Migration and the Globalisation of the Mediterranean World

Peter Mayo

LLAKES Seminar
Institute of Education
University of London

24th March 2014
HUMAN TRAFFICKING AND CARNAGE

The Mediterranean has become a hotbed of human trafficking and carnage resulting from desperate attempts by people from Africa and most particularly sub-Saharan and North Africa to flee famine, civil wars and trade their belongings to trust their luck in crossing over to Europe in pursuit of a better life. Migration has, however, been a constant characteristic of this region of the world which has constantly raised a series of issues concerning cultural hybridization and the way different people are represented, as well as different forms of racism based on cultural and historical ignorance.
EXCHANGE

- Ferdinand Braudel: to live in the Mediterranean was to engage in exchange - the longue durée.
- This day and age: the exchange takes on a different form: 'on a scale never seen before in history
- Not on a level playing field!
Slavoj Žižek: 'in the much-celebrated free circulation opened up by global capitalism, it is "things" (commodities) which circulate freely, while the circulation of "persons" is more and more controlled'.

**DEATH TOLL**

- Death toll in Mediterranean: around 20,000 in last two decades
- Add crossing the Sahara
- Derek Lutterbeck traces, through many interviews with Somali immigrants, the various steps in their journey from Mogadishu to Malta via the Sahara, Libya and the Mediterranean. These are vivid accounts of not only the hazards encountered when crossing the desert and rough seas in rickety boats but also the callousness of people along the way.
  - Included here are people, either acting alone or through smuggling organisations, on both sides of the North-South Mediterranean divide, who traffic in human misery, hardly caring a toss for the sanctity of human life.
  - Political intransigence, with a greater concern for issues of ‘security’ rather than the loss of precious human lives, seems to have gripped the ‘fortified entity’ that is the European Union.

REASONS FOR MIGRATION

would include:

- civil wars fuelled by an arms industry and exacerbation of tribal conflicts often resulting in rape and being disowned by family,
- the attempt among women to avoid female genital mutilation,
- the negative effects on African farming of subsidies provided to farmers in other continents,
- the negative effects of climate change, an impoverished environment (the ransacking of Africa)
- a colonial ideology which presents the West as the Eldorado and a context for the 'good life,'
- structural adjustment programs, the quest for better employment opportunities
- ... and one can go on, perhaps falling prey to western stereotypes and constructions of 'Africa'.
ONE MAJOR GLOBAL REASON

- ...namely the quest for low cost labor by corporations and other businesses alike which serves as a 'push and pull factor.'

- Hegemonic globalization necessitates migration, but it is the same victims of this process who are rendered illegal and criminalized as a result, often victims of the 'carceral state.' *1

- 1951 Geneva Convention recognizes a person’s right to asylum and allows for possible instances of 'irregularity' in recognition of situations that lead to ‘forced migration.’ *2


The North-South structural imbalances - a feature of a perennially colonial capitalist system, predicated on uneven levels of development, lead to the shifting of populations in the South.

A common feature of European imperial politics which persists till the present day: southern and oppressed populations can be moved at will to suit imperial interests.

It happened with Africans during the period of slavery and the slave trade, with Palestinians during the 1948 ‘Nakba’ and later with Puerto Ricans during ‘operation bootstrap.’ It continued to happen throughout modern history. It certainly happens with people from Sub-Saharan and North Africa today.

This is standard European imperialist policy. The interests today are many including primarily the ready availability of an underpaid and grossly exploited reserve or alternative army of labour to accommodate western imperial capitalist interests; these include depressing local wages and therefore labour costs.
The differences in the migrants’ subjectivities are underwritten - Muslim or Christian, Tunisian, Libyan, Moroccan, Algerian etc. - not to mention also the distinction between Arab and Berber etc. In so doing, we also tend to underwrite the intersections between their ethnicity and other subjectivities (class, gender, urban/rural...).
UNEQUAL MULTI-ETHNIC RELATIONS: COLONIALISM TRANSPOSED

- transformation of Mediterranean cities: population in these cities is increasingly becoming cosmopolitan.

- The global exists alongside the local in a situation of hybridity which has led to what is currently being described as the 'multicultural city'.

- In certain Southern European cities and towns, the cupolas of churches which, for centuries, have been perceived as bulwarks of Christendom against Islam, now co-exist alongside minarets - an important feature of the skyline of many a Southern European city.

- One can always argue that they have historically been so in certain Spanish cities where minarets serve as bell towers, e.g. La Girandola in Seville, La Mezquita de Córdoba.
FACILE MULTICULTURAL DISCOURSE

- In Southern Europe: 'multiculturalism' has been gaining prominence.
- Much of the discourse is however related to questions of race and ethnicity.
- One must also bear in mind that the relations between ethnic groups are unequal ones, reflecting a non-equitable distribution of resources.
- Need to avoid a very facile discourse concerning intercultural dialogue or education
- this often avoids the fundamental question, a critical pedagogical question: who dialogues with whom and from which position?
LANGUAGE IN A POSTCOLONIAL CONTEXT

post-colonialism used here in a manner which accounts for processes of domination, which have their origin in European colonization, but which extend beyond the period of direct colonization to take on new forms, is something which is relevant not only to the immigrants' country of origin but also to the receiving country.
A key issue in such a colonial or postcolonial context concerns language.

In genuinely multiethnic settings, one comes across situations when children receive an education in both the adopted language and the language of origin.

This situation prevailed in the USA and which drew reaction from the ultra right 'English only' movement and more recently the Tea Party. It is a situation which is being undermined by a number of moves and propositions.
BICULTURAL EDUCATION

- Antonia Darder has written extensively on the need for a bicultural education with regard to people living a bicultural existence,

- She draws on her own experience as a Puerto-Rican who had to move out of her territory towards California as a result of 'operation bootstrap.'

- Her writings and advocacy in this regard have greater resonance and apply to not only Hispanics in the USA, but also to migrants settling in Southern Europe and elsewhere.

BILINGUALISM,

- Learning to be effectively bilingual is part and parcel of a postcolonial education in that it enables one to retain a strong connection with one's ethnic roots, a key feature of one's multiple subjectivities.
- At the same time ensures that one learns the dominant language if only not to remain at the periphery of political life.
- Confronting the colonial by entrenching oneself in the traditional subaltern colonized culture often results in ghettoization.
DECOLONISING THE MIND

- Great challenges for education in the Mediterranean: providing learning situations which enable participants to decolonize the mind.
- An education which is based on a problematization of Eurocentric knowledge with its colonizing foundation.
- An education which valorizes, without romanticizing, the different cultures of the different groups that form the multi-ethnic society.
- A critical approach to multi-ethnic and antiracist education should allow participants to cross their mental and cultural borders.
Crossing borders would entail that one begins to understand something about the culture of others, religion included.

The curriculum is a selection from the cultures of society. It would be pertinent to ask: In whose interest is the selection being made?

These questions would be posed in any society in terms of the social differences involved - gender, class, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, ability, religious affiliation etc.

They will be posed with greater vehemence the more socially differentiated and secular a society becomes.
POLITICS OF REPRESENTATION

- There is always the danger, however, of providing a caricature of those who have traditionally been ‘otherised’.
- The complexity of the situations can easily be ignored, with religions being represented in simplistic terms and possibly distorted.
- The representation of different religions should therefore be approached with the utmost seriousness and best preparation possible, with special emphasis being placed on the teacher or media worker doing justice to the different religions involved.
MISCONCEPTIONS

- Misconceptions regarding Islam abound in the Western world.
- Countries in Southern Europe, which are recipients of immigrants from Arab countries and Muslims from Sub-Saharan African countries such as Somalia, are no exception.
- One of the greatest misconceptions regarding Islam is its strong identification, in the minds of many, with the Arab world.
- In effect, the Arab world is characterized by difference also in terms of religious denomination, while Islam is a truly international religion. Islam knows no geographical, racial and ethnic boundaries.
MISCONCEPTIONS

- Mahmoud Elsheikh so clearly points this out with regard to the way Islam is presented in Italian manuals.
- Some of the distortions are as serious as that of attributing the words of the Qu'ran to Mohammed rather than to God (the Koran as the object of revelation) and of producing representations, in miniature, of the Prophet when it should be common knowledge that representations of Mohammed and God are not allowed by the Qu'ran.
A postcolonial education would entail a critical engagement with a cultural heritage that reflects a colonial past, as in centres of colonial power such as Spain and Portugal, and a past marked by crusades against the Ottoman Empire.

Exotic and often demonic representations of 'alterity' abound throughout this cultural heritage, be it the colonized indigenous populations of the Americas or the 'Saracen.'

The latter constitute the traditional 'Other' in relation to whom 'Christian Europe' was constructed.
We barely recognize that the silver and gold that adorn much of the relics in our churches and palaces were extracted at the expense of human lives, the extermination of indigenous lives and those of others, in Latin America and elsewhere.

Human tragedy, in the form of genocide and rapacious colonial greed, lies behind the veneer of those 'things' judged as resplendent, 'things of beauty' perceived as a 'joy forever.'

And all this is based on the tragedy that results from 'otherising' - positioning those who are different as "other."

These tragedies continue to occur today whether in the killing fields of Amazonia or the Mediterranean sea with its floating migrant bodies.
WHAT THE WEST OWES TO THE SOUTH AND ISLAM

- What non-european cultures, including those constructed as ‘Southern’, contributed to ‘western civilisation.’

- Medicine, literature, cuisine, language, law, architecture....
THE DEBTOR’S SYNDROME

“... the person to whom one is indebted is constantly a hated person; particularly if the creditor, as in this case, is a strange body, rejected by the collective consciousness, hated by the political, social, cultural and religious institutions. If anything, the rage against the creditor, in these circumstances, becomes an almost moral duty and a necessary condition for the survival of that society.”

A similar politics of representation characterizes the realm of popular culture in the Southern European - or Northern Mediterranean - region, with the Sicilian marionette shows, involving Crusaders and the Predator (often the Saracen 'Other'), being a case in point.

In introducing immigrants to popular culture, one ought to be wary of its contradictions. It often contains elements which constitute a denigration of aspects of the immigrants' own culture.
Modified excerpt from the book:
