

## 8

# Intersectionality Revisited

The synergistic relationship between intersectionality's inquiry and praxis constitutes a core organizing principle of this book. Moreover, this relationship between its intellectual contours and its political action has also been essential for intersectionality as a form of *critical* analysis. We argue that maintaining the creative tension joining these two dimensions has been essential to intersectionality's originality and growth. For example, the way we told the history of intersectionality situated its emergence within social movement activism, while also addressing institutional incorporation in the academy, a positioning that highlights the vibrancy and necessity of intersectionality's ties to social justice movements and the need to continue to defend those ties within increasingly neoliberal colleges and universities. Maintaining this creative tension between inquiry and praxis as intersectionality expands its global reach characterizes dialogues within human rights venues, within reproductive justice initiatives and digitally networked social justice activism. The juxtaposition of intersectionality's ties to various forms of identity politics – for example, the black women's movement in Brazil and hip-hop as a global discourse of youth – and identity debates within intersectional scholarship highlights an important controversy that hinges on distinguishing between praxis and inquiry. Our analysis of diversity in public schools and higher education examines the challenges of placing intersectionality as a field of inquiry and praxis in dialog with critical education, an area that faces similar challenges.

These examples suggest that this synergy between inquiry and praxis is simultaneously critical and creative, catalyzing new ideas for inquiry and suggesting new forms of praxis. Many of our examples highlight intersectionality's contributions to creative solutions to important social problems, such as violence against women and girls, labor exploitation in unsafe working conditions, and the denial of education to youth. We include many examples of critical intersectional analysis that flows from praxis, the case of social activism for reproductive justice or immigrants' rights. This dialogical sensibility between knowing and doing has enriched intersectionality as a field of inquiry within academia, fostering new questions, avenues of investigation, and explanations across many disciplines.

Maintaining this creative tension between critical inquiry and critical praxis remains an ongoing challenge for intersectionality. Yet many people within academia, within activist settings, as well as within digital intersectionality do not see this relationship between inquiry and praxis as foundational to intersectionality's critical work. Some scholars wish to

extract intersectionality from praxis, leaving a purified set of ideas that can be manipulated unencumbered by the kinds of political stakes that have concerned intersectional practitioners. Similarly, activists who interpret intersectionality as being overly abstract and not worth studying demonstrate an anti-intellectual bias that elevates praxis over serious study. As the debates within online feminist publics and the spread of digital violence suggest, intersectionality's footprint within digital media can make conflict more overt and amplified. Significantly, creativity honed by placing inquiry and praxis in dialog need not generate consensus – indeed, it often catalyzes conflict. Yet being critical requires dialogs across differences in power, as long as such dialogs are committed to strengthening intersectionality.

The term “intersectionality” is very much in use these days, but is employed in a variety of ways by different social actors. 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 endeavors. Our efforts to provide a useful but not final definition of intersectionality speak to the impetus to encompass intersectionality's dual focus on inquiry and praxis. Toward this end, we began this book by offering the following description of intersectionality:

Intersectionality investigates how intersecting power relations influence social relations across diverse societies as well as individual experiences in everyday life. As an analytic tool, intersectionality views categories of race, class, gender, sexuality, class, nation, ability, ethnicity, and age – among others – as interrelated and mutually shaping one another. Intersectionality is a way of understanding and explaining complexity in the world, in people, and in human experiences.

We settled on this working definition because it is broad and elastic enough to house the diversity within intersectionality, yet provides some guidance on some important boundaries around intersectionality. Throughout the book, we have aimed to deepen this working definition in ways that embrace intersectionality's heterogeneity and dynamism.

The significance of this working definition goes beyond its organizational utility for this book. The definitional question is important because prematurely settling on one definition, history, or canon can shut down intersectionality's creativity and growth. We have tried to avoid these pitfalls by providing a more expansive view of intersectionality than can be found in any one location. We emphasize how using intersectionality as an analytic tool introduces greater complexity into a host of topics, such as digitally mediated social movements, climate change, and reproductive justice. Consensus often ends when we dig deeper into intersectionality's actual use. We have highlighted some of the debates within intersectionality, for example, conflicting views of the meaning of identity within

intersectionality. We also discuss the challenges that intersectionality confronts in remaining critical within varying venues that increasingly adopt neoliberal frameworks, for example, its own placement within the normative standards of higher education and the changing meaning of diversity work within public schools and academia. We avoid some of the most contentious debates that, in our assessment, sweep up intersectionality in service to other agendas, for example, arguments that “we,” whoever that might be, should move “beyond” intersectionality to some sort of “post-intersectionality” landscape.

Throughout the book, we emphasize several important premises that provide guidelines for our approach to intersectionality. First, we highlight the significance of the social structural domain of power for intersectionality. Not only do we build out this structural domain across many social institutions, for example schools, prisons, the media, and the workplace; we also present intersectionality’s structural context as traversing multiple layers of social organization. Specifically, we include examples from microlevel analysis that highlights the workings of individual creativity in social problem solving (Chapter 2 – Muhammad Yunus and microcredit), as well as within small group social interaction (our close reading of the meeting concerning intersectionality and human rights policy in Chapter 4). We provide examples of how grassroots groups draw upon intersectionality to guide social action – for example, the case of the Albuquerque initiative for reproductive justice. We do not treat macrolevel phenomena such as the state and global geopolitics as background variables. Instead, we present the nation-state as an important site of intersectionality’s structural social context, stressing how heterogeneous nation-states stimulate diverse public policies. We also present a transnational framework for human rights, social protest, and similar global phenomena that strives to link and transcend national contexts.

Second, we pay close attention to selected philosophical traditions that influence intersectionality’s ideas and politics. For example, we identify social democracy and neoliberalism as important philosophies or systems of ideas within intersectionality’s interpretive context. Fostering democracy has been an ongoing preoccupation for intersectionality, with various intersectional projects aligned with liberal, social, or participatory democratic projects. Intersectionality’s claims for inclusion, dialog, equity, and social justice rest on deepening the meaning of democracy. Yet neoliberalism has challenged these democratic ideals. The ideas of social democracy and neoliberalism remain contested within many of the public policies discussed here, among them securitization and the criminal justice system, the defunding of public education, and the FIFA business model (see Chapter 1). The growing visibility of far-right populism, especially its denigration of immigrants, people of color, and women, adds complexity to this mix. Certainly, there are other philosophies with wide social impact. Yet focusing on democracy and neoliberalism

provides a context for seeing how power influences the synergy of inquiry and praxis generally, and intersectionality specifically.

Third, we highlight the ideas and actions of people who make important, albeit often unrecognized, contributions to intersectionality. Because the synergy between intersectionality's critical inquiry and praxis is often more visible in the work of women of color, poor people, LGBTQ people, indigenous peoples, as well as young people, we bring the ideas of historically disenfranchised people to the forefront of our analysis as much as possible. For example, we highlight the ideas that emerged within the black women's movement in Brazil, as well as the identity politics of hip-hop, because black women and young people have made important contributions to intersectionality. Similarly, our approach to intersectionality's genealogy emphasizes the significance of social movement projects advanced by historically disenfranchised people for intersectionality's critical inquiry and praxis. Standard intellectual histories routinely overlook the intellectual work of people who are discriminated against within intersecting power relations of race, class, gender, sexuality, disability, and nationality. Significantly, these are often the same people who are most versed in social justice praxis.

Together, these premises concerning intersectionality's social structural context, the importance of philosophies in shaping intersectionality, and the importance of looking to oppressed people as agents of knowledge have informed our analysis. Guided by these premises, we settled on six core themes – namely, social inequality, intersecting power relations, social context, relationality, complexity, and social justice – to provide some guideposts in analyzing intersectionality's critical inquiry and praxis. Just as these characteristic themes reappear, albeit in different forms, within intersectionality itself, so we discuss them in different ways throughout the book. Here we revisit these themes as a way both of synthesizing some of the main ideas in the book and of discussing how intersectionality might cast a self-reflexive eye on its own truths and practices. Some of these themes have long been recognized and considered worthy. On others, the record is far more contested. We close this book by asking, where might intersectionality be headed? We look back in order to move forward.

## **Social Inequality**

Social inequality is a fundamental object of investigation for intersectionality, and we treat it as such throughout our book. For example, our discussion of income and wealth as dimensions of global economic inequality lays a foundation for a more informed discussion of social inequality that takes different philosophies into account. We also discuss how philosophies that offer different explanations for social inequality impact public policies of

nation-states. Focusing on social inequality sharpens our provisional definition: intersectionality constitutes a way of understanding and explaining complex social inequalities in the world, in people, and in human experiences.

Intersectionality bundles together disparate traditions on social inequality. This is its challenge and its strength. Understanding the historical patterns of scholarship and activism that catalyzed antiracism, decolonialism, feminism, critical disability studies, and similar critical projects requires serious study. These fields each have distinctive forms of critical inquiry and critical praxis that speak to the particular forms of social inequality that they study. Simply cherry-picking the ideas from several areas and bundling them together provides a thin understanding of social inequality that can masquerade as intersectionality. In one book, we could not do justice to the expansive literatures on social inequality that intersectionality aims to pull together. Instead, we ground our analysis in specific social practices, social problems, and social issues as one way of showing how using intersectionality as an analytical tool can foster more robust understandings of social inequality. Our discussion of FIFA in Chapter 1, for example, provides a good sense of how multiple social inequalities are structured and replicated. Rather than grappling with social issues in the abstract, as purely theoretical concerns, we instead adopted a more grounded approach of using intersectionality to examine a range of social issues.

We have also been careful not to present social inequality as something that is natural, normal, and inevitable. Using intersectionality as an analytical tool provides a powerful way of analyzing how intersecting power relations produce social inequalities. The scope of social inequality and the practices that organize it are certainly formidable. We pay attention to nation-state power in this book, both as a topic of investigation and as an important context for intersectionality's own praxis. The effects of neoliberalism and state policies of securitization suggest that elites wield inordinate power, with the resurgence of far-right populism raising new challenges for subordinated people. Yet these same tools of intersectionality can also be used to examine resistance to social inequality. The black women's movement in Brazil, hip-hop as a form of cultural politics, and digital activism all suggest that the response to social inequality need not be capitulation. Throughout this book, we provide examples where people not only do not give in, but actively protest the forms of social inequality that confront them. Our choice of topics speaks to this theme of resistance: global social protest, reproductive rights, digital activism, critical education, and the significance of identity politics all speak to the myriad ways that people resist within intersecting systems of power.

## **Intersecting Power Relations**

Power, another core idea of intersectionality, is complex and contested. Throughout this book, we approach intersectionality through a power-conscious lens or analytical framework. Intersectionality strives to look at power from many angles and asks what kind of power relations might be hidden behind those that are more apparent in a given context. We conceptualize power as a relationship rather than as a static entity. Power is not a thing to be gained or lost as in the zero-sum conceptions of winners and losers on the football playing field. Rather, power is exercised via the relationships that created the very categories of winners and losers.

Because the term “power” is widely used without there being much agreement as to what it is, we emphasize intersecting power relations to sharpen our book’s approach to power and do not shy away from difficult topics. Intersecting power relations permeate important global phenomena: those that oppress – for example, global social inequality and violence – as well as political actions that resist or oppose such oppression – for example, social protests that flare up in various national settings, ongoing social movements that evolve as they engage global phenomena, and digital media as new resources for oppressive and emancipatory uses. These global phenomena permeated by intersecting power relations are also variably impacted by the rise of far-right populism, which we attend to in this new edition, as it speaks to important changes in our current conjuncture and encompasses the very real menace of fascism. This power-conscious lens raises two important points about intersecting power relations and the political responses they can engender. First, intersectional frameworks understand power relations through a lens of mutual construction. In other words, people’s lives and identities are generally shaped by many factors in diverse and mutually influencing ways. Race, class, gender, sexuality, age, disability, ethnicity, nation, and religion, among others, constitute interlocking, mutually constructing, or intersecting systems of power. As categories of analysis, race, gender, sexuality, class, and nation gain meaning from power relations of racism, heterosexism, class exploitation, and nationalism. Within intersectional frameworks, there is no pure racism or heterosexism. Rather, power relations of racism and heterosexism gain meaning in relation to one another.

Second, power relations are to be analyzed both via their intersections, for example, of racism and heterosexism, as well as across domains of power, namely structural, disciplinary, cultural, and interpersonal. The framework of domains of power provides a heuristic device or thinking tool for examining power relations. The FIFA World Cup case introduced this heuristic by analyzing each domain of power separately. It broke them down into the kinds of power relations that are solidified in social structures (for example, organizations like FIFA and institutions like national governments) that are shared through

ideas and media, or culture broadly speaking, that appear repeatedly in the ways that informal social rewards and punishments get distributed in everyday interactions, and that affect the players' individual identities. These are, respectively, the structural, cultural, disciplinary, and interpersonal domains of power. Looking at how power works in each domain can shed light on the dynamics of larger social phenomena, the case, for example of the IMF's mainstream economic philosophies, or the longevity of the Afro-Brazilian women's movement. Yet, in actual social practice, the domains overlap, and no one domain can be put as the most determinant a priori.

Throughout this book, we investigate an important question: how is intersectionality situated within the power relations that it seemingly studies? Positioning intersectionality within contemporary power relations and analyzing the significance of that placement raise additional questions. How does intersectionality critically assess power relations of race, class, gender, sexuality, age, ethnicity, nationality, and ability? How might intersectionality better understand the way in which intersecting power relations shape its own praxis? These questions must repeatedly be asked and answered under the changing conditions of neoliberalism, far-right populism, and their challenges to social democracy.

In this book, we criticize intersectionality when it seems to be veering away from what we see as its core concern areas that are clearly associated with intersecting 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 critically analyze social inequalities – for example, capitalism, colonialism, racism, patriarchy, and nationalism – and replacing them with shortcut terms such as race, class, and gender may look harmless, 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.

Sexism, racism, and heterosexism all contain the “ism” that makes them recognizable as unjust systems of power, an important feature that is lost when these systems become reframed as identity categories of gender, race, and sexuality. The term “nation” cannot capture the complexities that accompany its use. Historical expressions of nationalism, both state-sanctioned repression and anticolonial movements for emancipation, replicate binary categories of nation as an entity that is inherently bad or good. Replacement terms such as “citizenship status” or “undocumented migrants” aim to take up the theoretical slack by referencing selected populations that are penalized by nationalist ideologies and nation-state policies. Similarly, when understood as a synonym of socioeconomic status which is

often measured by the use of income, the term “class” performs a different kind of reductionism within some versions of intersectionality.

This strategy of using shortcut language to describe intersecting power relations seemingly solves one set of problems, but it creates others. Over time, for example, these terms no longer invoke the original meanings of racism, sexism, nationalism, and capitalism, but instead become recast as floating signifiers that, unmoored from specific critical analytical traditions, can be assembled and reassembled at will. 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” can be repeated so often that it becomes 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. Our analytical framework of power, which offers a dual analysis that identifies intersecting categories of power that are organized across domains of power, is designed to counter these trends. This power-conscious analysis, in turn, suggests that intersectionality is a form of critical praxis within a response to complex social inequalities that are organized by a complex matrix of power.

## **Social Context**

With regards to social context, our book sits in a difficult position: we firmly believe in the importance of thinking and deploying intersectionality in context-specific ways that attend to both historical particularities and the increasing significance of a global context. Yet given the scope of intersectionality, we stress whenever possible the importance of contextualizing intersectionality in a global context, for example, the identity politics of hip-hop and the organization of networked global social movements as simultaneously local and global phenomena. We have done this in part by selecting important social issues and highlighting the political dimensions of a global framework. The term “contextualize” comes from this impetus to think about social inequality, relationality, and power relations in a social context. Using intersectionality as an analytic tool means contextualizing intersectionality’s arguments, both via our selection of examples, but also by being aware of how particular historical, intellectual, and political contexts shape intersectionality’s inquiry and praxis.

Our decisions throughout the book speak to the many ways that we investigate the relationship between intersectionality, local issues, and global phenomena. Knowing that it is impossible to give an exhaustive account of social context for every topic, we instead provide cases where place and space, both geographic and digital, constitute key components of social context. Our discussion, in Chapter 5, of the Rana Plaza collapse in Bangladesh shows how this event went far beyond Bangladeshi national borders. Instead,

this event illustrates the significance of working for an employer that provides dangerous working conditions in factories in other countries. It also shows how the global anti-sweatshop movement redefines global social movement space by exposing how FIFA paraphernalia that was produced by sweatshop labor in Bangladesh was marketed and sold in Brazil. The Rana Plaza case also illustrates how historically disenfranchised people can develop new understandings of their institutional and geographic social context by seeing connections that were formerly obscured. Global social protest occurs both geographically in local places, as well as in cyberspace.

Social context is such a broad term that, in this book, we emphasize the importance of nation-states for providing an often taken-for-granted social context for intersectional analysis. Whenever possible, we make mention of national context to remind readers that the ideas of intersectionality take different forms. For example, we introduce the ideas of Afro-Brazilian feminism, black feminism in the US, and Chicana feminism as sites where intersectionality evolved, not to compare them, but rather to contextualize the arguments of each. National context writ large matters, as do the positions of different social groups within each national context. The term “indigenous peoples” does speak to shared global experiences and challenges, but it also minimizes the unique experiences and challenges of groups within very different nation-states. This theme of varying perspectives that can arise within and across diverse social contexts informs differences within intersectionality itself.

Our emphasis on nation-states within our power-conscious intersectional analysis highlights the significance of political geography of intersectionality’s social location as shaping its intellectual context. For example, here we approach nation-states both as the object of intersectional analysis as well as the setting for intersectionality’s critical inquiry and praxis; for example, using intersectionality as a critical tool differs in South Africa, India, and Canada. Here we stress the institutional setting of academia as a social context for intersectionality’s intellectual and political endeavors. Our analysis of the 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 of our book; our comparison of varying interpretations of identity politics within academia and hip-hop also highlights the significance of the university and mass media as two institutional sites of cultural production; our analysis of the changing contours of intersectionality and diversity within higher education highlights the significance of context. In brief, intersectionality’s institutional trajectories are important for understanding how its ideas instantiate differently in different contexts.

At several points throughout this book, we express our concern that the growth, acceptance, and legitimation of intersectionality within academia and some public policy venues necessarily change 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 raise the question of who benefits from intersectionality's legitimation within academic social contexts. The answers to this question 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" (Bilge 2013) 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 intersectionality's social justice ethos. This may also mean saving intersectionality from ourselves if we 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 the well-known path of mentioning some canonical figures within the field without really engaging with their work, and then using this familiar genealogy as a proxy for the field itself.

Then there is the issue of historic context. The version of intersectionality that we present in this volume reflects the specific historical moment of the early twenty-first century and aims to be a critical intervention in that moment. For many scholars, the time of intersectionality as an idea came "precisely because of the plethora of authors working independently across the globe making vastly similar sets of claims" (Yuval-Davis 2011a: xii). Our discussion of intersectionality's genealogy takes this perspective. Yet it is important to point out that history is always in the making and is never finished. While intersectionality analyzes contemporary issues, it is also simultaneously formed and transformed by them. We see an important role for critical analytical inquiry and praxis at this specific historic moment. In so doing, we corroborate Stuart Hall's insights: "Movements provoke their theoretical moments. And historical conjunctures insist on theories: they are real moments in the evolution of theory" (Hall 1992: 283). For current debates inflected by the growing influence

of intersectionality within UN venues, juxtaposed with increasingly verbal critiques of intersectionality within European academia, 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 periods frame different theoretical and political moments of intersectionality.

## **Relationality**

Relationality references the connections among ideas, among discourses, and among political projects. The term “intersectionality” invokes a different understanding of relationality than that advanced within Western scholarship and political practice. Intersectionality’s basic heuristic, the seemingly simple idea that entities that are typically treated as separate may actually be interconnected, has had a major impact on disciplinary knowledge. The creation of interdisciplinary fields concerned with social justice illustrates the effects of new forms of relational thinking (Parker et al. 2010). This basic idea of examining the possibilities of interconnections and new political relationships among historically disenfranchised groups of people also informs desegregation within nation-states and decoloniality as a signature global phenomenon.

The insight that entities that historically have been conceptualized as separate and oppositional are interconnected and interrelated constitutes a major contribution of intersectionality to a variety of intellectual and political projects. Intersectional scholarship challenges forms of binary relational thinking that oppose theory to practice or scholarship to activism. Instead, intersectional frameworks strive to go beyond assumptions of oppositional thinking to forge a complex understanding of the relationships among history, social organization, and forms of consciousness, both personal and collective (Bannerji 1995: 12). Inspiring scholars and activists alike, intersectionality’s conception of relationality replaces notions of oppositional difference (either/or thinking) with notions of relational difference (both/and thinking) and has generated new questions and avenues of investigation (Collins 2019: 225).

Identifying the centrality of both/and understandings of relationality within much intersectional inquiry and practice, in this book we engage relationality in varying ways. For instance, our core premise that intersectionality is a form of critical inquiry and praxis is a statement of relationality between knowing and doing, a view that sees theory and practice as interconnected. We investigate the ways that the relationships among different groups across differences in power informs their analysis and praxis. We took issue with versions of intersectionality that reduce identity to an apolitical, individualistic category, arguing

instead that identity is always constructed in relationship to and within social contexts shaped by intersecting power relations. We have also foregrounded the importance of relationality for building co-resistance between various social justice-oriented struggles that often seem to be scattered, but may in actuality be interrelated phenomena. Our case of the Afro-Brazilian women's movement sketches out how coalitions that took relationality seriously and attended to both similarities and differences were crucial to the creation and maintenance of a vibrant social movement.

We devote less time here than we would like to examining intersectionality's relationship with similar projects, such as critical race theory, feminism, ethnic studies, or the intellectual debates in which these areas participate. Intersectionality's interconnectedness with other similar knowledge projects is mentioned at various places, but a substantial investigation is beyond the scope of this book (see Collins 2019: 87–120). When engaging with these projects globally, intersectionality must be wary of annexing other perspectives, such as decolonial and transnational approaches, under its wide tent umbrella. When intersectionality enters the Global South via top-down humanitarian, developmental frameworks, and projects from the North, it often erases local resistant knowledges and praxis and silences local knowledge producers (Bilge 2019). A similar erasure occurs through academic moves that ostensibly introduce intersectionality into new Northern contexts, where local struggles and racialized knowledge producers disappear (Bilge 2013). There is a fundamental difference between situations where disenfranchised groups around the world themselves claim versions of intersectionality, as evidenced by Dalit and Romani transnational feminist activisms, Afro-Brazilian women forming an independent black feminist movement, or the global contours of reproductive justice initiatives, and situations where some national or supranational instance imposes a top-down, watered-down diversity qua intersectionality agenda upon historically disenfranchised people.

This caveat also applies to knowledge projects that have an affinity with intersectionality. In a context of increasing commodification of post-1960s knowledge projects, for example, ethnic studies or women's and gender studies, within neoliberal academia, the current decolonial turn in higher education risks treating indigenous knowledges as simple add-ons (Bilge 2020). In the same way that scholars hope to fix their disciplines by adding intersectionality, indigenous knowledges increasingly face similar opportunistic shallow incorporation. There is reason to be wary about easy calls for integrating indigeneity into intersectionality, because such incorporations risk reproducing colonial academic practices. Rather than incorporation, intersectionality scholars should aim for an ethics of deep conversation with indigenous knowledges and question why intersectionality is not systematically used by indigenous scholars. Andrea Smith explains the reticence of

indigenous scholars to engage with ethnic studies: “Many Native studies scholars have refused engagement with ethnic studies or critical race theory because they think such engagement relegates Native peoples to the status of racial minorities rather than as members of sovereign nations” (2012: 76). Taking our cue from Smith, we can extrapolate and presume that this could also very well be the reason for indigenous qualms with intersectionality in our current moment, although collaborations between black, indigenous, and women of color were frequent in the formative years of intersectional thinking and action (see Chapter 3).

But annexing other perspectives need not be the case. Here, the challenge for intersectionality’s scholars and practitioners is to engage in ethical conversations with other emancipatory thought traditions and knowledge producers, whether they are in the Global South or the Global North, and to do so in ways that do not reproduce knowledge hierarchies and the power conferred by intersectionality’s academic capital on the global market of scientific ideas. In the face of the political, social, economic, and ecological urgencies of our times, the viability of social movements that may build an alternative future depends on how well we can practice radical relationality and deep reciprocity with each other and with nonhuman animate and inanimate beings, and work together in co-resistance.

## **Complexity**

Overall, these core ideas of social inequality, intersecting power relations, social context, and relationality highlight intersectionality’s complexity. Because these 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 to intersectional inquiry and praxis. 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.

As we argue throughout this book, 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 advocate 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 and its global reach beyond academia, the practices and ideas of diverse people past and present, in the Global North and in the Global South, come into view.

Conversely, if we reverse the object of our gaze and begin with an expansive lens that focuses on the social actions of projects to counter social inequality, we uncover the ideas of intersectionality in places that remain underemphasized. Grounding intersectionality in social action to address social inequalities and the social projects they engender greatly expands intersectionality's context of discovery. Moreover, this broader view of intersectionality's critical praxis provides a different context for analyzing intersectional inquiry. Narrowing this expansive lens to specific social contexts brings intersectionality within academia into sharper focus.

Intersectionality faces the challenge of sustaining the creative tension between its critical inquiry and practice as a route to stimulating complexity. Building greater complexity into intersectionality's arguments requires cultivating dialogs with and among scholars and activists of the Global South as well as examining social issues that do not seem to be part of intersectionality's focus. The analysis of intersectionality in this book may be of universal relevance, yet there is no way of knowing so without greater participation of scholars, activists, practitioners, policymakers, and teachers from the Global South. We have emphasized the ideas and experiences of social actors from historically disenfranchised groups within the Global North as well in the Global South whenever possible, taking care to do so in ways that do not reduce their experiences to data that reinforce the frameworks of the Global North. For example, our 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 both illustrate the significance of starting our analysis in the Global South, Brazil and Bangladesh, respectively. We also reject trying to fix problems of exclusion by simply adding 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 a global analysis into intersectionality is an ongoing process of broadening dialogs and introducing ever-greater complexity into its critical inquiry and praxis. Attending to global phenomena means that intersectionality must take a critical stance concerning its own social location as a legitimated discourse within the Global North, and must use this position as a way of broadening participation in ways that are not exploitative or tokenistic. Currently, the growth of social media and access to a wide array of ideas within popular culture suggests that intersectionality's ideas are no longer rationed by academic

gatekeepers or legacy media. Bringing more people into intersectionality's dialogs bodes well for its impetus toward social justice.

## **Social justice**

We emphasize the core theme of social justice because, in the face of institutional incorporation that seemingly severs intersectionality from political praxis, we have concerns with versions of intersectionality that may only pay lip service to social justice. As a form of inquiry that grapples with complex social inequalities, intersectionality's *raison d'être* is not simply to provide more complex and comprehensive explanations of how and why social inequalities persist, or to bemoan social injustices in the world, leaving someone else to fix them. Better explanations of social inequality and social injustice have long been used to defend these realities, not dismantle them. Social inequality and social injustice are not the same, although these ideas are often used interchangeably.

As we point out, intersectionality should not be conflated with social justice. Intersectional projects must be interrogated for their connections to social justice, without simply assuming that, because intersectional scholarship examines some facet of social inequality, it is by default furthering social justice. We raise a similar argument concerning diversity initiatives within higher education as a case where intersectionality may invoke earlier social justice traditions, yet where actual programs have been pressured to relinquish initial emphasis on access and equity. Critical engagement has been a strong theme within intersectionality as a field of inquiry, often through questions of social justice. The work of practitioners shows not only how social justice is critical, but also how social justice work challenges the borders between academic and activist work. For example, by challenging myths that racial democracy had been achieved, or that the Black Movement could handle the gendered concerns of women, or that Brazilian feminism was adequate for all women, the social justice activism of the black women's movement in Brazil provides a different angle of vision on social inequality and social justice.

We find there is more to be learned from examining the ideas and actions of people who use intersectionality as an analytic tool for social justice than from merely criticizing those who don't. Working for social justice is often seen as synonymous with intersectionality, primarily because the people who use intersectionality as an analytic tool, and people who see social justice as central rather than as peripheral to their lives, are often one and the same. These people are typically critical of, rather than accepting of, the status quo. We highlight intersectional projects that express a social justice ethos, yet also caution that a commitment to social justice is not present in all scholarship that claims intersectionality. Our arguments throughout the book have varying implications for social justice. For

example, the FIFA World Cup case suggests that competition is not inherently bad. People accept the idea of winners and losers if the game itself is fair. Yet fairness is elusive in unequal societies where the rules may seem fair, but differentially enforced through discriminatory practices. Fairness is also elusive where the rules themselves may appear to be equally applied to everyone, yet still produce unequal and unfair outcomes: in democratic societies, everyone has the “right” to vote, but not everyone has equal access to do so.

Social justice can be an overarching theme that brings the possible connections among critical discourses into sharper focus. The fields of critical race theory, critical race feminism, gender and sexuality studies, queer theory, ecological feminism, disability studies, and critical animal studies all speak to the ways in which various social categories of difference work to place particular bodies at risk of exclusion, marginalization, erasure, discrimination, violence, destruction, and othering. Intersectionality has been focused on bringing together the separate struggles of blacks, Chicanos, indigenous peoples, women, and similar historically disenfranchised people. Yet this strong focus on the significance of the collective identity politics of such groups can overlook the importance of overarching issues that affect these groups and all others. We wonder whether social justice and similar ethical concerns can provide a unifying ethical framework for intersectionality. Shared oppression provides a powerful point of departure for dialogs among historically disenfranchised people. While it is important to recognize shared discrimination and victimization, can this recognition provide a shared vision for intersectional inquiry and praxis?

When it comes to social justice, intersectionality demands more than simply being critical and entails turning critical analyses into critical praxis. Moreover, as intersectionality develops a deeper self-awareness of how social justice has and might inform its own critical inquiry and praxis, it becomes better positioned to investigate its connections to projects that share similar justice concerns. For example, while we only scratch the surface of questions of climate change and the environment, the growing visibility of environmental justice approaches provides an important site for dialog and building co-resistance (Malin and Ryder 2018). Environmental justice studies recognize that social inequality and oppression in all forms intersect, and that actors in the more-than-human world are subjects of oppression and frequently agents of social change. These insights are important for building an understanding of the ways that intrahuman inequality and oppressions function and how they intersect with human-nonhuman oppression (Pellow 2018). In this sense, social justice may provide an aspirational framework of shared interest that simultaneously expands and deepens intersectionality’s critical project.

## Coda

Throughout this book, we have cast a self-reflexive eye not simply on intersectionality but also on our own praxis. One important objective of this last chapter is to clarify our choices. Telling the story of intersectionality does a certain kind of political work in terms of authenticating and legitimizing particular schools of thought and subjects and 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, however temporary they are. 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.

As we wrap up this book, we ask: what ideas and experiences are not here? In what way 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 flattening their differences? Intersectionality can't engage with these expansive questions 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 via expanded global conversations.

We wish that we could have written a book that incorporated more 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 pursuing intersectionality entails. This openness would encourage a dialogical methodology for intersectionality that would advance a more democratic construction of knowledge itself. Equally important is the task of moving intersectionality into the politics of the not-yet, or, in the words of late queer of color scholar José Muñoz, “a utopian political imagination” that enables us to envision something else, a “not yet,” driven by “a desire that resists mandates to accept that which is not enough” (2009: 96). Moving into the politics of the not-yet is moving to a place of sustained hope in a social, political, and ecological climate that may not inspire hope. To move toward this place of the not-yet, it is imperative, we believe, that intersectionality remain open to the element of surprise.

Intersectionality now stands at an important crossroads. Thus far, it 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 in this book. But just because something is difficult does not mean that it's not worth doing. In order to remain a vibrant, growing endeavor, intersectionality must cast a self-reflexive eye on its own truths and practices. We see intersectionality's heterogeneity not as a weakness but, rather, as a source of tremendous potential for emancipatory social change. Intersectionality is a tool that we can all use in moving toward a more just future.