reductions. They function as criteria for determining whether individuals and groups are oppressed, rather than as a full theory of oppression. I believe that these criteria are objective. They provide a means of refuting some people's beliefs that their group is oppressed when it is not, as well as a means of persuading others that a group is oppressed when they doubt it. Each criterion can be operationalized; each can be applied through the assessment of observable behavior, status relationships, distributions, texts, and other cultural artifacts. I have no illusions that such assessments can be value-neutral. But these criteria can nevertheless serve as means of evaluating claims that a group is oppressed, or adjudicating disputes about whether or how a group is oppressed.

The presence of any of these five conditions is sufficient for calling a group oppressed. But different group oppressions exhibit different combinations of these forms, as do different individuals in the groups. Nearly all, if not all, groups said by contemporary social movements to be oppressed suffer cultural imperialism. The other oppressions they experience vary. Working-class people are exploited and powerless, for example, but if employed and white do not experience marginalization and violence. Gay men, on the other hand, are not qua gay exploited or powerless, but they experience severe cultural imperialism and violence. Similarly, Jews and Arabs as groups are victims of cultural imperialism and violence, though many members of these groups also suffer exploitation or powerlessness. Old people are oppressed by marginalization and cultural imperialism, and this is also true of physically and mentally disabled people. As a group, women are subject to gender-based exploitation, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence. Racism in the United States condemns many Blacks and Latinos to marginalization, and puts many more at risk, even though many members of these groups escape that condition; members of these groups often suffer all five forms of oppression.

Applying these five criteria to the situation of groups makes it possible to compare the oppressions without reducing them to a common essence or claiming that one is more fundamental than another. One can compare the ways in which a particular form of oppression appears in different groups. For example, while the operations of cultural imperialism are often experienced in similar fashion by different groups, there are also important differences. One can compare the combinations of oppressions groups experience, or the intensity of those oppressions. . . .

8

Intersectionality Revisited

Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge

RELATIONALITY

The theme of *relationality* that reappears in various forms across intersectional scholarship and practice has had an important impact on both. This insight that the connections among entities that had been seen as separate and often oppositional constitute a major contribution of intersectionality to all types of projects. . . . Entities that are typically treated

as separate may actually be interconnected. For intersectionality, this interconnectedness lies in the relationships between systems of race, class, gender, sexuality, age, ability, and citizenship spaces. An intersectionality framework counsels that these entities, in various combinations or in total, can all be accommodated under the umbrella of intersectionality.

Scholars and activists alike have found the concept useful, generating endless new questions and avenues of investigation. For example, the either/or binary thinking that has been so central to Eurocentric social thought is less relevant for intersectionality. Instead, intersectional projects look at the relationships among seemingly different phenomena. For example, interdisciplinary fields concerned with social justice are often informed by intersectional frameworks. Such fields strive to go beyond oppositional thinking carried out by Eurocentric binaries and attempt to forge a complex and interactive understanding of the relationships between history, social organization, and forms of consciousness, both personal and collective in short, *relational* thinking.

We have also been attentive to how this idea of relationality informs praxis. For example, we have criticized versions of intersectionality that reduce identity to an apolitical, individualistic category, drawing on the theme of relationality to show the complexities of collective identity politics. We also present an argument about the centrality of relationality to coalition politics, investigating how what seem to be scattered social movements may in actuality be interrelated phenomena in response to a global world order. The case of the Afro Brazilian women's movement in Brazil provides a sketch of how coalitions that took both similarities and differences into account were crucial to the creation and maintenance of a vibrant social movement.

We have spent less time examining intersectionality's relationship with similar discourses, such as critical race theory, feminism, ethnic studies, or the intellectual debates in which these areas participate. We think that intersectionality would benefit by thinking through how dialogs among forms of inquiry and expressions of critical praxis that resemble its own might unfold. Intersectionality's interconnectedness with other similar knowledge projects might draw inspiration from Freire's dialogical pedagogy or education for critical consciousness.

When engaging discourse, intersectionality must be wary of annexing other perspectives, such as decolonial and transnational approaches, under its wide tent umbrella. When intersectionality enters these contexts via humanitarian, developmental frameworks, and projects from the North, it can erase local resistant knowledges and praxis and silence local knowledge producers (which might also be true in northern contexts, for instance France and Germany). There is an enormous difference between cases where disenfranchised groups *themselves* claim versions of intersectionality, for example, black women in Brazil forming an independent black feminist movement, and where some national or supranational instance imposes a top-down, watered-down diversity *qua* intersectionality agenda upon historically disenfranchised people.

We wish that we could have . . . incorporated multiple knowledge projects and points of view from various regions of the globe and within a more expansive time period than the late twentieth and early-twenty-first centuries. We want to see more people involved in the kind of dialogical intellectual and political work that doing interesectionality entails. This openness would encourage a dialogical methodology for intersectionality that would advance a more democratic construction of knowledge itself.

The analysis of intersectionality may. . . be universally applicable, yet there is no way of knowing so without greater and different participation of scholars, activists, practitioners, policy makers, and teachers from the Global South. We have included the ideas and experiences of social actors from disenfranchised groups within the Global North as well as social actors in the Global South whenever possible, taking care to do so in ways that do not reduce their experiences to data that reinforce frameworks of the Global North. For example, case studies of the black women's movement in Brazil and their successful project

of Latinidades and the increasing visibility of the anti-sweatshop movement following the Rana Plaza collapse illustrate the significance of starting analysis in the Global South, Brazil and Bangladesh respectively. We also reject trying to fix problems of exclusion by simply adding in missing people and experiences into intersectionality as a preconceived entity. Instead, intersectionality requires a rethinking of these approaches in ways that democratize the social construction of knowledge.

Incorporating the global is not enough. Attending to global phenomena means that intersectionality must take a critical stance concerning its own social location both as a legitimated discourse within the Global North, and as a set of ideas and practices that only a small segment of educated, well-off people in the Global South can access. Because being able to read books such as this one elevates those with literacy above those who lack it, literacy articulates with individual and collective exclusion. But as we have also discussed throughout this book, people find innovative ways to access and do intellectual work, to develop multiple forms of literacy, for example, by using the media in global hip hop culture or digital activism. At maximum, intersectionality would be a much more inclusive dialogical process than is currently the case

SOCIAL CONTEXT

The theme of social *context* has many interpretations. We have examined the relationship between intersectionality and the social institutions that are part of its social context whenever possible. We have highlighted the academy as an important institutional context of intersectionality: our analysis of shifting meanings of intersectionality within social movements and incorporation into the academy contrasts the effects of these two institutional environments on intersectionality; our analysis of neoliberal state power, its discourse of securitization, and how institutional structures are shaped by these ideas is a primary theme. . . .

We have expressed our concern that the growth, acceptance, and legitimation of intersectionality within the academy and some public policy venues necessarily changes its composition and purpose, often for the better, but also for the worse. For example, we explore the politics of intersectionality's naming and incorporation into the academy as a bona fide discourse. Is intersectionality the victim of its own success? Contemporary trends that reduce intersectionality to a theory of identity also reflect the challenges of absorption. Within US higher education, the splitting of intersectionality into an academic component of scholarship and diversity initiatives of institutional service signals an attack on intersectionality's critical perspective. Via these concerns, we raised the question of who benefits from intersectionality's legitimation. The answers to this questions are far from clear, and may vary from one situation to the next. It is not enough to simply bury oneself in one's own work, claiming intersectionality as a set of stimulating ideas while ignoring the conditions that make that work possible.

The tongue-in-cheek phrase "saving intersectionality from intersectionality studies" reminds all scholars to be self-reflexive regarding our own practices in the context of intersectionality's newfound visibility and legitimation. Saving intersectionality might involve reclaiming intersectionality from people who often have little or no commitment to intersectionaliy's social justice ethos. This may also mean saving intersectionality from ourselves if few practice intersectionality as "business as usual", namely, as just another scholarly discourse or content specialization without implicating our work within the power relations that shape the field and academy at large. Such practices often follow prevailing canonical rules of identifying some key figures within the field whose ideas become proxy for the field itself, then moving on to use these straw-women figures as coterminous with intersectionality itself.

We also recognize the significance of how politics shapes the way in which physical and geographic space is understood and organized. Contexualizing intersectional categories that define space, for example, matters whether one is a citizen of Syria or Germany, or whether one plays soccer in South Africa or Spain. Intersectionality as a form of critical inquiry and praxis gains it meaning within specific social contexts. Placing greater emphasis on the specifics of social context of local, regional, and national geography would provide a more nuanced discussion of global processes.

Then there is the issue of historic context. Intersectionality appears at a specific historical moment and is an intervention in that moment. While it speaks to contemporary issues, it is also simultaneously formed and transformed by them. . . . For current debates inflected by the growing influence of intersectionality within United Nations venues, juxtaposed with increasingly verbal critiques of intersectionality within the European academy, intersectionality seems to represent both a promise and a threat. Accordingly, we reflect upon the specificities of historical events in which intersectionality is embedded, with the aim of understanding and describing how different historical conjunctures frame different theoretical and political moments of intersectionality. . . .

POWER RELATIONS, SOCIAL INEQUALITY, AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

Power, another core idea of intersectionality, is complex and contested. We have tried to situate intersectionality within contemporary power relations and analyze the significance of that positioning.

We have argued that power relations are to be analyzed both *via their intersections*, for example, of racism and sexism, as well as *across domains of power*, namely, structural, disciplinary, cultural, and interpersonal. How does intersectionality critically assess power relations of race, class, gender, sexuality, age, ethnicity, nationality, and ability? How might intersectionality better understand how intersecting power relations shape its own praxis? These questions must repeatedly be asked and answered under changing power relations themselves.

We have also criticized intersectionality when it seemed to be veering away from what we see as its core concern areas that are clearly associated with power relations. For example, because we have been especially troubled by the decreasing focus on *social inequality* within intersectionality's scholarship, we emphasize this theme. The hollowing-out of meanings of rich scholarly traditions that have long been associated with processes and systems of social inequalities—for example, capitalism, colonialism, racism, patriarchy, and nationalism—and replacing them with shortcut terms of race, gender, and nation may appear to be a benign substitution, but much is lost when systems of power compete for space under some versions of intersectionality. The terms themselves may appear to be equivalent and easily substituted for one another, yet the social relations that these shorthand terms reference are far more complicated. For example, sexism, racism, and heterosexism contain the "ism" that makes them recognizable as unjust systems of power, nuance that is lost when gender, race, and sexuality become redefined as identify categories. In contrast, the term "class" performs a different kind of reduction. By reducing the complex economic relations of capitalism to class, the complexities and sophistication of Marxist social thought and other serious analyses of capitalism are minimized. The rich traditions of nationalism, both celebratory and critical, simply don't fit comfortably under the signifier of nation. So replacement terms such as "citizenship status" or "undocumented migrants" take up the slack by referencing selected populations that are penalized by nationalist ideologies and nation state policies. They are referencing similar phenomena but are not readily reducible to one another.

This strategy of using shortcut language to make intersectionality's task of rethinking social inequality easier seemingly solves one set of problems, yet creates others. Over time, these

terms no longer invoke the original meanings of racism, sexism, and capitalism, for example, but instead become recast as floating signifiers that, unmoored from specific scholarly traditions, can be assembled and reassembled far more easily than would be the case if one seriously tried to place the actual traditions in dialog with one another. This reduction of intersectionality to an assemblage of shortcut terms does appear to be more democratic in that it encompasses more categories than before. Yet the mantra of "race, class, and gender" has been so often repeated that it can become meaningless. The phrase serves as an unexamined litmus test for scholars who can claim that their work is better than race-only or class-only analyses, primarily because it references more terms of social inequality.

We have similar concerns with versions of intersectionality that may pay lip service to *social justice*, yet seem unaware of its significance. People who claim intersectionality as a field of *critical* inquiry and praxis often hold an implicit and often explicit commitment to an ethics of social justice as part of their analytical lens. For a form of inquiry that grapples with complex social inequalities, its *raison d'etre* is not simply to provide more complex and comprehensive analyses of how and why social inequalities persist—critical engagement has been a strong theme within intersectionality as a field of inquiry—but also to engage questions of social justice. Social inequality and social injustice are not the same, although these ideas are often used interchangeably. The work of practitioners not only shows how social justice is critical, but also how social justice work challenges the borders between academic and activist work.

We have been careful to point out that intersectionality is not a simple substitute for social justice. Each project must be interrogated for its connections to social justice, not just assuming that because intersectional scholarship examines some facet of social inequality, it is by default furthering social justice. We raised a similar argument concerning diversity initiative within higher education as a case where intersectionality may invoke earlier social justice traditions, yet where actual programs have been pressured to relinquish traditional emphasis on access and equity.

INTERSECTIONALITY'S COMPLEXITY

Overall, these core ideas of relationality, social context, power, inequality, and social justice highlight intersectionality's complexity. Because each of these core ideas interact with one another, collectively they contribute to intersectionality's complexity. Thinking about social inequalities and power relations within an ethos of social justice, and doing so not in abstract generalizations but in their specific contexts, brings complexity. Attending to how intersecting power relations shape identities, social practices, institutional arrangements, and cultural representations and ideologies in ways that are contextualized and historicized introduces a level of complexity into everything. Moreover, the creative tension linking intersectionality as a form of critical inquiry and critical praxis introduces complexity into intersectional projects.

This creative tension raises important questions about which understandings of intersectionality will prevail. When we focus on intersectionality as a form of critical inquiry, we find a rich tapestry of scholarship produced by people who use intersectionality as an analytic tool in new and creative ways. Not all scholarship is like this, and not all people who claim intersectionality share this vision. But, overall, intersectionality's scholarship record thus far has been impressive. When we broaden our lens to include intersectionality as critical praxis, both its initial expression within social movements as well as its global dispersion beyond the academy, the practices and ideas of diverse people past and present, in the Global North and in the Global South, come into view.

We think that it is imperative that intersectionality remain open to the element of surprise. Our efforts to provide a useful but not final definition of intersectionality speak to the impetus to invite others into the conversation. We see the impetus toward intersectionality as more connected to the puzzles presented by the social world that we live in, rather than the concerns of established disciplinary endeavours. . . .

Telling the story of intersectionality does a certain kind of political work in terms of authenticating and legitimizing particular schools of thought and subjects, privileging particular genealogies and national locations at the expense of others. Particular histories that chart intersectionality as a field of study in particular ways might be rightly viewed as acts of closure, be they temporary. These histories pursue in their own ways scientific recognition, authority, and legitimacy and settle intersectionality within the Euro-American scientific archive in particular ways. As such, they participate in the establishment of intersectionality as a legitimate field of knowledge, which might be at odds with the pursuit of social justice. Our history of intersectionality has emphasized praxis, a dimension of intersectionality that does not routinely appear in these legitimated histories although a critical praxis does permeate intersectionality.

What ideas and experiences are *not* here? In what ways is our interpretation of intersectionality limited by these omissions? More importantly, how might we go about expanding the breadth of intersectionality to encompass the heterogeneity of ideas and experiences that are global without flattering their differences? Intersectionality can't engage these expansive questions if it chooses the narrow pathway of defining itself as a "feminist theory of identity," or, worse yet, if it severs its critical inquiry from its critical praxis. These questions have no straightforward answers, certainly none that can easily be resolved. Rather, they call out for more people working on them, in essence, an expansion of global conversations.

The central challenge facing intersectionality is to move into the politics of the not-yet. Thus far, intersectionality has managed to sustain intellectual and political dynamism that grows from its heterogeneity. This is immensely difficult to achieve when faced with the kinds of intellectual and political challenges that we have explored. But just because something is difficult does not mean that it's not worth doing. We see intersectionality's heterogeneity not as a weakness but rather as a source of tremendous potential. Intersectionality is a tool that we can all use in moving toward a more just future.