



The Difference That Power Makes: Intersectionality and Participatory Democracy

Patricia Hill Collins¹

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Abstract. This essay explores how developing more complex analyses of power and politics sheds light on important themes for both intersectionality and participatory democracy. First of all, drawn from intersectional inquiry, the article outlines three focal points of a power analytic: how analyses of intersecting, structural oppressions underpin systems of domination; how a domains-of-power framework provides a set of conceptual tools for analyzing and responding to intersecting power relations; and how a more robust analysis of the collective illuminates the political action of subordinated groups. From this power analytic, the essay examines power and politics from the standpoint of the resistance traditions of historically subordinated groups, especially African American women's political action. Finally, the article discusses implications of intersectionality's power analytic for projects for intersectionality and participatory democracy. Related to this, intersectionality conceptualization from Black feminism in flexible, pragmatic terms constitutes an important site for seeing the deepening commitment to participatory democracy as an alternative to technical agendas of the state.

Keywords: Black feminism; Intersectionality; Participatory democracy; Power; Resistance.

[es] La diferencia que crea el poder: interseccionalidad y profundización democrática

Resumen. Este ensayo explora cómo desarrollar de manera más compleja un análisis de poder y políticas que arroje luz tanto sobre las cuestiones relativas a la interseccionalidad como a la profundización democrática. En primer lugar, y desde la investigación interseccional, el artículo esboza tres puntos centrales de un análisis de poder: cómo el análisis de la intersección de las opresiones estructurales sustenta los sistemas de dominación; cómo el *framework* de los dominios de poder aporta herramientas conceptuales para examinar y responder a relaciones de poder entrecruzadas, y cómo un análisis más robusto de lo colectivo ilumina la acción política de los grupos subordinados. Desde este análisis, el ensayo examina el poder y las políticas desde el punto de vista de las tradiciones de resistencia de los grupos subordinados históricamente, especialmente la acción política de las mujeres Afroamericanas. Por último, el artículo discute las implicaciones de un análisis de poder interseccional para proyectos de interseccionalidad y participación democrática. A este respecto, la conceptualización interseccional del feminismo Negro en términos flexibles y pragmáticos constituye un importante punto de partida para un compromiso más profundo con la democracia participativa como una alternativa a las agendas técnicas del estado.

Palabras clave: Democracia participativa; Feminismo Negro; Interseccionalidad; Poder; Resistencia.

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¹ University of Maryland, College Park (USA).
E-mail: collinph@umd.edu

the Politics of Community. 2. Black feminism, flexible solidarity and intersectionality. 2.1. Black Women's Community Work and Black Feminist Thought. 2.2. Why Flexible Solidarity? Why Intersectionality? 3. The difference that power makes: implications for intersectionality and participatory democracy. References.

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Introduction

No standard definition of intersectionality exists, yet most people would associate one or more of the following principles with intersectionality: (1) racism, sexism, class exploitation and similar systems of oppression are interconnected and mutually construct one another; (2) configurations of social inequalities take form within intersecting oppressions; (3) perceptions of social problems as well reflect how social actors are situated within the power relations of particular historical and social contexts; and (4) because individuals and groups are differently located within intersecting oppressions, they have distinctive standpoints on social phenomena (Collins and Bilge 2016, 25-30).

There may be general agreement on intersectionality's contours in the abstract, yet intersectionality's incorporation into and increasing legitimation within the academy has catalyzed far less consensus among academics. Despite the contributions of front-line social actors, both outside and inside the academy, intersectionality confronts a growing backlash as a critical form of inquiry and praxis (see, e.g., Alexander-Floyd 2012). Revisionist narratives of intersectionality aim to erase the ideas and actions of Black women, Latinas, poor people, LGBTQ people and similarly subordinated groups from intersectionality's legitimate narrative, arguing that the visibility of these groups within intersectionality erodes its universal appeal. This re-writing of history, one Vivian May skillfully analyzes as "intersectionality backlash," both relies on overt resistance to intersectionality, as well as more subtle and indirect ways of undermining it (May 2015, 6-12). Such efforts aim to de-politicize intersectionality and place its ideas in service to neoliberal agendas that uphold individual and marketplace based solutions to collective social problems (Collins and Bilge 2016, 63-87).

This shifting political landscape shapes contemporary understandings of power and politics within intersectionality. On the one hand, within some segments of intersectional scholarship, references to power appear to be everywhere; power is constantly mentioned, referenced and cited. Yet merely mentioning power may do more harm than good. Within intersectional discourse, conventions that substitute "race" for racism, "sex" for sexism and "class" for capitalism foster abstract references to power that neglect what specific combinations of systems of oppression mean in reality. Relying on a series of shorthand terms to invoke intersecting power hierarchies, much as "race, class and gender" became reduced to a slogan through overuse, the phrase "intersecting systems of power," itself a replacement for intersecting oppressions, may be headed for a similar fate. Phrases such as intersecting systems of power that circulate as hyper-visible signifiers render power as a descriptive, placeholder term with ostensibly minimal political impact. The hypervisibility granted abstract power-talk simultaneously limits the kind of politics that become possible within these abstractions.

On the other hand, for scholars and activists who see the links joining intersectionality's inquiry and praxis, power and politics take on a different demeanor. Social

actors within social movement contexts often use intersectionality as a touchstone for political action. Frontline social actors within bureaucracies as well as those working in grassroots organizations often look to intersectionality to help solve thorny social problems such as homelessness, health disparities, mass incarceration, educational disparities and ever-present violence. Social workers, teachers, lawyers, nurses and similar practitioners engage intersectionality to help solve social problems. Despite their technical expertise, power hierarchies that create social inequalities and concomitant social problems seem evident. Within bureaucratic contexts, social actors who claim intersectionality seek guidance for how it might inform their problem-solving strategies. Blacks, women, Latinos/as, indigenous people, women, undocumented people and other similarly subordinated groups who are most affected by social problems often see intersectionality as essential for their political projects (Roberts and Jesudason 2013; Terriquez 2015).

In the U.S. context, this uneven emphasis on power and politics across intersectional scholarship and practice illustrates significant shifts in intersectionality's close association with the social justice ethos of mid-twentieth-century social movements. Robust understandings of power and politics that framed civil rights, feminist, anti-war and similar social movements for social justice persist, albeit unevenly from one intersectional project to the next. Core ideas of intersectionality developed in conjunction with these social justice projects continue to circulate within academic settings. Yet despite the growth of the corporate university (see, e.g., Nash and Owens 2015), social actors inside and outside the academy increasingly turn to critical understandings of intersectionality to inform their praxis. Then and now, social actors who are subordinated within multiple systems of power are in a better position to see how the power hierarchies, social inequalities and social problems that characterize one system of oppression not only resemble those of other systems, but also that multiple systems work together to shape their experiences.

Intersectionality might address neoliberal pressures to depoliticize it by examining how other projects confront a similar set of challenges. Here, participatory democracy offers some suggestive ideas. Intersectionality and participatory democracy are both aspirational social justice projects that take form through problem-solving and praxis, the hallmark of grassroots political activism and social movements. Intersectionality and participatory democracy both have been prominent during similar temporal periods, most notably the mid-twentieth-century U.S. social movements for racial, gender and economic justice as well as the resurgence of contemporary global social justice movements (Polletta 2014). Like intersectionality, participatory democracy faces a similar set of challenges as it aims to protect democratic governance within increasingly neoliberal nation-states. Participatory democracy also confronts new challenges associated with neoliberalism, specifically, how its historic association with the social justice movements of subordinated populations confronts pressures to recast itself as a technical project of the state. Exploring these historical and conceptual ties between intersectionality and participatory democracy potentially yields new insights about both areas. Specifically, more complex understandings of power and politics might help each project individually, but more importantly, catalyze an important dialogue between them (Palacios 2016).

This essay explores how developing more complex analyses of power and politics sheds light on important themes for both intersectionality and participatory democracy. Drawn from intersectional inquiry, Part I, "Hidden in Plain Sight: Hyper-

visible Power and Invisible Politics,” outlines three focal points of a power analytic: (1) how analyses of intersecting, structural oppressions underpin systems of domination; (2) how a domains-of-power framework provides a set of conceptual tools for analyzing and responding to intersecting power relations; and (3) how a more robust analysis of the collective illuminates the political action of subordinated groups. Part II, “Black Feminism, Flexible Solidarity and Intersectionality,” builds on this power analytic by examining power and politics from the standpoint of the resistance traditions of historically subordinated groups. By no means the only or universal case, African American women’s political action provides an alternative analysis of power and politics. Black feminism conceptualizes intersectionality and politics in flexible, pragmatic terms with an eye toward an overarching vision rather than in the static, ideological terms of political theory. It thus constitutes an important site for seeing the deepening commitment to participatory democracy as an alternative to technical agendas of the state. Part III, “The Difference That Power Makes: Implications for Intersectionality and Participatory Democracy,” discusses implications of intersectionality’s power analytic for projects for intersectionality and participatory democracy.

1. Hidden in plain sight: hypervisible power and invisible politics

Because intersectionality understands power as a multi-dimensional phenomenon, this section outlines three frameworks from my own work on power and politics that provide distinctive entry points for analyzing intersecting power relations. They are: (1) the matrix of domination framework that explains how intersecting systems of power constitute strands or components of political domination (Collins 2000, 227-228); (2) the domains-of-power framework that categorizes how structural, disciplinary, cultural, and interpersonal dimensions of power operate singularly and in combination in shaping the social organization of power (Collins 2000, 276-288; Collins 2009; Collins and Bilge 2016, 5-13; 26-27); and (3) the construct of community as an analytical tool for investigating resistance and other forms of political behavior (Collins 2010). I initially developed each framework by analyzing power relations from the situated standpoints of African American women and similar groups who were subordinated within intersecting systems of power. As a result, collectively these three frameworks map out a power analytic that both explains oppression and suggests strategies for resisting it.

The matrix of domination refers to how political domination on the macro-level of analysis is organized via intersecting systems of oppression. Heteropatriarchy, neo-colonialism, capitalism, racism, and imperialism constitute forms of domination that characterize global geopolitics, that take different forms across nation-states and that influence all aspects of social life. Intersectionality’s emphasis on intersecting systems of oppression suggests that different forms of domination each have their own power grid, a distinctive “matrix” of intersecting power dynamics. For example, intersections of racism, capitalism and sexism within the U.S. will differ from those in Brazil, producing a distinctive matrix of domination within each nation-state as well as relations between the two nation-states. Both nation states may share general histories of domination, for example, how their extensive engagement with the African slave trade, as colonies and as free-demo-

cratic nation-states was integral to their incorporation in global capitalism. Yet the distinctive patterns that domination has assumed within each nation-state differ dramatically—racial, class and gender domination in the U.S. and Brazil cannot be reduced to one another, nor to some general principles of domination absent the specifics of their histories.

The domains-of-power framework provides a set of conceptual tools for diagnosing and strategizing responses within any given matrix of domination. The framework is deliberately non-linear. There is no assumed causal relationship among the domains such that one determines what happens in the others. This is also especially useful for analyzing specific social problems that affect specific populations within a given matrix of domination, for example, how immigration policies articulate with citizenship. The domains-of-power framework enables a more finely-tuned analysis of how unjust power relations are organized and resisted. The domains-of-power heuristic provides a set of diagnostic tools that help individuals within subordinated groups/communities analyze and develop action strategies in response to the social inequalities that accompany intersecting systems of oppression. In essence, the domains-of-power framework connects the broader analytical space of a specific matrix of domination with the social dynamics of how it organizes individual and collective political behavior across varying social contexts.

The idea of community constitutes an integral dimension of power relations; it is the bedrock for theorizing the resistance of subordinated groups as well as the political action of individuals within such groups. Because subordinated groups are routinely excluded from formal institutions of governance and knowledge-construction, the resulting social inequalities that they experience limit their ability to exercise power within and across multiple domains of power. This exclusion in turn limits effective problem-solving because the perspectives of the people who are most affected by social problems are silenced. Yet the ability of a group of people to band together to ensure their own survival constitutes the bedrock of politics to resist these practices of exclusion and suppression².

Collectively, these three frameworks reflect my own efforts to conceptualize power in ways that advance intersectional inquiry and praxis, both inside and outside the academy. Intersectionality's focus on intersecting oppressions as the structuring principles of domination, its analysis of how social inequalities that flow from intersecting oppressions are ordered across domains of power, and the centrality of community as a template for the politics of dominance and resistance constitute important dimensions of a power analytic for intersectionality and potentially for participatory democracy.

1.1. Domination and Resistance as Objects of Investigation: Unpacking the Matrix of Domination Framework

Intersectionality's focus on the relationality *among* intersecting oppressions, and its search for the common features that reappear *across* multiple oppressions potentially

² Scholarly work either romanticizes communities as safe havens that lie outside the purview of electoral politics that form the building blocks of civil society, or romanticize communities as private, safe-havens from the public sphere. Analysis often stops at the borders of the construct. Here I take a less sanguine view, claiming that community is the template for an everyday politics that frames how people understand and participate in politics. In this sense, the rhetoric of community serves as a surrogate for a everyday language of politics.

deepens understanding of disparate forms of domination and resistance. In this regard, the construct of the matrix of domination provides one way of drawing insight from various literatures on domination, with as well as developing analytical clarity concerning their interconnections. Stated differently, political domination may rely on similar principals that are organized differently across imperialism, patriarchy and similar forms of domination. Moreover, drawing upon intersectionality to examine the matrix of domination in any given setting potentially sheds light on the relationship between intersecting systems of power, domination and political resistance.

How has political theory understood the concept of domination? Colonialism, postcolonialism, imperialism, heteropatriarchy, capitalism, nationalism, racism and neocolonialism constitute recognized forms of political domination. The expansive literature on political domination provides important clues concerning shared dimensions of macro-level, historically constituted forms of domination. For example, by distinguishing racisms of extermination or elimination (exclusive racisms, such as Nazi Genocide), from racisms of oppression or exploitation (internal racisms, such as racial segregation in the U.S., racial apartheid in South Africa and colonial racisms), Etienne Balibar provides a crucial intervention in critical racial theory (Balibar 1991). Balibar argues that these ideal types are rarely found in isolation, and that connections among these types is more common. Zygmunt Bauman's classic book *Modernity and the Holocaust*, develops this thesis of a racism of extermination, extending Balibar's argument beyond nationalism to link racisms of extermination to modernity itself (Bauman 1989). Political theorist Hannah Arendt had little theoretical interest in racism, yet her parallel histories of domination within the magisterial *The Origins of Totalitarianism* resonate both with Balibar's thesis of internal and external racisms and Bauman's analysis of racism and modernity (Arendt 1968). These three examples from political theory suggest that, whether intentional or not, these works provide important tools for thinking through the contours of political domination.

Placing this literature on political domination in dialogue with intersectionality's idea of intersecting oppressions provides a useful rubric for imagining a matrix of domination that takes form via the interconnections of particular systems of power. Oxford dictionaries offer varying and related meanings of the term *matrix* that bring nuanced meanings to the construct. A matrix can refer to "the cultural, social, or political environment in which something develops;" or "a mould in which something, such as a record or printing type, is cast or shaped;" or "something (such as a situation or a set of conditions) in which something else develops or forms." These meanings cast the construct of matrix as a structuring structure—it is not a benign container in which something happens, but rather shapes and gives structure to dynamic phenomena. Yet intersectionality adds a political analysis to these generic understandings of a matrix. As Vivian May points out, "Intersectionality ... contests several taken-for-granted ideas about personhood, power, and social change: in particular, its multidimensional 'matrix' orientation is often at odds with 'single-axis' sociopolitical realities, knowledge norms, and justice frameworks" (May 2015, 1).

Some key dimensions of the matrix of domination framework flesh out this notion of the structuring structure of domination and resistance. First, all contexts of domination incorporate some combination of intersecting oppressions, yet domination and resistance are organized differently across social contexts. Matrices of domination may take different form across national settings—the aforementioned

example of the U.S. and Brazil— yet the concept of a matrix of domination refers to the universality of intersecting oppressions within particular local realities. Just as intersecting oppressions assume historically specific forms that change in response to human actions —racial segregation persists, but not in the forms that it took in prior eras— so the shape of domination itself changes (Collins 2000, 227-228).

Second, while systems of power are theoretically present and potentially available within an matrix of domination, in actuality, some power are more salient than others within particular social contexts. Intersectionality provides a template for seeing multiple systems of power as imminent, yet not all systems of power as equivalent or even visible within a given matrix of domination. A finely-tuned analysis of saliency is essential for intersectional analysis as well as political actions to resist domination. In the U.S., for example, race, gender, class and nation have been tightly bundled together, with race often operating as proxy for class. Social movements can cast their agendas in relation to struggles over the meaning of American national identity, in essence, problematizing nation in ways that highlight neglected systems of power. Feminism has had an important impact within U.S. politics, precisely because it politicizes gender relations by showing how gender and sexuality shape what seemingly universal national policy. Gender and sexuality were there all along, yet they became salient in response to feminism as a social movement³.

Finally, when informed by intersectionality's focus on intersecting oppressions, the matrix of domination framework better captures the complexities and instabilities that characterize how domination and resistance coexist. Whether racism or sexism, resistance is always present, even if it seems to be invisible. Resistance is embedded within domination — a specific matrix of domination takes shape within the recursive relationship links its reliance on intersecting oppressions and resistance. A particular matrix of domination contains a tapestry of intersections of privilege and disadvantage that shape political behavior. Because individuals and groups all participate in these dynamic social relations, coming to terms with the contradictions of privilege and penalty across these complex social locations constitutes another angle of vision both on power and on political actions that occur within these locations.

Because intersectionality emerged within various resistance traditions, developing a power analytic with the idea of a matrix of domination at its core can shed light on strategies of resistance. Subordinated 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 the workings of domination in all domains of social organization. Because elites control much scholarly work, political domination is treated as being so common as to be mundane and ordinary. Yet viewing domination as normal and routine positions resistance to domination as unusual and exceptional. In this regard, the matrix of domination framework highlights the significance of the recursive relationship among domination and resistance, as organized across domains of power.

³ At one point, a lively feminist literature engaged nationalism, examining topics such as how the public policies of nation-states were inherently intersectionality, and how the national identities of various nation-state relied on intersecting systems of power. With the emergence of post-structuralism and neoliberalism in the 1990s, scholars moved away from the literature on nationalism, especially its emphasis on state power. For a core text from this literature that took a structural approach to intersectionality and nationalism, see Anthias, Floya, and Nira Yuval-Davis. 1992. *Racialized Boundaries: Race, Nation, Gender, Colour and Class and the Anti-Racist Struggle*. New York: Routledge.

1.2. Tools for Analyzing Power Relations: The Domains-of-Power Framework

The domains-of-power framework is a heuristic device for examining the organization of power relations. This heuristic can be used to analyze systems of power, either singularly or in combination, e.g., the organization of racism as a singular system of oppression (see., e.g., (Collins 2009, 40-81), as well as intersecting systems of power. The heuristic can also be used to analyze resistance to oppressions, for example, the singular histories of anti-racism or feminism, as well as their convergence within intersectional feminism.

Briefly stated, the heuristic has four main elements. Public policies that organize and regulate the social institution constitute *the structural domain of power*. Social hierarchy takes forms within social institutions such as banks, insurance companies, police departments, the real estate industry, schools, stores, restaurants, hospitals and governmental agencies. When people use the rules and regulations of everyday life and public policy to uphold social hierarchy or challenge it, their agency and actions shape the *disciplinary domain of power*. Increasingly dependent on tactics of surveillance, people watch one another and also self-censor by incorporating disciplinary practices into their own behavior. The *cultural domain of power* refers to social institutions and practices that produce the hegemonic ideas that justify social inequalities as well as counter-hegemonic ideas criticize unjust social relations. Through traditional and social media, journalism, and school curriculums, the cultural domain constructs representations, ideas and ideologies about social inequality. The *interpersonal domain of power* encompasses the myriad experiences that individuals have within intersecting oppressions⁴.

The domains-of-power heuristic potentially makes several contributions for developing a power analytic. First, because the domains-of-power framework is a heuristic and not an explanatory model, it makes no causal theoretical claims about intersecting oppressions. No one domain is deemed to be more important than another. Power relations within each domain can be analyzed, as well as those that straddle two, three or all four domains. The heuristic suggests that all domains of power are present and influence the organization of power within any social context. Yet because in actual social practice the political weight placed on one domain over others is historically and contextually expressed, the heuristic highlights the significance of historical and spatial context in analyzing intersecting power relations. This becomes especially important in conceptualizing intersecting power relations, precisely because they are so complex. The heuristic is effective because it is flexible. Actions within one domain can be compared across varying historical periods or geographic locations. Alternately, the synergy between varying domains can be compared across varying periods of time.

Second, the heuristic guards against reductionism because the synergy among domains of power illuminates complex forms that domination and resistance can take across the domains (Collins 2009, 54-56). For example, efforts to suppress Black

⁴ I have published various of this heuristic, with minor revisions. Earlier versions stressed domination and oppression as themes, leaving less room for resistance. For example, the 1990s edition of *Black Feminist Thought* describes the cultural domain as the “hegemonic” Yet the emergence of cultural studies that examines how culture constitutes an important site of political resistance highlighted my overemphasis on domination. Similarly, my term “interpersonal” aimed to express the dynamics of the social self within the context of community, yet the term “experiential” domain better captures my current thinking.

and Latino votes within in the 2016 U.S. Presidential election can be mapped across all four domains of power; namely, legal action to declare such voters ineligible (structural); spreading fake news about widespread voter fraud with no evidence to create a perception of unworthy citizens (cultural); creating a hostile environment for low-income Black voters via practices such as moving their voting site inside the local sheriff's office (disciplinary); and encouraging white citizens to patrol polling places to intimidate possible minority voters (interpersonal). Each of these sets of practices lend themselves to domain-specific forms of resistance as well as trans-domain political activism.

Finally, by considering how a specific action, policy, social institution or disaster rarely can be explained via one domain of power or by using one system of oppression, the domains-of-power heuristic builds analytical complexity into intersectional analyses of power. Theoretically, power relations can be analyzed both *via their mutual construction*, for example, of racism and sexism as intersecting oppressions, as well as *across domains of power*, namely structural, disciplinary, cultural and interpersonal. At the same time, the simplicity of the domains-of-power heuristic helps navigate the complexity that accompanies intersectional analyses of power. The framework enabling us to bracket domains based on the needs of specific intellectual and political projects, to focus on one or more domains, all the while cognizant that the others are there. This is the same kind of conceptual bracketing that sheds light the priority granted specific forms of oppression within a particular matrix of domination. Prioritizing systems of power based on their saliency for particular historical and social settings means that one can begin analyzing racism or sexism without the burden of considering all systems of power at the same time.

1.3. Collective Political Behavior and the Politics of Community

Community provides a construct for theorizing collective behavior. At its core, people practice behaviors of submission and resistance to social hierarchy in communal settings of shared, patterned ideas and practices. Liberal democracies point to individual citizenship rights as the bedrock of democratic politics, presenting promises of personal freedom to those who leave the strictures of various collectivities behind. Yet social inequality means not only that individuals from oppressed groups cannot exercise these rights, that they are unlikely to gain such rights without sustained collective action. In this sense, communities constitute a necessary albeit maligned the bedrock of politics (Collins 2010).

Several characteristics of the construct of community make important contributions to understandings of politics. First, communities constitute major vehicles that link individuals to the social institutions that organize complex social inequalities. Complex social inequalities take form intersecting oppressions as organized through domains of power, yet communities provide the context in which people experience these power relations. Individuals do not have unmediated relations with power relations. Instead, multiple and cross-cutting communities do the work of situating individuals within social contexts. Conceptually, communities are neither models of democratic participation nor deeply-entrenched hierarchy. While communities are imagined in varying ways for many political projects, they are constructed by their members who make them what they want them to be or disband them altogether.

Whether intentional or not, people use the construct of community to make sense of and organize all aspects of social structure, including their political responses to their situations. Similarly, social institutions use the symbols and organizational principles of community to organize social inequalities.

Second, ideas about community often move people to action, often by catalyzing strong feelings about the members of one's own group as well as others. Community is not simply a cognitive construct; it is infused with emotions and value-laden meanings. Whether an imagined community is a place-based neighborhood; a way of life associated with a group of people; or a shared cultural ethos of a race, national or ethnic group, or religious collectivity; people routinely feel the need to celebrate, protect, defend, and replicate their own communities and ignore, disregard, avoid, and upon occasion, destroy those of others (Anderson 1983). This ability to harness emotions means that the construct of community is versatile and easy to use. Yet these same characteristics foster unexamined and taken-for-granted assumptions about how communities are and should be (Cohen 1985). In everyday life and within much academic discourse, the term community is used descriptively, with minimal analysis or explanation. As a result, community can be imagined in many ways, from the micro-level of analysis so prominent within social psychology to the macro-level analysis of nations as imagined communities. One can imagine community through the lens both of multicultural inclusion as well racism, sexism and similar categories of belonging and exclusion (Yuval-Davis 2011).

In this way, because people exercise power in their everyday lives as individuals within communities, people use the construct of community to think and do politics. Stated differently, the construct of community provides a template for describing actual power relations as people live them and conceptualize them. People use the idea of community to organize and make sense of both individual and collective experiences they have within hierarchical power arrangements. A community is more than a random collection of individuals. Rather, communities constitute important sites for reproducing intersecting power relations as well as contesting them. Within a given nation-state, social inequalities organize its national identity or sense of national community, with individuals embedded in actual communities as a way of thinking about their placement in intersecting power relations. Thus, community constitutes a core political construct because it serves as a template for political behavior.

Finally, looking to community as a framework for collective political behavior highlights the significance of collective action. Collectivities that are oppressed as identifiable groups often provide more space for individuality and humanity within the confines of racial, ethnic, religious and/or class communities than is offered in wider society. Oppressed groups need durable collective units that map onto actual social relations. In essence, community as template for power relations emphasizes collective politics over the valorization of the individual as the primary recipient of citizenship.

The power analytic presented in this section offers a top-down analysis of power and politics. Yet beginning with the political behavior and analyses of subordinated groups provides a different angle of vision on power and politics. In next section, I examine how the resistance traditions of historically subordinated groups provide a distinctive angle of vision on both the meaning of power and the contours of politics.

2. Black feminism, flexible solidarity and intersectionality

Communities do not solely provide respite from oppression, they can become site of resisting it. African American women have seen their fathers, brothers and sons murdered, have lost their children to guns and drugs, cared for their adolescent daughters' children and visited their brothers in jail. Much of this has occurred within the boundaries of racial segregation, but not all of it. Black women's individual experiences with oppression, witnessing the personal suffering of their loved ones, and understanding the patterned nature of assaults targeted toward Blacks, women, poor people and LGBTQ people as collectivities have provided significant catalysts for action. Via these multiple modes of entry into political action, African American women typically developed a sensibility for women's issues by broadening preexisting analyses concerning racism and social class exploitation to include the additional oppression of gender as it affected their own lives and those in their communities. Moreover, as is the case of Black feminism, when political communities do not exist, people create them.

Black feminism constitutes an important case for studying how a subordinated population continues to empower itself within the U.S. context of domination. African American women developed Black feminist thought as an oppositional knowledge project, one that reflects the political interests and resistance traditions of Black women (Collins 2000). Such knowledge emphasized complex understandings of domination is organized and operates (intersecting oppressions) as well as complex perspectives on political possibilities within such contexts, e.g., Black feminist understandings of solidarity. In this sense, Black feminist thought's connections to the genealogy of intersectionality makes this case especially significant for examining the difference that power makes (Carastathis 2016; Collins and Bilge 2016, 63-87; Hancock 2016).

Historically, this broader project of Black feminist thought as oppositional knowledge drew from and influenced the everyday political behavior of African American women in families, jobs and civic participation. It also shaped how Black feminist leaders, intellectuals, and/or activists understood power and politics. This is important because Black women bring a distinctive sense of the political both to intersectionality and, potentially, to participatory democracy, a sensibility that reflects how those on the bottom of the social hierarchy flesh out the preceding power analytic.

Racism, capitalism and heteropatriarchy constituted highly salient forms of domination for African American women (Marable 1983). Black women's deepening analysis of intersectionality and its connections to political action, e.g., flexible solidarity, reflect the specific organization of intersecting power relations within segregated African American communities and as well as within U.S. society. Black women came to intersectionality and to flexible solidarity both as individuals and as members of an historically constructed community. Because Black women experienced race/class domination in gender-specific ways, they were better positioned to see how gender and sexuality affected their lives within intersecting oppressions of racism and capitalism. Over time, African American women intellectuals advanced more complex understandings of intersecting oppressions as well as pragmatic perspectives concerning political engagement with them. This matrix of domination of intersecting oppressions of race, class, gender and sexuality organized power relations both inside and out-

side African American neighborhoods. In the following sections, I draw upon the power analytic to explore how Black feminism reflects African American women's intellectual activism, with intersectionality and flexible solidarity emerging as important dimensions of a maturing Black feminism.

2.1. Black Women's Community Work and Black Feminist Thought

The changing contours of Black women's community work illustrates the trajectory that Black feminist thought took within African American communities (Collins 2006, 123-160). Prior to the post-civil rights period, African American women's community work lay at the heart of African American politics. For African American men and women, working to change segregated schools, biased election procedures, racial steering in housing, and discriminatory employment policies constituted one path to personal dignity and individual freedom. At the same time, Black women also contributed to African American communities by working collaboratively with Black men, by pointing out the internal contradictions of violence and love within African American civil society, and by speaking out against violence against Black women and other similar social problems. As a form of survival politics, Black women's community work made important contributions to communal well-being. Thus, Black women's political activism was expressed by working for institutional transformation and group survival within a larger framework of collective struggles for social justice (Collins 2000, 201-225).

Prior to mid-twentieth-century social movements, Black women's community work occurred primarily within racially segregated communities, and encompassed both protest and survival politics, with survival taking the lion's share of resources⁵. Community work included an array of activities, a form of reproductive labor that was designed to (1) ensure the physical survival of African American children; (2) build Black identities that would protect African Americans from the attacks of White supremacy; (3) uphold viable African American families, organizations, and other institutions of Black civil society; and/or (4) transform schools, job settings, government agencies and other important social institutions. During the slave era and through the mid-twentieth century, individual African American intellectual-activists did gain recognition within broader society. For example, Anna Julia Cooper, Ida Wells-Barnett, Mary McLeod Bethune, Pauli Murray, Ella Baker and Anna Arnold Hegeman clearly were exceptional individuals, yet their ideas and actions also reflected understandings of Black women's intellectual activism as being part of some aspect of local, national and/or transnational Black communities (Bay *et al.* 2015).

Within the confines of African American neighborhoods, many women exerted leadership that was designed to help individuals within their communities survive,

⁵ Within democratic societies, *institutional politics* examine the mechanisms of governance, viewing elected officials, bureaucrats, voters and citizens as bona fide political actors. Lacking citizenship rights, at one time being defined as less than human, Black women have historically been denied positions of power and authority within U.S. social institutions. *Protest politics* in the public sphere complements liberal definitions of institutional politics, typically framed through a focus on social movement activism. In contrast, *survival politics*, the hard work needed to ensure that a group of people is prepared to enter public institutions and/or is capable of protest, constitutes the bedrock of community politics because it is associated with the private sphere, is black, female and poor. Mid-twentieth century social movements created opportunities for many Black women to enter institutional politics.

grow, and reject the practices of anti-Black racism across all domains of power. Black women's motherwork, an important site of Black women's community work, illustrates the multi-layered texture of Black women's politics. Although motherwork resembles care work, especially understandings of care work as a set of principles for democratic participation (see, e.g., Tronto 2013), because motherwork is deeply embedded within the survival politics of African American communities, it has been infused with broader political intent. Whether they had biological children or not, the work that Black women did in caring for their communities constituted an important site that simultaneously *politicized* African American women and served as the primary location for their activism⁶.

In a world that devalues Black lives, to defend the lives of Black youth and aim to give those lives hope is an act of radical resistance. In this sense, contemporary expressions of motherwork that invoke these deep cultural roots bring a more politicized notion of care to political projects. Then and now, motherwork takes diverse forms (see, e.g., Story 2014). Like Fannie Lou Hamer, Ella Baker and members of the Black Panther Party, some women choose to become "mothers of the community" and contribute their reproductive labor to the survival politics of their local communities. Local grassroots activists who struggle for clean water, better schools, job training and more responsive police and social services for their neighborhoods care about and care for their communities by taking action. Certainly men have and continue to perform motherwork, but in the face of differential policing and mass incarceration that removes so many Black men from African American communities, motherwork continues to fall on Black women. When joined to an organizational base provided by Black churches and other community organizations, African American women often find institutional support for social justice initiatives. African American women's importance within Black churches as fundamental organizations of Black civil society provided an important arena for Black women's political activism as well as their consciousness concerning the political. This moral, ethical tradition encouraged African American women to relinquish the so-called special interests of issues as women for the greater good of the overarching community. Within this interpretive framework, fighting on behalf of freedom and social justice for the entire Black community and for a more inclusive society based on social justice was in effect fighting for one's own personal freedom. The two could not be easily separated.

2.2. Why Flexible Solidarity? Why Intersectionality?

Flexible solidarity and intersectionality constitute two interdependent dimensions of Black feminism that emerge from community politics. Each deepened over time in response to new constraints and opportunities of dominance and resistance across domains of power. Rather than viewing Black feminism as a static set of ideas that sprang from the minds of a few Black women intellectual-activists, situating Black feminism within the changing contours of Black women's community work suggests that contemporary Black feminism draws on sedimented forms of inquiry and social action. Intersectionality as a named discourse came to prominence in the 1990s (see,

⁶ More information: <http://kgou.org/post/doctor-patricia-hill-collins-works-expand-platform-black-womens-voices> (Consulted on 10 March 2017).

e.g., Crenshaw 1991), with analytical attention to solidarity emerging more recently (see, e.g., Shelby 2005). Yet the ties between intersectionality and flexible solidarity within Black feminism both predate this contemporary recognition.

Engaging in Black women's community work fostered a commitment to Black solidarity as a core feature of African American women's political engagement both *within* and *on behalf of* Black communities. Without solidarity among African Americans, political struggles to upend racial domination were doomed. Yet for Black women, an unquestioned solidarity could be neither inherently desirable nor effective when it rested on male-dominated, intergenerational gender hierarchies. Such solidarity was hierarchical, rigid, often backed up by religious theology or tradition, and created roadblocks for effective political action. Black women saw the need for solidarity, yet calibrated their ideas and actions to hone critical understandings of solidarity that were better suited for political projects. Solidarity was not an essentialist category, a bundle of rules that was blindly applied across time and space. Instead, a flexible understanding of solidarity enabled Black women to work with the concept, molding it to the challenges at hand.

Working within Black organizations often sensitized African American women to inequalities of gender and sexuality within Black communities as well as within broader society. This awareness catalyzed intersectional analyses. Yet the contexts in which people do intellectual work is just as important as the content of the ideas themselves. In this case, like intersectionality, understandings of solidarity were also worked out through everyday and organized political behavior within African American communities. Stated differently, sustaining political vigilance in the face of political domination where racism was especially salient required being attuned to the political implications of strategic choices.

African American women were not of like mind in sharpening their understandings of intersectionality and solidarity. For example, many African American women who worked in SNCC (Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee) during the civil rights movement experienced a growth in feminist consciousness as a result of the organization's gender politics (Anderson-Bricker 1999). In contrast, others failed to challenge hierarchies of gender and sexuality, arguing focusing on issues that seemingly lay outside civil rights agendas would dilute anti-racist action. Similarly, African American women have long held multiple perspectives on and taken an array of actions within Black religious organizations. Many African American women used the theology of a male-run church to advocate for gender equity whereas others questioned their ministers' interpretations of Christian scripture on the rightful place of women (Higginbotham 1993). Some left churches altogether, finding other faith traditions more suitable to their political perspectives. Black women were more likely to encounter women's issues via daily interactions within organizations that formed the public sphere of African American communities than within formal feminist organizations.

Despite the united front presented to the public, within African American communities Black women often questioned a solidarity politics that demanded their loyalty to Black men who not only failed to understand the social problems that Black women encountered, but who were often implicated in creating them. Rather than rejecting solidarity politics outright, a stance that has only now become available to many African American women, they chose to massage that solidarity, sometimes working with Black men, and other times opposing them. Flexibility that was

tethered to principled social action did not mean that women valued obedience, but rather that social context mattered. In essence, intersectionality coupled with more contingent, flexible notions of Black solidarity shaped Black women's participation in broader projects of mid-twentieth century social movements, as well as to challenge understandings of solidarity long extant within African American politics.

A compelling case can be made that early-twentieth-century Black feminist intellectual-activists not only developed intersectionality in crafting theoretical analyses of specific social problems, but that they also practiced a flexible solidarity that had an important influence on their intellectual production. For example, in her 1892 volume *A Voice from the South*, Anna Julia Cooper (1858-1964) provides an intersectional analysis that precedes both modern Black feminism and intersectionality. Contemporary scholars increasingly study Cooper as a foundational intellectual within Black feminism, pointing to her intersectional analyses of social inequalities that took power relations of race/class/gender and nation into account. Cooper also took a global perspective on social inequalities, with her work on revolutions in Haiti and France illustrating her understandings of colonialism and imperialism as forms of domination (May 2007). Ida B. Wells (1862-1931) another important African American feminist intellectual, also advanced intersectional analyses in the context of political action. Using the compelling case of lynching to point out how sexuality was intertwined with racism and sexism, Wells critiqued prevailing theories of social inequality that focused on African American biological and cultural deviancy (Collins 2002).

Cooper and Wells were also visible community organizers, and both women sustained close ties to African American communities. In the process of developing their intersectional analyses of the status of Black women and of lynching, Cooper and Wells were deeply embedded within African American communities and saw the potential effects of their intellectual work first hand. Yet their intellectual activism also reached beyond Black women's community work to broader domestic and international feminist and anti-imperialist projects. Their respective careers demonstrate a flexible solidarity where they entered into coalitions with Black men, White women, middle-class African Americans, and other political actors who could help solve the problems that concerned them.

The reemergence a vibrant Black feminism in the early-twentieth century highlights the persistence of intersectionality and flexible solidarity within African American women's intellectual activism. Contemporary Black feminism explicitly self-defines in intersectional terms and draws on flexible solidarity in its organizational practices. The emergence of Black Lives Matter in 2012 illustrates the centrality of Black women as political actors and the resurgence of Black feminism as a social movement (Cobb 2016). Initially led by three queer African American women who created the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter, the stellar growth of Black Lives Matter from 2012-2016 illustrates how the legacy of Black feminism has been brought to bear on the contemporary social problem of state-sanctioned racial violence. The web site of Black Lives Matter has undergone substantial updating as the organization has grown, yet the description of their mission has remained constant:

“Rooted in the experiences of Black people in this country who actively resist our dehumanization, #BlackLivesMatter is a call to action and a response to the virulent anti-Black racism that permeates our society. Black Lives Matter is a unique contribution that goes beyond extrajudicial killings of Black people by police

and vigilantes. Black Lives Matter affirms the lives of Black queer and trans folks, disabled folks, black-undocumented folks, folks with records, women and all Black lives along the gender spectrum. It centers those that have been marginalized within Black liberation movement (blacklivesmatter.com)⁷.

Black Lives Matter illustrates the interconnectedness of intersectionality and flexible solidarity as well as the continued challenges of using these ideas in contemporary inquiry and praxis. The movement as laid out by the founders of #blacklivesmatter is clearly intersectional by highlighting how all Black individuals within Black communities were worthy of political protection. Their intersectional mandate deepens analysis of how different sub-groups within Black communities experience racial domination. Significantly, the practices of Black Lives Matter also illustrate the challenges of using flexible solidarity both *within* a political community as well as among/across political communities. As the movement has evolved, it has rejected hierarchical institutionalization that characterizes traditional civil rights organizations in favor of a more fluid decentralized organizational structure.

Via its ideas and activities, Black Lives Matter advances a counter-narrative concerning intersectional power relations and counter-politics grounded in collective action that emphasizes the synergy of ideas and action. It includes tools of analysis of social problems, e.g., intersectionality as an analytical tool for understanding the organization of state-sanctioned violence across domains of power. Black Lives Matter also advances the idea of flexible solidarity as the bedrock of political action.

The type of Black feminism advanced within Black Lives Matter illustrates the significance of how collective social movements from below bring an oppositional standpoint to questions of participatory democracy. Advancing a social justice agenda requires deepening democratic participation, actions that highlight the creative tension between the desirable, the possible, the probable and the practical. With each iteration of a particular vision, in this case, intersectionality, or of ever-changing particular ways of experiencing the world, for Black women the lessons of flexible solidarity, everyday life is experienced as rooted, grounded, contingent, dynamic, and holistic. It is characterized by infinite opportunities to engage in critical analysis and/or take action. In everyday life, principles give life meaning and actions make it meaningful.

3. The Difference that Power Makes: Implications for Intersectionality and Participatory Democracy

Because intersectionality and participatory democracy share a common historical trajectory, placing them in dialogue potentially benefits both projects. Both projects gained renewed visibility during mid-twentieth-century social movements for civil rights, feminism and the New Left (see, e.g., (Collins and Bilge 2016, 65-77; D'Avigdor 2015). Intersectionality and participatory democracy also share a common set of concerns; both aspire to imagine new social relations of equality, fairness, inclusion

⁷ In: blacklivesmatter.com (Consulted on 15 February 2017)

and social justice. For both projects, achieving these ethical ends requires building equitable communities of inquiry and praxis that can survive within yet challenge intersecting oppressions. Stated differently, both projects confront the thorny question of building intellectual and political solidarities across differences in power.

Within these commonalities, intersectionality brings particular resources to the specific task of building inclusive intellectual and political solidarity that potentially benefits both its own project as well as that of participatory democracy. The power analytic presented here suggests a distinctive view of collective action that in turn fosters more complex understandings of political solidarity. Using the construct of community as a flexible, structural vehicle for complex solidarities supplements existing emphases on building political solidarity among individuals with a renewed attention to how structures and groups are equally if not more significant in political action. Power accrues to and is exercised by individuals, but those individuals are located within structures that serve as silent negotiators in political action. Attending to groups and collective processes creates new avenues of investigation, for example, building political solidarity (1) within and among historically distinct collective entities, e.g., communities that have a shared history and culture within systems of domination; (2) within specific domains-of-power as well as across such domains, e.g., communities of scholars and practitioners who recognize the necessity of collaboration; (3) within local, regional and national governmental units, e.g., projects to solicit citizen participation in public policy; and (4) social movements such as feminism, unionism and civil rights movements that make demands upon the nation-state or economic institutions. This renewed focus on power and politics that is grounded in communities of inquiry and praxis suggests several implications for intersectionality and/or participatory democracy.

First, scholars of intersectionality and participatory democracy alike must guard against relying too heavily on the questions that most interest elites, to the exclusion of those that concern subordinated populations. For intersectionality, the shift from social movement settings into the corporate university has encouraged vigilance in protecting the ideas of Black feminism and social justice. In contrast, the demands on participatory democracy to refashion itself within neoliberalism as ideology of elites may be more muted, in part, because the ideas of participatory democracy are more directly threatening to state power. Because ideas matter, much is at stake within academia and government institutions alike in negotiating the seemingly antithetical standpoints of elite and subordinated groups.

Taking on the perspective of elites who enjoy far more access to and control over the state can unwittingly recast participatory democracy as a technical problem to be solved by the state rather than a political project that aims to empower subordinated groups. By conflating equality of citizenship rights with the ostensible equality of actual citizens who aim to actualize their rights, state-centered approaches use a power evasive framework. Diversity initiatives in colleges and universities that counsel students, faculty and staff to uncritically assimilate into academic power hierarchies, rely on a power-evasive framework that emphasizes changing the person rather than the institution. Participatory democracy projects face similar pressures. When equality of rights becomes the taken-for-granted backdrop of democratic politics, social inequalities among citizens disappears as well as social inequalities within democratic institutions themselves. Resembling academic diversity initiatives, state-sanctioned projects can aim to encourage,

train, and/or coach ostensibly equal citizens on how to better participate in democratic processes. Yet assuming that the citizen is the basic unit of analysis, and bundling citizens together in artificial units called publics unmoors Black people, women, indigenous people, Latinas, poor people and other disenfranchised groups from collective and historically effective forms of political engagement. On paper, all individuals are equal, yet in practice, this is rarely the reality.

For intersectionality and participatory democracy alike, bracketing issues of domination as background variables instead of structuring features of democratic processes facilitates managerial solutions to technical problems. Often the decision is clear-cut, but more often it is not. As suggested by the case of Black women's intellectual activism presented here, social actors and the projects they espouse can uncritically accept interests of elite groups, cast in their lot with subordinated groups, and/or work out some sort of pragmatic engagement with both sets of actors. This historical and social context catalyzed a distinctive intellectual and political sensibility within Black feminism, one that over time propelled it toward intersectional analyses that stressed the significance of solidarity in the face of a dangerous enemy, and that conceptualized community in political terms.

Second, intersectionality's focus on intersecting power relations suggests that prevailing theories of power and politics are far less universal than imagined. Neither liberalism, with its valorization of individual rights, and nor participatory democracy as a philosophy of how citizenship should work to ensure equality were designed with subordinated populations in mind. Blacks, women, ethnic groups, and similarly subordinated groups often served as markers for the absence of rights that defined citizenship. Political theory that relies on assumptions of an imagined, ideal and normative citizen may seem universalistic. Yet political theories that ignore intersecting power relations that routinely exclude large segments of the population from first-class citizenship present particularistic theories that masquerade as universal. Relegating subordinated populations to second-class citizenship, or denying them any kind of citizenship, is part of the very definition of normal, first-class citizenship.

Intersectionality's focus on power relations provides an important oppositional lens for engaging mainstream social and political theories, yet the limitations of seemingly universal theories can also plague oppositional projects. Take, for example, how assumptions concerning individual citizenship that underlie both Western feminism and participatory democracy can misread the influence of social context on Black feminism. For many white, Western middle-class feminist thinkers, *individuals* constitute the primary social actors, with women organizing around personal advocacy for one's own interests. But this model flattens differences among women. The group-based treatment afforded people of color, immigrant populations, poor people and others whose group membership denies them rights of first-class citizenship have far fewer opportunities for political actions solely based on individual citizenship rights. This is not a choice between *either* the individual *or* the collectivity, but rather seeing how they work together. Black women certainly did advocate on their own behalf as individuals, yet an equally if not more prominent form of political engagement lay in involvement in community work *both* on behalf of themselves as individuals *and* others in their communities.

Third, robust projects of intersectionality and participatory democracy develop via practice, primarily within communities of inquiry and praxis that, while they emerge and subside within specific historic and social contexts, never disappear. Treating participatory democracy as a set of decontextualized principles that can be exported either into the academy or applied to preexisting state agendas misreads the significance of how and why freedom, justice, democracy and similar ethical ideas persist. Within intersecting oppressions, invitations from the top for token inclusion in social institutions, for example, diversity initiatives in the academy or shared governance of hand-picked citizen participants in state institutions, do not ring true. Token inclusion is not the same as gaining political power. Representatives from subordinated groups may seemingly participate in all levels of governance, yet possess visibility without authority. Participatory democracy from the perspective elected officials differs from that of subordinated groups. Both may embrace principles of participatory democracy, especially if such principles are hegemonic, yet belief in the same value systems cannot override highly unequal possibilities for participation across multiple domains of power. In contrast to top-down managerial ethos, bottom up understandings of participatory democracy deepen through use. The case of African American women's intellectual activism suggests that Black feminist ideas about intersectionality and flexible solidarity have roots in the late 1800s. Over many decades, when Black women encountered familiar social problems in new circumstances, they drew upon and recast these ideas, testing and revising them via social action. Conceptions of intersectionality and flexible solidarity persisted, albeit with varying degrees of visibility to elites, in large part because such ideas were embedded in Black women's communities of inquiry and praxis.

Finally, building inclusive democratic communities requires rejecting permanent hierarchy in favor of intersectional understandings of solidarity that facilitate coalition-building. Intersectionality and flexible solidarity can both be useful in thinking about the kinds of alliances and coalitions that might effectively foster participatory democracy. Solidarity may be an admirable political goal, but can have within it entrenched social hierarchies that routinely privilege and penalize designated individuals and/or sub-groups. Instead, flexible solidarity can facilitate coalitions among groups who have a shared commitment to a social ideal, e.g., freedom, social justice or democracy, or to a shared social problem, yet who take very different paths into coalition building. Intersectionality counsels that coalition building requires recognizing how intersecting oppressions shape how individuals and groups experience and understand social inequality. Flexible solidarity suggests that solidarity is a worthwhile goal, but that rigid models of groupthink where members must uncritically accept a permanent hierarchy is unsustainable in the long run. Flexible solidarity can accommodate social hierarchy within it, but not as an absolute and intractable feature of collective politics.

To survive, participatory democracy and intersectionality must develop roots within existing communities of inquiry and praxis as well as build new coalitional communities. Such communities can draw upon flexible solidarity to help withstand the tests of time. Unless ideas become sedimented in political and intellectual communities that can sustain themselves over extended periods of time, such communities may need to be repeatedly built anew in response to new challenges. Starting anew may not be the best option, yet when it comes to

social inequality and the lack of democratic participation, there may be no other options.

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