

Why bisexuality is queer

Non-dichotomous, de-colonial and intersectional reflections*

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ABSTRACT: The essay starts with the author's *Positioning*, a feminist practice of disclosing her own intellectual and political perspectives – since knowledge is situated, never neutral. In section 1. *Coming to terms with bisexuality* naming practices, labeling and definitions are discussed, to introduce the reader to the arena of debate around bisexuality and queer, and introduce intersectional and decolonial perspectives. Section 2. *From the margins of queer theory* demonstrates how bisexuality has occupied, from its very origins, a marginal space in Lgbti queer studies; it also touches upon the struggle against biphobia and for recognition of bisexual people. Section 3. *Bisexuality and queer spaces – beyond Western eyes* looks at the epistemological limitations of the monosexual paradigm within queer spaces, the necessity to decolonize them and use non-dichotomous perspectives. The section giving the title to the essay 4. *Why bisexuality is queer* explains the author's motivations, to be taken as an axiomatic starting point for an earnest discussion among queer scholars and activists. 5. *Re-queering the queer movement* ends with the necessity of intersectional alliances, in order not to restrict to sex, gender and sexuality the subversive potential of the queer perspective; and the need to take into account some neglected topics, such as Poly-amorous and Asexual love.

KEYWORDS: labeling practices; biphobia; (non)monosexuality; intersectional alliances; decolonization.

Nature created us as bisexual beings.
And requires us to act as bisexual beings.

Wilhem STECKEL, 1922

O. (PARTIAL) POSITIONING

Having been out as a bisexual activist since 1990 in California, I can recall the times when bisexuality was a taboo topic in the lesbian and gay movements. In the U.S. bisexuals were considered to be responsible for spreading HIV-AIDS: bi-men from the gay community to the heterosexual world, and bi-women to the lesbian community. A myth is hard to die; yet after some time of bisexual politics, after campaigning for visibility and acceptance,

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initiatives of sensitization, and workshops against bi-phobia, the B was finally added and the community became lgbt. In those years, I nourished myself with publications by scholars and activists (often they were the same people), political meetings, and support groups for bisexuals. Soon, I joined the queer milieu in the University where I was studying and working – and found it comfortable as a common house. Yet, after decades of successful diffusion of queer Studies, bisexuality became marginal; bisexuals did not disappear of course, but an interesting process of invisibilization took place. We are going to explore this phenomenon.

The reason why I think it is relevant to write about bisexuality being queer lies in the fact that such politics of belonging are still controversial. In a recent lecture I gave about the queerness of bisexuality, a person from the audience raised the point that I was “trying to sneak bisexuality in the queer discourse.” As a marginal intellectual in academia, that sounded to me as an urgent call for dealing with issues of entitlement of bisexuality (and bisexuals) in the queer space. I am beginning this work by looking at terms and naming practices around bisexuality and non-monosexuality; and at studies dealing with the complicated relation between bisexuality and queer, from a feminist, *intersectional* and *de-colonial* standpoint.¹ The central argument, *why bisexuality is queer*, is the output of a line of reasoning, developing a non-hierarchical position in the current debate in the awareness that all knowledge production is situated² and never ‘neutral.’

I believe some of my reflections, and the selection of decolonial and intersectional authors and concepts here offered (with no presumption of being exhaustive), may help us to think in non-dichotomous ways about gender, sex and sexuality while taking in account class, race, ethnicity, and geopolitical differences. Even though the essay is interdisciplinary, drawing from cultural studies, psychology, history, politics, and other fields of knowledge, the sociological perspective is intrinsically privileged because

¹ The intersectional approach, proposed by feminists of color, considers differences and inequalities comprehensively by intersecting them, understanding them as mutually constitutive rather than analyzing them separately (DAVIS 1981; HURTADO 1989; CRENSHAW 1989; 1991; HILL COLLINS 1990; LYKKE 2010; YUVAL DAVIS 2012). While the post-colonial and de-colonial perspectives and practices were introduced by intellectuals from former colonies and criticize the way knowledge was/is produced (NGÜGĪ WA THIONG’O 1986; MIGNOLO 2000; QUIJANO 2000; 2007; BOATCĂ, COSTA 2010). Both theories have a special focus on *power relations*, and an emphasis on *transformative practices*.

² For an introduction to the concept of *situated knowledge* see: HARAWAY 1988.

of ‘my background’. The choice of including some secondary sources from websites and activists’ blogs is meant to bring fresh positions and stimulating ideas into the picture. In my experience, the multifaceted link between bisexual activism and academic work has been one of fruitful mutual inspiration.

1. COMING TO TERMS WITH BISEXUALITY

BISEXUALITY

A state that has no existence beyond the word itself—is an out-and-out fraud, involuntarily maintained by some naive homosexuals, and voluntarily perpetrated by some who are not so naive.

Edmund BERGLER 1956³

In the last century, most literature and research on bisexuality emerged in North America and other anglophone countries, where bisexual movements first took place in the public arena. The debate is still dominated by what is published in the north-Atlantic area; and it is in the English language. The ‘inclusion’ of bisexuality in the lgt area, and later in the queer space, happened without decolonizing neither the contexts nor the theory. Yet, beyond western binary notions, there lies a multitude of concepts and practices, which are found today in different parts of the world. Postcolonial/decolonial approaches⁴ are very helpful in feminist and queer studies and have been argued for in the last couple of decades in different fields of knowledge (CAMPBELL 2000; ALTMAN 2001; HAWLEY 2001; MOHANTY 2003; BOYCE and KHANNA 2011; BIDASECA, VAZQUEZ LABA 2011; BOYCE, COYLE 2013; WEKKER 2016).

If we embark on the practice of de-colonizing our concepts on the basis of non-Western perspectives and experiences, we may find how both queerness and bisexual identities can dramatically change features with

³ As quoted in ANGELIDES 2001.

⁴ In her masterpiece *White Innocence*, Gloria Wekker writes about the difference between the two terms, a distinction I profoundly agree with: “While I use the terms ‘postcolonial’ and ‘decolonial’ I find that ‘postcolonial’ is increasingly used in a manner that is subject to inflation and is uncritical; that is, one can do postcolonial studies very well without ever critically addressing race. In that sense, it has come to resemble an old-fashioned type of anthropology, in that the other is unblushingly studied without questioning one’s own position, while anthropologists have, since the late 1960s, sternly interrogated their own discipline for its racializing power moves. Decoloniality, decolonial studies, or the decolonial option is the more cutting-edge approach, which starts from the realization of the nexus of modernity and coloniality” (WEKKER 2016: 174).

the variation of the geo-cultural locations we are considering. In some indigenous contexts bisexuality may have to do with polytheistic religions and the sphere of spirituality (HUTCHINS, WILLIAMS, SHARIF 2011; HUTCHINS, WILLIAMS 2012), such as the notion of *two spirits* found among Native-American people, which cannot be unproblematically assimilated to the term of ‘bisexuality’ and/or ‘queer’.

Increasingly, two-spirit identity is being included as one of the identities under the bisexual umbrella, yet there has been very little discussion about how this inclusion might affect two-spirit people, the research that pertains to us, or the services shaped by such data (ROBINSON 2017).

Drawing upon her personal experience as a two-spirit *and* bisexual woman, as well as upon research conducted with two-spirit people in the province of Ontario, Canada, Margaret Robinson offers five intersectional and decolonial points of comparison between bisexual and two-spirit identities:

(1) the complexity of our identities, (2) the role of spirituality, (3) our elevated rates of poverty, (4) sexual violence, and (5) the influence of colonialism. Although bisexual and two-spirit identities share a number of commonalities they have key differences in cultural context and meaning (ROBINSON 2017).

Issues of poverty and class are rarely mentioned in LGBT and queer literature, though we can find them in feminist studies by native/aboriginal, dalit, and gypsy scholars (CORRADI 2014; 2018). Even some self-defined intersectional works are not *fully* intersectional, because of the failure to address economic differences and inequalities – as if these categories of oppression did not add elements of explanation to the analysis, as if these important aspects were not mutually constitutive in the life of subjects and groups, and could be safely neglected.

Much of the debate on bisexuality is oriented toward epistemology, politics and social movements, where differences are remarkable, if we take into account geopolitical and cultural intersections. I can offer an example from my experience in Calcutta, India, where I was amazed to realize how the bisexual women’s movement founded an early expression in alliance with lesbians and with trans-women. While in the U.S. trans-phobia and bi-phobia were encountered both in the feminist movement and in the gay and lesbian community, the (latecomer) Indian political practice in this

field bypassed *years of conflicts based on the rejection of bisexuals and trans people*. To my eyes, non-monosexual and transgender identities, as well as lesbians and gays, seemed in the Indian context to have transcended – or never had shown – those rigid labeling boundaries and issues of purity still functioning as obstacles in our discussions about how to name ourselves and how to relate with each other.

About non-monosexual naming practices, Corey Flander argues in a special issue of the *Journal of bisexuality* that

[t]he ‘bisexual umbrella’ is a phrase that is most commonly used to describe a range of nonmonosexual identities, behaviors, and forms of attraction. Although this includes people who identify as bisexual, it has also been used to group together bisexuality with other nonmonosexual identities, notably pansexual, queer, and fluid (...). There are many other words that we use to describe what I have been referring to as the “bisexual umbrella” and non-monosexuality. Some resist the term non-monosexuality as it defines a population by what it is not (i.e., monosexual) and prefer other identity terms that are inclusive of attraction to more than one gender, such as plurisexual, polysexual pomosexual and multisexual. Others prefer the label of queer, though this term is problematic as an umbrella term in that it does not specify the existence of attraction to multiple genders (FLANDERS 2017).

It is worth noticing that the author enlists ‘queer’ among the ‘non-monosexual’ identities in a way that would probably be problematic to many lesbians and gays in the queer arena. While bisexuality is used at times as a synonym for polysexuality and pansexuality, for some activists pansexuality is a subcategory of bisexuality, even though the former seems to have a broader meaning. The prefix ‘Bi’ appears to be limiting the subjective choice to a binary model, while the term ‘pan-sexual’ looks more inclusive, in terms of the existence of more than two genders and sexes. However, some bisexual activists interpret ‘Bi’ as not having an exclusionary implication: the duality would refer to ‘my sexuality’ and ‘the Other’s’, not to ‘males’ and ‘females’.

Pan-sexuality as ‘love for everything’⁵ – implying the possibility of emotional, sexual, affective relations also with transsexuals, trans-genders and

⁵ Love for everything has limits marked by being – and interacting with – consenting adults. pan-sexuals and poly-sexuals have been mistaken, misrepresented and wrongly associated with pedophilia, as happened to Gays in the past.

inter-sexuals – can be seen as overlapping with poly-sexuality, commonly understood as the attraction to all genders. While for the Oxford English Dictionary, a poly-sexual person is one “encompassing or characterized by many different kinds of sexuality” (SIMPSON 2009), Linda Garnets and Douglas Kimmel explains how a poly-sexual identity is chosen “by people who recognize that the term *bisexual* reifies the gender dichotomy that underlies the distinction between heterosexuality and homosexuality, implying that bisexuality is nothing more than a hybrid combination of these gender and sexual dichotomies” (GARNETS, KIMMEL 2003). In the same way, as was argued above in the case of pan-sexuality, bisexual activists claim the “bi” suffix can refer to “genders which are the same” and “genders which are different”, simply referring to the attraction to more than one gender – thus excluding all possibilities of discrimination.

Toward the end of this brief excursus around definitions – meant to give an idea of the complexity of issues around non-monosexual terms, and about how bisexuality is located in the debate – I would like to offer the results of an empirical research on such distinctions, whose subjects are Canadian youths who participate in Gay-Straight Alliances (GSA) and teachers. The goal of the investigation was to assess how they perceive and/or experience bi/pan-sexualities. Despite different definitions, the author Alicia Anne Lapointe underlines how non-monosexualities show a common trait: the one “marked by invisibility, mis/understandings, and prejudice in school” (LAPOINTE 2016).

Stigma and resilience among bi/pansexual people are examined with particular attention being paid to youth’s experiences with biphobic prejudice— negative attitudes toward bisexuality and misunderstandings related to their identification as pansexuals. The findings are particularly salient considering there is little scholarship that explores bi/pansexualities in schooling. Because monosexuality is privileged over bi/pansexualities in society, bi/pansexual youth, like trans folks, often assume the role of cultural workers who actively de/re/construct gender, and subsequently sexuality through identifications that transgress fe/male and hetero/homo classification (LAPOINTE 2016).

The notion of ‘cultural worker’ well represents the constant effort non-monosexual people have to make on a daily basis in every environment – a work I believe is common among trans people. Since my paper, among the different non-monosexual options, focuses on bisexuality, the

working definition I want to disclose to the readers is the following: “bisexuality is the emotional and/or sexual attraction for people of any sex or gender”. However, the scope here is not to prove its appropriateness, but to think about the relation between bisexuality (whatever we mean by it) and queer – from a feminist standpoint and self-reflective practice.⁶

2. FROM THE MARGINS OF QUEER THEORY

I'm not sure that because there are people who identify as bisexual there is a bisexual identity.

EVE KOSOFSKY SEDGWICK 1991⁷

If all sexualities have a history, the story of bisexuality since its early days is the one of exclusion – not just in the straight world but also in the queer one. The first time I read the word ‘queer’ in the title of a publication “Queer Theory: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities. An Introduction” (DE LAURETIS 1991) I felt something was left out: exclusionary practices are everywhere. For bisexuals *a margin within the margins* was created already at the dawn of queer studies, because of the lack of understanding; the prevalence of binary modes of thinking; and the fear of challenging one’s own boundaries – even the theoretical ones the queer concept promised to overcome.

Some normative ideas around bisexuality are still operating today, consciously or unconsciously, in the queer arena – and we may want to reflect about their origins. The persistence of Freud’s definition of ‘ambi-sexuality’ as *a stage in all individuals’ evolution* leaves room for an interpretation of bisexuality as a phase to be overcome. Later on, Freud partially corrected his theory by including the role of education: social censorship would inhibit the still bisexual adolescent by compelling him/her to become mono-sexual – either gay/lesbian or straight. In my understanding, this later position formulated by Freud leaves the door open to the idea that heterosexuality is a learned behavior (in today’s terms: a social construction), which creates a friction with the ‘essentialist’ (or ‘innatist’) model of explanation – and contributes to the acceptance of a notion of sexuality as a changing element. In 1922, Wilhelm Stekel produced a very innovative piece of theory (Eng. tr. 1946): bisexuality was not a stage, but a sexual identity. His work, hidden

⁶ For an introduction to different writings on feminist standpoint theories, see HARDING 2004.

⁷ The statement is part of an interview released in 1991 and mentioned in several publications, it can be found in ANGELIDES 2001.

and ostracized by Freud, was crucial in giving a status to bisexuality, and even legitimized ‘normal fetishism’ as an erotic option.⁸

Since then, a non-dichotomous conception of sexuality in the West re-emerged only in the late 40’s, with biologist Alfred Kinsey’s Report, which became a milestone for bisexual studies. Kinsey proposed a ‘scale test’ putting human sexuality on a continuum between heterosexuality and homosexuality (instead of categorizing them in separate boxes). He discovered that most people fall in the large ‘middle area’ between zero (totally hetero) and six (totally homo). In his findings, those who had shown preferences for one gender but occasionally desired or had sex with the other were the majority. In the following decade, during the 50’s, the pioneers of sexology, the famous couple William Masters and Virginia Johnson, found a prevalence of bisexuality as a sexual orientation⁹ – and some of their followers’ quantitative research scored bisexuality quite high, up to 83% – but investigations were again confined to bisexuality as a behavior.

In the following decades, bisexuality started to be perceived as a mass behavior thanks to an empirical research: Laud Humphrey’s book *Tea Room Trade. Impersonal Sex in Public Places* (1970) became a classic in social sciences methodology manuals, both for the innovative value of the research and for the ethical issues Humphrey had to face in the aftermath of the publication. By using quite unorthodox methods, Humphrey proved how most men engaging in sexual encounters in public toilets were regularly married or in a relationship with a woman: although they represented themselves as heterosexuals, they had undeniable *bisexual behaviors*. Since then, the idea of bisexuality as just a sexual conduct informed much literature and is still around in the queer milieu.

The first research daring to go beyond bisexuality as a behavior, *The Bisexual Option* (1978) finally dealt with the research subjects’ *self-identification* and was produced by Fritz Klein, who further elaborated the Kinsey scale adding a 7th grade – where the 4th would be *attraction for both sexes at the same level*. However, few years later, with Timothy Wolf, he published *Two Lives To Lead* (1985) where bisexuality in men and women was represented as a variation of homosexuality, narrowing bisexuals to being again a minority within the gay and lesbian sexual minority.

⁸ His contrast with Freud on these and other issues led to his expulsion from the psycho-analytical society – and ultimately to suicide.

⁹ On bisexuality as a sexual orientation see MARCHETTI 2001.

Ivan Hill's *The Bisexual Spouse* (1987) a qualitative study on six bisexual couples was published in the outburst of the AIDS pandemic. On the back cover of the book, the author estimates a number of 25 million bisexuals married in the United States alone. Unwillingly, it added fuel to the ongoing bi-scare;¹⁰ in those days, the scapegoating of bisexual people both in the heterosexual community and in the gay and lesbian milieu was common. For years to come bisexuals were seen as 'infectors' of the HIV-AIDS plague. A bi-phobic social paranoia took hold, representing bi-males as the carriers of the virus from the homosexual community to the heterosexual world, and bi-women as carriers to the lesbian community.

Finally, the 90's marked the rise of a Bisexual social movement, expressing the political agency of bisexual people, who started to struggle collectively for the recognition of their identity: the Bay Area Bisexual Network (BABN); the Intimate Network in Los Angeles; and Bi-Nets in Florida, Boston, San Diego, Chicago. The publications of the anthology *By Any Other Name. Bisexual People Speak Out* (1991) edited by Lani Ka'ahumanu and Loraine Hutchins was a milestone that galvanized activists. A plethora of seminars against bi-phobia, of workshops and kiss-ins in progressive universities started to give visibility to the bisexual movement. In 1992, an *International Directory of Bisexual Groups* was published and reached the 10th edition in only one year.

More and more people were identifying as bisexuals and willing to meet with others. I remember when bisexuals took the lead of the "gay Parade" in San Francisco, with Lani Ka'ahumanu as a Grand Marshal opening the demonstration. Finally, the B was added, to GLT but it was mostly a formal achievement, as biphobia was still rampant. A paper I presented at a gay, lesbian and bisexual conference at the University of Illinois with the title 'Elements for a theory of bisexuality' (CORRADI 1992)¹¹ suggested that sexuality could be seen as a fluid element that changes over time in each person life. The point was harshly contested, and before a debate could start, I had to be escorted out by a group of feminist lesbians.

¹⁰ Media and physicians contributed to spread the idea that bisexuality and HIV-AIDS were related, by listing bisexuals as a 'risk group' (like i.v. drug users and sex workers) while the problem was not related to sexual identities, neither to drug addiction nor to prostitution: there are no risk groups, only risk behaviors.

¹¹ Laura CORRADI, "Elements For A Theory of Bisexuality", (presented paper) *Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Conference, Unit for Criticism and Interpretative Theory*, University of Illinois, Urbana Champaign, April 2-4, 1992.

The empirical part of that research ‘Profiles of (bisexual) desire’ through in-depth interviews in Santa Cruz, California, harvested firsthand narrations and outlined ideal-types – with a vast range of differences. For some interviewees bisexuality meant polygamy *tout court*; for others it meant bigamy; for the so called “bi-cycles” bisexuality could imply sequential monogamous relations. One of the women interviewed (grade 4 of Klein scale) was in a relationship, and “faithful” to it – having a bisexual identity combined with a monogamous behavior she said she was comfortable with. Yet her dream was to have an expanded family, a common desire in the queer bi-community: ‘you can only fly with two wings’ as one commented. In most of the interviews a critique emerged of the dominant mono-sexual paradigm and the necessity to overcome the nuclear family. Motivated research is needed to develop hypothesis, and answer questions such as: How many types of bisexualities are there? How does bisexuality intersect with categories such as class, race, gender, status, dis/ability? To which extent do bisexuals consider themselves queer? How do they feel in queer spaces today?

A recent study by Ethan H. Mereish, Sabra L. Katz-Wise and Julie Woulfe has looked at differences and similarities, in sexual orientation and sexual fluidity, among self-identified ‘bisexual women’ and ‘queer women’. In the results,

[s]ignificant differences between queer and bisexual women were also found for sexual attraction. Women identifying as bisexual were more likely to report equal attraction to men/transmen and women/transwomen, whereas women identifying as queer were more likely to report being mostly attracted to one gender or “other” genders. Women identifying as queer who experience more attraction to one gender may feel that their experiences are not captured within conventional definitions of ‘bisexuality’ as reflecting equal attraction to women and men. Although researchers have begun to explore the multiple ways in which the queer label is used, particularly within bisexual communities [...] Interestingly, no significant difference was found between women identifying as queer or bisexual regarding sexual fluidity in attractions. Previous research has indicated that women who report sexual fluidity in attractions are more likely to identify with identities that reflect attraction toward more than one gender, such as bisexual or queer [...] However, women identifying as queer were significantly more likely than women identifying as bisexual to report having ever experienced a change in sexual orientation identity and to report experiencing more than one change. This may be related to developmental timing of exposure to the term ‘queer.’ For

instance, a woman may identify as bisexual in high school and then identify as queer in college after learning about this identity. This may also occur in relation to a partner's gender transition (i.e., social and/or medical steps taken to align a transgender person's body with their gender identity), which in turn may lead to changes in an individual's orientation label (MEREISH *et al.* 2016).

By adding the intersectional prism in terms of race, ethnicity, culture, color and geopolitical background, we find a wide range of diverse yet common struggles. In Latin American countries bisexual activists are vocal and committed to gain visibility. The following quote from a Mexican website points out issues of acceptance: a self-managed survey in the lgbt collectivity resulted in almost half of the respondents identifying as bisexual – yet being invisible in the community.

Tristemente los bisexuales son un sector de la Comunidad LGBT (lesbianas, gays, Bisexuales, Trans) con menos reconocimiento dentro de la lucha por sus derechos y visibilidad. La invisibilidad dentro de la comunidad LGBT es un fenómeno muy preocupante; se requiere mayor participación de los bisexuales y mayor preocupación por sus necesidades por parte de otros miembros del colectivo. [...] En 2007 se hizo una encuesta a 768 miembros de la Comunidad LGBT, de entre ellos el 48.9 por ciento se identificó como bisexual. Por lo tanto, los bisexuales son tantos como sus “hermanos” gays, lesbianas y trans. *Nos guste o no, los bisexuales están aquí y están para quedarse* (<http://www.sdpnoticias.com/gay/2014/06/02/top-10-cosas-que-nunca-debes-decir-a-un-bisexual> SDPNOTICIAS 2014).

Latinos/nas bisexuals are active against bi-phobia in the lgbt queer communities as in heteronormative societies at large. With wit and irony they produce incursions in the web to contrast bi-phobic attitudes and ridiculous stereotypes implying bisexuals do not exist, such as the following one: *Dicen que si encuentras a un bisexual “de verdad”, puedes pedir un deseo y se cumplirá al tercer día...* Bisexuals in Latin America are committed to the educational mission by targeting families and communities, working on acceptance and suicide prevention at the crossroads of gender, sex, class, race/ethnicity, sexuality.

In an online publication from Ecuador there is a reference to the work of Rinna Riesenfeld who stated the importance of *pluralism* when dealing with bisexuality: “No hay una bisexualidad, hay muchas” – and advocated for a full acceptance:

Los bisexuales son poco comprendidos, se les cree ‘homosexuales no asumidos’ o ‘gente confundida’, se les exige ‘definirse’ y se imagina que son incapaces de comprometerse en una relación amorosa”, dice el libro *Bisexualidades*, de la sexóloga y psicoterapeuta Rinna Riesenfeld, el cual, según las palabras de su autora, está dirigido a los bisexuales, a sus parejas, familias, amigos, curiosos y cualquiera deseoso de entender y respetar la diversidad sexual (<http://www.amicsgais.org/forums/showthread.php?1643-%E2%80%9CNo-hay-una-bisexualidad-hay-muchas%E2%80%9D-Rinna-Riesenfeld> GAG: grup d’Amics Gais lesbianes Transsexuals y Bisexual, 2004).

The struggle for recognition of bisexuality as an identity in societies at large, as well as in the LGBT queer movement and studies, implies overcoming binarism and internal hierarchies. As Angelides puts it,

In overlooking the role the category of bisexuality has played in the formation of the hetero/homosexual structure, the project of queer deconstruction has in important ways fallen short of its goals. In subordinating gender to sexuality and insisting on a degree of analytic autonomy for the latter, many queer theorists have thought the two axes vertically or hierarchically rather than relationally and obliquely. As a result, bisexuality, an important historical regulator of the axes of gender and sexuality, has been elided in the present tense and, indeed, in almost any sense at all (ANGELIDES 2006).

In the same line of thought, Gurevich, Bailey and Bower (2009) indicate how bisexuality is undergoing an epistemic (dis)location within queer theory. This perspective is shared by Jonathan Alexander and Serena Anderlini (2012) who look at bisexuality and queer as

[...] two parallel thought collectives that have made significant contributions to cultural discourses about sexual and amorous practices (...) we have launched this project at a critical time in global and human history, when practicing love may be more useful as a way to care for than to multiply our species. The two constructs we engage are quite significant, as a practice of plural loves, bisexuality transgresses heteronormative mandates for gender and intimacy. Queer theory proposes a theoretical inquiry and intervention into heteronormativity (ALEXANDER and ANDERLINI 2012).

We should remember how queer theory was meant to overcome identity binarism such as masculinity/femininity and straight/gay; yet the in-betweenness of bisexuality has been too often ignored by queer academics

and activists. For Alexander and Anderlini, bisexual theory is a *queer path to knowledge*; and without the specific contribution bisexuality can offer, a fundamental element is missing. This is why efforts should be made to push bisexuality out of the margins it has been confined to by the dominant monosexual paradigm, and recognize its epistemological space to fully accomplish the subversive goals of queer theory.

3. BISEXUALITY AND QUEER SPACES – BEYOND WESTERN EYES

[Gender studies, sexuality studies and queer studies] ... these (inter) disciplines behave as if their central objects of study – gender and sexuality – can be studied most intensely if other axes of signification are firmly kept out of sight. For both gender studies and sexuality studies or queer studies, this means that a commitment to intersectionality notwithstanding race is mostly evacuated.

Gloria WEKKER 2016: 22

The metaphor of space is quite common both in bisexual and queer literature. In the former, to indicate an opening, or room for liberty in the debate, a breathing space, and a safe physical place where it is possible to gather, far from biphobic attitudes; bisexuality is seen intersectionally by Hemmings as

[...] a space that offers refuge from the perceived tyranny of what has come to be termed ‘monosexuality’. In this trajectory, sexual and gendered middle ground has been conceived of in a number of positive ways: as a bridge linking polar and otherwise estranged opposites, as a unique combination of sexual (as well as gendered or raced) differences, or as a space of difference rather than derivation (HEMMINGS 2002: 2).

‘Queer’ has also been variously defined as a symbolic and material friendly space – versus unsafe spaces, since most public spaces are under heterosexual social control. The necessity and possibility of a queer space has been theorized in several fields; such as social sciences, architecture, spirituality/religion, and human geography (BROWNE 2009; 2010). As a blogger has pointed out, queer spaces are not to be considered just LGBT locations, since processes of deterritorialization happen around queerness:

I have been using the term “queer space” without defining it. I have appropriated it from Foucault via Halberstam, but I feel free to mutate it as I work with it. I use

it to refer to social spaces with tolerance for difference and ambiguity. There are the cracks in the social system where new styles of dressing and living become possible. In Deleuzian terms these are spaces where deterritorialization occurs. I am not using queer as a synonym for lgbt. I do not consider all lgbt spaces to be queer. Some of them have become consumerist and thoroughly mainstream. One dyke I talked to called it the ‘gaystream.’ Queer space is not physical, it is a field of possibility in a social space. I organize queer space by wearing my outfits and by being out and open about my gender explorations. Queer space recedes and becomes less possible when I hide my difference when I try to “pass” as either gender. My view of queerness is heavily influenced by my background with ethnographic studies and Latour/Actor Network Theory. I see queerness as something that an actor organizes in her environment. She performs it and recruits others to participate in her idea. I do this by making friends and recruiting them into my gender project, and by just showing up and being visible day after day. Spaces become queer for me because I recruit allies who support me in my performance/structuring of queerness. Paraphrasing Bruno Latour I would call this a Program of Action. One of my most basic programs might be “I am femme and male. I claim the right to be here, and not to live in fear of violence” (<https://jasperswardrobe.wordpress.com/2009/01/21/what-is-queer-space/> JASPER 2009).

Queer is a social space where it is possible to experiment oneself. The scholar/blogger Jasper offers a hint about last decade’s enthusiasm around the queer promise of being the ultimate solution for socially subversive types of agency and subjectivity. Yet, Indian feminist theoreticians, such as Chandra Talpade Mohanty and Guruminder Bhambra suggest in different ways how the cooptation of gender, feminism and queer categories within the paradigm of western representative democracy and neoliberal academia is an ongoing process. If queer theories are not combined with post-colonial viewpoints, a concrete risk of being *subsumed* remains (MOHANTY CHANDRA TALPADE 2003; BHAMBRA 2007; BHASKARAN 2004). Therefore, de-colonizing theory, praxis, and activism can be an antidote to political neutralization and cultural assimilation (CORRADI 2018).

How can we decolonize both bisexual and queer Spaces? One way to start would be to consciously and self-reflectively learn from non-western cultures and experiences, an effort to be combined with the systematic attempt to overcome dichotomous thinking: after so many words spent about non-binary perspectives, it would be decisive to start *walking the talk*. ‘Innocent’ behaviors of white superiority (WEKKER 2016) are at times displayed also in the queer arena – in terms of leadership, agenda, patterns

of communication, and lack of reference to categories, authors and knowledge from the South of the world. Such a knowledge is being perceived by some whites as intellectually naïve, too ‘poetic’, methodologically spurious and theoretically not rigorous; overall failing to reach the ‘state of the art’ from the point of view of Euro-Atlantic *situated knowledge*. This is why queers of color are often invisible in academic settings and in society at large, feeling not to belong to any of the worlds they are part of.¹² As an example, feminist and queer gypsies are supposed to be non-existent (as it used to be for native/indigenous/aboriginal queer); they live their sexual and intellectual lives mostly unnoticed by whites, and feel alien in their roma, sinti, traveler communities, as well as in the lgbti queer and feminist arena, where they are seen – as everywhere else – as *transpassers* (PUAR 2004; CORRADI 2018). Queer theory urgently needs to be decolonized also at the intersection between sexuality and disability, as feminists in the field of critical disability studies have pointed out (MEEKOSHA 2011; SPARKES *et al.* 2017).

Western cultures are deeply grounded in dichotomous and hierarchical thought, for their theories and methodologies are marked with the same features of white supremacy, classism, inferiorization of the Other, binarism – and in great need to be decolonized (TUHIWAE SMITH 1999). Indigenous, aboriginal, Maori perspectives and non-western cultures have developed sets of non-hierarchical and non-dichotomous concepts that should be considered with attention. I want to mention the Indian notion of *Advaita*, or ‘non-duality’ (ASCIONE 2014; ASCIONE, SHAHI 2015; CONNELL, CORRADI 2017) which can be useful both practically, in coalition building and alliance politics, and theoretically in overcoming dual, binary standpoints, which consider sexuality either gay/lesbian or straight – a representation commonly found in queer studies, where mono-sexual supremacy is quite established.

As Angelides proposes, epistemologically we should talk about sexualities in a non-binary, or in a ‘trinary’ mode:

While gay/lesbian constructionism and queer deconstructionism have correctly identified the hetero/homosexual structure as the epistemological linchpin of modern western concepts and representations of sexuality, what I have suggested is that they have misunderstood the workings of this seemingly binary structure.

¹² On the politics of belonging see YUVAL-DAVIS 2012.

Instead of functioning as a binary of two mutually constituting poles, the hetero/homosexual structure has, both historically and epistemologically, functioned strictly speaking as a trinary. It is important to reiterate, however, that to argue that each of these terms are meaningful only in relation to the other two—that is, that each requires the other two for its self-definition—is not to argue that these terms are somehow truthful reflections of individual sexualities. It is simply to argue that, however ill-conceived or inadequate for the representation of the wide range of cultural forms of sexuality, this trinary structure has nonetheless been the primary organizing principle of modern western thought on sexuality. This has significant ramifications not just for queer theory and gay and lesbian history, but, indeed, for any research into modern western sexualities (ANGELIDES 2006).

Surya Monro in her book *Bisexuality: Identities, Politics and Theories* raises an important question: why is postcolonial analysis relevant to a discussion about bisexuality and intersectionality?

Contemporary internationally dominant sex, sexuality, and gender systems of categorization, and the social inequalities with which they are intrinsically linked, stem at least partially from a Western colonial past. This colonial past was the locus of the formation of not only modern Western sex/gender/sexuality categories, but also homophobia, biphobia, and heterosexism. These sets of categorization and hierarchies developed together, as part of the system of racialised, sexualized and gendered inequalities that underpin many contemporary societies. It is unsurprising that critiques of LGBT identities categories have emerged from postcolonial sites although postcolonial critiques of colonial prejudices and persecution regarding sexual diversity have been comparatively subdued [...] *Southern homophobias and biphobias are, to date, a largely unacknowledged legacy of colonialism* (MONRO 2015: 63-64, my emphasis).

Clare Hemmings, in her work *What's in a Name? Bisexuality, Transnational Sexuality Studies and Western Colonial Legacies* problematizes in a post-colonial manner, the way in which

[...] bisexuality is either absent, or inscribed as potential or behaviour, rather than identity. In the process, transnational sexuality studies reproduces bisexuality's historical role as facilitator of Western sexual oppositions, a role that also facilitates colonial distinctions between *cultures as sexually civilised or sexually primitive*. [my emphasis] In addition, rendering bisexuality as potential or behavior safeguards lesbian and gay subjects as de facto authors of queer studies transnationally (...). In Western theorization of sexual identities, particularly queer theory, bisexuality has faded somewhat from view in the last decade.

While bisexual theorists in the early to mid 1990s embraced queer approaches to sexuality, albeit critically, notes bisexuality's position within the field has not been institutionalized in the same way as transgender studies' has. While theorists seem to know that bisexuality needs to be acknowledged, this tends to take place only in footnote glosses, or tacked-on mentions that have no impact on sexual epistemology or methodology. In part, this must be due to the dual form that queer resistance to bisexuality has taken within queer theory and politics. On one hand, bisexuality has been understood as undermining lesbian or gay claims to legitimacy, bringing opposite-sex relationships very firmly into the frame that only ambivalently seemed able to contain them. On the other hand, it has been understood to reproduce the oppositional identity categories queer theorists wanted to challenge, the 'bi' in bisexuality figuring as the 'tie that binds' sexual poles. As a variety of bisexual theorists noted at the time, *bisexuality was simultaneously viewed as a challenge to and reproducer of Western sexual categories* (HEMMINGS 2009).

I would like to end this paragraph by recalling another de-colonial theoretical tool, manufactured in a different non-Western culture. While the Sanskrit notion of *Advaita* is related to the positive deliberation of avoiding dualities, the Islamic sociological concept of *Gharbzadegi* (translated as 'Westoxication') and introduced by the Iranian Jalal Al-e Ahmad (1982) urges oppressed people to initiate a social and personal detoxification from the west. The author regards the process of westernization as an illness, a contagious disease, a drug addiction; detoxification from the west is proposed as a first step of liberation from cultural subalternity (Connell 2007; Connell, Corradi 2014). Such a detoxification from the established supremacy of western ways of thinking, and from un-problematized general categories, would be a good practice also in the queer arena, which is becoming de-facto increasingly participated by diverse people. An intersectional gaze would convey the impression that queer is becoming less classist and more colored, while it remains very white in its intellectual production; and in everyday life relations, agendas, social representations. Authors in queer Islamic Studies (DAVIES 2010; Ali 2015; GUARDI, VANZAN 2012) should also be taken into account in the debate, not just as 'regional studies', but because of their epistemic value.

4. WHY BISEXUALITY IS QUEER

I am black and I am female,
and I am a mother and I am a bisexual,
and I am a nationalist and I am an anti-nationalist (...)
And no, I do not believe it is blasphemous to compare
oppressions of sexuality to oppression of race and ethnicity:
Freedom is indivisible or it is nothing at all.

June JORDAN 1993

The African-American feminist writer and activist June Jordan, in the above poem, applies one of the principles of intersectionality: differences should be discussed with no hierarchy of importance, since they are all expressions and categories of the same system of oppression. She also suggests bisexuality is a matter of freedom – not a sign of either confusion or opportunism.

Yet, the myth of bisexuality as *just a phase* – a period of uncertainty before one understands/decides whether to be gay or straight – is still enduring. For a long time, in the lesbian and gay milieu, bisexuality denoted the comfortable choice of not choosing, of not taking a stance: a sign of disorientation or mystification, an immature position, or a ‘fence-sitting’ behavior – while we should know in genders and sexualities there are no fences at all. What was so threatening about bisexuality?

Why do some people still not believe bisexuals are fully entitled to identify as “queer”? Objections about bisexuality being queer come mostly from two different epistemological positions: the first, a ‘fundamentalist’ monosexual standpoint, regards those having a hard time in recognizing sexuality as a fluid entity, and bisexuality as an identity among others. From their point of view bisexuality is not queer because bisexuals can enjoy *heterosexual privileges* by not disclosing their own sexual orientation. This objection is quite weak: gays and lesbians also have a long story of closeted lives – bisexuals may have more options in *passing* – but the problem is not about identity, it is about *coming out politics*: once you are *out*, you are queer, it doesn’t matter if you are G/L/T or Bi. Actually, bisexuals are often perceived as having something even more inexplicable: compared to monosexual queers, non-monosexuals are seen as strange, anomalous, weird individuals. For this reason, I find this type of argument – about bisexuals not being *really* queer – as somehow bi-phobic, given the efforts of bi-activists around visibility in the community and in society at large. The stigma hitting bisexuals is comparable to the one affecting

Transsexuals and Intersexuals: *inbetweenness* is still considered inappropriate, embarrassing, dangerous.

The second argument I am going to discuss about the queerness of bisexuality is seemingly more attractive and comes from the non-labeling standpoint: if sexuality is fluid, what is the sense of trying to define something so changeable as desire and attraction? “Why should I name myself Bi-queer – or anything at all?” ask some bloggers who share their reflections on topics such as “what’s wrong with labels;” or invite their readers to “stop putting so much pressure on yourself to pick a side.” The following excerpt is from an interview published in the online version of a popular magazine, where Lane Moore explains why she won’t label her sexuality:

I’ve dated pretty much every configuration of gender imaginable. But when people ask, I wouldn’t call myself bisexual (which is one of the only universally recognized defining boxes we currently have if you’re not gay or straight). I wouldn’t call myself anything because I don’t think any of the boxes apply, not to mention they all come with baggage that isn’t super appealing to me. bisexuals are still largely seen – incorrectly – as people sitting in chairs in sexual identity waiting rooms until their names are called to go into the “straight” or “gay” offices; lesbians are seen as being attracted to women and women only, and never men, not even a little bit or else you don’t count as a lesbian; and straight people are seen as people attracted to the opposite sex only (<http://www.cosmopolitan.com/sex-love/news/a39306/why-im-not-labeling-my-sexuality/> MOORE 2015)

To some, labels are an obstacle, a source of anxiety, an outgrown dress, the expression of an individualistic western model:

An often cited attack on ‘Western’ categories of sexual identities comes from the Palestinian scholar Joseph Massad who describes the defense of human rights on the basis of sexual orientation as a ‘missionary task’. The need to adhere to Western definitions of sexual identity is cited as an example of imperialism, where same-sex relations are ascribed particular meanings and identities by the West. This has prompted significant debate around the role of development agencies and multilateral organisations in protecting and promoting LGBT rights, particularly in post-colonial nations (<http://spl.ids.ac.uk/sexuality-and-social-justice-tool-kit/1-issues-and-debates/whats-wrong-labels>, Redacción Sdpnoticias.Com 2014).

However, labels, while being somehow considered to be obsolete today, are recognized as having had an important role in the past:

The identity categories lesbian, gay, Bisexual and Transgender have been instrumental in raising awareness of sexuality issues and of bringing them onto national and international policy agendas. The acronym ‘LGBT’ (with the addition of Intersex and sometimes queer and Questioning), is now recognized around the globe and provides a common language for talking about sexual rights and for bringing together individuals and organizations working for social justice. Understanding identity in terms of fixed categories has helped to make same-sex desire and gender non-conforming people visible to policy makers and development actors where they were not before. It has also helped to facilitate dialogue around citizenship and in some cases, enable legal reform (<http://spl.ids.ac.uk/sexuality-and-social-justice-toolkit/1-issues-and-debates/whats-wrong-labels>, Redacción Sdponoticias.Com 2014).

The power of self-definition is undeniably important to some extent. Here I am going to offer a long and enlightening quote from a blogger, well representing the ambivalence young people display around labeling practices:

Whenever I discuss my sexuality — as someone who identifies broadly as queer and bisexual and more specifically as [pansexual](#) — I am met with a very common response: “But why do [labels matter](#)? We’re all the same.” Often, this response comes from a place of good intentions. *Many people say labels don’t matter because they believe that labels are hindering [equality](#).* And I understand why many people think this way. It’s *tempting* to believe that inequality is caused by difference. It’s *tempting* to think that the only way to ensure that people don’t treat others differently is by ignoring our differences. We’re often socialized to view [differences as the cause](#) of inequality, rather than to understand oppression and inequality as systemic. [...] Often, imposing labels on people is rooted in a lot of queerphobia and [monosexism](#). For example, if someone uses the word “gay” to describe a man who doesn’t identify as gay, but exhibits behavior that is stereotypically associated with gay men, this can be pretty oppressive. That’s telling someone what their sexual identity is, and this is not okay. Secondly, you’re perpetuating [stereotypes about gay people](#) — and those stereotypes are dangerous as they often cultivate homophobia. Let’s look at another example. Non-monosexual people — *people who are attracted to more than one gender* — are often defined by the gender of their partner. For example, I’m currently in a relationship with a man. Often, we are referred to as a “heterosexual couple”, and I’ve been told by many gay people that [I’m not queer](#) because I’m dating a man. The label of “straight” is imposed on me, despite the fact that I don’t identify as heterosexual. This is a direct example of monosexism and [bi/pan-erasure](#), as it perpetuates the myth that people can’t be attracted to more than one gender (emphasis in the text; <http://everydayfeminism.com/2015/01/labels-empowering-harmful>, FERGUSON 2015).

I believe the problem lies not in the (legitimate) self-labelling but the (inappropriate) labeling from others; and in the pressure to choose a label: it should not be mandatory to define oneself in order to access a space, especially a space that wants to be open to diversities. Bisexuality is one among many self-definitions people can choose within or outside the queer milieu.

The position I am arguing for – that bisexuality is queer – is grounded on at least four motivations which I list below. These points in part represent a synthesis of the line of reasoning I have been carrying out so far. They can also be read as the basis of a theoretical and political proposal, in a work that can only be *collective*.

- a. Bisexuality is intrinsically queer because it contests mono-sexual representations of human sexuality. The mono-sexual paradigm is still dominant and pervasive today: either you are male or female, straight or gay/lesbian; either you like one gender or the other – and nothing in between. The very existence of bisexual identities (as well as trans-inter-sexual identities) defies the either/or social compulsion on genders and sexual preferences
- b. Bisexuality is queer because it challenges the established division between the hetero-norm and the ‘deviants’ – in favor of a non-dichotomous, fluid, interpretation of genders and sexuality, seen on a continuum, rather than in separate categories of un-changing identities. The existence of a third option – even though an inclusive spectrum of sexual diversities would better illustrate reality – can look threatening and make old identity politics look obsolete in clinging to boundaries.
- c. Bisexuality is queer because it questions the classic systems of explanation still prevalent in feminism, lgbti studies, as well as in social sciences, which are grounded on a binary understanding of differences: essentialism/innatism versus social constructionism; nature/ biology versus relations/society. By dwelling on the epistemological inbetweenness, of bisexuality it is easier to avoid reasoning in either/or terms; thus, overcoming dichotomous approaches by combining different elements of explanations (social, biological, biographical) and by considering them as non-competitive. Beyond classical (western) systems of explanation, we can move in the direction of creating forms of inclusive knowledge – learning from indigenous epistemologies (Black TAIARAHIA 2014), and de-colonizing theories and methodologies (Tuhiwae SMITH 1999) to speak of the increasing level of awareness and political complexity, globally.

- d. A theory of bisexuality is a pivotal element in understanding the potentials of queer itself. Many still believe queer is just an umbrella category for marginalized and discriminated sexual minorities. Starting to represent bisexualities also as an *emerging majority*¹³ would have far reaching consequences for the whole queer movement, both epistemologically and politically, implying the possibility to create intersectional alliances and subvert social heteronormativity from *within*. Taking such a stand would give a crucial contribution in disassembling patriarchy – and classism, racism, ageism, ableism – if only the queer did not restrict itself to gender/sex/sexualities, as we are going to discuss in the next paragraph.

5. RE-QUEERING THE QUEER

The continued erasure of bisexuality, by queer scholars in addition to mainstream critics, reveals that queer theory has not yet moved beyond its position as a homosexual opponent to heterosexuality, and therefore that bisexual theory has a role to play in queering queer theory.

Laura ERICKSON-SCHROTH and Jennifer MITCHELL, 2009

In some special occasions, such as when a movie star or a politician performs a coming out, queer spaces and identities can get a (sensationalistic) media attention and are improperly glamorized; bisexuality too can incur in some form of spectacularization and ‘juicy’ social representation. These processes of *exotification* – far from being really useful for the social recognition and respect of diversities – represent the soft side of homophobia and racism. Bisexuals are portrayed as the spicy ingredient for heterosexual couples and in swingers communities, where bisexual females are particularly welcome.¹⁴ “Performative bisexuality” is represented in movies as a piquant element; or in advertisements, mostly oriented to the heterosexual public, where bisexual young women are portrayed in a stereotypical way, as a stimulating yet frightening presence in the picture, to revive the attention of consumers, anesthetized by over-exposure to advertising (CORRADI 2012).

¹³ I learned the concept ‘emerging majorities’ in the 90’s from Angela Davis, who referred it to communities of color, workers, students, black people, Latinas/Latinos, women, lgbt people, indigenous people and the necessity of “forging a unity that can *make a new* majority of the old minorities” – as she restated during the Occupy movement (DAVIS 2011).

¹⁴ While male bisexuality remains less accepted also in these ‘alternative’ sexual environments because of the enduring social stigma connected with the ‘passive’ role and the assumption of loss of masculinity.

Only some of the political contributions of bisexual theories and practices to queer Studies do interact with post/de-colonial, feminist, intersectional standpoints, and do not restrict their range of critique solely to the contexts of gender/sex/sexualities. More studies are needed in this area, since the danger today is one of academic and political *domestication*.¹⁵ As the Indian theoretician Gurinder Bhambra (2007) has pointed out, the feminist and queer challenge can be re-absorbed in the dominant discourse by a simple ‘opening of dialogue’ and improvement of ‘identity pluralism’, while postcolonial/decolonial theories and practices can subvert analytical categories because of their trajectory heading to the very roots of the *colonial matrix of power* (QUIJANO 2000; 2007). Whereas today sex, gender, sexuality can be added to the prevailing western paradigm as elements of ‘modernity;’ the decolonial critique does not fit into such a frame. In other words, if the *opción descolonial* (MIGNOLO 2008) is left out of our work, whatever we call ‘queer’ is at risk of being subsumed and co-opted, as it has happened for Women and Gender Studies, Lgbt, and Sexuality Studies:

The postcolonial critique is not substantially different from that made by feminism and queer studies, but the nature of its *location* outside of the dominant understanding of the ‘modern social’ enables it to resist assimilation into the domain of the socio-cultural (despite the efforts of theorists of multiple modernities to so contain it) and open up discussion of general categories (BHAMBRA 2007: 880).

If we add the intersectional prism to our decolonial reflections, we may notice how much of the literature tends to look at bisexuality in a color-blind way – as happened in the past for lesbians and gays, when people of color were invisibilized; the assumption is of bisexuality as a neutral or mostly white phenomenon – while it is present in all communities, with common traits of misrepresentation. Richard N. Pitt (2006) has published a book on the ‘Down Low’¹⁶ – one of the bisexual lifestyles in the African

¹⁵ On the risk of academic domestication, see HINGANGAROA 2012.

¹⁶ The Black English expression *Down Low* (DL) was considered as ‘a not marginal lifestyle’ as early as summer 2003, according to one of the uncoolest articles of the New York Times Magazine ever published, which improperly generalized the DL as *the* form of expression of Black’s (unconfessed) bisexuality, in a paragraph dense with racial and sexual stereotypes, worth reading:

Rejecting a gay culture they perceive as white and effeminate, many black men have settled on a new identity, with its own vocabulary and customs and its own name: Down Low. There have always been men – black and white – who have had secret sexual lives with men. But the creation of an organized, underground subculture largely made up of

American community – presenting the results of a sociological analysis of around 170 articles written between 2001 and 2006. These point out how media tend to stigmatize black men’s bisexual behavior – described negatively as *duplicious heterosexuals*. At the same time, they show a compassionate understanding of white bisexual men as *victimized homosexuals* who are forced into the closet by heteronormativity and homophobia. An interesting *double standard* indeed.

Another social double standard regards the different degrees of sexual freedom and entitlement to polygamous relations (e.g., males vs females). Personal/political queer intersections meant to overcome both the mono-sexual and the monogamous paradigm have been studied by Serena Anderlini at the University of California in Santa Barbara, in particular the crossroads between bisexuality and *Poly-amory*¹⁷ – also defined as *Poly-fidelity* to stress the emotional and responsible dimension of multiple loving relations. As she posits, in an email interview:

[...] from a theoretical point of view, bisexuality should be considered as an *epistemic portal*, approaching the hypothesis of a ‘Gaia paradigm’ where symbiosis, love and sustainability are the keys of evolution. The practice of bisexuality allows knowledge of oneself, and the capacity to love in a complete and multiple way. A culture able to accept bisexuality can overcome the dichotomy which structures desire on the basis of an exclusive desired ‘object’. Such a culture opens up an horizon where loving energies are free to circulate and those who participate in amorous communities can have collective and individual benefits, enjoying physical and emotional health.¹⁸

black men who otherwise live straight lives is a phenomenon of the last decade... *Most date or marry women and engage sexually with men; they meet only in anonymous settings like bath-houses and parks or through the Internet*. Many of these men are young and from the inner city, where they live in a *hypermasculine thug culture*. Other DL men form romantic relationships with men and may even be peripheral participants in mainstream gay culture, *all unknown to their colleagues and families*. Most DL men identify themselves not as gay or bisexual but first and foremost as black. To them, as to many blacks, that equates to being inherently masculine (my emphasis; DENIZET-LEWIS 2003).

The accent in the article is put on the secrecy factor, the failure to disclose the truth, the social mask worn by bisexual black males, especially with *friend and family* (while supposedly among Whites they know all about the sexual conduct of their relatives). A few years later, Keith Boykin ‘answered’ to such a racist stereotype by pointing out how concealment in sex affairs is not unique to Black men (BOYKIN 2006). As a matter of fact, practices of cover up normally take place in all societies, all types of sexualities, all genders, and all races.

¹⁷ Polyamory is distinct from Polysexuality: it refers to the desire to be intimately or emotionally involved with more than one person at once, independently from sex or gender.

¹⁸ Personal communication 22/12/09.

According to Serena Anderlini, in poly-amorist communities bisexuality is very common and statistics produced within groups show the majority of poly-amorists also identify as bisexual. Poly-amorist communities offer an hospitable environment to those who desire loving experiences, which may include bisexuality. Sex is not the center of their discursive practices and politics – allowing space for theorizing around tender and caring dimensions, affect and social feelings.

A non dichotomous remark: poly-fidelity, multiple loves, polyamorous relations may be a-sexual, as well as bisexual and other sexual identities. Being asexual or demi-sexual, means people may live their life, or part of it, as characterized by a lack of sexual attraction, or desire of intimacy, or the decision not to be engaging in sexual activity unless emotionally involved. There are individuals, and communities – the most known being the Asexual Visibility and Education Network (AVEN) – who identify as asexual or demi-sexual, who are active in the queer political movement and participate in public initiatives. Some asexuals do not feel comfortable being the A at the end of the GLBTIQ acronym, because they feel critical about placing gender/sex/sexuality in a hierarchical position with respect to other diversities; and would rather opt for a larger scope in queer politics.

Indeed, as Carmen Dell’Aversano reminds us in her work (2012), the dimension of sexuality shouldn’t prevail, exorting us to go back to the pristine meaning of the term queer. She offers important historical quotes in favor of the argument that queer is not limited to gender, sex, sexuality. It can be useful to read such ‘foundational’ statements altogether,

Queer is ... *whatever* is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. *There is nothing in particular to which it necessarily refers.* It is an identity without an essence (emphasis in original; HALPERIN 1995: 62).

[Queer] mark[s] a flexible space for the expression of all aspects of non- (anti-, contra-) straight cultural production and reception (DOTY 1993: 3).

[A] lot of the more exciting work around “queer” spins the term outward along dimensions that can’t be subsumed under gender or sexuality at all. [...] queer’s denaturalising impulse may well find an articulation within precisely those contexts to which it has been judged indifferent. [...] By refusing to crystallise in any specific form, queer maintains a relation of resistance to whatever constitutes the normal (SEDGWICK 1996: 96-99).

It is necessary to affirm the contingency of the term [queer], to let it be vanquished by those who are excluded by the term but who justifiably expect representation by it, to let it take on meanings that cannot now be anticipated by a younger generation whose political vocabulary may well carry a very different set of investments (BUTLER 1993: 230).

Queer should not be regarded as another label, or an ‘umbrella term’: it is about *social subversion* by communities and people who recognize their own being as socially constructed, departing from gender/sex and sexuality but also going beyond them; and who identify the infinite ties relating oppressed people with each other and with a multifaceted system of domination operating in everybody. For this reason, the ‘horizon of possibilities’ cannot be restricted in advance to a set of groups, hence limiting the impact of queer to the area of gender/sex/sexuality. In real social life differences and inequalities are found only in mutually constitutive relations with other interlocking categories of oppression.

6. OPEN CONCLUSIONS

It is only through recognizing our privilege,
whether it be white privilege,
male privilege,
class privilege,
light skinned privilege,
or heterosexual privilege,
that we can challenge hierarchical relationships.

(Alexandra OPREA 2004: 39)

In this essay I have considered bisexuality within a constellation of terms related to non-monosexuality, which tend to overlap with each other and enrich the controversies around labeling practices; I have discussed the marginality of bisexuality in the queer arena, and explained some of the reasons why I believe bisexuality is queer; why bisexuals should be fully entitled in the queer milieu; and how the category of bisexuality, as an epistemic tool, can improve queer theory and spaces. I have also argued for the necessity of an intersectional approach and the decolonization of queer studies and politics, for enlarging the scope of queer politics by re-queering the queer movement and its relations, opening up to diversities and perspectives.

Bisexual, pansexual, queer, fluid, and the many other identity groups could exist as they are without stretching or retracting to (un)cover others, but we could still benefit from coming together for collective action. This would certainly mean that for groups who are marginalized in the umbrella communities, such as two-spirit people, there needs to be a specific focus to let people “opt-in” as opposed to be forcefully covered. Further, as recommended by intersectional theorists (...) collective action priorities should be determined by those who experience multiple forms of marginalization to not erase the needs and experiences of Indigenous people, communities of color, people with disabilities, or people living in poverty that are a part of the community (FLANDERS 2017).

Politically – in terms of intersectional alliances – it would be important to look at queer contributions that are not focusing exclusively on gender, sex and sexuality; to give more attention to Trans/Inter theories and experiences; to adopt a non (or less) labeling attitude; and to accept all types of self definitions in a non-judgmental way. At the social level, we should attribute more importance to new insights coming from postcolonial/decolonial studies and feminist intersectional theories and research, engaging with neglected components such as the Poly-amorist and Asexual communities. I want to mention other liminal perspectives I have not examined in the paper – such as queer Eco-feminism, Vegan *antispéciste* queer (GAARD 1997; JIMÉNEZ RODRÍGUEZ 2016) – which are looking at the multiple ways of re-sensualizing our relationship with nature; walking the path of radicality; and calling for consideration and acceptance in the queer arena.

In an era of rampant neoliberalism, committing to intersectional alliances and becoming a liberating *emerging majority* gives – to each and all – more political responsibilities in avoiding sectarianism and building coalitions across communities and agendas. Decolonization is a complex process, a collective enterprise that implies the deconstruction of despotic signifiers: *compulsory monosexuality* is one of them. The decolonization of our theoretical tools is a key passage for dismantling gender binarism, racism and hetero-sexism; dichotomous and hierarchical thinking; and white supremacy in the production of theories, methodologies and activism.

Other key passages consist in the overcoming of a widespread tendency to un/consciously indulge in destructive conflicts while dealing with the disarticulation of century old interconnected systems of oppression and exclusion. Such a divisive attitude, produced by internalized forms of oppression, can be challenged by starting with the recognition of embodying one

or more types of privilege – as Alexandra Oprea urges us to do in the above quote – in terms of class; race/ethnicity/culture/color; gender/sex and sexuality; status; abilities; religion; age and geopolitical locations. This strategy has to do with the collective practice of re-reading priorities and re-signifying relations – as black feminists, feminists of color and indigenous feminists have suggested.¹⁹ In such a frame, self-reflection, the politics of affect, and the social processing of difficulties can be regarded as useful steps for enhancing queer political agency.

A disclaimer. Stating that bisexuality is queer does not mean all queer are (or should be) bisexual; I do not intend to hide the fact that many bisexuals are not at ease in the queer milieu – given the persistence of biphobia and exclusionary practices. The epistemological and political proposal here is to take bisexuality seriously in a wider queer discourse, which should open up to intersectional perspectives, become ‘less white’ and commit to decolonize one’s own choice of concepts and ideas. An increased awareness about queer theory’s unrecognized boundaries can be achieved by actively practicing the acceptance of all diversities. The marginalization of bisexuality and bisexuals (as well as others) should not be further ignored in any space that claims to be queer.

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¹⁹ On indigenous feminism see: MARACLE 1996; HERNANDEZ CASTILLO 2002; GREEN 2007; SUZACK 2010; CORRADI 2018.

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