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## BOOK REVIEW

**'BANISH THOSE OTHER BORDERS': reframing concepts, coalescing (trans)feminisms**

*Book review of translocational belongings: intersectional dilemmas and social inequalities*, by Floya Anthias

Perhaps my favourite part of this much-awaited book by Floya Anthias, in which she synthesizes her decades-long engagement with intersectionality, social stratification, migration politics, and Marxist feminism, is its Prolegomena. There, writing in an autoethnographic vein, Floya Anthias gives us a glimpse into the worlds from, to, and through which she has transposed, transitioned, and translocated. We gain insight into her political motivations, her attachments, her feelings of (non)belonging, all of which, in more subdued ways, surface in the theoretical arguments comprising the seven subsequent chapters of the book: 'These memories resonate today in the writing of this book and unfold their traces over me, with sweetness, sorrow, and hope' (Anthias 2021, 8). Locating or situating the self, reflecting upon and narrativising one's location, and avowing the limitations of one's perspective have, of course, become commonplace exercises within academic feminism. I'm told they are practices with roots in consciousness raising groups, self-education circles, and other feminist movement spaces producing knowledge from experience, rife and tarrying with relations of power, as these inflect encounters between 'women'—that embattled location of 'heterogeneous commonality' (Collins 2003, 221). In the Prolegomena, Anthias tells us the book we hold in our hands is '[a] set of whistlings, written in the spirit of the engaged vagabond, refusing the safe place of accepted and received wisdoms' (1); that 'translocational belongings reflect the condition of the wanderer' (1), one navigating

the border of homeland and the migration experience: loss and displacement. The border of fear, of losing your family, of not understanding, of not being accepted. The border of being a colonial subject threatened and imprisoned for your desire for freedom from the colonial yoke, and the loss of the father behind the barbed wires of the Dhekelia camp, visiting him, seeing his tender face behind those bars. The border of political belief, of castigation for taking a different stand to the nationalist one ... The border of communism and how it separates you out from your neighbours but also as an inclusivist community of fellow believers. The simultaneous othering and belonging. And then the other border, the one that is strongly imprinted on all societies of ethnic conflict: the border with and against your 'other' who is around the corner, but who cannot be in your homes (5).

And here, Anthias issues a call, which, even if it is left behind in the pages that follow – where the text becomes disciplined into taking on the shape of sound and rational argument – continues to echo in my ears as I read them: ‘Please no more ours and theirs, no more borders of violence, let the borders be those of trees, of seas, of bodies, of voices: BANISH THOSE OTHER BORDERS’ (6, caps in original). These are, if I’m not mistaken, the only words written in capital letters in the book. So, I understand them to be central to Anthias’ intellectual project, even if she does not explicitly position it in terms of abolition politics. I am comforted by these words—‘BANISH THOSE OTHER BORDERS’—having appeared in the Prolegomena, in the form of a scream (as caps often indicate). Even as I yearned to encounter them again, in their place I found measured arguments, studied ripostes, and clear expositions. Nothing against all that; this is – after all – a work of sociological theory, which aims to make an intervention in the interdisciplinary scholarly field now known as intersectionality studies. Yet, those words in capital letters haunted me, and I sought their meaning and their feeling in the remainder of the book.

We live in a world where the geography of seas, rivers, and bodies have become weaponized in the service of violent borders. I am thinking of the aqueous cemetery that surrounds Fortress Europe; the Rio Grande that divides – unites the US and Mexico; the scripts of gendered violence and the feminicides that are enacted daily to reproduce this bordered reality in which we live. States cynically use geography to kill, entrap, expose, maim, and otherwise defeat the will and extinguish the lives of people on the move. On a spectrum with this extreme violence – at times extrajudicial and at others entirely legal, or at least legalized violence – are the quotidian violences of what Anthias’ longtime collaborator Nira Yuval-Davis and her co-authors have called ‘everyday borders’ (Yuval-Davis, Wemyss, and Cassidy 2019). For Anthias, categories uphold these ‘walls and borders [which] are everywhere around us’ (9). Thus, she argues, ‘[r]eframing our concepts is an important political practice which intervenes and potentially disrupts the borders and boundaries of fixed identities and essentialised conceptions of our interests, of who “we” are and who “they” are’ (11). Anthias understands this as ‘a form of intellectual revolutionary political practice which can inform and is informed by political activism’ (11).

Chapter 1 sets out Anthias’ main argument in the book: ‘there is a particularity to the current set of contradictions that modern societies face which lies in processes of dismantling fixities, on the one hand, but also tendencies towards their entrenchment and reproduction, on the other ... this is part of the mechanism for dealing with crises at different levels, denoting a central bifurcation in modern neoliberal democracies ... the mutual co-existence of de-ordering and re-ordering’ (11). Chapter 2 argues that ‘categorizations, and associated forms of belonging, involve the marking and making of *places* of difference, mapping out the borders and boundaries of entitlements, resource allocation, inclusion and exclusion, and inequality’ (11, italics in original). Chapter 3 revisits recent debates and quandaries concerning intersectionality and its use of categories, particularly

in asserting, on the one hand, their mutual constitution, and on the other, their separability. Here, possibly in tension with her eliminativist approach to categorial borders, Anthias reiterates her insistence on the analytic, social ontological separability of categories of race, gender, and class (amongst others), whilst at the same time asserting that they are mutually constituting and therefore lived as simultaneous in concrete relations (everyday life). I find very interesting Anthias' claim that '*mutual constitution is itself a heuristic that enables investigation: it asks [about categories] "what do they do to each other and what does this reveal about the operations of power?"*' (75, italics in original). The subsequent three chapters engage in a kind of contextual foundationalism, centring a single analytic category whilst arguing for its entanglement with the others: Chapter 4—centring class – elaborates an intersectional account of social stratification (12); Chapter 5—centring gender – examines 'dilemmas relating to sex and gendered forms of boundary making' (12); and Chapter 6—centring race – examines 'borders and boundaries in relation to nation, migration, and race, as interrelated aspects of territorializing resource allocations and subordinations within an imperative of closure and differential/subordinated inclusion' (13). Finally, the Epilogos 'looks at the political potential of an intersectionally inflected approach': '[i]ntersectionality has produced critiques and backlashes concerning its potential "whitening", neo-liberal agenda, policy framing, its individualization of difference, and claims and counterclaims about its origins. There is therefore the issue of the form of politics which it fosters, whether it be identity politics or solidarity politics', without these being always incompatible, according to Anthias. She points to a third way, which she terms a 'politics of translocation' (13).

Anthias arrives at the concept of translocational intersectionality bypassing some of the 'definitional dilemmas' that the concept has raised – to quote Collins (2015), to whom there is frequent reference as a fellow traveller throughout the book. For instance, Anthias insists that 'the important question ... [is] not "what is intersectionality" but "*what is the problem that intersectionality addresses?*"' (76, italics in original). This move circumvents the issue of intersectionality's conceptual definition, extension, scope by foregrounding the impetus and efficacy of the concept. Something similar is argued with reference to class and racism (later on in the book): we needn't become preoccupied with what intersectionality (or class or racism) is, but rather focus on the question, to what problem does it respond or describe (or, what effects does it have on people's lives). I found this shift – among other arguments about originalism, mutual constitution, and coloniality in this Chapter, entitled 'Assembling Places: Dilemmas of Articulation'—quite interesting. Unfortunately, these arguments are too complex to address fully given the space constraints of this short review essay.

For Anthias, the answer to the question, *to what problem does intersectionality respond?* is social stratification and social hierarchy (76). In constituting social hierarchies and stratifying subjects, Anthias argues 'categories assemble and re-assemble, articulate and entangle' in various ways: '[s]

ubordinations can be reinforced but they may also be mitigated' (89). Thinking about the answer Anthias gives to the question she poses, I found this – on the face of it a straightforward, and fairly uncontroversial answer – a little bit surprising considering the interplay between the metaphor of the intersection and the metaphor of the basement in Crenshaw's work (Crenshaw 1989), wherein the latter describes processes of the reproduction of social hierarchy as a vertical structure assigning people to places. I know that Anthias is keen on an anti-originalist position, but I couldn't help but wonder whether the parallel genealogies of Black British and US Black feminisms, in relation to the concept of intersectionality specifically are part of the reason for intersectionality's indeterminacy and polysemy. Actually, I would suggest that a materialist analysis of the concrete social relations in which intersectionality came to be a heuristic need not lapse into the traps of originalism, as Jennifer Nash (2015) has articulated them, whom Anthias invokes approvingly. A certain impatience with the suggestion that we trace the transpositions, translocations, and transformations of a concept seems reserved (not specifically by Anthias, but more generally speaking) for intersectionality in a way that one rarely hears it expressed about, say, social reproduction theory or the recognition/redistribution debate.

I am unsure if intersectionality responds to the problem of stratification. Still, one of the aspects that I most appreciated about Anthias' book is its focus on capitalism. Anthias argues that '[c]apitalism is ... more than just an economic system with class as its motor ... intersectionally constituted power relations and resource allocations become the motor of capitalist social systems, through the harnessing of categories in potentially plastic and changeable forms' (107). Citing a tradition of theorizing racial capitalism (Oliver Cox, Cedric Robinson, and more recently, Satnam Virdee) as well as Marxist feminist arguments concerning the gendered and racialized constitution of a 'reserve army of labour' (RAL) (Saskia Sassen, Anthias herself, and others), Anthias nevertheless wants to 'delimit ... class heuristically through retaining the idea of class in the Marxist sense to denote positions and relations in the production process, retaining also the idea of class exploitation as a mechanism of class relations' (111). Intersectional theorising of capitalism with an abolitionist horizon, in my view, is ever more urgent as capitalism faces multiple, intersecting crises of its own making, the lethal intractability of which is becoming ever more apparent to anyone paying attention.

Part of that project, of a translocational intersectional theory of capitalism, for Anthias is analysing 'how women are inserted into the global landscape of inequality, as workers, and within the global care chain'. In this connection, in Chapter 5, 'Transgressing Places: Dilemmas of Gender, Intimacy, and Violence', Anthias makes a number of claims from which I'd like to take a critical distance. These concern what she terms 'undoing gender', possibly a reference to Judith Butler's book of the same title (Butler 2004), who is invoked as a foil here (118–119). Anthias claims that '[t]he undoing of gender for many women in the Global North has been made possible through the

continuing “doing” of gender (often racialized) in the care work of women from the Global South’ (118). Although it is a bit unclear to me what the empirical basis of this claim is, it seems to target ‘gender fluidity, including gender transitioning’ (118), which Anthias glosses briefly in a section titled ‘Transgendering or undoing gender’. Here, the discussion is woefully uninformed by transfeminist theories, presenting instead so-called ‘gender critical’ views as a legitimate feminist political position, albeit one of ‘feminist backlash against transgendering [sic]’ (138). Whilst Anthias does not, it seems to me, take an explicit stance with respect to what she terms the ‘dilemma between pulls to fluidities and pulls towards fixities, raised particularly with gender transitioning’, she acknowledges that ‘angry backlash from some feminists’ against trans people’s right to gender self-determination has involved ‘a new wave of hate speech towards trans-people [sic]’ (138–139). Yet, unfortunately, this brief (2-page) gloss is replete with cisnormative and TERF tropes about trans people – albeit ones which are mostly attributed to ‘some feminists’ rather than being explicitly avowed by the author herself. Perhaps the most extreme of which is the claim that ‘[s]ex re-alignment through surgery may be regarded by some as a form of brutality towards the body and, therefore, yet another kind of violence in the name of gender’ (138–139). This comes at the end of a chapter that has addressed forms of gendered violence such as intimate partner violence, rape, familial gender violence, so-called honour based violence, and trafficking. Concerning the latter, whilst being careful to explicitate that ‘sex work is work’ (129), and that trafficking exploits precarious and illegalized migration statuses, the appeal to trafficking risks to reproduce the criminalization of people feminists are keen to ‘protect’. Trans people are not understood here as the targets, victims, and survivors of gendered violence, including on migration routes and in exploitative labour conditions. The only violence that is named is that which they ostensibly perform ‘in the name of gender’ consensually to their own bodies. Further, the medical intervention – without their consent – on the bodies of intersex people, which upholds the naturalized binary gender system at question here, is not mentioned in this connection. It is a lacuna of the argument that there is no discussion of rampant violence against trans people, particularly trans women of colour in the Global South, no discussion of their economic exploitation as people who perform reproductive labour (such as sex work), nor is their acute marginalization in the capitalist economy due to structural and interpersonal transphobia.

In contrast to the deconstruction of race and class as naturalized categories of oppression and exploitation, a kind of reassertion of gender appears: gender is taken to be ontologically anchored in the ‘actual physical or material aspects of sexual difference [and its ...] visceral effects linked to menstruation, the menopause and reproduction’ (119). Whilst Anthias recognizes that ‘a central contradiction found in gender categories lies in the mutuality and violence/subordination twin and that this constitutes a particularly biologicistic discursive apparatus that feeds into naturalizing relations of subordination’ (12), this clarity does not extend to transgender phenomena. If ‘women’—that is, women

presumed to be cis and heterosexual – are trapped within this contradiction of gender, they are nevertheless constructed as agonistic subjects. Trans women, by contrast, are deemed responsible for reproducing gender through their ostensible failure to question gender deeply enough, when seeking ‘sex re-alignment’ (138) of their ‘misaligned bodies’ (21). A contentious division is installed between trans people who seek gender affirmative interventions and those who do not, namely non-binary people. Anthias wagers that

[n]on-binary gender identities appear much more challenging to the ordering process than sex re-alignment. This may account for people seeking modification of their bodies so that they are able to express their gender fluidity; fixing their gender through fixing their body. To exist in the in-between is much more difficult to accept within the gendered order of things (138).

But the ‘in-between’ is, often, precisely that space of acute transphobic violence from which cis privilege insulates all those who pass as non-trans. Thus, we encounter a structural cisnormativity and a latent transphobia in the argument. In subsequent personal communication (after seeing a draft of this review), Floya Anthias has assured me this does not reflect her actual politics, which she characterizes as ‘fully committed to trans rights’ (email dated 17 June 2022). I appreciate that. But, particularly in these times when trans people face a transnationally – organized attack on their very right to exist, airing TERF or ‘gender critical’ positions taken against trans people without explicitly rejecting them as violent ideologies aimed at making trans lives unliveable, misrepresents the issue at hand. As intersectional feminists, we need to be clear that TERFism is not a legitimate position in an intellectual debate internal to feminism; but rather, one manifestation of rising, and increasingly normalized fascism. Moreover, instrumentalising trans, genderqueer, and nonbinary people as a trope of the ‘undoing of gender’, whilst failing to view them as subjects whose gender identities are as much formed within the contradictions of racial capitalism as it articulates heteropatriarchy as are those of cis heterosexual women and men (Namaste 2009), elides the systemic violence trans people face in precisely the structures that are the subject of analysis in this book – a book that insists on *translocationality*. This, I believe, is a problem that I hope Floya Anthias will address in her subsequent writing against ‘those borders of violence’, as part of her lifelong praxis to ‘BANISH THOSE OTHER BORDERS’.

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