions of the labour market, with little prospect of escape. It seems that a new hierarchy of inequality is developing within the migrant division of labour in Greater London. This new hierarchy is distinguished not only by legal status and the right to work but also by ethnicity and skin colour. (McDowell et al. 2009, p. 19f)

This study, focused on working conditions among migrants employed through non-standard contracts and often through agencies in a specific geographical area of the United Kingdom, used an intersectional perspective to stress the importance of grasping the impact of the global economy in a local context.

According to Holgate et al. (2010), gender within the field of Industrial Relations studies has been conceptualized and treated through what Sandra Harding identified as “feminist empiricism.” This means that women have been added to the analysis, but the theories employed to explore the social processes at play have often remained the same. The authors argue that a gender study in this sense has not challenged the foundations of the field of industrial relations. We would argue that the Swedish working life research differs from what is found in the United Kingdom in this respect. Gender analyses have been successfully included in working life studies, often through means of theoretical tools that do capture the gendered feature of labor and work organizations. However, these analyses have often failed to explore, and thus rendered invisible, processes of racialization. While issues of racism and colonialism have been central to the development of intersectional perspectives in the United States and the United Kingdom, Swedish gender research on working life has focused on the intersections of class and gender. There are exceptions, however. Wuokko Knocke was one of the first gender and working life scholars who explored the ways in which racism shapes the labor market and migrant women’s lives in Sweden. Almost two decades ahead of the debate on intersectionality, she challenged scholarly analysis of the Swedish labor market as structured solely by class and gender inequalities (Knocke 1986, 2011). She convincingly showed that migrant women often worked full time and with other assignments than Swedish-born women workers (Knocke 1981), and her research thus explored and explained how race, class, and gender shaped labor segregation and segmentation. She further showed that Swedish trade unions, by ignoring issues of ethnic discrimination and racism in the labor market, failed to represent their entire membership base, all the while contributing to reproducing ethnic inequalities and divisions within workplaces.

Along with Knocke, two other pathbreaking interventions in the field of Swedish working life studies should be mentioned here: sociologist Aleksandra Ålund’s work on migrant women at the crossroads between transnational families and work (Ålund 1991, 1994), and economic historian Paulina de los Reyes’ (2000) systematic reading of the relationship between Swedish and migrant women’s different and hierarchical positions within the labor market. The work of these scholars represents early and central contributions that have illuminated not only the multiple forms produced and reproduced in the Swedish labor market but also the links between migration, racism,



gender, and divisions of labor across public/private divides. There are other intersectional analyses of work located in the field of gender studies that have illuminated the specific position of migrant and racialized workers (such as Boréus & Mörkenstam 2010; Huzell & Lundberg 2010; Sager 2011; Abbasian & Hellgren 2012), the racialization and gendering of the labor process itself, as well as the impact of neoliberal economics in the organization and transformation of care work in Europe (Calleman 2007; Gunnarsson & Szebehely 2009; Gavanoas 2010; Strollo 2013). Thus, there exists a stream of intersectional working life research within the research tradition of working life studies in Sweden, although we would argue that the works of these authors rarely have been acknowledged as central to this field.

While questions of work and labor have been important in shaping an intersectional perspective in Swedish gender studies, they seem to play a more peripheral role today. It seems that somewhere in its journey to the heart of gender studies, intersectionality was delinked from analyses of work and economic relations (Walby 2009). The genealogy of the concept is well framed in materialist understandings of inequalities, often focused on issues of both recognition and redistribution (Fraser 1995), but during recent years, the term has traveled toward a more poststructuralist and even postmodern inspired understanding (Mohanty 2003). This is a shift that has made issues of working life marginal in gender studies—which is paradoxical, considering the present historical context where gendered identities and conflicts evolve from transformations and new demands in working life (cf. Adkins & Lury 1999; see also Bradley (1996) on the linguistic turn in social sciences and its effect on issues of class and economy).

In the book *Framing Intersectionality* (Lutz et al. 2011), which brings together several important voices in the debate on the concept, none of the chapters addresses issues of work—and the authors argue that “urgent and important” (ibid., p. 9) research on intersectionality is made in areas like queer, disability, and masculinity studies. In *Nordic Journal of Feminist Theory (NORA)*, many articles that present or include an intersectional perspective have been published (such as Staunæs 2003; Kvist & Peterson 2010; Andersson 2012), but few of them are engaged in analyses of labor market issues (although see Della Puppa 2012). This is not to say that there are no gender analyses of the labor market, or that no queer or postcolonial analyses of work are being done. Neither does it mean that research produced on vital topics ranging from sexuality to whiteness is not of high scholarly quality, or that they are unimportant. Indeed, these are pressing issues in today’s world, affecting people on an everyday basis. Our argument is of a different character: Gendered and racialized experiences of paid work in the context of employment, and the forms of organizations, struggles, and identities evolving from it, have a rather marginal impact on the theoretical and methodological development within today’s gender studies. This suggests that gender research on working life is neither at the center of gender studies or intersectional studies, and that intersectional perspectives have failed to be incorporated into the field of working life studies.

### **The concept of class and the poststructuralist shift in gender studies**

During the 1970s, the critique against Marxism’s inability to grasp class as a lived experience and not only as a structural position within capitalism grew. Inspired by Marxist theorists such as Antonio Gramsci, as well as historians such as E.P. Thompson, Marxist

class analysis explored formations of class identity in terms of social construction and as a political and ideological subject (Willis 1977; Ambjörnsson 1988; Horgby 1993). However, despite the attempts to create a more dynamic analysis of class and work, Marxist theories were still questioned for their inability to theorize resistance and agency (Grint 2000). Researchers in gender and race studies challenged the ontological privilege class took within Marxist analyses. The turn from Marxism toward poststructural perspectives stressing the role of language and discourse in producing and maintaining inequalities has been labeled the cultural and/or linguistic turn in the social sciences. In many ways, this development has been fruitful and has in some ways coincided with the introduction of intersectional perspectives. The cultural turn has been important in challenging vulgar Marxist and feminist assumptions of gender and class relations as monolithic and deterministic relations. The focus on language and discourses is central to the understanding of how processes of inequalities are reproduced and challenged. However, as Skeggs argued in her pioneering book *Formations of Class and Gender* (1997), the hegemonic position that poststructuralist perspectives took within gender studies led to a marginalization of class analysis within that field while also changing the ways in which we ask questions about class, work, and the economy (Acker 2006a). We argue that the focus on language and culture has resulted in class being delinked from issues of labor and work. While class began to count again in the beginning of the new millennium (ibid.), much thanks to the success of intersectional perspectives being brought forward in gender studies through the lens of, for instance, masculinity studies and the pioneering work of scholars such as Raewyn Connell (1995), class has mostly been understood in this context as a cultural phenomenon and the focus has been on the performance of class identities and classed subjectivities. Linking class to the capitalist system and its specific modes of production and reproduction, as well as to issues of ownership, labor processes and exploitation is still often understood as taking a deterministic and essentialist position (cf. Holgersson 2011). Class has been turned into a question of culture (Ebert & Zavarzadeh 2008).

We want to acknowledge Skeggs' work, and the work it has inspired (in Sweden among others Ambjörnsson 2004). However, we believe that it is central to reintroduce a concept of class in gender studies that is linked to the organization of work and the economy; a concept that can grasp relations of exploitation and inequality, and explore the transference of resources and power between different bodies. We want to focus on class as a social relation that is vital for the production and reproduction of capitalism and patriarchy, and not seen as a category among other categories. Our argument here is that there is a need to supplement studies analyzing how class is done in terms of consumption patterns and access to symbolic capital, with analyses of how unequal relations between women are created in the context of paid work, and where different groups of women occupy different positions within the organization of labor. We strongly agree with Mohanty when she asserts that today, it is important for feminist studies to

see the processes of corporate globalization and how and why they recolonize women's bodies and labor. We need to know the real and concrete effects of global restructuring on raced, classed, national, sexual bodies of women in the academy, in workplaces, streets, households, cyberspaces, neighborhoods, prisons, and social movements. (Mohanty 2003, p. 516)



Feminist scholars have identified the lack of interaction in the academic debate between class and intersectionality. Anthias (2012, p. 125) argues that there is a need to “rethink the newer approaches to class in tandem with other forms of social hierarchy and boundary construction which relate to difference and inequality, such as those of ‘race’ and gender and this is where the interrogation of the usefulness of intersectionality approaches is relevant.” We agree that there is a need for new debates on class and its relation to work and the economy; this is crucial especially at a time when class inequalities are growing—and they are growing faster in Sweden than in any other OECD country (OECD 2013). We believe that gender research in the field of working life studies can contribute to this debate.

As we have pointed out, there is a strong tradition of intersectional analyses taking their point of departure in issues of work, and these should be brought to the forefront of current studies of working life and inspire more working life research to employ intersectional perspectives. An important aspect here is that such studies need to engage critically both in the use of intersectionality as a theoretical and analytical tool, and in the debate surrounding intersectionality within gender studies. Gender research on working life would bring highly needed perspectives into today’s debates on intersectionality, for instance by introducing questions and theoretical frames that can examine issues of labor and industrial relations, resistance and compliance, social mobilization, labor processes, and technology. This would allow for deeper explorations into, on the one hand, the continuity of patterns of inequality and, on the other hand, the variability and heterogeneity through which inequalities are lived.

In the next section of the article, we introduce authors who we feel can be used as inspiration for such intersectional analyses within working life research.

### **Intersectional lighthouses: Joan Acker, Miriam Glucksmann, and Chandra Talpade Mohanty**

Women’s different positions within neoliberal globalization and its transformation of production and reproduction have in many ways made visible the need for intersectional perspectives in analyses of work. The scholarly production of the three feminist researchers we are about to discuss is broad and extensive, and we will briefly identify what in our understanding are the central interventions for the field of working life studies.

Through the work of feminist organization scholars, research has established the gendered feature of work and occupations. Joan Acker (1990) pioneered this perspective by challenging the notion of organizations as rational entities, devoid of assumptions about bodies. Instead, Acker argued that organizations are intrinsically gendered and that notions of gender and sexuality permeate their everyday practices to the benefit of certain bodies, notably white, heterosexual men. Consequently, organizations create and recreate inequalities through their structures, practices, and culture. Relations of work are gendered through a variety of mechanisms and processes, Acker (1990, p. 145f) argues, as “the structure of the labour market, relations in the workplace, the control of the work process, and the underlying wage relation are always affected by symbols of gender, processes of gender identity, and material inequalities between women and men.” Since Acker’s groundbreaking work, feminist research has illustrated through empirical investigations the ways in which “gendered practices and assumptions are embedded in



organising processes” (Acker 2006a, p. 105), and has proved that while masculinity is associated with strength, rationality, and cerebral capabilities, femininity structures often “less well-regarded jobs” (McDowell 2009, p. 53) and is associated with emotions, dexterity, inferiority, and accommodation (Kanter 1977; Pringle 1988; Salzinger 2003).

Through her focus on class as a relation of power within the realm of production and reproduction, accumulation, and distribution, Acker employs a concept of power that acknowledges inequalities as relations of exploitation as well as issues of recognition. Thus capitalism comes into question as a system within which freedom, equality, and collective human power are impossible; class is inequality, and capitalism presupposes class. Acker’s contribution, we argue, directs analytical attention to ongoing processes and practices of gendering and racializing that are integral to the production and reproduction of class. She distinguishes between class practices, gendering and racializing processes, and effects of gendered and racialized class practices. Class practices refer to activities that “organize and control production and distribution” (2006a, p. 50); gendering and racializing processes shape these practices, the effects of which are varying forms of inequalities that are naturalized by means of ideologies of natural differences. There are different points of entry into analyzing gendered and racialized class practices, but as these relations are created in part by organizing practices “that accomplish the practical goals of production and distribution,” one way to analyze their historical production is to focus on the organizations through which the capitalist economy functions (ibid., pp. 105, 106). Class happens in organizations as some people work, others work by managing work, pay wages, perform ownership control, and/or bring home profit. Acker draws attention to bodies in this respect, stating that “bodies as images, imaginations, and physically present and active are the essential material conditions for the ongoing practices that we label as work and gendered and racialized class relations” (ibid., p. 108).

The capitalist economy works mainly through organizations, Acker argues, and these organizations shape gendered and racialized class relations in that they “decide what should be produced and what services should be offered” (Acker 2006b, p. 443). To grasp those processes, Acker develops the concept of inequality regimes:

All organisations have inequality regimes, defined as loosely interrelated practices, processes, actions and meanings that result in and maintain class, gender and racial inequalities within particular organisations. [...] I define inequality in organizations as systematic disparities between participants in power and control over goals, resources and outcomes; workplace decisions such as how to organise work; opportunities for promotion and interesting work; security in employment and benefits; pay and other monetary rewards; respect; and pleasures in work and work relations. (ibid.)

The inequality regime of an organization corresponds to the history, politics, and economy of the surrounding society. Inequality regimes are various, complex, and changeable. Thinking in terms of organizations’ inequality regimes is a conceptual strategy for examining the production and reproduction of complex inequalities within organizations. Even though it treats the inequality regime as specific to a certain organization, the analysis is based on an understanding of organizations as embedded in wider relations of power and inequality, and the approach allows for exploration of patterns of inequalities as they extend beyond the analytical unit and the experience of those working



within the organization at hand. In this way, the concept is also a dynamic and useful tool in intersectional analyses with different starting points.

For example, Arne Nilsson (2006) shows that in the Swedish America Line passenger cruise-ships, which traveled the route Gothenburg–New York between 1915 and 1975, the gender regime that organized work was not hetero-normative, as gay men were recruited and defined as “good workers” on the boats. However, the homosexual men on staff were placed in service positions and were excluded from male-coded work onboard, for example, in the machine room. The local inequality regime was thus shaped by heterosexuality, but the consequences of it—in this particular case where gay men were considered suitable for serving married women traveling alone—created a space where heterosexuality as such was, untypically, not the norm.

Acker’s way of conceptualizing the inequality regime by arguing for class as gendered and racialized has been considered problematic, especially for those who disagree with the centrality of class in the construction of the social (such as Holgersson 2008). We believe that since the concept of class places the attention on issues of distribution, production, and reproduction, and power within organizations, it also opens up for analyses of complex formations of power and inequalities, as well as resistance and change, that actively link material and symbolic orders. While we would not agree with the ontological place Acker gives class in relationship to gender and race and other social relations, we want to acknowledge the centrality of the concept as a source of inspiration to intersectional analyses of work and organizations. For Acker, intersectional analyses are framed in a materialist tradition that combines a focus on the doing of gender and racialization with processes of distribution, ownership, and the dynamics of the capitalist economy. Because of this, we argue that Acker’s work can be used as an intersectional inspiration for analyses of the role of gender, race, and sexuality in shaping the working life and its organizations.

Acker’s analysis is linked mostly to organizations, and its main focus is not on the global economic links shaping these organizations. One way of expanding this particular perspective is by looking at the ways in which different arenas, seemingly unconnected in the everyday world, are really dependent on each other. Sociologist Miriam Glucksmann (1990, 2000) has explored these interconnections and interdependencies through her concept of the Total Social Organization of Labor, TSOL. This concept allows for explorations of how different “work activities” are related and how different arenas, which are usually analyzed and interpreted separately, are intertwined and form a complex network at the level of everyday practices. TSOL is a model aiming to grasp four different prisms through which different aspects of work can be studied. The first prism is through processes that involve production, distribution, exchange, and consumption of goods; the second one is the boundaries between public and private; the third between the conceptualization of markets and non-markets, what is understood as work and what is not; the fourth involves work–time dimensions. The model aims to grasp the major issues concerning time, space, and different arenas of life; how these variables are entangled; and how this affects different groups of people in particular locations.

Glucksmann (2000, p. 18ff) describes her initial thought behind the model: trying to capture the links between the works of different socio-economic contexts. Instead of making a distinction between work in general, and work carried out within the framework of formal employment, she wanted to use an inclusive concept—one that recognized as

work both paid and unpaid, and in some cases almost indistinguishable from life's other human (social, cultural, family-based) relationships. The underlying assumption here is that what counts as work, and what does not, changes through time and space.

The TSOL is a model that can seem a bit too complex to use in practical research. One way of illustrating it is, however, to use a concrete example, employing an everyday phenomenon. Such an example is breast-feeding, although perhaps a counterintuitive one. If we see a woman breast-feeding today, we assume that she is the child's biological mother, who in an intimate act provides both closeness and nourishment to her child. Breast-feeding can indeed be a private moment between mother and child, but breast-feeding is also a part of the reproductive work performed by many women. Breast-feeding is feeding (recognized as reproductive work by, among others, DeVault 1994); it requires some preparation, physical sacrifices (not just in terms of what the woman herself can eat and drink and what clothes she can wear—it also requires physical effort, often felt in the neck and shoulders). It often requires concentration, and time. It is a necessity that if it did not exist would have to be replaced with the work of buying and later assembling baby bottles and milk prepared to just the right temperature. The supply part is reproductive work, and breast-feeding is feeding into what is now considered an intimate sphere. But at other times and in other places, it has been a service some paid others for, or had their domestic workforce perform for them. In Sweden, women who have an abundance of breast milk are today encouraged to sell it to hospitals' neonatal units. Thus, in this physically intimate and seemingly natural act, the shifting boundaries and connections that Glucksmann talks about can be made visible. Breast-feeding and bottle feeding is further surrounded by an industry where some people work to produce and provide consumers with baby bottles, baby milk powder, breast pumps, bottle sterilizers, small rubber shields to protect sore nipples, and so on. Gendered welfare state practices and traditions are reproduced through work with information on the benefits of breast-feeding, and outside the limits of the welfare state there are voluntary formal and informal structures to convey the same thing. Even global politics is involved, as the World Health Organization makes policy decisions on how women ought to breast-feed around the globe. Framing the phenomenon of breast-feeding, there is therefore work firstly to produce, distribute, and consume goods linked to breast-feeding; secondly, the limits being created between breast-feeding as a market and nursing as a private act, and between nursing as a paid service and as an intimate act; there is, thirdly, the limits we create when we choose to define breast-feeding as something other than work, even when women pump milk and then sell it, and even though breast-feeding is feeding that requires labor; and, fourth, time aspects of all of this that means that breast-feeding is considered in different ways at different times and also requires time in different ways. This could be one way to proceed to look at phenomena that link market, the private, the intimate, and the commercial through the four prisms that form the basis of the TSOL model. The most important aspect of the model, in our view, is that it shows how these different arenas are related and affect or even cause one another. Our example gives a brief illustration as to how the concepts of TSOL can be used in order to explore the ways in which what appears to be completely different spheres really are shaped in relation to one another, by processes that shift over time and space, and which are gendered, classed, and racialized.

While both Glucksmann and Acker acknowledge global and transnational dimensions, they are not at the heart of their arguments. We finally, therefore, would like to



discuss the contributions of Chandra Talpade Mohanty (2003) to analyses of working life. In the Swedish context, Mohanty is often thought of as a postcolonial writer with a background in literature, working mostly on issues of discourse, representation, and identity (Wetherell & Mohanty 2010). However, a close reading of her work shows that labor in general and women's work in particular are central questions of social justice and transnational solidarity posed by the author. As one of the principal figures of a postcolonial feminist perspective, Mohanty has critically examined the ways in which "Western" feminism represented the lives of women in the periphery, exposing in these representations legacies of colonialism and racism. In her renowned text "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses" (Mohanty 1988), she explored the "production of the 'Third World Woman' as a singular monolithic subject" (p. 333). The author shows how the category of "Third World Woman" as a fixed, ahistorical subject emerges within gender studies, through scholarship narrowed to Eurocentric notions of gender and patriarchy. The central argument is that this category is created in a hierarchical relation toward the self-representation of Western women as "modern women." It is through this binary, hierarchical opposition that the category of Third World Woman is linked to notions of oppression, isolation, patriarchy, (fundamentalist) religious order, etc. In the text she shows, among other things, how Western feminism on a discursive level appropriates knowledge about Third World Women and thus captures the colonial gaze of gender studies. But she also stresses the importance of local and contextual analyses of social phenomena, particularly by underlining the need for contextualized feminist analyses grasping the specific ways in which patriarchal power, class, colonialism, and racism intersect at the local level. This is a theme she has returned to since, arguing that "the local and the global is undoubtedly interconnected by parallel, contradictory and sometimes converged power relations that positions women in different and in similar locations as workers" (Mohanty 2003, p. 135).

We think this is a vital part of intersectional analysis, which should not only be seen as a tool to analyze intersections of class, gender, sexuality, and "race"/ethnicity, but also as a way to conceptualize the effect of economies and their mutual interdependence. Further, there is a need to critically examine the knowledge production of both gender and working life research from a feminist postcolonial perspective in order to dismantle the ways in which these fields continue to represent the lives and labor of Third World Women. While Mohanty certainly provides us with tools to do this through her own research, she also emphasizes the importance of studying women's work in different social and economic settings. Women's work, both as an ideological construction and as an everyday practice, can function as a way of comparing the lives of women across social spheres. Mohanty stresses the importance of understanding women's work as locations for transnational feminist solidarity, but she also points to the need for analyzing the "historically specific naturalization of gender and race hierarchies" (2003, p. 141) in the construction of women's work, as well as in the creation of particular categories of workers:

In the case of women workers in the free-trade zones in a number of countries, trade unions have been the most visible forum for expressing the needs and demands of poor women. The sexism of trade unions, however, has led women to recognize the need for alternative, more democratic organizational structures, and to form women's unions (as in Korea, China, Italy, and Malaysia) or to turn to community groups, church committees, or

feminist organizations. In the United States, Third World immigrant women in electronics factories have often been hostile to unions that they recognize as clearly modeled in the image of the white, male, working-class American worker. Thus, church involvement in immigrant women workers struggles has been an important form of collective struggle in the United States. (Mohanty 2003, p. 163)

Mohanty highlights how women's work can be viewed as important sites to grasp the ways in which global capitalism structures everyday life through the coding of specific forms of labor and organizing as female/male or migrant. She argues that it is important for research to explore and account for the ways in which, for example, migrant women have common interests as workers, but also shares specific social circumstances as women (*ibid.*). Thus, Mohanty's empirical examples, for instance of Korean Women Workers Association's occupation of a Masan factory in 1989, draw attention to strategies of collective resistance that highlight for instance "poor women workers' building community as a form of survival" (*ibid.*).

One way of reading Mohanty, then, is as a call for working life research to explicitly aim to change today's unequal capitalist economy, and to understand and acknowledge women's work as central to both the construction and the challenge of global inequalities. In this sense, Mohanty differs from many gender scholars in that she locates the frame of feminist solidarity on the shop floors of neoliberal global capitalism. Work in its many forms is a central activity in people's lives, and one of the reasons why resistance against inequality and exploitation takes place at workplaces across the globe is because of this fundamental fact. Paid work is central not only because it provides economic assets, but also because it is a place of solidarity, pride, and identity, inclusion, exclusion, discrimination, promotion, status, health and ill-health, freedom and constraint, acceptance, respect, and oppression: it is all there, in places where work is performed. Like Mohanty, more gender scholars need to engage in issues of work because of this.

## Conclusion

This article has been written in the spirit of wanting to bridge traditions and fields and to emphasize the need for intersectionality to be integrated into research on working life. Just as gender researchers challenged Marxist and liberal concepts of class and work, intersectionality challenges gender studies and its understandings of power, privilege, and relations of domination and subjugation. It therefore has the potential of broadening our conceptions of labor and work as well. We argue that there is a long tradition of intersectional analyses of working life that can function as inspiration to Nordic working life studies, but also that there exists and is being produced important research on the labor market and the working life within the framework of intersectionality. This research, and the conceptual tools developed within it, needs to be incorporated into working life research. We have chosen to introduce a number of authors whom we feel have made central contributions to intersectional analyses of work and labor, but who are yet to be included as scholars central to the field of working life research in Sweden and the Nordic countries. Their research should also inspire gender scholars to once again place analyses of labor and work at the heart of gender studies. Thus, what we are hoping for is an expanded interest formation in both working life and gender research,



one recognizing work as a central issue, and intersectionality as a central analytical tool. Nordic working life studies need to include an intersectional perspective that acknowledges the centrality of multiple inequalities in the ways through which labor markets are regulated, working lives are lived and experienced, and new forms of solidarity and resistance are constructed. We propose, quite simply, a renewed and reinvigorated dialogue between gender research and working life research.

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## End notes

- <sup>1</sup> We make a vague distinction here by pointing out that researchers who have explored gender in the labor market have not always identified themselves or their research as feminist. Feminist research, to us, is research that in some way locates itself in the political project of feminism and can be viewed as normative in the sense that it strives toward equality by, for instance, taking the standpoint of women and/or other subordinated groups in society.
- <sup>2</sup> Going over the abstracts submitted to the two latest conferences (2012 and 2013), we found that a vast majority dealt with work environment and health, including work/life balance; work performance and organizational performance and psychosocial factors related to this; and leadership/management issues, including managerial regimes such as New Public Management, Lean production, etc. Out of 112 abstracts compiled in the conference material posted online, 29 described research that specifically looked into questions of either gender or ethnicity, and/or inequality/equality on the labor market or in specific workplaces.
- <sup>3</sup> Indeed, one of the authors we will write about later on in the article, Joan Acker (2006a), feels that the term intersectionality still connotes different and separate structures that add to each other in much the same way two-system theory did; she suggests talking about gendering and racializing processes instead.