'Eurocentrism and Migration Regimes'

Dr Ipek Demir, Professor of Diaspora Studies, and Director of Centre for Ethnicity and Racism Studies, University of Leeds

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Thank you very much for the invite and for this organisation, especially to Kate but to any of you who were involved.

So we were talking about academics and practitioners, so I am an academic and I tried to write a talk that's also maybe, to some extent, useful for practitioners too, but I'm afraid you can't

get the academic out of me I've been doing it for too long, but hopefully some of the ideas I'll share with you will, kind of be seen as also, ways for us to rethink migration and what we're doing and so on in general. And I will talk about Eurocentrism and I will explain what it means, but I will then connect it to migration regimes, right, so that's kind of how my talk is outlined. So, it's about 20 minutes.

So, Eurocentrism is a narcissistic view of self, which sees Europe and Europeans, understood here as also incorporating White settler colonies, so USA, Australia, Canada and others, as a miracle. Eurocentric assumptions claim modernity as a European project. That there is something special and exceptional about Europe and Europeans, and they situate the rise of modernity with European States and its people. So, when I say modernity, there is kind of like an association of it, with certain developments in the way that we study and understand them in history, hence the three temporal breaks. Even if you are from the non-West like me, you will have studied this, the political revolutions, the economic revolutions and cultural revolutions through which we had the rise of Europe and modernity, and therefore progress, right. This is quite central and obviously people have criticised this view, I will show citations from them in a bit. These sorts of revolutions have typically been situated within Europe rather than making the examination of European empires, which is when these revolutions happened, remember? We didn't have European states, we had European empires when these were also happening, together with their colonies. However, the unit of analysis associated with this progress has

been, has European states, or within the boundaries of Europe, even though when these revolutions happened, if you think about it, we had European colonies.

In standard understandings of modernity and political revolutions we have the, for example, the French Revolution, but also the US Bill of Rights or the English Reform Act and all those sorts of things, arising as political interactions which have interrupted and revolutionised the political landscape, the relationship, for example, between citizens and kings, the ideas about sovereignty and expanding, for example, rights, equality, liberty, and those freedoms and dignity. So, these sorts of political revolutions they are then seen as underpinning the modern age that we live in, and many of the freedoms that we possess.

This sort of understanding of typical understanding of Europe and especially of modernity, however, leaves out the many revolts and rebellions that took place demanding equality, freedom and liberty elsewhere, often actually against Europe and European oppression ranging from, of course, indigenous groups in Latin America to Maori and Aboriginal movements in Australia and New Zealand, indigenous uprisings and rebellions in Asia, the decolonisation in 1950s and 60s in the previously colonised terrains. We can think about them ongoing in terms of the civil rights movement in 1960s in the US but also something like Bristol bus boycott for example in the UK, and to today's indigenous movements, Black Lives Matter and anti-racist struggles. These sorts of revolts, rebellion and uprisings are

fundamental to how freedom and equality were understood in the colonies, by the oppressed, but also they came to, where I'm talking especially about the ones in 1800s, 1900s too, but also in the imperial centres. Hence the enslaved and colonial subjects were not merely victims of imperial history, but rather agents whose resistance not only contributed to their own freedom, but also put pressure on and reshaped the metropole, including Britain and Europe more widely.

Even if you think about it in US alone there were 150 slave uprisings, revolts. Eurocentrism is, therefore, in academia, seen as both Ethnocentric but also contradictory and Gurminder Bhambra and many others, have done a lot of work questioning this sort of typical story of modernity and have criticised Eurocentrism. I have their names in the slides, but here what's interesting is that Eurocentricism is ethnocentric, because it suffers from the view that there is something extremely special and distinct about Europe and its people that they brought about this kind of progress, while at the same time they try to attempt to sustain the universality of the Western project (that it should be copied everywhere else). Hence there's that kind of a tension there that I want to highlight: Eurocentrism is itself contradictory.

Now you might say what is this to do with migration. Well, I'll try to kind of link it as much as I can. So, why did I talk about this? I talked about this because the Eurocentric miracle view outlined so far has consequences, and it is central for understanding contemporary migration regimes and discourses. And I want to give some examples of this. And I want to talk about it under

three headings. Firstly they are problematic because they act and continue to act as a justification for hard violent borders of the Global North. They lead us, they contribute to the view, the dominant view, that diversity is something that happened to the Global North recently, and therefore needs dealing with, right. So, they also ignore the contributions migrants have made to the Global North as they don't see ‘others’ as originators of ideas and concepts. The ‘others’ might have revolted a bit but that isn’t seen as constituting an intellectual contribution to modernity. But the French Revolution does, for example, because of the kind of particular construction of, of these revolts and rebellions and the modernity story we tell.

So, I want to take up each of these three. So, the first one as I said it acts as a justification for hard violent borders of the Global North, and I think there are various borders here that we need to think about. If we consider the response of the Global North to what has been a human tragedy and violence at the borders in the last decade even - we have the Mediterranean borders, the US Mexico border, we also recently had the Polish border as you remember, with Iraqi Kurds I think, and so the effects of this miracle to some extent become clear. The language who deserves to come and live in the Global North, and the securitisation of the borders of the Global North are closely linked to this miracle view. It is therefore worth asking: if these tragedies at the borders of the Global North would have been approached as a security issue, if we didn't have this ethnocentric miracle view as dominant. If those drowning in the Mediterranean and English Channel were White Europeans, how

would have our approach been different? Would the Global North have been as tolerant of this violence? Would we have instead demanded, as some of us still do of course, but the dominant approach isn't, would we have instead demanded, humane, and compassionate responses to migration and refugees from the Global South. Would we be thinking about offshoring refugees, for example, if, if they were White Europeans. These are some difficult questions we need to, maybe, ask ourselves and of course the offshoring option are also in the context of Rwanda, but as you well know, people in this room will know, Australia has adopted it for many years, that asylum seekers were placed in the Pacific nation of Nauru and Manus in Papua New Guinea, and even if they, if they were given refugee status that it refused to allow asylum seekers to be settled in Australia, itself of course, a White settler country.

The racialised bordering of the Global North continues, as you know Denmark also has developed this offshoring option recently in June 2021, so they are going to use an offshore processing centre in third country camps when reviewing the cases, and then the UK government first thought about it in, well, brought to the attention of the media and public in 2021 and they first thought about it, I think, with the Ascension Islands, a British overseas, kind of post-colonial place again, and then we had the, we had the Nationality of Borders Act in 2022 which paved the way with the Rwanda deal, of course that's going through the courts and so on.

Now hard and violent bordering of Europe is also evident elsewhere in terms of the privileges and kind of certain agreements and relationships the EU establishes with other countries. The EU has dealt with the refugees arriving in Greece by boat by signing a refugee re-admission agreement with Turkey in 2016 and is paying Turkey to host refugees. Now I'm putting refugees in quotes here, because even though Turkey is party to the 1951 Refugee Convention it maintains a geographical limit, and it only accepts applications from, gives refugee status to, people from Europe and. Therefore, Syrians do not have an official refugee status in Turkey. There are, I think, officially 3.7 million, I don't know if it's changed recently but when I wrote this paper it was and unofficially it's about four million Syrians including those living illegally. So, so, Syrians, leaving Syrians in Turkey are without refugee rights, settlement and other protections.

We can also understand this violence in borders, more broadly of course. There is the violence that, that people faced before they come to the Global North, some of it in boats but other ways, for example, airline carrier sanctions, visa policies, detention centres, offshoring options or the closing or narrowing of safe routes for others to move. But I argue that the miracle view also acts as a justification for violent borders within the Global North continuing in the form of counter terrorism strategies, hostile citizenship regimes, punitive policing, surveillance, securitisation and hostile integration strategies for, for many. How does that relate to the integration that, that some of the groups and organisations here are doing - this is interesting.

Eurocentrism then is predicated on an ethnocentric miracle view, a narcissist self-regard for Europe and Europeans. Their primacy and superiority continues to underpin migration regimes and securitise borders of the Global North.

Secondly, so I had listed three things, so the second point I'd like to make is that Eurocentric approaches lead us to the dominant but inaccurate view, but I'm reading from slide now, that diversity is something that happened to the Global North recently. This is because they ignore that cultural plurality has been woven into the fabric of the Global North due to colonialism and empire. I listened to a programme about Haiti and, you know how it was actually even in 1700s, it was an extremely diverse place right, European empires were extremely diverse. Now, much of the constructions of history tell a story of there was White European history versus a racially diverse today, ignoring multiracial and interconnected histories with elsewhere.

Naidoo and Littler discuss with respect to the UK, for example, the presence of post war immigration. When people talk about post war immigration, i.e. post 1950s to the UK, how that is itself othered and told in a way which reinforces a White history and the multicultural present as kind of post-colonial immigrants came to the kind of, UK, and especially she points out this is a problem in both schools and heritage sector. So, one thing to think about is, you know, even in citizenship tests. I don't know if any of you did the citizenship test like I did, so those sorts of things of course reinforce that sort of idea of kind of White

history and then even in a celebratory tone after 1950s we became more diverse. I'm saying that even that is very problematic because it ignores that kind of multiracial history of European empires.

The connections of many racialised minorities to the UK in this way are erased, promoting the myth of the British culture – I’m quoting here as White and hermetically sealed before the advent of post war immigration, and this is kind of the problem that I'm trying to raise here. And most of you will of course remember the Windrush scandal, when people who came to the UK from the Caribbean, many of them came as Commonwealth citizens, so they didn't need a passport or visa. Due to more restrictive citizenship laws in the UK over the years they were turned into what has been deemed as, from citizens into migrants, and some were even sent back to the Caribbean, a place they had never visited before or lived in before. And so in a sense, for thinking about refugee integration, what's interesting here is that usually, migrants coming to citizenship in terms of integration, and here we have the irony of citizens (Commonwealth citizens) being turned into migrants in the UK.

Such approaches therefore miss out that much of European history happened elsewhere. In order to challenge this sort of thing actually migrants and diasporas, refugees themselves, challenge the amnesia related to who they were, where did they come from. So, in 1960s when they faced opposition and go back to your country kind of thing, they developed a movement, you know, lots of mobilisations and part of the mobilisation was

also the slogan ‘we are here because you were there’, making a spatial link between UK and elsewhere but also a temporal link between the configuration of UK today and its history. And it's not just in the UK, Indigènes movement for example, in France, is doing a similar kind of way in which is questioning that amnesic understanding. Due to the spatial and temporal limitations Eurocentric approaches set, they end up construing non- Europeans and non-Whites as alien to the Global North - that the global majority has been central to European history, modernity and society, due to colonialism and empire is overlooked. Instead, stories of migrations to the Global North are told by focusing on others arriving at the borders of northern states and thus as a new recent problem that needs to be tackled. So, such views therefore lead us to the problematic view that racial and ethnic and religious diversity is something that happened to the Global North recently, be it Australia or America or UK. And they see the recent migrations to the West as exceptional and as ‘record’ migrations, so migrations from South to North have become the primary migrations of interest, and that's quote from the wonderful books written by Lucy [Mayblin] and Joe Turner, Lucy is here, she's telling me to stop but it is a wonderful book, it’s on migration and colonialism, I can't remember the exact title but I have read it, cover to cover brilliant book but kind of, these have become the primary migrations of interest whilst ignoring centuries of migrations from North to the South, with immense and detrimental impact on the indigenous populations and their societies all around the world. Migration is instead examined detached from colonial

history, is presented as a new problem that the North now needs to solve. And there's also a good quote from Bhambra and Holmwood here, who say that in the course of colonial history, European populations moved in greater numbers and with greater effect over the populations they encountered, than is the case of the course of migration to Europe. So, dominant understandings of migration ignore this wider context of migration.

Now, I would like to move on to the third consequence of Eurocentric thinking on migration, understanding migration and dominating migration regimes. The Eurocentric miracle view I have been criticising, does not see non-Europe and non-Europeans as originators of sources and concepts and ideas, ideas like freedom, dignity, liberty, human rights. The kind of contributions that ‘others’ have made in terms of expanding our understanding and experience of these concepts, their contributions are not sufficiently recognised. So, if you think about it we, we have women’s movement or disabled movement or a working class movements. We may not be working class or a woman, but the way in which they struggled and expanded ideas about freedom and justice, that's part of the modernity’s story that we tell. So, what I'm arguing is that we need to do the same in terms of understanding the expansions that migrants brought. Now this is sometimes told, but it's not told in a way how we (the West, Europe) learned from them in terms of them expanding modernity and our concepts and practices, our rights and freedoms. It’s told as something that happened in history, rather than something which expanded modernity in terms of

rights and freedoms. We need to challenge this and here I have some examples.

Does anybody know these three Afro-Caribbean men, what that is from? No? It’s from the Bristol bus boycott of 1963, when actually Bristol bus company refused to employ Black and Asian bus crews. There was no union support actually the union took the side of the employers on that, so it’s in a sense the UK's Rosa Parks movement but it's interesting how even in the UK we think of these sorts of ‘race’ issues as an American problem. We don't know that we actually have our own Rosa Parks moment. The mayor of Bristol is mixed race and he said that even he only found out about this history of Bristol recently, and these men who, were Afro-Caribbean led the kind of movement against this discrimination and then we, they also were joined by students and other groups. And we had, for example, in 1965, the introduction of the Race Discrimination Act that came into place. Just very briefly, there is the Grunwick Dispute in a recent article I wrote about these two, so if you're interested in these two movements I'm very happy to share them with you, and that was led by Jayaben Desai who raised issues of, she's an African Asian, so she raised issues of humiliation at work, different pay for Whites and others, and she led very, very big movement in the UK to challenge this intersectional discrimination South Asian women in the labour force were facing. They didn't have union support initially, then the union supported her, but a little bit reluctantly. But, for example, postal Workers Union supported them. There's kind of an interesting history here also in terms of the labour unions kind of being rather ambivalent and reluctant

in terms of some of the support that they gave to people of colour in the work place. So, I added a few other things there, other examples.

But what, what we need to think about is that through these sorts of questioning and movement and so on, just like maybe their grandparents or their grand grandparents led rebellions and so on in the Global South during colonialism now we have kind of Global South in the metropole also raising continuing certain issues of freedom and equality and also expanding these rights for all of us and, and I'm arguing that we need to make those a bigger story of the migration stories we tell. Immigrants and refugees are not just working and adding to the British current economy only but they have expanded core values in Britain, let's say what counts nowadays as British values of freedom and dignity and equality and so on. And so, therefore, I'll come to my last summary.

In a sense then we need to think about migrants a bit more differently, we need to think about them as instigators of ideas about equality, dignity and freedom. We need to think about them as makers of modernity in our contemporary globalised world. That they are not just an outcome of globalisation of modernity. Hence the typical stories there's globalisation that's why we have migrants, but I'm kind of saying there is also this other side that they are makers of our contemporary globalised world, and that we also need to see them as primary agents of decolonisation of the Global North, which itself is of course an expansion of rights and equalities that we are kind of, in the midst of rethinking. The more we integrate such a perspective

on immigration and other related topics, the more we can kind of tackle issues of integration or what's the value of migration from a totally different perspective. Thank you very much for listening.

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