

Yuval-Davis, N., Kannabiran, K. & Vieten, U.M. (Eds.) (2006) *The Situated Politics of Belonging*. London, Thousand Oaks, CA, New Delhi: Sage. 238 Pages (including index). ISBN: 10 1 4129 2101 5 (hbk), ISBN: 13 978 1 4129 2101 5 (pbk), Price: £70.00 (hbk)

‘Violence, suffering and oppression form the triad on which imagined communities of belonging are constructed, which then feed Utopian political projects’ (p 205). Thus begins the final chapter (by Gita Sahgal) in this collection of essays, and it goes straight to the core of the central concerns of this book. If this sounds rather bleak, the editors are justifiably unapologetic and upfront about identifying a ‘global crisis situation’ within the politics of belonging, which runs along political, social, economic and moral dimensions. We could add an epistemological dimension to this list. In other words, while deconstruction in critical theory across many disciplines, including cultural studies, has produced invaluable insights into questions of culture, identity, and rights, there is a strong sense that a limit has been reached. Despite continuous deconstruction of the potentially destructive effects of strict binaries and boundaries in an academic context, they appear to be forever growing in rigidity beyond that context, and we witness the often disastrous outcomes on a day to day basis. Gurminder Bhambra simply puts it like this in the second chapter of this book: ‘once deconstructed, what then?’ (p 32) This is the vital question (inspired by Stuart Hall’s ‘the multicultural question’) that all chapters in this volume are concerned with in one way or another, and it thus makes a very timely and urgent intervention in the field, or rather fields, as the approach is decidedly multidisciplinary.

The editors identify the politics of belonging as situated in three different, but complementary ways: temporally, spatially and intersectionally. While the former two relate to historical contexts and the importance of place, the latter forces the focus explicitly onto ‘the intersecting and intermeshing social locations along different power grids in society’ (p 7). It thereby also problematizes the notion that belonging is a project that can ultimately be achieved, and sees it rather as a continuous process for which the tools are unequally distributed. This is the central theme underlying the wide variety of approaches in the book, and it cuts across the three parts around which it is organized: multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism; racisms and sexism; and human rights and

military interventions. Each of these sections is framed within the general notion of the politics of belonging and usefully moves from chapters with a broad theoretical approach to chapters with a more specific focus, be that specific locations, social groupings or specific social struggles.

Thus, the first two chapters in part one (by Anthias and Bhambra) address the broader context of translocations, globalization and rights, while the latter two (by Nava and Kannabiran) focus on the specificity of London as a cosmopolitan space, and on Dalit women's politics of resistance. Particularly the Nava chapter about London is symptomatic of this volume, in that it sheds new light on migration struggles, often seen as characterized by racism and xenophobia, by providing an alternative history of hospitality, sympathy and desire for cultural and racial 'others'.

Part two opens with a chapter in which Nirmal Puwar warns against the danger of 'romanticizing marginality' and presses for the need to think beyond commonly used categories (such as race, gender and class), by drawing attention to the fluidity that characterizes these identified 'axes of differentiation'. It then gets more specific again, with chapters on contemporary African diasporas (Ifekwunigwe), the relationship between Irish belonging, diaspora and current migration flows (Feldman), refugees living on temporary protection visas in Australia (Humpage & Marston), and gender and caste conflicts in rural Bihar (Thapar-Björkert). Like Nava, Humpage and Marston draw attention to the complexity of an official policy of exclusion, contrasted with a hospitable approach at the community level, which leads to resettlement experiences fraught with ambiguity and ambivalence.

The third part largely focuses on public discourses, primary through the media. Robert Fine begins this part with an important examination of the contemporary use of the language of 'evil' and its consequences. In the process, he asks a vital question: 'Does the language of 'evil' allow us to maintain our *astonishment* in the face of human atrocity' (p 152, original emphasis). This is followed by Chandler who makes a link between the West's projection of power abroad, and what he calls the 'political malaise' at home. It then becomes more specific again with chapters on the differential media treatment of two Australian citizens in Guantanamo Bay (Skrbiš), and the gendered politics of belonging in recent Iraq history (Al-Ali). The final chapter can again be seen

as symptomatic of the approaches in this book in that Gita Saghal does not stop at deconstructing how violence contributes to ideas of belonging, but she takes that a step further by suggesting how violence can be a catalyst to create strategic anti-violence movements. In the process, she asks some pertinent questions about the relationship between ‘agency’ and ‘capacity’, both on individual and group levels.

In relation to human rights struggles of all kinds, Sahgal suggests that ‘there can be no final answers, but only a set of contingent practices, which we assess and renew’ (p 220), and this could be seen as pertaining to this book as well. Although certainly ambitious in its scope, the aim of this volume is not to provide all the answers, but the fourteen chapters and the introduction challenge us to move beyond deconstruction and to think strategically about ways to destabilize existing power grids, and for this reason alone it would make inspiring reading for anyone concerned with the politics of belonging today. While the sales ‘blurb’ for this book suggests a readership of ‘scholars working in the areas of multiculturalism, globalisation and culture, race and ethnic studies, gender studies and studies of post-partition societies’, it should have an even wider application, as the politics of belonging affect us all.

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