Democratising, stretching, entangling, transversing: Four moves for rearticulating migration categories

Abstract: Migration categories are powerful in shaping who migrates, how and with what rights. This paper outlines the who, why, how, where and when of current categorisation and its limits. It then suggests four practices that can reshape migration categories: democratising and decolonising them by taking these categories beyond the countries of the global North; stretching their spatio-temporal referents; entangling them with other categorisations based on race and gender and how they are practiced so that their theoretical foundations disciplinary insights and methodologies can be multiplied; and transversing them to see other processes and methods that cut across migrant categories.

Migration has often been seen as an outcome of conflict but conflict over migration has also been the centrepiece of politics and policy in many receiving countries (Gattinara and Morales 2017). Viewing migration primarily as conflictual, between receiving and sending, between migrants and the migration industry which polices migration, between those who welcome migrants and those who don't, are all commonplace. Migration and conflict is also the basis of party politics, with parties lobbying over sentiments around migration (Thorleifsson 2017). It has been fanned by right-wing populist governments in some countries (Mihálik and Jankoľa 2016). This is, of course, not a global phenomena or all-encompassing. For instance, China sees migration not only as conflict but also as a way of building links, and of cementing diasporic relations with their own extended diasporas (Ho 2020). Many countries also

encourage student migration (Gao and Wit 2017; Gu and Qiu 2017). However, even here there is potential for conflict as who belongs and how belonging needs to be evidenced, demonstrated and achieved are always questioned (Anderson 2013). It has led to a politics of uncertainty, which is also used to wedge groups apart.

Politicians and policy makers use classification and categorisation of migrants to remove (but also recreate) some of that uncertainty. Policy makers, in particular, identify criteria and methods for seeing who belongs and how, in order to differentiate between migrant and non-migrant, while politicians tinker with these categories in line with what they think makes them electable and what they presume to be societal needs (Oishi 2020). Categories are therefore widely used as a way of receiving some people and denying entry to others (Crawley and Skleparis 2018). However, categories are also used to understand, argue and lobby for (W. Allen et al. 2018). It is a tool for mobilisation (Cantat 2016). Migration categories therefore sit at the heart of policy discussions – their content, purpose and their deployment.

Migration categories also engage researchers offering critical perspectives on their uses and abuses, their typologies and limitations (Elrick and Farah Schwartzman 2015; Dahinden, Fischer, and Menet 2020). This paper adds to this literature by first bringing together and systematising some of the existing perspectives on migration categories - academic, administrative and those used by migrants themselves. These categories are sometimes held apart but in reality, they are often entangled. This paper argues for the importance of seeing migration categorisation as a set of practices that are occupied by multiple actors with their different tools and for different purposes, and for making these entanglements themselves the object of study. It then sets out some of the current critiques of migrant categories before outlining four theses for advancing discussions on migrant categorisation. These theses, it is argued, are important for addressing the politics of the present.

The rest of the paper is divided into four sections. The first outlines some of the ways in which migration categories have been used: by whom, why, how, where and when. In doing so, it follows others in showcasing how categories are perspectival (Dahinden, Fischer, and Menet 2020) and contextual. The second section outlines existing critiques of categorisation in general and how migration categories raise specific issues. The third provides four suggestions for furthering discussions on migration and categorisation, epistemologically, methodologically and politically. These involve democratising, stretching, entangling and transversing existing categories. Although most of these arguments focus on epistemological issues, each also contains within it methodological and political arguments that, arguably, are intertwined and necessary for addressing migration beyond conflict. The final section offers a brief conclusion.

The architecture of migration categories: who, why, how, where and when?

Categories facilitate sense-making; they are part of how we understand the world. Gillespie, Howarth, and Cornish (2012), suggest four qualities of categories – they are perspectival, historical, re-constitutive of the categories and disrupted by movement – which are all applicable to migration research Migration categories are perspectival, as they vary based on who does the categorisation, e.g. policy makers, politicians, media, academics and so on. They are historical, i.e. have inheritances from the past, but also but also are productive of migration futures. Their practice reconstitutes the categories themselves. Finally, what work the categories are going to do will influence how they are constituted and reconstituted. Arguably, for migration scholars, mobility actually produces categories and does not only disrupt it.

One way in which to address the multiplicity of categories is to break them down and ask who, why, how, where and when categorise come to be. The *who* of migration categories has usually

been addressed through differentiations between the approaches adopted by administrators and researchers on the one hand, and those who are subject of and subjected to categorisation on the other. Some categories are imposed from the outside, but others may be claimed and created by migrants themselves. They may appear to migrants as strategies of how to route themselves prior to movement; as choices, as a selection, on forms and documentation where they 'declare' their category and claim a right (Tuckett 2019); or as a way of constructing their own life narratives as they look back and constitute their lives for audiences – families, communities, researchers and so on. It is thus a changing practice that is productive of strategies, of declarations of identity and personhood but also of memory and how we look back and look forward to who we are (Bornat, Raghuram, and Henry 2009). It is thus subjective as much as it is objective.

Table 1 about here

This difference, based on 'whose categories', is widely used (Dahinden 2016). Oliver Bakewell (Bakewell 2008), for instance, suggests that 'refugee' is an imposed category and does not account for the complexities of the lives of displaced people. He argues that researchers unreflexively adopt administrative categories, enabling the stranglehold of policy categories in analysis and even in lobbying and community support. In effect, it is by utilising the category and then inverting its' implications that NGOs and researchers are able to garner support for those who are displaced but, for him, this is not enough; we need to use more experiential categories that defy and redefine categories. Researchers therefore also need to focus on policy irrelevant categories.

Others, like Roger Brubaker distinguish between categories of practice and categories of social analysis arguing that the categories of practice are more meaningful and capture the complexity of daily migrant lives (Brubaker 2013). In doing so, he points to the reasons, i.e. the *why* of migration categories, suggesting that due attention be paid to how those being researched and administered are listened to. The ubiquity of organisations and actors who are involved in migrant categorisation means that the investments in categorisation, i.e. *why* they categorise, are also varied For instance, it can be a way of producing exceptions (politicians), creating newsworthy items (media), a satisfying job (producing and managing forms), a mundane everyday activity (border control) or of analysing and interpreting (researchers), or invoking claims and rights (migrants).

These different perspectives are inevitable (Bowker and Star 1999) but they are laden with power relations. Different actors have different degrees of powers to categorise. This multiplicity of categorisation can, however, also be instrumentalised by the powerful. For instance, Elrick and Schwarzmann (2015) highlight the difference between statistical categories and social categories, i.e. those that are administrative and those that are used in wider discourses and sense-making. On the one hand, there are differences in the extent to which people and institutions have the *power to categorise*. On the other hand, there are also distinctions in the *power of the categories* themselves. These power differentials arise, in part, through the *how* of categorisation. For instance, administrative or legal categories may be seen as derived from law but 'common sense' categories are derived from these as well as through media and public discourses, contemporary and historical (Gutiérrez Rodríguez 2018). Moreover, the ways in which categorisation is operationalised, through everyday talk rather than through judicial processes is another important vector of differentiation. The power of these categories is not just derived from association or use by policy makers, i.e. *power over groups,* but can also gain *power through everyday circulations* amongst communities and

populations, often reverberating through their use in social media and wider media, i.e. power through reach (J. Allen 2016).

Thus categories are power-laden with some having greater reach and significance because of the circles in which they circulate. How categories are operationalised and what effects they have vary. The ubiquity of categorisation points to how categories are performed at different sites, i.e. the '*where*' and '*when*' of categorisation. The power of particular sites in migration category-making cannot be underestimated. Walking up to an immigration counter and being questioned by an immigration official can be unnerving for many. But categories are also solidified at the global level through, for instance, one global forum for migrants and another for refugees with different participants, concerns and outcome frameworks (McAdam 2019). Categorical differences are also played out at national levels as policy makers respond to political demands leading very often to the monitoring and expelling of undocumented migrants, limiting lesser skilled and family migrants and facilitating skilled migrants. Moreover, categorisation is also done in mundane sites. They are enacted every day in visa and consular offices (Infantino 2014) and on the assemblages associated with transport (Walters 2015), around the world with different stamps, different passports and papers all of which also lead to differential rights . Moreover, when a landlord is required to check and ensure that they are not letting a house to an irregular migrant, or when the public are encouraged to report those with irregular status, they are required to categorise and are invested in both the roles and responsibilities of the state and its' authority to categorise. Here borders operate within the nation in everyday places: while opening a bank account, while renting a house, while paying fees at a university. Bordering is, thus, increasingly a distributed set of activities performed by bank tellers, landlords, estate agents, university staff and so on (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013). We are all invited to, indeed required to, act as border agents, categorising migrants and measuring the threat they pose to a nation.

However, Kunz (2019) usefully highlights how categories are used by people to congregate and not just to aggregate as they are selectively interpreted and used. They enable collectivities. Categorisation can thus also be seen as an event, a claim, often public, to be part of that collective. These collectivities are place-specific and shifting. For instance, refugees in Greece alter the basis of their claims to refugeehood based on the dynamics of a particular place and event. Categories are thus contextual and can be modified based on the conditions of claim-making (Erensu 2016).

The limitations of categories

Although the who, why, how, where and when of categories are useful, in practice they usually operate together. Categories can, therefore, be seen to limit thinking – to box in, rather than provide us with the ability to see the connections and relationships necessary for understanding empirical reality, leading to what some have called the tyranny of categories (Stewart 2015; also see title of IMISCOE Spring Conference 2017).

Researchers have attempted to question particular categories (that they are researching) by showing the diversity of ways of measuring that go to make up the category, i.e. the methodologies involved; the lack of conceptual clarity and distinctiveness and how categories are produced in place and time and are therefore not transcendent. They thus, critique the epistemological tenets of categorisation – distinctiveness and mutual exclusivity - as well as the claims to universality and generalisability that often underpin categorisation (Collyer and De Haas 2012; Bakewell 2008). There are at least three outcomes of this methodological and epistemological fuzziness. First, categories have been critiqued because they lack internal consistency and the logic of homogeneity (Boucher 2020). Secondly, they are empirically difficult to pin down (Baas 2017). As Michiel Baas points out in the case of skilled Indian

migrants they are not necessarily produced through any notion of singularity or difference that is perfectly mirrored in the empirical world. Rather, there are many who straddle categories questioning the distinctiveness of each of the categories. Thirdly, categories have boundary crossing qualities; they are not always adequately or appropriately exclusionary. Together, these point to the lack of mutual exclusivity, i.e. if you belong in one category then you can't be in another category within the same categorical typology, which is crucial to the epistemology of categories.

However, additionally, there are a few qualities of migration categories that make it distinctive and even more problematic. First, migration categories are often not singular. They are already based on a mix of categories. Collyer and De Haas (2012) outline how categorisation involves four sets of qualities:

- Spatio-temporal (internal-international; short-term-long-term)

- Location-direction (South-South; North-South etc.)

- Statutory (regular-irregular)

- Causal (family, student, labour, forced)

Importantly, these categories cross-cut each other. So, students are often seen as short-term and are welcomed through a regular status, often irrespective of where they come from, although African or Asian students might be scrutinised more about their financial arrangements and might find it harder to get a visa. They can't enter the category quite as easily.

But migrant categorisation is not only composite in how it operates but also in intention, i.e. they may involve a mix of criteria. For instance, the skilled migration category involves not just skills or qualifications (themselves splintered across study subject, level of qualification and where qualifications were obtained) but usually age, employability or employment, sector of employment, earning potential and so on. Skills are defined by adjusting these empirical

variables to then form the basis for differentiation. Moreover, the categories are also not always individual. For instance, a spouse's qualifications, age or income may be added to a skilled migrant's application, albeit under the skilled migration entry route (Boucher 2016). Thus, the composite nature of all categories allows both those categorising and the migrants to exercise agency and to identify the categorisation that works best for them at a particular time. But the empirical limits of a category makes categorisation epistemologically unsatisfying. It raises questions such as, what is the core of the category and what sources of data make it possible to categorise; what are its empirical bases?

Secondly, a group of categories is also often juxtaposed, collapsed or simply mangled up with another category group and this is particularly important in migration because of its' highly politicised nature. For instance, valuation occurs because migrant/non-migrant or skilled/lesser skilled is lightly and loosely associated with qualities such as good/bad; hard-working/scroungers and even extended to other descriptors such as nationality, race, migration status and so on.

All these differentiations and valuations are dependent on categorisations but on different types of categorisations which have different empirical bases. For instance, as Sarah Kunz (Kunz 2019) argues that 'expatriates' as a self-identifying category play on their whiteness and colonial and postcolonial advantages to differentiate themselves from the category of migrant. Expatriates ascribe a classed and raced position to migrants and posit this against the neutrality and lack of interrogatability that whiteness produces for the expatriates themselves. Drawing on examples she points to the power of racialised categorisations and the work that race does to draw a boundary between migrant and expatriate.

This is made possible because categories are combined. For instance, migrant/non-migrant may be incoherently united with other categories such as religion and race to demonise the 'other'

(Supik and Spielhaus 2019). Politically, the importance of categorisation lies not in the singular category but on how it is placed alongside other categories, how they are compared and valued differently. Some migrants are valued while others are just tolerated or, more often, treated with disdain. Highly skilled migrants are almost universally desired. Most other migrants – family migrants, lesser skilled workers, refugees and even student migrants - are viewed with suspicion and even hostility. Presumably, the latter group are all seen as less skilled de facto as the welcome extended to skilled migrants is not always extended to these groups. Categories may therefore be used to include or exclude, to devalue or value.

Thirdly, classification is slippery, with both the tools and their deployment adjusted to achieve particular outcomes and given the political nature of migration categories, these shifts can be cataclysmic and sudden but can also sometimes be slow and incremental. The UK state used shifting categories of citizenship, i.e. how the regulations around UK citizenship changed, to evict a number of people who had travelled from the Caribbean to the UK around the time the Caribbean nations gained independence (Olusoga 2019). The changing nature of the policy and of citizenship was applied retrospectively to disenfranchise and deport in what is now known as the infamous Windrush scandal (de Noronha 2019). The sudden change in *what* territories belong to the UK at the time of independence was not accompanied by a change in *who* belongs to the UK. The latter was incremental and changed slowly over time until one day it was implemented and the outcomes criminalised at one fell swoop. These different temporalities speak to how the politics of migration, mobility and territory are being produced. For Bowker and Starr (1999), the resultant twisting and torsion of two times – the time of the body and that of the classification system - can be tortuous. They call this force of power the torque and ascribe it to the *when* of categorisation.

However, the where of categorisation can also be tortuous. For instance, the deportation of dual citizens who have been convicted of crime in France and the UK suggests that citizenship no

longer provokes the constraining framework that it previously produced – i.e. the right to be punished according to the rules of the country of which one is citizen and resident, and where the (sometimes alleged) crime was committed (Fargues 2017). Thus, the state uses the category of citizenship - not their own, but that of another country - to deport. And the right to citizenship is revoked so that arguably citizenship is no longer based on citizenship criteria but on judiciary category, i.e. have they been convicted or not. There is a shift in the category through which citizenship is awarded, historically, legislatively and played out through rearranging spatial connections and rights. In doing so, it renationalises citizenship and sees the evicting space as a constituting itself as a pure space through these deportations (Griffiths 2017). Arguably, then, what we are seeing is not the tyranny of categories but tyranny through categories. It is the basis of current conflict politics.

Fourthly, categorisation is not only reflective of society but also performative, performed through everyday practices leading to the sense that categories sometimes tyrannise migrant lives (Dahinden, Fischer, and Menet 2020). Different types of categories thus occur in the same discursive and affective fields, albeit occupied by a varied range of actors, documents, modes of engagement and purposes. The definition of illegality or irregularity may be defined by administrators using policy definitions, but they bend to and get shaped by what public opinion thinks about irregularity, becoming tighter or looser, depending on their acceptability (also see, Talleraas 2020). Thus, these definitions influence and shape each other.

Moreover, categorising people also produces subjectivities differentially, based on the categories, who categorises, who is being categorised and what are the categories from which an individual is excluded. A migrant may, over time, come to take on the semblance and characteristics of the category which they are assigned as the advantages and the disadvantages of those categorisation get played out. For instance, migrants who are able to bring their family legally may do so, and distinguish themselves from those who can't, who are not seen as having

the skills and income to enable such family mobility. The skilled migrant eventually takes on the cloak of the virtuous minority, the deserving group. These affective and discursive qualities are administratively produced but also get resignified through forms of distinction. Yet, it is in their relationship that this signification occurs, leading common-sense categories to influence administrative ones and vice versa. It raises questions such as how have some categories evolved into others?; how do they constitute each other? This is important because categories are not only imposed but also struggled over and political mobilisation around categories occurs through and not only against administrative categories.

All categorisations, thus, have a life in practice. If claiming a category is a form of practice, then standing day after day and stamping a category on passports is also a practice. The authority and the power to undertake those practices and hence the effects of these practices may arise from different sources. Recognising all these categorisations as examples of practice also questions the imputed authenticity, rigour, level of conceptual abstraction (Brubaker 2013) and instrumentality (Bakewell 2008) of some categories compared to others. All categories can be interrogated based on the motives, dispositions and the pressures of those undertaking the categorisation. Some may be more coherent or exclusionary in principle but not always in practice. Thus, how a migrant is marked up at the borders is not necessarily consistent or replicate by others as categorisation is often discretionary. Administrative processes also break down or may be altered. Some groups of people may simply be forgotten as temporal anachronisms or bear the brunt of changing regulations (Wardle and Obermuller 2019).

The lack of empirical specificity, along with the different valuations, operates powerfully in today's context when anti-immigration rhetoric and conflict around migration attitudes seems to be pre- written into migration. Attitudes towards migration are highly polarised; between migrant receiving contexts and sending ones and also cross-cut by gender, sexuality, religion, ethnicity, as it multiplies across intersections and divides migrants into small groups. These

have found particular expressions in the case of Brexit, for instance (Clarke and Newman 2019), where the final decision to leave was incorrectly attributed to the travails of a white working class affected by austerity-hit UK (see Dorling 2018; Bhambra and Holmwood 2018 for a critique). They purportedly voted to remove other 'foreign' working class groups, with whom they have been placed in direct competition for scarce and diminishing resources. In response, others have pilloried anti-immigrant sentiment and suggested that singular factors such as class barely explains such sentiment. Class itself, then, needs recategorisation (Tyler 2015).

In sum, categorisation has consequences. Although most discussions of categorisations focus on how policy makers' categories influence decision-making at the borders and increasingly within borders, categorisation is performed everywhere. For instance, both the media and researchers shape public understandings of migrants and other adjacent categories such as ethnicity. They selectively collapse variables to produce effects and affects. NGOs may use categories to lobby while categorisation by the people themselves also shape people's sense of self over different periods of time. They may present and re-present themselves as their understandings of categories /life circumstances change. Thus, one of the productive effects of categorisation is that people change their sense of identity. Some of these shifts may be momentary but others can be long-lasting shaping the nation, who belongs to that nation, and how. They can embed or pre-emptively remove the bases of conflict. Although categories and categorisations are increasingly under scrutiny (Benson and O'Reilly 2018), including in migration studies, in the next section I suggest that most existing critiques of categories arise from within migration studies itself. Instead, what happens if we step outside the framing device that migration offers and truly demigranticise (Dahinden 2016). The next section therefore outlines some of the limits of existing critiques of categories and also why it matters.

Four theses for rearticulating migration categorisation: learning from beyond migration studies

Categorisation has not only been widely mobilised within migrant policy and increasingly in media and public discourses, but as we saw above, is also being critical interrogated, especially by researchers (see particularly, Dahinden, Fischer, and Menet 2020).

In the rest of this paper I suggest four further moves towards thinking through categories in migration studies. I argue that even existing critiques of categories have been based within the literature on migration in particular contexts, rather than stepping outside its confines. Stepping out is, however, necessary if categories are to help us move beyond conflictual and polarised analysis and migration responses. This requires particular epistemological, methodological and political shifts. This section therefore highlights four practices that are necessary for rethinking migration categories.

Democratising categories

Democratising categories has long been a call by those working within an Actor Network Theory (Latour 1987) and Science Technology Studies (Callon and Law 2005; Bowker and Star 1999), for whom categories should be open to humans and non-humans alike. Yet, many of their arguments have focused on particular humans, who are left unmarked. It is white western humans whose categorisations are redone through the materials and objects which are involved in these categorisations. Yet, non-white humans and their subjectivities, and what they bring to undoing categorisation has rarely been considered.

In migration studies too, democratisation, i.e. the desire to reduce the authority of 'experts' in categorisation, has been an important objective. Here expertise is ascribed based on objective

knowledge and outside perspectives. Instead it is argued that insider knowledges and constructions by migrants should be better valued (Bakewell 2008). However, in doing so, migration has been the primary experience around which the experience/'expertise' divide has been constructed. Yet, the vectors that are important for different groups of migrants will differ. For instance, one migrant may consider mobility journeys as central; another might think that the nature of the work offered, i.e. how it progresses their career is paramount in how a receiving country appears, a third might find the onward trajectory that a particular overseas degree offers as more important than the country. These other categories – based on jobs, subjects studied, internship opportunities afforded are all equally or more relevant and will impinge on how migration is categorised by migrants. Migrants make decisions based on their whole life experience and so the non-migration categories may actually be more relevant in how migration is experienced. This entanglement of multiple categories, however, is somewhat understudied. Instead, for instance, international student migrants are seen through the lens of migration rather than through the spatialities of study (Raghuram 2013).

For Gross-Wyrtzen and Gazzotti (2020), paying attention to these categories involves not just democratisation but thinking of migrant subalternity. It involves recognising both the colonising gaze through which migration categories and knowledges are produced and the limits to our understanding of the views of those subject to this gaze. It requires ontological uncertainty, epistemological humility and methodological reorientation. In the future, we need to take the other categories that impinge when we think through the 'who' of migration more seriously.

Stretching categories across place and time

Categories are spatio-temporal configurations, i.e. they have a where and a when. They are discursive outcomes of cultural tropes and social formations, but also administrative outcomes of policy decisions responding to very particular 'here' and 'now'.

Moreover, these migration terminologies and categories are often universalised even though they often arise from the particular histories of the management of global South to North migration. For instance, thinking about student mobility as different from economic migration is usually central to migration policy. Yet, students are a central plank of economies in some countries such as Australia, with international student fees underwriting national student fees and state subsidies. These fee flows are enormous and dwarf the flow of aid; they thus act as a negative remittance from the global South to the global North (Raghuram and Sondhi 2017) with countries like UK and Australia increasingly dependent on these movements of money. Considering students as an economic category, i.e. as cash cows or study as an export industry places migration categories within a different matrix of value and valuation (Raghuram, Breines, and Gunter 2020). Students are recast as economic migrants, but here it is the economy of the receiving country that benefits. Where you look at a migration category from, can, in effect, upend categories. Recategorising migration based on how the receiving country is benefiting repositions these categories and highlights what is swept under the carpet by seeing migrants as applicants and supplicants. In effect, the price of categories needs to be better acknowledged.

Similarly, migration is conceptualised as occurring across borders that are often colonial inheritances. They have produced enduring legacies around which migration categories are centred. For instance, notions such as migrant integration produce not only the migrant but also a society, purportedly occupied by indigenous people, into which the migrant has to be integrated (Schinkel 2018). But this notion of who is the indigenous society comes with very

particular temporal cuts. In many countries, indigenous populations have been stigmatised, 'tribalised' and racialised (Chakma 2001); they too are evicted from 'society' as defined hegenmonically/homogenously. Collapsing indigeneity and belonging with length of period of stay precludes as much as it includes.

All categories are also unstable over time so that the nature of categorisation and the ways of categorising are always altering. There is some debate about the history of categories – where they come from, emergence of new categories and why this has occurred (Schrover and Moloney 2013) pointing to the very European histories of the emergence of the refugee category in post war Europe. The temporality to migration categories implicit in migrant – what sufficed in Europe as the differentiation between mobility, migration and refugees - has now become inadequate (but see (Apostolova 2015). This temporality is important, but we also need to take into account "heterogeneous temporalities that mingle and jostle with one another to interrupt the teleological narratives that have served both to constitute and to stabilize the identity of 'the West'" (Gupta 1998: 17). For Gupta (Gupta 1998), writing through postcolonial theory, this requires different relations between different space-times, the space-times of the colonies and how they produced those of the imperial powers and vice-versa, not in neat ways but in intersectional, fracturing ways that stretch, reshape, disassemble, reassemble and fragment categories. The revaluation of knowledge and insertion of categories derived from those who are subaltern, who have been dominated through colonial power relations has become the centrepiece of decolonisation theories (Ndlovu-Gathsheni 2018), but decolonising migration categories and moving beyond the current cognitive empire (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2020) for achieving epistemic and migration justice is yet to become a call in migration research. Decolonising in this context should not be based on epistemic tourism, i.e. borrowing a concept or a term but instead of repositioning the politics of knowledge

production, in, with and for migrants. It requires epistemic humility and methodological decentring.

The spatialities of migration categories are not only situated but also exist within a world of circulation. They are translated and transported, especially in the context of harmonising policies. For instance, the need for collating data and harmonising policy across the EU has meant that migration categories have had to transcend boundaries. However, this has also not been without conflict between the member states and between the normative principles of the EU with different countries (France, Germany) arguing for a sectoral approach awarding extra rights for some while other member states (such as Spain) argue for the importance of harmonisation and simplicity of process and equality for all legal migrants. The sectoral approach, with enhanced rights for skilled migrants, was granted but here too locational variations had to be anticipated and accommodated (Mourão Permoser 2017). The categories required translation as is evident in the classification of skilled labour in the blue card scheme (Raghuram and Sondhi 2019). The countries involved used different criteria and thresholds for the category of skilled migrants and also adopted them differentially with gendered consequences. Thus, the territoriality of categories is always in tension with its extra-territorialities. This matters because although categories have emerged in specific context for particular purposes, their purported specificity also, rather contradictorily, leads to claims to objectivity and assumes transcendence of the specificity. This leads, for instance, to migration policy mobility as some categories and their attendant policies are considered more authoritative.

Categorisation in a world beyond migration categories: Entangling categorisation

Categories exist in a world of categories, raced, gendered and so on. Many writers have explored gender and its complexity within the lives of migrant women (Kofman and Raghuram 2015). But gender and race also come with rich lexicons of theorisation around categorisation (Ahmed 2006). For instance, gendered categories are not only sociological but also etymological. Drawing on Bakhtin's notion of heteroglossia educational psychologists have explored how girls narrate themselves through narratives of monoglossic gender stability (Francis 2010), masking internal diversity and inconsistency. These other bodies of work around categorisation in literature, in etymology, but also in gender studies where categorisation and its political and epistemological issues have been interrogated, have to be discussed alongside migration categories.

Similarly, race too underpins migrant categorisation (Erel, Murji, and Nahaboo 2016; Hof 2017). There is a materiality to race (Pitcher 2008), bodily, institutionally, theoretically. If bodies carry racial markers, then these play out in places and spaces through the force of politics and institutions. But importantly, there is also a context to theorisation, i.e. theorisation aims to attend to the particularities of a political conjuncture. As race questions have become reignited due to the black lives matter movement, we have to ask what old questions around slavery, forced migration and categorisation are being recast through the contemporary moment. What forms of categorisation and recategorisation are required to address contemporary migration concerns?

These questions are not disciplinary or even transdisciplinary but *anti-disciplinary*. Postcolonial theory abounds with the critiques of colonial categories, including those inherited from individual disciplines, as a form of control. For instance, Fanon famously outlines the psychic life of categorisation, with his famous quote about a child who sees him on a train and calls him out saying 'Look, a Negro' (Fanon 2008). He points to the ways in which that is

produced dialectically between him and the white child. These literatures highlight the multiplicity of sites where categories are discussed and produced – literature, history, psychology and so on. Many of these directly abut migration studies and have to be taken seriously. Moreover, these critiques come with different but important political edges. But in doing so, 'we must persistently educate ourselves into the peculiar mindset of accepting the untranslatable, even as we are programmed to transgress that mindset by 'translating' it into the mode of 'acceptance.'' (Spivak 2015).

While most critiques of migration have focused on the internal diversity within categories, it is worth noting that categories may also be called up in more monoglossic ways by those who are the object of the study. This is particularly true within movement politics such as black lives matter where the invocation of a singular category is *the* political point. At times, it is important to hold the place for absolute difference in categorisation and thus echo the very live and demanding questions being posed by a range of decolonising movements within knowledge production. They show us how the categories we use are colonial, at best postcolonial. Addressed through questions of race they suggest that we need to think of different starting points, but also differential outcomes required to challenge inequalities.

Transversing categories

Changing the point of interrogation is crucial. Starting with the issue of migration arguably leads to the inevitability of migration categories. What happens if we start from stories of other forms of social change. Stephen Castles calls this social transformation and thinks about the contexts of change . Similarly, Amelina (Amelina 2017) argues for transnationalising inequalities and using that as a lens through which to view other vectors including migration.

These transversal cuts through migration point to the possibilities of going beyond migration as the primary optic through which to view migration concerns.

In the context of student migration Raghuram (2013) suggests student migrants should be situated, not primarily or only as migrants, but instead as students, recognising that study itself is a transnational project with universalising claims (Madge, Raghuram, and Noxolo 2015). This spatial stretch of knowledge is crucial for producing and reproducing the power of knowledge but also its brokering institutions. Thus, recognising how universities needs certain kinds of mobilities to assemble their positions of power as knowledge producing institutions, but also how knowledge itself requires mobility goes beyond pure economic calculation of the value of students but also recognises student mobilities as part of knowledge mobility more widely. It leads to questions such as what happens to knowledge if we don't have movement? This question is posed outside the frame of migration and instead as a problem of knowledge and its constituents and constituencies. Doing so, also points to the considerable effort required and taken to normalise migration as the category through which students are studied. To unsettle this, we need to see mobility as constitutive and productive and not just as an adjunct. Politically and ethically this is crucial if we are to minimise the tyranny of migration categories in our thinking. Moreover, as we use transversal categories, we see that what constitutes the data on which categories are posed and through which sense is made is itself changing.

Hence, the challenges and shifts are not just epistemological and ontological but also methodological (Scheel, Ruppert, and Ustek-Spilda 2019). The primary data or methods of analysis in such transversal categories may be entirely different and may put together fee-paying students, separating those from those on scholarship, irrespective of migrant status. The meaningful categories are not always ethnic, national or migration based. These other categories can offer interesting challenges to migrant categorisation, unfolding different

practices in which people (migrants and non-migrants) are placed differently, not only differentially.

Data sources are also changing because of technology, bringing its' own opportunities and challenges. For instance, as we move away from census to data analytics aggregated through all kinds of practices, we need to think creatively about what new forms of categories might emerge. Research exploring social media and the links between migrants and non-migrants, or on how mobile phones are used to facilitate migration (Van Liempt and Zijlstra 2017) will use data collected from clicks, from GPS searches – analytics collected and stored by search engines. They will become the objects of analysis and the resultant categories and categorisations may look very different and raise different ethical challenges (Taylor 2016). We need to plan for a world of categorisation that goes beyond populations and individuals to activities and clicks. The materialities in which categorisation are imbricated and through which it is performed are changing apace.

Conclusions

Migration and categorisation are inherently entangled, with migration dependent on, and often subject of, categories. These categories are habitually taken to be administrative or policy related but they are not only that; they can also be generated by migrants and activists. These different categorisations can be the basis of conflict, but it is also by using and abusing categories that conflict is generated. For instance, people may be selectively targeted by being ascribed to a category, or categorisation is used to abuse some migrants. There has been a tendency to position the administrative/analytical categories as opposite to and, often contradictory to migrant's own categories with each seen to have different qualities, sources, methods and authenticity. However, this paper argued, first, that all migration categories exist in the same discursive field of categorising practices. It tabulates some of these practices,

methods and processes, i.e. the who, why, how, where and when of migrant categorisation before outlining why such a practice-based conceptualisation of categorisation is important.

The paper then explores some of the existing critiques of categories. It suggests that much categorical critique currently does not adequately expand existing discussions and can lead to continued polarisation within migration debates. It offers inadequate conceptual clarity on how migration sits within a wider set of processes of which migration might be an effect. It is presentist and focused on the immediate. Unravelling these without understanding its histories and spatialities can have limited benefits.

The paper then suggests four moves to rethink categorisation in the future. It argues that it is important to look at migration categories as existing in a world of categories, to see how they are being done and undone, to stretch and transverse them and to democratise them by starting elsewhere. For instance, democratising and stretching categories raises questions such as: what are the categories that migrants bring with them, or what are the pre-migrant qualities that are relevant in shaping migrant worlds. Moreover, what do those categories look like in other contexts? What difference does it make to think about categories as lived? How do we take on the categorisations and categories meaningful to those whom we study? How can we best engage with resituating categories through demands like black lives matter, which ask for stability rather than decomposition in their categorisations. Transversing categories and entangling them multiplies the axes through which migration categorisation is studied. It raises questions such as: Is the category of the right thing and how does it intersect with other categories? How are they assembled, enacted, performed? When do they have to hold together? Addressing contemporary politics requires looking at the methods of the contemporary moment but also to think about the good work that categories might be doing. Both are required if we have to transact between the generality of categories and the singularity of justice. That is what is required for the politics of the present.

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