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Book Review

Translocational Belongings: Intersectional Dilemmas and Social Inequalities

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Routledge, 2020

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Social inequalities create violence and threaten to reduce democratic features of contemporary political lives. People are excluded, exploited, and discriminated against and easily left exposed to both state violence and (politically encouraged) sporadic violence. On what basis? On a long list of oppressive bases: class, gender, race/religion/ ethnicity/nationality/religion/citizenship status, sexuality, age, ability, language, body shape, culture, sexuality, education, accent and many others. In 1989 Kimberle Crenshaw¹, introduced the theory of intersectionality, arguing that feminists could no longer analyze each such base of oppression, on its own but must consider their mutual constitution. Almost concurrently, Patricia Hill-Collins² (1990) articulated her notion of interlocking relationship between the three axes of oppression, class, gender and race. Since 1981, Floya Anthias, Professor Emerita of sociology and social justice at university of Roehampton, London, has been developing an approach that corresponds with these African-American feminist scholar looking at the interplay between different social divisions. The book I review here builds on her later work on *Translocational positionality*.

Translocational belonging takes the intersectionality project further by elaborating on the notion of 'constituting each other' or the intertwined. What do we mean when we say that gender, race, and class constitute each other, and do they always have the same analytical weight? It introduces a sociological feminist theory that aims at answering the question of: how should sociologists undertake to tackle the intersectionality of oppression bases? Anthias' answer to these questions begins with the recognition that, analytically, we need to maintain the separation of the categories while presenting the understanding of their mutual constitution. Translocational analysis then is a three levels analysis: the level of social ontologies, that of social categories, and then the level of concrete social relations. At the latter level, the axes are never separated even if perceived as either gendered, racialized or classed by actors, but at the level of ontologies, it may be effective to try understanding the history, economy, and resistance of each hierarchy separately.

The book has seven chapters, each addresses a different dilemma in pursuing the analysis of intersectionality as anchored in place and time. Without a spatio-temporal perspective, it is difficult, argues Anthias, to attribute significance to the accumulations of achievements made by social struggles, that have changed oppressive relations over time in specific places. Each of the chapters, focuses on a different set of contradictions that renders the intersectionality project, even more theoretically complex. Chapter 1, marking places, discusses social polarization; Chapter 2, branding places, discusses boundary crossing vs their maintained; Chapter 3, assembling places, discusses intersections of inequalities; Chapters 4, 5 and 7 are discussed in detail below, and chapter 6, territorializing places, discusses ethnic/racial subordinations. Of primary importance for Anthias is that a sociological approach to intersectionality maintains the analysis as relational and processual. I won't unfold here the theoretical arguments presented in each of the chapters. Instead I illustrate the relational and processual analysis by focusing on Anthias perspective on the dimension of class, presented in chapter 4, „Hierarchizing places“. Class is prominent in the book as a whole and thus chapter 4 is of particular importance. Then I turn to her analysis of gendered violence, analyzed in chapter 5 „transgressing places“, followed by my introduction of her perspective on the aspect of resistance and struggle from an intersectionality perspective, presented in chapter 7 „transforming places“.

Anthias has a unique voice within feminism and among political economists, and a good way to grasp it is by examining her understanding of class in the fourth chapter of the book. Anthias point of departure for conceptualizing class in its intersections with gender and race is that each has cultural and economic features, and its the intertwined nature of the economic with the symbolic in each that sheds light on how they operate together. The cultural and the symbolic operate next to economic processes and mechanisms demanding attention to the broad political and social conditions enabling them. Note that even if class has a history of being equated with ownership of resources, specific gender and racial histories in specific locations are inseparable from the development of such ownership. For Anthias, The mutual constitution of gender, race, and class is the constitution of the material/cultural nexus of social relations. By distancing from the understanding of class as representing the 'economic' without the cultural, Anthias is able to focus on the relational as both political and personal shaping the range of processes and outcomes, including *resource production, allocation, distribution, and contestation* (p. 106). Anthias drops the traditional stratification perspective of class as a fixed pyramid and maintains the Marxist tradition of 'class relations' into her understanding of the mutual constitution of inequalities. If class and all other inequality axes must not be understood as uniform over geographical shifts and temporal process and transformations, 'class relations' becomes the organizing principle of intersectionality as simultaneously studying structural barriers, cultural repertoires that constitute the inferiority of the 'other' and resistance, organizing and challenge. By focusing on relations and resistance analysts may better reach "processes and outcomes in spatio-temporal ways" in understanding inequality.

The fifth chapter demonstrates a multilevel analysis by emphasizing the tendency to analyze intimate partners' violence as reproduced within patriarchal dependency relations. Anthias joins other feminists in portraying violence against women as structural rather than a matter of men being violent towards women. However, the field of intimate partner violence is one in which class is often marginalized, emphasizing on race, religion, and ethnonationalism to the extent of stigmatization which has extremely negative consequences on women's ability to complain or seek formal support. In this way, femonationalists, right-wing activists, can take pride in being morally better than the 'Other'. Anthias shows how class analysis and attention to issues of dependency generated by citizenship status and lack of papers/documents, must be taken into account in the analysis of gendered violence to refrain from such stigmatization and paternalistic treatment of those of different ethnic descent.

Anthias follows several guidelines in developing *translocational belonging* as an analytical framework for understanding the mutual constitution of oppressive structures or hierarchies. Firstly, she warns analysts of social inequality of the possibility that social categories will become monolithic (Working class-Black-women is a highly diverse category). The same warning goes to activists using identity politics as identity implies some unifying elements in any category. The unification of categories is an essentializing force that, Anthias explains, has served the reproduction of hierarchy. Thus, anyone interested in dismantling hierarchy must deter any implicitly unifying insinuations. Secondly, oppressive structures take a specific shape in each geographical place, but, more important, many people are moving between places and communities in ways that generate dualities and complexities of encounters between differentially located oppressive structures. Thirdly, each oppressive structure is both material and cultural, both institutional and inter-personal. Fourthly, each oppressive structure is relational: class relations, race relations, and gender relations embed a politics of resistance and protest, which accumulates political assets and progress and create reactionary trends. The overlapping dynamics, which are salient to each of these guidelines, is the major challenge of a processual intersectional analysis of the type introduced here. How then should researchers maintain an emphasis on the translocational shifts, geographical and cultural, next to the investigation of the relationality and the potential of both collectivist and individual resistance to any of the oppressive structures? Anthias gives theoretically complex and sociologically intriguing answers to these questions in each of the seven chapters.

Another principle from Marxist traditions of thought is maintained in Chapter 7, by focusing on belonging in its manifestation as struggle. It is the emphasis on organizing and resistance and the extent to which translocational thought and action could yield more potential for coalition and solidarity politics. Anthias paves the path by a set of warnings, the first being the risk of 'categories' that would fragment the struggle rather than create a critical mass and relevant leadership. Further, Anthias warns of any contestational politics of the possibility that adding more specific categories to legislations and policies would backfire. Instead, the potential is embedded in struggles' defini-

tions that invite and may create solidarity politics. Another warning is directed at the hope for dialogical politics that cannot suffice if we accept the translocational view and its focus on power and privilege. The rare ability to admit power and privilege challenges the chances of dialogue. A further warning goes to any political endeavor that would reproduce hegemonic patterns of thought and practice (e.g., gay marriage and commodification of surrogate mothers).

As a way to overcome these obstacles Anthias calls for “a greater emphasis on tackling the impediments to full participation through the attack on translocational subordinations on several fronts” (p. 186). By that, she encourages the organizing of struggles that would transform the system of inequalities as operating in the economy, in the polity, and in society which would require a willingness to accept the strength of inclusive communities inviting membership and belonging of all regardless of citizenship status.

Anthias’ approach to the complexity of social locations and their intersections (e.g. gender, race-ethno-nationality and class), emphasizes the relational nature of people’s responses to their intersectional position. They accept the inequality structures and oppressive axes relevant to their position and resist those in a range of ways to the extent of contesting resource distribution. Following translocational belonging means that our understanding of inequality is concurrently an understanding of entitlement (and thus, claims to resources) as a dynamic dimension of belonging associated primarily with stigmatized ethno-national categories and the forms of exclusion they experience.

In *Translocational belonging*, immigrants do not form a social category but not just because of dynamic of the immigration stories. Anthias utilizes her immigrant biography, described as a matter of repeated painful transitions and separation in the preface to the book, to remind us that immigrants are not the ‘other’. They are us. All efforts to draw boundaries, structural and racist exclusions, inferiorizing mechanisms are highly effective for promoting capitalist exploitation and nationalistic politics. However, at the level of concrete social relations, the endeavor of ‘othering’ immigrants, even in its horrific levels of cruelty at the US border with Mexico, is bound to fail.

The book is not an easy read, and maintaining the required level of analytical complexity is made even more difficult by the continuous focus on dynamic transformations. However, it is a necessary read to anyone interested in dropping intersectionality as a buzzword and turning intersectionality into a rigor theory of inequality and power.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Crenshaw, K. (1990). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. *Stan. L. Rev.*, 43, 1241.
- 2 Collins, P. H. (1990). *Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment*. routledge.