

# Pluriversal intersectionality, critique and utopia

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## Abstract

Since intersectionality theory constitutes a critical assessment of the way the social world operates and strives for social justice, it entails an image of how the world is and how things could become. In this article a version of intersectionality with particularly strong counter-cultural tendencies is considered. Drawing on Ruth Levitas's approach to utopia as 'method', it makes explicit pluriversal intersectionality's utopian content. It is shown that the defining features of this intersectionality theory share an elective affinity with the principle of self-management lying at the core of the libertarian strand of socialist thought. But the utopia whose contours are drawn here is not expected to act as a blueprint. Instead, the article aspires to serve as an invitation to dialogue about the kind of future that could lie beyond intersectional oppression and, consequently, help consolidate pluriversal intersectionality's transformative potential.

## Keywords

dialogue, pluriversal intersectionality, relationality, self-management, social change, utopia

## Introduction

Intersectionality has become an almost inescapable approach in research devoted to exploring the mechanisms of power and oppression. But interest in intersectionality theory has unfolded alongside an increasing aversion towards utopian thinking. Some intersectionality scholars (Dixon, 2014; Morris, 2002) even regard the latter as a dangerous endeavour. For many of utopianism's critics, there is something dangerously irrational about utopias: a danger to truth, knowledge and society at large (Kumar, 1993). In fact, in its 'quest for respectability through recognition as a science' (Levitas, 2010, p. 538), the discipline of sociology itself came to develop an aversion towards evaluation (Levitas, 2013; Sayer, 2011; Scott & Marshall, 2005) and prescription (Dawson, 2016; Levitas, 2010, 2013). Recently, though, British sociologist Ruth Levitas (2007, 2010, 2013)

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sought to rehabilitate utopian thinking within the discipline of sociology. The latter, she claims, must be reconfigured in such a way as to assert its inherently holistic inclinations and 'endorse' utopia as a 'legitimate and useful mode of thought and knowledge-generation' (Levitas, 2013, p. 219). Levitas, as well as Patrick Hayden and Chamsy el-Ojeili (2009), Erik Olin Wright (2010), Matt Dawson (2016), Lisa Garforth (2017) and Luke Martell (2018), among others, all have, in their own way, contributed to restoring the legitimacy of utopian thinking within the sociological profession.

This article contributes to the aforementioned discussion on utopianism by making explicit the silent utopian content of what I chose to call pluriversal intersectionality. I intend to show that doing so will help consolidate the transformative potential of intersectionality's social critique. In a first instance, the approach to utopian thinking adopted here, drawn from Levitas's (2013) own work, is reviewed. It will be shown that utopian thinking need not entail blueprint thinking. Secondly, the features of intersectionality theory are identified. This section draws largely on Patricia Hill Collins's (2019) most recent work, in which she depicts intersectionality as a critical theory. Finally, I make explicit intersectionality's preferred future. A (provisional) utopia for intersectionality theory is drawn, based on the principle of self-management associated with the libertarian socialist school of thought.

## In defence of utopia (as method)

Drawing on Levitas's (2013, p. xii) own work, utopia shall here be understood as 'the expression of the desire for a better way of being or of living'. What characterises a sociological utopia, such as the one formulated in this piece, is the fact that the desire in question is expressed holistically. To adopt such an approach to utopia entails recognising that evaluative attitudes and questions regarding 'what ought to be' are not only ubiquitous in our everyday life (Bloch, 1996; Hayden & el-Ojeili, 2009; Levitas, 2013; Sayer, 2011), but also infiltrate many forms of sociological thinking (Levitas, 2013; Wells, 1906). Indeed, as H. G. Wells (1906, pp. 366–367) insisted, '[t]here is no such thing in sociology as dispassionately considering what *is*, without considering what is *intended to be*'.

A utopian sociology is best executed whenever it affirms its holism, that is, whenever it establishes connections between different domains making up social life, be they economic, cultural, political or environmental (Levitas, 2013). To affirm sociology's holistic utopianism therefore entails investing the powers of one's imagination in the 'construction of integrated accounts of possible (or impossible) social systems' (Levitas, 2013, p. xiv). In fact, as Levitas (2013) compellingly demonstrated, sociology has, despite its ostensible aversion towards evaluation and prescription, never entirely successfully suppressed this kind of holistic utopianism. Even Emile Durkheim, who was instrumental in professionalising sociology as a science, drew the contours of 'a good society' (Levitas, 2013) in attempting to understand what constitutes normal or abnormal forms of social cohesion. Indeed, even the French (positivist) sociologist could not resist the charm of normativity, as evidenced by his discussion of the division of labour's 'abnormal forms' (Levitas, 2013) or his thoughts on professional ethics (Dawson, 2016). 'Sociological models', then, are 'necessarily imaginary' and holistic (Levitas, 2013, p. 84). But since

critical forms of sociological thinking seek to problematise ‘what is’, they entail an overt evaluative relation to the world and are, in turn, marked by a normative outlook (Levitas, 2013).

The fact that utopian thinking is ubiquitous and silently underpins attempts to explain or understand how society operates is, in part, what encouraged Levitas (2013) to assert sociology’s utopian content. But she chose to do so in a rather distinctive way, that is, by treating utopia as a ‘method’. Under this reading, utopia is not so much an endpoint as a means for transforming the social, or ‘method’. The task of making ‘explicit’ a silent utopia is, in this sense, less about formulating a ‘blueprint’ for an alternative future than an engagement with ‘the actual institutional structure of the present and the potential institutional structure of the future’ (Levitas, 2013, p. 126) that cultivates the desire for, and guides, social change. Furthermore, developing a utopian sociology is about making ‘explicit a method that is already in use whenever and wherever people individually or collectively consider what the future might bring and how humans might choose to shape it’ (Levitas, 2013, p. 219). Levitas’s approach, which informs the task set out in this article, is therefore inscribed in what Hayden and el-Ojeili (2009, p. 242) called the ‘new utopianism’, that is, an approach to utopia that ‘eschews the paradigm of prescribing any final, perfect, and fully imagined future society to be imposed upon reality from the “outside”’. Since it is a method, it has a processual character: it is ‘necessarily provisional, reflexive and dialogic’ (Levitas, 2013, p. 149). In short, to treat utopia as a method entails attributing a function to it – one whereby the ‘imaginary reconstruction of society’ is thought to disrupt the established order. Implied in Levitas’s approach is William Morris’s (1995) own idea that ‘[d]esire must be taught to desire, to desire better, to desire more, and above all to desire otherwise’ (Abensour, 1999, pp. 145–146). Utopia has a major role to play in indicating that things could be otherwise and, consequently, acts as a disruptive force in everyday life, alerting us to the possibility for change. Finally, treating utopia as a method also entails accepting that utopias must remain, at any moment, open to criticism; that ‘[a]ll utopias are flawed’ (Levitas, 2013, p. 216). For, as de Sousa Santos pertinently noted, ‘what is analysed today may no longer exist tomorrow’ (2014, p. 33). It is thus essential to insist on the ‘provisionality, reflexivity and contingency of what we are able to imagine’ (Levitas, 2013, p. 19). Only in this way can utopias invite us all to seek greater freedom and justice and open a dialogue on the kind of future we want to bring to life.

Finally, to be truly emancipatory utopia must not only be critical of itself and provisional, it must also be dialogical. For, dialogue prevents holistic thinking from developing into a totalising vision, ‘wilfully blind to its own flaws yet supremely confident in its complete truth’ (Hayden & el-Ojeili, 2009, p. 239). Dialogue, therefore, creates conditions favourable for the kind of reflexivity that can dissolve what has been crystallised or, put differently, that can ‘reactivate beyond historical sedimentation a new being-in-the-world grounded in the play of multiple energetic and violent passions’ (Abensour, 1999, p. 134). Dialogue is the engine of emancipation; utopia is its fuel. To perform its emancipatory function, then, utopianism must be critical of itself. It must, through dialogue, recognise that it has to fail and insist on its provisionality. Only this way can utopianism, including the form whose contours are drawn in this article, be expected to equip critique with the requisite tools for resuming the movement towards emancipation.

But this will of course depend on whether its proponents can accept this utopia's own failures. It will depend on their participation in a dialogue in which it is 'possible to discuss, in a rigorous fashion, alternative ways of organizing society in terms of their feasibility and desirability' (Sayer, 2011, p. 252). What follows is an attempt to start a dialogue on the preferred future of intersectionality theory.

## **Defining features of pluriversal intersectionality**

Although the term 'intersectionality' was coined by legal theorist Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), its logic had already been deployed in a range of texts and activist practices, before Crenshaw first made use of it. While a hallmark of Black feminist thought (King, 1988), it also framed the work of socialist feminists, whose intersectional approach made an appearance in their analyses of the relationship between capitalist and patriarchal oppression (Bohrer, 2018; Holstrom, 2002; Lutz et al., 2011). Intersectionality studies now count a rich range of theoretical, methodological, empirical and political projects, involving diverse applications and uses of the 'intersectional approach' (Berger & Guidroz, 2009). In this article, I treat intersectionality not only as an 'analytical tool' with valuable 'heuristic' qualities (Chun et al., 2013; Collins & Bilge, 2016; Crenshaw, 2011) but also as a 'critical theory with a social justice imperative' (Smooth, 2013, p. 13; see also Collins, 2019). As such it is understood as a knowledge project that, in the process of probing structures of power and domination, sets out to create possibilities for social change (Collins, 2019). More specifically, I regard intersectionality as a counter-cultural or counter-hegemonic project (Collins & Bilge, 2016), to the extent that it can connect different struggles and provide a basis for thinking differently about the way we relate to ourselves and the world around us. The most radical approach to intersectionality, with the strongest potential to offer such a worldview, is what Collins (2019) called the 'co-formation' approach. For, under its guise, one does not merely seek to establish connections between different social categories, but effectively 'dissolves the categories themselves' (Collins, 2019, p. 241) in a manner echoing the image of 'borderlands' proposed by Anzaldúa (1987) or Bohrer's insistence on treating capitalism as a 'complex and multifaceted system of domination' that is best analysed by grasping the 'unity of oppressions' (2018, p. 64). The 'co-formation' approach, in fact, rests on distinctive ontological presuppositions echoing those found in the work of proponents of 'pluriversality' in autonomous decolonial thought (see, for example, Escobar, 2018; Grosfoguel, 2007) and according to which 'nothing exists by itself [;] everything interexists' (Escobar, 2018, p. 84).<sup>1</sup> Intersectionality, thus understood, is an analytical tool and critical theory with the potential to envision social relations affirming universality by celebrating particularity or, put differently, recognising that what we have in common is difference. In order to emphasise these features and capture the fact this version of intersectionality is particularly well-suited for the task of envisioning a social reality beyond that of the self-interested and isolated monads of capitalist relations, I chose to call it pluriversal intersectionality. Below I show what expressions 'of the desire for a better way of being or of living', or 'preferred future', this approach to intersectionality embodies. Before doing so, though, let me review some of pluriversal intersectionality's key features.

Firstly, to adopt a pluriversal approach to power in society entails exposing ‘the diffuse and differential nature of interlocking forms of oppression’ (Chun et al., 2013, p. 917). As such, it ‘invites a complex view of power as multipronged and shifting, operating across different sites and scales simultaneously’ (May, 2015, p. 23), at the core of which lies the principle of relationality. The latter is fundamental to pluriversal intersectionality. It operates on both a vertical and a horizontal axis. Vertical relationality, as I choose to call it, is orientated towards the study of the relationship between individuals’ experiences and structures or, put differently, between the personal and the structural level of action. Horizontal relationality, on the other hand, addresses the relationship between different sets of experiences or different structures. But while the two axes are analytically distinguishable, they are intricately interconnected in practice. This is because interlocking systems of power always play out on both micro/personal and macro/structural levels (May, 2015, p. 48). Power itself, then, operates in relational terms (Collins, 2019; May, 2015). This means that social divisions like race, gender and sexuality cannot be adequately understood separately and that ‘systems of power are interconnected and mutually constructive in shaping violence and similar phenomena’ (Collins, 2019, p. 251). Structures of power and domination are, in this sense, co-constitutive. Thus, relationality as understood by the pluriversal approach bears significant implications for the way domination and emancipation are understood and analysed. It ‘highlights how lived identities, structural systems, sites of marginalization, forms of power, and modes of resistance “intersect” in dynamic, shifting ways’ (May, 2015, p. 22).

The strength of this relational understanding of power lies in its capacity to move beyond the ‘common denominator’ (Alarcón, 1990) approach to conceptualising power and oppression and, in so doing, overcome the pitfalls and dangers of identity politics and essentialisation. Indeed, pluriversal intersectionality does not only open up the scope for understanding how structures of power and domination intersect and constitute one another, but also for thinking identity differently. For, to grasp how different structures of power intersect paves the way for grasping how identities affected by those structures, too, intersect. As briefly indicated above, it even means envisioning a state of affairs whereby identity categories are dissolved. However, such a dissolution need not entail an outright rejection of identity or modes of identification. Calls to abandon identity do actually run the risk of excluding particular oppressed groups whose emancipation heavily relies on modes of identification, such as indigenous communities seeking self-determination in the face of settler colonialism (Smith, 2010). More concretely, what it risks doing is to deny those communities the capacity, through ‘Native traditions . . . to remember their nations as not necessarily structured through hierarchy, oppression, or patriarchy’ (Smith, 2010, p. 50). Instead, what the pluriversal approach has the potential to do is to provide a basis for reimagining identity, by rethinking the way difference and otherness are apprehended. It ‘disrupt[s] dominant discourses that regard these categories as fixed and mutually exclusive’ (Crenshaw, 2011, p. 230) and opens up the scope for treating, like many indigenous communities do in America, otherness as ‘a bond rather than a division’ (Walker, 2020, p. 148). The matter at hand, therefore, does not so much consist in an outright rejection of identity but in conceptualising identity as something brought to life relationally. It entails recognising that asserting difference – on

which identity itself rests – can coexist with, and indeed serves as a basis for, recognising our interrelatedness. For, to suggest that, under the guise of relational identity, commonality is asserted through difference, entails claiming that identity is ‘turned outwards’ (Césaire, 2003); that it is collectively produced. As an approach to identity, then, pluriversal intersectionality treats the self as relational and dialogically arrived at, in a manner echoing the work of Charles Taylor (1989).

But it also entails a distinctive approach to emancipation. In fact, like many indigenous communities struggling against settler colonialism, pluriversal intersectionality treats identity as an emancipatory tool – as a basis for a political project. Under its guise, ‘people derive their identities from their politics rather than their politics from their identities’ (Cho et al., 2013, p. 803). Relational identity is thus not only a collective project, it is also a political one to the extent that it can facilitate connections between diverse political struggles. As such, it envisions a subject taking the form of ‘coalitional identities of resistance’ (Violet, 2002, p. 486) akin to Hardt and Negri’s (2004) ‘multitude’. But rather than asserting commonality *in spite* of differences, it treats difference as the *basis* for building commonality. Put simply, then, emancipation is not here achieved by identifying with other oppressed groups – this would entail subsuming particularity under universality – but because I recognise that my emancipation from structures of oppression is co-constituted by, and co-constitutive of, other groups’ emancipation and that my fate as, say, a white male individual subjected to heterosexism overlaps, but is not reducible to, the fate of a black heterosexual person subjected to patriarchal domination. It opens up the scope for thinking emancipation as something achieved not in spite of other groups, but through them. In this sense it is akin to Axel Honneth’s concept of ‘social freedom’, according to which individuals ‘can only realise their capacity for freedom as members of a free social community’ (2017, pp. 28–29).

However, to speak of identity in such terms need not entail apprehending identity or self-hood as something fixed and stable – quite the contrary. Instead pluriversal intersectionality recognises the potentially divisive and intolerant character of such an understanding of identity and anticipates its constant reworking, as captured by Gloria Anzaldúa’s concept of ‘*mestiza consciousness*’, which she defined as:

... a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity. She learns to be an Indian in Mexican culture, to be Mexican from an Anglo point of view. She learns to juggle cultures. She has a plural personality, she operates in a pluralistic mode – nothing is thrust out, the good the bad and the ugly, nothing rejected, nothing abandoned. Not only does she sustain contradictions, she turns the ambivalence into something else. (1987, p. 79)

Dualisms, divisions and binaries that are the result of the stabilising of identity are thus resisted by this pluriversal approach to intersectionality. It is consequently capable of achieving what Jasbir Puar (2007) thought only ‘assemblages’ could achieve, that is, to resist ‘linearity, coherency, and permanency’ (2007, p. 212).

For the above reasons dialogue, which according to Collins (2019, p. 147) is ‘commensurate with intersectionality’s core theme of relationality’, is expected to play an essential part in putting the pluriversal logic of action to work. To quote Audre Lorde, ‘what is most important to me must be spoken, made verbal and shared’ (1984, p. 40).

Dialogue is ‘an act of self-revelation’ (Lorde, 1984, p. 42), both individual and collective; a ‘liberatory expression’ (hooks, 2015a, p. 53). For, it opens up ‘the possibility of articulating the variety of ways we experience and negotiate our identities’ (Alsultany, 2002, p. 110). Thus, precisely because individuals are understood as intricately interrelated is dialogue treated by pluriversal intersectionality as an essential means for developing the capacity to assert one’s self-hood, and a key facilitator of collective emancipatory action. In fact, speaking and listening are both essential for learning about oneself, others and the world around us. They are fundamental for making hidden forms of domination visible, for understanding how different structures shape our experiences and those of others and for forging solidarities. Through dialogue we come to recognise ‘the power of self-definition and the necessity of a free mind’ (Collins, 2000, p. 285), while developing new subjectivities capable of ‘even . . . “shattering” established notions of agency’ (May, 2015, p. 47) and structures of power. For our partners in communication come to be treated as ‘essential to my achieving self-definition’ (Taylor, 1989, p. 36). Dialogue provides the communicative tools with which individuals’ interrelatedness is asserted and negotiated and, consequently, is key to the discovery of overlapping fates, and a fundamental step towards the formation of ‘coalitional identities of resistance’.

This is why dialogue has been central to a range of initiatives led by Black women, who came to devise practices ‘root[ed] in our concrete reality while simultaneously imagining possibilities beyond that reality’ (hooks, 2015b, p. 110). Often conscious that criticism is incomplete without offering alternatives (hooks, 2015b, p. 35), these women have, for example, assumed the role of othermothers. As ‘women who assist bloodmothers by sharing mothering responsibilities’ (Collins, 2000, p. 178), othermothers are effectively ‘nonparents’ who have been given “rights” in child rearing’ (Collins, 2000, p. 182). As such, they play a crucial role in both fostering a spirit of mutuality, community, love and peace in Black neighbourhoods and communities, and in challenging dominant norms of action (Collins, 2000). They have brought to life (utopian) visions of love such as those found in the work of hooks (2001) and facilitated the development of new schemes of perception that are essential for developing new ways of knowing and opposing dominant ways of thinking and behaving (Collins, 2000). As othermothers, or as activists involved in what Zenzele Isoke (2013) called the ‘politics of homemaking’, Black women have therefore sought to create spaces for the kind of dialogue that can foster a ‘radical black subjectivity’ and radically new practices (Isoke, 2013, p. 95). Intersectionality, and particularly its pluriversal form, then, offers both in academic and activist practice something distinctively counter-cultural when confronted with capitalism in the form of an ‘ethics of radical interrelatedness’ (Keating, 2009, p. 84). Little has nevertheless been said about the kind of institutions such ethics could materialise into. This is the task I shall now turn to.

## **Pluriversal intersectionality’s utopia**

If the task of critical theory like pluriversal intersectionality is to facilitate emancipation, then it is highly desirable to affirm its utopian content. For, as Sayer (2011, p. 252) very pertinently put it, if ‘a critique gives no indication of how a set of problems might be

removed then its force is undoubtedly weakened'. Despite this and the presence of some utopian insights such as hooks's (2001) 'new visions [of] love', intersectionality has, it seems, developed an aversion towards utopian thinking. Chris Dixon (2014), for example, is critical of attempts to prescribe. To formulate a utopian vision, under Dixon's reading, risks falling into a kind of top-down prescription 'based on a predetermined "right" analysis' (Dixon, 2014, p. 61), or blueprint, that would both stifle the spontaneity of struggles and movements and favour the figure of an all-knowing academic over the transformative energies of individuals directly affected by oppression and/or engaged in political action. This aversion towards utopia is therefore explained by the fact that it risks advancing the agenda of an individual or group at the expense of others, denies the 'epistemic agency' (Collins, 2019) of oppressed groups and, consequently, closes off all possibilities for dialogue.

However, while Dixon's concerns are, at bottom, entirely legitimate, they are founded on a rather narrow conception of utopia, which pits 'an approach of collectively asking questions, of exploring and experimenting together' (2014, p. 61) against the (utopian) scholar's imagination of what the world could be like. The latter is depicted as a danger, that is, as a potential source of authoritarianism (Dixon, 2014, p. 61). Such reservations are echoed in Marla Morris's contribution to the *This Bridge We Call Home* (2002, p. 144), who warns of the exclusionary tendencies of 'blueprints' and 'final solutions'. Both Morris and Dixon, therefore, take issue with a form of utopian thinking postulating an image or vision which reality must conform to. They equate utopian thinking with blueprint thinking. They understand utopia as a goal rather than a method. However, this particular understanding of utopia contrasts sharply with Levitas's own and the one adopted here.

Before I begin showing what utopian insights pluriversal intersectionality could inform, a further clarification of the task at hand here is in order. Many scholars who have made contributions to intersectionality scholarship have provided their own vision of an alternative, at times showing the kind of contributions intersectionality can make to policy (see, for example, Dill & Zambrana, 2009; Wilson, 2013), and at times even offering full-blown utopian insights such as those found in texts – often literary – making up the Afro-futurist movement (see, for example, Butler, 2000; Delany, 1976; Nelson, 2016). However, the task set out in this article is not to review those contributions or make visible the utopian content of other perspectives like Afro-futurism, but to make explicit a silent utopia embodied in intersectionality theory and, particularly, its most radical, pluriversal form. Thus, rather than seeking to engage with explicit statements by intersectionality scholars about how things could be or applying Levitas's method of making explicit silent utopias within in relation to other knowledge projects, I seek to devote my attention to the utopian content embodied in a particular approach to intersectionality. Furthermore, in one of her latest works, Collins noted that the co-formation approach, which I chose to rename pluriversal intersectionality here, 'more often lies in the imagination of an individual thinker or theorist than is hammered out in actual social relations' (2019, p. 241). It is an approach that lends itself particularly well to the formulation of metaphors like Anzaldúa's 'borderlands'. But metaphors do not simply 'criticize what is' – they are also useful for 'imagin[ing] what is possible' (Collins, 2019, p. 249). Thus, while it is a particularly useful analytical tool for developing a critical theory



capable of grasping the complex operations of power, the relational prism it analyses them with is inherently utopian. There is, I wish to argue, a distinctively counter-cultural vision embodied in pluriversal intersectionality that, in my view, could offer a fruitful basis upon which to rethink the way we relate to the self, others and more-than-human others. I will now discuss some key utopian insights such ontological presuppositions entail.

To envision pluriversal intersectionality's utopia I draw from what is known as the libertarian strand of socialist thought. In it one finds a central organising principle of economic and political life known in French as *autogestion*, often translated in English as self-management. Defined by Henri Lefèbvre as 'the theoretical essence of liberty' (1975, p. 18), and Mihailo Markovic (1975, p. 345) as a 'necessary condition of a new, genuinely socialist society', this principle is thought to be crucial for giving life to equality while securing conditions necessary for freedom. As such, it is instrumental for the 'synthesis of the ideas of equality and liberty' (Guérin, 2017, p. 82). Self-management informs the formation of democratically organised associations and 'functional democracy' (Cole, 1920). Under its guise, economic and political institutions mediate social relations in such a way as to facilitate the recognition that individuals inter-exist. Self-management is, as I aim to show, central to the operationalisation of 'social freedom'. Consistent with the holistic character of the concept of utopia adopted here, I shall provide utopian insights beyond economic life and show how self-management is expected to mediate social relations in political life, as a well as relations between individuals sharing extra-economic interests associated with their everyday experiences.

Economically speaking, self-management entails a socialisation of production from below, that is, one in which collectively organised workers and consumers democratically manage the economy.<sup>2</sup> Associationalism and cooperativism are in fact central to this principle and inform economic practices in which a dialogue plays a central role. Through democratic dialogue, each member of the association is in a position to exert control over the activities affecting them, while creating conditions particularly favourable for mutual reciprocity. Here an individual is thought to be 'really free to the extent that his [*sic*] freedom, fully acknowledged and mirrored by the free consent of his fellowmen, finds confirmation and expansion in their liberty' (Bakunin, 1971, p. 76). Like pluriversal intersectionality, proponents of self-management treat the self and freedom as social. Associational life is expected to foster what Cole (1980, p. 46) described as a 'communal spirit', upon which the realisation of one's desires relies. For, '[t]he consciousness of a want requiring co-operative action for its satisfaction is the basis of *association*' (Cole, 1920, p. 34; emphasis in original). The mutualist and cooperativist attitudes an association fosters, therefore, are expected to play a key part in affirming self-hood. It follows that, under the guise of self-management, self-hood is brought to life dialogically. Indeed according to proponents of self-management like Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, the individual 'is born a sociable being' (1993, p. 192). This principle of economic life, therefore, shares with pluriversal intersectionality a conception of the self and freedom that is social and dialogically realised. Like it, it 'grapples with the interconnectivity of our *mutual* living' (Violet, 2002, p. 488; emphasis in original). For this reason, it could even be argued that self-management gives the 'ethics of radical interrelatedness' institutional form in economic life.

Self-management can, too, open the scope for an alternative system of allocation of resources that has the potential to entrench even further the relational conception of identity and selfhood entailed by pluriversal intersectionality. Since '[w]orkers create the social product' and '[c]onsumers enjoy the social product' (Albert, 2003, p. 91), both must be in a position to engage in a dialogue. For this reason, workers and consumers should not only be empowered to engage in a democratic dialogue within their respective associations. They should also be equipped with the means to replace market relations with a system of 'negotiated coordination' (Devine, 1988). Under such a system, associations of producers deliberate with associations of consumers on what counts as socially useful production. In other words, both producers and consumers have control over the quantity and quality of resources to be allocated and, in the process of doing so, come to assert their inter-existence. For, this conscious and dialogical system of coordination could be said to generate 'information through a transformatory process in which concern for others as well as for oneself is encouraged and reinforced' (Devine, 1988, pp. 191–192).

Also, like pluriversal intersectionality, self-management is inclined to 'run against conventional ideas of identity'. The kind of 'associationalist society' it gives rise to is one of 'varied and overlapping planes of social identity and cleavage' (Hirst, 1994, p. 67). It is almost as if it had been formulated on the basis of Gloria Anzaldúa's own demand for thinking of her 'as Shiva, a many-armed and legged body with one foot on brown soil, one on white, one in straight society, one in the gay world, the man's world, the women's, one limb in the literary world, another in the working class etc . . .' (1983, p. 228). In addition to giving ontological relationality institutional form, self-management opens the scope for institutions with the potential to frame the formation of identities that are 'attuned to interwoven forces' (Puar, 2007, p. 212). In an associationalist society, membership to associations is open and voluntary. Individuals can choose to join a diverse range of associations, based on the desires they wish to realise. Self-management, therefore, holds the potential to give workers and consumers alike full expression to their varied identities.

Furthermore, it is expected to do so without sacrificing difference for an abstract universality and giving associations' members the means to constantly renegotiate their identity. Indeed, while the individual is 'the source and sustaining spirit of every association' (Cole, 1920, p. 191), personal freedom is not pitted against the interest of other members. This is because in virtue of being formed in order to satisfy a want that requires cooperative action, democratically organised associations are extensions of their individual members' interest. Through self-management, individuals negotiate their desires with other members of the group and are in turn able to align collective conceptions of the good life – the common good – with individual ones. For example, each member has an equal vote (individual) to choose the decisions (collective) they will eventually have to conform to. They are in a position to recognise that while the 'self is radically other from the other', this other is also 'posited within the self' (Morris, 2002, p. 140), whether this other is another member, the interest of the association as a whole or the rules members have to conform to. Associational life, therefore, 'organizes convergences without denying differences' (Guérin, 2017, p. 142), while securing 'obedience to the law which we prescribe to ourselves' (Rousseau, 1993, p. 196). But because self-managed

associations operate on the basis of democratic negotiations, they open the scope for ‘provisional analyses that can be perpetually recast’ (Collins, 2019, p. 234) through ‘open communication, free expression of critical opinions, and dialogue’ (Markovic, 1975, p. 331). Therefore, in addition to providing a basis on which commonality is achieved through difference, self-management facilitates an ‘on-going reconstruction of the way you view your world’ (Anzaldúa, 2002, p. 560) and a space for the ‘creative re-working, rather than stabilising of identity’ (Taylor et al., 2010, p. 5), which constitutes an essential component of the pluriversal intersectionality’s approach to identity and emancipation.

Dialogue between democratically organised associations of producers and consumers is therefore essential for ensuring that the formulation and realisation of the general social interest proceeds in free, equitable and cooperative terms. But, given the complex mechanisms of power pluriversal intersectionality helps expose, any utopia drawn from it must be in a position to grapple with such a complexity. For example, it must recognise that individuals are ‘located within structures that serve as silent negotiators in . . . action’ (Collins, 2017, p. 35). For Collins (2017), those structures must be made explicit in political action, through participatory democracy. The task here consists in reorganising political life by ‘building inclusive democratic communities’ composed of ‘coalitions among groups who have a shared commitment to a social ideal’ (Collins, 2017, p. 37). Dialogue would be expected to play a key role in forging those coalitions by making intersecting structures of power, along with the experiences they engender, explicit in political action. It would facilitate the formation of coalitions around particular interests shared across differences. This vision of political life is compatible with the ‘strongly anti-statist’ (Hirst, 1989, p. 2) principles of functional representation found in pluralist political theories. For the coalitions in question entail the representation of individuals organised collectively for a particular purpose or function, such as the purpose or function of a producer, consumer or even ‘civic’ association (Cole, 1920).

But I wish to argue that the task of making explicit intersecting structures of power must not be confined to political life. It is indeed essential that the means of production – economic life – ‘be controlled by those most directly affected by their use at that level’ (Devine, 1988, p. 132). Such users are not always adequately represented by the categories of production and consumption. Women, for example, are affected by decisions made in material production not merely as producers and consumers but also as mothers. Motherhood is not a category of action and interest reducible to either production or consumption. Thus, while organising producer and consumer groups democratically increases the chance of addressing issues of power and domination as manifested in, for example, the discriminatory practices of a particular workplace, those associations may not constitute a sufficient guarantee for the inclusion of such matters in the negotiation of the general social interest. Put differently, because of the predominantly economic interests producer and consumer associations tend to represent, they might not provide sufficient scope for addressing matters of social inequality like racism and patriarchy, which rest on both economic and extra-economic arrangements and are not confined to the internal operations of a particular association. In addition to producer and consumer interests, the interests of non-economic groupings who are concerned by ‘how particular means of production are used [must therefore] be involved in the decision’ (Devine,

1988, p. 132). Like associations of producers and consumers, those groups, along with the analyses and interests they represent, 'can be perpetually recast'. As the material circumstances affecting the group change, so does its interest. To become genuinely intersectional, then, dialogical coordination must involve negotiations between voluntary and self-managed associations of producers, consumers and other 'interest groups' (Devine, 1988).

## Conclusion

This article partly sought to show that utopian thinking need not entail blueprint thinking and the now well-known dangers this could lead to. To construe utopia as a method entails attributing a function or role to it in emancipation, rather than postulating an image of a perfect future. Utopias ought to be criticisable, fallible and open to change. They ought to be treated as a force for change, rather than its goal. Utopias inject movement wherever immutability reigns. They 'relieve the weight of the real, its massiveness, its density, in order to render it suddenly problematic' (Abensour, 2008, p. 418). The utopia drawn here is therefore expected to assist pluriversal intersectionality in its attempt to achieve social change. This is because utopias are disruptive of the *status quo*. They are essential for thinking the future in holistic terms and resuming the movement towards emancipation, interrupted by the sedimentation of ideas in the face of which utopia-free critique had become toothless.

For example, a key element the utopian insights formulated in this piece could offer is a vision of an alternative economic and political system that does not merely hold the potential to overcome class oppression but could, too, provide a basis upon which to envision a role for self-management in empowering a truly diverse range of groups. Self-management could, too, indicate what kind of path the collectivisation of work and, more generally, social life, envisioned by eco-feminists like Silvia Federici (2019) or Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva (2014) could take. It could also stimulate discussions on the kind of structural change required to turn the values marking counter-cultural activities like those associated with othermothers and the politics of homemaking into generalised practices. It invites dialogue on the role production, consumption and interest groups, as well as alternatives modes of political representation like 'functional democracy', could play in emancipation. Crucially, it proposes to assess any possible future based on the principle of relationality, that is, by ensuring that the proposed institutional forms do not lead to the emancipation of one group at the expense of another. As such, it could serve to affirm the possibility and cultivate the desire for envisioning alternative economic and political institutions that can speak to the demands of highly diverse struggles. But, precisely because of this, it could, too, cultivate the desire for forging coalitions and initiating a dialogue on a collective political project with the potential to affirm our inter-existence. What the utopia whose contours were drawn here certainly does not intend to do though is substitute pluriversal intersectional critique. Instead, it complements it with a provisional image of what things could become and, as such, weaponises critique with a much-needed provisional idealisation on the basis of which to assess existing reality.

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## Notes

1. I am here also implying that there are strong affinities by the decolonial critical theory of the likes of Arturo Escobar and the co-formation approach to intersectionality. In fact, Escobar himself draws from diverse knowledge projects, including some intersectionality scholarship. See for example Escobar's *Pluriversal Politics* (2020).
2. Recently, scholars like Ritzer and Jurgenson (2010) have noted the emergence of what they call the 'prosumer'. This phenomenon driven by the digital economy could, they claim, pave the way for a new capitalist form. While it pertinently captures some notable developments in the way individuals relate to 'user-generated content', it does overstate the extent to which the separation of production and consumption has been overcome. For, even a seller on eBay or a Facebook member has to rely on the expertise of programmers to use those platforms. They are still consumers of platforms created for them by others.

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