

CONVERSATION

Intersectionality and food consumption: a roundtable

Stefan Wahlen, stefan.wahlen@uni-giessen.de
University of Giessen, Germany

Marie Plessz, marie.plessz@inrae.fr
INRAE/CMH, France

Wesley Dean, wesleydean@ifro.ku.dk
Kia Ditlevsen, kmd@ifro.ku.dk
University of Copenhagen, Denmark

Stergios Magkriotis, stergios.magkriotis@ed.ac.uk
University of Edinburgh, UK

Vasco Ramos, vasco.ramos@ics.ulisboa.pt
University of Lisbon, Portugal

Intersectionality is a concept that has received little attention in scholarship on consumption, despite its significant relevance. Marie Plessz and Stefan Wahlen organised a roundtable held at the European Sociological Association (ESA) Consumption research network (RN5) interim meeting, 2 September 2022, in Oslo. This is a summarised and edited transcript of this roundtable discussion. As such, it advances the conceptual lens of intersectionality applied to (food) consumption studies and critically assesses possible future avenues of research that build on existing approaches. It first discusses the role of social and political positions that might be considered intersectionally, to then outline central characteristics as well as empirical strategies when investigating food. This transcript also showcases a possible novel format that is welcomed in the journal *Consumption and Society*.

Key words food • intersectionality • power • social positions

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Stefan Wahlen: Welcome to this roundtable on intersectionality and food consumption. Together with Marie Plessz, we have prepared this roundtable to

initiate a debate on this theoretical approach. Marie is going to introduce some basic ideas on intersectionality, maybe not everyone is familiar with the concept. After this brief introduction, four discussants are going to introduce themselves and how their research relates to intersectionality. We are already very curious to listen to your experiences, to your insights and a lively discussion. Now I pass the floor to Marie Plessz who will briefly share some introductory thoughts.

Marie Plessz: Thank you. So, when we thought about this roundtable with Stefan Wahlen, our starting point was whether there is anything going on with food and intersectionality and how should we address it? Intersectionality is a theoretical framework that has made inroads into European sociology. So, what to do with it, and why should we care? Well, I think that recent crises have reminded us that we live in unequal societies. There are still many people living in poverty. Examples range from the Greek public debt crisis to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Ukraine war has raised our attention to the fact that not everyone has equal access to food. Movements such as the Indignados in Spain or the yellow vests in France have been very vocal about inequalities. Plus, we are now more and more conscious that we, in Europe, are part of a larger colonial or postcolonial world. This major divide might be experienced by people all over the world. Intersectionality is a way to connect these divides in social positions. However, even if intersectionality is relevant for the sociology of consumption, it is not completely acknowledged so far, at least not in Europe.

What does intersectionality mean? I, on purpose, don't say what it means exactly, because I don't think there is one exact definition. In her review, Patricia Hill Collins (2015) says there are definitional dilemmas about intersectionality. There is a narrow definition that she spells out this way: 'Intersectionality references the critical insight that race, place, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation, ability and age operate not as unitary, mutually exclusive entities, but rather as reciprocally constructing phenomena' (Collins, 2015: 2). I think this narrow definition contains two main points. First, intersectionality is about power relationships, not only about social positions. Power relationships between mutually defining positions. For example, being White only means something if you are othering non-Whites and relates to power relationships around race. Also, race complicates class divisions. Second, the definition is about representation, about political representation. For example, the visibility or the invisibilisation of the various positions that we hold in these interacting power relationships matter. This means it's not the same to be White and to be a White woman. It's not the same to be a White woman and to be a Black woman, but often this difference is blurred and obscured. And the fact that it is blurred affects the experience of Black and White women.

This definition has been much used in research on social movements, discrimination, legal studies, public policy studies, and so on. And it's harder maybe to see how it could be relevant for the study of everyday mundane practices like food consumption and eating, because we are interested in invisible practices and often, in private spaces. The second definition I found is much more open. Sometimes we use intersectionality just to say that the experience of people in a dominated position is not the same when they are women or men, and so we are back to position instead of power relationship. In quantitative research, it often happens that people speak of intersections and measure it with interaction terms in a regression model. Maybe this is not a fully intersectional approach according to the first definition. So, the question which arises here is: can the concept of intersectionality be actually useful

for the kind of sociology of consumption that we are interested in and can it help us generate or convey new knowledge in our field of research?

Stefan Wahlen: Thanks for this introduction to intersectionality, we surely have some common ground to start with. We asked our discussants to reflect upon these aspects beforehand. I now would like to ask each of you to briefly introduce yourself and share how your own work on food consumption relates to intersectionality.

Vasco Ramos: My name is Vasco Ramos. I am a sociologist from the Institute of Social Sciences at the University of Lisbon. My research lies at that juncture between the sociology of families and life course, and the sociology of consumption and food. I am interested in the idea of trajectories of food practices and how they relate to broader social trajectories. As my work progressed, I began to focus on a specific life course transition, the transition to parenthood. However, I'm not focusing on feeding the child but on the overall logic of food work: acquisition, preparation, eating and even food disposal.

I am working on the hypothesis that transitional periods, such as becoming a parent, getting married or getting divorced, are prone to a reassessment of practices. However, the changes that might occur are contingent on the previous trajectory and current material circumstances. So far, I have interviewed men and women who became parents in the last three to four years. Following that, I will continue my fieldwork with kitchen tours and participant observations, such as food preparation and shopping, as well as interviews. My theoretical and methodological perspective is inspired by practice theories, more from the first generation like Bourdieu and less by Schatzki, Reckwitz and others. To move forward, there are additions to Bourdieu's approach that need to be deployed. I am resorting to qualitative methods.

How is intersectionality relevant to me? Honestly, it was not at the forefront of my research. It wasn't an object of study. Yet the literature I have been following and episodes during fieldwork made me realise that it could be a relevant concept to frame the life stories that I'm hearing and how individuals relate to food. The narratives I have collected reflect aspects of class, gender, migration and ethnic inequality, sometimes interlocked in a way that leads back to the notion of intersectionality. The idea makes sense to frame differences in exclusion in consumption in the past and the present. I believe that, in the future, intersectionality will be a thinking tool in addressing many aspects of consumption and food.

Kia Ditlevsen: That's really interesting. I am Kia Ditlevsen from Copenhagen University and I am currently working on a research project together with Bente Halkier and Lotte Holm. We look at gendered food practices and discourses of health and food among disadvantaged people. Here we already have two really classic intersections, between gender and class. In this project we look at food practices, but we also have the ambition to include a notion about social hierarchies and inequalities. I think that some of the newer practice theories, insisting on flat ontologies, are not really able to grasp social hierarchies and inequalities. So, on one hand, I also tend to just turn back to Bourdieu: this is a safe place and intersections are also accounted for there. But, I think we can also think with newer intersectionality theories. Understanding research results through the lens of feminist scholars can help us to understand some of these unjust distributions, for instance, in our work. In our research we find a strong discourse about the healthiness of food, about how you ought to eat. And this is something that some participants, the disadvantaged

people, don't have access to live up to. So, this is, of course, something that is unjust. And in order to grasp that, intersectionality is really helpful.

Alongside this, I also work on research about the consumption of organic foods and sustainability practices. And here I think that it is increasingly important also to take this intersectional perspective and consider how different distinctions are at play. Marie, you mentioned the yellow vests in France, and I think what they as a protest movement have made clear is that, if we are to make a sustainable green transition in food consumption, then it needs to be socially fair. And in order to understand how regulations and initiatives can be perceived as unjust, I think we need to understand how it looks from the perspective of different groups of people. And I think intersectionality is a really strong tool to use here, to make us as researchers be aware that we need to look at different groups. We cannot just assume that the regulation of gas prices looks the same for everyone, even though it might be a relatively good idea for the climate.

Wesley Dean: Great. My name is Wesley Dean currently also at the University of Copenhagen. Intersectionality has a different sort of importance in my career path as a North American sociologist. In the US, if you don't know who Kimberlé Crenshaw is, then you can't really call yourself a sociologist. I've used the concept of intersectionality to address household hunger and coping strategies in two very different rural locations, one in central Texas and one on the Texas–Mexico border. On top of Crenshaw's essential trifecta of race/ethnicity, social class and gender, I considered it very important to incorporate physical location, space as another social structure. There's this expression among US rural sociologists that there is no one 'rural' and rurality itself is not really a single social structure, but is the expression of multiple policies. These ways of being rural are going to have an enormous impact on the way you access food.

So, I'll give you two spaces. There are multiple boundaries between the United States and Mexico. There's a cultural boundary which in Texas is roughly around San Antonio. Many Texans will tell you that once you've made your way to San Antonio, you're culturally in Mexico. There is the official legal boundary on the Rio Grande River and then 20 miles within Texas there is another boundary that is regulated by Border Patrol. So if you're driving from the border, if you live in Laredo¹ and you work in a small town which is 25 miles away, you'll be stopped at a checkpoint and ordered to show your passport, your documentation status and so forth. These three borders have a dramatic impact on your life opportunities and constraints depending on where you are within those borders and who you are within the context of those borders. So, imagine you're a woman living in a *colonia* – that's self-made housing along the border that's often deeply impoverished. If you do not have legal documentation status in the United States and you're within that range between the border and the 20-mile limit, then you don't leave the house or you don't do it very often. Your husband may also not be a legal resident, but it's understood that the husbands, if they get deported, they'll just be dumped on the other side of the river and then they come right back. But the woman's task in this context is to stay at home, take care of children, and not risk her own health or the possibility that children may be left alone. You do not take that particular risk, unless, of course, you are a legal resident of the United States, and then that particular border becomes less important, more of a nuisance than a barrier. So, stepping away from these three borders, I also worked with people in central Texas who might have otherwise been very similar. I had a research project in a small town

that's well-known for its mushroom farm. Everybody worked in the mushroom farm, men and women alike, regardless of their documentation status and so forth. These characteristics structure the way that you acquire food. They radically confine the way you can buy food or present you with opportunities to purchase food, depending on where you lie within that particular border and what your documentation status is. So, space is important. But don't just think of space as just a location, you know, or a distance so much as something far more complicated.

Stergios Magkriotis: Great. My name is Stergios Magkriotis working at the University in Edinburgh. I come from refugee studies, currently researching everyday practices of urban refugees in Athens. I think it's quite interesting that in refugee studies, intersectionality is sort of implicitly considered, but not explicitly mentioned and theorised that often. So, when I was preparing for this roundtable, I tried to remember, and searched different library databases for pieces on intersectionality and displacement, and there weren't that many references coming up. But despite that, at the same time, especially from a cultural perspective, we can say that intersectional approaches are taken up.

To highlight significances, after having studied the impact of food aid programmes in Sudan and Uganda, Harrell-Bond (1986) used the famous saying 'food is the best medicine' in a chapter where the connection of food with health, among other areas, was discussed. And there we can also see an elaboration around the intersections between food and basically all other aspects of aid. So, arguing that when you have a population with burdened health (due to living conditions and past experiences of war and so on), if you consider what food they are provided with, and by paying more attention to food consumption, then some of these issues could be improved without necessarily increasing medical assistance, which is also very challenging in situations of displacement. So various intersections of food practices are evident, within displacement when thinking in terms of race, gender and age, but there are also intersections emerging between food and other practices that can also in turn highlight the importance of an intersectional approach. For example, I did my ethnography in a social kitchen and my departure point of interest was the everyday practices of refugees in a broader sense, but I ended up finding out a plethora of connections that were actually emerging through food practices. I mean cooking, eating and distributing food in relation to other areas of social life. It's very interesting at the same time to see how in displacement, food can improve social conditions for refugees.

So, I will close by saying that at the same time, it can be very challenging to consider intersectionality, and while having the best intentions, apply to praxis. We see for example that often refugees prefer to reject food that is not appropriate and/or preferable, rather than simply accept tasteless food due to their circumstances, even if that means they will remain hungry. Even in settings with the 'best' intentions, like the kitchen where I did my fieldwork, an informal grassroots space where refugees themselves are involved in cooking, and it's the aim to provide good, tasty food, it wasn't that rare seeing people 'rejecting' food on preferences related to ethnicity, religion or social position.

Socially and politically relevant intersections

Stefan Wahlen: Thank you all for introducing yourselves. We can already see that there are many aspects coming up when we talk about intersectionality and food.

Our first question that we asked you to prepare is: how can everyday practices such as consumption signal socially and politically relevant intersections? And here we would like to emphasise the socially and politically relevant intersections. What are these relevant intersections? What kind of social positions and relationships might need consideration?

Kia Ditlevsen: I think that that's a very good point to start with. It makes me think about how we can use the notion of intersectionality as an invitation to be critical towards our own understanding of food consumption. So, what is problematic food behaviour? What is problematised by public discourses? For instance, it's quite relevant to look at migrant populations living in Western Europe and look at some of their food practices and food waste practices, like stretching the food, which I think most of us could learn from. The thing is that symbolic value is significant here, because we can definitely find sustainable practices among some of the more marginalised groups in society, who could be migrants, minority groups or relatively poor people. But these are undervalued practices, that people do not wish to stick to. So, this is definitely a situation where you can say: there are some very socially and politically relevant intersections here, which could have great political and societal importance. In our study, it's quite clear that we have a group of 'failed consumers'. They are relatively poor and do not have the option to consume very much. At the same time, their food practices are much more sustainable than most of ours. Simply because they don't drink red wine, they can't really afford cheese and red meat, and they don't go on vacation. All of which have a very strong symbolic value of luxury and pleasure, which I think we need to address – so that other groups in society are willing to learn food practices from these people.

Vasco Ramos: There's another thing we should address, and it might be the elephant in the room. We are White, middle- to upper-class scholars. Can we address intersectionality? Of course we can. However, we must listen and learn. The driving force behind intersectionality reflects entirely different concerns, which are being posed by scholars who, thus far, have not worried about consumption. They have been concerned with different issues: the recognition of human rights, issues of social justice, and so on. We probably need to start by engaging with these scholars and the questions that they have been posing.

I wanted to bring the conversation back to what Marie Plessz mentioned at the beginning, to issues of visibility or invisibility. I am thinking about what makes an intersection socially and politically relevant. I come from Portugal, a country with a long colonial history. On top of that, we have an overlap between class and migration. Most migrants in Portugal are working class and often work in consumption sites as cooks or servers in restaurants. When consumption goes on, they are often behind counters. In my sample, I have men and women from various social classes and ethnicities. When I interviewed White, middle-class mothers, they talked about the blessing of home food delivery, especially during the first months after childbirth, when they wouldn't or couldn't even get into the kitchen. Home food delivery started to boom in Portugal in 2019. With the COVID-19 pandemic, it became widespread. Nowadays, standing in front of a McDonald's at 7pm, you will see many delivery bikes parked there. A large chunk of the drivers are Brazilian or Southeast Asian men. Many of the cooks behind the grill are migrant women, as are a large number of cleaners. Some of the White, middle-class women I interviewed were the recipients of this food prepared and delivered by migrants. I also interviewed Black women from the former

Portuguese colonies who were cooks or servants in these restaurants. However, often they cannot afford to engage in this type of consumption except when at work. In Portugal, as in France, the collection of data on ethnicity is not allowed. We do not have any actual figures on these realities, which leads to double invisibility and adds to the social and political relevance of the issue. Additionally, work in these industries is often performed in highly exploitative conditions, without proper social security, and sometimes even without an actual contract. Nevertheless, many consumers benefit from this work. If we want to move forward with any discussion on the social sustainability of transitions towards a desirable future, this is a central point we need to consider.

Stergios Magkriotis: Actually, I've been thinking that sustainability is something that has to be seen intersectionally, as well as what we consider to be a sustainable practice. Especially thinking of the environment today and food and, again, aid within the context of 'crises', we lose completely the concept of sustainability. We see that humanitarian provision is generally completely unsustainable. The struggle, for example, to assist populations in protracted displacement that have been living in camps in Africa where there is both food and energy scarcity. There's been so much research and effort from organisations on how to transition, for example with the introduction of solar panels to cook instead of making fire from logs, because wood picking has led to further deserting the landscape. And, of course, the practice of providing food aid, the food chains that are involved and emerging, if thought in broader sustainable terms, both in terms of waste and emissions, for example, are completely unsustainable. So, sustainable consumption and living, if combined with intersectional thinking, I believe will overall lead to the inevitability of considering an approach that takes human rights as a central point. We might be able to solve environmental and sustainability problems more easily. An approach that covers the right food can also be a more sustainable way of doing food aid.

Marie Plessz: Well, we can probably discuss how to do sustainable aid, but maybe population displacement is completely unsustainable to begin with, socially speaking.

Vasco Ramos: I wanted to add something to this. It was already mentioned in the beginning, Wesley pointed to the geographies of consumption. Even in my few days here in Oslo, I noticed how the landscape of consumers in different areas of the city changes. It happens everywhere we go. It's a central point in moving forward with the idea of intersectionality. The social makeup of the city changes, as does the offer in terms of consumption, when we travel around town. I think we cannot avoid looking at the work of social geographers.

Kia Ditlevsen: This is the thing about the social and political importance of intersectionality, I think. My way into intersectionality is through feminist scholars. The theories were first developed as feminist perspectives and using intersectionality to look at consumption highlights the importance of also looking at exclusions through identities, which has for long been a feminist agenda. I know 'identities' is a quite contested concept at the moment, but I do think that this is important. It is one place where scholars of intersectionality can offer something special to research, because they can show us, for instance, how giving aid to food banks or supporting people with benefits has different consequences, political consequences and social consequences, because by aids you may stigmatise some identities by making it visible that they are not 'proper' productive citizens in the eyes of society. So, when we think about everyday consumption, intersectionality is important because it makes some of these visible and invisible distinctions politically significant.

Central characteristics of an intersectional approach to food consumption

Stefan Wahlen: Thanks Kia for the transition to our next question. In addition to what we already discussed, we were thinking about the characteristics that might be central when developing an intersectional approach and that could be, for example, identities. Even though identities might be contested, identities might be considered as manifestations of these intersections. So, our second question for this roundtable is: what characteristics are central when developing an intersectional approach to food consumption?

Vasco Ramos: I would like to read an improvised definition of intersectionality, among the many that are possible, just because we might not be on the same page. I am drawing mostly from the work of Kimberlé Crenshaw (2017) and Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge (2020). So, 'intersectionality means acknowledging that several aspects of a person's political and social identity, such as class, gender, race, but also ability level, migrant status, sex, gender identity, shape their acting in everyday life, how they understand the world and how they relate to others involves recognising that individuals and the social groups that they constitute are vulnerable to specific forms of oppression and experience. Different types of exclusion inherent to capitalist development over the centuries, which are connected with imperialism, colonialism, and the gendered division of work'.

The idea of intersectionality is gaining traction within the scientific discourse; it originated in the US, spread to the UK, and is now spreading to other countries. It was very much a movement from below, so to speak. There's a discussion, as Kia mentioned, because intersections have different effects on structural and identity levels. There is a heated debate on this on the field. Regardless of where we stand, we should acknowledge that race, class and other forms of power have different consequences. I think that this is relevant because we might be tempted to think about this question and go after a specific group, for example, being a woman, being Black, or being working class, and target them in our research.

I think this can be a problem because we might exoticise the 'other'. We might end up reinforcing prejudices and disregarding one principle that a few researchers in this area mention: the majority-inclusive approach. To know the meaning of exclusion, you need to know what inclusion means. You have to go against preconceived notions that, for example, take White, middle-class people as a 'normal' and homogenous group. It might not be like that. One principle of intersectional research is using a contextual approach where we might need to compare people in different positions and, for example, consider what food and consumption look like for them, given their contextual embeddedness.

Wesley Dean: You know, following up on this, I just started reading this fairly new book by Psyche Williams-Forsen called *Eating While Black: Food Shaming and Race in America*. Just as I was saying earlier about there being no one rural, she's very clear in her book that there is no such thing as, say, Black cuisine in the United States. She delineates all sorts of cuisines, immigrant cuisines from different African nations, various regional American cuisines, haute cuisine, and so on. These are all sorts of different kinds of cuisine that might be associated with somebody who, from a kind of very basic social category, might be called Black.

Stefan Wahlen: So I think you point to a very interesting issue: that of cuisines being used to differentiate social positions, but also integrating positions. We might

include people in our group, but we might also be excluding others, if that's what you're pointing towards.

Marie Plessz: Also, we as sociologists tend to homogenise the groups that are most distant from us, typically the poor. This criticism was addressed to Bourdieu, because his notion of taste of necessity leads to a very homogenous view of deprived households, as if they just reacted to economic constraints, while the dominant could use their 'taste for liberty' to make choices. French sociologist Claude Grignon was very vocal about this point ([Grignon and Passeron, 1989](#)), and he illustrated it with research on food. Claude and Christiane Grignon (1980) showed how there were different ways to be a working-class household and to make ends meet, according to, for instance whether people live in the countryside or in a big city – which brings us back to geographical location. And to the question of meaningful positions or characterisations.

Kia Ditlevsen: Well, I think so too – it has to be meaningful intersecting characteristics. Otherwise, you end up having this extremely fragmented picture. I think this has to do with a tension between intersectionality theories and Bourdieu. To him, it was politically meaningful to talk about the working class and he focused his work accordingly. His analyses could be critiqued for not being fine-grained enough – to leave out important socially differentiating characteristics. On the other hand, if you make your analyses too fragmented, they lose political significance. And to me intersectionality theories are highly political theories, aiming to shed light on inequalities.

So, of course there is not a fixed pool of characteristics that you should always use, there must be some kind of openness to what is meaningful in the field. But by looking at some of the central power dynamics in society, you can find the ones you should always look for. And we do know this, I mean, we do know that class, gender, maybe age and ethnicity or migration status are important differentiating factors. We should look for these, but at the same time keep a sensibility towards not essentialising people, nor fixating power dynamics.

Vasco Ramos: There is no one-size-fits-all answer. It depends on what you are researching, the funding, the team, the available time and the objectives. Devising a nested matrix with all the categories and searching for these people makes no sense. Ann Phoenix, a researcher at UCL, talks about using anchor points and key characteristics to consider when researching intersectionality ([Phoenix, 2006](#)). She argues that this makes qualitative analysis more manageable. Intersectionality is not about social positions; it's about relations of power or power dynamics. We must consider intersectionality as a process, not as an opposition between fixed positions. Many authors within the field of intersectionality don't speak of race, preferring to address racialisation. They don't take gender for granted but prefer to discuss gendering. Their take on social class is also processual; it's the actual practices that generate and separate social groups.

Marie Plessz: I completely agree with your point that the characteristics that are central depend on the specific research. And it's maybe an empirical question in a way. Typically, scholarship on political movements, discrimination, and so on, never addresses household structure. Household composition is not so relevant or not seen as relevant in the public sphere. However, for food consumption, this sphere is highly relevant. In my own research, I have tried to test whether the presence of a woman helps maintaining more desirable food habits and food practices. And so, I think this

might be an intersectional characteristic of households that is completely invisible, typically in statistics. Yet we know it pops up when we see research showing that men, married men, have better careers than single men, and than single and married women. So, is it exploitation in a way that has raised profits for married men in the work sphere? And so, these might be the things that the literature doesn't prepare us to see as intersectionality, but that might emerge from some of our fieldwork.

Kia Ditlevsen: Yes. But you do still know from the literature that there are gendered power dynamics in society. That structure. So, this is why you need intersectionality to ask these kinds of questions.

Empirically grasping intersectionality

Stefan Wahlen: Talking about the characteristics of the social conditions and social relationships is also talking about empirical strategies. I think it's also interesting to continue with methods that we might find useful. We had some methodological issues raised in the roundtable already, but there might be additional ones. Our last question is: which methods do you find relevant to better understand intersectionality in and of consumption?

Wesley Dean: Yeah, but I guess it's a reformulation of a question based upon some parts of the earlier conversation. And this is probably a question mostly for Marie, since you're the most quantitative person on our panel. But if we're going to do quantitative intersectional work, how do we get away from this 'matrix' to identify ways of thinking? I mean, when I want to think about intersectionality in a quantitative paper, I create interaction terms.

Marie Plessz: This is also what I do. Interaction terms are my empirical starting point. And then the qualitative literature. I think we have to acknowledge the limitations of quantitative analysis. And one of the limitations of survey data is that we are often collecting data at an individual level. So, we are not good at grasping collective identities, power relations, ambivalences or conflicting views. We can do it a little bit with open questions, but as you know, in the end we seldom analyse open-ended questions in quantitative research. So, I think, well, we need more qualitative research!

Wesley Dean: I wonder if one of the consequences of taking this critique of 'the matrix', as I'm going to call it, that a lot of our quantitative work is based on big pre-existing data sets. And maybe if you start with qualitative work, you can just construct better interaction terms in your survey than you would get from, I don't know, your gender and race variables.

Marie Plessz: Definitely. And as Vasco said, in France, we can't have ethnic origin and the word race is subject to heated debates (Sabbagh and Peer, 2008). And so, in a quantitative survey, we just cannot address race in a proper way, but qualitative research has its way. That's one more reason why we need qualitative research, because with qualitative fieldwork we can be very inductive and dig further into what comes up in terms of the relevant intersections.

Vasco Ramos: Yeah, but there are other options for quantitative research. You can oversample. You can have a booster sample. For example, here in Norway, there are many people from Eastern Africa. If it's relevant to the research questions, it can be included, which is something that we cannot do in Portugal or France, although there may be ways to get around it. However, intersectionality lends itself, first and foremost, to qualitative and ethnographic methods. Stergios probably has something

to say about that. It gives us a feeling of what to look for in quantitative work. We have to start with qualitative and ethnographic data before bringing this together for a quantitative analysis of consumption and food.

Stergios Magkriotis: Yes, the starting point can be an intersectional lens in a broader sense. So, if we're thinking of an ethnographic study: it does not necessarily mean to heavily rely on intersectionality. When we look at the research on food and displacement that stresses the different relations we have with food, and what coping strategies displaced people develop in different contexts, then yeah, food hasn't been considered explicitly through intersectionality. But if we use the lens, then we're going to see how it sticks out and perhaps how we can't escape it. And then there are steps we could take in our own thinking and our own research. In practice, without referencing all the key debates around intersectionality, we must be open to it because, overall, intersectionality is a way of understanding and researching.

So, another example when looking at aid is the use of genetically modified (GM) crops and food, provided by many donors and humanitarian actors due to their low cost and ease of production. If we take agency out of the equation, then there is no doubt that this approach can sufficiently feed people. It is assumed that it will cover nutritional needs, while also being appropriate for people's tastes and practices. The aspect of it being GM food is ignored because in times of crisis donors wouldn't consider that. Authorities and populations in need would reject it on the basis of other health and safety concerns. It happened for example in Zambia, where for international donors the rejection of GM food was seen as an irrational choice that prolonged the famine. This aspect of agency is also applied to social kitchens and grassroots movements. The most accessible and 'cheap' option is not necessarily what will be chosen as there are sociopolitical factors and agency involved in decision making, including from whom we accept donations and how we source food. When we start looking at how these choices are made, then we can begin recognising the many entangled intersections and how complicated choices, and researching them, can be.

Going back to your point about the challenges of doing intersectionality, while trying to be inclusive, there are many limitations and it is challenging to have a universal sense of intersectionality in practices. For example, in my research when I was doing my fieldwork, many grassroots groups and collectives placed an emphasis on the element of taste and the quality of food, when running funding campaigns and doing outreach. Something that distinguishes them from many humanitarian organisations and introduces an element of intersectionality in their practices. Nevertheless, challenges emerge. If the food is vegetarian, for a number of reasons and choices, you will have people who, both due to personal and on occasions cultural preferences, would want meat. There is obviously a choice to be made. But then you have people with health conditions and strict diets, such as intolerances to particular foods. As it turns out, the capacity to address issues like these, like if someone is intolerant to gluten, when pasta is served regularly, is limited to more informal settings. Changing the menu can be challenging for a number of reasons. Overall, I have the feeling that looking at decision making and hidden power relations in practices is a good starting point when taking an intersectional approach.

Stefan Wahlen: Which brings me back to something that Kia mentioned at the beginning. If you think of practice theories, and if you think of intersectionality as an approach that considers power relationships: can we combine them at all? Are there ways to empirically move forward?

Kia Ditlevsen: Of course you can combine them. But you have to choose a focus. It is important to remember that when you use an intersectionality approach, it is an approach that assumes that there are hierarchies and power relations, as well as inclusions and exclusions. So, this is what you buy into. I think conceptually you can combine practice theories and intersectionality perspectives. They can work fine together. But you have to choose between flat ontology and social hierarchies. Practice theories are different and one way of combining the perspectives is to look at the hierarchical expectations for performances.

Vasco Ramos: I wanted to add that there might be a problem. A recent text by Sarah Salem (2018) called 'Intersectionality and its discontents: Intersectionality as traveling theory' mentions that this perspective came out of the US, then to the UK, and became a catch-all term, even a buzzword. We may forget its radical origins, but it came from an ongoing fight against social injustice. When theories travel, they sometimes lose some of their tenets. I like to go back to the foundational texts and read them. We must go back and see how they try to conceptualise intersectionality to propose ways of moving forward. However, this is already a large field in itself, which makes it difficult.

Marie Plessz: My problem with practice theories as regards intersectionality is that I think practice theory has never been a critical theory. There are other literatures that are better at this and can address mundane activity, such as Dorothy Smith's institutional ethnography (1987; 2005), which I think is underused. Her point is to look at the margins and why marginalised people struggle so much to do what we expect them to do. Their struggles and failures tell us about the taken-for-granted expectations embedded in our policies and norms, in terms of class, income, literacy, household structure. ... And, well, it's brilliant, it's feminist, it's about class and it includes methodological recommendations, which practice theories still lack obviously.

Stefan Wahlen: So, I don't know if you still have any questions, things that you would like to add? When we started thinking about this roundtable, we considered it as an invitation to start thinking about the topic. As a community, we hadn't talked about it that much. Intersectionality is a highly relevant theoretical as well as empirical approach and it's worth thinking about it further. Hopefully you found our conversation helpful and you might take it as an inspiration to reflect further. Thanks for having been here and for actively contributing to this roundtable.

Note

¹ Laredo is on the Mexico–US border.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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