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## Mooring 'super-diversity' to a brutal migration milieu

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### Abstract

The migration milieu in which 'super-diversity' locates is not a crisis of human mobility, but the crisis of political imagination to engage with mobility as integral to twenty-first century citizenship. The migration milieu of Western capitalism actively requires and refutes the migrant, making a volatile life-world of migration in public discourse, policy and everyday life. Rather than focus on the current conceptual reach of super-diversity, my paper directly engages with whether super-diversity has explanatory cogency for this brutal migration milieu. Vertovec's original outline of super-diversity points to accelerated migrations in which the elaboration of borders and circumventions have become 'more multiple', 'more stratified' (Vertovec 2007). While migration processes have discernible scale, breadth and pace, I argue that it is the milieu of history, atmosphere and ideology that is formative. My aim is to relate processes of diversity-making to the punitive effects of the European border complex. I expand on the *politics of contradiction* and the fear generated by the migration 'crisis', and the discriminatory sorting of migrants sustained by an historic *ethos of subordination*.

**Key words:** migration milieu, super-diversity, politics of contradiction, ethos of subordination, borders, multi-culture

## **Super-diversity and the politics of contradiction**

The migrant is the person necessary to but restricted from advanced capitalist societies. The deep discrepancy of how western societies both require and refute migration is referred to as the 'liberal paradox', a consistent production of inconsistencies in public policy, discourse and practice (for example, Marciniak and Tyler 2014). The state of contradiction is caught between a sustained economic appetite for migrant labour from elsewhere, and a political commitment to a national authenticity in which hierarchical notions of 'race' and ethnicity are core. Within the European continent including the UK, there are enduring histories of a voracious appetite for labour and resources from outside the limited confines of the nation. Institutionalised projects of slavery, colonisation and migrant labour have been sustained through the enduring sentiment of nativism. This is a highly contradictory politics, expansive in its entitlement to extend national borders to incorporate people from elsewhere in order to build and serve society, and simultaneously fortified against the claims of migrant citizens.

A savage nativism currently abounds across Europe, sustained by migration rendered as crisis (Tazzioli and de Genova 2016). The migrations that have effectively underpinned the construction of modern European nations and that continue to shape cross-cultural exchange are rendered invisible by the prevailing crisis mantra. At the forefront of crisis consciousness is an armature of new legislations, regimes of scrutiny and public volatility. In the UK the Immigration Act of 2014 has firmly inserted illegality into the panoptic management of migration, extending the social sorting of migrant lives well beyond the national border, and ushering in a 'new politics fear' that permeates political practice (Massey 2015, 287). The 2016 Brexit referendum fed off the 'threat' of migration, legitimising public expressions of xenophobia from parliament to the street. In France, the growing insistence of 'Laïcité' is now more publicly removed from the constitutional underpinnings of secularism and more directly focused on anti-Muslim sentiment towards the perceived foreign-citizen. Austria, lurching backwards into a history of discriminatory politics, pledges to militarise the Brenner Pass and the Frontex EU border agency, incorporating a state at war within the rhetoric of crisis. 'Crisis' has a claim to immediacy and justifies exceptional intervention. But the histories of the large-scale displacements of humans across the routes of the slave trade, over the expanse of colonial misrule, and alongside the *en masse* migrations connected to Europe's interventionist politics, show how international migration to Europe is a

continuous formation, one in which an *ethos of subordination* has been core (Goldberg 2006).

In 2007 Vertovec articulated a notion of 'super-diversity' as the increasingly stratified and multiple processes of migration evident in the new millennial period, leading to heightened social diversity and regulatory complexity. Vertovec's concept, broad in its outline, relates to wide geographies of 'migration-driven diversity' (Meissner and Vertovec 2015), but his 2007 paper is nonetheless embedded in an account of migration into Britain. It is not incidental that the context in which super-diversity has had most salience is in the highly differentiated region of European nation states aligned through increasingly fragile multilateral arrangements, where levels of international migration since 2000 are reportedly greater than any other global region (United Nations 2016). It is the geopolitics of migration in Europe that provides a core focus of my paper, bringing to bear an historic perspective to new migrations and emphasising the structures of discrimination that shape fixed and moving borders. As part of *Ethnic and Racial Studies'* 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebration, I have been commissioned to engage with Vertovec's original article on 'Super-diversity and its implications', and I focus on whether super-diversity has explanatory cogency for the brutal migration milieu in which we are located. Vertovec's core question of why variegation matters is at the forefront of this exploration, in particular his focus on 'a multiplication of significant variables that affect where, how and with whom people live' (2007, 1025). I address what makes a variable significant, and explore how societal variegation connected to migration relates to 'race', multiculturalism and space.

I pursue Vertovec's supposition that there is a heightened diversification of cultural and political aspects of social life with respect to migration. However, my orientation is that while contemporary migration has a perceptible scale, breadth and pace, migration systems emerge through a milieu of history, atmosphere and ideology. The differentiated migratory processes that super-diversity invokes are connected to processes of diversity-making and the affective political temperament that sustains social sorting (Ahmed 2004). I therefore moor super-diversity to the *politics of contradiction* and *ethos of subordination* that is invested in the fortification of the border and the emotive problematisation of the migrant. Questions I am compelled by are how the fracturing of routes and bodies *en-route* relates to a zeitgeist in which migrants are actively displaced, sorted and segregated, alongside the moralising rhetoric of humanitarianism (Fassin 2011). I explore what conditions of power produce violent

social stratifications as increasingly endemic to the regulation of migration, and what forms of urban multiculturalism emerge in a highly volatile migration milieu.

Vertovec's account of shifts in migration processes focuses on the new millennial period, when established migration routes to Britain became notably more diverse, incorporating not only a wider array of countries of origin, but smaller and more multiple groupings of migrants. Vertovec's articulation of this heightened migratory diversity is captured in three key aspects: demographic shifts in the changing range of inflows, origins, languages and religions; new formations in regulation around citizenship status; and the policy requirements and public service delivery sensitivities in the context of a diversifying society. His article outlines the challenges for social science research to engage with social complexities related to migration diversities in more qualitative ways, highlighting 'emergent forms of racism', 'detailed patterns of segregation' as well as new experiences of 'contact' and 'creolisation' (2007, 1044-1046). Vertovec's emphasis is on emergent dimensions of 'migration-driven diversity' in which conventionalised markers of identity including ethnicity and 'race', are re-considered alongside those of class, gender, religion and age.

The original concept of super-diversity is articulated as a broadly intersectional approach to perceptible shifts in societal composition within a distinctively mobile era. The concept is also a prompt for different methods to engage with the lived experiences and institutional implications of the interplay of human and procedural variables. As 'a conceptual work in progress' (Meissner and Vertovec 2015, 542), super-diversity refers to the emerging social phenomena of variegation in relation to amplified migration circuits and restrictions. How super-diversity connects to structures of economic and political power and the inequalities they secure is not explicitly advanced. Super-diversity is thus not developed as a theory, and it is important to engage with the implications of this positioning. In this paper I argue that without a more relational emphasis that goes beyond detailed articulations of social complexity, super-diversity is potentially detached from the innate politics of contradiction and ethos of subordination that are core to diversity-making in a discriminatory migration milieu.

What super-diversity has effectively captured is a tenor to explore how more recent and varied flows of migration map onto existing structures, and the kinds of institutional imaginations required to engage with difference as opposed to more nativist

assumptions of assimilation. In the decade since its inception, the idea has acquired significant public resonance, surfacing most prominently in socio-linguistic studies, but also appearing in activist platforms, institutional deliberations, policy documents, and white papers. Super-diversity has evidently provided a compelling space to explore what it means to live with the changing nature of migration as configured through a wider presence of individuals and groups within contemporary social formations. Pertinent explorations that engage with the 'difficulties of diversity' (Ramadan 2011, 35) include the limits of mainstream electoral politics to represent differences and the emergence of alternative voicing through super-diverse counter-publics (Walters and Uitermark 2016). Bloemmart and Rampton (2012) explore how proficiencies in multilingual meaning-making emerge as much out of inventive urban repertoires as from the extensive circuits of displacement imposed on certain migrants. And while urban super-diversity and embedded practices of exchange are produced by overlapping structures of global and local distribution (Hall 2015), the idea of diversity can also be instrumentalised in the making of shared spaces to mask hierarchies (Aptekar 2015).

While super-diversity has become part of a public vocabulary capturing a sense of emerging social complexity, its widespread parlance is equally marked by absences. Repertoires of exchange feature prominently in the vocabularies of super-diversity, yet prevailing inequalities connected to 'race' (Humphries 2015) and class (Jackson 2015) are less invoked. Recently in British Sociology there has been an urgent call to insert 'race' more centrally into our comprehension of social relations (Alexander and Nayak 2016), offering both a more historically connected (Bhambra 2013) as well as differentiated knowledge of the social (Bhatt 2016). This has been further pursued by the need for racism and racialisation to penetrate studies of migration and super-diversity (Alexander 2015), connecting categories of race, religion and legal status to the restrictions of mobility in a highly unequal world. In the sections that follow, I outline ways of thinking through super-diversity and its umbilical tie to a brutal migration milieu. I refer to how the diversification of people across space is actively produced in processes of discrimination before and after the border point (Hall, King and Finlay 2016). Through 'the punitive border complex' I explore the border as a volatile space of exclusion generated by the dense accumulation of ideologies and mechanisms that in their discriminatory nature, produce certain forms of diversity. I pursue how border systems extend into the everyday life of moving borders, where racialised bodies are positioned as suspect, as has been made so evident in the recent enforcement of

'burkini' restrictions in France. I further engage with forms of urban multi-culture and how static conceptions of public space might be disrupted to connect the super-diversity paradigm to spaces of repression and resistance.

### **The punitive border complex**

If Vertovec's contention is that both migratory circuits and restrictions have become 'more multiple' and 'more stratified', how might we interpret the border as a quintessential space of super-diversity or pronounced diversity-making? The expanding border regimes across the divided territories and fragile multi-lateral arrangements of Europe constitute an erratic border complex that shapes how bodies are diversified across space. As a primary filter of global mobility, the European border complex is composed of mutually reinforcing regulations and violations that fundamentally re-compose our understanding of what it means to be human. Through a fragmented collection of sovereign powers, the restrictions across the asymmetrical terrain of the Mediterranean ascertain 'what place is given to life, death and the human body' (Mbembe 2003,12). With one death for every twenty-three safe arrivals across the Central Mediterranean in 2016 (Crawley et al. 2016), and with those deaths marked predominantly by "irregular" migrants from sub Saharan Africa, the racial bio-politics of the border complex is brought into full view. While remarkable levels of mobility were secured for some through Schengen agreements and accessible visa arrangements, access to others simultaneously became prohibited. Thus the European border exists in a mercurial duality of increased mobility and restriction inherently dependent on punitive social sorting, where questions of human rights are frequently held in abeyance.

The border affect further expands by becoming externalised through irregular collaborations and diplomatic concessions with countries outside of the EU, thereby extending the territory of the 'border security model' (Andersson 2016, 1056). Policing is currently displaced via the EU-Turkey deal that came into being in March 2016, preceded by the European deal with the Libyan Government. Every shift in the maintenance of border restrictions generates more clandestine and dangerous circumventions, with dire human consequences. The EU-Turkey deal substantially limited flows across the Aegean and in the short time period since March, increased deaths were evidenced (Crawley et al. 2016). As Andersson's (2016) analysis of the

Euro-African border complex reveals, routes form in relation to borders, and together they produce multiple discriminations through surveillance, blanket policing, fencing, displacement, re-routing and smuggling. For super-diversity to engage more explicitly with border space, the relationship between restrictions and differential outcomes across multiple national terrains is just one set of variables that is central to the reasoning of 'where, how and with whom people live' (Vertovec 2007, 1075). Sigona (2016), for example, reveals how migrants are differentially filtered through the Mediterranean in response to controls, where 98% of migrants that reach the Greek Islands by sea are from five countries, in contrast to 52% incorporating the top five countries arriving by sea to Italy. This difference reflects both history and politics, and while the circulatory labour migration from Africa to Europe has a long trajectory, recent variegations in flows matter for understanding the connections between origins, re-directed routes and differential outcomes. Within respective arrival zones chains of sorting occur, involving an inconsistent distribution of migrants across reception spaces that are significantly varied in local politics and organisational capacities. In expanding an analysis of super-diversity in relation to border crossings, Sigona traces the variability of legal status in relation to policy, allowing us to see categorisations of race and ethnicity in migrant outcomes.

*En-route* diversity-making therefore has much to tell us about how restrictions structure flows, while the structures of reception reveal the erratic and violent nature of differential outcomes, as migrants are processed through protracted tiers of assessment. The extension of the border complex into the realm of everyday life manifests in multiple ways, one of which is the legal production of lives held in suspension. Suspensions of human life occur through due process underpinned by elaborate immigration legislation in which human life is essentially undervalued. Suspension takes a number of social and material forms, including multiple modes of detention evident in the proliferation of camps and reception centres across Europe (Andrijasevic 2010) as well as more decentralised mechanisms or 'detention in the community' in which the migrant is variably marked including by tagging (Klein and Williams 2012). The migrant has no choice but to inhabit a durable migration regime advanced by irregular and 'dramatic variations' in naturalisation processes and the life in limbo this incurs (Hainmueller and Hangartner 2013, 1). The legal production of uncertainly profoundly affects the likelihood of access to work, as well as the access to civic status that is integral to being able to work.



The border further penetrates the practice of everyday life through the decentralised and privatised nature of immigration control. In the UK the malicious government experiment brandished by the threat, 'In the UK illegally? Go home or face arrest', was pasted over vehicles driven around the London Boroughs of Barking and Dagenham, Redbridge, Barnet, Brent, Ealing and Hounslow in 2013. This intervention, intentionally conducted in the highly visible space of daily life, actively generated fear and anxiety and simultaneously increased perceptions of racism (Jones et al. 2014). The question and questioning of migrant status is thereby made highly visible in both public space and public consciousness. The authorised atmospheres of suspicion captured by Massey's 'politics of fear' surface the deeply structural and psychological ways in which migrant sorting penetrates social realities. This is particularly apparent in times of economic uncertainty, as evidenced in the 2016 Brexit result where xenophobia intersected with historic racisms.

As border control becomes more militarised and privatised, migratory journeys diversify, and categorisations of legal status become significantly more fragmented, deeply entwined in the bio-politics of 'race' and religion. While Vertovec's original articulation of super-diversity is written with a more innocuous sense of border, the unfolding of a brutal migration milieu reveals the connections between power, violence and diversification as profoundly significant. Such processes of diversification reveal the emergence of new route and border infrastructures, and their connection to the underlying ideologies that differentially shape human outcomes as migrants move towards and through borders. The making of super-diversity is therefore not only forged in the social complexities evident in the country of settlement, but is preceded by processes of diversity-making that emerge from the discriminatory restrictions and erratic procedures of an intricate border complex.

### **Urban multi-culture**

Super-diversity is frequently invoked as a way of exploring social exchange in cities where migration has amplified in recent years, and a notable line of research has foregrounded the convivial aspects of cross-cultural interactions in urban spaces. As much as cities are sites of cross-cultural participations, they are also sites of growing inequality where global processes of migration intersect with durable inhabitations of

'race' and class. I engage with De Genova's (2015) idea of the 'migrant metropolis' as the urban realm in which migration, marginalisation and racialisation are actively co-constituted, while simultaneously exploring urban multi-cultures as capricious and inventive, pushing within and against the confinements of subordination (Back and Sinha 2016). Here I explore the physical, regulatory and psychological constitution of 'super-diversity' in urban space in two key ways: firstly by engaging with far more differentiated compositions of what it means to be 'public' in the stratified city; and secondly by paying closer attention to the spaces of urban multi-culture in which resistance and re-configuration are central practices of city-making.

My approach reflects core findings of our 'super-diverse streets' research, where we explored migrant economies and spaces across categorically 'diverse' and 'deprived' parts of Birmingham, Bristol, Leicester and Manchester. Our selected multi-ethnic streets were located in marginalised parts of cities, where jobs are hard to come by and the impacts of longstanding state under-investment are hard felt. It became apparent during our research of independent proprietors on these streets, that particular combinations of pronounced diversity in relation to origin and ethnicity are repeatedly located in marginalised parts of cities. Following detailed qualitative survey work, we traced flows of migrants to the streets over the past five decades, connecting why people had migrated in the first instance, to how they had become street proprietors. For the most part, migrants had become independent proprietors of shops not because of a cultural disposition, but because of intersecting spheres in policy-driven distribution of migrants across the UK, as well as economic discriminations in the labour market. It became apparent that a racialised and ethnicised notion of where someone is from matters more for where one lands in a city than class, educational attainment or language proficiency. We were also aware that exchange on street is pragmatic before it is ideological: street proprietors engage in the practices of exchange that incorporate the pursuit of profit, but at the same time rich transaction economies extend to social acts of care and counsel (Hall, King and Finlay 2016).

Our research across the contours of marginalised spaces, migration policies and economic inequalities opened up the notion that 'being public' rather than being 'in' public space involves negotiating places that are available or restricted to us. In learning the city, we encounter its offerings and its punishments, and on the basis of these embedded experiences of city and self, we curate ways of being public in our

everyday life. Being public is an everyday occupation that offers countless opportunities for valuable cultural exchange as well as the exposure to abuse, whereby we accumulate multiple spaces and repertoires. Bramwell's (2015) research on the life-worlds of hip hop in London directly engages with the city as a lived compendium of spaces, revealing how formative interstitial spaces such as the bus and the mobile phone are in being public. Yet these interstitial spaces are as potentially productive as they are discriminatory, and Elliott-Cooper (2016) shows how the expanse of 'stop and search powers' racially transform pavement space, while Gilroy (2012) exposes the banal setting for extreme racial abuse on the commuter train. I therefore suggest a more mobile conception of being public, where the city is learnt as a transverse of experiences composed of bits and pieces as we are move from one realm to another, where the regulation of the human body is never detached from the process of learning. These in-betweens, these spaces of thin interactions and aggressive everyday interruptions, potentially incorporate the underbelly of analysing super-diversity and the city, paying attention to crucial combinations of being public that tie us to the city and at the same time alienate us from it.

To take up the challenge of understanding the diverse and disparate city, we need to engage with the compendium of not only living the city, but living the planet, following connections within and across space. Postcolonial urban studies offer valuable avenues for thinking through the global-local co-constitution of super-diversity, starting with Simone's (2014) assertion that practices of learning, resisting and re-constituting, are precarious; they exist within and through the deep inequalities endemic to a capitalist order. Ong explicitly engages with wider circuits of learning across lines of culture and nation, exploring the potentials of new aspirations and participations to 'remap relations of power' (2011, 12). These invocations of self and city-making allow us to rediscover the active formations of association and refusal previously advanced in *Resistance through Rituals* (Hall and Jefferson 1976), in a different image and mode to those of either consensual cohesion or the singular acquiescence to a national identity. A more mobile conception of space as dynamic, tied both to moving through the city, and to near and far places, brings to a more static frame of 'public space' planetary inferences of inversions and disruptions (Ndhlovu 2015), enchantment and atmosphere (Garbin 2013), and the archaeology of segregation that lurks below the city surface.

## **'Super-diversity': history, atmosphere and ideology**

We are in a border abyss, a dark political and psychological chasm where the expansion of migration control is implicated not only in the necropolitics at the border point, but in the punitive disciplining of migrants as perceived non-citizens within European society. It is in this sense that we are in crisis. This paper has focused on mooring super-diversity to a brutal migration milieu that both requires and refutes the migrant, thereby producing the volatile life-world of migration in public discourse, policy, and everyday life. The reach of the border therefore extends well beyond the moment of crossing, encumbering day-to-day life with processes of suspension, restriction and discrimination. Within the core of European migration politics is an historic bio-political compact in which some bodies are permitted to move with relative freedom, while others are not. These contradictions are maintained as much by the ever-expanding zone of the border as by the illusion of humanitarianism. I have argued that to understand the shifts in contemporary migration from the perspective of super-diversity and social complexity, it is crucial to connect with the formative history, ideology and atmosphere of the migration system. Diversity itself is a highly malleable and unstable term that exists not only in flows and intersections of people across a density of global, national and intimate borders, but in a fluctuating public consciousness driven by a contradictory politics and an enduring ethos of subordination.

When 'super-diversity' was conceived of as an approach and method in 2007, it focused on the emergence of multiple circuits and restrictions of migration. The active nature of border-making remained largely unarticulated, implicit in but detached from *de facto* conditions of pronounced demographic diversity. If super-diversity is to be more explicitly connected to the brutal European milieu of migration, then its purchase is surely inseparable from the expansion of borders across physical and mental space, and the de-borderings that emerge from cross-cultural resistance. In my view, the core value offered by super-diversity is an attention to the ways in which the variegation of people within and across border spaces matters. In this paper I have described borders as fixed and moving in an attempt to connect the violent nature of managing human mobility and restriction with durable practices of discrimination. Border space raises implications for a more mobile methodology, relating the processes of *en-route* diversity-making and the arduous labyrinth of migrant journeys, to the multiple interior borders that shape where, how and with whom people live. Within the frame of the 'migrant metropolis' I have also explored a more mobile conception of 'being public' as

opposed to cross-cultural exchange 'in' public. Here my desire is to expand on super-diversity in urban space not as a demographic reality, but a spatial and psychological constitution of difference, where discrimination and resistance prevail.

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