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THEOLOGY: BIOGRAPHICAL – CONTEXTUAL –
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The Border and the Map. Exploring Intersectionality's Relevance for Christian Social Ethics

GARY SLATER

Abstract

Intersektionalität ist ein sozialkritischer Analyserahmen, der untersucht, wie sich verbindende Identitätskategorien auf Interaktionen zwischen Individuen und Gruppen in einem bestimmten sozialen Kontext auswirken. Sie ermöglicht eine besondere Sensibilität dafür, wie solche Kategorien zu Ausgrenzung oder Marginalisierung führen. Für die christliche Sozialethik ist die Anwendung eines intersektionalen Ansatzes wertvoll, da er dazu beitragen kann, die Reflexion über strukturelle Gewalt mit den Erfahrungen von Leidenden und Ausgeschlossenen zu verbinden.

Die Anwendung von Intersektionalität über ihren ursprünglichen Kontext hinaus birgt jedoch Risiken. So besteht die Gefahr, die Option für die Leidenden mit dem erkenntnistheoretischen Anspruch einer Privilegierung der Perspektiven von Ausgeschlossenen zu vermischen. Zudem kann eine Überdehnung der Reichweite von Intersektionalität zu einer Verwechslung des Verständnisses von Intersektionalität als Heuristik und als Gegenstand führen. Insgesamt droht durch die Vermischung von moralisch/epistemologisch und heuristisch/objektiv nicht nur eine Vernachlässigung biographischer und kontextueller Elemente, die notwendige Ergänzungen zu theologisch-ethischen Anwendungen von Intersektionalität darstellen; diese Tendenzen drohen auch, die binäre Logik zu verfestigen, zu deren Vermeidung Intersektionalität entwickelt wurde.

Dieser Beitrag vertritt die These, dass die genannten Risiken durch eine Reflexion der Metaphern „Karte“ und „Grenze“ geklärt und vermieden werden können. Karten und Grenzen sind so miteinander verbunden, dass die Art, wie Grenzen gelesen werden, vom Verständnis von Karten abhängt. Zudem können Karten und Grenzen besser und schlechter interpretiert werden. Dies eröffnet eine normative Dimension, die Lehren über bessere und schlechtere Wege der Anwendung von Intersektionalität in der theologischen Ethik ermöglicht. Um diese Punkte herauszuarbeiten, wird auf die Chicana-Dichterin und Wissenschaftlerin Gloria Anzaldúa und den rabbinischen Theologen Peter Ochs Bezug genommen. Während Anzaldúas Arbeit eine biographische Dimension in die theologische Anwendung von Intersektionalität einbringt, holt Ochs' Arbeit eine kontextuelle Dimension ein. Beide Autor*innen durchkreuzen auf ihre Weise die binäre Logik, die Intersektionalität eigentlich bekämpfen sollte, aber durch falsche Anwendungen und Überdehnungen reproduziert.

Intersectionality is a social-critical analytical framework that explores how compounding categories of identity affect interactions among individuals and groups within a given social context, with particular sensitivity to how such categories generate exclusion or marginalization. For Christian social ethics, there is some value in applying an intersectional approach, since it can help link considerations of structural forces with the experiences of those who suffer and who are typically excluded.

Applying intersectionality beyond its original context carries risks, however. For example, it is possible to conflate the moral imperative to attend first to those who suffer with the epistemological claim of privileging the perspective of the excluded over others. It is also possible to overextend intersectionality's reach, which conflates an understanding of intersectionality as a heuristic with its object. Taken together, the moral/epistemological and heuristic/object confluences not only risk neglecting the elements of biography and contextuality that are necessary complements to the theological-ethical applications of intersectionality; these tendencies also risk perpetuating the binary logic that intersectionality was developed to prevent.

A key claim of this chapter is that these risks can be clarified and avoided through critical attention to the metaphor of the map and the border. Maps and borders are inherently linked, such that how one reads borders is a function of how one reads maps. Maps and borders can also be interpreted in better and worse ways, a normative dimension that offers lessons on better and worse ways of applying intersectionality in theological ethics. In drawing out these points, two figures are especially germane. These are the Chicana poet and scholar Gloria Anzaldúa and the rabbinic theologian Peter Ochs. Whilst Anzaldúa's work brings a salutary biographical dimension to the theological application of intersectionality, Ochs's work brings a salutary contextual dimension. In their respective ways, both writers confound the binary logic that intersectionality was meant to combat, but which misapplications and overextensions of intersectionality replicate.

On 20–21 October 2022, a conference was held at the Franz Hitze Haus in Münster. The conference was entitled “Theology: Biographical – Contextual – Intersectional”, and its programme and promotional materials featured a distinctive image: a map displaying an intersecting set of lines representing bus routes across an urban road network. On each bus route was labeled a distinct category of identity – race, gender, religion, class, and so on. This image, as well as the three adjectives – biographical, contextual, intersectional – that gave the conference its name, are relevant to the task of the present chapter, which is to explore the application of intersectional approaches theologically and ethically. The chapter's key claim is that considering the image of a *border* alongside that of the map is an instructive way to explore the application of intersectional approaches for theology, particularly Christian social ethics, because it draws out connections with biography and contextuality that prevent the heuristic of intersectionality from being overextended. Although *border* has not featured as prominently within the

literature on intersectionality as much as other spatially-oriented terms such as *margin* or *map*, the link between borders and intersectionality is not difficult to establish. In its broadest sense, every intersection is a border, and every border is an intersection. Moreover, how one reads borders is a function of how one reads maps. Since, like intersectionality, borders can be thought about in better or worse ways, to the extent that intersectionality is thought of in terms of a map, the implication regarding better ways of thinking in intersectional terms is clear.

The chapter unfolds in three sections. The first section traces the background and development of intersectionality as a critical framework for diagnosing multiple forms of exclusion. The relation of intersectionality to the metaphor of the map is engaged, as are some of the prevailing academic critiques of intersectional approaches. The second section pivots to how intersectionality might be applied within Christian social ethics. Both risks and opportunities are considered. Benefits include the capacity to allow the excluded to represent themselves and the integration of compounding structural forces of injustice and exclusion; risks include a tendency to overextend intersectional analyses, conflate epistemic and moral commitments on the part of excluded perspectives, and inadvertently replicate binary logic. The third section looks at border thinking as a way to mitigate these risks. To draw out these points in ways that link intersectionality and theological ethics, two figures are engaged as especially helpful: the Chicana author and activist Gloria Anzaldúa and the rabbinic theologian and pragmatist philosopher Peter Ochs. These figures' respective writings offer insights on biography and contextuality, borders and maps, that complement those of intersectionality.

1. Intersectionality: background and context

Intersectionality is a social-critical analytical framework that explores how categories of identity affect interactions among individuals and groups within a given social context. Its key premise is that categories of identity (e. g., gender, race, sexuality) tend to intersect as compounding factors of exclusion or marginalization. In its original context, intersectionality was located within the legal academy, predominantly interested in considering factors of gender alongside race in legal cases, and explicitly anchored in the perspective of Black women. From these origins, intersectionality has since been extended to other academic disciplines and, within the past decade, to public and political contexts.

The origins of intersectionality as a social-critical analytical framework can be traced to the article "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics" by Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw (1989). In that article, the intersection metaphor took the following form:

“Consider an analogy to traffic in an intersection, coming and going in all four directions. Discrimination, like traffic through an intersection, may flow in one direction, and it may flow in another. If an accident happens in an intersection, it can be caused by cars traveling from any number of directions and, sometimes, from all of them. Similarly, if a Black woman is harmed because she is in the intersection, her injury could result from sex discrimination or race discrimination.” (Crenshaw 1989: 149)

Two traits are notable about Crenshaw’s formulation of the intersection here. First is its emphasis on the need for theory to account for experience, particularly when certain persons are structurally at risk of having their experiences overlooked. Crenshaw argued that if existing theories on gender and race ignore the experiences of Black women, then the theoretical framework needs to be revised. Intersectionality was thus a deliberate effort to undertake such a revision, precipitating what has been called a “tectonic shift in the nature of feminist theorizing by suggesting that black women’s experiences demanded new paradigms in feminist theorizing” (Cooper 2016: 386). The second notable trait of this formulation is its spatial imagination. Aside from the fact that the image of the intersection is inherently spatial, the spatial dimension of intersectionality is also indicated in the title of another seminal article from Crenshaw (1991), “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color”.

The spatial – and, in particular, cartographic – imagination within intersectionality functions in at least two ways, both of which are compelling. The first compelling function of the visual metaphors within intersectionality is its representation of difference and unity, since an intersection is a space of both encounter and separation. Keeping this balance in view is analytically rich, if difficult to maintain. The second compelling feature is how “margin” implies a lack of recognition and, by extension, a lack of power. To write of “margins”, as Crenshaw and other writers (cf. hooks 1984) associated with intersectionality have done, is to imply that structures of marginalization should be unmasked on behalf of those at the margins.

These logical and visual elements are among the most novel contributions of intersectionality, a term that otherwise captures very old ideas. For example, the American social reformer Sojourner Truth (1797–1883) sought to call attention to her identity as a woman in addition to her identity as a Black American (cf. Painter 1997). More recently, bell hooks (1984) adopted a framing of marginality/centrality in arguing for recognizing non-white perspectives in feminism. Still another influence on intersectionality was critical race theory, which sought to expose structures of racial exclusion underlying purportedly neutral legal and political institutions (cf. Bell 1980). Crenshaw adopted a similar posture and argued that race should not be considered in isolation but rather alongside other categories that intersect within a given legal case.

Since its emergence within academic literature in 1989, intersectionality has evolved and extended and, in so doing, fractured. There are at least three reasons for this rise in prominence. First, there has been a proliferation of categories of sexual identity, thus calling for a framework to integrate these proliferating categories within a stance whose normative commitment to justice is clear. Second, at least in a North American context, there has been a renewed commitment to racial justice and impatience with the institutional inability to address it in the wake of Black Lives Matter and the election in 2016 of Donald Trump. Both of these developments have been accompanied by increasing applications of academic terms within political activism. Third, there has been a rise of a right-wing media culture that is increasingly focused on cultural identity. Such a culture has highlighted the term “intersectionality” and arguably given it more prominence for a mass audience than its progressive activist or academic progenitors. In such contexts, the term is employed as a signifier for an amorphous cluster of characteristics associated with one’s political opponents.

Considering its prominence, intersectionality has unsurprisingly been subject to a range of academic criticisms, even among those who broadly share its aims. One critique is that intersectionality is unable to account sufficiently for identity (cf. Nash 2008), especially when it comes to the fullness of subjectivity beyond social categories (cf. Downing 2018). Complementing this critique is the argument that intersectionality is epistemologically lacking or difficult to apply (cf. Hancock 2007). As Peter Kwan (2000: 687) puts it, “[A]lthough intersectionality illuminates the ways in which victims of multiple forms of oppression must be recognized as such on their own terms, in and of itself intersectionality tells us little about the [...] subjectivity of those caught in the trajectories of intersecting categories”. Conversely, intersectionality has also been criticized for being overextended, especially in the wake of its emergence as a target of right-wing invective and increasing appropriation on the part of advocates for social justice. As Brittany Cooper cautions, intersectionality should not be taken as a holistic vision for achieving just and harmonious social relations. Rather, it is an analytical device that uses its central metaphors as an analytical tool (cf. Cooper 2016: 404). In this regard, Cooper is channeling Crenshaw (1991: 1244), who wrote, “at the outset,” that “intersectionality is not [...] some new, totalizing theory of identity”.

The question of how widely to extend the scope for intersectional approaches is an important one. That the intersection is meant to be taken as a metaphor is obvious, but what exactly is it a metaphor *for*? Does intersectionality provide a picture of society itself, or is it, as Crenshaw and Cooper insist, merely a tool for analyzing social dynamics within specific cases? In her commentary on Crenshaw’s original formulation of intersectionality, Cooper has it that Crenshaw’s work on intersectionality “exposed through use of a powerful metaphor exactly what it meant for systems of power to be interactive, [...] explicitly tying the po-

litical aims of an inclusive democracy to a theory and account of power” (Cooper 2016: 386). Yet, in seeking to put these ideas to work, it remains far from clearly how closely one should hew to their original context in legal scholarship and the perspective of Black women. These points are worth bearing in mind as one considers what it means to apply intersectionality self-consciously to theology, especially theological ethics.

2. Intersectionality and Christian social ethics: opportunities and risks

Christian social ethics exists at a disciplinary intersection between theology and ethics. It can be defined as engaging Christian thought and practice to reflect on “cultural repertoires of response to important human challenges” (Jenkins 2013: 4). It is obvious, then, that to apply intersectional approaches in Christian social ethics is to extend intersectionality beyond its original context. This is not a disqualifying fact, but it does call for care and attention. Encouragingly, the original norms and commitments of Crenshaw’s work do overlap with those of Christian social ethics – especially those that stem from a liberationist perspective – with regard to combatting exclusion structurally. More generally, it is an undeniably good thing to integrate exclusions analytically, which is what intersectionality seeks to do. Social ethics seeks to read the signs of the times, and if intersectionality can assist in that task, then it is a helpful resource for the work. There are also many challenges addressed by Christian social ethics whose complex combinations – migration and ecological devastation on issues of displacement, for example – would seemingly benefit from intersectional analyses.

However, there is a risk that the capacities of intersectionality to combat social problems might be overstated, such that it becomes not so much an analytical tool as a totalizing worldview. As represented by conservative critics of intersectionality such as Andrew Sullivan (2017), for example, intersectionality takes on a kind of theological character in that it “posits a classic orthodoxy through which all of human experience is explained – and through which all speech must be filtered”. Sullivan interprets intersectionality as conveying its own idea of original sin framed in terms of privilege and marginalization through social identities. “To overcome this sin”, writes Sullivan (2017), “you need first to confess, i.e., ‘check your privilege,’ and subsequently live your life and order your thoughts in a way that keeps this sin at bay”. Sullivan’s interpretation is not an iteration of intersectionality that would seem to hold much promise for Christian social ethics. In fact, a bit ironically, it is the least promising iterations of intersectionality for Christian social ethics that are those that most expressly take on the trappings of a religion.

It must be emphasized that Sullivan's portrayal of intersectionality does not accord with that of many of its proponents. As Brittany Cooper (2016: 404) explicitly states, "intersectionality does not deserve our religious devotion". Nevertheless, given the heated political context in which intersectionality is often discussed, it bears being as clear as possible the risks that should be avoided in any application of intersectional approaches in Christian social ethics. If, as Crenshaw's formulation has held, intersectionality is a form of mapping, then the map should never be mistaken for the world that the map represents. That is, the *heuristic* should not be mistaken for its *object*. Such a conflation would not only detract from the ability of intersectionality to uncover compounding exclusions or prevent the silencing of voices; it would actively work against the intentions of intersectionality in its original formulation.

There is an additional risk in applying intersectional approaches in Christian social ethics, which is the conflation of moral and epistemological commitments. It is possible to conflate the moral imperative to attend first to those who suffer with the epistemological claim of privileging the perspective of the excluded over others. To unpack this risk, consider the Frankfurt School philosopher and critical theorist Theodor W. Adorno. As Adorno (1973: 17–18) famously wrote, "The need to let suffering speak is a condition of all truth. For suffering is objectivity that weighs upon the subject [...]". These words illustrate the mix of opportunities and risks associated with applying intersectional approaches in Christian social ethics. As to the opportunities, suffering, as Adorno puts it, is an appropriate framing of exclusion in moral terms. Moreover, revealing how social structures – categories of identity very much included – generate suffering upon subjective perspectives is valuable. Intersectionality lends itself to these emphases, with the extra benefits of seeking to prevent one's voice from being reduced or projected upon, and with a spatial metaphor that lends itself to a rich and nuanced combination of identity and distinction. However, linking "suffering" with "truth" explicitly conflates moral and epistemological commitments, and adding the qualifier "all" explicitly maximizes the reach of the claim. Intersectionality in its applications has been at risk of exhibiting the tendencies embedded in the quotation from Adorno. This may not apply to Crenshaw's work itself, but it very much applies to discourses on identity within public life.

To some extent, the public discourse on identity represents a problem of culture that is much too big for this chapter. Nevertheless, two further things can be said. First, "intersectionality" as a political and cultural signifier has indeed become caught up with the problematic tendencies just observed in Adorno, i.e., the maximalist positioning and moral/epistemic conflation. There has been a tendency on the part of activists to overextend intersectional claims, provoking conservatives to overextend their claims in response. As Jane Coaston (2019) has put it, "The current debate over intersectionality is really three debates: one based on

what academics like Crenshaw actually mean by the term, one based on how activists seeking to eliminate disparities between groups have interpreted the term, and a third on how some conservatives are responding to its use by those activists". According to Coaston, what is most triggering for conservatives is not the putatively descriptive or analytical character of intersectionality; rather, conservatives "object to its implications, uses, and, most importantly, its consequences, what some conservatives view as the upending of racial and cultural hierarchies to create a new one" (Coaston 2019). One of the triggering factors here is the epistemology/morality conflation on the part of the activists, which overextends the claims of intersectionality to bad effect.

Second, both the critiques of intersectionality and its articulations have tended to exhibit severe and antagonistic forms of binary logic. Binary logic is propositional logic, which, in keeping with what Aristotle called the law of the excluded middle, entails that only one among contradictory propositions can possibly be true. Framings in terms of mutual exclusion are common within this logic. One sees logical binarism associated with intersectionality within the academy, including on the part of critics of intersectionality like Jasbir Puar (cf. 2012), who initially sought to replace intersectionality *in toto* before ultimately softening to a more nuanced position of complementarity. More consequentially, binary logic has dominated discussions of identity within public life, a prominent example being the use of the slogan "All lives matter" as a riposte to Black Lives Matter. Notably, binary logic does not only manifest itself within debates between progressives and conservatives. One also sees it in competitive claims between groups that commonly identify as vulnerable to exclusion.

Just as suffering tends to generate more suffering, binaries tend to generate more binaries. This is not just about overextended claims or epistemic/moral conflations. Nor is the issue even only about the overt binarism on display. It is also about the loss of a nuanced account of identity and difference. "Specific perspective X" versus "all" is the *least* nuanced framing possible, bad in general, and disqualifying as a methodological resource for Christian social ethics. To prevent being caught up in such errant tendencies, Christian social ethicists would be advised consistently to complement intersectionality with the notions of contextuality and biography. Contextuality and biography are inherently logically triadic rather than binary, which means that either/or claims are always made with overt reference to a third thing in the form of a particular person or group with a particular history. With this in mind, applying intersectionality within Christian social ethics can and should mean: (1) keeping a measured view of intersectionality as an instrument (even if a normatively-laden one); (2) keeping epistemic and moral commitments distinct (but not separate, much less opposed); (3) maintaining a delicate balance between identity and otherness, which is to say seeking to repair errant and overextended binaries with attention to triadic logic.

3. Borders and maps

Since as far back as Crenshaw's "Mapping the Margins", from 1991, intersectionality has been framed as a map. The present section explores the intersectionality-as-map metaphor and adds to it a new dimension: border thinking. With intersectionality considered as a map, the key claim here is that borders are an instructive and even necessary complement for considering intersectional approaches within Christian social ethics. This is the case for three reasons.

First, reflecting on borders prevents intersectionality from being overextended beyond its fundamental role as a heuristic device. It does this in two ways. The first way is through the metonymic character of borders (cf. Sander 2018). This means that despite being polysemic (cf. Balibar 2002), which is to say, signifying in different ways in different contexts (cf. Krichker 2019), borders remain tethered to specific, concrete, and material contexts. This entails that, even though borders are logically codependent with maps, there are always phenomenal realities in actual border spaces that exceed the map, i. e., are impossible to represent cartographically. Recognizing this point means imposing a healthy limitation on the significance of maps. The second way that border thinking prevents the overextension of intersectionality is through the fact that borders and maps share a common normative measure. Just as intersectionality can be applied badly, so can maps be read badly, and bad thinking about borders is often a sign of bad map readings. Whereas good thinking about borders is dynamic and relational, bad thinking interprets the map's objects as too static and reified. This magnifies division, mutual exclusion, and binarism (which itself is a bad border).

Second, like intersectionality, borders have both epistemological and moral dimensions, and such dimensions can be related in ways that avoid conflation. The epistemological function of borders is well put by Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Nielson (2013: 16), who write, "Insofar as it serves at once to make divisions and establish connections, the border is an epistemological device, which is at work whenever a distinction between subject and object is established". As for the moral dimension of borders, this becomes immediately clear when one considers Mezzadra and Nielson's line alongside Anne-Laure Amilhat Szary's (2015: 10) point that "any kind of place where an object and a subject are to be thought together is a theater of unequal relations and domination processes". Yet the fact that borders are both epistemologically and morally significant does not entail reducing the epistemological dimension of borders to its moral dimension. As I have argued elsewhere (cf. Slater 2023), borders are an intellectual challenge as well as a moral challenge. However, just as they are an intellectual challenge, so are they an intellectual opportunity, and with the intellectual opportunity comes moral opportunity. This is a helpful way to think about the moral and epistemic dimensions of intersectionality.

Third, border thinking facilitates navigating identity and difference (cf. Mignolo 2012). This is not just because actual border spaces exhibit possibilities for persons to connect within conditions of exclusion (cf. Agier 2016), or because the ambivalence of borders as sites of both connection and separation is methodologically fruitful for an “ethics of liminality” (Heimbach-Steins 2016: 239). It is also because, unlike the image of the “margin” that is found in much literature on intersectionality, the border facilitates triadic rather than binary logic. This may seem surprising, given that borders are paradigmatically two-sided. However, borders are also fundamentally semiotic in character, in that a border cannot be anything without being interpreted by someone as a sign and always for a purpose. It is precisely the presence of an interpreter alongside bordered sides that renders a border triadic instead of binary. This is not only a helpful antidote to the binarism that attends problematic discussions of intersectionality; it also militates specifically against the antagonism between “specific perspective X” and “all” that indicates a loss of nuance on intra/intergroup dynamics.

In order to draw out these points in ways that link intersectionality and theological ethics, two figures are especially valuable to consult. These are the Chicana poet and scholar Gloria Anzaldúa (1942–2004) and the rabbinic theologian Peter Ochs (born 1950), whose writings are helpful both individually and in tandem. Broadly put, Anzaldúa’s work brings a salutary *biographical* dimension to the theological application of intersectionality, whereas Ochs’s work brings a salutary *contextual* dimension. Moreover, as Anzaldúa’s work sheds light on *borders*, Ochs’s work sheds light on *maps*. In their respective ways, both writers confound the binary logic that intersectionality was originally meant to combat, but whose misapplications and overextensions of intersectionality replicate to painful effect. Anzaldúa and Ochs can be taken in turn.

Gloria Anzaldúa was a Chicana feminist and poet whose work existed at the intersection of feminism, nationality, language, and queer theory. In addition to discourses on intersectionality, her work has been influential in the field of border studies, especially that of her home region of the US-Mexico border. For present purposes, Anzaldúa’s ideas are helpful in transforming the “margins” that occupy much intersectional thought to “borders”. Anzaldúa takes the commitments and cultural contexts of intersectionality and directs them toward borders, doing so with sensitivity and attention to subjectivity and attending to the contradictions of borders in terms of suffering and joy, passive and active participation, and literal and metaphorical understanding of borders.

Of particular significance in Anzaldúa’s work is the way that the border relates to the body within a specific biographical history.¹ Anzaldúa (2007: 25) famously

1 The centrality of the body is evident from the title of her first major work, “This Bridge Called My Back” (1981).

referred to the US-Mexico border as “*una herida abierta* [an open wound] where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds”.² As Darius Alexander Ornella (2014: 155) puts it, “body is always boundary-body, liminal body,” which is to say both that “it is always on the verge of becoming but is not yet” and that “it constantly escapes the boundaries that confine and aim to tame messy bodies”. Ornella (2014: 158) recognizes in a compelling way the link between embodied existence and bordered existence, as well as a subtle balance between moral and epistemological commitments: “Boundaries can render the other invisible, but in doing so they can render visible the very meaning of boundary arrangements”. In Anzaldúa’s (2007: 25) work, body and border converge in a space of the “prohibited and forbidden”, a space of overlapping categories of identity. According to Anzaldúa (2007: 21), “Borderlands are physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where, under, lower, middle and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy”. In speaking from this space, in *being* this space, Anzaldúa gives voice to ambivalence and liminality out of her own autobiography. This is helpful for intersectionality, not only in terms of recognizing the intimacy of bodies and, by extension, subjectivity and biography, but also in navigating otherness that recognizes exclusion while retaining the possibility of connection, and doing so without reification of abstract categories.

Peter Ochs is a leading figure in the interfaith dialogue movement Scriptural Reasoning, which achieves a unique combination of rabbinic theology, pragmatic philosophy, and interreligious encounter. Nicholas Adams (2008: 450) has described Ochs’s work on Scriptural Reasoning as the “conjunction of scientific inquiry, historical investigation, and ethnographic description”, in which these disciplines respectively fashion hypotheses, investigate traditions, and engage practices. Ochs’s relevance to the present discussion may seem less clear than that of Anzaldúa, lacking an overt connection to intersectionality, borders, or even ethics. Still, when one recalls that maps and borders are logical devices, Ochs provides a theologically informed guide for how to read maps, and his longstanding work in interreligious dialogue can plausibly be taken as a viable form of border navigation.³ Moreover, Ochs (cf. 2019: 31) has endorsed the possibility of applying his work, whose relevance to ethics is demonstrable (cf. Slater 2017).

- 2 This speaks not merely to subjectivity per se; it is also relevant to Christian social ethics. As Willis Jenkins (2013: 94) has claimed, “the moral inventiveness at the center of Christian social ethics has definite occasions: it arises from the scene of a wound”.
- 3 Regarding religious borders, the term “border” appears in the work of Daniel Boyarin (2004), Francis X. Clooney (2010), and John Thatamanil (2020), among many other commentaries on interreligious encounter. So intuitively relevant is the language of bordering to interreligious issues that the presence of such language is rarely discussed.

For present purposes, the key contribution of Ochs's work is its articulation of triadic logic as relevant to suffering among multiple identities. The key distinction for present purposes is between binary and triadic logic. In an aptly-titled essay called "From Two to Three: To Know Is Also to Know the Context of Knowing", Ochs (2007: 197) points out how, as opposed to the mutual exclusion of binary logic, truth understood triadically is "relational (relative to conditions) but not relativistic (arbitrary or strictly subjective)". What this means is that any effort to respond to a problem must occur with respect to a particular interpretive community, which supplies the context by which the correction acquires meaning. Ochs links the binary/triadic distinction, respectively, to suffering and repair. As Ochs (2011: 15) puts it, "Logically, *suffering* refers to events that we can identify in, and only in, the binary logic of propositions. [...] Logically, the activity of *repair* [...] can be diagrammed only through narratives that imitate the activity, thereby providing both illustration and instruction in the practice of repair". Repair can be understood as a certain way to read the map as a means of responding to suffering.

If Ochs's commitment to the logic of diagramming as a means to repair suffering resonates with the prerogatives of intersectionality, so does Ochs's balance between moral and epistemological commitments, as well as his attention to how large-scale structural forces manifest themselves in specific lives. "For me," he writes, "'very big problems' may have 'very small solutions': in this case, that the colonialism that is 'writ large' into the dominant political and economic institutions of the West displays the binary logic that is 'writ small' into the way modern folks learn to make judgments about the world and one another" (Ochs 2006: 59). As for striking an appropriate moral/epistemological balance, "the logic of suffering is also a logic that suffers – that teaches exclusion and consequently can lay the groundwork for more suffering" (Ochs 2011: 8). This entails that although the experience of suffering confers a *moral* priority, it does not automatically confer an *epistemological* priority. This is a helpful way to contextualize the moral epistemology presented by Adorno, in which the truth that suffering generates is repaired when embedded in a specific context. Altogether, the triadic approach pioneered by Ochs offers a better account of difference, one that points toward contextual solutions without losing a sense of the whole.

4. Conclusion

The scope of this chapter has been quite limited. Far more expansive, not to mention challenging, than using the metaphor of the border to explore applications of intersectional approaches in Christian social ethics would be actually attempting such an application. The possible outlets are many, from the dispute between gen-

der critical feminists and trans activists to studies of vulnerable populations within migrant communities (e.g., Georgian domestic workers employed by Turkish migrant families in Germany). There is no shortage of structural challenges to engage, nor is there a shortage of suffering. Nevertheless, even within this modest scope, there is valuable potential on a small scale. The border thinking indicated in this chapter's third section speaks to humility and empathy in concrete contexts, as well as the possibility of going across and letting in ways that are rich contributions to the ongoing work of Christian social ethics.

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