



# **Rip it up and start again: The challenge of intersectionality**

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# Overview

- What is intersectionality and why does it matter?
- Inequalities at the intersections in Scotland
- Rip it up and start again



‘That man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helps me into carriages, or over mud-puddles, or gives me any best place! And ain’t I a woman?’ – Sojourner Truth, 1851



‘The triply-oppressed Negro woman is a barometer of the status of all women, and that fight for the full economic, political and social equality of the Negro woman is in the vital self-interest of white workers’. – Claudia Jones, 1949

‘I’m a woman. I’m a Black woman. I’m a poor woman. I’m a fat woman. I’m a middle-aged woman. And I’m on welfare. In this country, if you’re any one of those things, you count less as a human being. If you’re all those things, you don’t count at all’. – Johnnie Tillmon, 1972

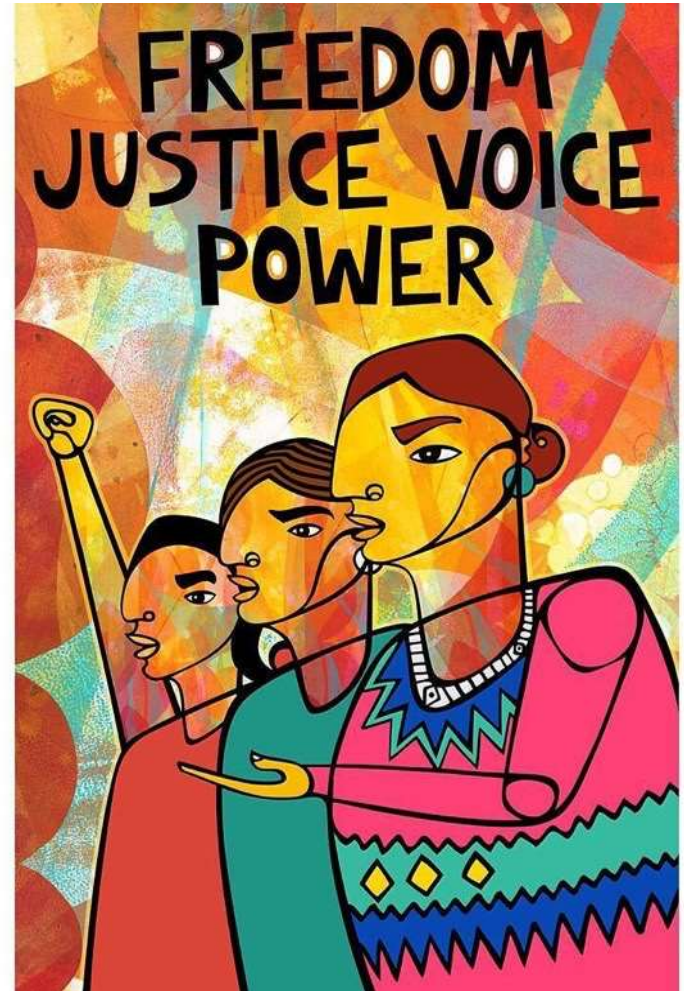


‘We had to begin to unpack the effects of racism, sexism and class on ourselves and on the individuals and white institutions we had to deal and live with...We wanted a stake in making the rules of the game of life and when we did, the doors began to close.’

– Scottish Black Women’s Group, 1985

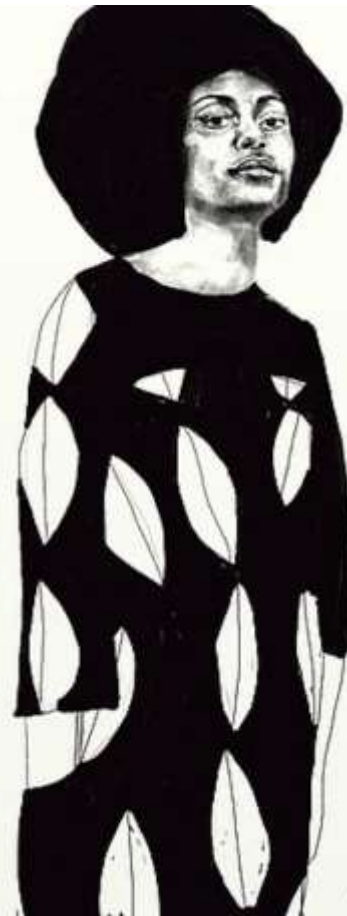
# What is intersectionality?

- Understanding how race, class, gender, sexuality and disability **interact** in ways that **benefit some groups** and **disadvantage others**
- Intersectionality is an analytical tool to examine power dynamics *and* a politics for social change



# Intersectionality + Black feminism

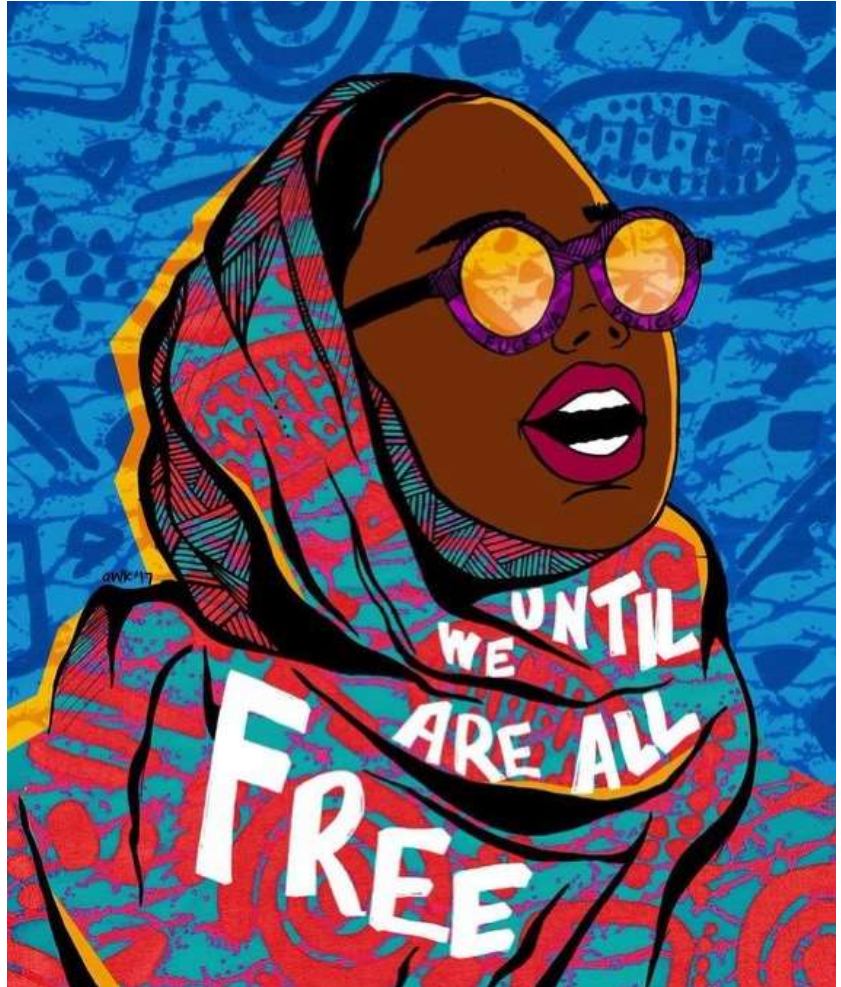
- Intersectionality is a key element of Black feminism and its roots can be traced back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century
- **Intersectionality was developed by and for Black women** to name and take seriously our experiences
- ‘We realize that the only people who care enough about us to work consistently for our liberation are us’ (Combahee River Collective 1977)





# Intersectionality, not diversity

- Intersectionality is *not* a fancy way to discuss diversity
- Diversity seeks the inclusion of different groups in institutions
- Intersectionality seeks the transformation of institutions, not the insertion of marginalised groups into broken systems



# Intersectionality, not diversity

- Intersectionality has moved from Black feminist activism to academia to policy and practice—why?
- Intersectionality is a powerful way to discuss multidimensional inequality and disadvantage
- BUT: It is being used and abused in ways that dilute its radicalism





# Inequalities at the intersections

- The starting point for intersectionality is **complexity**
- Complex inequalities cannot be understood via analyses that re-enforce group sameness
  - ‘women and girls’; ‘the working class’; ‘LGBTQ groups’; ‘Black and Minority Ethnic people’; ‘the Muslim community’



# What about Scotland?

- Counter-intuitively, Scotland's social democratic ethos has made it incredibly difficult to discuss complex inequalities beyond gender and class (and sometimes disability and sexuality)
- Race and racism are widely seen as issues for England and the USA but not 'egalitarian' Scotland
- In Scotland, race is erased from discussions about gender, which undermines and delegitimises the analyses and experiences of women of colour



# What about Scotland?

‘If they [policymakers] wanted to listen to us they would come to us when they’ve written zero of their policy not when they’ve written 99% of it. So when it comes to minority women’s issues or minority people’s issues more widely, we are the afterthought, always’

--Scottish Asian anti-austerity activist, Edinburgh  
2012

# What about Scotland?

‘Ethnic minority groups [are] trying to drive in their humble way different causes, but how do you link with the local people, the indigenous people? It’s almost impossible...You don’t seem to find an avenue to join in when people are doing their thing, so you somehow find yourself on the sidelines all the time. Even if you did your thing, you won’t be able to attract them [white Scots] to come with you [because] it’s so segregated’

--West African migrants’ rights activist, Glasgow, 2012)

# Rip it up and start again

- 1a. 'Intersectional gender architecture' does not make sense. Whether you acknowledge it or not, *gender is always raced and classed*
- 1b. You're going to have to get to grips with race, racism and anti-racism in your feminist analyses; otherwise, what's the point?
- 1c. You're going to have to recognise how all-white spaces are racialised. The presence of people of colour does not 'activate' race



# Rip it up and start again

2. You cannot retrofit equality, solidarity or trust. Your projects and processes must be built from the ground up \*with\* women of colour
  
- 3a. Speaking in universal terms about 'women and girls' erases women and girls of colour because this is just another way to discuss the dominant white experience
  
- 3b. You can build solidarity through difference: the long history of anti-racist feminist activism in Scotland and the Black Lives Matter movement offer a blueprint