

EUROPE, DIASPORA, AND MULTI-ETHNIC FUTURES: LOOKING THROUGH INTERSECTIONAL LENS

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It is axiomatic these days that migrations form a key phenomenon in the contemporary globalized world. According to the OECD- UNDESA figures there were 232 million international migrants living in the world in 2013. The proportion of female migrants ranged from 52 percent in the global north to 43 percent in the global south. They range from economic migrants, through trafficked persons to refugees and asylum seekers. These migrations create a plethora of diasporas. Of course, not all migrations comprise diasporas. There has been considerable debate surrounding criteria which may be used to define a particular migration as diaspora. At minimum, diasporas are not temporary sojourns, rather they are about settling down elsewhere, putting roots and creating ‘home’ away from the place of origin. Over the last two decades, considerable effort has gone into theorising and analysing different formations of diaspora. There have been major shifts in conceptualising diaspora, with dynamic conceptions acquiring greater salience.

Europe has of course been a site for global diasporas for a very long time, most notably for the Jewish diaspora and the Roma diaspora, both of whom have been associated with a history of persecution. More recently, diasporas emanating from many different parts of the world have been created in Europe and there are substantial internal migrations within Europe. But how do we think of Europe? As a geographical space, a socioeconomic and political formation, a cultural assemblage, an idea or an identity? Of course it is all of these but they are not immutable givens but form a contested terrain. As Michael Wintle notes, Europe “is a historically and spatially mobile matrix” (Wintle, 2013:10). Its borders have been continually shifting. Evidently, the first proposal for unifying Europe emerged against a common enemy after the Fall of Constantinople to the Turks in 1453. Today, Turkey is applying to join the European Union, interrogating commonsense notions of where the borders of Europe lie. The fifteenth century is also significant

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for two other events that have a bearing on contemporary politics. The first was the arrival of Columbus in the Americas on 12 October 1492, and the subsequent histories of the formation of current day Americas, including the USA, involving slavery and genocide as well as cultural exchange and hybridity. The second was the fall of Grenada in Spain in 1492, which marked the end of seven hundred years of influence of the Muslims in Europe – an event that places into relief the historical contestation between Judaism, Christianity and Islam and how these contestations are reconfiguring today. It is also worth noting that the identity of Europe was not formed only in opposition to Islam but also marked by tensions *within* Europe, which was never a homogeneous geo-political entity. During the over five hundred years of European expansion and colonisation, the idea of 'Europe' as a unified category has been continually disrupted by intense rivalry and conflict as testified for instance, by the two world wars of the last century and the subsequent Cold War between the capitalist countries and the socialist power blocs. Under such circumstances, ideals of a pan-Europeans identity have been challenged by a variety of national identity formations and nationalisms. These national formations have in turn been internally subject to contradictions of gender, racism, class and ethnic specificities. We witness such power play even as it unfolds today in, for instance, the Ukraine. Yet, both singly and collectively, European nations exercise considerable power on the world stage. The future of Europe, the theme of this conference, depends on the ways in which this power is exercised. We stand in the middle of a historical juncture when there is a third war in Iraq. These wars place into relief the problematic ways in which certain European powers have been drawn into conflict on a world stage. However, it is not the global power play which is my focus today. Rather, I am much more concerned to deal with issues as they pan out inside Europe.

One significant area of interest would seem to be the way in which European countries learn to deal with cultural differences. Some of these cultural differences have emerged recently due to the arrival of new migrant and diasporic groups into European countries, whereas other cultural differences are there because of the historical internal constitution of these nation states. In Britain, for instance, the nation state consists of England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Each of these components has specific cultural and political histories. So that Britain has been characterised by internal heterogeneity long before the arrival of migrants from Britain's former colonies in the post WWII period. These groups from the former colonies have been augmented by European migrants from the continent, including from Romania, since Britain joined the European Union. These more recent settled populations have introduced newer cultural elements. The current debate about 'multiculturalism' or 'inter-culturalism' is symptomatic of the complexities involved. It is argued by some critics that policies of multiculturalism are responsible for creating a lack of social cohesion. I would argue against this although I have been critical of 'multiculturalism' myself in the past because in Britain it tended to focus largely on culture, and not sufficiently on the effects of

racism. But the current critics of multiculturalism are not making this argument. Rather, they seem to be in favour of a kind of assimilation. I would wish to distance myself from assimilation but endorse integration. I subscribe to the broad message of the 1966 speech by Roy Jenkins, the then Home Secretary of Britain, in which Jenkins advocated 'integration' which he distinguished from 'assimilation'. He defined integration as "not a flattening process of assimilation but as equal opportunity, accompanied by cultural diversity, in an atmosphere of mutual tolerance". My only reservation about this formulation is that it does not acknowledge the fact that in a class divided society such as Britain, majority of the migrants and diasporics are likely to be 'integrated' at the lower levels of the economy, where they are likely to experience discrimination and disadvantage. Jenkins does not say anything about racism or class inequality in Britain, which I think is critically important to take account of. However, like him, I would favour integration, but into a more equal society, and not assimilation. This is not to suggest that one does not take issue with certain cultural practices, as for instance, Female Genital Cutting, just because it is a cultural practice found in some minority ethnic communities. Such practices are against the rights of the girl child and these rights must be assiduously protected. So an injunction to have respect for cultural difference is not an invitation to undermine human rights of the category of person involved. Human rights are important to maintain across all cultures. Rather, I am referring to the pressures for assimilation, which sees the world through Eurocentric lenses.

The issue of language is quite important too. At one level, it is crucial that minority ethnic groups learn the language of the country to which they have migrated so as to be able to take full part in society, both economically, politically and culturally. On the other hand, it is also important that there are opportunities for groups, if they so wish, to learn their own languages since language is so centrally a part of identity. Indeed, it need not be a case of either the one or the other. The best situation would be when both options are available. Both the state and civil society may cooperate in providing a broad range of possibilities. The question of citizenship is also important for our discussion. In the globalised world that we live in, capital has freedom to cross borders and boundaries around the world, yet there are often stringent policies against people migrating for work, especially against those who come from the global south to the global north. If we want equality and justice for all groups in Europe, then it is equally important to uphold the claim to rights of citizenship for all.

Immigration is a major controversial issue today throughout Europe. Employers need labour, but to do predominantly low paid jobs associated with poor conditions of work. Without citizenship rights, there is a danger of exploitation of this category of low paid employees doing work which the indigenous workers might decline to undertake.

In Britain, and many other countries of Europe, anti-immigrant discourse is rife. Immigrants from the global south are not the only people against whom this discourse is directed because the majority of immigrants coming into Britain today are from other European Union countries. The rightwing political parties thrive on this anti-immigrant sentiment. For instance, Nigel Farage, the leader of the rightwing Independence Party in Britain, and who is married to a German woman, caused a scandal when in a radio interview he claimed that people would not be happy to live next door to a Romanian. Clearly, there is a hierarchy within this discourse between Germans and Romanians!! The Independence Party is doing very well attracting support in many parts of Britain, making the more mainstream parties tilt to the right in response. This party and some politicians in the mainstream parties are opposed to Britain's membership of the European Union. This narrow nationalism challenges the somewhat more cosmopolitan vision of conglomerate institutions such as the European Union, although one must bear in mind that EU itself is seen operating as "fortress Europe" in relation to migrants from outside Europe. The impact of global inequities and inequalities must be addressed. On a more positive note, it is important to bear in mind that Britain has laws called the Race Relations Acts, which make it illegal to discriminate on the basis of 'racial' origin. Although racism cannot be eradicated by legal instruments alone, these laws are extremely necessary. When it comes to the European Union, its social charter, I would argue, needs to be given as much importance as the economic dimensions.

I now wish to turn to the question of diaspora and intersectionality. Intersectionality is about the different formations of power constituted around different social axis such as gender and social class. I shall return to this.

It is my claim in this presentation that diasporas are inherently intersectional, and that the study of diaspora and intersectionality are intrinsically connected. For instance, as an empirical trajectory diaspora cannot be understood as a homogeneous category. A specific diaspora is differentiated according to factors such as gender, race, class, caste, ethnicity, and sexuality. As a concept too, diaspora is an articulation of diverse narratives enunciated from various 'situated' positions. And the situated positions and knowledge are the terrains upon which the embodiment of our specificity is constructed. We become a 'woman', a 'classed individual' or a 'gay person' in and through the interplay of intersecting axis of differentiation. I have argued elsewhere that the concept of diaspora centres on the configurations of historically specific modalities of power which undergird, mark and differentiate diasporas internally as well as situate them in relation to one another (Brah, 1996). The concept of diaspora is a genealogical one, and it signals the historically variable analysis of economic, political and cultural forms in their inter- and intra-relationality. That is to say that, this genealogical analysis is intersectional.

There is some concern in the field of diaspora studies that the concept of diaspora overemphasizes mobilities, and that routes are foregrounded at the expense of roots. In my view the two aspects are not mutually exclusive: diasporas are simultaneously about 'space' and 'place', about movement as well as settling down. It is important to pay attention to both features of diaspora. I have described articulation of the 'genealogies of dispersal' with those of 'staying put' as 'diaspora space'. Within this conception of 'diaspora space' multi-locationality, home, homing desire and belonging is juxtaposed with historical temporalities and diasporic spatialities. How does a site of migration become home? How do we come to 'feel at home'? This is a complex question, one which brings the social and the psychic simultaneously into play. A home, whether in the sense of a dwelling in which we reside or a country or region in which we live, is often *assumed* to be a 'safe' place, but this is not always the case, something which physically and psychologically abused persons know all too well. In terms of a nation-state, a region, or locality immigrants may reside in a given place but they may often be constructed and represented as the 'Other'. They may experience all manner of discrimination. They could be denied citizenship rights. Or, they may have legal rights but may not be seen to belong to the larger community or the nation. There could well be terror on the streets directed against racialised, ethnicised people who may or may not be immigrants. All this mitigates against feeling of being at home on the part of diasporic groups. Yet there are also the intimacies of everyday life – kinship bonds, friendships, relations of conviviality, neighbourliness, collegiality, inter-connections of love – which make a place a home. Feeling at home is essentially about feeling secure and have a sense of belonging – but this cannot be taken for granted, may have to be struggled over, and is an on-going project rather than a once for all established fact.

So far, I have been concerned with issues to do with diaspora. But what do we mean when we invoke the term intersectionality? Where does this idea and concept emerge from? The concept of intersectionality is, as I noted above, first and foremost a feminist one. It grew out of feminist critiques of discourses which failed to address the fact that woman is a heterogeneous category. There are class differences amongst women. Different groups of women are differently racialized. Women comprise different ethnicities. They are rich or poor, and so on. These longstanding debates remain relevant today not only because they highlighted and signalled diversity, important though that fact is, but because they raise the somewhat contentious issue as to how best to theorize and understand such differences. That challenge is equally pertinent today, every time we embark on a new study. In what ways do we tackle the concept of 'différence' and how best to analyse clusters of differences across various and variable but intersecting dimensions. I shall return to this point.

In 2004, Ann Phoenix and I wrote about the discourses on intersectionality, and we described the concept of 'intersectionality' as "signifying the complex, irreducible,

varied and variable effects which ensue when multiple axis of differentiation – economic, political, cultural, psychic, subjective and experiential – intersect in historically specific contexts” (Brah and Phoenix, 2004: 76). I still hold on to this way of looking at intersectionality. It challenges the additive models of discussions on the subject. There are those critics who argue that debates on intersectionality fail to take on board issues of colonialism, imperialism and postcolonialism. But this patently would not be the case in the above definition. Historically specific relations categorically address questions of coloniality, postcoloniality and imperialisms in their various varieties. There is also academic comment that intersectional studies may not always attend to transnational and global concerns. This is an important point, yet when *diasporic* intersectional analyses are conducted the questions of transnationalism become central.

I have spoken above about cultural difference. But there are other features of the concept of difference that need to be theorised. Much has been written theoretically on the subject of difference across different disciplines. In my own case, I have tried to work through this terrain by suggesting that difference may be theorised along four axes: difference construed in terms of a social relation; difference understood as subjectivity; difference theorised as identity; and difference conceptualised as experience. (Brah, 1996). Importantly, each of these axes is in turn marked by intersectionality. Although for analytic purposes these axes are presented as separate, they cross-cut and enmesh in practice. Experience, for instance, cannot be understood independent of social relations, nor are social relations without bearing on identity and subjectivity. Indeed, the four axes are centrally implicated in the constitution of the other.

As a *social relation*, difference is to be understood in structural terms along economic, political, and cultural discourses and institutional practices. Here it references the macro and micro regimes of power within and across which different forms of differentiation such as class, racism, and gender, for instance, are instituted as structured formations. Social relations foreground systemic and systematic dimensions of social hierarchies and regimes of power. Structural features undergird our social positions and mark the many and variable ways that historical genealogies impact on everyday experiences. Social relations as difference underscore the materiality of social life.

In terms of the second axis of difference, *namely subjectivity*, we need to explore the means by which the human subject is itself produced. Here, the linguistic approach has been especially influential, analysing ‘différence’ which is at the very heart of language itself, at the centre of meaning production. Within Saussurian and post Saussurian linguistics, language represents a way of differentiating between things and relating them to one another. It is argued that meaning is neither intrinsic nor referential; rather it is relational and differential. That is to say that each sign derives its meaning from its difference from all other signs in the chain.

As we develop our sense of ourselves in and through language, language is the site of the formation of subjectivity. Issues of 'différence' have therefore figured prominently in debates about subjectivity. These debates have been accompanied by various critiques of the humanist conceptions of the subject as a unified, unitary, rational and rationalist 'point of origin', as centred in consciousness, and in terms of the Universal Man as the embodiment of an ahistorical essence. Post structural approaches question the view that consciousness is an origin, treating it instead as an effect of signification (Belsey, 2012; Weedon, 1987). Overall, in relation to subjectivity, there has been considerable contestation about the relative merits of discursive as compared with psychoanalytic approaches to the constitution of subjects and subjectivity. I believe that both approaches are relevant. Psychoanalysis too disrupts a notion of a centred, unitary rational self by foregrounding an inner world permeated by fantasy, conflict, non-rational and unruly responses, and desire. Difference as subjectivity, then, is neither unified nor fixed but fragmented and continuously in process.

In relation to the third axis of difference, namely difference understood as *experience*, this is yet another arena of debate, as the concept of experience has been highly contested. It is now generally agreed that experience is not transparent. In other words it does not transparently reflect a pre-given reality, it is not an unmediated guide to some pre-given transparent truth. Rather, experience is a cultural construction and it is the site of subject formation. Indeed experience is a process of signification which is the very condition for the constitution of that which we call 'reality'. Experience, as a signifying or meaning-making practice, is embedded within symbolic and narrative means of making sense. This links with the idea of diaspora as a confluence of diverse and different narratives, both complimentary and contradictory. As I have argued before, experiences do not happen to a fully constituted subject, rather experience is the site of subject formation. Experience is mediated through intersectional formations such as our positionality in terms of gender, class, generation, sexuality and so on.

Finally we may consider 'différence' understood as *identity*. Indeed struggles over identities are in part contestations over meaning. The problematic of 'différence' is also the problematic of identity. As Stuart Hall, drawing on Derrida's concept of difference, suggests, identity is always in process and not an established fact (Hall, 1996). Although he is persuaded by the Foucauldian notion that the subject is constructed in discourse, he remains cautious in so far as this perspective fails to fully address how and why the subject identifies with certain subject positions and not others. His answer, like that of Judith Butler, is to advocate the use of psychoanalysis alongside the discursive approach for the task of thinking through the problematic of identity.

As I noted earlier, the four axes of difference just described always articulate. The questions of commonality and difference are therefore complex, and they demand

complex and nuanced, though urgent solutions. A positive future for Europe warrants nothing less.

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