
REVIEW OF AVTAR BRAH'S *DECOLONIAL IMAGININGS: INTERSECTIONAL CONVERSATIONS AND CONTESTATIONS* (2022)ANA MARÍA CRESPO GÓMEZ
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Avtar Brah is an eminent author, having published numerous books, articles and reviews, alongside editing a few other publications. She is a Professor Emerita in sociology at the University of London, Birkbeck College, besides belonging to the editorial board of the academic journal *Feminist Review*. *Decolonial Imaginings: Intersectional Conversations and Contestations* (2022) is groundbreaking in the domain of intersectionality, by showcasing the potential for addressing inequality and power relations in various disciplines, such as sociology. Thanks to this influential author, much work has been done in the domain of diaspora, and her book *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities* (1996) laid the groundwork for further research on borders, identity and transnational identities. However, as she recognised in an interview included in this publication, she sought to write a book based on empirical work and political practice.

A definition of the term ‘intersectionality’ was provided by Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge in the book *Intersectionality* (2016). More recent work has since been published on that subject, for example, *Revisualising Intersectionality* (2022), edited by Elahe Haschemi Yekani, Magdalena Nowicka and Tiara Roxanne. Brah’s work is a transdisciplinary study, as it offers to explain how mobilities might result in different forms of belonging. She also conflates theories, such as border theory, decolonial feminist theory and diaspora studies. Nonetheless, her interest in ‘intersectionality’ and the question of female identities goes back to previous publications, such as the article “Ain’t I A Woman? Revisiting Intersectionality” (2004), where, along with Ann Phoenix, she addresses the old categories of ‘woman’ in the context of the second Gulf War and the

US and British occupation of Iraq. What is seen in the entirety of her analysis is how she puts forward the social and political context of the time before focusing on a more academic insight. In that 2004 publication, her use of 'intersectionality' began to develop because, as she says, the study of the intersectional did not begin to be used in Britain until the late 1980s. Before that, there was an agreement in academia that referring to all women using the category of 'woman' was wrong.

Brah describes how recent social and political events, with a focus on the COVID-19 pandemic, have shifted the configurations of power. Likewise, the onus is on the controversial figure of the migrant, for which she resorts to political and popular discourses prevalent in Europe in the last few years, such as Brexit. Besides, she enquires into the idea of the 'bogus migrant', which increased the hatred exponentially towards migrants from the former British colonies that had been living in Britain most of their lives. These migrants were called the 'Windrush Generation', the 492 passengers who arrived on the ship *Empire Windrush* on 22nd June 1948 from the Caribbean. Finally, the author follows the description of this hostile environment following Theresa May's anti-immigrant policy, also known as the 'Windrush Scandal'.

Decolonial Imaginings is structured into ten chapters, distinguishing between theoretical chapters and interviews. In the introduction entitled "Multiple Configurations of Power: Framing the Decolonial", she comments that the present-day consequences of colonisation entail approaching the concept of 'decolonisation'. This concept is key to the book and refers to those processes involving political change that resulted in the independence of former colonies to established sovereign states. A shift occurred at the end of the Cold War when 'decolonisation' was eventually transformed into 'decoloniality' to include notions relating to the decolonisation of knowledge, emphasising its epistemic reconstitution. Brah considers that 'decoloniality' allows people to foreground those regimes of knowledge otherwise forgotten or repressed by the main forces that govern the world, which are modernity, colonialism and capitalism.

From the author's vast engagement with different theories, it is essential to point out Anibal Quijano's notion of 'coloniality of power', as it helps us understand how the capitalist world we live in is inseparable from exploitation and racialisation (2007). However, Brah sets the stage for more gender-based analysis. It is precisely in that sense that the author brings to light the concept of Lugones' 'coloniality of gender' (2010: 747) that she develops into 'decolonial feminism' as a counternarrative to imperial and

neoliberal feminism. As she sees it, the movement of decoloniality is not focused on feminism but is progressively extending to other disciplines. Gurminder K. Bhambra and John Holmwood's *Colonialism and Modern Social Theory* (2021) and Ali Meghji's *Decolonizing Sociology: An Introduction* (2021) are two contemporary examples of the increasing use of this term in academia.

'Decolonisation' and 'decoloniality' have developed hand in hand, though the term 'decoloniality' refers primarily to the experience of the Caribbeans, South Americans and Latinos in the United States of America. It also embraces pluriversality and dialogue between different epistemic traditions (postcolonialism and decoloniality). Pluriversality, in Mia Perry's words, refers to a concept "emerging from decolonial theory that provides a counternarrative to contemporary Northern assumptions of the universal" (2021: 293).

The second chapter, entitled "Mobilities, Political Groundings, and Feminist Decoloniality", delves into the question of location and decolonising practices associated with feminism. Brah brings up one of the cartographies of diaspora, the 'roots and routes' that she positions in the context of Black feminist activism in the late 1970s. Along the same lines, she considers her own feminist locationality inscribed within the subjectivities and identities of those affected by migration.

The following, "Borders, Boundaries, and the Question of Commonality and Connectivity," hinges primarily on the cultural dynamics that make up ethnic and national identity by understanding the long-debated questions of ethnicity, nation or borders. This part begins with the author presenting the world as a global village, hence the importance of borders and boundaries. To illustrate her point, she gives tangible examples of the building of the nation-state, with migrants trying to reach Europe and the demonstrations which took place in Europe between supporters and opponents of migration.

The book moves on to a conversation in the chapter "Reflections on the Postcolonial: A Conversation between Avtar Brah and Katy P. Sian", which, according to the author, introduces personal reflections as well as a political approach to the material under scrutiny. Precisely on the question of borders, which she also sees as cultural, political and experiential, besides territorial, she revisits the crisis of immigrants crossing the Mediterranean, many of whom drowned turning the sea into a watery grave. In this interview, Brah speaks about how much she was influenced by other theories and authors,

such as poststructuralism, Foucault's notion of discourse, and Derrida's concept of *différance*. Nevertheless, as she states, her work is multidisciplinary, drawing from multiple epistemological traditions, including questions raised by Marxism.

Whilst the early sections of the book address the term 'decolonial' or 'decoloniality', the rest intersects diaspora with other fields of study, for example, in the chapter "Diaspora in and through Feminist Inflections". Although she points out that all the studies within this book do not always revolve around questions of gender, they remain essential as they lay the terrain of diaspora studies as a field of research. The following chapters, "Multiple Axes of Power: Interrelations between Diaspora and Intersectionality" and "Formations of Citizenship: Articulations across Diaspora, Law, and Literature", enquire into the relationship between the multiple axes of power, the formation of citizenship and the politics of resistance. Brah examines various forms of power embedded in the intersections between gender, sexuality, ethnicity and race.

Despite mentioning the importance of diaspora, the onus of *Decolonial Imaginings* is on the feminist discourses affecting us even nowadays. In the chapter "Contemporary Feminist Discourses and Practices within and across Boundaries: A Conversation between Avtar Brah and Clelia Clini", Brah explores how she became involved in student politics for the Civil Rights Movement in the United States, stemming from her interest in feminist politics. For her, the local and the global cannot be separated from each other in understanding critical events that affect Europe, such as the refugee crisis.

The last interview is entitled "Insurgent Knowledges, Politics of Resistance: A Conversation between Avtar Brah, Brenna Bhandar and Rafeef Ziadah". In their conversation, Brah is asked how she developed her methodology, called 'the diasporic' from Althusser's theory of interpellation. Brah's reply revolves around the political and social events of the 1980s that stemmed further contestation in academia precisely on the term 'immigrant'. 'The diasporic' arose in a time of increasing globalisation and sought to demarginalise communities. Besides she is also queried on the connection between the fall of the Berlin Wall and the demise of the Soviet Union, with its impact on left politics. The interview moves on to Brah's understanding of diaspora, but precisely on the importance of intersectionality for women's experiences and her own.

Astutely, incisively and intellectually muscular, the essays in this book are a treat for every scholar interested in topics as varied as the question of borders, 'decoloniality' or

the multiple configurations of power that reign over our lives. One marvels at the staggering variety of authors, theories and movements that Brah seems to master beautifully. Besides this, each essay, although enmeshed in the logic of the book, has its own particularities, and each one feeds on the other. Of great interest are the interviews, as they enable us to delve more deeply into the author's motivation and interests, as well as how she developed her line of work since she began to work as a PhD student in Britain during the 1970s.

The epilogue serves as an introduction to further work on the topic. Entitled "Imagining Decolonial Futures: Politics of Alterity and Alliance", it opens with the latest events that have negatively shaped the world, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the Black Lives Matter movement. Next, the author refers to the importance of the academic journal *Feminist Review*, which has been at the forefront of intersectional feminist politics by facing problems and conflicts. In the end, she advocates for a project of mutual support, using Mary Louise Pratt's term 'contact zone' to challenge the effects of neocoloniality, heteronormativity and racism, among others.

As Angela Y. Davis comments on Brah's newest publication in her befitting endorsement, it "encourages us to think more deeply and expansively about the contemporary need for a politics of solidarity grounded precisely in difference, which is still too readily perceived as an impediment. Productively revisiting the still relevant principle of political Blackness, this is decolonial, anti-racist feminism at its very best".

Decolonial Imaginings: Intersectional Conversations and Contestations (2022) familiarises the readers with a rich analysis and an intrinsic understanding of how borders, ethnicity, the question of the nation-state, feminism and migration are intersected in a complex social and political context. As it stands, this book of well-researched chapters is a crucial addition to the domain of intersectionality and builds on Brah's critical research.

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