Talking about Bordering

Prof. Nira Yuval-Davis* interviewed by Prof. Louise Ryan** 15 July 2019

In the summer of 2019 as the UK was in the midst of heated Brexit debates and Theresa May's minority government clung on to power, Professor Louise Ryan interviewed Professor Nira Yuval-Davis about her recent book Bordering (Yuval-Davis, Wemyss and Cassidy 2019). Although things have changed in some significant ways since that interview, for example Boris Johnson has now replaced Theresa May as Prime Minister, and won a landslide election victory in December, 2019, and the controversial Brexit Bill was passed by the British Parliament, many of the issues about borders and bordering remain extremely relevant to-day. The current pandemic has not only revealed Britain's dependence on migrant workers, especially in health and social care, but also exposed health inequalities among migrants and ethnic minorities. As the post-Brexit immigration landscape begins to emerge, the analysis of Nira Yuval Davis remains as pertinent as ever.

Louise Ryan (LR): Perhaps we can start this interview by talking about the situation that Britain is in now – in the summer of 2019 – and about who could have predicted that we would end up in the kind of mess we are in? In terms of what is going on at the moment – particularly in relation to immigration and to the whole multicultural project, the social cohesion project – what do you think are the key challenges facing us today, in twenty-first-century Britain?

Nira Yuval-Davis (NYD): I think before we talk about challenges, we have to understand the root causes of this mess that we're in, which I have been calling in my writing 'the double crisis of global neoliberalism of governability and governmentality'. I started to write about it in 2012, because it started to become very explicit after the crisis of 2008, where the bankers got away with causing the crisis and all austerity projects started, among other reasons, to pay for a bail-out of the bankers. It became very clear that, with global neo-liberalisation, governments could no longer represent the interests of their citizens, because they have to work to accommodate the interests of the multinationals and corporations, both in order to attract them to stay

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in the country as employers and also because the whole differentiation between public and private spheres has become completely entangled.

This is why the banks were bailed out, in order for the general economy not to collapse. It meant that the government could no longer represent the interests of its citizens. There was also a shift in that, with the privatisation of the welfare state, Parliament had less space for decision-making, while the government executives had to work more autonomously with all this transnational and supranational – also the EU, not just the private sphere. So also around Brexit, the whole fight between the Parliament and the government is very much an illustrative example of some of these resulting tensions.

The crisis of governmentality followed when citizens understood that governments do not represent their interests, whatever political party they are. What happened in Greece is a very extreme example. Even if they very much wanted to represent the interests of the citizens, there are so many constraints that they could not overcome. Therefore, people started to believe that it doesn't matter what they vote and so they developed hostility to what they call 'the political class'. Of course, the lives of people have become much more precarious with the austerity programme, so what we see is a bottom-up response, the rise of nativist kinds of extreme-right movements, either secular or religious, all over the world, in the Global South as well as the North. It actually started in the Global South with the so-called structural adjustment programmes which opened up the post-colonial states to be 'devoured' by neo-liberal corporations in the name of globalisation but then of course it was the turn of the northern states. So the rise of nativist authoritarian movements has been a kind of a bottom-up response.

What I call 'everyday bordering', which replaced multiculturalism as the main technology for controlling diversity and discourses on diversity in society, has come as a top-down response, both to the crisis of governability and to the crisis of governmentality. It aims to show that: 'Yes, maybe we are not in control, we cannot represent your interests but we will try and keep you safe' and, in response to nativist sentiments, that: 'We will make sure that all (the very shrinking pool of) public resources that exist will be distributed only among those who "belong"'.

The whole nativist project is about this differentiation between belonging and not belonging rather than ethnic origin. This is why, in the new extreme-right movements, you have ethnic variety and it is very much a form of an assimilatory project.

Therefore, what has happened as a result of all this is a transformation of the notion of citizenship. There is a new kind of citizenship duty, which is to become unpaid and untrained border guards and to check if everybody around you and definitely your tenants, your students, your employees, your clients, your patients, are entitled to share in these kinds of public resources (or private resources, even, in the case of tenants).[1] And so, at the same time, everybody, especially the racialised minorities as well as the migrants, becomes suspected illegal or at least illegitimate border-crossers, but all of us have also become these border guards in that, if we fail in this new citizenship duty, we can be criminalised and end up in jail.

Ironically, if the trained and paid border guards do not identify the illegal border-crossers, they do not end up in jail; however, landlords who fail to identify the forged passports of their tenants can, according to the latest Immigration Act, end up in jail. This is also very divisive. We saw in Brexit how much, among the racialised minorities, the settled people who have citizen status and those who have not, have been so much at loggerheads. But it affects even more intimate relationships, such as when you have raids by immigration officers, for example. In the case of restaurants of specific racialised minorities (and very often it is a result of biased immigration legislation which disallows the bringing over of trained chefs of specific ethnic cuisines), the cook can be an irregular migrant who is also the father-in-law of the owner of the restaurant. So everyday

bordering divides families as well as dividing communities and society as a whole. The project of social cohesion – which always was in some way faulty because it assumed that only the migrants should adjust to the wider community rather than viewing it as a mutual process – is now becoming virtually impossible.

LR: So, there is a lot to pick up on there, Nira. But one of the things you mentioned, there, was about the whole austerity agenda. As you know, there are economists who have said right from the beginning that austerity was unnecessary and that it was a politically motivated agenda. In fact, back in 2008, before the Conservatives came to power in Britain, some members of that party, such as George Osborne, already identified austerity as a strategy to cut public spending. To what extent would you agree with that critique?

NYD: I would agree 100 per cent. I attended, last weekend, a Labour Party social forum and it was amazingly good. There were several economists, including Varoufakis, who analysed exactly what you have just said and we know that, if people do not earn money, they cannot buy products so, in many ways, austerity is a self-defeating project if the aim is to improve people's economic situation in the long run – and I'm not even mentioning here the neglect and decay of all the public infrastructure and services under the austerity policies. There is collusion between the Tory project and those people whose interest is to exert control. People joke that Donald Trump was elected in the United States because the corporate owners and managers got fed up with relying on mediators like George Osborne and David Cameron and went directly to be in government but that also has its own problems.

It is quite clear that one should not expect anything else, any kind of political project, of any party which represents, at least in bold terms, the underlying ideology of the Tories, which has always colluded with global neoliberalism. Of course New Labour also did that but the Tories supported it for the interests of a particular elite.

LR: So, to what extent do you make a connection between the whole austerity agenda and the results of the Brexit referendum in 2016?

NYD: Well, the austerity agenda only exacerbated the overall feeling of the precarity of more and more members of post-industrial society because, of course, austerity was not the point of departure. The point of departure really relates to much larger processes, not only of the neo-liberalisation of the market but also of the 'microchip revolution' and, as in any kind of revolution, a lot of people found themselves dislocated. So, Ulrich Beck talked about the risk society but, of course, austerity just exacerbated it because, before that, the Thatcherite project had promised a new form of security with a letting go of the old forms of security.

In the 1980s, I remember hearing discussions in various places – like in the hair salon – in which women were saying: 'We can now buy shares of companies, we can now own the energy companies, we can now buy our council house'. So, people felt these new forms of security. But with austerity, even these compensatory mechanisms have been taken away and, of course, people felt adrift and it's very easy to look for a scapegoat; that has been the role of the migrant. But if we do not know what we are going to do, whether we are going to have enough to eat and where we are going to live, if we cannot stay with our family or even establish a family, what is going to happen, and so on, what can we hold onto? In this situation, primordial identities can take on a new salience, be they religious or secular. Because these are something that nobody can take away from you.

So, in precarious times, identity can become more important to people. It can provide a sense of stability in uncertain times. So this is why, after intensive market research, the Brexiteers came up with this slogan: 'We will take back control'. This was a very conscious and very effective means of constructing the Brexit project. Of course, what we see now is the opposite, but people are still very much captivated by this kind of nostalgia for the Empire, nostalgia for the days in which they felt secure and they feel that they would regain it if there

would just be 'us' around. Even though the notion of 'us' has always been contested, there is this promise that things will be OK and somebody like Boris Johnson is very good at playing to this audience.

LR: It is interesting and contradictory, the role of George Osborne in all of this, because he was the architect of the austerity agenda as Tory Chancellor of the Exchequer and yet he is completely anti-Brexit and, through his new job as the editor of *The Evening Standard* newspaper, he is absolutely using every opportunity to oppose Brexit. It's like he had this austerity agenda but completely failed to understand how it would boomerang back on him with the result of the Brexit referendum.

NYD: The thing is, the EU itself is a bit of a contradictory project because, on the one hand, it is a project of global neo-liberalisation – which Osborne is very much a part of – but, at the same time, the EU has also been the forum where there has been some kind of recognition of workers' rights and civil rights and the whole notion of human rights (which the government now want to abolish in the UK). Yesterday, in the Labour Party social forum, somebody described what is happening now, as the Tories bleat about Brexit, as not a choice between 'deal' or 'no deal' but a deal with the EU or a deal with Trump's USA and all the deregulations and removal of protective rights that this would involve.

   The whole idea behind Brexit was to undermine workers' rights so that Britain would be very attractive as a kind of sweat shop, without workers' rights, and for investments with high technology and so on. This is very difficult for people to grasp, but I think this is what is happening – it's a kind of split within the neoliberal class as well as, of course, the rest of us who are opposing neo-liberalism.

LR: It's interesting, because it shows that, even amongst that right-wing Tory cluster, they're not even in agreement themselves as to what they actually want. Hence, all this political in-fighting is going on. The Tory Party seems to be at war with itself.

NYD: Yes, within capitalism there are competing agendas and competing projects. Of course, Osbourne, on a personal level, was ousted from power after the referendum but, unlike David Cameron, Osbourne was given this tool, editor of a newspaper, which has enabled him to vent revenge on all those who beat him up. So we also need to understand Brexit as a result of internal rivalry within the Tory Party. Now Boris Johnson... did you see how in the first days of his selection[2] he adopted some Churchillian body gestures – the way he held his head, hands behind his back and so on. Apparently, we need somebody who is like Churchill because 'It's a national crisis'. But many of us would argue that 'This is not a war, this is self-inflicted harm'.

LR: Indeed. It is again the whole nostalgia thing and Boris Johnson is very much playing into that by evoking images of past greatness.

NYD: But at the same time, very cleverly, he also said 'Hey, my great-grandmother was Turkish, I am not associated with the racism'. But he can also play the posh, Etonian private-school boy. He can play 'I was mayor of London', so this is why he can create this kind of, at least temporary, wide appeal.

LR: Until he actually has to deliver something and then it all begins to fall apart. God, it's so depressing. So we think Boris is a shoe-in, do we? He's definitely going to win this leadership race.[3]

NYD: As well as Brexit itself, we also have to think about the other, related, immigration issues. Who could ever have imagined that the Windrush[4] scandal would occur? I was, in the 1980s, part of a group called WING

– the Women, Immigration and Nationality Group. With the new Nationality Act of 1981, we campaigned for people to register here as British because otherwise, if they come from a particular Caribbean and other post-colonial places, which do not approve of double citizenship, they would automatically become citizens of these countries and lose their British-subject status.

We said, 'If you don't do it, if you go to visit your family or whatever for a few months you might not be allowed back into Britain'. But we couldn't imagine that their livelihoods would be taken away, that they would not be given NHS treatment, being sometimes detained and even deported. We can never really imagine beyond particular twists of what we know. We need a lever in order to see things completely differently.

LR: Yes. It's interesting because, at the moment, my colleagues and I at the University of Sheffield are doing this research project on ageing[5] and one of the groups we include are older African Caribbean migrants and these are people in their 80s and 90s. In fact, tomorrow I'm doing a walking interview with somebody from that age group. From what our participants have told us, it seems almost random – those who found out that they needed to change their passports in the 1980s to secure their status in this country and those who did not hear that information.

So some of them said 'Some people came to our church and the pastor gave them the pulpit and they said to us, "You must change your immigration status, this is happening"'. The people we interviewed, so far, had all changed their passports, but they recognised that it was often just a matter of luck, a moment in time, that somebody came to speak to them and said, 'You must do this', and if you missed out on those kinds of informal information channels, well that was unlucky. Some people did just fall through the cracks in that information process. Of course, that happened in the 1980s, long before social media and the internet. So, information was often word-of-mouth.

I've heard it said by some people that, if this Windrush scandal had happened the year before the Brexit referendum, probably a significant proportion of people would have voted against Brexit, because they would have realised that this is what can happen, even to those who take their immigration status for granted.

NYD: That is comforting to think about [laughing]. Maybe fewer Black people would have voted for Brexit, but I don't necessarily think that fewer white people would.

LR: No, but maybe that would have been enough to swing the referendum results in certain areas but anyway, these are the benefits of hindsight...

Maybe we can switch now and talk more specifically about your book – *Bordering* (Yuval-Davis, Wemyss and Cassidy 2019). In the book you talk about the ways in which everyday bordering is coming to play such a central role. How do you think that has changed from previous eras? Because I can remember in the 1990s, when I was working as a student in London, there were quite often Home Office raids, especially of restaurants and bars and places like that, to check the passports of staff. Now it's changed in its magnitude, so what do you think is different about this everyday bordering now?

NYD: It's interesting to think about the nature of that change. I've just been part of a wonderful group associated with the British Academy of Social Science, working on a report about the contribution of British social sciences to the understanding of issues such as racism and migration. We decided to focus it on the 'hostile environment'.[6] The main kind of thesis that we all shared of the hostile environment is that it's not new. As we just talked about the Windrush – I mean it started much earlier and the first guy who brought the Windrush in was the MP Enoch Powell, who then later delivered the infamous Rivers of Blood speech.[7] However, while this is not new, some things have changed.

I think one of the major changes has been in the construction of nationality and immigration law. The 1981 Act has been crucial here because of the shift from post-Imperial and the Commonwealth, although even then there was a process in which the right of people from the ex-Empire to come and settle and get full citizenship rights has been gradually eroded.

Then we have the shift towards Europe. So, suddenly Britain becomes a 'normal' nation state because, prior to that, there were all these different categories of people from the Commonwealth with different kinds of status, including overseas British citizenship – this very paradoxical citizenship that did not even give you the right to come to Britain, except in the case of the Falklands. After the Falklands war.[8] of course, the residents were granted real British citizenship just so that it would not look too ludicrous, defending the Falklands as part of the British state while its inhabitants were not allowed free movement in it.

Then we see that Britain became an ambivalent part of Fortress Europe, so there is still a border with continental Europe but also free movement to and from Europe for British and other European citizens. Then, of course as Balibar (2009) had predicted, with the fall of the Berlin Wall and the Soviet Bloc, there is confusion about what are the boundaries of 'Europe'. Prior to that time, following WWII and the Cold War, the borders of Europe seemed to be naturalised around the boundaries of Western Europe and NATO. Also, in terms of hegemonic imaginaries, 'Europe' was constructed as encompassing Protestant and Catholic Christianity – with the exception of Greece, which was Orthodox but as it was the cradle of Western civilisation, so Greece was the exception that proves the rule.

Then we see the expansion of the project of Europe and you see there that the Catholic and Protestant Central and Eastern European countries have become absorbed into the European project in a way that leaves orthodox Christians very much lagging behind. Nonetheless, so-called 'Europe' is very secular and, of course, the whole notion of Turkey not being allowed to join the EU is of great significance here as well.

But we see then that the racialisation has moved and diversified, not only from those who came from what was known as NCWP (New Commonwealth Countries and Pakistan) and who, before 1981, at least had certain rights of settlement in the UK but from people outside the original British Empire – whether from Eastern Europe or parts of the Middle East, which has been under British mandate but not under British Rule but also could have been from another part of the Ottoman Empire. This was one kind of major shift.

The other shift in the post-cold-war era related to the whole notion of refugees in the Geneva Convention which, after WWII, was very much built around the image of refugees from the Soviet Bloc. Then, suddenly, both in terms of numbers as well as origins and causes for escape, the whole nature of asylum-seekers started to change. So although a 'hostile environment' has been there from the beginning, its nature changes, as does the discourse. Probably the first hegemonic engagement of mainstream politics with this new kind of racialisation took place in the elections campaign of the Tories, headed by Michael Howard,[9] and the big advertising boards calling people to secretly collude and admit that they share this fear of migrants. The slogan was: 'Are you thinking what I'm thinking?' Then Howard failed to win an election because he was thought to be too racist. But years later, we hear Theresa May, as Home Secretary, actually explicitly using the term 'hostile environment'. This is already part of the response to the double crisis of governability and governmentality that I mentioned at the beginning of this interview. Then we have the 2014 Immigration Act and the 2016 Immigration Act; multiculturalist policies that started to be transformed already towards the end of the reign of New Labour[10] become submerged in the technology of everyday bordering.

In the research project I was working on, we made a film entitled *Everyday Borders* which you can download from the website (https://vimeo.com/126315982). We toured the country with the film, together with the various migrants and human rights organisations which campaign on this issue. In the meeting organised at the House of Commons, one of the speakers, an Independent Baronesses in the House of Lords, said in the discussion that she has never encountered such a cruel law as the 2016 Immigration Act. Of course, the major

difference between the 2016 and 2014 Acts, is that the latter criminalised the unprofessional, unpaid and untrained citizen border guards and extended this to all the areas of society which those who 'do not belong' should not be part of.

Both Marine Le Pen and Donald Trump and others say very explicitly that left and right are not relevant any more – the major condition is between globalism and patriotism. So, Theresa May's hostile environment was around this project of patriotism – which, of course, then gave naturalisation and valorisation of the Brexit discourse. This is what actually happened.

LR: But it's that contradiction again, isn't it? It is about patriotism, it's about these slogans of 'taking back control', 'making Britain great again', but all of that is predicated upon these deals with America or these deals with China. It's completely contradictory at its core.

NYD: Or deals with Europe.

LR: Yes.

NYD: People think that they are out of control if Britain is part of a European customs union and this kind of thing but, being outside a customs union and having to negotiate, for years, a deal with major exporters and importers, gives Britain much less control than before. This is not about logic.

LR: The Chancellor, Philip Hammond, was saying yesterday or the day before that, if Britain leaves without a deal, it will actually give more control to France because all of those checks at Calais, about what is imported, how slow it will be, imports and exports would be held up with all these checks. So, under a 'no deal' one would actually give more control to France, rather than 'taking back control' over Britain's ability to trade freely.

NYD: This is just one example. Another example is the whole project of the 'UK'. Is that going to be undermined in terms of Northern Ireland, in terms of Scotland? Although the whole Brexit logic is about 'taking back control', within the European project the whole de-territorialisation of borders, at least within the EU, was a possible project, given the use of technology. But now, within the nationalist discourse of Brexit, you have the re-territorialisation of borders. So, I mean, talk about contradictions! Yes.

LR: The whole Northern Ireland issue is fascinating. It didn't really feature in the debates around Brexit in the lead-up to the referendum, but actually it was a crucial argument that the Remainers could have made, if they had galvanised around the Northern Ireland border issue and the importance of the peace process. The fact that most of the political leaders were English and they didn't even think about Northern Ireland it quite revealing. It was a huge missed opportunity in terms of the referendum campaign, quite apart from the moral argument about the peace process.

NYD: You know, very shortly after the referendum, I was invited to speak both in Dublin, at the Academy there, and in Belfast about this subject and the people in Dublin were much more worried than the people in Belfast. People in Belfast then still didn't understand the implications of Brexit while, in Dublin, because Britain is between them and the rest of Europe, they were very worried about it.

LR: People in Ireland are obsessed with Brexit. When you go to Ireland there is more on the news about Brexit there than here in Britain, which is hard to imagine, since it's almost wall-to-wall coverage here all the time. But in Ireland people are really worried. It's interesting in terms of the Northern Irish border because, at the moment, it is literally an invisible border and it threatens to become what it used to be in the past. I remember the first time, because I grew up in the South of Ireland, the first time I went to the North it really felt like going to another country. We went on a school trip and it was like, 'Oh my God, we are going to this strange place called Northern Ireland', which was scary and there were soldiers and tanks and I remember seeing soldiers walking down the street with guns. I had never seen soldiers with guns before, on the street among the shoppers.

NYD: I was very struck by that as well, when I first visited Belfast. Because when I went into the Palestinian occupied territories, where there are guns, there are no shoppers, there were soldiers and it was kind of mutually exclusive. But in Northern Ireland it was altogether different. I recently read this amazing book called *Milkman* (Burns 2018). It got the Booker Prize 2018. The best book about Northern Ireland which describes this reality, but it's a great book in many other ways as well and I really recommend it.

LR: OK, *Milkman*. I must look out for that. Maintaining this invisible, frictionless border on the island of Ireland is vital to the continued peace process and the success of the Good Friday Agreement.[11] With all the many criticisms of Tony Blair, all the justifiable criticisms of Tony Blair, the Good Friday Agreement was one of his main successes and all of that is threatened to be undermined now because of Brexit.

NYD: I used to know Mo Mowlam.[12]

LR: Yes. She was wonderful.

NYD: She was wonderful. I met her first because, as an MP, she made contact with feminist academics and invited us to various meetings. I remember that, after the first time she tried to help political prisoners in Northern Ireland and got a lot of attacks from the popular press, I emailed her to congratulate her and she wrote back to me that 'Whatever they say, however they respond, I am so determined, I will keep on doing it'. She has been more or less kind of…

LR: …forgotten. Yes, that's true. There was a whole team of them leading on the peace process but Mo was really wonderful.

NYD: Then she was removed from her job because she was too radical.

LR: But then she became very ill didn't she? And she died young, unfortunately.

NYD: I wonder how much the stress and the humiliation of being removed, after doing all this amazing work, affected her. She was one of those heroines who should not be forgotten.

LR: That is true, absolutely. But let's go back to talk more about your book *Bordering*.

NYD: A very important part of the book, in addition to the discussion and illustration of everyday borderings, is what we call 'grey zones' and 'limbo spaces', in which more and more people around the world – before,

during and after they cross borders – find themselves for life. This permanent paralysis and being deprived of human rights. As Zygmunt Bauman called them, 'human waste' because the world is apparently 'sociologically full'. Saskia Sassen talked about 'expulsions' of all these unwanted people. In the book, we were looking at the whole debate about how people are not accorded any kind of humanity; therefore, the fact that they die in their thousands, either in the Mediterranean Sea or in the desert, does not count because they don't 'belong' anywhere or they have been rejected from the places where they do belong. Giorgio Agamben called them 'bare lives'.

But we should not collude with this construction of these people only in terms of their construction by others. We should continue to see them as agents with their own attachments, belongings and identities, with their own decision-making faculties, however constrained and Kafkaesque the reality in which they live. The work we did in 'the Jungle'[13] in Calais, very clearly showed how much agency, activity, initiative and imagination as well as attachments the people staying there had. Of course, even for those who eventually make it into Britain, their problems are not over yet. ... I volunteered in Hackney Migrant Centre as a cook and my fellow cook there waited 27 years in order to have settled migrant status! That shows you that the 'hostile environment' did not start recently but over 27 years ago.

And of course you have all these people having to queue at the Home Office and never knowing if, at the end of the queue, they are going to be told to come again or if they're going to be detained or … be taken into custody and immediately deported. So they are deprived of a human right, which nobody talks about, but I think it's absolutely basic – that is, the right to be able to plan a future. 'The Jungle' in Calais was destroyed and the people were not allowed to live there. Now, in Italy, it is a criminal offence to try and help to pick up drowning people, the basic human right to life.

In the book we also talked about Dover as a post-border town, as a 'grey zone'. Now we also want to expand our work to look at the North West of England and the post-industrial towns because there is a continuum between the 'limbo spaces' and the 'grey zones' in which those people live who are actually not allowed anything – because they have no citizenship rights – and the people who might have citizenship rights but do not have any resources to apply for them.

While we are seeing the current crisis in terms of those who belong and those who do not, what is happening to those who do not belong can become completely invisible, so this is also a very important part of our book. We talk about the border as a 'firewall'. By that we mean something which is neither entirely open nor closed but which allows easy passage to some while blocking many others.

LR: So, in the book you use the concept of 'situated intersectionality' to interpret what is going on. Can you say a bit more about how you use that concept?

NYD: This is the methodology that we use. I have been developing this methodology for a long time, very much following the epistemological approach of Patricia Hill Collins. Unlike others who say 'There is no truth' – a kind of relativism – Hill Collins says that we can only approach the truth if we encompass as many differently positioned views, situated gazes, as possible. There is this metaphor of the elephant and the blind people. The blind people were asked to describe what is an elephant. One touched its tail, one the ear, one the trunk etc. They all described what an elephant is very differently. They were not wrong but they had access only to a partial truth. Like we all always do.

So, in the book we applied the situated intersectionality methodology, using different 'bordering scapes' as case studies. We encompassed the different situated gazes which produced different understandings of what bordering and borders are. Even when we interviewed border guards, the official immigration border guards, of course they are not homogenous, they have intersectional identities. For example, the women border guards

we interviewed mocked the male border guards who thought up these 'go home' vans.[14] The women saw these very much as empty macho gesturing. The women guards showed us the small visiting cards which they use when they go to different places, supposedly to build community relations but then to see if somebody is frightened and runs away when they arrive and they give this intelligence to their colleagues, who raid the business afterwards. They say this is so much more effective. So you have the situated gendering there. But all of them saw the law as a dichotomy – everything is either legal or illegal. All the immigration officials we talked to enjoyed living in London and its multiculturalism and saw themselves as not racist. But they said 'The law is the law'. From the situated gaze of the restaurant owner, for example, who they raid, the situation is much more complex. They often raid at the height of business hours, like Friday night, so the border guards think they're doing their role, they are enforcing the law. But of course, the restaurant owners see these raids as acts of malicious vandalism, causing the business to be destroyed after it had been built up for years and years, as who wants to dine in a restaurant which is subject to a massive police raid?

So, in order to understand it, you need to look at both sides. And more than that, one of the reasons why there are so many irregular workers in Bangladeshi restaurants, for example, is because the law gives special visas to demanded jobs, including chefs – but ethnic chefs are considered to be just 'fast food'. They don't earn enough, they're not allowed into the country, so therefore, as a result of immigration policies, there are not enough chefs in successful Bangladeshi businesses. Thus, if the latter don't want to close down, they rely very often on relatives or others who do know the cuisine. So, yes, this is the law but, as social scientists, we know that law is a human creation and reflective of particular political and ideological projects. So this is an example of why the situated intersectional methodology was so important in order to understand what happened. If we had interviewed just the border guards or if we had interviewed just the irregular migrants, we wouldn't understand the whole picture, like the blind people and the elephant.

LR: On that point, it is clear that this book has really grown out of your body of work over many decades. I remember, as a student, reading *Racialised Boundaries* (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1992), which you co-wrote with Floya Anthias. How do you see your work having evolved over the last 25 years or so?

NYD: Well, it evolved in a very organic way, I think. It very much started when I looked at the gendering and racialisation of national projects. I started thinking about the Zionist Project, looking especially at the roles of women as national reproducers and in the military, because I grew up in Israel, so this was one trajectory. I therefore extended it to examine other nationalist projects and other settler societies. But the other trajectory was discovering the wonderful news that Floya Anthias, who was a friend, was a colleague with me in Greenwich University and we were both members of a Sex and Class socialist feminist group. Both of us were interested in also examining race and ethnicity, not just sex and class. But we were met then with yawns and 'Yes, it's interesting but that's not what's important'. Productive anger can be quite important, so both of us decided to start working together and that's how our work on the project of *Racialised Boundaries* started.

Our article together in *Feminist Review* (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1983) was the first time we developed our intersectional approach. In *Racialised Boundaries,* beyond further developing this theme, we also looked in more detailed ways at nationalist projects. I continued by studying borders as well as boundaries and the relationship between them, looking at borders as one of the signifiers of boundaries in terms of racialisation. My book *Gender and Nation* (Yuval Davis 1997) brought together these two trajectories.

But I also became involved in Women Against Fundamentalism. This was important not only because it was … and continues to be an amazing group of feminists who were all rebelling against our communities as well the sexism and racism of the state and hegemonic society. But it also reinforced my approach to transversal solidarity politics – that while you have to defend all victims of human rights abuse on various racial, religious,

ethnic and national conflicts, it should not be an uncritical solidarity. Your long-term allies are those who share your values. A lot of sections on the left, the anti-Imperialist left, thought that 'the enemy of my enemy is my friend'. I think they started to realise that this attitude is too simplistic when it came to groups like Isis but I think, until then, it's been quite a problematic blind spot for many people on the left. This was another development out of which I started to work on what I considered to be the most comprehensive framing of my theoretical approach with the book, *The Politics of Belonging: Intersectional Contestation* (Yuval-Davis 2011). So I wasn't working any more only on nationalism or racism but also started to work on issues of citizenship. I also continued, of course, with religion and cosmopolitanism and also developed an approach to the feminist politics of care, as a feminist political project of belonging. So, for me, this was very much the overall kind of framing.

Then I was approached to take part in the EUBORDERSCAPES project – which I, of course, accepted, as borders and boundaries always interested me and, of course, bordering is the other side of belonging. As part of this large project, I led the work package of nine international partners on everyday bordering. The 2019 Polity book *Bordering* is the result of the work with my two wonderful senior research fellows, Georgie Wemyss and Kathryn Cassidy, based on the fieldwork in Britain. We also published special issues and so on, which used the methodology of situated intersectionality on a comparative basis across the wider project. Part of the situated intersectionality methodology is also encompassing what Lesley McCall calls two alternative intersectionality methodological approaches – the *intra*-categorical and the *inter*-categorical approach.

You need both, because the inter-categorical approach compares the same variable between different places or scales or temporal locations. This is very important to what some have called pluriversalism. It's not relativism or universalism but pluriversalism, so that you can encompass the meaning of gender or race, for example, in these different locations without giving a privileged authority to one location over the other, nor separating them to have validity only in one specific location, as relativism does. But for us, the pluriversal epistemology was not sufficient because, even within the same place and time, people are differently situated and their differential understanding of the meaning of gender or race as well as anything else also needs to be encompassed. For example, we guest-edited a special issue of *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, on a comparative study of discourses on Roma and bordering (Yuval-Davis, Wemyss and Cassidy 2017). In it we published a paper which compares these discourses in four countries and, in each of them, in four different temporal points, in newspapers with various ideological approaches in order to be able to illustrate how you need to encompass all of these different situated gazes to understand the issues in an intersectional way.

LR: What I found fascinating, listening to that overview of how your work has evolved, is the way in which your very sophisticated and, in many ways, quite high-brow philosophical work sits with a very grass-roots activism and I think that is a very unusual thing for academics to be able to combine.

NYD: For me it was mutually nurturing, all the time. It was very important, because a high-brow, detached, sterile kind of debate which doesn't have any kind of relevance to people's struggles, is no good. On the other hand, the anti-intellectualism of many activists creates such gross simplification and distortion and can easily slide into what I consider to be reactionary politics. My pet hate is what I call 'identity politics' because, although it has played an important historical role in mobilising a different kind of struggle, it shares with multiculturalist policies the homogenising and reifying of groupings. Identity politics also risk equating groups and social categories, as well as collapsing individuals and groups as interchangeable in terms of representation and therefore covering-up internal power struggles within groups and organisations. We see this now in anti-Semitism and the Labour Party,[15] which really annoys me and I try to write and do things within groups. Because of course I am an anti-Zionist Israeli Jew and the dominant identity politics which we see so strongly, for

example, around the question of anti-Semitism and the Labour Party, defines all Jews as Zionist and Israel as a collective self, so anyone who criticises Israel is considered an anti-Semite and the Jews among us are considered 'self-hating' Jews.

It is not that my Jewishness is irrelevant to my own personal politics. My drive to become politically active started when I understood that my family was murdered by the Nazis and their local helpers in Lithuania, and then growing up and understanding the meaning of the military government against the Palestinian citizens of Israel and then after 1967 in the Occupied Territories.[16] So there are contradictions because the Jews tend to see themselves as victims of racism and yet they are also perpetuating racism against the Palestinians.

There is no essentialist construction of 'the victim' or 'the racist' and anyone can become one or the other or both. So if you don't interrelate these two levels, it can be very misleading and very reactionary. Luckily, in Women Against Fundamentalism – and now we have this *Journal of Feminist Dissent* – I found this wonderful group of activist feminists from many different origins – a few of them are academics but many of them are not – who share my kind of politics, so this has been great.

As I mentioned earlier, I am now working with a group of social scientists on a report on racism and migration, and the hostile environment, for the Academy of Social Sciences. Although academics, the members of the group are not doing this work for their University's Research Excellence Framework[17] or any other kind of career-related motive but because they think it's important and they are committed. I'm not on my own; it's wonderful to meet all these kinds of people.

LR: I would love to hear more on your views about what is happening in the Labour Party at the moment, so that would be really interesting. Before that, just in terms of your career, you said you started off at Thames Polytechnic – which then became the University of Greenwich – and then you went to the University of East London. Somebody of your calibre, with the kinds of publications you've had, you could have gone anywhere, but you very much stayed in the 'new university' sector.[18]

NYD: Being on the Sociology sub-panel in the RAE (Research Assessment Exercise)[19] and then in the REF (Research Excellence Framework) I was virtually the only one from a so-called 'new university'. Realising it made me become fully conscious of the implications of this and it then became a conscious political struggle for me, because I could see how my colleagues (and many of them are friends and I like them and their general politics a lot) take for granted the resources that are available to people in 'old universities'. These resources are not available to us in 'new universities'. When Floya Anthias and I wrote *Racialised Boundaries* (1992), we were teaching 15 or 16 hours, five courses a week, writing was considered to be a weird hobby and only when Thames Poly became the University of Greenwich did we start to get research money. People came and said 'Oh, you were right, this is part of the job, not just teaching...' and now, of course, what is happening with the REF and with the 'old universities' Russell Group – the possibility of sustaining a centre of excellence within the new universities sector – is virtually going to go down the drain. It's horrible, the impact of the neo-liberalisation of universities.

LR: Yes, the neo-liberalisation of the university sector in the UK is a crazy situation. Just a couple of final questions, Nira, because we've been talking for a long time. If you're happy to talk about what is happening with the Labour Party, I would really be fascinated to hear your views.

NYD: When everybody joined the Labour Party with Jeremy Corbyn, I did not, not only because I have never been part of any kind of establishment party but also because of what I told you about the tradition of the left, of 'the enemy of the enemy is my friend'. I was critical of Corbyn on that level, although my son became

'Corbynised' and was all the time telling me what I'm missing in terms of all the important work that was being done there, which the media is completely distorting. After the recent European elections, however, I decided to join the Labour Party, when everybody had started to leave it. The reason was not just because I felt compelled to become an active part of the whole debate on anti-Semitism, although I have written about it – even outside the party – but because I felt that it is very important to hold on to Labour's social justice agenda, because Brexit has become a new form of divisive identity politics.

To hold on to that, I thought I should join in order to support it and, almost by chance, I was told about this Labour Social Forum last weekend. It has been wonderful. They speak my language, they analysed the situation in a very sophisticated way, while trying to make realistic proposals for what they are going to do once they have the power. To what extent they will be able to do it, who knows.

After spending all my life on the margins, it will be good to be part of an organisation such as the Labour Party which actually has the power to implement any policies. Of course, whether or not they can, I don't know, but I have decided it's time to look at it, to try. I'm always game to try anything once at least, but I cannot say any more than that.

LR: So just finally, we talked quite a bit about Theresa May and the 'hostile environment', but of course Theresa May herself fell victim to a very hostile environment in Parliament, particularly through February and March 2019 and all that period. To what extent do you think she fell victim to a very sexist and even misogynist parliamentary system? Did you feel any sympathy for her, Nira?

NYD: In a way, yes, although her politics and her role in promoting and developing the 'hostile environment' are unforgiveable. Obviously, she is a courageous woman but so was Margaret Thatcher. I grew up in Israel with Golda Meir, Margaret Thatcher, Indira Gandhi. Strong women but were they feminists? Theresa May is not a feminist. I have always been outspoken against the UN Resolution 1325, which says you have to involve more women in order to enhance peace processes. Which women? The women I mentioned just now are anything but peace-loving. This is where the whole question of transversal politics and solidarities based on shared values, rather than on 'identity politics', is so important. So, I don't see Theresa May as my political ally, even though she is a woman. I can see that she faced a lot of difficulties, most probably as a result of sexism, and sexism in parliament needs urgently to be fought against, but she also went back again and again with that problematic, on many grounds, Brexit Deal[20] and did not listen to others in parliament.

LR: Well, thanks so much for your time, Nira; it has been so thought-provoking. I think we can end there.

Notes

[1] Nira refers here to the immigration law (2016), which penalises landlords if they rent a property to tenants who do not have the right to live in the UK (see https://www.gov.uk/landlord-immigration-check) or requires universities to check the right to study and to monitor the attendance of Tier-4 visa-holders (international students subject to immigration control).

[2] During the summer of 2019, when this interview took place, Boris Johnson had been selected as a candidate for leader of the Conservative Party, to replace Theresa May.

[3] When the interview took place in July 2019, the Tory leadership election was going on and, while Boris Johnson was the firm favourite to win, he had not yet been formally elected.

[4] This occurred in 2018 when it emerged that long-term British residents, mainly of Caribbean origin, were being targeted by immigration officials as 'over-stayers' because they did not have British citizenship. Although most had arrived in the 1950s and 1960s, as British subjects, their status had changed over time as their countries of origin gained independence from Britain.

[5] This is the Sustainable Care Project, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council – http://migrationresearch.group.shef.ac.uk/care-in-and-out-of-place-towards-sustainability-and-wellbeing-in-mobile-and-diverse-contexts (accessed: 30 January 2020).

[6] The Hostile Environment was an immigration strategy of the British Home Office and is especially associated with Theresa May during her tenure as Home Secretary. For more details see https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2018/aug/27/hostile-environment-anatomy-of-a-policy-disaster? (accessed: 30 January 2020).

[7] In 1968, Enoch Powell delivered the notorious Rivers of Blood speech in which he warned that immigrants, especially Black migrants, were a threat to peace and security in British society. It was all the more ironic given that Powell had been among those politicians who initially encouraged 'Windrush' immigration to Britain from the Caribbean.

[8] In 1982 Britain and Argentina entered a conflict over the disputed status of the Falkland Islands.

[9] Leader of the Conservative Party from November 2003 to December 2005.

[10] New Labour lost the general election in 2010 and was replaced by a Tory/Liberal Democrat Coalition led by David Cameron.

[11] Signed on 10 April 1998; in effect since 2 December 1999.

[12] Mo Mowlam was a Labour MP and Secretary of State for Northern Ireland during the delicate peace-process negotiations.

[13] Colloquial term for a camp near the port of Calais, in France, sheltering migrants waiting to cross the English Channel.

[14] This was an initiative by the Home Office in 2013 under the hostile environment strategy, which involved vans driving around the country telling so-called illegal migrants 'to go home' or risk detention. It was widely judged ineffectual and the initiative was scrapped.

[15] For a discussion see https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2019/dec/03/corbyn-apologises-for-antisemitism-in-labour-party (accessed: 30 January 2020).

[16] This refers to the so-called Six Days War between Israel and neighbouring countries in June 1967.

[17] The Research Excellence Framework (REF) is an audit of all research output in UK universities which then informs the allocation of resources.

[18] The term 'new universities', sometimes called post-1992 universities, refers to all the old polytechnics which became universities in 1992. These are widely regarded as less research-intensive and hence have less research resourcing than the more 'elite' Russell Group universities.

[19] The RAE was a research assessment scheme prior to the REF (1986–2008).

[20] This refers to Theresa May presenting the same EU withdrawal bill to Parliament on three occasions. Each time it was defeated by MPs.

Conflict of interest statement

No conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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