Book Review

The politics of belonging: intersectional contestations by Nira Yuval Davis, London, Sage, 2011, 264pp, £26.99 (paperback), ISBN 978-14-12921-30-5

Nira Yuval-Davis provides an innovative approach to contemporary scholarly literature on intersectionality, nationality, and citizenship. She applies the theory of intersectionality to different political projects of belonging, beginning with the citizenship question to the issue of care. Though Yuval Davis' research is largely informed by her anti-racist and socialist version of feminist political commitment, in *The Politics of Belonging* she addresses the need to move intersectionality beyond the borders of women's and gender studies.

This research contributes to a better understanding of the complexities of the politics of belonging and the way they are affected by the mechanisms of neo-liberal globalization. It provides an innovative way to operationalizing intersectionality by using a multi-levelled analysis for the deconstruction of nationalism, religion, cosmopolitanism, and the issue of care. The analytical framework developed in this monograph allows us to examine the levels at which social divisions should be studied, their ontological base, and their relations to each other.

Yuval Davis' central argument is that the analysis of formal state citizenship needs to look at its connection with political projects within and beyond the boundaries of the state. In doing so, her contribution to scholarly literature allows for contextualizing how those projects affect individuals simultaneously. She further argues that neo-liberal globalization has opened a space for the development of multiple alternative projects of belonging, both locally and globally. These projects provide internal contestations to the ways in which existing concepts of nationalism and citizenship are perceived as natural and normal. The author promotes intersectionality analysis as a tool to reach a

more comprehensive understanding of the connection between global, national, and local politics of belonging and the way in which those multi-levelled processes impact on perspectives of nationhood and citizenship.

The monograph consists of six central chapters and the concluding remarks. In the first chapter, Yuval Davis sets the tone of the analysis through the development of her theoretical framework. She critically analyses the notion of belonging, which is not just about the construction of collective identities and attachments. It also includes the different ways in which individuals identify themselves as belonging to those collectives (p. 18). Further, we need to examine the different political projects of belonging, which position people with and outside different collectives. The author suggests distinguishing between belonging and the politics of belonging in our analysis in order to bring to light the power structures that determine those boundaries. Each subsequent chapter looks at one of the central contemporary political projects of belonging: citizenship, nationality, religion, cosmopolitanism, and care.

In chapter 2, the author discusses the rights and obligations associated with state citizenship and the mechanisms states use to define and control citizenship, such as the way individuals have access to passports or how statistics are developed. She highlights the challenges in contemporary state citizenship to embrace and acknowledge difference by discussing alternative projects of citizenship (intimate citizenship, consumerist, or multicultural citizenship). Yuval Davis acknowledges the different impact those citizenship projects have on people's lives, in particular the powerful inclusion-exclusion mechanism of state citizenship. Chapter 3 discusses notions of nationalisms through feminist lenses and through the lenses of alternative, 'out-of-the-box' approaches, such as projects of autochthony, indigeneity, and diasporism. Placing religion at the centre of the analysis, chapter 4 examines the collapse of the secularization thesis and the challenging development in the era of neo-liberal globalization, which sees religion as a central factor of social and political mobilization. The author discusses those challenges by looking at religious and antifundamentalist feminisms.

Chapter 5 provides an overview of different kinds of cosmopolitan discourses and places a specific emphasis on human rights and human security in the analysis of cosmopolitanism 'from above' and 'from below'. The author critically analyses the drive towards the construction of a unified political order by discussing the dichotomy of universalism and relativism through human rights, security, and feminist lenses. Looking at the differences between feminist ethics of care and feminist transversal dialogical politics of belonging, Yuval Davis reveals in chapter 6 the ultimate intersectional contestations from an

activism perspective. Opposing the feminist ethics of care, she proposes a transversal feminist politics with more emphasis on ‘rooting’ and ‘shifting’ in the context of changing relations of power (p. 199). Concluding in chapter 7 with a summary of her central argument, the author provides an illustrative account of her own transversal and emancipatory project of belonging and hope.

Those different politics of belonging are informed by power structures, identity and values, which are interconnected. This becomes visible in the analysis of the construction of global, national, and local projects of belonging from both a hegemonic and contesting perspective. The analysis reveals the way in which those projects impact differently on those who form part of certain collectivities; it shows the difference in individuals’ social positioning, their identities and their norms and values. In order to understand a specific social phenomenon, we need to address those differences which, following Yuval Davis, is best done by combining a macro analytical approach with specific case studies.

However, this suggestion raises questions concerning the operationability of this research approach. The author acknowledges herself the limitations of this approach, by highlighting the impossibility of applying it within the boundaries of this monograph. While the book addresses the different politics of belonging from a broad macro level perspective, it provides no space for an in-depth analysis of specific cases.

While it might not be possible within the limits of one research project to look in-depth at all boundaries and politics of belonging, by acknowledging this limitation, the author opens a space for future research projects. With her inclusive and multi-levelled approach, the author brings together notions of nationality and ethnicity and, most importantly, the impact political projects of belonging have on the individual members of the ethnic and national collectives. By connecting implications of contemporary projects of belonging at both the micro and macro level, this monograph reveals a crucial challenge to hegemonic forms of nationalism and citizenship.

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