Feminism in Coalition

Thinking with US Women of Color Feminism

LIZA TAYLOR

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To the students who took Feminism in Coalition at LMU (spring 2016 and spring 2018) and Elon (spring 2020). This is for you.

Contents

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Introduction

A Discipline in Need of Feminist Refinement: Obscuring the "Politics" of Intersectional Group Activism

Though research on progressive coalition politics is notably limited among many mainstream contemporary political theorists—noteworthy exceptions include Anna Carastathis (2013), Ange-Marie Hancock (2011), Edwina Barvosa (2008), and Cricket Keating (2005, 2018), among others[1]—when attention has veered in this direction in the past decades, a curious and troubling pattern has emerged. In addition to looking to a narrow set of political thinkers, much contemporary analysis tends to obscure the concrete politics of coalition activists in favor of densely philosophical accounts fixated on the discursive unfixity, improbability, and unpredictability of coalitional activism.

Take for example the 2012 supplementary issue of *Theory and Event* that focused on the student coalition that emerged as part of Quebec's Maple Spring, in which a student strike against rising tuition fees grew into a

broader people's struggle against neoliberal policies that pushed austerity measures and weakened democratic institutions. In response to the announcement made by the Parti libéral du Québec in early 2010 of its intention to raise tuition fees by seventy-five percent over five years beginning in 2012, a handful of Quebec student associations formed the Coalition large de l'Association pour une solidarité syndicale étudiante (CLASSE), which represented half of the striking students and was considered to be the most radical of the student groups in its commitment to free postsecondary education and an egalitarian internal decision-making structure. Offering a chronology of events, thirteen articles, and the CLASSE Manifesto itself, the *Theory and Event* issue sought to explain and interpret the events of the Maple Spring as they had unfolded up to the point of the issue's publication (summer 2012). Remarkably, most of the contributing authors were from art, art history, communications, and philosophy departments. Given that *Theory and Event* self-identifies as a journal committed to the fields of "political theory and political science," it is curious that only one self-identified "political theorist" appeared in a special issue on an explicitly political event. On a more generous reading, one might welcome *Theory and Event*'s commitment to interdisciplinarity in its treatment of political activism. Such an interpretation, however, is complicated by the fact that the dominant analytical lens used by this seemingly diverse set of authors was one informed narrowly by poststructuralist philosophical commitments to ontological unfixity, epistemological undecidability, and political indeterminacy, and particularly by the work of a handful of theory titans in this area: Jacques Rancière, Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, Alain Badiou, Slavoj Žižek, and, of course, Judith Butler. As Butler has argued in her most recent lectures on the topic of coalition, what brings people together in the space of coalition is not a shared political commitment to, say, dismantling the neoliberal structures that drive austerity measures and the antidemocratic policies unfolding in Quebec in 2012. No, what brings people to progressive coalitions, Butler maintains, is the unpredictability of ethical encounter—the fact that we do not know with whom we will find ourselves in the space of coalition—or, as she has also put it, the "unchosen dimension" of our solidarity work (Butler 2015, 152). With theorists such as Butler as their guides, the contributing authors emphasized the unpredictability, uncertainty, unimaginability, and undecidability of this moment of coalitional activism.

Such an interpretative frame, however, was particularly odd given the remarkable decisiveness and, dare I say, *decidability* of CLASSE itself.

Whereas the scholarly interpretations of the Maple Spring were replete with unknowns—and with an emphasis on undecidability as a site of productive political engagement—CLASSE's manifesto was explicit in outlining its own set of knowable problems and political goals. The problem, it asserted, was neoliberal capitalism and the corresponding undemocratic form of politics it both engenders and relies on. The goal, it insisted, was a more participatory democratic order. The most concrete act CLASSE called for in the manifesto was the strike itself, hoping that this action would incite a groundswell of support from students and nonstudents alike in their shared political commitment to contesting a social order that guaranteed unequal access to public services leading to increased wealth for a small number of people and corporations (CLASSE 2012). One of the only pieces published within this special issue that explicitly takes up these concrete political reasons for the formation of the strike is the CLASSE manifesto itself. Are we therefore left to believe that political theorists have no insightful interpretative frames to apply to the unfolding of coalitional events? And if it seems that activists may be the best theorists of the concrete politics that incite and guide coalitional activism, then why weren't their theoretical insights foregrounded in the special issue? The dissonance between the concrete politics articulated by CLASSE and the insistence by contemporary theorists on the complete undecidability and political indeterminacy of coalition events reflects the severe limitations of a theoretical framework that proceeds from these poststructuralist theoretical influences instead of from the accounts of activists on the ground.

Fast-forward five years. In the wake of the 2016 US presidential election, many political scientists scrambled to make sense of a campaign season and electoral outcome that defied much of the established knowledge on the logic behind successful election campaigns and voter behavior. To others, especially to the variety of nonwhite minorities, women, and others targeted by Donald Trump's shockingly offensive campaign rhetoric, the outcome simply laid bare to the unknowing portion of white America—those not subject to Trump's hourly Twitter vitriol—what those who were subject to his racist, xenophobic, misogynist, and otherwise distasteful comments had known for quite some time: America was becoming increasingly polarized by racial and misogynist attitudes. To a handful of political science scholars, this outcome was also not unexpected. It simply confirmed what Michael Tesler had discovered in the years leading up to the 2016 election: rather than indicating the end of hostile race relations in America, Barack Obama's presidency ignited increasing racial resentment, the effects of which we can see in the

public's response to Trump's racially hostile campaign rhetoric (see Tesler 2016a, 2016b; Sides, Tesler, and Vavreck 2016). Tesler's findings in relation to the effect of racial attitudes on the 2016 presidential election—the fact that those with stronger racial resentment and ethnocentric beliefs were more likely to support Trump than other Republican candidates (Tesler 2016b)—have been corroborated and expanded by other scholars interested in the "cultural backlash" explanation for Trump's successful presidential bid: the fact that the 2016 election was unusually influenced by hostile attitudes toward progressive viewpoints about people of color, the LGBTQ community, and women (see Inglehart and Norris 2019; Turney et al. 2017).

This analysis bears a striking resemblance to the analysis given to explain Ronald Reagan's victory in the 1980 presidential election. In the same way that backlash to growing progressive attitudes and the shifting demographics in the United States that played a part in electing our first Black male president gave us Donald Trump, scholars in the 1980s showed that growing resentment toward the progressive gains of the civil rights movement (Edgar 1981; Cook 2015) and women's liberation (Eisenstein 1981; Edgar 1981, 225) set the stage for Reagan's successful presidential bid and the policies that defined his presidency: a "war on drugs" that put a disproportionate number of young Black men behind bars, a return to family values policies that threatened feminist gains on workplace and reproductive justice, and Reaganomics policies that reduced domestic government spending on programs that would help minority and poor Americans while granting multibillion dollar tax cuts for the rich and big business. With the multipronged attack on women, people of color, and the poor that was the result of many of Reagan's policies, any effective response from the Left at the time would have to be similarly multifaceted.

The need for a multifaceted and coalition response to diverse oppressions was already a familiar fact for many Women of Color feminists of the time. Following Chela Sandoval (2000) and Chandra Mohanty (2003), I understand Women of Color not as an ontological category describing a certain identity related to being a woman of color but instead as a way of understanding or as an analytic—that is, a theoretical and political orientation characterized by a critical awareness of oppressions as mobile and interlocking and a critical orientation toward monolithic understandings of "women." I am following Shireen Roshanravan (2014) in capitalizing *Women of Color* when referring to texts and authors adopting this particular political and theoretical feminist orientation (when referring to women who simply hold the identity women of color, I refrain from capitalizing the

term). While most Women of Color feminist scholars are indeed nonwhite, understood as an "analytic," Women of Color feminism can accommodate white feminist activist-theorists as well. Minnie Bruce Pratt's influential 1984 essay, "Identity: Skin Blood Heart," is exemplary here.

In a number of interviews in the 1980s and 1990s, Angela Davis had asserted that women of color and other subjugated people would have to come together in coalitions if they ever hoped to effectively dismantle the interlocking oppressive forces that shaped their lives (Davis 1989; Davis 1998; Davis and Martínez 1994; Davis and Bhavnani 1989). In fact, this theme of coalition politics has been central to Women of Color feminist activism since Shirley Chisholm first championed it in her 1972 bid for the presidential nomination of the Democratic Party wherein she advised diverse subjugated people to unite in coalitions committed to undermining the interlocking oppressive forces that were gaining traction in the backlash to the civil rights movement of the 1960s (Chisholm 1972). Even before Chisholm's urgent call to intersectional coalition politics, members of what came to be known as the Third World Women's Alliance (TWWA) gestured in a similar direction in the late 1960s (see Beal in Morgan 1970; Burnham 2001).[2] Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, influential activist theorists such as Bernice Johnson Reagon, Audre Lorde, Sandoval, the TWWA, and the cofounders of the Combahee River Collective (Combahee) as well as activist editors such as Barbara Smith, Gloria T. Hull, Patricia Bell Scott, Cherríe Moraga, and Gloria Anzaldúa (who compiled a range of Black and Women of Color feminists anthologies in this period) all echoed Chisholm's call, consistently maintaining that the only way to effectively undermine oppression was in coalitions across seemingly intractable race, class, gender, sexuality, and other divides. As Davis declared in 1989, "this is the era of coalitions" and specifically "multiracial" social justice coalitions committed to tackling intersecting forms of oppression and subordination (Davis and Bhavnani 1989, 71). In line with her contemporaries, Davis envisioned a form of unity that would compel people "to look at many different issues in a qualitatively different way" (Davis and Bhavnani 1989, 78). When asked in an interview on PBS's *Frontline* to specify what she meant by "coalition," Davis clarified that what is needed are "politically based coalitions" that are more focused on the issues than progressive movements had been in the past and that are defined by coalitional strategies that "go beyond racial lines. We need to bring black communities, Chicano communities, Puerto Rican communities, Asian American communities together" (Davis 1998).

By the mid-1990s, a much broader range of white, postmodern, and Third World feminists also began discussing coalition. As Linda Nicholson argued in 1994, coalition politics is "not something merely external to feminist politics but [is] that which is also internal to it" (Nicholson 1994, 102). Feminist politics, she insisted, had been "exhibiting internal coalitional strategies" since the late 1960s (103). While the work of Women of Color feminists is no doubt at the forefront of this history, Nicholson proposed that many other white feminists were also, and had been for decades, interested in coalition politics. Charlotte Bunch confirmed this only two years later by stating that while the "women's movement" may be dead, "the women's coalition is (or maybe coalitions of women are) alive and well" (Bunch et al. 1996, 934). By 2000, a consensus across feminist theory had emerged: the way forward for feminism was coalition. The 2000 *Signs* special issue, "Feminism at a Millennium," is indicative of this. Almost all of the fifty-plus articles published in this special issue "attest to the urgency of coalitions" (Howard and Allen 2000, xxiv, xxix). The practice of coalition, both the editors and many of the contributors (Stimpson, O'Barr, Ransby, Brodkin, Laslett and Brenner, and Bauer and Wald) argued, is crucial to feminism's future (Howard and Allen 2000, xxx). This consensus remains strong today.

When asked to speak at the University of Chicago only weeks after Trump's election, Davis again attested to the need for progressives to engage in "radical activism" that would build and strengthen "community" and that would be defined by collective "struggle" against intersecting, oppressive forces in the form of multiracial coalitions (Davis and Taylor 2016). What is needed in our contemporary moment, Davis implored the crowd, is a truly intersectional approach to undermining oppression, one that is led by younger social justice activists informed by the lessons learned from the Women of Color feminist activists who have been engaging in effective coalitional organizing since the 1970s. Davis's call to progressive activism in the form of intersectional coalition politics is unambiguous. Still, it is yet to be taken up by many mainstream political theorists.

In the January 2017 supplementary issue of *Theory and Event*, devoted to questions on how progressives might respond to a Trump presidency, no time is devoted to progressive *coalition* politics as a possible answer. In comparison with the 2012 supplementary issue on CLASSE, the selection of authors appearing in the January 2017 issue of *Theory and Event* had shifted decisively toward political theory and political science orientations (almost all of the scholars are situated in political science departments or social justice centers). But what had dropped from the conversation was the need

for progressive alliances in the form of "coalition."[3] Given the urgent need to shift our thinking to progressive coalition politics in light of Trump's multipronged attack on diverse subjugated people, patterns such as this leave me worried that many contemporary scholars are ill-equipped to take on our current set of challenges.

With Women of Color feminists' continued insistence (since at least the late 1960s) on the importance of coalition politics to any successful progressive movement to dismantle interlocking oppressive forces, why haven't political theorists on "the Left (minus the feminist political theorists listed at the start of the introduction) taken up this line of thinking more often? And when they do engage with coalition politics, why do they treat coalition as an unimaginable, unpredictable, and politically indeterminate phenomenon? The disjuncture between what coalition activists report in the trenches and what many mainstream political theorists theorize about in academic writing troubles me and not just because of the charge that it widens the theory-practice divide (which, indeed, it does) and thus delegitimates political theory as a vocation. My concerns run deeper. Dominant strands of contemporary political theory (including, among others, those shaped by poststructuralist influences), I fear, are stymied by this growing dissonance, leaving them ill-prepared to conceive of effective intersectional collective responses necessary in a Trump United States. (It's important to note that "Trump America" began before Trump was elected and will likely continue long after he leaves office.) This is so because they find themselves confounded by what Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe have labeled the "crisis" of post-Marxist collective politics.

In *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (1985), Laclau and Mouffe argue that the twentieth century, particularly the movements of the 1960s, has exploded the Marxist notion that *class* is the primary marker of forms of social injustice. What is now in "crisis" is a vision of the Left that relies on the Marxist ideas of the ontological centrality of the category of the "working class" and the supposed homogeneity of a "collective will" (Laclau and Mouffe 1985, 2). The proliferation of struggles by feminists, sexual minorities, racial minorities, religious minorities, ethnic minorities, and so on reflects what they call a "surplus of the social" in relation to what might have previously been thought of as the organized structures and categories of society (1). In simple terms, narrow class, race, or gender politics alone fail to capture the breadth of devastation brought on by the neoliberal policies of Reaganomics.

What concerns me here is not just the implication of this so-called crisis—that intersectional social justice struggles are incapable of forming

a united coalitional front—but rather, that for Laclau and Mouffe and other influential coalition thinkers such as Deleuze, Guattari, and Butler this crisis is shaped by a concurrent shift at a more theoretical level toward poststructuralist philosophical and political reflections on difference and the implications they carry for collective politics (see Coles 1996, 375). Laclau and Mouffe best articulate this shift in their appeal to what I will present as a multilayer crisis reflecting the poststructuralist theoretical orientations that I find troubling: (1) the assumption of the supposed incompatibility between intersectional social justice struggles and Marxist collective organizing (the intersectionality crisis); (2) the inclination toward the ontological unfixity of all social categories such as "workers" and "women" (the ontological crisis); (3) the proclivity toward epistemological *un*decidability as the accepted framework for making sense of the movement of power and oppression (the epistemological crisis); and (4) the insistence on political indeterminacy as the basis of coalitional activism (the political crisis).

For Laclau and Mouffe and for other contemporary scholars informed by the theoretical orientations named above, all categories are thought to be forever unstable or "unfixed" due to their ongoing *discursive* production—that is, their ongoing production in and through language that leaves categories such as "class," "women," or "workers" forever unfinished (Laclau and Mouffe 1985, 85, x). In addition to challenging fixed ontological categories, Laclau and Mouffe argue that discursive unfixity has devastating implications for modes of *understanding* built on structural determinism, or the notion that society and the forces of oppression operating in it are intelligible structures that could be fully grasped through scientific rationalism or other identifiable modes of understanding. If the perceived ontological crisis is marked by a "surplus" of the social, we might understand the epistemological crisis to be marked by a perceived *deficit* of knowledge, or "structural *un*decidability" (Laclau and Mouffe 1985, xii). If we cannot rely on our old ways of knowing and understanding social forces, how are we to identify the power structures that we hope to challenge politically? Thus the practical politics dimension of the crisis emerges, the perceived political indeterminacy that is thought to be the necessary complement to discursive unfixity and epistemological undecidability. In essence, thinkers such as Laclau and Mouffe (1985, 109, 176), Deleuze and Guattari (1987, 469–70) and Butler (1990, 20–22) try to match the unfixity of the social with an equally indeterminate left-oriented (the lowercase *l* in *left-oriented* is meant to signal a lack of clear political directionality in such formulations) coalition

politics. As many mainstream contemporary authors attempt to confront and work through the layers of this crisis, they encounter several tensions, roadblocks, and conundrums, which are what concern me here.

Specifically, when influential contemporary political theorists, such as Butler, have attempted to maneuver around the tension that results from simultaneously adopting a philosophical commitment to discursive unfixity and a political commitment to a *determinate* Left-oriented agenda, they have succeeded in doing so only by sacrificing the politics of coalition in favor of either problematic notions of ontological disturbance, in the form of *coalition as spectacle* (made popular by Butler's collective drag argument), or apolitical and highly unlikely aspirations to universal ethical community, in the form of *coalition as ethical community* (made popular by Butler's more recent work). In what I call *coalition as spectacle*, Butler's commitment to discursive unfixity shapes a congruous form of politics in the form of collective parodic repetition (Butler 1990, 43–44, 186–88). In this formulation of "antifoundational" coalition politics (20–22, 45), the goal and direction of a coalitional assemblage remain as uncertain as the signifying process that produces the individuals therein (23). Coalition emerges here *as spectacle* wherein sexual minorities find themselves performing unplanned disruptive acts of gender and sexuality defiance, such as collectively dressing in drag. The very purpose of the coalition thus reveals itself in a spectacular performance of gender and sexuality parody.

In a second formulation (though incongruous with Butler's first), politics as ontological disruption is replaced by politics in the form of *ethical orientation*. Politics is eclipsed here by a shared ethical commitment that is itself rooted in our universally shared "condition of primary vulnerability" wherein we are all, as infants, at the mercy of others to keep us alive (Butler 2004, 31). According to Butler, this primary vulnerability, the fact of our shared precariousness, can form the basis of a universal community committed to tackling the uneven precarity of the *most* vulnerable (certain bodies are more vulnerable to the forces of global market capitalism than others). Instead of outlining a Left-oriented coalition politics built around the experience of a particular social group, such as the proletariat, in her formulation of what I am calling *coalition as ethical community*, Butler expands the very notion of class to include *all* people. In such an understanding, however, the very real danger of coalition politics across intractable race, class, gender, and other differences vanishes from view. Thus, despite their incongruity, both formulations share one thing: the concrete politics of progressive coalitions—that is, the goal or purpose of the coalition and

the arrangements of power that situate and frustrate all collective efforts—becomes obscured in the process.

The chokehold of these poststructuralist philosophical influences on contemporary theorizing about progressive coalition politics has led to markedly narrow depictions of collective politics (when a concrete politics is even articulated). It is this, and not the simple fact of the widening divide between theory and practice, that deeply troubles me. Is it possible to foreground the politics that demands intersectional coalitions in the first place and both situates and frustrates encounters within coalitional spaces while also attending to the multiplicity, heterogeneity, and complexity that mark our contemporary social world? Yes, I will argue; a possible way out of this impasse between unfixity and fixity emerges most prominently within early US Women of Color coalitional feminism. Though I will focus primarily on texts that emerged in the 1970s and 1980s, many of the key ideas surfacing here exist within a longer genealogy of US Black and Women of Color feminism beginning as early as the nineteenth century and continuing into the present. I engage texts from this longer genealogy throughout my discussion. I specify the context of the United States (*US* Women of Color feminism) not to signal a shared nationality among the different activist-scholars engaged here but rather to locate the scholarly and publishing context wherein their major works first appeared.

Thinking with and through the Concept of Coalition with Women of Color Feminism

Feminism in Coalition: Thinking with US Women of Color Feminism is thus an invitation to more of my colleagues within contemporary political theory to *think with* US Women of Color coalitional feminist theory. Heeding Davis's call, it implores political activists and theorists alike to take cues from some of our most rigorous political theorists on collective intersectional group politics. Recall that for Chisholm, uniting fractured social justice movements was a *challenge* (not a crisis) that she and contemporaneous Women of Color coalition feminists met with a notion of coalition politics centered on dismantling interlocking oppressive structures. While many scholars since Laclau and Mouffe have taken for granted the relationship between the proliferation of social justice struggles and discursive unfixity, I contend that there are alternative ways to accommodate multiplicity and complexity without subscribing either to discursive unfixity in the form of coalition as spectacle or to ethical commitment in the form of coalition as ethical

community. To arrive at these alternative understandings, we must turn to alternative voices that will lead us to new concepts, specifically to ones not limited to the theoretical straitjacket of poststructuralist influences.

My impetus in turning to alternative voices is shaped by an interest in thinking differently and better about effective intersectional group politics in a demographically shifting and politically divided United States. The insights of these voices point toward possible ways out of the impasses faced by contemporary European/US political theorists who are stymied by poststructuralist philosophical reflections on difference. Feminist, especially Women of Color, coalitional activists and theorists have been actively working through these problematics since the late 1960s. Thus, one of the major claims of this book is that contemporary political and feminist theorists who have not yet engaged this rich body of work would do well to turn toward these activists and theorists instead of away from them, as have certain prominent feminist theorists such as Butler (1990 and 1995) and Jasbir Puar (2007 and 2012).

By "intersectional" group politics I mean a form of collective group politics that attends to multiple "intersecting" (Crenshaw 1991), "interlocking" (Combahee 1983), or "intermeshing" (Lugones 2003) social justice concerns—assaults on reproductive autonomy, contesting neoliberal policies that benefit the rich and corporations at the expense of the middle and working classes, separating children from their parents at the US-Mexico border, forms of structural racism including the disproportionate imprisonment of Black and Brown people, police brutality against Black and Brown people, using welfare policies as a way to police the reproductive autonomy of Black and Brown women, the disappearance of Black, Brown, and Indigenous women, and so many others. While such injustices may be of primary concern to corresponding identity groups (women, the working class, people of color, women of color, prisoners, Indigenous people, and so on), when I speak frequently of *intersectionality*, I resist speaking of actual identity groups. Rather, I am speaking to a particular "analytic," or way of understanding systems of domination and oppression (Crenshaw 2015). Though *intersectionality* as a term emerged formally with Kimberlé Crenshaw's 1989 article "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex," the concept and analytical practice had been in circulation well before Crenshaw's coinage.

Sojourner Truth's work is exemplary here. In her "Ain't I a Woman?" speech—delivered to the Women's Rights Convention in Akron, Ohio, in 1851—Truth challenges both the racial violence of slavery and the rigid gendered stereotypes of Southern, aristocratic femininity in her provocative

and repeated question, "Ain't I a woman?" Within a context of a convention devoted to the situation of "women," Truth challenges both the women and men present to consider whether a Black slave such as herself, who defies traditional notions of white femininity by working in the fields and stepping out of carriages and over ditches without the help of a man, is still a "woman." Through this simple question, Truth positions herself at the intersection of white supremacy and patriarchy, forcing her audience to begin to acknowledge the existence of two systems of oppression simultaneously (2004, 128). Frances Beal elaborates a similar argument in her famous 1969 pamphlet, "Double Jeopardy: To Be Black and Female," wherein she highlights the "slave of a slave" (Beal in Morgan 1970, 385) status of Black women on account of their double marginality in relation to both racist and sexist capitalism. Her claim is an analytical one that carries clear political implications. Like Truth, the analytic she adopts is that of intersectionality wherein she insists that to make sense of the effects of racist capitalism, one must analyze its connection to sexist capitalism. Not only do multiple systems of oppression exist simultaneously, but these systems interact with one another. The implication that this analytic carries for group politics was rather straightforward for Beal: "Any white woman's group who does not have an anti-imperialist and anti-racist ideology has absolutely nothing in common with the black woman's struggle" (Beal in Morgan 1970, 393). Indeed, this became the rallying call behind the activist work she did as part of the TWWA and as editor of the TWWA's journal, *Triple Jeopardy*.

When I use *intersectionality*, then, I am speaking to this evolving sense of the ways in which multiple systems of domination exist in society simultaneously and are mutually reinforcing. I am crediting US Black and Women of Color feminism with bringing this to the fore. Thus, when I position this project as one invested in exploring the possibilities for intersectional collective group politics, I mean to signal an interest in exploring possibilities of alliances across race, class, gender, sexuality, faith, ethnicity, and other differences for the sake of tackling intersecting systems of domination and oppression. What version of progressive collective group politics might an intersectionality analytic inform? While this question is posed as a live and pressing one in contemporary feminist studies, one of my central claims is that this "politics" question was settled long ago with early US Women of Color coalition feminists such as Combahee, the TWWA, Reagon, and many others.[4] For the feminists who developed the analytic of intersectionality, the corresponding politics was always coalition politics. Part of my aim here is to make this claim unequivocally clear so that contemporary theorists

and activists might move on to the next question of how we might utilize the savvy coalitional strategies of US Women of Color coalitional feminism in the context of our contemporary social justice struggles.

When using the formulation *Women of Color*, I resist any connection to Puar's treatment of *women of color* in her 2012 article, "'I Would Rather Be a Cyborg Than a Goddess.'" When Puar uses either the phrase "women of color," or its acronym, WOC, she treats it as an identity category that has become "simultaneously emptied of specific meaning in its ubiquitous application and yet overdetermined in its deployment" insofar as it is the "difference of African American women that dominates this genealogy of the term women of color" (Puar 2012, 52). For an incisive critique of Puar on this point, see James Bliss (2016). Not only does Puar problematically limit *women of color*'s usage to an identity category, but, as Bliss points out, her critique of intersectionality, and necessarily also of women of color, exhibits an anxiety in Puar's work that "manifests as hostility toward the project of radical Black feminism" (Bliss 2016, 734, 738). My project therefore proceeds in the opposite direction of Puar's insofar as it welcomes theoretical engagement with the radical Black and Women of Color feminists who gave us the sophisticated analytic of intersectionality and its corresponding politics of coalition.

Though the conversation about coalition politics within US Women of Color feminism is an ongoing one, my focus is primarily on the early generative texts written in the 1970s and 1980s, both because of the crucial importance of these texts and because of the historical resonance of their time to ours: a time of backlash to progressive gains. While there are differences between the activist-scholars from this period, I will instead highlight the ways in which they converge on using the *concept* of coalition not only as a practical solution to questions related to collective feminist organizing across difference but also as a theoretical apparatus for examining the very philosophical questions and puzzles that have perplexed many contemporary European/US political theorists. The variety of ways in which US Women of Color coalition feminists think with and through the concept of coalition enlivens broader conversations within contemporary political theory on theorizing political subjectivity and consciousness in spite of both ontological and epistemological fluidity and theorizing a version of progressive coalition politics that foregrounds the politics of coalitional work while also accommodating this fluidity.

Thinking with US Women of Color coalition feminists, this book thus traces a constellation of concepts orbiting the notion of "coalition" emerging

in the early generative texts by the TWWA, Combahee, Chisholm, Reagon, Smith, Lorde, Moraga, Anzaldúa, Pratt, Sandoval, María Lugones, Mohanty, and the many authors appearing in *This Bridge Called My Back*. At various points throughout the book, I follow this conversation into the 1990s and early 2000s by reading a selection of texts by Crenshaw, Linda Alcoff, Edwina Barvosa-Carter, Cynthia Burack, Mohanty, Lugones, and Sandoval—and even into the present with works by Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, Erica Townsend-Bell, Karma Chávez, Carastathis, Keating, Roshanravan, Ashley Boher, and Zein Murib. The concepts that surface here are shaped by the analytic of intersectionality emerging out of an even longer genealogy of US Black and Women of Color feminism that begins with activists such as Truth. While tracing this conceptual genealogy, *Feminism in Coalition* challenges its political theory readers not yet familiar with US Women of Color coalitional feminism to enter unfamiliar territory, wherein the concept of coalition will emerge in unconventional and perhaps perplexing ways. In addition to uncovering more concrete notions of activist coalition politics—in the form of what I call "politico-ethical coalition politics"—I will invite readers to entertain notions of coalitional identity, coalitional consciousness, and coalitional scholarship. By challenging the chokehold that notions of undecidability, unfixity, and indeterminacy have over contemporary political thought, these more peculiar adjectival formulations of coalition will offer creative and ultimately promising ways out of the tensions and conundrums articulated above.

Concrete coalition politics, early US Women of Color coalition feminists maintain, requires an appreciation of interlocking oppressions, which not only produce what they conceive as "coalitional" understandings of collective group politics, identity, consciousness, and even scholarship, but also reshape the very stakes of Laclau and Mouffe's so-called crisis. Challenging the presumed intersectionality "crisis" of post-Marxist group politics, activist-scholars such as Smith and the other cofounders of Combahee show that for them there was never any "crisis" between Marxism and intersectionality. As we learn in a recent interview between Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor (2017) and the cofounders of Combahee, their intersectional commitments and their Marxist commitments were clear and congruous from the start. As they put it, all that was required was an extension and reworking of Marxism, not an abandonment of Marxism. This presumption of the possible compatibility between Marxism and intersectional social justice concerns is further explored in Bohrer's *Marxism and Intersectionality: Race, Gender, Class, and Sexuality under Contemporary Capitalism* (2019). As my engage-

ment with her text will reveal, while such a presumption is explicitly stated by the Combahee cofounders, it was also implied in accounts by Women of Color feminists appearing as early as the mid-nineteenth century. I take this shared presumption as my starting place so that I may reframe Laclau and Mouffe's so-called crisis of Marxism as a *challenge*, not a crisis—a challenge that Women of Color feminists such as Combahee and many others have met and worked through since the nineteenth century.

The ability to do this is captured in the formulation "politico-ethical coalition politics," a distinctive understanding of coalition located in early US Women of Color coalitional feminism and vividly on display in Reagon's 1981 coalition speech, "Coalition Politics: Turning the Century." I engage in a close examination of this speech alongside contemporaneous work by Smith and the other cofounders of Combahee; Chisholm; Lorde; Anzaldúa; the authors appearing in Moraga and Anzaldúa's (1983a) coedited anthology, *This Bridge Called My Back*; and Sandoval's account of the unique consciousness formed among the members of the US Third World feminist consciousness-raising (CR) group at the National Women's Studies Association (NWSA) annual conference in 1981. This undertaking reveals that politico-ethical coalition politics embodies three distinguishing characteristics: an emphasis on coalition as a dangerous and even life-threatening *struggle*; an understanding that coalition is generated out of a shared *self-reflexive political commitment* to undermining oppression; and an emphasis on *existential transformation* as inherent to the very process of coalescing. While I will demonstrate that the notion of politico-ethical coalition politics on offer from this rich body of work is uniquely *political* insofar as it foregrounds the decidable and goal-oriented politics of coalitional activism rooted in a shared political commitment to undermining oppression, I reveal that this form of collective political engagement is best thought of as politico-*ethical* insofar as the political commitment to undermining interlocking oppressive forces grounding their efforts is overtly self-reflexive, thereby encouraging an ethical sensibility characterized by love and existential transformation.

It is precisely this understanding of coalition politics that resonates across the 2017 Women's March on Washington's (WMW) unity principles, notably written and conceptualized by a national team composed primarily of Women of Color feminists. An unprecedented success in its ability to mobilize a diverse population for an intersectional social justice platform, this event offers an excellent opportunity to examine the extent to which this constellation of concepts might prove instructive for contemporary activists. Notwithstanding the various controversies that erupted leading

up to and in the wake of the 2017 WMW, I will show that the key values and principles guiding the march, shaping the convictions of various speakers and attendees at the march, and even propelling some of the most heated controversies surrounding the march demonstrate the necessity and promise of politico-ethical coalition politics.

This form of coalition politics is made possible for Women of Color coalition feminists by reconfiguring notions of political subjectivity, political consciousness, and collective authorship in "coalitional" terms. By locating a "coalitional" understanding of identity within this literature, wherein Women of Color feminists are thought to be internally heterogeneous and complexly situated and nevertheless in a constant struggle toward ontological wholeness and unity, I show that thinking with these authors will offer creative alternatives to the emphasis on ontological unfixity and the subject-in-process characteristic of poststructuralist attempts to theorize multiple and fluid conceptions of identity within political theory. Through this process of internal struggle toward coalitional identity, the authors I examine show us, women of color acquire a "coalitional consciousness"; that is, a tactical epistemological awareness and acuity for navigating complex (though nevertheless identifiable) social systems of oppression and for assuming tactical political subjectivities for the sake of collective group action. The skills that they acquire by navigating their own coalitional identities and struggling toward ontological wholeness as coalitional selves, this *thinking with* reveals, prepares them for the difficult work of coalition politics with other subjugated peoples and across at times conflicting or hostile differences. Their ability to map potential lines of collective activism from *within* the space of lived oppression and marginalization, we will find, offers creative alternatives to the dominant mode of bird's-eye view theorizing typical of approaches within political theory as dissimilar as Lenin's scientific socialism and Deleuze and Guattari's unpredictable "minoritarian becomings" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 469–70).

I recognize that to use the concept of coalition in such unconventional ways will likely puzzle some readers. I will demonstrate that the multidimensionality that this concept holds for US Women of Color coalition feminists need not trouble us. Arriving at these imaginative concepts, however, is no easy task. To get there, these activist-theorists have also profoundly reshaped how they *do* political theory. To be sure, the unique contribution of US Women of Color coalitional feminism to the study of intersectional coalition politics does not end with its strong appeal to politico-ethical coalitions as the best way to unite diverse subjugated groups working to

undermine oppression. While attention to coalition building and coalition politics is perhaps one of the most celebrated aspects of US Women of Color feminism among contemporary political and social theorists interested in progressive group politics (see Burack 2004, 159), the true sophistication in their notion of coalition lies in its multidimensionality. For these authors, coalitions were not simply "indispensable instrumental tools" of minority politics (159). Following Burack (2004), Sandoval (2000), and Townsend-Bell (2012), I will demonstrate that US Women of Color coalitional feminism also functions as a kind of coalitional discourse that not only arrives at coalition as the answer to the progressive politics question provoked by the perceived crisis of Marxism but also enacts a form of *coalitional scholarship*. This new understanding of what is entailed in the very *process of theorizing* coalition has led contemporary scholars such as Townsend-Bell to describe Women of Color feminist anthologies such as *This Bridge Called My Back* as "written" or "textual" coalitions (Townsend-Bell 2012, 130). While attempting to understand a material object such as a book as a "coalition" no doubt poses a hefty set of challenges, to pass off this final formulation of coalition as too strange or less than rigorous would be to miss one of US Women of Color feminism's most important contributions to both contemporary political theory and to contemporary feminist studies.

In order to effectively theorize coalition politics, these authors show that a more collaborative mode of scholarship is absolutely essential. I call this mode of scholarship *coalitional* because it is not just collaborative, it is also unambiguously political and is grounded in an activist and self-reflexive social justice mission. The insights emerging out of this coalitional scholarship and the urgency with which it pushes toward workable and practical solutions provide a stark contrast to the impasses and deadlocks that shape scholarship within dominant strands of contemporary political theory. First, it moves us in the direction of collective and even coalitional conversations as opposed to master narratives that grant authority to a handful of canonical male thinkers and comprehensive rational, or scientific, theories. Across the chapters that follow, I take no one, single theorist as my primary theorist. While I do select certain authors and pieces in order to illustrate certain points, many of the points I make by way of one text or one thinker are echoed across many other texts and authors. Furthermore, the texts I engage here mostly include a range of shorter essays, speeches, stories, poems, streams of consciousness, personal reflections, movement documents, and manifestos written by a range of US Women of Color coalition feminists, and they often

appear in anthologies as opposed to single-authored books that attempt to outline a comprehensive theory of collective progressive politics. Much of early US Women of Color coalitional feminism in fact comes to us through anthologies or coauthored articles (see Lugones and Spelman 1983). By their very nature, anthologies create the opportunity for "a print-based collective space" (Norman 2006, 39). When such anthologies also self-reflexively engage the challenge of working across differences and for the sake of undermining interlocking oppressions, then they also have the potential to enact the very coalitions they seek (39). The coalitional discourses activated within these anthologies are overtly political, rooted in an activist social justice mission, and intensely self-reflexive. The authors are aware of the challenges inherent in the coalitional goals they hope to achieve and spend much time—in conversation with one another through printed interviews or explicit references to one another across the pages of the anthology—working toward solutions to the challenge that difference poses to collective intersectional politics. Women of Color feminist anthologies such as Smith's (1983a) *Home Girls*, Hull, Scott, and Smith's (1982) *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave*, and Moraga and Anzaldúa's (1983a) *This Bridge Called My Back* exemplify this collectively self-reflexive and overtly political character. Many of the authors I engage here (Smith, Moraga, Anzaldúa, and Lorde) were actively involved in bringing these anthologies to print.

Ideas presented in the handful of single-authored texts that I engage have also emerged out of coalitional conversations. For example, the linchpin of Sandoval's (2000) argument in *Methodology of the Oppressed*—which I will position as the bedrock of US Women of Color feminist understandings of coalitional consciousness—was developed in conversation with other Women of Color feminists in 1981 as they collectively reflected on their marginalization within mainstream academic feminism. As secretary to the US Third World feminist consciousness-raising (CR) group, a group that formed within the space of the 1981 NWSA Annual Meeting due to feelings of severe marginalization as women of color within the space of the conference, Sandoval's 1982 report, "Feminism and Racism: A Report on the 1981 National Women's Studies Association Conference," documents, summarizes, and reflects on the proceedings of the conference and the experiences of the US Third World feminist CR group. By assuming the role of "secretary," as opposed to primary "author," of this report, Sandoval places herself in a coalitional conversation with the other women at the conference. As such, she documents, rather than develops, a unique epistemology—or consciousness—of US Third World women that moves unequivocally toward

coalition. Though I have never shared a common physical space with all of the Women of Color coalitional feminists whom I engage throughout this book, *Feminism in Coalition* similarly attempts to document the evolving sense of coalition emerging among these authors and texts. Coalition thus operates on two levels across Sandoval's work. The notion of the "methodology of the oppressed" that she develops in her 2000 book not only relies most fundamentally on the coalitional consciousness that is typical of US Women of Color feminism, but the very idea itself emerges out of the coalitional space of the 1981 meetings of the US Third World feminist CR group.

Both Lugones's and Mohanty's single-authored texts continue this trend toward coalitional scholarship. In the preface to *Pilgrimages* (2003), Lugones writes that the book "represents" an "attempt to grasp a thematic" for "many years of theoretical reflection within grass-roots radical political work" (ix). Ultimately, she asserts, the book is the outcome of "shaping ground together" (x). The book is "neither a contemplative, nor a visionary, nor a programmatic work"; instead, it "*takes up, from within, a feel for collectivity*" (ix; my emphasis). Not only will Lugones ultimately arrive at coalition as an indispensable tool for minority group politics, the book itself also attempts to embody many key components of coalitional thinking. It takes concrete encounters with difference as its starting place, and it creatively and collectively thinks through how such differences may provide the basis for collective emancipatory politics. In the introduction to *Feminism without Borders* (2003), Mohanty makes a similar declaration in relation to the collective thinking that went into the production of her book: "While many of the ideas I explore here are viewed through my own particular lenses, all the ideas belong collectively to the various feminist, anti-racist, and anti-imperialist communities in which I have been privileged to be involved. In the end, I think and write in conversation with scholars, teachers, and activists involved in social justice struggles. My search for emancipatory knowledge over the years has made me realize that ideas are always communally wrought, not privately owned" (1). Like Sandoval and Lugones, Mohanty positions her text within a coalitional conversation among Women of Color feminists and other social justice activists who are collectively committed to undermining and resisting interlocking oppressions. Not only is the book fundamentally preoccupied with elaborating visions of feminist political solidarity, but the text itself is born out of "a self-reflexive collective process" (8). Like Sandoval and Lugones, Mohanty thus situates her theoretical contributions as in conversation with, and indebted to, early US Women of Color feminists such as Smith, Lorde, and Reagon (4).

A second component of coalitional scholarship is the propensity to theorize from *within* lived struggle instead of from abstract principles. All the authors that I engage here theorize from within grassroots activist work. It is this experience of struggle, and not a theoretical framework rooted in either rational choice theory or discursive unfixity, that shapes their theory of coalition politics. In so doing, these authors dispense with a certain style of political theory that focuses either on rational argumentation or on poststructuralist tendencies toward discursive unfixity, and instead they favor innovative and creative modes of storytelling, polemical prose, rousing speeches or manifestos, and intensely personal reflections on encountering and working through multiple levels of difference. With this unique methodological approach to political theory, the US Women of Color coalition feminists I *think with* here spend time tracing both individual and group journeys toward coalition. Through such endeavors, the very notion of coalition—that is, of self-reflexively struggling across differences for the sake of a shared political commitment to undermining all forms of oppression—inflects the full life of their work.

These themes also arise in contemporary feminist scholarship on coalition. For instance, in *Wealth of Selves: Multiple Identities, Mestiza Consciousness, and the Subjects of Politics* (2008), Barvosa uses Anzaldúa's unique conception of identity to demonstrate how identity may be reconceived simultaneously as multiple *and* as cohesive and whole (11). Vital to the possibility of feminist alliance, Rowe argues in the same year, is the notion of a "coalitional subject" (2008, 3). Curiously, however, Aimee Carrillo Rowe ultimately turns explicitly to the language of "alliance" in place of "coalition" due to her belief (following Albrecht and Brewer 1990, 304) in its ability to signal a longer lasting and deeper political relationship built on trust. Coalition, on the other hand, is a short-lived and strictly strategic relationship. Following this distinction, Rowe argues that an "alliance analytic" will prove most useful to a project of theorizing possibilities for feminist solidarity and feminist politics (Rowe 2008, 5). My analysis, however, forces the question: Why this turn away from coalition, especially when we already know that Rowe contends that the "coalitional subject" is central to the subject of feminist alliance? My intervention thus departs slightly from Rowe's due to my interest in retaining the language and conceptual purchase of coalition not just as a practical answer to the question of collective progressive politics but also as a sophisticated concept in its own right.

My willingness to hold on to the concept of coalition and to explore it in its more curious adjectival forms is reflected in recent work by Chávez.

To call something "coalitional," Chávez argues in her 2013 book, is to imply an "intermeshed understanding of identity, subjectivity, power, and politics located on the dirt and concrete where people live, work, and play" (7). Absolutely crucial to both concrete coalition politics and coalitional understandings of identity, consciousness, and scholarship, my and Chávez's analyses both contend, is an appreciation of struggling against interlocking oppressions, which also produce what we might call intermeshed (pace Lugones) understandings of identity, power, politics, and subjectivity. Such an understanding accommodates complexity without insisting on fragmentation. Instead, it invokes a sense of wholeness or coherence in complexity and multiplicity. The ability to do this, I am suggesting, along with Chávez, is captured in the adjectival formulation, *coalitional*.

While Rowe, Barvosa, and Chávez all remain open to theorizing notions of subjectivity and consciousness that correspond (and for Rowe and Chávez explicitly so) with the notions of coalitional identity and coalitional consciousness that I will develop here, my analysis pushes *coalitional* into new territory with the notion of coalitional scholarship. Chávez gestures toward this idea in her definition of *coalitional* as involving a type of understanding that one acquires on "the dirt and concrete where people live, work, and play" (2013, 7). Here Chávez advocates "theory in the flesh" (7), drawing from Moraga and Anzaldúa's understanding of the phrase in *This Bridge Called My Back*, as a way in which activists-theorists bring the concrete material experiences of their lived struggles to their writing. Lugones's notions of "pedestrian" and "streetwalker" theorizing accomplish something similar (Lugones 2003, 5, 207–37). The emphasis in both approaches is on the idea of theorizing from below and from within lived struggle. Though overlooked by Chávez here, what is also central to these concepts and is exemplified in Moraga and Anzaldúa's *This Bridge Called My Back* is how such approaches to theory activate a coalitional discourse that becomes the basis of coalitional scholarship.

To return briefly to Rowe's analysis, it seems the notion of coalitional scholarship that I offer here may incline scholars such as Rowe to rethink the value of a "coalition analytic" over an "alliance analytic." The approach to collective politics on offer by early US Women of Color coalitional feminist theory, I will show, was clearly on display in the approach they took to their scholarship in the form of textual coalition. While Chávez, too, is aware of something unique to the way in which Women of Color feminists *do* political theory, my analysis demonstrates that it is worthwhile to actually name this unique methodology "coalitional scholarship" precisely because it points

to the creative potential of coalition not only as a thing or practice on the ground (Chávez 2013, 146–47) or as a way of rethinking important related concepts (identity, consciousness) but also as a way of doing political theory. If the notion of politico-ethical coalition politics that I have developed here corresponds with Rowe's understanding of feminist alliance, then why not emphasize the remarkable continuity of thought found within early US Women of Color coalitional feminism by foregrounding the promise of this term, *coalition*? This is precisely what I set out to do.

Outline of Chapters

To accomplish these tasks, the book is staged around four moments of intervention in contemporary political thought that such a *thinking with* provokes, followed, in chapter 5, by an application of lessons learned through these encounters to the 2017 WMW and, in the conclusion, by takeaways for contemporary and future activists. Each of the first four chapters of the book is organized around accomplishing three main tasks, though not always sequentially: (1) presenting a central problematic in contemporary political or feminist theory encouraged by poststructuralist philosophical commitments to ontological unfixity, epistemological undecidability, or political indeterminacy; (2) reengaging the key concepts and components shaping each problematic through the lens of *thinking with*, depending on the chapter, intersectional feminist precursors to US Women of Color coalitional feminism, the key authors and texts from the early decades of the 1970s and 1980s, or other important texts from the 1990s and early 2000s; and finally (3) situating each chapter's conceptual intervention within more recent contemporary feminist scholarship in order to identify both what is unique to early US Women of Color coalitional feminism and how the concepts forged there continue to shape contemporary feminist studies in productive ways. Across these chapters, my intended audience includes both contemporary European/US political theorists as well as contemporary feminist theorists and activists. The work of *thinking with* US Women of Color coalitional feminism to revisit key problematics within contemporary political theory will prove particularly salient to contemporary political theorists who have yet to turn toward US Women of Color coalitional feminism and find themselves grappling with theorizing collective progressive activism beyond the theoretical straitjacket of poststructuralist theoretical influences. The variety of practical politics questions and philosophical puzzles that I explore along the way should be of particular interest to

feminist theorists invested either in celebrating the sophisticated theoretical reflections of early US Women of Color coalitional feminism, or in critically reexamining trends within contemporary feminist scholarship on the topics that I explore here—revisiting the subject of feminism through the conceptual framework of multiple and fluid identity, developing an intersectional feminist consciousness that might guide collective activism, exploring the relationship between the ethics and politics of feminist activism, and engaging in activist feminist scholarship. Situating these interventions within contemporary feminist activism through the case study of the 2017 WMW and the concluding takeaways will appeal most directly to feminist, ethnicity, and critical race studies activists interested in engaging in intersectional collective politics in a contemporary moment marked by proliferating attacks on intersectional social justice.

Chapter 1, "From Rosa Luxemburg to the Combahee River Collective: Spontaneous Coalition as a Precursor to Intersectional Marxism and Politico-Ethical Coalition Politics," sets out to dissolve the premise of the so-called crisis of post-Marxist collective politics (what I call the intersectionality crisis) by putting Rosa Luxemburg's version of Marxism, as presented in "The Mass Strike, the Political Party, and the Trade Unions" (1906), in conversation with a genealogy of US Women of Color feminists beginning with Maria Stewart in the first half of the nineteenth century and continuing through Combahee and the TWWA. Both of these 1960s and 1970s Women of Color feminist activist groups—Combahee in their "Black Feminist Statement" (1977) and the TWWA in their *Black Woman's Manifesto* (compiled in the late 1960s–1970)—and the lineage that came before them display a commitment to what contemporary scholars such as Bohrer understand as intersectional Marxism. Such a commitment, I will show, might be productively read as a conceptual precursor to the notion of politico-ethical coalition politics emerging in the 1970s and 1980s. The problematic introduced here is Laclau and Mouffe's starting place, namely, the assumption that attention to intersectional social justice struggles and Marxism is necessarily incompatible. By *thinking with* Combahee and the TWWA about Marxism, we find that the version of Marxism that precipitates Laclau and Mouffe's crisis is that of Vladimir Lenin. When putting Combahee, the TWWA, and a genealogy of US Women of Color feminism in conversation with Luxemburg, we find that Lenin's rigid scientific socialism, which relies on Communists to shape the proletariat's class consciousness and corresponding politics, might be replaced with a theory of spontaneous coalition politics that emerges neither out of the precision of natural science (pace Lenin)

nor out of the morass of theories of discursive unfixity (pace Laclau and Mouffe) but instead out of the school of lived struggle.

Luxemburg's approach to Marxism was unique in her insistence that workers living and working in oppressive conditions would develop their own sophisticated understanding of oppression. It was this political consciousness, she insists, and not one imparted on them by school masters or party leaders, that would guide their activist efforts (Luxemburg 2004a). It is on this methodological point—theorizing from *within* lived struggle—that a fruitful conversation between Luxemburg and Women of Color feminist activists might begin. Though Luxemburg does not explicitly advocate an approach that could be called "intersectional," when reading her emphasis on theorizing from inside a space of lived struggle alongside Stewart, Truth, Ida B. Wells-Barnett, Combahee, and the TWWA, an *intersectional wedge* is opened in Marxism that not only dissolves the crisis of post-Marxist collective politics but also sets the stage for a theory of spontaneous though nevertheless united and directed coalition politics equipped to take on intersectional social justice concerns.

Building on the notion of intersectional Marxism developed in chapter 1, chapter 2, "Women of Color Feminism and Politico-Ethical Coalition Politics: Recentering the Politics of Coalition with Reagon, Smith, Combahee, and Lorde," develops the key components of "politico-ethical coalition politics" by thinking again with Combahee and with Reagon's 1981 coalition speech; Chisholm's 1972 article; the collection of essays, poems, stories, letters, speeches, and polemical appeals appearing across Lorde's 1984 work, *Sister Outsider*; and a selection of early 1980s pieces by Smith. The problematic explored here is the tendency among contemporary scholars such as Butler and those influenced by her work to obscure the politics that demand and situate coalitional activism in favor either of ontological disruption (in the form of *coalition as spectacle*) or ethical community (in the form of *coalition as ethical community*). In both formulations, the politics of coalition fades from view as attention either to antifoundational and politically indeterminate group spectacle or to apolitical and naively optimistic aspirations to ethical community takes center stage.

After outlining this problematic, the chapter proceeds to *think with* early US Women of Color coalition feminists in order to develop a theory of politico-ethical coalition politics that recenters the politics of coalition through three distinguishing features: an emphasis on coalition as a dangerous and even life-threatening *struggle*; an understanding that coalition is generated out of a shared *self-reflexive political commitment* to undermining

oppression; and an emphasis on *existential transformation* as inherent to the very process of coalescing. Turning to Reagon's speech, the chapter soberly confronts the very real challenge of intersectional coalitional activism, an endeavor that Women of Color feminists insist is marked by continuous *struggle*. Such an emphasis, I will show, immediately calls into question naive aspirations on the part of Butler and other contemporary authors to a shared ethical orientation as the cementing force behind coalition efforts. I make this argument by resituating Reagon's oft-cited coalition speech outside of contemporary misinterpretations of this text that read into it an ethical orientation toward receptive generosity (see Coles 1996). By putting Reagon in conversation with her contemporaries, I reveal, instead, a nascent theory of coalition as politico-ethical encounter. While Romand Coles reads an ethical orientation in Reagon as the cementing force behind coalition politics, I instead read a *self-reflexive* political commitment to undermining all forms of oppression, and particularly those that emerge within coalitional spaces, as the cementing force behind coalition politics.

As I demonstrate across the chapter, thinking with early US Women of Color coalition feminists about coalition politics helps us to think differently about the conundrums shaping both of Butler's formulations of coalition politics. Unlike Butler's formulation of coalition as spectacle, Reagon, Smith, Lorde, and others show us that coalitional activism is uniquely *political* insofar as it foregrounds the decidable and goal-oriented politics of coalitional activism rooted in a shared political commitment to undermining interlocking oppressive forces. Unlike Butler's formulation of coalition as ethical community, it further reveals the important ethical dimension of coalition work without letting it eclipse the political basis of coalitional activism. This unique relationship between politics and ethics resonates across contemporary feminist engagements with questions of feminist alliance and solidarity. By contrasting arguments made by Mohanty in *Feminism without Borders* and taken up by authors in the *New Political Science* "Feminism in Coalition" symposium (2018),[5] with Butler's recent lectures on the topic, Puar's work on assemblage theory, and *Theory and Event*'s special CLASSE issue, I show the continued salience of politico-ethical coalition politics to contemporary political theory and feminist studies, while warning against a trend that moves decisively away from intersectionality and toward post-structuralist philosophical reflections on difference.

Chapter 3, "Coalition from the Inside Out: Struggling toward Coalition Identity and Developing Coalitional Consciousness with Lorde, Anzaldúa, Sandoval, and Pratt," grounds politico-ethical coalition politics in coalitional

understandings of identity and consciousness that accommodate multiplicity and fluidity while resisting ontological unfixity and epistemological undecidability, thus presenting two more instructive concepts emerging out of this literature and introducing the third key component of politico-ethical coalition politics: an insistence on opening oneself to *self-transformation* as part and parcel to the process of coalescing. In relation to developing a notion of *coalitional identity*, the problem confronted is the philosophical straitjacket of ontological unfixity, which has led Butler, Moya Lloyd, Diana Fuss, Puar, and many others to the complete disavowal of any form of identity-based group politics and to the outright dismissal of Women of Color feminists who seek to recuperate some notion of identity-based group action.

Offering a useful alternative to theorizations of the subject-in-process rooted in permanent discursive unfixity, the chapter seeks to celebrate the distinct advantages of an identity-based group politics, especially when "identity" is reconceived in coalitional terms. Returning to Lorde's *Sister Outsider* (1984f) and putting her in conversation with Anzaldúa's influential *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987), Carmen Vázquez's account of working in a multiracial women's coalition in San Francisco in the 1980s (captured in Carastathis 2013), Combahee's nuanced rendering of identity politics in their 1977 "Black Feminist Statement," Mohanty's (1991) and Alcoff's (1997) brilliant treatments of such nuances in their discussions of positionality in the 1990s, and more recent work by Carastathis (2013), the chapter revisits questions centering on critiques of monolithic understandings of identity categories and the extent to which a more fluid conception of identity might nevertheless provide a basis for effective intersectional coalition politics. By thinking with a genealogy of US Women of Color coalitional feminism beginning with the early pivotal texts in the 1970s and 1980s and continuing with texts produced throughout the next three decades, the chapter develops a notion of *coalitional identity* conceived as an internal political process, or struggle, toward ontological wholeness that mirrors the external political process of struggling across difference that is required for successful politico-ethical coalition politics for these activist-theorists.

The chapter thus challenges contemporary engagements with Anzaldúa presented by feminist thinkers such as Cristina Beltrán (2004), wherein Anzaldúa's willingness to challenge unfixity is scrutinized. While Beltrán is reluctant to concede that a mestiza might have a special role to play in guiding collective politics due to her position as a border woman, I argue

that it is precisely her unique ontological existence as a coalitional self that positions her and other Women of Color feminist activist-theorists from this period as our most promising guides in Trump's United States. When understanding identity in coalitional terms, we begin to appreciate how a focus on identity might lead us in the direction of critical self-awareness rather than essentialist identity politics.

In relation to developing a notion of coalitional consciousness, the problem confronted in the second half of the chapter builds from the epistemological "crisis" of Marxism. While Laclau and Mouffe's impetus in theorizing the social world as "unfixed" rests on their desire to avoid the epistemological decidability characteristic of Lenin's Marxism in the form of scientific socialism and top-down party politics, contemporary attempts to maneuver outside of this rigidity struggle to move away from bird's-eye view theorizing. Exemplary here is Deleuze and Guattari's theory of diagramming minoritarian becomings. Deleuze and Guattari break the rigidity of Lenin's scientific socialism through their account of the social world as a "machine assemblage" wherein the movement of oppression and groups existing within society follows a fluid rhizomatic, rather than arborescent, formation (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 140, 358–61). Despite this injection of fluidity and movement into previously rigid and striated understandings of oppression and society, they nevertheless adopt a bird's-eye view of the social that, while it will not, in this case, *pre*scribe political activism in the way it did for Lenin, it is nevertheless locked into *de*scribing the fluid movements of collective group resistance as they unfold from a removed (bird's-eye view) perspective. While this move toward diagramming minoritarian resistances accommodates the smooth space of intermeshed and mobile forces of oppression, it is ill-equipped to guide coalitional activism. Politics here assumes a descriptive mode of mapping oppression and group resistance from above and after the fact, rather than attempting to prescribe the creation of future coalitional disturbances.

By putting Anzaldúa's conception of mestiza consciousness in conversation with Sandoval's articulation of "oppositional consciousness" and Lugones's conceptualization of "pedestrian theorizing," this chapter goes on to develop an account of mapping oppression that tactically *prescribes* collective political action without falling into a top-down approach. Specifically, recalling Luxemburg's approach to Marxism, it explores the possibility of theorizing oppression from *within* oppression through the notion of *coalitional consciousness*: a tactical epistemological awareness and acuity for navigating complex and fluid (though nevertheless identifiable) social

systems of oppression and assuming tactical collective political subjectivities for the sake of collective group action. I'm indebted to both Sandoval (2000, 71) and Keating (2005) for their uses of the phrase "coalitional consciousness." In thinking especially with Sandoval here (I think more directly with Keating in the conclusion), I show that US Women of Color coalition feminists such as Anzaldúa, Vázquez, and others acquire this unique mode of understanding through the process of internal struggle toward coalitional identity. The skills they procure by navigating their own coalitional identities and struggling toward ontological wholeness as coalitional selves not only prepares them for the difficult work of coalition politics with other subjugated peoples and across, at times, conflicting or hostile differences but also equips them to practice prescriptive coalition politics from a collective position from *within* the map.

To return briefly to Beltrán's criticism of Anzaldúa (Beltrán 2004), this chapter therefore clarifies that the reason the unique coalitional consciousness of Anzaldúa and other "border women" might be valuable to collective organizing is not rooted in facile understandings of "standpoint" theory that treat Anzaldúa as possessing "right" or more "accurate" epistemology but in the practical know-how she has acquired through the process of "traveling," in Lugones's (1987) sense of the word, across her multiple identities and positionalities. Such journeys equip her and other women of color to engage in effective coalitional activism. As such, thinking with Anzaldúa, Sandoval, Lugones, and Vázquez, I will show, helps us to see how embracing fluidity and movement in our depiction of power and oppression does not necessarily wed us to a diagrammatic mode of descriptive politics. By theorizing from within the map, we avoid the dangers of bird's-eye view theorizing while still elaborating a decidable epistemology that might guide a politically fluid yet determinate form of coalitional activism. By turning in the final pages to Pratt's autobiographical essay, "Identity: Skin Blood Heart" (1984), in which she recounts her own coming to consciousness (as a white, Southern, Christian, middle-class lesbian woman), the chapter demonstrates that coalitional identity and coalitional consciousness are not capacities reserved only for nonwhite women. On the contrary, it argues that white people interested in engaging in politico-ethical coalition politics and taking seriously the task of confronting "white privilege" can and must develop these capacities (a theme I return to in chapter 5).

Chapter 4, "Writing Feminist Theory, Doing Feminist Politics: Rethinking Collective Feminist Authorship with *This Bridge Called My Back*," presents a uniquely "coalitional" way of engaging in feminist political theory distinc-

tive to the Black and Women of Color feminist anthologies emerging in the early 1980s (though containing pieces written or delivered in the 1970s). The collaborative, unambiguously political, and intensely self-reflexive collective authorship practices of Women of Color feminists in this period such as Smith, Scott, Hull, Moraga, and Anzaldúa usher in promising alternatives to the problematic feminist collective authorship models offered in the decades immediately before and after the 1980s. Specifically, the chapter presents Moraga and Anzaldúa's coedited anthology, *This Bridge Called My Back*, as an exemplary depiction of *coalitional scholarship* insofar as it both arrives at and enacts politico-ethical coalition politics in the form of "textual" or "written" coalition. I'm indebted here to Burack and Townsend-Bell for their uses of phrases such as "coalitional discourse" (Burack 2004, 159) and "written" or "textual" coalitions (Townsend-Bell 2012, 130, 133, 144–45). It was in thinking with these formulations that I developed the notion of coalitional scholarship, and it is precisely this mode of collective authorship, the chapter contends, that enables US Women of Color feminism to arrive at a politico-ethical understanding of coalition politics.

The chapter makes this argument by juxtaposing *This Bridge Called My Back* with two other groundbreaking attempts at collective feminist scholarship: Robin Morgan's 1970 anthology, *Sisterhood Is Powerful: An Anthology of Writings from the Women's Liberation Movement*, and Rebecca Walker's 1995 anthology, *To Be Real: Telling the Truth and Changing the Face of Feminism*. Insofar as feminist anthologies are thought to enact the collectivity for which they call, this juxtaposition reveals the danger in relying on either *ethical* notions of textual "sisterhood" (as found in *Sisterhood Is Powerful*), or *ontological* visions of lifestyle feminism in the form of textual mosaic (as found in *To Be Real*), as the cementing force behind social justice coalition politics. Only *This Bridge Called My Back*, I argue, emerges as a truly coalitional text, thus deepening the diverse ways in which the concept of coalition operates across this period and offering a creative alternative to problematic forms of single- and collective-authorship models dominant in political and certain feminist theory circles.

If feminist political theory is now moving unequivocally in the direction of coalition, which I contend that it is, then theorists interested in theorizing coalitional possibilities would do well to embrace new, coalitional, ways of thinking. By turning to more recent experiments with coalitional modes of engaging in collective scholarship, such as that undertaken by the Sangtin Writers and Richa Nagar in *Playing with Fire: Feminist Thought and Activism through Seven Lives in India* (2006), the chapter ends by dem-

onstrating the continued relevance of the unique scholarly practices of early US Women of Color coalitional feminism. In my view, the concept of politico-ethical coalition politics is not only an improvement on other contemporary attempts to theorize Left-oriented intersectional politics insofar as it exposes the myth of the crisis of Marxism and effectively dissolves the tension between unfixity and fixity, but it also encourages this kind of methodological rethinking.

Chapter 5, "The Women's March on Washington and Politico-Ethical Coalitional Opportunities in the Age of Trump," turns to a practical application of the constellation of concepts developed in the first four chapters of the book. Specifically, it argues that the 2017 WMW offers a compelling account of the promise of politico-ethical coalition politics in the contemporary United States. At a time when the undiscriminating hatred politics of the Trump administration demands a united front to stand in opposition to a variety of oppressive policies and rhetoric, the post-Marxist challenge of re-envisioning progressive group politics outside of class-only, women-only, Black-only, and so on identity politics seems ever more pressing. On this front, contemporary scholars and activists have much to learn from the savvy coalitional strategies of early US Women of Color coalitional feminism, many of which were utilized to shape the core unity principles of the 2017 WMW. Rooted in a clear political commitment to undermining interlocking oppressions and driven by a critical self-awareness of the potentially oppressive and exclusionary internal dynamics that have haunted feminist organizing since the 1960s, the 2017 WMW national team succeeded in putting effective politico-ethical coalitional organizing into practice. Rather than speaking to the impossibility of realizing intersectional political commitments on a mass scale, the various controversies surrounding the march that erupted across news platforms in the weeks leading up to and in the months following the march reflect the strength of a coalitional strategy rooted in struggle, self-reflexive political commitment, and existential transformation. The one misstep of the march was the ontological entrapment staged by centering "women" in the chosen name for the march. Doing so muddled the clarity and blunted the strength of the message of self-reflexive political commitment otherwise espoused in the unity principles and statements coming from the core national team. It is precisely such a dogged political commitment that is urgently needed for progressive intersectional activism in an age of increasingly hostile race relations, persistent economic precarity, and emboldened misogyny.

In the conclusion, I consolidate lessons learned and takeaways for practical next steps on how to unite across difference for the sake of intersectional social justice struggles. In the spirit of the central political, philosophical, ethical, and scholarly orientations presented and celebrated across the book, my final remarks are deeply textured by the most recent insights of some of the earliest theorists of US Women of Color coalitional feminism, including Barbara Smith, Chandra Mohanty, Minnie Bruce Pratt, Angela Davis, María Lugones, and Cherríe Moraga, as well as by some of their contemporary fellow travelers, most prominently Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, Cricket Keating, and Sara Ahmed.

Notes

Introduction

1 See Shireen Roshanravan (2010, 2014, 2018), Erica Townsend-Bell (2012), Chandra Mohanty (2003), María Lugones (2003), Romand Coles (1996), Ashley Bohrer, (2019), Karma Chávez (2013), and Zein Murib (2018).

2 The TWWA first started organizing in the late 1960s in response to the marginalization members felt in the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) on account of their race and gender. First forming as the Black Women's Liberation Committee within SNCC, these members soon became their own independent group, called the Black Women's Alliance, which changed its name to the TWWA when expanding its membership to Latinas and Asian American women (Burnham 2001).

3 One explanation for this could be that the 2017 special issue was not devoted to a self-identified moment of coalitional activism in the way that the CLASSE special issue was. Additionally, a number of the articles included in the issue give some attention to the importance of collective resistance, solidarity, and alliance in the face of a Trump United States, and in so doing they cite important moments that we might read as those of intersectional coalitional activism, such as the Standing Rock movement and the Women's March (see Ferguson 2017; Baum 2017; Goodhart and Morefield 2017; Isabela Altamirano-Jiménez 2017). Unfortunately, however, much of this attention is limited either to the final paragraph or so of their remarks

or to brief comments made throughout the article. Exceptions here include Jodi Dean (2017) and Lia Haro and Romand Coles (2017).

4 This question is the subject of Palgrave Macmillan's thought-provoking edited book series, The Politics of Intersectionality.

5 See Murib and Taylor (2018a, 2018b); Taylor (2018); Osei-Kofi, Licona, and Chávez (2018); Murib (2018); Roshanravan (2018); and Keating (2018).

Chapter 1: From Rosa Luxemburg to the Combahee River Collective

1 Many critical race scholars and activists emphasize the connection between race and class. See, for example, Cornel West's edited collection of Martin Luther King Jr.'s writings and speeches (King 2015). For an excellent discussion of the intersectional roots of Marxism and the Marxist roots of intersectionality, see Bohrer (2019).

2 While they do not call this chain of equivalence a "coalition" (they instead call it a "Leftist hegemony"), and while they do not use the word *coalition* anywhere in the text outside of one instance of *coalesce* when describing the process of hegemonic articulation (Laclau and Mouffe 1985, xii), I am following Romand Coles (1996) in understanding hegemonic articulation as a form of *coalition* politics.

3 We see this especially in Lenin's texts such as *The Tasks of the Russian Social-Democrats* (1897), *What Is to Be Done? Burning Questions of Our Movement* (1902), *"Left-Wing" Communism: An Infantile Disorder* (1920), and *The State and Revolution* (1917). See Tucker (1975) and Lenin (1978).

4 See Carole Pateman (1988), Charles Mills (1997), and Joel Olson (2004) for good discussions of both the implicit and explicit patriarchal and racist motivations of Enlightenment ideals.

5 I should clarify that I do not disagree with the claim that ontology could provide the basis of politics. As I will argue in chapter 3, one of the greatest insights of US Women of Color coalitional feminism is their formulation of a *coalitional* identity that forms the basis of coalition politics. My problem with Laclau and Mouffe, therefore, does not reside with their willingness to present ontology as a possible basis for politics; rather, I take issue both with the notion that this would be a "fixed" identity and with the unmistakable inconsistencies that such a move engenders in the context of their argument.

6 The tension between the strict scientific socialism of Lenin and the spontaneous proletarian politics of Luxemburg is nicely captured by Georg Lukács (1968), who advocates putting these two components—organization or conscious control and spontaneity—in a dialectical relationship.

7 For Hegel, the dialectic is actually an unfolding of consciousness and spirit, not of society. This is what distinguishes Hegel's dialectic from Marx and Engels's *materialist* dialectic (Hegel 1988, 19–24).