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# Intersectionality, Intersectional Standpoints, and Identity Politics

Zahra Meghani

Philosophy Department, University of Rhode Island, Kingston, RI, USA 02881  
Email: [meghaniz@mail.uri.edu](mailto:meghaniz@mail.uri.edu)

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## Abstract

This article differentiates between standpoints, intersectionality, intersectional standpoints, and identity politics. It argues that although there is no necessary connection between intersectionality and ethics, the intersectional standpoints of the oppressed do epistemic, ethical, and political work. To make this argument it uses a case study that takes the form of an analysis of mainstream arguments for denying public assistance to the working-class undocumented from an intersectional standpoint of that group. This paper also addresses two substantial criticisms of intersectional standpoints, including the charge that identity-politics-based intersectional standpoints foster victimhood politics and undermine class-based struggles.

This article aims to do some basic conceptual work by differentiating between standpoints, intersectionality, intersectional standpoints, and identity politics. In the introduction to her 2019 monograph *Intersectionality as Critical Social Theory*, Patricia Hill Collins notes that intersectionality has been conceptualized in a range of ways, including as a “paradigm, concept, framework, heuristic device, and theory” (Collins 2019, 2). She considers it a virtue that intersectionality has been built from a multitude of different perspectives, and widely and quickly adopted. It also means it is time “to analyze what intersectionality is, what it is not, and what it might become” (22). As part of the project of specifying the particulars and parameters of intersectionality and its future shape, Collins takes up the question whether social justice (or ethics) is a fundamental component of intersectionality. Her inquiry leads her to contest the notion that there is a necessary connection between intersectionality and ethics (or social justice).

This project recognizes the merits of Collins’s analysis. It argues that although there is no necessary relationship between intersectionality and ethics (or social justice), the intersectional *standpoints* of the oppressed do epistemic, ethical, and political work. To that end, this paper uses a case study. The case study is an evaluation of mainstream arguments for denying public assistance to a marginalized population *from* an intersectional standpoint of that group. Two key criticisms of intersectional standpoints are also considered in this paper.

As the notion of standpoint is one of the foci of this project, it makes sense to clarify its use. This paper does not read “the standpoints of the oppressed” as denoting their identities. Rather, it conceptualizes the standpoints of the oppressed as referring to two different but related things. They are as follows:

- i. Standpoint (analytic) frameworks
- ii. Standpoint analyses

Standpoint (analytic) frameworks should be understood as models (or approaches or methods) for analyzing dominant narratives and systems of oppression. They are *critical* analytic frameworks because, informed by the embodied experiences of the oppressed, they challenge the dominant narratives about the social order and the social order itself. Such critical analytic approaches examine those narratives and systems of oppression with the end of exposing which groups they benefit, how, in what ways, and the harms experienced by the oppressed.

Standpoint (analytic) frameworks are used to develop standpoint analyses. Those analyses qualify as *critical* analyses because they are not purely descriptive. Rather, they evaluate the dominant narratives and systems of oppression by questioning their claims about their logic, naturalness, goodness, and rightness. The construction of standpoint (analytic) frameworks as well as standpoint analyses are social epistemic projects (more on this later).

Recent works in feminist epistemology have taken on different projects with respect to standpoint theory. For instance, Sharon Crasnow differentiates between standpoint epistemology and other epistemologies (Crasnow 2018), while Briana Toole argues for a place for standpoint epistemology in mainstream Western epistemology circles wherein it remains marginalized (Toole 2022). This project covers different ground. By drawing on standpoint theory and various works by Black feminists, it aims to offer a possible answer to Collins’s question whether there is a necessary connection between intersectional analyses and social justice (or ethics). This paper acknowledges that Collins is correct that all intersectional analyses are not committed to social justice. However, the argument is also made that there is a subcategory of intersectional analyses that are intersectional *standpoint* analyses. Intersectional *standpoint* analyses and the identity politics based on them can be a resource against oppressive norms, institutions, laws, policies, and practices.

Part I delineates the difference between standpoints, intersectionality, and intersectional standpoints. In addition, the histories of intersectional standpoint analyses are outlined. Part II contains a case study that illustrates the epistemic, moral, and political work that intersectional standpoint analyses can perform. The case study is constituted of analyses of three mainstream arguments for the denial of benefits to working-class persons with irregular immigration status *from* an intersectional standpoint of the undocumented. In the third and final part of the article, two substantial criticisms of intersectional standpoint analyses are considered.

## I. Standpoints, Intersectionality, and Intersectional Standpoints

Standpoint theory has its roots in the works of Karl Marx, who used it to analyze the oppression of the proletariat (Hartsock 1983/2004; On 2013). The Combahee River Collective developed Marx’s theory. They understood that interlocking (including interacting<sup>1</sup>) systems of oppression shaped their life circumstances. They realized that

they needed to develop critical analysis of their oppression and ground their political movement in that analysis.

The 1977 manifesto of the Collective articulates its aim as follows:

The most general statement of our politics at the present time would be that we are actively committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression, and see as our particular task *the development of integrated* [read: intersectional standpoint] *analysis and practice based upon the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking. The synthesis of these oppressions creates the conditions of our lives.* (Collective 1977/2014, 271, my italics)

Drawing on Black feminist philosophical works, Kristie Dotson has argued that the Collective's manifesto provides a sophisticated analysis of oppression. It recognizes that the oppressed experience oppression as a holistic phenomenon, even though it is constituted of multiple, interlocking systems of oppression (Dotson 2017, 122–23). The systems-based conception of oppression can be used to connect different experiences of oppression, whereas an “experience-based conception of oppression can aid in identifying ranges of jeopardization”<sup>2</sup> and the harms that the oppressed live with (123).

Oppression should be understood as a multi-stable phenomenon (124). Such a phenomenon manifests in a variety of ways, and it can be interpreted in different ways and conceptualized differently depending on a number of factors, including the “cultural inheritances, cognitive commitments, and embodied location” of knowers as well as their social effects and their relationships to it (124).<sup>3</sup>

Although the Collective performed crucial work in developing Marx's theory, arguably, in mainstream academic circles, it is not as well recognized as Nancy Hartsock's useful account of feminist standpoint theory. ‘Standpoint’ refers to the achieved analyses and critique of the dominant ideology by epistemic communities, which include laypersons, activists, researchers, and scholars. Standpoints (that is, standpoint (analytic) frameworks and the analyses of oppression that are developed using those frameworks) are ‘achievements’ because they are not natural (that is, intrinsic or inherent) to any person or group (Hartsock 1983/2004).<sup>4</sup> Rather, they are the product<sup>5</sup> of concerted, collaborative efforts to resist and challenge the dominant narratives and systems of oppression. In other words, standpoint analytic frameworks and analyses are social (read: collaborative) epistemic endeavors that are informed by the embodied experiences of the oppressed. They reject the account of the social order provided by the dominant narratives, and instead question them with the end of exposing, analyzing, and criticizing the workings of oppressive norms, institutions, policies, laws, and practices (Hartsock 1983/2004).<sup>6</sup>

Subordinated groups are particularly well-positioned *and* more likely to be motivated to question dominant narratives and systems of oppression than are the groups that benefit from them or who are not impacted by them. The oppressed are especially well-situated to interrogate dominant narratives and devise strategies for resisting oppressive systems because they carry them on their backs. Such systems function and flourish by exploiting, objectifying, marginalizing, dominating, and subjecting them to violence.<sup>7</sup> Analyzing the motivation of dominated groups to understand and criticize their oppression, Collins writes,

[s]ubordinated groups have a vested interest in uncovering, analyzing and evaluating how domination shapes their experiences with social inequalities and social

problems. In contrast, elite groups have a vested interest in minimizing and erasing [read: hiding] the workings of domination in all domains of social organization. (Collins 2017, 25)

bell hooks's work clarifies the connection between marginality and standpoints. Standpoints (that is, standpoint (analytic) frameworks and analyses) are about analyzing and resisting the dominant norms, institutions, laws, policies, and practices *from* the margins. They are a "place" for epistemic work that is ethical, and which has emancipatory possibilities. hooks writes,

Marginality . . . [is] much more than a site of deprivation; . . . it is also the site of radical possibility, a space of resistance. It was this marginality that I was naming<sup>8</sup> as a central location for the production of a counter-hegemonic discourse that is not just found in words but in habits of being and the way one lives. As such, I was not speaking of a marginality one wishes to lose—to give up or surrender as part of moving into the center—but rather of a site one stays in, clings to even, because it nourishes one's capacity to resist. It offers to one the possibility of radical perspective from which to see and create, to imagine alternative, new worlds. (hooks 1990, 149–50)

Standpoint theory continues to be an important resource for analyzing, critiquing, and resisting oppression primarily because laypersons, activists, scholars, and researchers have developed it such that it can be used to address the problem of multiple, interlocking modes of oppression. After all, class-based oppression is not the only kind of oppression, and different systems of oppression work in conjunction in complicated ways to shape the lives of different groups.

### *Intersectionality vs. intersectional Standpoints*

A host of activists and researchers, including hooks, Kimberlé Crenshaw, and Collins, have argued that analyses and strategies for dismantling systems of oppression must take intersectional approaches that are informed by the standpoints (that is, standpoint (analytic) frameworks and analyses) of the oppressed. But the question must be asked whether intersectionality (that is, intersectional analyses) and intersectional *standpoint* analyses are the same.

When Collins and Sirma Bilge discuss intersectionality in their 2016 monograph, *Intersectionality*, they always appear to mean the *standpoint analyses* of different oppressed groups who are differently located under systems of oppression and who recognize those systems as oppressive. However, three years later, in *Intersectionality as Critical Social Theory*, Collins takes a different stance:

Intersectionality<sup>9</sup> is often perceived as fundamentally critical of unjust societies because social justice seems to be so central to many of its projects. It certainly seems that intersectionality is on the side of social justice. . . . *Overviews of intersectionality routinely depict it as a form of resistant knowledge that is inherently dedicated to social justice* (Collins and Bilge 2016;<sup>10</sup> Dill and Kohlman 2012; Grzanka 2014; May 2015) (my italics). (Collins 2019, 253)

Delving into the question whether those engaged in intersectional analyses are necessarily committed to ethics (or social justice), Collins notes that some public health

researchers employ intersectionality as a methodology without a normative commitment to improving the lives of the marginalized. They do not consider social inequality as their main concern or their research program as a social justice project (276).

Engaging more deeply with the question whether there is a necessary connection between intersectional approaches and social justice (or ethics), Collins argues that intersectionality (or intersectional analyses) can be purposed to serve oppressive ends. In the chapter titled, “Intersectionality without Social Justice?,” Collins writes, “Intersectionality’s categories of race, gender, sexuality, and ability were important in laying a foundation for eugenics’ approach to body politics” (259). The analytic categories of ability<sup>11</sup> (including normalcy) and nationality are crucial organizing categories for eugenics programs (270–71). They are leveraged by architects of eugenics projects, who also draw on dominant cultural narratives about social groups and social Darwinism (257).

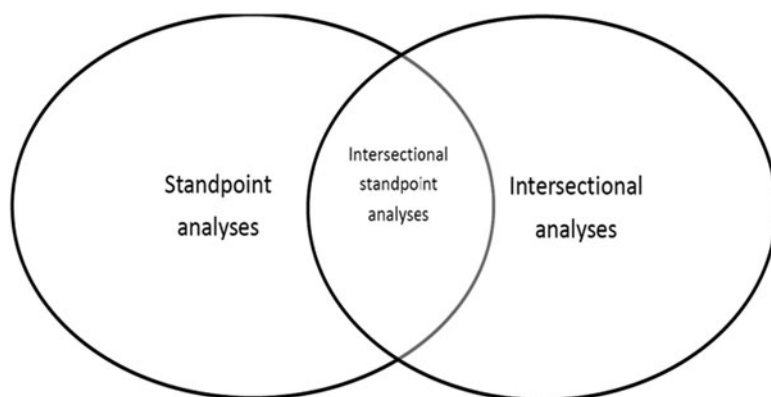
In different contexts, creators of eugenics projects have woven and continue to weave the categories of disability/ability and nationhood differently, yet seamlessly, with other categories (including the categories of race, gender, religion, ethnicity, and sexuality) to “construct” different groups. The physical, intellectual, psychological, and emotional traits attributed to social groups are construed as heritable, immutable biological facts.

Eugenicist projects place social groups in hierarchical classification systems. The categorization schemas are deemed “natural” by the architects of such projects on the grounds they are based on (supposedly) immutable biological facts about the groups (257–58). State actors use those hierarchical classification systems to justify their eugenics programs, creating norms, institutions, policies, laws, programs, and practices that treat groups differently, with some populations treated as though they are not fully or truly human.

For instance, the Nazi nation-state “implemented its eugenics [program by] . . . divid[ing] humanity into categories of immutable difference—for the German population, these were Aryans and Jews, Germans and foreigners, heterosexuals and homosexuals, men and women, and able-bodied and disabled people” (266). Those groups were then ranked as fit or unfit, normal or abnormal, deserving or underserving, depending on the value that they supposedly brought or did not bring to the national interest. The categorical differences were then used to create narratives about the nation’s identity, wealth, and decline. Jewish persons, Roma people, homosexuals, and political dissidents were construed as the “other” who were responsible for Germany’s failed economic and political policies. Using that logic, the state created genocidal policies for the populations it considered undesirable, even as it encouraged reproduction among those it regarded as fit and worthy (266–67).

The thrust of Collins’s analysis is that even grossly unethical and vicious eugenicist projects may be rooted in intersectional analyses. As intersectionality (that is, intersectional analyses) can be used for inequitable and unjust ends, in the epilogue of her book, Collins advises those who use intersectionality<sup>12</sup> that they should conceptualize their work as critical inquiry and critical practice such that they continually examine the ethical commitments that motivate and influence their work (219).

Collins is correct that not all intersectional analyses are ethical. However, *some* intersectional analyses overlap with standpoint analyses, with *intersectional standpoint analyses* their shared domain. (Not all standpoint analyses are intersectional analyses; some focus only on one system of oppression, such as classism.) [Figure 1](#)<sup>13</sup> is a representation (of sorts) of that relationship.



**Figure 1.** A representation of the relationship of intersectional standpoint analyses to standpoint analyses and intersectional analyses.

As mentioned earlier, standpoint analyses are the product of social epistemic endeavors that reject the account of social ordering provided by the dominant narratives and instead interrogate them by exposing, analyzing, and criticizing the workings of oppressive norms, institutions, policies, laws, and practices. So, the *intersectional* standpoint analyses of oppressed groups qualify as tools that take on multiple, interlocking systems of oppression for the purposes of resisting domination, exploitation, marginalization, subjection to violence, and objectification.

Next, the histories of the development of intersectional standpoint analyses in the US are outlined. Those histories matter because it is a question of acknowledging the epistemic, ethical, and political labor of various groups of women of color for whom addressing the problem of multiple interlocking systems of oppression was not a purely theoretical academic enterprise. Rather, it was rooted in their activism in a society that racialized them and others like them (Collins and Bilge 2016). Those histories also make it obvious that intersectional standpoint analyses have two organizational focal points: critical inquiry and critical praxis (Collins and Bilge 2016).

### *Histories of Works of Intersectional Standpoint Analyses: The US Context*

In academic circles, Kimberlé Crenshaw is identified as the Black feminist legal scholar who coined the term “intersectionality” in her 1991 *Stanford Law Review* article, “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color” (Crenshaw 1991; Collins and Bilge 2016, 81). Collins and Bilge acknowledge Crenshaw’s specific and important contribution with respect to intersectionality’s development. They also argue that the use of intersectionality<sup>14</sup> as critical inquiry and critical practice (in what is now the US) has much longer histories (Collins and Bilge 2016, 63–87). They delineate those histories for two reasons. First, to bring to light the epistemic work done by women of color, and second, to argue that the mainstreaming of intersectional analyses in the neoliberal context, including neoliberal academia, is laden with power. Of the latter phenomenon, Bilge writes,

Introducing a knowledge product to new contexts implies a politics of translation and of “prefacing,” generating its own [academia] celebrity system and status hierarchies both locally (in the context of translation) and internationally. Hierarchies are created when one establishes whose texts are deemed foundational and included in the translated “canon”; who gets invited to major scientific events where the new knowledge product is launched and confronted by local expertise; who gets the credit for introducing it; whose career benefits from it; who are included to be a part of local expertise, who is side-lined; who is empowered by this introduction, and who is not. Thus debates about intersectionality also reflect power struggles, opportunity structures, and turf wars internal to specific disciplines and fields. (Bilge 2013, 410)

Collins and Bilge’s project of laying out the histories of intersectionality (read: intersectional standpoint analyses) is also about contesting the erasure of “intersectionality’s [that is, intersectional standpoint analyses’] intersectional origins” (Luft and Ward 2009). Bilge, for instance, has analyzed the “disappearance” of race and ethnicity in European feminist academic circles. In a 2013 article, she discusses “an important international conference, Celebrating Intersectionality?, that was held in 2009 in Frankfurt where the origins of intersectionality in Black thought were contested and disappeared. That erasure has racial import because of the crucial and defining role Black women played in developing intersectionality as an epistemic methodology. Contesting the erasure of the academic contributions of Black women in academia (including gender and women studies), Bilge writes “intersectionality as thought and practice is the fruit of the labour of racialized women” (Bilge 2020, 2310).

To challenge revisionary projects that erase the epistemic, ethical, and political labor of racialized women, Collins and Bilge identify a long history of intersectional standpoint works by women of color (Collins and Bilge 2016).<sup>16</sup> This section of the paper reiterates the account that Collins and Bilge (2016) give of the long history of intersectional (standpoint) works by women of color. They trace the history of (what may be termed) intersectional standpoint analyses to the work of Black feminists, specifically, Sojourner Truth’s 1840 “Ain’t I a woman” speech (Truth 1851), Anna Julia Cooper’s book, *A voice from the South; by a Black woman of the South* (Cooper 1892/1988), Frances Beal’s essay, “Double Jeopardy: To Be Both Black and Female” (1969/2008), Toni Cade Bambara’s edited volume, *The Black Woman* (Bambara 1970), and The Combahee River Collective’s “A Black Feminist Statement” (Collective 1977/2014).

The history of intersectional standpoint analyses by Chicana writers and activists has long roots (Collins and Bilge, 2016, 71). Dorinda Moreno’s *La Mujer: En Pie de Lucha* (Moreno Gladden 1973), and Marta Cotera’s two edited volumes on Chicana feminist thought, *Diosa y hembra: The History and Heritage of Chicanas in the US* (1976) and *The Chicana Feminist* (Cotera 1976; 1977), are among defining works of intersectional standpoints. Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa’s edited collection, *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (which includes works by women of color of different ethnicities), and Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* are also key intersectional standpoint analyses (Moraga and Anzaldúa 1981; Anzaldúa 1987).

Asian American feminists also developed intersectional standpoint analyses. Asian Women United of California’s edited collection, *Making Waves: An Anthology of Writings by and about Asian American Women* (Asian Women United 1989), and *The Forbidden Stitch*, edited by Shirley Geok-lin Lim, Mayumi Tsutakawa, and

Margarita Donnelly include the writings of Asian American women from a variety of national backgrounds and ethnicities, that is, Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, Korean, Vietnamese, and Indian (Lim, Mayumi, and Donnelly 1989; Collins and Bilge 2016, 73).

Indigenous feminist intersectional standpoint analyses have importantly exposed the illegitimacy of colonial nation-states and white-settler societies even as they challenged heteronormativity. They have argued for Indigenous sovereignty and autonomy and the need for state actors to respect their treaties with tribes. In their intersectional standpoint analyses and the political movements based on them, Indigenous feminisms aim to center and instantiate anticolonial practices (Collins and Bilge 2016). Qwo-Li Driskill, Chris Finley, Brian Joseph Gilley, and Scott Lauria Morgensen's edited volume, *Queer Indigenous studies: Critical interventions in theory, politics, and literature* (Driskill et al. 2011), and Mark Rifkin's monograph, *When Did Indians Become Straight?: Kinship, the history of sexuality, and native sovereignty*, exemplify such works (Rifkin 2010; Collins and Bilge 2016, 73–74).

The point here is that intersectional standpoint analyses have varied histories. A few other things can be said about them. Intersectional standpoint analyses do not aim to create grand theories or narratives that explain and provide solutions to any and all systems of oppression, relevant for all ages and places. Nor is there any attempt to abstract away from different types of oppression, such as racism, sexism, heteronormativism, ableism, classism, colonialism, colorism, ethnocentrism, casteism, or neocolonialism, in their varied forms and degrees. Rather, intersectional standpoint (frameworks and) analyses can be conceptualized as tools for generating analyses of oppression *and* strategies of resistance that are informed by the complex embodied experiences of the oppressed as well as the histories of oppressed groups in specific locations and time periods. They interrogate the dominant narratives and systems of oppression. They lay bare falsehoods and the injustices that dominant narratives attempt to justify. They also expose oppressive norms, institutions, laws, policies, and practices as irrational and corrupt. In other words, intersectional standpoint (analytic frameworks and) analyses do epistemic, ethical, and political work.

The next part of the article uses a case study to illustrate the epistemic, moral, and political work that intersectional standpoint (analytic) frameworks and analyses can perform.<sup>17</sup> The case study is an evaluation of three mainstream arguments that are used to deny public assistance to indigent persons whose immigration status is irregular. That assessment is developed using *an* intersectional standpoint (analytic) framework of the undocumented in the US.

## II. An Evaluation of Three Mainstream Arguments for the Denial of Benefits from an Intersectional Standpoint (Analytic) Framework of the Undocumented: A Case Study

The intersectional standpoint (analytic) framework of the undocumented used in this case study is that of racialized<sup>18</sup> persons who are working-class and whose immigration status in the US is irregular. In the case study, the dominant narrative about the morality and rationality of the denial of public benefits to that population is examined using a historically informed intersectional standpoint analysis of the undocumented. That intersectional standpoint analysis brings to light the values and aims that have and continue to shape public assistance policies.

By examining the mainstream arguments for the denial of public assistance to indigent persons whose immigration status is irregular *from* an intersectional standpoint



(analytic) framework of the undocumented, this paper does not mean to imply that the undocumented in the US are a homogeneous group. They are not. Their experiences vary as do the intersectional standpoint analyses that they develop (that are informed by their embodied experiences and based on collective epistemic work). This paper also does not mean to suggest that any and all intersectional standpoint (analytic) frameworks and analyses constructed by the various groups that constitute the larger class of undocumented persons will generate precisely the same critical analyses outlined in this project.<sup>19</sup> Rather, the intersectional standpoint (analytic) framework and analysis of the undocumented used in this paper are *constructs* that can be used to ground and shape identity politics for the purposes of challenging oppressive norms, institutions, laws, policies, and practices (more on identity politics later).

This part of the article has two sections. The first section outlines the history of US public assistance policies. Specifically, it is a *critical* history developed using the intersectional standpoint (analytic) framework of the undocumented. It is a historical account that is attentive to hidden and overt values and norms that shaped public assistance policies, and sheds light on the domination, exploitation, and marginalization of racialized populations. The second section analyzes three mainstream arguments for the denial of public assistance to working-class persons whose immigration status is irregular. That analysis is developed using an intersectional standpoint (analytic) framework of the undocumented.

### *A Critical History of Public Assistance Policies Developed from an Intersectional Standpoint (Analytic) Framework of the Undocumented*

Currently, in the US, undocumented persons are not eligible for a variety of public benefits. However, between 1935 and 1971, unauthorized immigrants were not barred by federal law from receiving Social Security benefits, unemployment insurance, Old Age Assistance, Aid to Dependent Children, food stamps, or Medicaid (Fox 2016, 1058–59). In fact, “[u]nder federal law, both authorized and unauthorized immigrants were eligible for these programs on the same basis as citizens” (1058–59). A 1935 report of the House Ways and Means Committee on eligibility for Social Security benefits and unemployment insurance asserted that “services provided by aliens, whether resident or nonresident, within the United States [we]re included” (cited in Fox 2016, 1055). The federal government went out of its way to ensure that noncitizens would be able to access Social Security benefits. The Secretary of Labor responsible for the Immigration and Naturalization Services gave instructions that agency personnel should not seek information about noncitizens from the Social Security Board (Fox 2016).

The early 1970s marked the beginning of a radical change in the US stance toward public benefits for undocumented and documented immigrants. It was attributable to the reaction of the dominant group of citizens to two major social and political changes. First, racialized US citizens were finally afforded access to public benefits programs by the federal government (more on this later), and second, the racial and ethnic composition of new immigrants changed. Both changes are briefly discussed next.

With the passage of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 (commonly referred to as the “Hart-Celler Act”), the national origins immigration quota (that was established in 1921) was repealed. The 1921 quota had reflected a eugenicist worldview that considered persons from western and northern European countries to be of the highest stock. It sharply limited the number of immigrants from Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and southern and eastern Europe, giving preference to immigrants from

western and northern Europe (Chishti et al. 2015). In contrast, the 1965 Hart-Celler Act instituted a system that gave preference to potential immigrants who were relatives of US citizens or permanent residents. It also privileged highly skilled and professional workers over less skilled applicants. It permitted 170,000 immigrants per year from the eastern hemisphere. Immigration from the western hemisphere (including Mexico) was capped at 120,000.

The crafters of the Hart-Celler Act assumed that it would “preserve the country’s predominantly Anglo-Saxon, European base” (Chishti et al. 2015). President Johnson asserted that the bill would not effect change in US society. According to Chishti et al., the bill’s floor manager Senator Ted Kennedy stated, “It will not upset the ethnic mix of our society.” Those assurances garnered support for the Hart-Celler Act from groups that espoused the 1920s national-origins quotas.

However, following the passage of the 1965 Hart-Celler Act, most of the new immigrants were persons from Asia. They used the family preference system to bring their families to the US. The unexpected flood of immigrants who were members of groups that were considered by the dominant US population to be inferior was coupled with a significant rise in the number of Mexican citizens in the US whose presence was unauthorized. The latter phenomenon occurred because, although there was a substantial labor market need for farm workers, the Bracero Program (that brought Mexican citizens to work on US farms) was eliminated in 1964, and the Hart-Celler Act placed limits on the entry of Mexican nationals into the US (the Act lumped Mexico into the category of western hemisphere). So, Mexicans were still drawn into the US to work on farms, but they could no longer do so legally. Moreover, the Hart-Celler Act separated families that spanned the Mexican–US border, resulting in unauthorized border crossings into the US by Mexican nationals who had families in both countries.

During the 1960s, increasing numbers of persons of color claimed welfare benefits. Social benefits programs had been in place since the 1930s, but only some indigent populations had been permitted to participate in them. The benefits programs had been designed to exclude the professions that employed populations of color, specifically farm workers and domestic workers<sup>20</sup> (Fox 2016). When the deracialization of welfare occurred (because of a series of Supreme Court decisions), it “helped increase access to public assistance [such that between] . . . 1960 and 1972, the number of . . . Aid to Dependent Children . . . recipients more than tripled, to roughly 11 million” (Fox 2016, 1062).

The increase in the numbers of immigrants of color (including undocumented persons from Mexico) and the fact that a significant number of indigent US citizens of color were finally able to participate in public benefits programs resulted in a backlash from the dominant groups. Arguably, indigent undocumented persons bore the brunt of it because they were politically powerless. They were systematically barred from public assistance programs. In the early 1970s, Congress established the Supplemental Security Income program (Fox 2016, 1059). Departing from the standard policy of affording benefits to all indigent persons, undocumented persons were deemed ineligible for the program’s benefits. In 1972, the Social Security Administration changed its policy to exclude undocumented persons from accessing the benefit. The following year, they were rendered ineligible for Medicaid and Aid to Families with Dependent Children. In 1976, Congress decided that undocumented persons could not lay claim to federal unemployment insurance. The US Department of Agriculture denied food stamps to them, and the regulatory change was ratified in 1977 by Congress.<sup>21</sup>

This critical historical analysis of public benefits policies is not a decontextualized account that overlooks the values and concerns shaping public policy. Rather it is an

evaluation from an intersectional standpoint (analytic) framework of the racialized, undocumented working class. It questions the epistemic and ethical warrant of the decontextualized and homogenizing arguments (see below) that are used to justify denial of public benefits to indigent persons whose immigration status is irregular. It also sheds light on the values and interests shaping public assistance policies. For instance, Martha Escobar has argued that the mainstream culture's denigration of indigent Black women who exercised their right to lay claim to public assistance is cut from the same cloth as the decision to refuse access to public benefits to indigent immigrant populations who are primarily persons of color (Escobar 2010).

### *Three Mainstream Arguments for the Denial of Benefits: An Assessment from an Intersectional Standpoint (Analytic) Framework of the Undocumented*

In this section, (versions of) three mainstream arguments for excluding undocumented persons from public assistance programs are evaluated from the intersectional standpoint (analytic) framework of the undocumented. The arguments are termed “the unethical claim to public benefits argument,” “the not ‘real’ members of society argument,” and “the undocumented as a suspect class argument.”

#### *The unethical claim to public benefits argument: An evaluation from the intersectional standpoint (analytic) framework of the undocumented*

One of the key arguments in mainstream media (and echoed by some political philosophers) for the denial of public benefits to undocumented persons is that those social programs are funded by general taxes and their aim is to redistribute resources from wealthier members of the nation to poorer ones (see, for instance, Carens 2013; 2014, 549).<sup>22</sup> The programs in question would be “things like income support programs (often called welfare in the United States) and perhaps other programs aimed at poorer members of society such as social housing” (Carens 2008, 430).<sup>23</sup> The contention is that legitimate claims to benefits from such public assistance programs are based on “real” membership in society. The constitution of “real” membership is defined by the dominant norms, institutions, laws, policies, and practices (more on this later).

This type of argument for denial of public benefits to the undocumented working poor are presented as moral by their proponents. They assert that indigent undocumented persons have no ethically justified claim to public benefit programs. However, such arguments are credible only if one overlooks that they abstract away from the lives of undocumented persons in the US and ignore the impact of the denial of public assistance on indigent undocumented persons. To understand the significance of those omissions, it is illuminating to consider the particulars of the undocumented persons who are impacted by the denial.

In the US, for instance, in 2019, by and large the undocumented population was composed of racialized populations from the global South (Mexico [48%], El Salvador [7%], and Guatemala [7%]) (MPI 2001-2023). In 2019, approximately 57% of the unauthorized population had a family income of less than 200% of the poverty level. Moreover, in 2019, approximately 46% of the adult undocumented population did not graduate from high school, and another 24% had only a high school degree (MPI 2001-2023).

In 2017, there were 7.6 million undocumented workers (Budiman 2020). In 2017, undocumented workers constituted 5% of the US workforce (Krogstad, Lopez, and Passel 2020). They were employed primarily in the lower tiers of the hierarchy of

professions. They were 22% of farmworkers, 15% of construction workers, 8% of production workers, and 8% of service workers (Krogstad, Lopez, and Passel 2020).

As the working poor, access to necessary medical care is a serious and enduring problem for undocumented persons. In 2019, almost 5,800,000 (53%) of unauthorized persons in the US did not have health insurance (MPI 2001-2023). They were generally ineligible for Medicaid, a US federal and state-funded health insurance program that provides coverage to certain low-income populations (KFF 2022).<sup>24</sup> Indigent undocumented adults were and remain ineligible for various other public benefits, such as food stamps (NCOA 2022). The denial of public benefits has profound consequences for them. Among other things, it means hunger and lack of medical care. That impact is likely to be gender-differentiated. Women undocumented workers tend to send more of their income to their families in their nation of origin than do men undocumented workers, and thus they are less likely to have money for their own survival. Moreover, given that undocumented workers generally find work in the highly gendered segments of the economy, with “woman’s work” paid less than “man’s work,” the denial of public benefits to that population is not a gender-neutral matter.

From an intersectional standpoint (analytic) framework of the undocumented, the failure of arguments for denial of benefits to consider the impact of exclusion from public assistance schemes on the affected group (including its gendered impact) calls into question their capacity to provide ethical guidance about public benefits policies. Moreover, that analytic framework raises questions about the moral status of the benefit policies themselves.

*The not “real” members of society argument: An evaluation from the intersectional standpoint (analytic) framework of the undocumented*

Some arguments for excluding undocumented persons from public assistance programs appeal to the notion that persons with irregular immigration status are not “real” (or full) members of the nations in which they live. Joseph Carens is one of the few mainstream political philosophers who has engaged at length with the question of the fair treatment of undocumented persons. Carens has interpreted “real” membership in terms of “full social membership,” which he defines as that which one has by either being born in a country or residing in it for at least five years. He has justified the five-year residency requirement on the grounds that “the passage of time . . . generates membership claims for irregular migrants and with those membership claims come claims for access to these sorts of programs” (Carens 2013, 145; see also 2008, 430). As justification for his espousal of the five-year residency stipulation,<sup>25</sup> Carens writes, “I recognize it is impossible to say on theoretical grounds precisely how many years, but I<sup>26</sup> think five is about the right number” (my italics) (Carens 2013, 108). In support of *his* intuition about what qualifies as the “right” length of time for the satisfaction of the residency requirement, Carens contends that the five-year residency threshold denotes the unfolding of a human life, including formation of ties between noncitizens and other persons who live in that nation (Carens 2013, 152). In other words, he conceptualizes social membership in terms of the relationships that develop between persons (regardless of their citizenship status) who live within the borders of a country over at least a five-year period (Carens 2016, 465).

According to (a version of) that argument, undocumented persons can lay claim to full social membership in the destination nation only after a five-year residency period. That stance appears to assume that when undocumented persons enter the US or other

countries, they have no pre-existing substantive connections to anyone in those countries.

However, that is not always the case. Migration systems theory contends that the movement of large numbers of persons from one country to another is “the result of interesting macro-structures of geopolitical relationships often rooted in history, and meso-structures of informal social networks that migrants have with one another” (Rajendra 2015, 363). Large-scale migration from one country to another is the product of historical, economic, and political relations between them, such as conquest, colonialism, and temporary-worker programs (363). For instance, the presence of a large number of undocumented persons from Mexico in the US is the result of the past and current relationship between the two nations, which includes a history of conquest, discriminatory immigration laws (more on this below), and the Bracero Program.<sup>27</sup> In 1942, the US created the Bracero Program (which brought in Mexican citizens to work on US farms on a temporary basis) at the behest of US farm owners who claimed that they did not have a sufficient supply of farmworkers because of WWII (Center for History and New Media 2021). The program was terminated in 1964, but US farms continued to need workers. However, most Mexicans could no longer work legally on US farms because the Bracero Program had ended and the Hart-Celler Act limited immigration from Mexico. Thus, the presence of Mexican farm workers in the US became criminalized even though they filled and continue to fill a significant gap in the labor market. This history partially accounts for the fact that Mexican nationals constitute a significant portion of the undocumented population in the US. So, given the history of circular migration of Mexican workers between the two countries, at least a percentage of persons from Mexico who enter the US without authorization have pre-existing family ties to the US populace.

So, when arguments that construe the undocumented as having no ties in the countries in which they live and work are analyzed from an intersectional standpoint (analytic) framework of the undocumented, it becomes clear that they omit relevant facts. Disregarding history and relevant particulars, such arguments (mis)construe all undocumented persons as having no ties or histories with anyone in the country where they reside. Such decontextualized and homogenizing arguments (mis)represent them as the “other” who are alien intruders, utterly detached from their environment.

*The undocumented as a suspect (or criminal) class argument: An assessment from the intersectional standpoint (analytic) framework of the undocumented*

Some proponents of denial of public benefits to undocumented persons imply that the group is fundamentally criminal (or at least suspect) by virtue of its irregular immigration status. Ruben Garcia has argued that criminality is inscribed into the identity of persons whose immigration status is irregular (Garcia 2003, 751). Some have proposed that if undocumented persons are not convicted of any crime during the five-year residency period, they should be afforded public benefits. Such claims appear to suggest that those persons constitute a fundamentally ethically suspect group such that its members must prove their worthiness by not being convicted for a five-year period.

Those types of assertions become questionable when they are evaluated from an intersectional standpoint (analytic) framework of the undocumented, with attention to the relevant statutes. In the US, for instance, laws and policies have constructed unauthorized persons as a criminal population. In 1996, the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act and the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act were passed. The Antiterrorist and Effective Death Penalty Act of

1996 was also enacted. With respect to noncitizens, the category of aggravated felony was expanded to include crimes that were traditionally classified as misdemeanors, such as shoplifting, bribery, car theft, counterfeiting, drug possession, drug addiction, forgery, perjury, petty theft, prostitution, simple battery, tax evasion; the categorization was applied retroactively (Escobar 2010, 76; 104; Inda 2013, 300). This reclassification of criminal acts significantly expanded the number of noncitizens who were categorized as guilty of aggravated felony, even though unauthorized persons who committed those crimes did not present a threat to physical public safety that violent offenders represented (Human Rights Watch 2009, cited in Inda 2013). Laws were crafted to make it harder for unauthorized persons to avoid categorization as serious criminals. The point here is that arguments for denying access to public benefits to undocumented persons that construe them as a suspect class should be evaluated from an intersectional standpoint (analytic) framework of that group. That may help bring to light the values and interests that actually shape them.

To sum up, this is an intersectional standpoint analysis of three mainstream arguments for the denial of benefits to the racialized undocumented working class that is informed by the complex lived experiences and histories of oppressed groups, during a certain time period at a specific location. This analysis reveals that the standard arguments (for denial of benefits to the working poor whose immigration status is irregular) overlook multiple epistemically and ethically relevant particulars even though those arguments are presented by their proponents as informed and moral (in the sense that they implicitly claim to provide ethical guidance for public policy). This analysis illustrates the epistemic, moral, and political work the intersectional standpoint (analytic) frameworks and analyses of the oppressed can perform.

### III. An Evaluation of Criticisms of Intersectional Standpoints

The intersectional standpoint (analytic) framework and analyses of the undocumented that are developed in this article are likely to be subject to at least two criticisms. They may be termed the homogeneity criticism and the victimhood politics criticism. Below, the criticisms are delineated and addressed.

#### *The Homogeneity Criticism*

It could be argued that the construction of the undocumented's intersectional standpoint (analytic) framework and analyses in this article's case study entails homogenization of a number of very diverse groups of the undocumented. The groups do not face the same kind and degree of discrimination, marginalization, and exploitation, nor do they have the same histories. The differences are relevant and should not be glossed over or ignored.

Political theorist Wendy Brown articulates a version of that type of objection in a 2016 interview for the journal *Feminist Legal Studies*. She explains to the interviewer, Katie Cruz, that she finds intersectionality a useful legal tool:

[however, as] a theoretical and historical understanding of subject production it [that is, intersectionality] seems to me extremely limited and I find it very frustrating, the extent to which it is grabbed at to solve the problem of thinking complex identity formation. Here's why: first, the forms of power that produce in any particular society race or caste, class or gender, sexuality or belonging—national, civic,

undocumented, sans papier, whatever it is—not only are those specific to historical and geopolitical place, they are also each built out of different kinds of powers and different histories. The powers that produce a sexual division of labour and gender rooted in it are so different, for example, from the powers that produce a gender binary that make trans illegible or unviable, which in turn are so different from the powers that produce race in republican France today and race in the US with its particular histories of slavery, genocide, colonialism and immigration. *Intersectionality doesn't help us build theories of identity (of the oppressed) that reckon with those various kinds of powers and various kinds of histories, and in fact tends to elide them. . . .* It [that is, intersectionality] abstracts from place, from history, and from particulars, and it tends to reify identity categories, and to make them transhistorical and even universal. (Cruz and Brown, 2016, 78–79; my italics)

Wendy Brown conceptualizes intersectionality as a flawed device for analyzing complex identity-formation processes. She believes that intersectionality is a failed tool for building theories of identity *because* it does not take into account systems of power and histories. Moreover, she holds that intersectionality reifies identity categories (such as race, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, class, and so on) as transhistorical and universal categories.

Contra Wendy Brown, this article draws on the works of intersectionality activists, scholars, and researchers (such as the Collective, hooks, and Collins) to argue that intersectionalities (that is, intersectional standpoint (analytic) frameworks and analyses) should be understood as *critical analytic frameworks* and *critical analyses* (that are generated using those frameworks) based on the embodied experiences of the oppressed. Those frameworks and analyses are created for the purposes of developing resistant knowledge(s) and grounding identity politics. Thus, this article does not conceptualize those analytic frameworks and analyses as tools for analyzing identity-formation processes or constructing theories of identity. Moreover, it does not argue that intersectional standpoint frameworks and analyses conceptualize identity categories as transcending time or functioning as universal categories.

Intersectionality activists, scholars, and researchers do *not* claim that intersectional standpoint analyses *qua* analyses have a transnational or universal scope. For instance, Collins has made the case that heteropatriarchy, neocolonialism, classism,<sup>28</sup> racism, and imperialism are forms of power and domination, and each kind admits of variations (Collins 2012; 2017). So, the *intersectional* standpoint analyses of those systems of oppression vary depending on the particulars of their object of study. *Intersectional* standpoint analyses are specific to particular systems of oppression at specific points in time and place. Those analyses do not claim to be universal analyses of systems of oppression.<sup>29</sup>

It should also be recognized that the intersectional standpoint (analytic) framework and analyses of the undocumented that are used in this article are not about ignoring differences within the group of the undocumented. Rather, they can function as *devices* for forging alliance among different groups of the oppressed for the purposes of analyzing their domination, exploitation, marginalization, subjection to violence, and objectification.<sup>30</sup>

It also needs to be clarified that the term “undocumented” as used in this article is not meant to be an essentializing term, that is, a term that defines the group it refers to in some sort of integral, unique, and unchangeable sense. Aurora Levins Morales’s

analysis of the term “women of color” can illuminate how the term “undocumented” is used in this article. She explains that “women of color” should *not* be understood as referring to an ethnicity or race. Rather, the term “women of color” should be conceptualized as an “[invention] of solidarity, an alliance, a political necessity that is not the given name of every female with dark skin and colonized tongue, but rather a choice about how to resist and with whom” (Levins Morales 2001, 102–3).

Just as the concept of women of color is not about muting the relevant differences (in terms of race, class, sexual orientation, (dis)ability, nationality, age, ethnicity, religion, or caste) among those who are categorized as such, the concept of the undocumented is not about diluting the differences between the various groups of the undocumented. Instead, it is about forging solidarity between them for the sake of addressing inequities and injustices that impact them differentially. The solidarity can be understood as a response to dominant narratives inscribing ‘illegality’ on the racialized working class whose immigration status is irregular.<sup>31</sup> Such narratives make illegality that group’s defining and integral feature, construing them as an ethically suspect class whose claim to certain human rights, including workers’ rights, is contestable.

### *The Victimhood Politics Criticism*

This criticism contends that intersectional standpoints (read: intersectional (analytic) standpoint frameworks and analyses) foster victimhood identity politics. To convey the significance of that charge, identity politics is briefly explicated, and then the criticism is addressed.

#### *Identity politics: Some background*

In 1977, the Collective used the term “identity politics” in its manifesto (Smith 2020). The manifesto was a response to the failure of the US to address the oppression of Black women, even as the nation passed equality legislation and implemented some practices of equality (Moran 2020, 263). The Collective’s intersectional standpoint (framework and analysis) and their political activism was the assertion of their political autonomy as Black women.

The Collective intended the term “identity politics” to signify political movements that had emancipatory agendas (which included equitable treatment of social groups, and relationships of nondomination between them) and were rooted in and informed by their intersectional standpoint analysis of interlocking systems of oppression.

The Collective did not advocate separatism. Rather their intersectional, relational conception of their embodied selves (under conditions of oppression) underlay their commitment to working with other social groups that were marginalized and with whom they shared an emancipatory vision. In a 2020 interview, Barbara Smith, one of the authors of the manifesto, clarified the Collective’s use of the term “identity politics” and the philosophical analysis motivating it.

*When we use the term ‘identity politics,’ we are actually asserting that Black women had a right to determine our own political agendas. We, as Black women, we actually had a right to create political priorities and agendas and actions and solutions based in our experiences in having these simultaneous identities—that included other identities via the working class, gay, lesbian, bisexual, etc. . . . We strongly believed in coalitions and working with people across various identities on common problems. (Starr 2020; my italics)*



The Collective's identity politics was based on their intersectional standpoint analysis, which was the product of their communal epistemic work to critically evaluate the dominant narratives and interlocking systems of oppression that constrained their life possibilities and political autonomy. That collaborative epistemic endeavor also aimed to develop strategies of resistance and solutions to their oppression.<sup>32</sup>

Although the Collective articulated its conception of identity politics more than four decades ago, it still holds currency. For instance, it is because Olúfẹ̀mi Táíwò understands identity politics as denoting identity-based political movements that have an emancipatory agenda (which includes equitable treatment of social groups and relationships of nondomination between them) that he criticizes the capture of such movements by elites (Táíwò 2020; 2022). Elites pay lip service to the emancipatory goals of identity politics (that are based on the intersectional standpoint frameworks and analyses of the oppressed) even as they seek to perpetuate oppressive practices that ensure the continuation of the unjustified power that they hold over the very groups that they purport to support and represent (Táíwò 2020; 2022). Such elites can be said to engage in pseudo identity politics.

It has been argued that the Collective intended the term "identity politics" to refer to political movements that are grounded in and shaped by the intersectional standpoint (analytic) frameworks and analyses of the oppressed. However, today, in the larger US culture, the term "identity politics" appears to be used in a much looser sense. Moran provides the following definition of that broader conception of the term "identity politics":

[A]ny form of politics that mobilizes specifically and meaningfully around the concept of identity. In such political analyses and movements, the group's identity performs conceptual or organizational work" (Moran 2020, 263).<sup>33</sup>

The broader (mainstream) cultural conception of identity politics covers intersectional standpoint(s)-based identity politics of the sort that the Collective used. The Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement qualifies as engaging in identity politics of the kind that the Collective would consider to be identity politics. BLM would also be covered by the broader cultural notion of identity politics. BLM constitutes a political movement that unifies a multitude of differently situated persons of different national origins who are racialized as Black and subject to various kinds of oppression. The purpose of the BLM movement is to analyze and resist inequities and injustices.

Under the broader cultural conception of identity politics, the political activities of groups that the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) identifies as hate groups<sup>34</sup> qualify as identity politics *if* they use their social group identity (for instance, their race, gender, ethnicity, and so on) to do conceptual or organizational work for their movements. Such groups' claims of oppression are not empirically justified. Their analyses are not standpoint analyses. To reiterate, standpoint analyses are the products of social epistemic endeavors that reject the account of social ordering provided by the dominant narratives and instead interrogate them by exposing, analyzing, and criticizing the workings of the oppressive norms, institutions, laws, policies, and practices. [Figure 2](#) is a rudimentary, incomplete representation of the different types of identity politics that the broader cultural conception of the term covers.

The point here is that not all identity-based political movements are committed to social justice (which includes equitable treatment of social groups and relationships of nondomination between them).

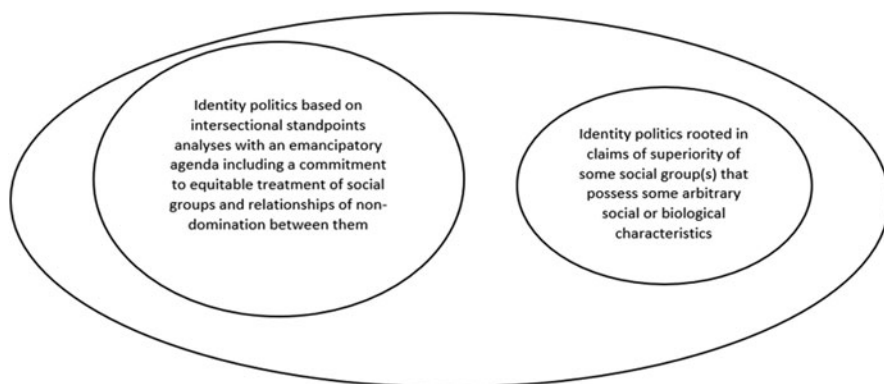


Figure 2. Identity Politics (broader cultural conception)

### *Intersectional standpoint(s)-based identity politics of marginalized groups and the charge of victimhood politics*

The use of identity politics (in the Collective's sense) by the oppressed in the US has a long history. However, it has been criticized on the grounds that it encourages the oppressed to engage in victimhood politics, which is psychologically damaging to them.

Wendy Brown, for instance, has raised just that objection against marginalized and dominated groups that use identity politics (that are rooted in their intersectional standpoint analyses). She rebukes them for not focusing primarily on the "real" problem, that is, the toxic interaction between capitalism, liberalism, and neoliberalism. Brown claims in her 1995 monograph, *States of injury: Power and freedom in late modernity*, that the groups that engage in (intersectional standpoint(s)-based) identity politics yearn for a "white masculine middle-class (liberal, neoliberal capitalist) ideal." She writes,

[It is the white masculine middle-class liberal, neoliberal capitalist] ideal to which non[-]class identities refer for proof of their exclusion or injury: homosexuals, who lack the protections of marriage, guarantees of child custody or job security, and freedom from harassment; single women, who are strained and impoverished by trying to raise children and hold paid jobs simultaneously; and people of color, who are not only disproportionately affected by unemployment, punishing urban housing costs, and inadequate health care programs, but disproportionately subjected to unwarranted harassment, figured as criminals, ignored by cab drivers.

The point is not that these privations are trivial but that *without recourse to the white masculine middle-class ideal, politicized identities would forfeit a good deal of their claims to injury and exclusion, their claims to the political significance of their difference.* (Brown 1995, 61; my italics)

Employing the lens of Nietzschean psychology, Brown goes on to claim that the use of identity politics by oppressed groups in the US "breed[s] a politics of recrimination and rancor, of culturally dispersed paralysis and suffering, a tendency to reproach power rather than aspire to it, to disdain freedom rather than practice it" (55).

Analyzing Brown's criticism of the (intersectional standpoint[s]-based) identity politics of the oppressed, Collins and Bilge note,

For [Wendy] Brown, identities are “wounded attachments” that trap poor people, Black people, LGBTQ people, and women in a cycle of rehashing their injuries and blaming their oppressors. Identity-based political movements [on Brown’s account] thus rely on a compulsive repetition of traumatic events, holding us captive of our oppression. (Collins and Bilge 2016, 128–29)

Wendy Brown does not discuss at length the undocumented in the US who are the focus of this article’s case study. However, presumably, she (and others who share her stance) might argue that the intersectional standpoint (analyses) of the undocumented (discussed in this article) primes them to engage in victimhood politics. Rejecting power and autonomy, rather than seeking them.

A few things need to be said about this type of criticism of the use of identity politics by oppressed groups, including the racialized undocumented working class. Accusing oppressed groups (that use intersectional standpoint(s)-based identity politics to seek equitable and just treatment) as engaging in victimhood politics appears to be a form of epistemic gaslighting. Epistemic gaslighting can be understood as persons or structures intentionally (or unintentionally) exerting unwarranted pressure on epistemic agents to make them doubt their own perceptions *and* standpoint analyses (including intersectional standpoint analyses).<sup>35</sup> In at least two ways, this type of gaslighting takes the form of unjustified reproach of those whom it targets. First, they are scolded for their flawed perceptions and analyses. (Brown, for instance, claims that the oppressed who use identity politics invariably name class in their “multiculturalist mantra . . . [of] ‘race, class, gender, sexuality,’” but rarely theorize or develop their analysis of it [Brown 1995, 61]). Second, the oppressed who develop (intersectional standpoint (s)-based) identity politics are chided for feeling the harm in the way and to the degree they do. They are rebuked for lacking the character to shrug off the harm. In other words, it includes the unwarranted accusation that the social groups who suffered the harm have chosen to be weak, rather than “manning up” and “overcoming” the damage they suffered (recall Brown’s Nietzschean criticism of the dominated groups who use (intersectional standpoints-based) identity politics). This kind of gaslighting sets up standards and then reprimands those who are the target of the gaslighting for failing to meet them.

This type of criticism misconstrues the political movements of oppressed groups that are based on their intersectional standpoint analyses. It calls into question the legitimacy of their intersectional standpoint analyses (about their inequitable and unjust treatment) and their strategies for resistance. It also fails to acknowledge the work that such political movements have done in changing oppressive norms, institutions, laws, policies, and practices.

Brown’s claim that oppressed groups that use identity politics acknowledge class-based oppression but rarely theorize or develop analyses of it merits scrutiny too (Brown 1995, 61). In fact, she is not the only one who has taken issue with the use of identity politics by oppressed groups. Collins and Bilge have argued that Eve Mitchell, John Caputo, Alain Badiou, and Slavoj Žižek believe that the use of identity politics by oppressed groups plays into and serves global capitalism (Collins and Bilge 2016, 127).

The claim that identity politics (and the intersectional standpoint frameworks and analyses they are based on) undercut class-based struggles presumes that there is no point of coincidence between them. Two things need to be said about that supposition. First, the assumption that identity politics (that are based on intersectional standpoint

frameworks and analyses) are invariably in tension with class-based analyses is not warranted. Class is very much part of a number of intersectional standpoint frameworks and analyses. The intersectional standpoint analyses developed by laypersons, activists, researchers, and scholars do not ignore class, rather they analyze the complicated, interlocking interplay between various forms of oppression including classism (see, for instance, the manifesto of the Collective and the works of hooks, Crenshaw, Collins, and Bilge). Depending on their context and goals, intersectional standpoint analyses and the movements based on them choose to prioritize specific problems (Bilge 2013, 421, n.9). Also, note that class is integral to the intersectional standpoint (analytic) framework and analyses of the undocumented used in the case study in this article.

Second, class-based movements are a form of identity politics. After all, identity politics is any kind of political activity by a group (or an organization) that specifically and substantially mobilizes around some aspect of that group's (or organization's) identity (Moran 2020, 263). Class-based movements coalesce around the *identity* of those whose labor is exploited and who work under conditions about which they do not have meaningful say. To state the obvious, class-based movements are a form of identity politics.

So, it is a mistake to think that class-based movements are fundamentally different in kind and in tension with political movements that are based on the intersectional standpoint analyses of oppressed groups. Also, there is no warrant for the charge made by some academics that the oppressed who engage in identity politics (with an emancipatory agenda) are engaging in victimhood politics that is psychologically damaging to them.

### *The Road Traveled*

This article differentiates between standpoint, intersectionality, and intersectional standpoint. It argues that although there is no necessary connection between intersectionality and ethics (or social justice), the intersectional standpoints of the oppressed do epistemic, ethical, and political work. This article also addresses two key criticisms of intersectional standpoints.

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### Notes

1 The description of systems of oppression as “interlocking” could be misread as implying that those systems are static and the relationship between them is fixed (that is, once they lock into place, they stay that way). This article uses the term “interacting” to clarify that “interlocking” is used in a broader sense that denotes that systems of oppression are dynamic and the relationships between them change as the systems of oppression change.

2 This article understands “jeopardizations” as the risks that dominant narratives and systems of oppression impose on oppressed groups. The risks are not the same for all dominated groups (or for all the individuals within those groups) but vary depending on their social context.

3 Dotson should not be read as arguing for a naïve form of subjectivism or a relativist conception of oppression. Rather her point is that because oppression is a multi-stable phenomenon, it is experienced differently and jeopardizes and harms the oppressed in different ways depending on their social context.

4 For other relatively recent works on feminist standpoints, see, for instance, Harding 2004.

5 The term ‘product’ is used loosely; it does not mean to imply that standpoint (analytic) frameworks or analyses are static or fixed. Standpoint (analytic) frameworks and analyses can change as the particulars of oppressed groups change.

6 It should be noted that this is not a call for unquestioning acceptance or affording of absolute epistemic privilege to the standpoint analyses (of the dominant narratives and the oppressive social orders) that are developed by the oppressed because they may be limited or flawed in some regards.

7 These are derived from Iris Marion Young's analysis of oppression; she contends that the five faces of oppression are marginalization, powerlessness, exploitation, cultural imperialism, and violence (Young 1990).

8 hooks was referring to the language that she used in the preface to *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (hooks 1984).

9 Collins appears to use "intersectionality" in this context to mean intersectional research projects, methodologies, and analyses.

10 Note that Collins here is referring to the 2016 monograph, *Intersectionality*, which she and Bilge co-authored.

11 Collins rejects the biomedical conception of disabilities that locates "disabilities" within the bodies of specific individuals.

12 Those who use intersectionality should be understood as those who develop and employ intersectional methods of analyses and the analyses that are constructed using those approaches.

13 As a representation of a possible relationship between intersectional analyses and standpoint analyses, Figure 1 is limited in its ability to capture all aspects of those analyses. For instance, it does not convey that intersectional standpoint analyses are informed by the embodied experiences of the oppressed. Those experiences include the harms they experience because of the dominant narratives and systems of oppression as well as the risks that are imposed on them by those narratives and systems.

14 The use of the term "intersectionality" in this context should be understood as intersectional standpoint (analytic) frameworks and standpoint analyses as well as the political movements based on them.

15 The terms "women" and "men" are used with the understanding that they are socially constructed, normatively charged terms.

16 This article follows in their footsteps and echoes their analysis because such rememberings matter a great deal given the tendency of the academy to sideline, forget, or appropriate the epistemic labor of women of color. In mainstream Anglo-American philosophy, for instance, Black feminist works of philosophy remains mostly unacknowledged as philosophical works. Kristie Dotson's article "Introducing Black Feminist Philosophy" contests that refusal of recognition (Dotson 2017).

17 For other examples of intersectional standpoint analyses of the undocumented, see Meghani 2014; 2015.

18 The term "race" does not refer to a biologically real category in terms of genetics; there are more differences within groups classified as races than between (so-called) races. Moreover, the reality of persons whose parents are from different "races" should be sufficient to confound any attempt to treat races as genetically distinct kinds. The term "racialization" is used to denote race as a socially constructed category that is used to maintain unjust power relations among groups. However, insofar as racism creates and maintains unjust power relations between groups, it should be treated as a very serious and real problem of injustice.

19 It also needs to be clarified that those who do not belong to the class of the undocumented may develop or help construct intersectional standpoint (analytic) frameworks and analyses about the oppression that group experiences, provided they participate in or learn from the collective epistemic endeavor necessary for the development of such analytic frameworks and analyses.

20 The exclusion of domestic workers from the benefits program disproportionately impacted indigent women of color and their families because domestic work was one of the few employment options available to those women.

21 Some of the benefits were restored for undocumented children and the elderly and certain other groups of noncitizens (see USDA 2011, especially 54). However, most of the indigent undocumented population is still barred from accessing public benefits (see USDA 2011, especially 4 and 54).

22 This article considers Joseph Carens's position at some length because it is the most well developed and defensible one for the denial of public benefits to undocumented persons.

23 Carens contends that it is morally permissible for liberal democracies to deny certain kinds of public benefits to indigent undocumented persons who have not been resident for at least five years.

24 In 2022, California expanded its statewide Medicaid program (known as Medi-Cal) to provide health insurance coverage to 286,000 undocumented Californians who are age fifty and over (Office of Governor Gavin Newsom 2022).

**25** Although Carens would allow unauthorized persons access to public benefits if they meet the five-year residency requirement (with, presumably, no criminal conviction), it is US policy to not provide undocumented persons with public benefits regardless of the length of their residency.

**26** If Carens's intuition is examined from the intersectional standpoint (analytic) framework of the undocumented racialized working class, it is likely to be considered, at best, uninformed.

**27** Mae Ngai details the conditions of employment, and the failure of both countries to ensure fair wages and work conditions for the workers. She also discusses the racialization of this population of workers, the refusal of American unions to support these workers, and the actions undertaken by the Immigration and Naturalization Services to serve the labor needs of large-scale farms (Ngai 2014, chapter 4).

**28** Collins identifies capitalism as a form of oppression. However, as it is not the only class-based form of domination and exploitation, the term "classism" is used instead to denote the category of class-based oppressive systems, which includes capitalism.

**29** Also, consider that Crenshaw has argued that intersectionality (read: intersectional standpoint frameworks and analyses) should be used as a resource for analyzing and addressing domestic violence against women (Crenshaw 1991). Analyses of and measures to address violence against women are inadequate if they fail to factor in that heteropatriarchy, racism, classism, ableism, neocolonialism, xenophobia, and other forms of oppression work in complicated and different ways with each other in different contexts to differentially impact the lives of different groups of women who experience domestic violence. As a proponent of intersectionality (read: intersectional standpoint [analytic] frameworks and analyses) and the political movements based on them, Crenshaw claims that the differing histories, experiences, and situatedness of the targets of domestic violence must be taken into account if state actors and societies are to treat them fairly and prevent such violence.

**30** Crasnow makes a similar claim about standpoints (that is, standpoint analyses), but not intersectional standpoint analyses. She rejects intersectionality, citing Naomi Zack's criticism of it (Crasnow 2018). Zack has argued that the adoption of intersectionality by women results in the fragmentation of women as a social group into micro-groups that undermine the possibility of emancipatory, shared goals, and coalitional political movements (Zack 2005).

However, the works of women of color discussed in this article attest to the fact that intersectional standpoints (both analytic frameworks and analyses) can serve as the basis of identity politics projects that are coalitional endeavors. Tina Fernandes Botts's article "The Genealogy and Viability of the Concept of Intersectionality" (Botts 2017) addresses the kind of worry Zack expresses (Zack 2005). Botts argues that intersectionality (as a research program and as methodology) is flourishing in the social sciences and the humanities. Intersectionality (as a research program and as methodology) does not lead to fragmentation that is harmful for common goals of the oppressed, including their coalitional efforts that aim to produce resistant knowledge and achieve political ends.

**31** See, for instance, Garcia 2003 on that construal of that population.

**32** In the larger US cultural context (including mainstream academia), intersectional standpoint frameworks and analyses, and the political movements rooted in them, have been the subject of misguided criticisms. For instance, identity politics based on the intersectional standpoints of the oppressed has been charged with a commitment to a biological determinist conception of social groups. That criticism is not justified with respect to the Collective. The authors of the 1977 manifesto overtly and clearly stated that "[a]s Black women . . . [we find] any type of biological determinism a particularly dangerous and reactionary basis upon which to build a politics."

**33** Moran also distinguishes between groups and movements that are identity-based and engage in identity politics, such as the Black Lives Matters movement, and those that invoke identity but in which identity does little or no motivational or conceptual work (Moran 2020, 263). The latter kind of movements rely on notions such as equality or justice to do their conceptual and motivational work (264).

**34** The SPLC defines a hate group as "an organization or collection of individuals that—based on its official statements or principles, the statements of its leaders, or its activities—has beliefs or practices that attack or malign an entire class of people, typically for their immutable characteristics" (SPLC 2020).

**35** This notion of epistemic gaslighting borrows heavily from Gaile Pohlhaus's conception of it. She writes, "Epistemic gaslighting, we might say, occurs when a person, practice, image, or institution exerts unwarranted pressure on epistemic agents to doubt their own perceptions" (Pohlhaus 2020, 679). This article proposes broadening Pohlhaus's notion of epistemic gaslighting to include "unwarranted pressure by agents or structures on epistemic agents to doubt their own standpoint or intersectional standpoint analyses."

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**Zahra Meghani** is a philosophy Professor at the University of Rhode Island.