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## Intersections and Translocations: new paradigms for thinking about cultural diversity and social identities

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**ABSTRACT** This article reflects on the concepts of cultural diversity, belonging and identity which inform important debates for managing 'difference' in contemporary European societies. These address issues relating to transnational migration, ethnic diversity and racialisation in a range of social contexts. The article also reflects on the concept of intersectionality as a means of developing a more integrated analysis of social divisions and identities relating particularly to gender, ethnicity and class. It is clear that once we focus on the intersectionality of social divisions and identities, we can move away from essentialised notions of culture, difference and belonging. However, the complexity of social divisions and their inter-relations, both as analytical categories and as categories of practice, asks us to rethink the terms that we use for understanding both identity formations and forms of inequality. This article considers the utility of a more intersectional framing and the notion of translocational positionality in understanding the articulation of social identities.

### Introduction

Issues of culture, identity and diversity dominate present-day discussions, in education and in the political arena, often tied to the perceived problems raised by ethnic diversity and migration. There are important social concerns here with charting the educational progress or otherwise of particular social categories, and with finding ways towards greater social inclusion of the disadvantaged, within the school system and in society more generally. Minorities are often the object of reference in such debates, and of course issues arise particularly in terms of linguistic or cultural competencies and how these can be developed to provide greater opportunities.

However, in these debates there is an enormous emphasis on the cultural domain. It is easy to think, therefore, that the social has been colonised by this focus on culture. It is not so much that focusing on culture is in and of itself a problem, but the issue revolves around how culture is conceived. There is no doubt that in many discussions culture is treated as a possessive property of individuals, as a free-floating signifier, as static and given and as a thing that we carry with us (e.g. Anthias & Yuval Davis, 1992; Modood, 2007). It is a tendency that relies on a disconnected notion of culture away from time, from space or location, from meaning, from context and from social relations of stratification in modern societies. This is problematic and assumes a binary notion of culture versus structure, and implies a harsh separation between the material and the cultural. My argument is that such a view problematises the achievement of the purported aims of the initiatives that are undertaken in the name of social correction of the cultural 'deficits' identified.

In this article I first reflect on issues relating to culture and diversity. Second, I reflect on the intersectionality paradigm as a means of addressing some of these issues. The article also develops the potential of using a translocational lens (Anthias, 2002, 2008, 2009) to rethink the framing of the important issues involved.

### **The Cultural: one domain or many?**

The cultural itself can be disaggregated into a range of aspects; these include systems of categorisation, rituals and traditions, moral judgements and values, social etiquettes, forms of representation, modes of communication, forms of sociality, production of creativity/arts and their social valuation, and so on (the list is endless). Where the boundary between the cultural and the non-cultural is to be placed seems to me an impossible task to agree since all social practice is imbued with the cultural: it is the medium by which human life is made possible.

Much of this practice is embedded in psychic processes, on the one hand, and in material structures, on the other, which frame the possibilities for action - an insight to be found in some of the work of Bourdieu, amongst others (Bourdieu, 1986). Institutional structures of employment, of law, capital, the state and organisational features of social life can be seen as both cultural and structural. Notions of both culture and structure depend on something more than fleeting or emergent social arrangements and are embedded and embodied in everyday life in ways which are difficult to change voluntarily or by will (echoing here Durkheim's [1982] notion of social facts).

This also raises the issues of belonging and identity, which have too often been seen as mechanistically tied to culture, particularly where this is seen in terms of ethnicity. It has often been assumed that ethnic position implies ethnic identity, and this implies belonging to a particular culture with contents which are generic (and homogeneous) to the group (particularly in relation to multiculturalism; Modood, 2007). Hence individuals who have migrated or whose parents and even grandparents have their roots somewhere other than their country of residence are seen to have 'a culture' which has been transposed from elsewhere. Gender and class differences are made invisible, as are inter-generational ones.

The rucksack view of culture (Erel, 2010) sees it as luggage that we take with us on our travels. This treats culture as a commodity or a normative system which is statically present and is 'possessed' by people from specific national or territorial regions. Such a view has been challenged by approaches that recognise the fluid and multiple nature of identities (e.g. Hall, 1992) and consider the interaction between the practices and values of actors and their social environments. It is also challenged by the range of attempts to look at intersections (i.e. the complex interweaving of forms of identity and inequalities around us; see e.g. Anthias & Yuval Davis 1992, Collins, 1993; Crenshaw, 1994).

Although holding on to given cultural values, traditions, rituals and beliefs is often important, particularly for those who have been displaced through migration and have experienced new forms of settlement (particularly transnational actors), these are often used for new ends. For example, such cultural struggles, manifested in mother-tongue classes or in setting up faith or complementary schools (ethnic schooling), can be seen as ways of dealing with particular social challenges faced by minorities, including racism and lack of mobilisable cultural capital (Pecenka, 2009). They can also be seen as a way in which intergenerational struggles are enacted within families and as part of an attempt to maintain control over the future of the young (a point made in recent work by Archer et al, 2010).

### **Cultural Diversity**

In modern discussions, including policy debates, there is a concern with the balance of two aspects: the maintenance of difference, on the one hand, and the pursuit of a harmonious society with core values, on the other (see e.g. Commission of the European Communities, 2005; Commission on Integration and Cohesion, 2007). Underpinning this are issues about the types of diversity that are desirable and the point at which too much difference (of the wrong kind) may be inimical to social solidarity (see also Goodhart, 2004, for a critique of too much diversity). However, given that norms and values, as well as practices (the sphere of the cultural), are embedded in social arrangements, institutions and practices, we could reframe the issues within understandings of complex inequalities. This multidimensional nature of inequality has been recognised in the new equality act in the UK (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2010) as well as in new EU directives (European Commission, 2007).

Of course it would be foolish to deny that there is difference in all sorts of ways. People's values, beliefs and indeed tastes will differ. However, they do not always differ in important ways

(i.e. ways which lead to social conflict), nor is social conflict itself purely a question of a difference in beliefs and values. What lie behind contestations about culture are often conflicts and struggles over interests or resources or questions of rights and respect/representation and redistribution (Alcoff, 2006; Anthias, 2010). The latter is not just a question of economic resources, it is also one of cultural, educational and other resources that make up the stratification system of modern societies. As Bourdieu (1986) has rightly reminded us, resources or capital take forms which are cultural, symbolic and cultural as well as economic.

Also, it is not clear that, where social cohesion is concerned, the central problem is ethnic or faith diversity, or immigration for that matter. For example, in recent publications by Joseph Rowntree (Hickman et al, 2008), issues of safety and convenience were seen as central in people's positive relationship to their locality, and issues of age, locality and class were regarded as more important than ethnic/religious diversity in eroding social cohesion. Such publications, however, have largely under-explored issues of gender despite the fact that issues of safety will concern the old, the young and women in particular.

I personally do not feel married to the concept of diversity, although I am passionate about the complex and rich tapestry of human life. Diversity has become a term that disguises other concerns, such as difference or otherness. It already presupposes, like difference, a core from which it diverges. The notion takes on a range of meanings depending also on what it is preceded by: ethnic diversity, sexual diversity, value diversity, and other types of ideas, such as managing diversity, celebrating diversity or tolerating diversity.

Present-day discussions of diversity may act as a code for introducing compensatory mechanisms to soften the edges of inequality but do not function as radical transformations in the ways these are produced and sustained. Diversity management has become a form of strategy by employers and can be seen as part of the human relations school of management (Erikson, 2007). Diversity in this sense involves ideas about people defined in a preset way and ignores many dimensions of their social location as well as their meanings and experiences.

The problem of 'groupism' (Brubaker, 2004) refers to the assumption that identity derives from being a member of group. A group is conceived of as a thing rather than as something hailed or being 'made' ('group-making' in the active sense might be a better formulation). Groups are seen as homogeneous: gender, class and other categories are also seen as groups instead of as processes or social relations. This is mirrored in the idea that migrants belong to ethnic (or religious) groups and they bring with them given predispositions (which spur them to make particular choices in terms of labour market niches, or familial and social organisation and mobilisation). Although this idea can certainly not be completely dismissed out of hand, it predisposes us to put people in little boxes of cultural predispositions.

The idea of a coincidence of ethnicity and nation (although nowhere fully attained) has been very much problematised by the growth of multi-ethnic and multicultural societies in the West - they have always existed in the East, where state formation was more a product of colonialism and imperialism. In the following section I will look at multiculturalisms' view of culture.

### Multiculturalisms

I use this term in the plural because it has many nuances and there are different forms. One crucial uniting element is that the discourses and practices of multiculturalism have tended to focus on cultural difference and promote policies which will enable the cultural differences of groups to be ratified and their claims acknowledged. Multiculturalism has also been seen to be a way of countering the social and economic disadvantages of ethnic minority groups and is seen as part of the fight against racism and exclusion (Anthias & Lloyd, 2002).

Multiculturalism has been premised on the right to difference of culture and the cultural needs of 'groups'. But this is only seen to be relevant for minority cultures, and the dominant group in the state is seen to have individual rights instead. Minority group culture is seen to be about *particular* kinds of symbolic practices, language, religion and lifestyle. Dominant group culture, on the other hand, is seen as universalising and taken for granted and not just about cultural contents. Indeed, alongside this notion of equating culture and ethnicity is the assumption that 'White' or European culture is not ethnic, for it is universalising.

Multiculturalism has tended to treat ethnicity as essentially to do with cultural contents and it is generally treated as benign, ignoring the more violent and exclusionary elements and power hierarchies within ethnically formulated groupings (although the limits of this are laid down by legal principles also relating to gender violence and family which prohibit certain so-called cultural practices like polygamy, genital mutilation and honour-based crimes against women). Individuals become endowed with ethnic cultural symbols which are seen to embody them in a totalising way. The contextual, multidimensional, gendered and classed nature of groups is therefore underemphasised. Groups themselves may reinforce the needs of cultural maintenance or needs for cultural identity (e.g. Cypriot community leaders and their associations stress the maintenance of cultural markers, like many other such minorities). But this is not so much to do with holding onto specific elements *per se*, since they are ever-changing (e.g. ideas about sexual purity of women or ideas about arranged marriages have shifted considerably). Rather, it is about reinforcing the solidary and emotional bonds with the 'group' through fear of them being lost and thereby depriving the group of valuable resources, memories and ties (see also Alcoff, 2006).

The tendency to conflate ethnicity and culture, found in multiculturalisms, underplays the political dimensions of ethnicity (Hechter, 1987). Ethnicity is a dynamic and politically inflected set of practices and struggles (I prefer to refer to ethnicity as 'the social construction of an origin as a significant arena for struggle' (see Anthias, 1992).

In addition, the recognition and celebration of difference, in all its guises, may lead to political and moral relativism. Particularly important is the danger that cultural relativism can justify the continuing oppression of women in 'the name of culture and tradition'. This is a position taken up by Okin (1999), in a problematic way, however, since all culture, not just minority culture, is potentially oppressive of women. As Nira Yuval Davis and I have argued over the years, one of the major characteristics of all cultures is the marking of women as different and as performing specific gendered roles for the ethnic or national collectivity (Anthias & Yuval Davis, 1989).

Moreover, claims of minority groups have tended to be treated as 'cultural' claims when indeed they may be less motivated by a concern with culture and more motivated with a concern for equal opportunity. For example, when asked about their involvement in such claims (such as for Muslim schools), many see themselves as attending to the educational opportunities for their children and making their life easier rather than explicitly being concerned with cultural preservation (Pecinka, 2009).

Defining the limits of difference in a multiculturalist context is problematic. Which 'cultures', or elements of 'cultures', would be 'legitimately' included in the multiculturalist vision and which would not is essentially a political question decided by the dominant group in the state. Outlawing cultural systems like polygamy, female genital modification, the ritual use of drugs, or forced marriages immediately comes to mind. The differential degrees of tolerance of the dominant towards social practices is central here, and these are related to what western thinkers often regard as universalistic rules which themselves have a social and cultural base. The limits of multiculturalism are also determined by struggles over the allocation of resources and the prioritisation of different cultural 'needs' relating to an identification of so-called 'private needs' and 'public needs'. The boundaries between public and private are socially determined, within specific cultural, class and gender contexts. In this regard, whether provisions for specific religious needs, childcare facilities for working mothers or cultural activities are provided depends, among other factors, on definitions of what constitute core cultural needs of groups to be attended to in the public arena.

One central difficulty of multiculturalism is the assumption that all members of a specific 'cultural' group are equally committed to that culture. Culture is seen as articulated in terms of people's ethnicity or identity. In this way, members of minority 'cultures' are homogenised. In one sense this may be because the voices of the culturally different have to be treated as working in unison, otherwise they cannot be easily distinguished from the majority or the 'normal' dominant 'self'. Such constructions do not have space for 'diversity within' or conflicts of interest. For example, those of class and gender become invisible. The notion of multiculturalism has tended to assume definite, static, ahistorical and essentialist units of 'culture' with fixed boundaries and with little space for growth and change (Modood [2007] has challenged this recently).

Critiques of multiculturalism have come from both the right and the left, often echoing the same problems, particularly the idea of 'parallel' or separate lives which are seen as the cause of

disharmonious 'race' relations, rioting and crime, and, indeed, as providing a potential and fertile ground for terrorism, particularly that fostered by Muslim dissentors in the wake of the events of September 11 and July 7. Critiques of multiculturalism (e.g. Goodhart, 2004; Phillips, 2005) have pinpointed the unintended consequences of segregating communities on the basis of cultural needs and cultural commonalities. Multiculturalism's strategy of paying attention to cultural needs is not only about unambiguously respecting the wishes of communities, for it has resonances with segregationist politics, where it has led to separation of culturally or ethnically defined groups. These assumptions, however, have been challenged recently (see e.g. Amin, 2008). Multiculturalist policies have also tended to fail to acknowledge the gender-specific, and, indeed, at times sexist elements of ethnic culture or the ways in which both ethnic and race boundaries are exclusionary.

However we critique multiculturalism for reifying culture and failing to deal with issues of equality, leading to parallel lives and new calls for 'social cohesion' (reasserting the rights of the dominant group to have 'integration' on its terms), the problem still remains of a balance between valorising difference and the cherished traditions of people from different backgrounds or different values, and finding a common space for civic participation and agreement on core social aims. This is far from easy, particularly where there are divisions in terms of economic and other material resources and where there is a different commitment to dominant structures.

However, the identification of the fault lines of multiculturalist policies should mean reframing the agenda and not ditching it in the name of a spurious notion of social cohesion (see Yuval-Davis et al, 2005). A starting point may be found in a move away from the idea of one dominant culture that sets out the frame of reference, and which sees the issue as a question of tolerance towards other cultures. The reframing of the debate has been too polarised in terms of either cultural diversity or social cohesion.

Exhorting minorities to take on the cultural and other symbols of so-called mainstream society also hides the concern with tighter border controls in the interest of national security in the wake of the events of September 11 and July 7 and the ideological and political aftermath. It constructs 'the stranger' (who may be a British citizen or even second- or third-generation locally born) as the root cause of social and political alienation. This is found most recently in Britain in the Path to Citizenship Green paper (Home Office, 2008) which sets out a *conditional citizenship* based on ideas of it being earned through proving knowledge of, and embeddedness within, a British way of life and a *tiered citizenship* process with, for the first time, the setting up of a probationary period.

One significant hurdle in the debate on diversity is conflating cultural identity with the development of a sense of belonging. This brings me to the notion of belonging. Belonging involves belonging to something. One can belong, though in a number of different ways (stronger or weaker, affectual, legal, etc.). At the same time as belonging in some ways, one can also not belong in other ways (e.g. one can belong as a member of the labour market and yet not belong as a citizen). In addition, for example, youngsters from migrant backgrounds can belong to two or more 'nations' or 'ethnicities', and migrants in many European societies are allowed dual nationality. At the same time they can be excluded from various aspects of these. Moreover, you can belong because you are accepted as belonging to a community but may not necessarily identify with it. For example, I can belong to the Cypriot community in Britain in the sense of being accepted as a Cypriot but I may choose not to identify with it. Belonging, in other words, gives access without necessarily giving commitment. To require commitments of belonging, as new legislation concerning citizenship tests for migrants does in the UK, goes well beyond the idea of belonging.

It is clear, therefore, that a sense of collective identity and a feeling of belonging to the country you reside in are neither co-terminous nor mutually exclusive. You may identify but not feel that you 'belong' in the sense of being accepted or a full member. Alternatively, you may feel that you are accepted and 'belong' but do not fully identify, or your allegiances may be split (Anthias, 2002). Belonging has *experiential*, *practical* and *affective* dimensions. It relates to how we feel about our location in the social world, which is in turn related to formal and informal *experiences* of belonging. In addition, it is also about *practices*: we articulate our belonging through our practices, and our practices give rise to our sense of belonging.

Belonging is not just about membership in a community, rights in a community and duties we have in a community (as in the case of being a citizen). Nor is it just about forms of identification with groups, like saying I belong to the Greek Cypriot collectivity; it is not just about



identification. It is also about the social places constructed by such identifications and memberships, and the ways in which social place has resonances on stability of the self, on feelings of being part of a larger whole, and it is about the emotional and social bonds that are related to such places.

Belonging and *social inclusion*, rather than *cohesion*, are closely connected, although this does not mean that belonging itself brings about social inclusion. It is, however, through *practices* and *experiences* of social inclusion that a sense of a stake in and acceptance in the society is created and maintained. Here, to belong is to be accepted as part of a community, to feel safe within it and to have a stake in the future of such a community of membership.

### Hybridity, and Diasporic and Cosmopolitan Belongings

Critiques of notions of ethnicity and identity that are fixed, stable, monolithic and exclusionary have led scholars and activists to embrace new ideas of hybridity and cosmopolitanism. The modern use of the concept of hybridity seeks to argue against a mono-culturalist view of identity, depicting identity as syncretic and changeable rather than as static and essentialised (Bhabha, 1994). It is often used alongside what may be regarded as its sister notion, that of diaspora (e.g. see Cohen, 1997). Cosmopolitanism, despite the difficulties, or indeed the refusal to give it a precise definition, is also a claim towards a broader cultural and justice-related framework, beyond national exclusivity, and towards a more global liberal understanding of difference and cultural values. I will only comment on hybridity, given constraints of space.

Hybridity is a term that has been seen as characterising the 'modern condition', particularly with post-modern discourse, and it has been a central term in post-structuralist cultural theory and in some variants of globalisation theory. 'Hybridity' is used in different ways and constitutes for each contemporary writer a way of challenging existing paradigms of 'identity' (see Anthias, 2001). For example, Stuart Hall suggests that hybridity is particularly linked to the idea of 'new ethnicities' (Hall, 1992), which attempts to provide a non-static and non-essentialised approach to ethnic culture. Paul Gilroy (1993), on the other hand, uses Du Bois' notion of 'double consciousness' to denote the hybrid and diasporic condition. Homi Bhabha (1994), too, sees the transgression of national or ethnic borders as the key to the condition of hybridity; a double perspective becomes possible and signals the migrant artist/poet/intellectual as the voice that speaks from two places at once, and inhabits neither. This is the space of liminality, of 'no place', or of the buffer zone of 'no man's land'. Bhabha sees hybrids as cultural brokers. It is clear that this does not occur out of a simple process of accretion, nor is it ever complete; it is full of discontinuities and ruptures.

Hybridity therefore references *cultural* syncretism or interpenetration and its transformative as well as transgressive potential. However, given the range of different meanings that can be legitimately attached to the notion of 'culture', it is important to be clear on how the term is used. This is far from clear, with different writers using the term in different ways (see e.g. Hall, 1990; Gilroy 1993; Bhabha 1994). However, the meanings and uses of the cultural elements, as well as the particular combinatory of elements, point us in the direction of rejecting a view that cultural artefacts or practices have singular or fixed meanings. Such hybridities cannot be judged as either transgressive or progressive, without paying attention to their deployment.

Not all aspects of culture have been equally malleable to globalisation, if that implies homogenisation particularly around western values and actions. This is particularly the case with regard to family organisation, gender relationships and religion. Gender and religious practices may hold different meanings in different contexts (see e.g. Afshar, 1994). In other words, the bringing together of different cultural elements syncretically may transform their meaning but need not mean the breakdown of the central or core cultural values espoused. It may be the case that there is an intermingling of cultural styles and values, producing new and innovative forms, but this need not necessarily lead to changing ethnic solidarities or the diminution of ethnocentrism and racism which is often implied by hybridity theorists. The pick and mix of cultural elements, denoted by the term hybridity, does not necessarily signify, however, a shift in identity or, indeed, the demise of identity politics of the racist or anti-racist kind. Despite these provisos, however, the hailing of transcultural and translocational identity formations (see Anthias, 2002) is an important counter-

position to fixed notions of identity and ethnicity that characterise both academic writing on these issues as well as political action.

In fact, the boundaries and borders between those who are regarded as belonging and those who are not determine the forms of particular belonging. The exclusionary and population management policies of states may be located here. Moreover, it is important to relate the notion of belonging to the differential positionings from which belongings are imagined and narrated, in terms of gender, class, stage in the lifecycle, etc., even in relation to the same community and in relation to the same boundaries and borders. Within all discussions of multi-ethnicity, there is a crucial stumbling block in terms of a failure to focus on social locations in their broader sense, and this constitutes a significant shortcoming. Both local and less local forms of belonging and position cannot be dissociated from a range of bounded social relations through the other categorical formations of gender and class (for example), as well as their processes and their effects.

### **Social Divisions and Intersections**

The discussion of the boundaries of the cultural and its social organisation raises the issue of the kinds of social collectivities which occupy the playing field of the cultural. This relates to the central social collectivities or divisions of ethnicity, race, gender and class. In traditional sociology, the realms of ethnic and gender phenomena were seen to be primarily about culture, about signs and significations, about cultural constructions to do with forms of identity and notions of appropriate forms of behaviour (in different ways for gender categories and for ethnic categories, of course). Class, on the other hand, was seen to be about the economic, about labour markets, about forms of economic hierarchy linked to the division of labour or to the realm of production and distribution of commodities (Anthias, 2001).

This distinction between some social divisions as primarily cultural (the gender and ethnic ones, for example) and class as material has been again challenged by the revival of class analysis that stresses the centrality in the pursuit of class hierarchies of forms of social distinction, of forms of elective belonging, as Mike Savage (Savage et al, 2005) calls it, for the middle class, and forms of disidentification in the work of Beverley Skeggs (1997). Class hierarchy establishing forms of morality about types of persons is also found in the work of Andrew Sayer (2005), amongst others.

Whilst there is some overstressing of the cultural in some of this work, I am more concerned to argue that the parameters of ethnic and gender divisions are central in the formation of social inequality and its reproduction – that is, that ethnic and gender divisions are not cultural constructions alone, but have material characteristics which involve placing individuals on the scale of hierarchy in society not just in and of themselves as binary constructions in terms of self and other (white/black, male/female/ ethnic dominant/ethnic subordinate), but in terms of how these formations interlock and intersect.

Inequalities, exclusions and forms of discrimination are systemic in modern societies and multidimensional. How important they are, and whether there is a concern to deal with them, is a political issue (determining priorities of struggle and change), a strategic issue (determining which are the best ways to do this), and a conceptual issue (determining how to identify them and where they come from). The link between different inequalities and discriminations is important to understand. Dealing with one discrimination only may involve increasing another (e.g. if you are concerned with ethnic equality you may increase inequality on the basis of sex - for example, by giving such groupings the right to disadvantage women or control them). This is why the discussion and conceptualisation of the intersectionality framework is so important.

There cannot be a definitive definition of an intersectionality framework, as there is a great deal of diversity in the way it is theorised and applied. It has a long history, but is a more recent 'fast travelling concept' (Knapp, 2005). It is a feminist development stemming from debates within black feminism (see hooks, 1981). Since the early 1980s the triad of gender, race and class has been the subject of a great deal of social debate and commentary (see e.g. McCall, 2005). Triple oppression, interconnections, interplay, interlocking systems of oppression, fractured identities, overlapping systems, simultaneous oppressions are all terms that have been used to signify the processes highlighted (Anthias, 2008). Coinage of the term 'intersectionality' has been attributed to Crenshaw (1994) (despite its provenance lying much earlier in the writings of black feminists in the

1980s in particular (see e.g. hooks, 1981). Put simply, intersectionality argues that it is important to look at the way in which different social divisions inter-relate in terms of the production of social relations and in terms of people's lives. Gender is seen as inflected by race and race inflected by gender – that is, they can be seen as mutually constitutive in terms of experience and practice. Intersectional theorists highlight divisions amongst 'women' by pointing towards processes of racialisation and class (although there is a tendency to use the term 'poverty' instead) and the disadvantages that follow. They have qualified the gender agenda to achieve a more complex understanding of gendered forms of disadvantage.

There are clearly rather different foci within the 'intersectionality' framework, and I do not have the space to look at different inflections or theoretical presuppositions here. However, because of the socio-legal framework that Crenshaw's (1994) important contribution is embedded within, it has influenced the tendency to look at processes of disadvantage emanating from the conjuncture between two or more different categorisations or identities, such as those combining race and gender or race, class and poverty/unemployment/exclusion (e.g. Black poor mothers or Black unemployed, criminalised men). The intersections are therefore formulated in terms of the different positions people hold in relation to gender, race and class and other social categories. According to this approach, the unity of two minority traits constitutes in fact a distinct single-minority entity giving rise to unique forms of position and disadvantage that can be accounted for neither by race nor gender, nor by adding the one to the other. What this type of 'intersectionality' insists is that the syncretic character of social divisions leads to a transformation. In terms of discrimination, it focuses on processes leading to experience not only of multiple forms of inequalities, but also of particular distinct ones. This has become particularly significant in recent years, given the growing concern with addressing multiple strands of inequality within European equality practices (Verloo, 2006).

Arguably, one danger with this notion of intersections is found in constructing people as belonging to fixed and permanent *groups* (e.g. ethnic, gender and class groups) which then all enter, in a pluralist fashion, into their determination. There is a danger of race, class and gender becoming taken for granted as categories for social analysis and a danger that they construct groups. This undermines the focus on *social processes, practices* and *outcomes* as they impact on social categories, social structures and individuals. The importance of context, meaning, representation, action and the political nature of claims and attributions at the intersectional level is raised. (Does this imply a more complex variant of identity politics?)

This is further complicated by the fact that, despite the danger of seeing people as belonging to fixed groups, groups exist at the imaginary or ideational level as well as at the juridical and legal level. Therefore, the membership of people in groups is important in two ways. One is in terms of attributions of membership and the consequences that flow from these attributions. For example, being labelled as a member of a national or racialised group may affect how one sees oneself and ideas of belonging and otherness. This may have an important role in determining forms of social engagement and participation and in the construction of claims about belonging that may be vehicles for a range of political, cultural and economic resource struggles.

A related issue is the extent to which cross-cutting categories can be multiplied; potentially there could be an infinite number of cross-cutting categories. The idea of intersecting groups raises the issue of how many should be taken into account: answers have ranged from three (gender, race and class trilogy) to nine (the new equality bill proposals in UK and EU policy [Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2010]). Potentially there could be an infinite number of cross-cutting categories (i.e. more and more 'hybrid' groups). Of course, one could argue that the relevance of the category is a product of its social saliency, but there may be equally important categories which are invisible in social practice (as women or non-black minorities such as the Roma have been). The political salience of a category doesn't always exhaust its social saliency or the importance of forms of oppression (experienced and unseen). It is more useful where the notion of grouping is employed to work with a more flexible and emergent notion of parameters.

There has been a tendency to focus on identity and not enough on structure. There has also been a tendency to under-explore class in terms of treating it both as a population grouping and as a set of social relations or as a dynamic of social relations. There is also an issue about whether the concept of intersectionality has universal applicability or is only applicable to marginalised groups (Nath, 2009). Of course, if it purports to understand social relations, it must aim to be more



generally applicable (see Anthias & Yuval Davis [1992] for a view that sees it having a more general applicability). In addition, in terms of legal or policy initiatives, legal frameworks identify fixed legal categories and may have difficulty dealing with complexity.

Intersectionality uses a powerful metaphor which may be misleading as it suggests that what takes place is similar to being at an intersection. However, what happens at an intersection might not be a product of the roads as gender, race and class are always constitutive of each other (unlike roads); this means we shouldn't take the metaphor too literally (it should be seen as signposting complexity as well as multiplicity).

A further set of questions relates to whether it is a theory or heuristic device (I prefer the latter). But what kind of heuristic device is it? Kathy Davis's (2008) claim that it is a sensitising concept or a buzzword is persuasive but somehow leaves me unsatisfied. There are many different ways of approaching intersections, such as refusing the existence of categories, emphasising identities, emphasising structures of power, focusing on the law and equality legislation (these differences are important analytically and politically even if we accept that the term's role is as a 'buzzword').

For an intersectional framing to deliver its promise there is a need to think of different levels of analysis – relations in the concrete world between people and the categorisations and social divisions that affect them. This involves thinking about the analytical links between different types of social division – for example, similarities and differences between class division, gender division and ethnic division (see Anthias, 1998), as well as their differences as social relations of categorisation, collectivity and inequality. In addition, one or other of the divisions doesn't always matter in particular contexts, or some may matter more than others; for example, ethnicity doesn't always matter either at the structural or identity level – it has a spectrum of intensity and identification (Pieterse, 1997).

This means that social categorisations are not equally positioned or salient at all times and that the approach has to be historically sensitive as there are complex new emerging constellations of disadvantage. They are context- and time-related and exist within sets of social relationships at particular points in place and time. Moreover, complex social relations cannot be reduced to the workings of the intersections of gender, race, etc.; the latter are abstractions and conceptual tools which denote how our societies organise social relations. They do not exist as given 'groupings', but are socially made and unmade by practices. It is political strategies for representation and for exclusion that construct such categories as meaningful, and they are centrally linked to discourses and practices of power and struggles around them.

There is often contestation or political struggle around who belongs and what criteria individuals should have in order to count fully as belonging. Sometimes this includes cultural criteria, sometimes legal entitlement (as in nationality), and sometimes religious faith, or others, such as behaving in appropriate ways (e.g. women within ethnic groups). There is also a danger in leaving out the understandings of subjects themselves who are not divided into fragments in the way some of these arguments might suggest, or who do not necessarily think of themselves in such terms. Issues emerge, therefore, about the power of definitions and who makes them here.

With these provisos, despite the difficulty of the notion of intersections, it may be possible to see ethnicity/nation, gender and class as structural processes as well as categories as they are embedded in lived experience, in organisational structures, in social interactions and in forms of representation. They involve processes relating to a range of economic, political and social interests and projects and to distinctive (and variable) forms of social allegiance and identifications which are played out in a nuanced and highly context-related fashion. These may construct multiple, uneven and contradictory social patterns of identity and belonging (as well as domination and subordination).

The political questions opened up here go beyond an auditing of hybrid positions in the social structure, and have direct relevance in terms of how inequalities, identities and political strategies are conceptualised and assessed. Such implications undermine identity politics on the one hand and raise issues about contextual and conjunctural coalitions around specific issues, as well as more general questions about wider frameworks for integrating approaches to inequality. They also problematise the view of inalienable and primary boundaries round the categories themselves.

### Moving Forward: social locations and translocations

In this part of the article I want to present a particular approach which may be seen as intersectional, which tries to integrate notions of social structure and the formation of identities and collectivities. Ethnicity, gender and class may be seen as involving processes and relations of hierarchisation, unequal resource allocation and inferiorisation relating to a range of economic, political and social interests and projects and to distinctive (and variable) forms of social allegiance and identifications. These are played out in a nuanced and highly context-related fashion. They involve political strategies for representation and for exclusion, and they are centrally linked to discourses and practices of power and struggles around them.

However, complex social relations cannot be reduced to the workings of the intersections of gender, race, and so on: the latter are abstractions and conceptual tools which denote how our societies organise social relations, and in the lived experiences of people they are articulated in contextual and combinatory ways. It is also important to think about different levels of analysis which also intersect in social relations. Such levels can be treated as heuristic devices enabling specific kinds of investigations as a focus of study:

- *Experiential*. This focuses on the experiences of persons (within specific locatable contexts – say, in the school, in the work place, in the neighbourhood) and their narrations of these;
- *Intersubjective*. This arises from the level of intersubjective relations: the actions and practices that take place in relation to others (often within institutional settings);
- *Organisational*. This focuses on institutional and other organisational forms – for example, family structures and networks, educational systems, political and legal systems, the state apparatus and the system of policing and surveillance – for instance, how is sexuality, biological reproduction or population categories constructed, organised and represented within institutional frameworks and in terms of the allocation of resources?
- *Representational*. What are the symbolic and representational means, the images and texts, the documents and information flows around the ontological spaces of social difference and inequality? (For more discussion, see Anthias, 1998.)

I have argued before about abandoning the lens of identity for understanding issues of difference and division and instead looking at processes of social location and positionality (Anthias, 2002, 2008, 2009). This involves looking at both where people are placed within relations of social hierarchy within a time and space framework, and how they position themselves in time and space and in terms of their narrations of their social position in relational terms. In my understanding of social locations (which uses a spatial metaphor), these are not treated as fixed or given:

- Our 'location' is always characterised by being within, and embedded in, relations of hierarchy within a multiplicity of specific situational and conjunctural spheres.
- We experience simultaneously being and becoming, fixity and change.
- Our positions and positionality are linked, but not in a mechanistic way: we take up positionings in relation to our locations depending on context and meaning as well as 'interest', and in terms of values, goals and projects.

This leads me to the concept of *translocational positionality* (Anthias, 2002). This approach aims to pay attention to spatial and contextual dimensions. It emphasises processes (rather than fixing people and 'groupings' of people). Difference and inequality are conceptualised as a set of processes, and not as possessive characteristics of individuals, although individuals experience the outcomes of these processes.

Moreover, there are no standard outcomes involved in the dialogical articulation of the boundaries and hierarchies of social relations. On the one hand, they can be mutually reinforcing (as in the case, possibly, of a migrant, unemployed woman). On the other hand, they can be relational/contradictory (e.g. a man may be subordinated in class terms, but is positioned advantageously in relation to his female partner, and may exercise patriarchal forms of power over her, or a woman may be subordinated as a cleaner, but have a degree which gives her good life chances in some contexts). An individual may be positioned higher in one social place than another (e.g. migrants returning to their homelands may achieve class benefits as they may display relative wealth to poorer villagers). This perspective enables the abandonment of the residual elements of

essentialisation retained within the idea of fragmented and multiple identities so favoured by critics of unitary notions of identity and some versions of intersectionality.

### Concluding Remarks

In this article I have argued that individuals are positioned within systems of power in multiple and at times contradictory ways. Forms of social distinction and inequality are produced in complex combinatories of social location in its broadest sense, forged through multiple sites. Hierarchical relations linked to social divisions are emergent and subject to historical contingencies, variable, irreducible and changeable. They intersect within specific and local contexts and in relation to agency (as social action rather than will). Furthermore, I have stressed the importance of understanding *contradictory locations* where dominant and subordinate ones intersect (Anthias, 1998, 2008), thus placing actors as subordinate in some times and places, and more dominant in others. In this way subordination and hierarchy are multifarious depending on different constellations of power in different time/space frameworks. However, there are social locations where the dialogical articulations produce an amplification of inequality and disadvantage, and these need attending to. The need to consider diversity must therefore incorporate not just a concern with the binaries of identity and difference but also the *articulation* of social divisions and identities. This involves examining both the specific combinatories that produce systemic inequalities and their transformatory potential. Enabling measures need to be put in place in a more nuanced way, and this must attend to social relations more generally and not focus singularly on the diverse who are constructed as the migrant or racialised others.

I want to now briefly turn to some methodological and social policy issues raised by intersectionality framing. Using large data sets which include variables of gender, class and ethnicity already assumes these to be categories of social relevance (which is not unreasonable in and of itself). However, the classifications used are products of particular auditing systems (e.g. of the state) and are therefore political constructs. It is therefore important not to take these for granted as representing the realm of the 'real' unproblematically, and to be cautious about the use of the data. Studying groups, such as a particular migrant group of women, to thereby unpack the supposed homogeneity and find differences within (what McCall [2005] calls intra-categorical analysis) is also useful. However, these categories are socially constructed and we should not assume that finding particular characteristics within these categories means that there is some causal relationship between the outcomes and the nature of the categories themselves. I do not, however, take the view that the use either of data sets or of researching, given 'groupings', is in and of itself untenable or useless.

However, if we want to abandon as much as possible some of the problems involved, it may be useful to start with place and context. Starting off from an examination of unequal positions (within organisations, the state, neighbourhoods, sites of education) and who fills them (i.e. what the categorical formations are that are yielded by this) is I believe an important way of moving ahead with the kinds of analysis that intersectional frames enable. This means that the categorical formations yielded in the process can be seen as axes of power rather than of social identities: these axes of power are manifested in unequal social places, although they do not derive from within them exclusively.

The social policy issues raised are also difficult, as we have seen, with some critiques being made of the attempted use of intersectionality within the multiple discrimination frameworks in the UK and the EU (Verloo, 2006; Kantola & Nousiainen, 2009). I would like to end with a number of difficult issues faced in the social policy arena.

- Intersectionality policy has difficulty dealing with the inequality of women within their own communities and within own families (i.e. outside what is usually thought of as the public domain);
- It is difficult to identify and label the points of intersection;
- It is difficult to find the actual causes of given outcomes;
- How can the equality duty be implemented at intersectional levels? What do public bodies need to do, since they can't predict which combinatories intersect to develop specific outcomes?

- Even if we assume that public bodies can only be responsive, there is still the problematic requirement that a subject is able to identify where the disadvantage comes from.

There is clearly a great deal of work to be undertaken with regard to these difficult issues within current social arrangements. I believe a more radical rethinking of forms of inequality and the social relations involved needs to accompany the exercise of improving public provisions to deal with discrimination and disadvantage.

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