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Reflections on intersectionality: a journey through the worlds of migration research, policy and advocacy

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ABSTRACT
The term 'intersectionality' is usually attributed to Kimberlé Crenshaw, a legal scholar, who coined the term in 1989. In this paper, we reflect on how the concept has travelled through both space and time. We trace the longer history and more complex geography of intersectional approaches rooted in grassroots women's movements in the Global South, where radical claims were made against the dominance of white, middle-class women's analysis of the situation of women in the world. These, together with the Black women's movement in the US, paved the way for the emergence and coining of the term intersectionality. We then reflect on how the concept travelled in three domains of migration-related knowledge: academic research, international policy and advocacy politics. We find that, while some academic research is true to the original politics of intersectionality, there is also some research that has strayed much further away from the original aims of intersectionality, to the extent that we would question whether it can be called intersectional at all. In international policy, we find that the original radicalism of the term has been watered down in the translation of the term into policy targets and measurements. Finally, in advocacy politics we find the greatest continuity with the original aims of the term.

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Introduction

An extensive body of feminist and anti-racist scholarship has explored intersectionality, delineating its key parameters and 'the journey' of the concept, highlighting how it has assumed different meanings and points of emphasis over space and time (Blidon, 2018; Davis 2020; Lutz, Vivar and Supik, 2011;

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Hopkins 2019). Commonly attributed to the feminist legal scholar, Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989, 1991), who coined the term in 1989, the origins of intersectionality are usually traced to the US Black feminist movement that identified how race-based inequality was a fundamental structure in shaping gender-based inequalities. Explicitly rejecting the argument that gender, class and race are separate categories of oppression, Crenshaw proposed that 'the violence that many women experience is often shaped by other dimensions of their identities, such as race and class' (1991, 1242).

With time, intersectionality, both as a concept and as an approach, has travelled, with its transatlantic journey from the US to Europe attracting particular attention (see Davis [2020]; Lutz, Vivar and Supik [2011]), albeit mainly in English-speaking circles (see Blidon [2018] on the reception of this term in France). In so doing, scholars contend that the primary focus on race, class and gender – what Patricia Hill Collins (1990) referred to as a 'matrix of domination' – was replaced by an emphasis on ethnicity, nationality and religion. Davis (2020) attributes this change to a discomfort in addressing issues related to race and racism in Europe and a reflection of historical differences between US and European race histories. For others, this 'domestication' which reflects local, albeit western, priorities and agendas, has meant that this 'fast travelling concept' has been reduced to a 'formula to be mentioned, largely stripped of the baggage of concretion, of context and history' (Knapp 2005, 225). The result, many have argued, has been an erosion of its transformative and radical roots and potentialities (Bilge 2013; Hopkins 2018; Tomlinson 2018). As Anthias (2012) cogently argues, intersectionality is not about a static interplay between different additive aspects of an individual's identity (gender, race, class and so on), but rather dynamically located, on the one hand, within structures (economic, political, social and institutional frameworks) and on the other hand processes (such as broader social relations including representation). Its ambition is the structural transformation of economies, societies and social norms. However, scholarly consensus on the impact of theoretical distance on conceptual insurgency have shifted over time. Edward Said's (1983) work is instructive in this context in that while he proposed that travelling theories lose 'their originality and insurgency' as they move, he later refined this argument, acknowledging that movement can in fact 'radicalise and reinvigorate' ideas (see also Davis [2020] and Carbado [2013]).

Although there is still a long way to go before geography as a mainstream discipline fully adopts intersectional thinking (Eaves and Falconer Al-Hindi 2020; Hopkins 2019), intersectionality as a concept and approach is becoming more widely used in sub-disciplines such as feminist geography and gender scholarship (Mollett and Faria 2018, Vaiou 2018), but also development and migration studies (Bastia 2014; McIlwaine and Datta 2003; Stasiulis et al. 2020). Intersectional approaches have also transitioned to shape the

discourses of global policy communities such as the United Nations and development cooperation agencies, as well as the advocacy of migrants' rights organisations. At the same time, they have been the basis of the praxis of many transnational feminist organisations since at least the 1980s (see, for example, Sen and Grown [1988] work with the Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era, DAWN). It is these, perhaps less visible, journeys that this paper is attentive to as we seek to further explore the uses, and abuses, of intersectionality speaking specifically within the field of migration. We advance three key arguments.

First, we argue for the need to disrupt dominant genealogies of intersectionality research, which are strongly suggestive of particular temporalities and spatialities of knowledge production and circulation. In particular, we seek to draw attention to perhaps less familiar and visible southern understandings of intersectionality, and in so doing challenge the presumed unidirectionality and linearity of knowledge transfer from the global north to the south, a task that has already begun with the Special Issue published in this very journal in 2018 (see Rodó-de-Zárate and Baylina [2018]). We build on what Mollett and Faria (2013, 2018) term 'postcolonial intersectionality' by bringing in the specific histories and experiences with intersectional claims that were already emerging from the global south during the 1970s. We then illustrate the uses, meanings and potential of intersectional approaches with specific examples of the ways in which intersectionality has been taken up and used in migration research, policy and advocacy. Our intention here is not to suggest alternative chronologies but rather to emphasise the rich and diverse interplay and plurality of ideas and concepts that make up this body of work.

Second, we seek to address a lacuna in scholarship which has predominantly explored intersectionality's journey in relation to academic research, with much less attention afforded to its take up in international policy and, to some extent, in advocacy politics (see Hankivsky and Cornier [2011] for an exception). Here our ambition is to consider these three communities of knowledge to explore how intersectionality has been deployed and to what effect. Perhaps unsurprisingly, we highlight that while some feminist research, and advocacy work in particular, has retained its radical edge, this ethos is much less prevalent in policy work. This can be attributed, in part at least, to the policy ambition to target and categorise the marginalised, which has the contradictory effect of both affording symbolic significance while also engendering control.

How or why is a migration lens significant? For a start, it can be argued that migration, and the migrant, is herself an intersectional entity, and not merely in terms of being a gendered, racialised, classed (and so on) body but also by virtue of the spatial and temporal power geometries within which she is located (Anthias 2012). The notion of a double-movement – as

deployed by Jon May and his colleagues (2008) – is useful in unpacking the co-movement of ideas and people. More specifically, intersectionality is a body of knowledge that has travelled while also shaping the movement of bodies that travel. As Anthias (2012) argues, people are constituted as gendered, classed, racialised subjects prior to migration, and are 'othered' as they travel such that intersectional social locations enable mobility for some but restrict it for others.

This paper is underpinned by our own individual and collective experiences of using intersectionality in migration research, including as 'leads' for the Work Package on gender inequalities in the UKRI MIDEQ project on South-South migration. This project is significant both in relation to its ethos of decolonising knowledge production and circulation and highlighting the significance of southern knowledges, as well as its empirical focus on South-South mobilities, which have been insufficiently interrogated to date. From the inception of this project, we have sought to explore, promote and integrate an intersectional perspective in the work we have been carrying out as part of this work package (Izaguirre and Walsham, 2021). In turn, each of us has also engaged with and used intersectionality in other work outside of this project, whether based in international organisations, carrying out research and advocacy on migration, or teaching migration and related disciplines (Bastia 2011; Bastia 2014; Bastia 2019; Bastia, Piper and Prieto-Carrón 2011; Datta 2004; McIlwaine and Datta 2013, Lee and Piper 2013).

Plural genealogies and knowledges of intersectionality

As we highlighted above, prominent genealogies of intersectionality as a concept and approach begin in the late 1980s, with the work of Crenshaw (1989, 1991) and in US academia and advocacy, before tracking its journey, from the US to Europe, and its disciplinary and methodological cross over from legal to gender and feminist studies (Davis 2020; Lutz, Vivar, and Supik 2011). While Lutz and her colleagues (2011) are attentive to the 'forerunners' of intersectionality, acknowledging the significance of the American civil rights movement, feminist and anti-racist struggles, they also concur that these did not fully reflect on intersectional perspectives.

Within the specific context of gender and development scholarship, the focus on intersectionality emerged from multifaceted critiques of Western Feminism as ethnocentric 'intellectual imperialism' (Steyn 1998) and as a monolithic discourse and practice (Peake and Trotz 2002). Coinciding with a broader theoretical turn in development and gender studies to post-colonialism, post-development and decolonization, Black scholars argued that mainstream feminism was predicated on the norm of white, middle-class women (Collins 2009; hooks 1981). Meanwhile, Global South feminists (some of whom were speaking from within Northern academy) criticised the

representation of 'Third World' women as uniformly poor and uneducated (Mohanty 1988; see also Barrios de Chungara 1978; Davies 2020). In gender and migration studies, this tendency was reflected in the predominant depiction of female migrants from poorer countries as victims and victimised.

While this account of how intersectionality travelled reflects the widely accepted history of the concept, we would argue that its origins go further back in time, and also travel further South in space (see also Mollett and Faria 2018). As Vaiou (2018) has convincingly argued, within feminist geography, feminist intersectional interventions in the academy and in political struggles pre-date the development of intersectionality as a field of study (examples include Kobayashi and Peake 1994; Radcliffe and Westwood 1996; Ruddick 1996). North American scholars have also acknowledged the much older history of intersectional-like thinking that was already practised during the 19th century, particularly by Black women active in the civil rights movement (e.g. Cooper 1886 cited in Eaves and Al-Hindi 2020). However, here we would like to add a different genealogy to explain how interventions from grassroots politics from the Global South have also helped pave the way for the emergence of intersectionality. Before the term was coined by Black feminists in the US, grassroots women's movements in the Global South were demanding greater recognition of their lived experiences and were challenging the dominant narratives of mainstream, mainly middle-class feminist movements. This history of intersectional approaches as practiced and advocated since at least the 1970s in the Global South is seldom acknowledged but was at least as important as critical voices from the Black feminist movement in the US in challenging liberal, second-wave feminist thinking. These interventions from the Global South aimed to decolonise feminist theory and disrupt the dominant direction of travel in knowledge from the North to the South, by foregrounding the lived experiences of marginalised groups of women from the Global South.

Challenges to dominant feminist ideas and praxis came from women's experiences in grassroots organisations, such as those who mobilised resistance towards the military dictatorships imposed in many Latin American countries during the 1960s and 1970s. In the Latin American region, working class and indigenous grassroots women's organisations contested elite framings of gender-based inequalities, rejected the term 'feminist', and advocated class- and ethnic-based 'liberation' as a necessary requirement before gender equality was considered a possibility. Domitila Barrios de Chungara, a Bolivian leader of working class women, challenged elitist framings of feminist politics not just in her home country, where she was active in leading working class organisations, but also in international organisations. Her intervention at the first UN World Conference on Women, which took place in Mexico in 1975, was a key event in raising awareness of what we would today call intersectional tensions within the global feminist movement. In her own account,

Domitila describes herself as a miner's wife (Barrios de Chungara 1987). At that particular meeting, when challenged by a fellow Latin American woman who called for her to 'forget about the suffering of her people', 'forget about the massacres' and find common ground with other women, Domitila replied:

> Very well, let's speak about us two. But, if you let me [speak], I am going to begin. Madam, I have known you now for a week. Every morning, you arrive with a different dress; but I do not. Every day, you arrive with makeup and dressed hair like somebody who has time to pass by an elegant hairdresser and can spend good money on that; but I do not. And I am sure that to present yourself here at this meeting, the way you do, I am sure that you live in a very elegant house, in a good neighbourhood, right? But we miner's wives only have a very small house that we rent and when our husband dies or falls ill or is sacked by the company, we have ninety days to leave the house and [then] we are on the street. Now, madam, tell me: Do you have anything in common with my situation? Do I have anything in common with your situation? So, what equality are we going to talk about between us? If you and I are not similar, if you and I are so different? We cannot, at this moment, be equal, even as women, don't you think? (https://muywaso.com/el-dia-que-domitila-barrios-cuestiono-los-feminismos-de-elite-en-la-onu/ translated by Tanja Bastia)

Some of these powerful sentiments are visible in more critical scholarship on intersectionality, which pivots around three key tenets. First, scholars argue for the need to recognise difference, originally identified primarily in relation to race and ethnicity but subsequently expanded to include age, generation, location, sexuality, class and disability (Katz and Monk 1993). Relatedly, critical scholarship demands a shift from a static focus on people's identities to an appreciation of structure on the one hand as related to economic, political, social and institutional frameworks, and process on the other referring to broader social processes, including those of representation (Anthias 2012). As Hopkins (2018) argues, it is inevitable that some form of disadvantage will be more relevant than others in a given context, so it is important to look at both context and location when using the term. Second, intersectionality is underpinned by the need to challenge the reproduction of colonist thought that is deeply embedded in feminist and gender epistemology, as illustrated above in the othering of Black, ethnic minority and 'Third World' women. Third, there is a need to operationalise intersectionality in praxis, or in other words, intersectionality is about both theory and method. This has commonly been explored in relation to the ethics of conducting fieldwork on 'others' or in 'other places' (i.e. in places the researcher does not usually reside), which requires a reflexive approach and being conscious and critical of one's positionality (Nagar 2002). It is also increasingly discussed as a much needed methodological approach to make development interventions more attuned to beneficiaries' needs and realities. This carries its own sets of challenges (see below).

Having reviewed the genealogy of the concept of intersectionality, tracing its roots to grassroots feminist movements in the Global South, we now move to reflecting on what happened to the radicalism of the term once it started being more widely used in three key areas, using migration as our guiding focus: academic research, international policy and advocacy politics.

Researching intersectionality and migration

Since the first decade of the millennium, migration studies using intersectionality as a framework have proliferated (see Buitelaar 2006; Gao and Hopkins 2022; Ludvig 2006; Kosnik 2011; Prins 2006). Intersectional approaches to studying migration also made significant contributions to advancing our understanding of the concept, namely, applying it, for example, to analyses of privilege (Kynsilehto 2011) and to studies of intra-group differences (McIlwaine and Bermudez 2011). This helped refine the use of intersectionality by moving it away from an exclusive focus on 'double jeopardy' (whereby, for example, Black women are particularly marginalised by virtue of being women and black) towards a recognition of how 'power and social categories are culturally constituted' such that fixed hierarchies cannot be ascribed to particular identities. Intersectionality is not, therefore, about a 'race to the bottom' and intersectional analysis remains relevant at 'the top of social hierarchies' (Carbado 2013, 813).

It is important to recognise the changing nature of early research such that while most of the studies taking up intersectionality at this earlier stage, during the first decade of this century or so, were usually explicitly feminist, other work was not necessarily identified as feminist, nor anti-racist, or include the key components of this concept as categories of interest. For example, Clareton (2021) adopts an intersectional approach but with a focus on children and age. Whilst she acknowledges that gender as well as class and race are important for understanding constructions of age and parenthood, her study on the time politics of deportability focuses on age as the main category of analysis. Abutbul-Selinger (2017) takes intersectionality further away from its original roots by looking at the intersection between ethnicity and religion, without acknowledging the role that gender plays in the construction of both.

There is a clear tension between at least three possible uses of intersectionality: (i) seeing intersectionality as a potential intersection of any social category, in which gender and/or race might not even feature; (ii) to analyse the ways that various categories of significance might influence gender relations and acknowledging that gender relations are always also classed and racialized; and (iii) to do such an analysis on the intersections of various categories of disadvantage with the aim to also promoting social justice.

As the concept is adopted more widely, there is increased danger that it will be used 'out of context', without acknowledging its origins in Black feminist politics and thought, and for purposes other than those which it was initially intended. We would agree that such erasures amount to what Mollett and Faria describe as 'epistemic violence' (2018, 572), given that it does an injustice to those who have contributed to developing intersectionality as a concept as well as intersectional ways of thinking (see Byskov [2021] on epistemic injustice). Moreover, we would question whether a study that is not feminist nor anti-racist in its intention can be called intersectional. For example, Bürkner (2012) argues that intersectionality can be used to solve tensions between structure and agency in the sub-field of migration studies and, while acknowledging how gender permeates the various forms of disadvantage that migrants experience in their daily lives, he does not engage with the politics that in our view is essentially embedded in the term. The essence of intersectionality is its feminist and anti-racist intentions, feminist here understood as the politics that originates from plural, post- and de-colonial feminisms. Within migration studies, as in feminist geography, we can find research that is feminist in its scope and integrates in its analysis the intersection of various forms of inequalities but without using intersectionality as a framework (e.g. Pratt 1999). We would argue such an approach is truer to the original aims of intersectionality than research that explicitly uses its framework but is stripped of its politics. We make this argument not with the intention of keeping intersectionality 'pure', or 'at home' or close to its origins. Doing so would not only be tragic, as Davis (2020) argued, but it would also be impossible, given, as we have shown, the much more complex origins of intersectional thinking (so where would 'home' be? Which 'origins' would we be referring to?). We make this argument based on transnational debates that have informed our thinking and our wish to learn across our differences (as Davis 2020 indeed suggests we should).

Our current research on South-South migration in Africa and Asia, has sought to foreground intersectionality from its inception. As part of this process, we facilitated a workshop in September 2020 with project partners based in Ghana, China, Nepal, Malaysia, the UK and Switzerland (the Brazil team joined the project when this work was already under way and we are now also exploring these questions with them), on the salience of intersectionality as a 'frame' or 'prism' to understand difference; which aspects are of particular relevance in different research contexts; and what methodological issues are associated with an intersectional approach. While intersectionality was not something that all participants had used to frame research in the past, there was a broad consensus that the concept had relevance to the migration dynamics within migratory corridors. It was, however, noted that existing research on gender and migration tended to implicitly privilege particular intersectional concerns – including age, education, class, ethnicity

and marital status – while there was a relative silence around other dimensions, notably race, disability, caste and sexuality. This was attributed in part to a research focus on *labour* migration, which in turn emphasises certain concerns and downplays others, for example through an implicit focus on the able-bodied and – as Manalansan has noted elsewhere in relation to sexuality – a concern with the 'laboring gendered agent' to the exclusion of a 'desiring and pleasure seeking migrant subject' (2006, 243).

Regarding race and racism, the relative silence on this issue was also linked to challenges in translating key concepts. For example, in the Chinese context an absence of adequate terminology on race makes it more difficult to raise the issue and confront it explicitly. An allied concern relates to local social and political sensitivities, which make explicit discussion of racism more challenging for researchers and the migrants with whom they are working. In this context, the concept of 'xenophobia' may be perceived as less threatening and easier to raise in exploring the discrimination that migrants face. In fact, in research on migration between Africa and China (African migrants in China and Chinese migrants in Africa), there is a tendency to talk about xenophobia and discrimination in everyday life. In this literature the issue of race is often dismissed as 'ignorance' (Castillo 2020) or approached tangentially as 'xenophobia', rather than given explicit attention in relation to systemic issues rooted in specific histories (Castillo 2016; Pieke et al. 2019; Zhou 2017). As we will return to below, this includes studies by scholars within China (Izaguirre, Skov and Walsham 2021).

We also found that within the growing body of work on migration between Africa and China, very few studies incorporate a gendered lens into their analysis (for exceptions see Obeng's (2019a, 2019b) and there is often an implicit assumption that e.g. African entrepreneurs and students are predominantly – or even exclusively – male. This is despite the longstanding – and in some cases dominant – role of women in cross-border trade within the African continent (Brenton, Gamberoni, and Sear 2013). Research on migration in this context is too often approached through a homogenised lens (Zhou, Xu, and Shenasi 2016).

Reflecting on the transatlantic journey of intersectionality, there was agreement that while intersectionality was a useful framework, more specific attention to the considerable diversity across different research contexts was required. For example, a concern with caste and gender among Nepali migrants sparked discussion on the need for cross-learning and exchange on this issue between the Nepal and Malaysia research teams. There was also interest in exploring intersections of privilege as well as those that compound disadvantage. For example, Ghanaian migrants in China may be from relatively wealthy socioeconomic backgrounds, which partially offset – or at least modify – how they experience other dimensions of inequality and vulnerability. While the need to reflect local concerns was widely

accepted, a focus on multiple intersecting dimensions of inequality could potentially entail a loss of focus on gender relations. We would argue, however, that an explicit intersectional research framework that acknowledges the broader conceptual roots of intersectional approaches in grassroots women's movements across the Global South can help to guard against this. Further, as we demonstrate below, this is not only a historical concern – it is equally relevant in relation to contemporary discussions on global policy and rights-based intersectional organising to promote solidarity across different migrant groups led by activists in the Global South.

Intersectionality in global migration policy

Governance systems at the national, regional and global level fundamentally shape policy processes and outcomes. Institutionally, global migration governance has frequently been described as 'fragmented' given its multi-actor character, with many UN agencies and other non-state actors populating this space and limited coordination between them (Betts 2011; Grugel and Piper 2007). One notable example in this regard is the separation between refugees and labour migrants, leading to a division of labour in the world of international organisations between United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), the International Organisation of Migration (IOM) and International Labour Organisation (ILO), and the development of two Global Compacts – the Global Compact for Migration (GCM) and the Global Compact for Refugees (GCR) – which fails to reflect the reality of mixed migration flows and how migrants transition between categories. As the institutionalisation of migration evolved on the global level, one key contentious issue has been the disconnect between a rights-based approach and a securitised, managerial approach to migration policy, with the latter becoming increasingly dominant (Geiger and Pécoud 2010; Hujo 2019). This trend reflects global governance priorities more generally, particularly the emphasis on market liberalisation above and beyond the protection of social and economic rights. In addition, global and national policy-making processes continue to operate in silos, with sector-specific approaches dominating and the mandates of ministries and international organisations focusing on particular target groups such as poor people, women, migrants, workers, children, persons with health or disability challenges.

As a result, gendered forms of oppression experienced by migrant women – as an *intersection* of migrant status, often compounded by racial or ethnic discrimination and class oppression – continue to be insufficiently addressed by global governance organisations (Basok and Piper 2012). This is partly related to the fact that those institutions that address migrant issues often lack a gender perspective. At the same time, when they do address the specific needs of women, the issue of trafficking, and to a lesser degree the

domestic violence associated with domestic work, attracts a disproportionate share of their attention and resources. While both are important issues, policies and programmes to address global trafficking tend to emphasise control and security dimensions at the expense of a human rights perspective. Approaches to both trafficking and domestic violence also reflect patriarchal discourses on the part of governments in which women are regarded primarily as victims of violence perpetrated by individual men and where the proposed solution to these problems is for women not to migrate, rather than actions to tackle the violence they are subjected to with a recognition of their right to movement (Basok and Piper 2012). Consequently, women are often homogenously portrayed as passive victims, rather than supported as agents capable of making decisions. The underfinancing of institutions and support structures that would enable survivors of violence to overcome these challenges and move forward is often unacknowledged or silenced in debates on this issue. Finally, by focusing on the twin issues of trafficking and violence, albeit from an individualised perspective, global governance institutions tend to neglect systemic labour exploitation and forms of abuse. These are often experienced differently according to intersectional constellations of advantage and disadvantage, including skill sets and levels of education, country of origin, migration status, race/ethnicity and religion.

A comprehensive rights-based approach is typically championed by standard-setting international organisations (IOs) or custodians of UN conventions, such as the ILO, UNHCR, UNICEF and UN Women. The principles of non-discrimination and equality are key pillars of the work of the ILO, for example, and as part of the ILO's Decent Work Agenda, it informs all the organisation's programming efforts (ILO 2011). Female empowerment is one of the core objectives for UN Women, including the empowerment of migrant women. Both agencies' agendas converge on the issue of domestic work, which incorporates migrant domestic workers who are primarily women, many of whom hail from the Global South. However, within the sphere of global migration governance, the ILO and – to an even greater extent – UN Women are less influential than non-standard setting actors like the IOM (Hennebry, Hari, and Piper 2019) or the international financial institutions (IFIs).

Global, regional and national institutions involved in the governance of migration rarely use intersectionality as an approach to understanding and promoting the rights of female migrants. In principle, migrant women are protected through general norms of non-discrimination and equality; substantive rights such as labour rights and the right to be free from debt bondage; and identity-based rights aimed at specific groups, such as women's rights (Piper and Satterthwaite 2007). In other words, there are internationally agreed standards for different roles migrant women occupy: as women, workers, and migrants. The list of applicable human rights norms include

the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Social, Economic and Cultural Rights, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and the International Convention of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and their Families. In addition, there are a number of ILO Conventions relevant to migrant workers, including the Conventions on Migration for Employment (1949, No. 97), on Migrant Workers (1975, No. 143) and on Domestic Workers (2011, No. 189). However, these legal instruments offer protections based on a single, discrete status (as visible minorities, workers, migrants, or women). Overall, international protections for migrants are rather weak and initiatives that go beyond these single-status protections are particularly rare. Further, while both the ILO and UN Women recognise the intersectionality of migrant women's oppression in their policy-related publications, these normative framings are not always matched by on-the-ground work in specific countries (Basok and Piper 2012).

More recently, the intersectional approach has been championed in the UN across a wide range of institutions including those with a single-status mandate (UNHCR 2018; UNHCR, Care and ActionAid 2020; UN Women 2020a; WHO et al. 2020). Publications abound making reference to the concept as a way to give justice to overlapping inequalities, cumulative disadvantage and the fact that identities are context-dependent and fluid. In large part this reflects efforts to 'leave no one behind' and 'to reach the furthest behind first', as stipulated by the Sustainable Development Goals (UN 2015). Intersectionality speaks to the aspiration of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to be more integrated and holistic than previous agendas, and to break out of the siloed and sectoral approaches of development cooperation and policymaking. However, aid agencies still struggle to operationalise the concept and translate it into meaningful and empowering interventions, partly because the necessary data collection tends to lag behind the conceptual thinking (an issue that the UN is starting to address, see Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data 2018; UN 2019). UN Women notes that:

> While the development sector is becoming increasingly aware of the importance of intersectionality, this is not yet reflected in policies and interventions, and there is no one framework or approach that meaningfully considers all possible forms of intersecting identities. An intersectional approach requires constant assessment and reassessment of the interactions of different identities and compounded experiences of discrimination and oppression. It is about first understanding the challenges of society's most marginalized and then using this understanding to reduce barriers to their agency (UN Women 2020b).

When intersectionality is taken up by development actors, it runs the risk of repeating some early mistakes associated with gender mainstreaming or

poverty reduction approaches. These agendas often remained rhetorical and failed to address underlying structural inequalities and power asymmetries. Instead, agencies used buzzwords and co-opted transformative language and approaches in a way that supported the status quo and palliative rather than transformational policies. In the words of Cornwall and Brock (2005, 1043), '…words that once spoke of politics and power have come to be reconfigured in the service of today's one-size-fits-all development recipes, spun into an apoliticized form that everyone can agree with'.

In the case of intersectionality, the notion of cumulative disadvantage could become an approach in which the 'most vulnerable' are identified by adding up marginalising identity features to select those individuals who tick the most boxes. Such an approach would ignore social relations, fluid identities, or combinations of personal identities that do not readily fit into the 'furthest behind' group (for example, migrant men losing their privileged masculine status when crossing a border and becoming a foreigner or undocumented worker). Using intersectionality as a targeting instrument in this manner would reinforce the detrimental effects of this fashionable approach among donors, thus further undermining solidarity structures and setting back the universalisation of rights (Mkandawire 2005; UNRISD 2016). It also puts a blind eye on cumulative privilege and ignores the fact that intersectional analysis remains relevant at the top of social hierarchies as was mentioned above.

Whether the concept of intersectionality in its emancipatory meaning will gain greater traction in global policy cycles and the operations of international organisations and development or humanitarian actors depends on the fulfilment of several conditions. These include: technical conditions related to the collection of disaggregated data as well as training, awareness raising and capacity building on intersectionality; political conditions related to the inclusion of concerned individuals, groups and CSOs in decision-making and planning, intersectional budgeting (feminists have long advocated for gender budgeting, but intersectional budgeting would simultaneously consider other disadvantages beyond the gender category for resource allocation [Xhemali 2020]) and programming, and intersectional dialogues at multiple levels; and finally the integration of intersectional approaches into broader efforts to promote human rights and egalitarian policies.

Intersectionality in advocacy politics

Sustained and concerted civil society advocacy and engagement at global, regional and national levels has played a crucial role in ensuring migrants' rights remain on the agenda in global migration policy processes (Hennebry et al. 2019). Thus, the rights-based approach to migration governance embedded not only in international norms but also in strong bottom-up

participation by civil society organisations (CSOs) is critical in providing voice to migrants at all levels of decision making (Piper and Rother 2020). Transnational advocacy networks are expanding across the world, comprising grassroots organisations formed for or by migrants, returnees and members of diasporas. Ideas about what constitutes 'migrant rights' travel across borders, pertaining to what has been called 'political remittances' (Piper and Rother 2020). With more national, regional and global trade union bodies joining such efforts, 'networks of labour' have emerged (Zajak, Egels-Zandén and Piper 2017).

Historically, the world of trade unionism was based on the European history of industrialisation and thus the representation of formal workers in heavy industries. Women and racialised migrants were for a long time excluded. However, this attitude has changed in recent decades, following extensive debates about the historical privileging of class over race in Europe and North America (see Penninx and Roosblad 2000). The decisive shift in union policies toward foreign workers from the 1990s onwards (see, for instance, Avci and McDonald 2000; Basok 2008; Haus 1999), in which trade union members have engaged collectively in challenging the marginalisation and oppression that migrants experience, is partly related to migrants taking up union leadership roles. After creating space to challenge the issue of racial discrimination against migrant workers alongside class, there was again a need to fight to ensure that addressing the specific vulnerabilities of informal sector workers and women made it onto the agenda of the worker movements. An important strategy in this regard was to highlight that some of these forms of oppression are not necessarily gender-specific *per se*, but relate to the type of work or sectors women migrants occupy and often dominate (Piper and Satterthwaite 2007).

Frequently unaware of their rights or too marginalised to assert them, migrants in general and migrant women in particular have not been able to effectively challenge abusive and discriminatory practices. Instead, pro-migrant NGOs, INGOs, and other social actors have raised awareness of their plight and demanded change. Particularly important has proved to be 'self-organising' by the affected themselves, i.e. migrants instigating and shaping advocacy efforts (Piper 2013a). *S*cholars interested in emancipatory transformation via a rights-based, intersectional approach have employed participatory action research methods with activist migrants (see e.g. Pratt and Johnston 2014; Stasiulis and Bakan 1997). Satterthwaite (2005, 32) makes a compelling plea to use the methodology of intersectionality to uncover empowering norms for migrant women within the corpus of human rights law. Bond (2003, 76) similarly calls for an intersectional approach to inform the ways in which advocates promote human rights around the globe.

Hong Kong is a well-documented example where migrant domestic workers have been particularly well organised, forming cross-ethnic alliances and

also being supported by the larger trade union movement (Piper 2013b). They have demonstrated how (at least partially) intersectional organising can lead to solidarity in line with the union slogan 'a worker is a worker is a worker' by forming alliances across different nationalities and sectors (Rother 2017). In Uruguay and Paraguay, domestic workers' organisations, including migrant domestic workers (migrating from abroad and internally in the case of Uruguay and mainly from rural areas in the case of Paraguay), have been similarly successful in advocating for their rights, by building networks with different types of actors within and across national borders (ILO 2014). For example, trade unions and the national association of house-wives built an alliance in the case of Uruguay, and women's groups and international organisations such as the ILO and UN Women in the case of Paraguay. Rojas-Scheffer (2022) applies an intersectional lens in research on these two countries showing that different actors sharing an interest in subverting power hierarchies - be they based on regimes of gender, class, ethnicity and/or citizenship - can come together to form networks of activism.

Given the tendency for immigration authorities to take precedent over agents enforcing employment law, undocumented or irregular migrants remain on the margins of collective organising and are often prevented from taking up their own struggle. The experience of being a migrant worker subject to the full force of the 'temporality-precarity nexus' (Withers and Piper 2021) has propelled a new understanding of what a rights-based approach to migration entails, largely driven by activists in the Global South. Namely, a decolonised rights-based approach to migration governance (Estevez Lopez 2010), at whose core is the aim of ending the managerialism of migration and the highly circumscribed lack of mobility currently provided for by dominant regulatory practices. Instead, a decolonised approach focuses on mitigating the drivers of migration so that migration becomes a choice, and not a necessity, while simultaneously addressing the exploitation and discrimination migrants experience throughout the migration process. It aims to generate a deeper commitment to human and labour rights on the part of more developed and less developed regions, including both so-called sending and receiving countries, and to help foster more equitable forms of social development, thereby reducing the pressure to migrate in which the decision to stay or to migrate are equally valid and equally viable.

Conclusion

Our reflection on whether intersectionality retains its radical origins has been informed by our analysis of what happens to intersectionality as it travels across space and time and in different migration-related communities of knowledge. We began by arguing that, while intersectionality was coined in the late 1980s in the US, there is a much longer history both 'local' in the

US as well as global, found in the grassroots women's movements in the Global South. These earlier interventions have prepared the ground and facilitated the conditions for the emergence and the coining of the term. As we showed, women in the Global South already practiced intersectional approaches and argued for an intersectional politics during the 1970s. Some of their interventions shaped transnational feminist spaces and were politically aligned with the arguments put forward by the Black women's movement in the US.

In our analysis of the three domains of knowledge, we showed that the radicalism inherent both in the original coining of the term intersectionality as well as previous intersectional approaches has not always been met in academic research. Research that is inspired and guided by feminist ethics and politics appears to retain this radicalism. However, intersectionality is a malleable term and has been taken up by research that does not conform to feminist thinking. Here, intersectionality becomes an invitation to include different 'variables' and categories, but without necessarily having a lens on intersectional justice. Examples of this includes studies which call themselves intersectional, but fail to include gender or women's rights or marginalised and/or racialized groups as key concerns, calling into question whether they can be described as intersectional at all.

In the policy dimension, we have shown that the radicalism inherent in intersectionality is watered down in policy implementation and experiences a backlash, sometimes obscured by terms such as 'leave no one behind'. While such approaches may focus on vulnerability and poverty, they are not informed by a feminist politics nor by a historical analysis of the structures that lead to unequal outcomes, or the desire to radically overhaul these structures in view of creating a more equal society.

We find the greatest continuity with the origins of intersectionality in current advocacy circles, the transnational networks of feminists and migrants' rights advocates that aim to promote migrants' rights from an intersectional perspective. These grassroots but transnational networks continue to practice the politics associated with the origins of intersectionality in their aims to protect migrants' rights against the current entrenchment of those rights.

Learning from the current project that we are collaborating on, we noted that decentring and decolonising migration research, while at the same time practicing an intersectional approach, is not straightforward nor easy in a multi-cultural, multi-linguistic, transnational team of researchers. We noted the importance of contextual as well as historical approaches to studying migration. We also recognised that communities of knowledge are also geographically and historically constituted, and choices about what is remembered, forgotten or ignored reflect the uneven distribution of power across the globe (including between north and south) – hence the importance of addressing the political as well as the technical in understanding how

intersectionality has travelled between academic, policy and advocacy communities.

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