

Intersectionality and Migration: A Critical Exploration of the Intersections of Gender, Race, Class, and Other Social Categories in the Experiences of African Women Migrants

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Abstract

Migration is a complex phenomenon influenced by a myriad of factors, including economic, social, political, and environmental factors. However, an emerging perspective in migration studies is the recognition of intersectionality, a concept that emphasizes the interconnectedness of various social identities and the ways in which they intersect to shape individuals' experiences. Intersectionality recognizes that individuals possess multiple social identities, such as gender, race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, and disability, among others. These intersecting identities are not isolated but are entangled in a web of power relations and systems of oppression. When considering migration, the influence of intersectionality becomes crucial as it sheds light on the differentiated experiences and outcomes of migrants based on their intersecting identities. This paper using the Philosophical method of analysis , aims to explore how intersectionality influences migration, focusing on its impact on the decision-making process, experiences, and outcomes of migrants.

Key Words: Migration, Africa, Women, Intersectionality, , Identity

Introduction:

Migration is a complex topic that has engaged philosophers throughout history. Various philosophers have offered perspectives and insights on migration, addressing ethical, political, and social dimensions of the phenomenon. Hobbes (1651), known for his social contract theory, emphasized the role of the state in providing security and stability. He argued that individuals enter into a social contract and transfer their rights to a governing authority in exchange for protection. Hobbes' theory raises questions about how the state should respond to migrants and whether it has an obligation to protect and provide for them.

Kant's(1795) ethical philosophy centers on the notion of human dignity and the moral imperative to treat individuals with respect. He proposed the idea of cosmopolitanism, which emphasizes the equal moral worth of all human beings regardless of nationality. Kant's perspective encourages considering migrants as bearers of rights and deserving of moral consideration.

Hannah Arendt, a political philosopher, examined the concept of citizenship and the rights and privileges associated with it. She highlighted the importance of political participation and belonging to a community. Arendt's work raises questions about the experiences of migrants, their inclusion or exclusion from political communities, and the impact of statelessness on their rights and identities. Seyla Benhabib (1991), a contemporary political philosopher, has explored issues of migration, multiculturalism, and the politics of belonging. She has emphasized the need to reconcile universal human rights with the recognition of cultural diversity, advocating for inclusive democratic practices that accommodate diverse identities and experiences. Martha Nussbaum (2013) an influential philosopher, has written extensively on global justice and capabilities approach. She emphasizes the importance of providing migrants with basic capabilities, such as education, healthcare, and political participation, to enable them to live a dignified life.

Nussbaum's work sheds light on the ethical responsibilities of states toward migrants and the need to address inequalities. Joseph Caren (2002) has made significant contributions to the philosophical debate on migration. He argues for an inclusive approach that recognizes the moral claims of migrants and challenges the legitimacy of strict immigration controls. Carens advocates for a more open and just approach to migration, acknowledging the importance of fairness, equality, and human rights. These are just a few examples of philosophers who have engaged with the topic of migration. Their perspectives contribute to the ongoing philosophical discussions on the rights of migrants, the responsibilities of states, the ethics of borders, and the challenges of global citizenship. The philosophical inquiry into migration helps us reflect on the moral and political dimensions of human movement and the values that should guide our responses to this complex phenomenon.

As an inquiry, Migration studies has permeated into almost every field of inquiry. Peter Scholten et al (2002) has this to say:

Migration studies has contributed significantly to our understanding of mobilities and migration-related diversities. It has developed a distinct body of knowledge on why people migrate, how migration takes place, and what the consequences are of migration in a broad sense, both for migrants. In this field, migration studies has evolved at the crossroads of a variety of disciplines. This includes disciplines such as sociology, political science, anthropology, geography, law and economics, but increasingly it expands to a broader pool of disciplines also including health studies, development studies, governance studies and many more, building on insights from these disciplines.

The decision to migrate is often influenced by a range of factors, such as economic opportunities, political instability, environmental changes, and social networks. However, intersectionality adds another layer of complexity to this decision-making process. For instance, an individual's gender, race, or class identity may intersect to shape their access to resources, their vulnerability to certain forms of discrimination, and their opportunities for mobility. These intersecting identities can influence whether individuals are compelled to migrate or have the means and agency to do so. Furthermore, intersectionality influences the experiences and outcomes of migrants throughout their migration journey. Migrants who embody multiple marginalized identities may face compounded challenges and forms of discrimination. For example, migrant women of color may experience gender-based violence and racial discrimination, while LGBTQ+ migrants may face persecution due to their sexual orientation or gender identity. These intersecting forms of discrimination can shape migrants' access to resources, employment opportunities, social support, and legal protections in the destination country, ultimately influencing their integration and well-being. Understanding how intersectionality influences migration is essential for policymakers, practitioners, and scholars involved in migration studies. By recognizing the interconnectedness of social identities and the ways in which they shape migration experiences, interventions can be developed to address the unique challenges faced by different groups of migrants. Policies and programs that are sensitive to intersectional dynamics can promote more inclusive and equitable migration outcomes, ensuring that the rights and well-being of all migrants are protected. Intersectionality plays a critical role in understanding migration by illuminating the ways in which individuals' intersecting social identities shape their decision to migrate, their experiences during migration, and their outcomes in the destination country. Recognizing and addressing the influence

of intersectionality in migration is essential for fostering inclusive and equitable migration systems and promoting the well-being of diverse migrant populations

Conceptual framework

Migration

Migration refers to the movement of individuals or groups of people from one place to another, typically involving a change in their permanent residence. People migrate for various reasons, including economic, social, political, and environmental factors. Migration according to the International Organisation for Migration (2015) is: “the movement of a person or a group of persons, either across an international border or within a State”.. It is a population movement, encompassing any kind of movement of people, whatever its length, composition and causes; it includes migration of refugees, displaced persons, economic migrants and people moving for other purposes, including family reunification. It is only when migration takes place that we have a migrant. If such is the case, then who is a migrant? The United Nations defines a migrant as “an individual who has resided in a foreign country for more than one year irrespective of the causes, voluntary or involuntary, and the means, regular or irregular, used to migrate”. Under such a definition, those travelling for shorter periods as tourists and businesspeople would not be considered migrants. However, common usage includes certain kinds of shorter-term migrants, such as seasonal farm-workers who travel for short periods to work planting or harvesting farm products.

Here are a few types of migrants.

- ❖ (a)Economic Migrants: People may migrate in search of better job opportunities, higher wages, or improved living conditions. This type of migration often occurs from developing countries to developed ones.
- ❖ Forced Migrants: Forced migrants happens when individuals are compelled to leave their homes due to conflicts, persecution, natural disasters, or other threats to their safety. Refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) fall under this category.
- ❖ Internal Migrant: Internal migrants refers to people who move around within the same country. It can occur due to rural-urban migration, where individuals move from rural areas to cities in search of better economic prospects or improved quality of life.
- ❖ International Migrants: International migrants are people who cross national borders. It can be voluntary or forced and is often driven by a combination of economic, social, political, or environmental factors.

Migration can have both positive and negative impacts. On one hand, migrants contribute to the economic growth of their destination countries by filling labor market gaps, starting businesses, and paying taxes. They also contribute to cultural diversity and bring new ideas and skills. On the other hand, migration can strain resources in both the origin and destination countries and can give rise to social and economic challenges. It's important to note that migration is a complex phenomenon, and its causes and consequences can vary widely depending on the context and individual circumstances.

- ❖ Migration as a complex phenomenon is influenced by a variety of factors, both push and pull factors, that motivate individuals or groups of people to move from one location to another. Here are some common causes of migration and the sources I got it from:

- ❖ **Economic Factors:** Chiswick, B. R. (2000) said that “economic reasons often drive migration”. People may move in search of better employment opportunities, higher wages, or improved living standards. Economic disparities between regions or countries can lead individuals to seek better economic prospects elsewhere.
- ❖ **Social and Political Factors:** Castles, S., de Haas, H., & Miller, M. J. (2014) noted that “Sociopolitical instability, persecution, conflict, or human rights violations can force individuals or communities to migrate to ensure their safety and security”. Political unrest, civil wars, or discrimination based on ethnicity, religion, or political beliefs often result in forced migration.
- ❖ **Environmental Factors:** McLeman, R., & Smit, B. (2006). Noted that “environmental factors such as natural disasters, climate change, or ecological degradation can trigger migration”. Rising sea levels, droughts, floods, or other extreme weather events can disrupt livelihoods, destroy homes, and displace communities, forcing them to migrate.
- ❖ **Demographic Factors:** Lee, E. S. (1966) said that: “Changes in population dynamics, including rapid population growth, aging populations, or demographic imbalances, can influence migration patterns”. Demographic factors can create pressure on resources, infrastructure, and social services, leading individuals or families to seek better opportunities elsewhere..
- ❖ **Education and Job Opportunities:** Docquier, F., Lowell, B. L., & Marfouk, A. (2009) noted that: “Access to quality education or specialized job opportunities can also drive migration. Students may choose to pursue higher education abroad, while skilled professionals may migrate to countries where their skills are in demand, leading to brain drain in their home countries”.

It is important to note that migration is a multifaceted phenomenon, and individual migration decisions can be influenced by a combination of factors rather than a single cause. Africa like many other countries of the world has had its own fare share of people migrating for better standard of living especially with the recent happenings in Nigeria. It is important to recognize that migration in Africa is influenced by a complex set of factors, including economic, social, political, and environmental conditions. Policies addressing migration within and from Africa should consider the specific needs and challenges faced by migrants, such as improving livelihood opportunities, promoting regional cooperation, addressing conflicts, and ensuring the protection of human rights for migrants and displaced persons..

Africa

Africa is a diverse continent located primarily in the Eastern Hemisphere. It is the second-largest and second-most populous continent, with a population of over 1.3 billion people. Africa is known for its rich cultural heritage, ethnic diversity, and natural resources. Geographically, Africa is bordered by the Mediterranean Sea to the north, the Atlantic Ocean to the west, the Indian Ocean to the east, and it extends southward to the convergence of the Atlantic and Indian Oceans. The continent is home to a wide range of landscapes, including vast deserts like the Sahara in the north, the lush rainforests of Central Africa, the savannas of East Africa, and the mountain ranges such as the Atlas Mountains and the Rwenzori Mountains.

Africa has a complex history, with ancient civilizations like Egypt, Carthage, and Mali contributing to its rich cultural heritage. The continent has experienced various colonial periods, primarily during the 19th and 20th centuries, which have shaped its current political boundaries and socioeconomic conditions. Africa is home to a diverse array of languages, with over 2,000 different languages spoken across the continent. The most widely spoken languages include Arabic, Swahili, Hausa, Amharic, Yoruba, and Zulu. The continent is known for its abundant natural resources, including oil, gas, minerals (such as gold, diamonds, and copper), and agricultural products. However, despite its resource wealth, Africa faces significant challenges, including poverty, political instability, conflicts, inadequate infrastructure, and health issues such as HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other infectious diseases.

In recent years, Africa has shown promising signs of economic growth and development, with several countries experiencing positive changes in governance, increased foreign investment, and improvements in education and healthcare. Regional integration efforts, such as the establishment of the African Union (AU) and the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), aim to promote cooperation, trade, and development across the continent. It's important to recognize that Africa is a vast and diverse continent with a range of experiences and realities across its 54 recognized countries. Generalizations should be avoided, and individual countries and regions within Africa should be examined with their unique histories, cultures, and challenges in mind.

Migration patterns and the reasons why Africans migrate are influenced by a multitude of factors. It is essential to note that migration is a complex phenomenon influenced by individual motivations, economic conditions, political factors, conflict, and other social and environmental circumstances. Edward M e tal (2020) noted that : “Economic factors are often a significant driver of migration. Many Africans seek better job prospects and economic opportunities abroad. High unemployment rates, limited job prospects, and poverty in their home countries can motivate individuals to migrate in search of improved livelihoods”.

Political instability as noted by Joanne van Selm (2015) and armed conflicts, and civil unrest can displace people and force them to flee their home countries. Conflicts in countries such as South Sudan, Somalia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Eritrea have resulted in significant refugee outflows. Environmental Factors: Environmental challenges as was noted by Achille Mbembe (2015) such as droughts, desertification, and food insecurity, can drive migration. Climate change is increasingly affecting African countries, impacting agricultural productivity and exacerbating existing vulnerabilities. Julia Bredtmann et al (2015) noted that Education and Skill Enhancement can influence migration. Some Africans migrate to access better educational opportunities or to gain specific skills not readily available in their home countries. This type of migration is often driven by aspirations for higher education and professional development. Family reunification as was Rinus Penninx et al (2016) noted by is a common motivation for migration. Africans may migrate to join family members who have already settled in other countries, seeking to reunite with their loved ones and benefit from established networks.

Women

The department of ‘Division for the Advancement of Women Department of Economic and Social Affairs United Nations’ presented its findings on “WOMEN AND INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION” to the Second Committee of the General Assembly at its fifty-ninth session (A/59/287), addresses key issues related to women and international migration. A summary of its findings is seen below:

The migration of women has always been an important component of international migration. As of 2000, the United Nations PopulatioDivision estimates that 49 per

cent of all international migrants were women or girls, and that the proportion of women among international migrants had reached 51 per cent in more developed regions. Women often migrate officially as dependent family members of other migrants or to marry someone in another country. Female migrants are, however, increasingly part of flows of migrant workers, moving on their own to become the principal wage earners for their families. Most migrant women move voluntarily, but women and girls are also forced migrants leaving their countries in order to flee conflict, persecution, environmental degradation, natural disasters or other situations that affect their security, livelihood or habitat.

The department of 'Division for the Advancement of Women Department of Economic and Social Affairs United Nations' again noted the importance of gender in any discussion that concerns migration because gender has a lot of roles to play. The findings of the could also be summarized below:

As a key organizing principle of society, gender is central to any discussion of the causes and consequences of international migration, including the process of decision-making involved and the mechanisms leading to migration. Previous approaches to documenting and understanding international migration have often disregarded the migration of women. Analytical frameworks either ignored the participation of women in international migration and their contributions or assumed that the causes and consequences of international migration were similar for migrant women and migrant men, thus avoiding an investigation of how migration and its outcomes differ by sex. It is important to understand the causes and consequences of international migration from a gender perspective because hierarchical social relations related to gender shape the migration experiences of migrants, whether male or female. Understanding whether migration occurs because of gender inequality or whether migration itself helps to perpetuate gender disparities is important to guide the formulation of policy and measures to address the specific needs of women who migrate

Women and migration is a topic that encompasses the experiences, challenges, and opportunities that women face when they move from one country or region to another. Migration can occur for various reasons, including economic, social, political, or environmental factors. While migration has traditionally been associated with men, women now constitute nearly half of all international migrants worldwide. Women may migrate for unique reasons such as seeking employment opportunities, escaping gender-based violence, joining family members, or pursuing education. Women's motivations for migration can be influenced by factors such as gender inequality, limited economic opportunities, and cultural norms. Female migrants often face distinct challenges and vulnerabilities during the migration process. These can include exploitation, trafficking, discrimination, and human rights abuses. Women migrants may also encounter difficulties accessing healthcare, education, legal protection, and social services in their host countries. Many women migrate for employment purposes, particularly in sectors such as domestic work, care work, agriculture, and garment manufacturing. These occupations often come with low wages, poor working conditions, long hours, and limited legal protection. Female migrant workers

may also experience gender-based violence and harassment in the workplace. Women may migrate to reunite with their families, particularly as wives, mothers, or daughters. Family reunification policies and processes can pose significant challenges, including lengthy separation periods, high costs, and complex legal requirements. In some cases, women face barriers to obtaining residency or citizenship rights through family ties.

Female migrants play a significant role in sending remittances, which are financial transfers sent back to their home countries. Remittances can contribute to poverty reduction, economic development, and improving the well-being of families and communities left behind. However, women's ability to control and invest remittances may be constrained by social and cultural norms. Empowerment and agency: Migration can also offer women opportunities for empowerment and personal growth. Women who migrate may gain access to education, skills training, better job prospects, and increased autonomy. Additionally, women's migration can challenge traditional gender roles and norms, promoting gender equality and social change. Governments and international organizations are increasingly recognizing the need to address gender-specific aspects of migration. Policies should aim to protect and promote the rights of women migrants, address gender-based violence and discrimination, ensure access to essential services, and support women's empowerment. Comprehensive migration policies should consider the intersecting factors of gender, migration status, and other forms of social disadvantage.

It is important to acknowledge that women's experiences of migration are diverse, shaped by intersecting factors such as class, race, ethnicity, age, and migration status. Therefore, it is crucial to adopt an intersectional perspective when analyzing and addressing the challenges and opportunities faced by women in the context of migration.

Intersectionality

Kimberlé Crenshaw (2016) the chief protagonist of the term “intersectionality said that: "Intersectionality is a lens through which you can see where power comes and collides, where it interlocks and intersects. It's not simply that there's a race problem here, a gender problem here, and a class or LGBTQ problem there. Many times that framework erases what happens to people who are subject to all of these things." Patricia Hill Collins (2000) said that: "Intersectionality is a way of understanding and analyzing the complexity in the world, in people, and in human experiences. Intersectional theory suggests that oppressive institutions, such as racism, sexism, classism, heterosexism, ableism, and xenophobia, among others, are interconnected and influence each other”.

Social categories intersect with migrants in various ways, and these intersections can have significant implications for their experiences and outcomes. The intersectionality framework, developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw, highlights how different social categories such as race, gender, class, and nationality intersect to shape individuals' experiences of oppression and privilege.

- ❖ **Race and Migration:** Bloch, A. (2011) was of the opinion that “race plays a crucial role in how migrants are treated and perceived in different societies”. De Genova,(2002) also noted that “racialized migrants often face systemic discrimination, racial profiling, and unequal treatment in immigration policies, employment, housing, and access to social services”. For example, studies have shown that Black migrants in Western countries often experience higher levels of discrimination and have more limited opportunities compared to their white counterparts
- ❖ **Gender and Migration:** (Hochschild, 2000; Anderson & Rogaly, 2005) noted that “gender is another significant social category that intersects with migration. Migrant women often

face unique challenges, including gender-based violence, exploitation, and limited access to healthcare and education. They may also experience intersecting forms of discrimination based on their race, nationality, and class. For instance, studies have shown that migrant women engaged in domestic work are vulnerable to labor exploitation and abuse

- ❖ **Class and Migration:** (Massey et al., 1994; Portes & Zhou, 1993) noted in their different works how Socioeconomic class intersects with migration in various ways. Migrants from low-income backgrounds often face economic challenges, such as precarious employment, low wages, and limited access to social welfare systems. Class-based discrimination can further exacerbate the marginalization of migrants, particularly those with limited financial resources. Research has shown that the economic conditions and opportunities available to migrants can vary significantly depending on their class position.
- ❖ **Nationality and Migration:** Shachar, A. (2009) said that “the nationality of migrants significantly influences their treatment and legal status in receiving countries”. Different immigration policies, laws, and practices often result in differential treatment and varying levels of protection for migrants from different countries. The concept of "deservingness" is frequently invoked, leading to preferential treatment for migrants from certain countries while marginalizing others. This creates disparities based on nationality in terms of access to asylum, visas, and rights.

Identity

Identities according to Ashmore et al (2004) are “social categories in which an individual claims membership as well as the personal meaning associated with those categories”. The concept of identity in relation to migration is multifaceted and encompasses various dimensions, including personal, cultural, social, and national identities. Migration can significantly impact an individual's sense of self and how they identify with different aspects of their identity. Here are some references that explore the relationship between identity and migration: Risman (2004) said that: “race and socioeconomic status, for example, always intersect as axes of domination, but the social processes that create and maintain them are not necessarily identical. Gendered images support racial domination, but racial domination can hardly be attributed to gender inequality”. Collins (1990) noted that: black men’s inferiority gets promoted through constructions of hypersexuality”. While Collins (2000) also said that: Black women’s inferiority gets promoted through sexualized images such as Jezebel or welfare queen”.

The formation of migrant identity is a complex and multifaceted process that is influenced by various factors, including social identities. Social identities are the different aspects of an individual's self-concept that are shaped by their membership in various social groups, such as gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, and socioeconomic status. When it comes to migrants, their social identities intersect with their identity formation in several ways. Migrants often navigate multiple identities simultaneously. They may have a sense of belonging to their country of origin, while also seeking integration and acceptance in their host country. These multiple identities can be influenced by factors such as language, culture, and heritage, and they may shift over time as migrants adapt to new environments and experiences. Migration involves encounters with different cultures and often leads to the creation of hybrid identities. Migrants may blend aspects of their home culture with elements of the host culture, forming a unique identity that

reflects their cultural diversity. This hybridity can manifest in language use, food preferences, traditions, and customs, as well as in the values and beliefs held by migrants.

Migrants may face intersecting forms of discrimination and privilege based on their gender, race, ethnicity, or other social identities. For example, migrant women may experience specific challenges and discrimination that differ from those faced by migrant men or native-born women. Intersectionality helps understand how different aspects of identity influence migrants' experiences and access to resources. Social identities can shape how migrants are perceived by others and how they perceive themselves. Stereotypes and biases associated with particular social identities can impact the integration process and identity formation of migrants. For example, racial or ethnic stereotypes may lead to discriminatory treatment or hinder social inclusion, affecting how migrants view themselves and how they are viewed by society.

Migrants often maintain connections with their home countries and communities, leading to the development of transnational identities. These identities may involve a sense of attachment and belonging to both the home and host countries, resulting in a complex interplay of social identities. Transnational connections can be maintained through communication, remittances, participation in cultural events, and engagement in political or social issues of both the home and host countries. Social identities are embedded in power dynamics that influence migrants' identity formation. Power imbalances related to gender, race, and socioeconomic status can shape the experiences and opportunities available to migrants. These power dynamics can affect migrants' self-perception, sense of agency, and the choices they make regarding their identity.

It is important to note that the ways in which social identities intersect with migrant identity formation are highly individual and context-dependent. Each migrant's experience will be unique, influenced by personal background, migration history, social environment, and personal agency. Understanding the complex interplay between social identities and migrant identity formation requires recognizing the diversity and complexity of migrants' experiences and narratives.

Recommendations

Dealing with conflicting identities resulting from the intersection of social categories can be challenging, but there are strategies and approaches that migrants can use to navigate this complex issue. Here are some suggestions:

- ❖ **Self-reflection and self-awareness:** Take the time to reflect on your own identity and understand the various social categories that intersect within you. Recognize that your identity is multifaceted and that conflicts may arise due to societal expectations or stereotypes associated with each category.
- ❖ **Embrace complexity:** Acknowledge that having multiple identities is normal and that it is okay to have conflicting feelings or experiences. Embrace the complexity of your identity and understand that it is a unique blend of various cultural, ethnic, religious, and other social influences.
- ❖ **Seek support and community:** Connect with individuals or communities who share similar experiences or who can relate to the challenges you face. This might involve joining migrant support groups, participating in cultural or religious organizations, or seeking out online communities where you can discuss and share your experiences.
- ❖ **Educate yourself:** Learn more about the social categories that intersect within you and the experiences of others who share similar backgrounds. Engage in reading, research, or

attending workshops that can help you understand the social dynamics and historical context related to your identities.

- ❖ Develop a personal narrative: Constructing a personal narrative that integrates and celebrates your various identities can be empowering. Reflect on the positive aspects and strengths associated with each category, and find ways to weave them together in a way that feels authentic to you.
- ❖ Challenge stereotypes and biases: Take an active role in challenging stereotypes and biases associated with any of your intersecting identities. This can involve educating others, sharing personal stories, or participating in advocacy work to promote understanding and inclusivity.
- ❖ Practice self-care: Dealing with conflicting identities can be emotionally and mentally draining. Take care of yourself by practicing self-care activities that help you maintain a sense of balance and well-being. This may include engaging in hobbies, seeking therapy or counseling, practicing mindfulness or meditation, or connecting with nature.

Remember, the journey of reconciling conflicting identities is ongoing and unique to each individual. Be patient with yourself and give yourself the time and space to explore, understand, and embrace the complexity of who you are.

Conclusion

Intersectionality influences migrants by recognizing that their experiences and challenges are shaped by the intersection of multiple identities, such as race, ethnicity, gender, class, and more. It highlights the need to consider the unique circumstances faced by different groups of migrants, addressing discrimination, marginalization, and vulnerabilities they may encounter. By acknowledging intersecting identities, policies and interventions can be developed to ensure equal access to resources, protection, and opportunities for all migrants, regardless of their diverse backgrounds.

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