

# ANN PHOENIX

2015-15  
2017-15  
2019-15

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“ For me it’s not possible to think about Black feminism without thinking about intersectionality. Black feminism was an inclusionary project. It was quietly saying, look, we, in our multiplicities are here as well. But it was also saying - this is a mode of thinking, this is a way of understanding the social world.

**A**nn Phoenix is one of the most outstanding scholars in the field of intersectionality research - the theory, heuristics and methodology of researching the effects of entangled mechanisms of domination/oppression. The connection between subjectivity and social structures is at the centre of her work, as is the triad of race, gender and class, which she expands to include other categories relevant to inequalities. Ann’s research revolves around four thematic complexes: Motherhood and families, intersectionality and Black feminisms, school and racism, and childhood, poverty and migration. Among other things, it should be emphasised in this context that her work also deals with different ages of life - children, young

people, adults - and not infrequently puts the perspectives and experiences of different generations in relation to each other. She is particularly interested in the connection between self-relationships and the positioning of others, as well as in the possibilities for action in what can be a field of contestation. In addition to numerous international publications and research projects (Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Germany), Ann Phoenix’s person and work are also characterised by the fact that she often publishes in author collectives and that she also expresses herself as a critical public intellectual: most recently in a contribution on the significance of Black Lives Matter and in 2017 in a commentary on Rogers Brubaker’s



In 2013, the Cornelia Goethe Center for Women’s Studies and the Study of Gender (CGC) established the Angela Davis Guest Professorship in International Gender and Diversity Studies. The Guest Professorship serves to promote international and interdisciplinary collaboration in the fields of Gender and Diversity Studies.

The inauguration by its namesake, activist, public intellectual, and scholar Prof. Angela Davis, attracted considerable public attention both nationally and internationally. Following professors Chandra Talpade Mohanty (2015) and Amina Mama (2018), this year’s Angela Davis Guest Professorship will be held by Ann Phoenix.

book informed by intersectionality theory: „Trans. Gender and Race in an Age of Unsettled Identities“.

### Intersectionality as a perspective of analysis

According to Ann Phoenix, intersectionality should always be understood as a multi-level analysis. It addresses not only different categories of difference, but also different levels of society: Each level that is examined - micro, meso or macro - helps to contextualise further levels. At the same time, it can be assumed that structure and process are connected, that social structures can therefore be transformed by social practices.

Ann Phoenix's numerous empirical works are also widely received internationally. The central method for her empiricism is narratives, because in them the past shines out as well as the future, and they are the perfect method for capturing ruptures and contradictions in biographies.

### Important theoretical references

Several authors have influenced Ann Phoenix's work. These include important Black feminists such as Patricia Hill Collins and the namesake of the Visiting Professorship, Angela Davis; as well as Gayatri Spivak, Avtar Brah, Gail Lewis. In addition, Judith Butler, Michel Foucault,

Frantz Fanon and various family and narrative scholars are also significant inspirations for her work.

### Biography

Ann Phoenix was born in the Caribbean islands in 1955 and followed her parents to London at the age of 6. They had migrated before. In relation to her arrival in London, she describes experiences of racism as absolutely formative, especially in everyday school life. The fact that she was able to live the first years of her childhood surrounded by black people nevertheless gave her a strong will and self-confidence: „I was always told that I was clever!“

After leaving school and studying philosophy, economics and psychology, she completed her PhD in 1991 with a study on mothers under 20. She was then Senior Lecturer in Psychology at the open University and in 1997-1998 she was Visiting Professor at the University for Humanistic Studies in Utrecht, the Netherlands. After several years as Professor of Education and Co-Director of the Thomas Coram Research Unit at the Institute of Education, then part of the University of London, she was appointed to the Institute of Education, part of University College London since 2014.

### Current research fields

#### Childhood, Poverty, Migration

A central question of Ann Phoenix's work is how children cope with challenging family circumstances, such as

poverty or serial migration. Here, intersections are not only evident in relation to class, gender and experiences of migration and racism, but also in intersections of resources, generations, social relations and social context. For the processing of family crises, it is decisive whether the children experience them as shared with the parents, thus a family identity can be developed; or whether they are experienced as separate, as for example in the case of serial migration, which then presents a potential for conflict. An intersectional perspective on the gender socialisation of children is therefore indispensable, because they learn from the very beginning that gender differences intersect with racialised differences and commonalities so that black and white people are not the same. Children thus learn not only about gender distinctions but also about racism at the same time. In addition, they also lived more often than white peers with relatives other than just parents, thus also with different sources of interaction and identification. Gender theories remain overly simplistic if they do not take into account structural factors such as household structures, participation in the labour market, classism and racisms.

**8. July 2021**

The ties that divide us:  
Rethinking psychosocial  
positioning as local, national  
and global?

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2015-15  
2017-15

**15. July 2021**

The indispensability of  
Intersectionality: Living  
through unexpected  
transformational  
conjunctions

## School and Racism, Black Masculinities, Black Femininities

School and school education function as social place-makers, which is another reason why intersectional studies of everyday school life or its experience are central. In Ann's research on masculinities (with studies in London and Helsinki), it becomes clear that boys are as concerned with school interaction cultures and a recognisable student habitus as with learning and their qualifications and that this is a racialised process where, in London, black maintain high status by being seen to be tough and where they are not expected to engage with school work. Black girls, on the other hand, attain better at school than black boys, but are often not treated as if they are capable by (white) teachers. In addition, their femininity is measured against the norms associated with whiteness and devalued. According to Ann Phoenix, education is structured by complex relations of inequality that distribute differently the possibilities and ideas of who we can become. In doing so, it always operates in the tension between recognising and denying subject positions and at the same time as invoking (and/or limiting) future possibilities of becoming a subject.

## Black British Feminism

Ann Phoenix views black feminisms as plural sets of processes that include the experiences of „British African Caribbean people“, but are transnational and sociohistorically located. In the British context, they cannot be separated from the influences of African and Asian feminisms. Ann's research always treats gender as relational and so focuses on the experiences of Black girls and women in Britain, but also Black masculinities. One issue on which she focuses is on questions of the psychic costs of racism, which also take effect through categories such as gender and class. Ann's publications repeatedly return to the question of un/belonging, especially in connection with „non-normative childhoods“: childhoods in families whose members have different national-ethnic-cultural affiliations, in foster and adoptive families as well as in families in which the primary caregivers are not fathers and mothers but aunts, uncles and grand-

parents. Ann Phoenix understands Black feminism to be necessarily intersectional: „We all occupy multiple subject positions and the categories we inhabit decenter each other and yet operate together at the same time“. The need for an intersectional feminist perspective has emerged from the everyday experiences of Black women, she says:

„If we go back to 1980, when I was a PhD student at Manchester and attempted to open a bank account, what happened to me was that the bank manager said that I had to show my passport. And I said – why? I've never shown a passport before to open

a bank account, I am British, why should I? Who shows their passports? I was so angry I didn't stay there. I went to another bank, and they asked whether I was married. And I said I was, and they said I couldn't open it in the name of Phoenix but I had to open it in the name of my husband. And I was already in such a worn down state that I actually did. So for me that indicated one of the reasons why a Black feminist project was absolutely crucial, and why one had to think about racialisation and gender simultaneously, why they weren't separate.“



The Cornelia Goethe Center for Women's and Gender Studies (CGC) is an interdisciplinary and internationally oriented academic center for women's and gender studies at Goethe University Frankfurt am Main, currently involving nearly 60 professors and numerous staff members from ten departments. The center was founded in 1997 and named in 2000 after Cornelia Goethe, the gifted sister of the Frankfurt University's namesake.

Today, it is one of the largest and most established gender research centers in Germany. The center's research focuses on care and migration, transnationalisation and social movements, gender justice and diversity, social inequalities as well as biopolitics, body and gender.

With its international conferences, workshops and subject-specific events, the center provides space for scientific exchange as well as international cooperation and networking. With event formats such as the interdisciplinary Cornelia Goethe Colloquia, a lecture series on changing topics, and the Angela Davis Visiting Professorship, the center reaches a broad public. The center's participation in the Goethe University's Citizens' University and the work of the center's Circle of Sponsors are also crucial to its public impact.

The Center offers an interdisciplinary bachelor's minor in Gender Studies and a master's level certificate program in Gender Studies to students.



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