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Intersectional Solidarities and Resistances in Face of Violent Migration Regimes Editorial Sarah Murru, Robin Vandevoordt, Naïké Garny, A. Tancrède Pagès

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## Intersectional Solidarities and Resistances in Face of Violent Migration Regimes

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#### Introduction

Migration regimes affect people's mobility differently along the lines of their gender, race, class, nationality, age, sexual orientation, and more, exposing them to varying degrees and types of violence (Spijkerboer, 2018; Ansems De Vries & Guild, 2019; Kalir, 2019; Welander, 2021). Single men who cross borders irregularly are often hyper-securitized and subject to the constant risk of being detained and deported (Wyss 2022); along their migration journeys, women and men are exposed to different kinds of economic and sexual exploitation (Turner, 2020; Orsini et al., 2022; Freedman, Sahraoui & Tyszler, 2022); applicants for international protection based on SOGI (Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity) claims are indirectly forced to mould their narratives to Eurocentric understandings of nonheteronormative sexuality to have their applications assessed (Dustin & Ferreira, 2021; Giametta, 2017); persons seeking to apply for asylum, family reunification or regularisation are often subjected to the slow violence of 'waiting' due to long, complicated procedures (Hage, 2009; Näre, 2020) and, increasingly, their exclusion from the welfare state endures for several years after they have acquired formal residence status (Hinger & Schweitzer, 2021; Bendixsen & Näre, 2024).

While the effects of violent migration regimes on variously marginalised people have been extensively documented, less attention has been paid to the equally intersectional forms of solidarity and resistance that have emerged in response (Zajak et al., 2021; Ataç & Steinhilper, 2022). We see that the rise of alliances and conflicts between actors with different biographies, backgrounds, and statuses, is at the heart of a debate on practices of solidarity and resistance in face of violent migration regimes. On the one hand, scholars criticise such practices for reproducing gendered, racial, and neocolonial power relations between people that provide support and those that receive it (Pette, 2015; de Jong, 2017; Braun, 2017; Ngombe, 2020; Sahraoui & Tyszler, 2021; Vandevoordt & Verschraegen, 2019). On the other hand, scholars showcase the potential of emerging practices to create new social subjectivities and to mobilise actors into collective political action (Stierl, 2018; Deleixhe, 2018; Della Porta, 2018; Vandevoordt, 2019; Mescoli & Roublain, 2021; Schwiertz & Schwenken, 2021; Della Porta & Steinhilper, 2021; Costa Santos & Garny, 2022). However, while most of these studies draw upon feminist and decolonial theories, they seldom use an explicitly intersectional framework. This is surprising, given the increasingly common call for a reflexive turn in migration studies encouraging scholars to embrace intersectional understandings of human mobility (Gatt et al., 2016; Lutz & Amelina, 2021; Cleton & Meier, 2023).

This special issue brings together a wide range of recent case studies of practices of solidarity and resistance, each informed by an intersectional understanding of the relations between the people that are involved within them. The emphasis of each contribution varies between a critical analysis of how power relations are reproduced and how they are countered. Central to each paper is at least one of three questions that cannot be fully disentangled from one another: how can acts of solidarity and resistance avoid reproducing gendered, neocolonial, or ageist power relations? How can these power relations be countered in a context of structural violence that is unevenly distributed across race, gender, class, sexual orientation, and age? What new political subjectivities and social imaginaries emerge through the collective efforts of persons with sometimes radically different positionalities?

To address these questions, we have brought together analyses on cases involving a diverse array of actors and practices. Some contributions are more theoretical, others more empirical; some focus more on how power is reproduced along intersectional lines, others explore how these power relations can be undone. While the authors in this issue draw on different concepts such as solidarity and/or resistance, they speak to each other through a sensitivity to the distinct positions of the actors involved, and to the dynamic, shifting balance between power and resistance. Rather than situate ourselves firmly within one line of research (e.g. 'autonomous solidarity' or 'constructive resistance'), we explicitly seek to bring together a variety of approaches revolving around the same, broad issue. In this editorial, we

spell out some of the guiding assumptions behind three concepts that are often loosely defined in the context of violent migration regimes: intersectionality, solidarity and resistance. By doing so, we hope to shed light on the relation between these concepts and to identify the common threads that could tie together an otherwise fragmented field of inquiry.

#### Intersectionality

Intersectionality is a concept that serves as a theoretical, methodological, epistemological, political, and ethical tool, not only in academia but also in civil society (Hill Collins, 2019; Freedman et al., 2022). First approached and reflected upon by the Combahee River Collective (1981) to apprehend the 'interlocking systems of oppression' (Hill Collins, 1990), it was coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991) through the metaphor of 'street crossings' to convey women of colour's particular experience at the crossroad of both racial and gender discrimination. The concept has fostered scholarship that complexifies understandings of power and domination by highlighting how social inequalities and marginalisation unfold at the intersection of various power relations (Bilge, 2010). If the theoretical understanding of oppression entails looking into a variety of directions to locate the imbricated forces at play. then methodologically, this has led scholars to think in new ways about how to unveil what lies at the margins (Carbado et al., 2013; Marfelt, 2016; Rice et al., 2019) and how to stay true to experiences that are situated in specific places and times (Yuval-Davis, 2015). Moreover, the gradual establishment of intersectionality as a central concept, interdisciplinary field (Cho et al., 2013), or critical social theory in social sciences (Hill Collins, 2019), emphasises that it cannot be disconnected from the political commitments towards social justice that gave birth to it (Hill Collins, 2015). Strong epistemological and ethical dedications thus anchor scholarship mobilising intersectionality within a broader transformative, political, and justice-oriented project. Unsurprisingly, these ideals, and the concept of intersectionality itself, have been embraced as guiding paradigms for civil society efforts and social movements striving to fight inequalities (Chun et al., 2013; Laperrière & Lépinard, 2016).

In migration studies, intersectionality is used to address the interconnectivity between race, gender, class, and sexuality, by illustrating the interrelated nature of the othering process 'in the context of powerful postcolonial orders of migration' (Manalansan, 2006 in Lutz & Amelina, 2021, p. 66; see also Cassidy et al., 2018; Merla et al., 2024). Despite the criticism levelled at the various categorical approaches to intersectionality and their tendency to essentialise the social dimensions it addresses (McCall, 2005), the concept of intersectionality has facilitated an unprecedented examination of the specific situations and positions experienced by 'migranticised' individuals in their entanglement with other dimensions of inequality (Lenz, 1996, in Lutz & Amelina, 2021, p. 63; see also Cleton & Meier, 2023; Gatt et al., 2016). In this sense, the value of bringing an intersectional perspective to the study of solidarity and resistance to violent migration regimes, is that it helps shed light on how the experiences, actions, and strategies of the actors involved within them are shaped differently by the broader power structures in which they are entangled.

At the same time, intersectionality has traditionally been used as a tool to not only analyse distinct forms of oppression, but to challenge these as well (see Hill Collins, 2015). Cho et al. (2013, p. 800), for instance, coined the term 'intersectional politics' to refer to 'dual concerns for resisting the systemic forces that significantly shape the differential life chances of intersectionality's subjects and for shaping modes of resistance beyond allegedly universal, single-axis approaches.' More recently, Ishkanian and Peña Saavedra (2019) have argued that what they describe as 'intersectional prefiguration' entails:

[...] more than the recognition of diversity or a bid to integrate diverse voices or interests (Bygnes, 2013; Roth, 2008), but is rather concerned with acknowledging, challenging, and transforming relations of inequality and oppression both within group spaces and beyond (2019, pp. 988-989).

In other words, the use of an intersectional perspective implies a sensitivity to the distinct ways in which people are affected by multiple structures of oppression, and to how these structures can be effectively dismantled.

#### Solidarity

The concept of solidarity has a long, complicated history in social theory as well as real-life politics (Dean, 1995; Featherstone, 2012; Oosterlynck et al., 2016; Rakopoulos, 2016). It is deployed by both the political left and right, and it can refer to phenomena as divergent as the rise of ethno-racially bounded national welfare states and the prefigurative practices of autonomous collectives. 'Solidarity' is thus heavily imbued with 'ontological assumptions' about what it is, what it should be, and who can be involved in it (Kapeller & Wolkenstein, 2013, p. 477). In the past decade, the concept has taken flight in critical migration studies, mainly in response to the increasingly violent nature of migration regimes across the global North. In this context, solidarity with people on the move refers to a wide array of practices, ranging from stop-gap forms of support to acts of civil disobedience and collective protest (Della Porta, 2018). It is practised across a multitude of geographies, from the rugged terrain of mountain- and sea-scapes to urban centres, and from public fora to the privacy of individual homes.

Within this literature, solidarity has been conceptualised in ways that are both fragmented and consistent (Bauder & Juffs, 2020). While it is usually defined in an imprecise, intuitive way that implicitly builds on a variety of theoretical traditions, solidarity invariably implies a *political* dimension that sets it apart from 'humanitarianism', 'charity' or even 'civil society' (Della Porta, 2018; Vandevoordt, 2019; Mezzadra, 2021). In a recent article, for instance, Dadusc and Mudu (2021) describe humanitarianism as 'filling the gaps', whereas solidarity seeks to 'create cracks in the system' while, at times, simultaneously enacting alternative visions and practices of migration/mobility. It is not difficult to find examples to support such a clear-cut distinction: humanitarian NGOs that do not publicly question European migration regimes face a lower risk of criminalisation than those that do; and while 'search and rescue' operations near the Libyan coast may be discursively framed as lifesaving endeavours, they may de facto help strengthen European borders by returning those rescued to Libyan shore, exposing migrants to a litany of human rights violations. 'Solidarity', by contrast, refers to practices that help to facilitate migrants' escape from state control (e.g. Papadopoulos et al., 2008; Picozza, 2021), thus 'creating cracks' in the coloniality of asylum and citizenship.

While this clear-cut distinction obviously has the advantage of offering a sense of (normative) orientation, a growing group of scholars has demonstrated the 'hybrid' nature of many existing practices of solidarity (Rozakou, 2016, 2017; Sandri, 2018; Steinhilper & Fleischmann, 2017; Stierl, 2018; Sinatti, 2019; Feischmidt et al., 2019; Vandevoordt, 2019; Vandevoordt & Fleischmann, 2021; Della Porta & Steinhilper, 2021; Schwiertz & Schwenken, 2021). Drawing on his analysis of the political nature of different search-and-rescue operations in the Mediterranean Sea for instance, Stierl (2018) urges researchers and activists alike to explore 'the possibility for political dissent to be formulated and enacted *within* humanitarian reason' (Stierl, 2018, p3). At the same time, in a context of multiple crises, radical actors may find themselves in a situation where their political actions are put on the backburner in favour of immediate social action (Rozakou, 2017; Vandevoordt & Fleischmann, 2021).

In both its ideal-typical and hybrid conceptions, the term 'solidarity' has thus been used mainly to underscore the political and collective nature of a wide range of actions. Through its lens, even seemingly banal forms of practical support may appear as the prefiguration of a more egalitarian society, while conflicting encounters between people with varied positionalities may be found to catalyse a new social movement. Whenever it is used in this context - responses to violent migration regimes - solidarity points to the potential to transform social relations and to reimagine political subjectivities. This would make 'solidarity' complementary to, and congruous with, an intersectional perspective: while the latter is most powerful as a tool that helps to elucidate the specific experiences of people who find themselves at the crossroads of different structures of oppression, 'solidarity' works best to explore how more egalitarian relations are already being put into practice. Both concepts, then, could be used as tools to 'resist' violent migration regimes.

#### Resistance

Similar to the body of work that has emerged around intersectionality and solidarity, the relatively young field of 'resistance studies' has developed from a commitment to understand oppression, as well as to how change can emerge from the proverbial margins (Seppälä, 2016). Spread across disciplines, and inspired by, among others, Subaltern Studies, E.P Thompson's 'history from below' or 'people's history', and Foucauldian perspectives, this scholarship aims to foster 'resistance knowledge' (Vinthagen, 2015a) that can explain social change. So far, two big tendencies have guided these works. One focuses on a more structuralist, state-centred approach to 'contentious politics' (Tilly & Tarrow, 2015; Tarrow, 2022) encompassing the study of social movements, revolutions, civil conflict, guerrilla warfare, and terrorism (Chenoweth & Stefan, 2011; Vinthagen, 2015b). The other investigates less confrontational, everyday forms of resistance (Johansson & Vinthagen, 2020), the 'weapons of the weak' (Scott, 1985; Scott, 1990), and the 'quiet encroachments' of ordinary people within the public space (Bayat, 2010). This broad interpretation has facilitated the exploration of the diverse, multifaceted, and complex means that people use, create, or foster to resist domination, marginalisation, and violence.

Recent scholarship tries to bridge these two big streams of understanding by going beyond binary categories such as collective/individual, (un)organised, or public/private (Lilja, 2022; Lilja et al., 2023). These efforts showcase a complexified view of resistance that approaches it, rather than just a moment of opposition, as an ongoing process (Murru & Polese, 2020). In a similar vein, the concept of 'constructive resistance' - understood as 'initiatives where people start to build elements of the society they desire independently of and in opposition to the dominant structures already in place' (Sørensen et al., 2023, p. 1) - has been helpful to grasp how people both 'resist' oppression and 'construct' more desirable living conditions in small, 'low-key' actions as well as in larger, self-organised endeavours (Lilja, 2021; Sørensen et al., 2024).

When conceived in this way, (constructive) resistance has much in common with how 'solidarity' has been used in critical migration studies. Both terms are often used interchangeably, with 'resistance' carrying the assumption that the people who are acting 'against' violent migration regimes are less powerful than those enforcing such regimes (e.g. Busse & Montes, 2024; Martin et al., 2020; Merla et al., 2024; Rigo, 2019; Tyszler, 2019, 2021; Vandevoordt, 2021). Like 'solidarity', 'resistance' is often used in an intuitive, imprecise way that conflates different theoretical traditions. A notable exception can be found in Maurice Stierl's *Migrant Resistance in Contemporary Europe*, which starts from the premise that:

If we accept that we live in a time of hegemonic mobility control, itself inscribed in global systems of inequality, can or should we conceive of unruly acts of border crossing as acts of resistance? (Stierl, 2018, p. 5)

In his use of the term, resistance is synonymous with struggle and political movement. In the context of migration, resistance is inherently connected to the kinetic movement of people across borders (see also Hess & Kasparek, 2017; Achiume, 2017). Through this lens the archetype of the passive and vulnerable migrant is subverted. Resistance is practised when migrants dissent against the politics to which they are subjected. Resistance is seen in

migrants' unsanctioned crossing of the border(s). Resistance is made manifest in their selforganisation into larger entities of solidarity across intersectional identities.

Similar to Stierl, in her book *Les Damnées de la Mer*<sup>1</sup>, Camille Schmoll (2020) conceptualises the resistance of migrant women in reception centres as an embodied practice that is situated in a specific space. This helps to highlight that, while women (and others) find themselves confined to the margins of Europe, on the fringes of citizenship and in a situation of waiting, isolation, and boredom (Mountz, 2011; Kobelinsky, 2010, 2012), the centres in which they gravitate can become 'a place for experimenting with new practices and a new relationship to oneself and to the space of migration, a politics of life that resists, an autonomy in tension'<sup>2</sup> (Schmoll, 2020, p. 157). In other words, while 'resistance' may have much in common with 'solidarity' and 'intersectionality', it helps us to shift our gaze towards less visible practices that appear less ambitious in terms of transforming broader social and political structures, yet have consequences for the people involved. In a context where overturning violent migration regimes may seem improbable to relatively fragmented actors, 'resistance' can provide an accurate vocabulary to analyse piecemeal forms of support and transformation.

### Insights and contributions: the intersectionality of solidarity and resistance

The articles in this special issue contribute in three different ways to debates on solidarity and resistance in face of violent migration regimes. The first three papers highlight how placing our focus on the intersectionality of solidarity and resistance inevitably results in unveiling power relations and imbalances within these practices, even when they are aimed at countering oppression. In her paper, Liselot Casteleyn explores what unfolds within solidarity practices that happen at the intersection of various power relations and structural marginalisation. In particular, she highlights how solidarity practices, while providing much needed care and support to migrant people, are partly responsible for maintaining a certain status quo by helping asylum seekers in SOGI procedures confirm the dominant, heteronormative, and Euro-centred narrative on LGBTIQ+ sexualities. Two other contributions follow a similar critical assessment of power relations within solidarity practices. First, the contribution of Glenda Santana de Andrade and Jane Freedman, drawing from the French context, powerfully analyses transactional sexual relationships happening between refugees and volunteers as embedded within broader racial capitalism. Second, Zinaïda Sluijs builds on the concept of 'maternalism' to emphasise how discourses of intimacy and care can conceal structural inequalities differentiating, in her case, morally superior white Swedish women volunteers from passive, dependent, and infantilised asylum seekers.

Second, two papers add more theoretical depth to solidarity and resistance from an intersectional perspective. While documenting alternative reception practices, **A. Tancrède Pagès** deploys Marianna Fotaki's (2022) concept of 'embodied solidarity' in documenting squatting practices in the Parisian metropolitan region with an emphasis on an ethics of care revolving around radical inclusion. Given the heterogeneous profile of the squatters, he explores how intersectional identities are foundational in shaping the provision and reception of care in a shared space. **Naïké Garny and Sarah Murru** build on the concept of 'constructive resistance' to document a feminist shelter for migrant women in Brussels. In doing so, they question if 'intersectional resistance' might be understood not only as a set of ethical guidelines for inclusive resistance practices but as practices that, because they are located at the intersection of power relations, emerge from experiences of violence informing their intersectional approach to resistance.

Third, the last three papers all contribute to understanding how intersectionality allows to foster new identity formations within progressive movements, and looks at

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> *The Damned of the Sea* 

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Translation of the authors.

practices of solidarity and resistance as a collective project (Cho et al., 2013). Two contributions highlight how Ukrainian refugee mothers mutually support each other. Located within the Belgian context, **Hannah Grondelaers** documents the way in which specific intersectional identities of refugee mothers shape mutual solidarity. In a similar vein, **Rachel Benchekroun** draws a typology of solidarity practices by lone racially minoritized mothers in the UK with insecure immigration statuses to highlight the role of social infrastructure in facilitating solidarity practices. Finally, **Chiara Martini**'s contribution explores the practices of autonomous organisations and collectives along the Balkan Routes, particularly the creation of 'safe spaces' within urban areas accommodating the needs of both people on the move and local precarious populations. Martini demonstrates how the seemingly innocuous provision of humanitarian material support can quickly become a practice of contentious solidarity within an increasingly hostile mobility regime.

This special issue ends with a commentary by Jasmin Lilian Diab and Maybritt Jill Alpes (2024) who offer a reflection on the concept of time and the use of participatory approaches in the context of humanitarian aid and research in Lebanon. They suggest unpacking the preconceived notions of time in order to develop an inclusive understanding of intersectional resistance and solidarity in both fields.

In conclusion, looking at solidarities and resistances in the context of violent migration regimes from an intersectional perspective allows to better understand (a) the transformative potential of people and their doings, and the structural barriers with which they are confronted, (b) the complex, contradictory and spatially embodied experiences, in which power relations are both reproduced and countered, and (c) the new tensions and dilemmas that arise from practices of solidarity and resistance as they take place in face of violent migration regimes.

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