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## ***Methodological interculturalism: breaking down epistemological barriers around diversity management***

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### **ABSTRACT**

As part of the post-multicultural era, transnationalism, super-diversity, cosmopolitanism and solidarity develop a sense of awareness to live in a complex society. This requests us to identify the epistemological barriers preventing us to produce new knowledge, since there is a raising consciousness that these new frameworks cannot be addressed with old policy maps. All share the need to go beyond methodological nationalism, and one of its by-products: multiculturalism. *Methodological interculturalism* is a promising epistemological lens through which to cluster this new diversity geography. It is a direct answer to the key question, what happens when the unit of analysis from which we argue about “how to live together” is diversity itself rather than a supposed us/we/unity/ majority/state/nation lens. The outcome is the recognition that super-diversity and transnationalism is a fact that we need to incorporate into our public culture, together with new normative claims of justice related to cosmopolitanism and solidarity.

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The new context of super-diversity and transnationalism, together with the securitization framework which has penetrated most diversity-management thinking, preventing a more open, cosmopolitan and solidarity diverse societies, highlight the very volatile situation in which Europe finds itself. On the one hand, the inverted globalization trend takes the form of an offence against what it considers to be an attack against the integrity of the traditional state foundation: nationalistic identity narratives, welfare chauvinism, economic national protectionism. The recent entrance of intercultural policy (Ic) into migration and ethnic studies, on the other hand, has also provoked some initial signs of disconformity against the master narrative that has dominated diversity management: namely, multiculturalism (Mc) (Meer,

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Modood, and Zapata-Barrero 2016; and the recent discussion promoted by *Comparative Migration Studies*, edited by Levrau and Loobuyck 2018). The simplest way to define Ic is that it focuses on commonalities between people with different national backgrounds, instead of differences, as Mc does, and that these common bonds among people, including nationals citizens, are the basic ways to bridge them. It seeks to foster what the Mc has left in the background or simply set aside: contact and interpersonal relations (Zapata-Barrero 2015). Ic is seen as a separate policy paradigm, however not necessarily at odds with Mc. But some critics still insist on continuing to place it as an epiphenomenon of Mc (Modood 2017). There is some sort of ideological proviso that keeps them within a “multicultural bunker” that acts as an epistemological barrier. Even Kymlicka, whose reasoning is less ideological than Modood, recognizes that Mc needs to be updated given new contexts related to migration and diversity (see my Rejoinder, Zapata-Barrero 2018b).

In this brief article, I would like to pursue this line of argumentation articulating what I consider is one of the key epistemological foundations of interculturalism. In spite of sharing with Mc the recognition of the inevitability of diversity in modern cities, of opposing to monoculturalist assimilation strategies, and that both seek equal treatment of difference (Meer, Modood, and Zapata-Barrero 2016, 9), there are some new trends in the diversity debate where Mc clearly shows its limitations. This is one way to define the post-multicultural era in which we are now entering (Zapata-Barrero 2017a). These epistemological implications give Ic its proper place within the diversity debate. Let me call this dimension *methodological interculturalism*.

The premise of this logic of thought is that the new diversity dynamics calls for the need to discuss new conceptual maps, since new diversity-related contexts cannot be addressed with old policy focuses such as Mc. For this, we need to break down conceptual barriers, which have been dominant these last decades, in large part produced by the Mc narrative. *Methodological interculturalism* is a promising epistemological lens through which to look at new theoretical diversity-related paradigms. It is first and foremost a direct reaction against methodological nationalism. The premise is the assumption that diversity and difference is a fact that we need to incorporate into our public culture. It is a direct answer to the key-question, what happens when the unit of analysis, the initial premise from which we argue about “how to live together” is diversity itself rather than a supposed us/we/unity/majority/state/nation lens. What happens if we begin to formulate arguments taking diversity as the main vantage point? In this case, we need to assume that diversity is not only a fact but a culture that needs to be fostered by public institutions. This *culture of diversity* involves that differences should fundamentally be the object of affirmation and not negation, and that diversity needs to be separated from a national-based and ethnic-based (even racial-based) perception of identity. *Methodological interculturalism* also requests that it is through

this diversity-lens that we must review mainstream public policies. In this framework, *methodological interculturalism* highlights the importance of contact between people as the most appropriate way to drive integration (can integration and diversity accommodation be done without contact?, by only distributing differentiated rights, as Mc has defended for decades?).

Through *methodological interculturalism*, I want to give to Ic its proper foundation. It will help me to channel most of the emerging theoretical paradigms that have been put forward these last years, distinguishing the distinctive features and new dynamics of diversity and migration: transnationalism, super-diversity, cosmopolitanism and solidarity. As frameworks of analysis, all requests, however from different angles, to go beyond what has been popularized as methodological nationalism. Mc is a direct by-product of methodological nationalism (Zapata-Barrero 2018b): It has been basically thought to be implemented at the basic structure of society level, it is a state-based theory, though as a macro-politics. Initial works on Mc indicators confirm this view (see, for instance, Banting and Kymlicka 2013). Because of this vantage point, it assumes the link between state and national identity, have no convincing answer to the territorialization of ethnic differences, and then it is still dependent of three analytical frameworks that *methodological interculturalism* tries to overcome: the Unity/Diversity and the Majority/Minority analytical separations, as well as the tendency to categorize society following only ethno-legal parameters between citizens and immigrants. In my defence of Ic (Zapata-Barrero 2018b) I highlighted the epistemological barriers a national-based view of culture may cause but also this tendency to have an uncritical group-based view of diversity, and on perpetuating the power-relation and inequalities that are often related to diversity, keeping, instead of breaking down, these dominant analytical frameworks. For *methodological interculturalism*, these analytical distinctions must today become a target of criticism, since they reinforce precisely what needs to be overcome. This can lead to the continued perpetuation of stereotypes or discrimination against others.

How can we say today that diversity is a minority category and unity the majority? How can we categorize immigrant associations as minority actors! Under *methodological interculturalism*, there is a strong awareness that most of the problems our cities encounter under the form of xenophobia, racism and intolerant practices probably have something to do with the lack of diversity policies targeting national citizens. *Methodological interculturalism* helps us to denounce this tendency of ignoring national citizens when formulating diversity policies.

The fact that Mc insists on being the only valid policy paradigm, implicitly claiming that it has the monopoly of diversity-friendly management, is for me a clear example of what we may call "epistemological arrogance" we cannot accept it. It is obvious that Mc has had a very ambitious normative programme from the very beginning, mixing equality principles with a just society, and it is

clear that after decades of existence Mc has failed to reach the just and diverse society it promised us. For me, Mc is sinning with the same resistance than the national revival of most political narratives, essentializing national tradition/identity, which is a much closer illustration of remaining romanticism.

This romantic Mc is contrary to the pragmatism of *methodological interculturalism*, which defends a micro-policy focus, promoting face to face relations, case by case, incorporating what has been also less theoretized by MC, the public space in cities.

Elsewhere I have called these taken-for-granted policy frameworks as *multicultural idols* that have dominated the understanding of diversity management and the way Mc has produced knowledge around diversity (Zapata-Barrero 2017b). *Methodological interculturalism* is some sort of copernican turn. We know that Bacon famously identified what he considered the main errors in the human attempt to gain knowledge. He called these errors "idols", suggesting that these are ideas that are taken-for-granted which influence the way we produce knowledge, and explain why so many minds hold so many false ideas for long periods of time. These *multicultural idols* have framed a great part of the last scholarly decade on diversity management, and are now being disputed through *methodological interculturalism*. In a previous contribution, I identified at least three: Beyond the national narrative domination: the local turn; beyond ethnocentrism and group-based narrative hegemony: the return to the individual; beyond the immigrant/citizenship divide of the population narrative framework: the mainstreaming turn (Zapata-Barrero 2017b, 176–180)

The basis of *methodological interculturalism* turn around these three parameters, together with the epistemological assumptions that have governed these last decades migration studies: Unity/Diversity and Majority/Minority nexus. It is a fact that in the post-multicultural era we are entering, we cannot accept as premise that those that define diversity do not include themselves within this category. If we want to go a step forward within the diversity debate, we simply cannot accept uncritically that diversity be used as an euphemism to perpetuate the us/others separation of societies.

At this point of my discussion, *methodological interculturalism* plays a prominent role. When it is placed within the policy paradigm change theory, it can be a legitimate epistemology allowing to build new knowledge that is related to diversity management, clustering the new theoretical trends that migration studies have identified these last years: transnationalism, super-diversity, solidarity and cosmopolitanism.

Let me map this current diversity geography in necessarily limited terms given the length limits of this article. My central argument is that *methodological interculturalism* clusters transnationalism, super-diversity, cosmopolitanism and solidarity debates on diversity today. This fact legitimizes its distinctive features as a policy paradigm today, since it helps us give answers to the

diversity concerns these theoretical paradigms invite us to challenge. To put it in other words, there are positive correlations between Ic and the four main theoretical paradigms governing migration studies today.

I have no room to go into the conceptual interrelations but let me make some first key distinctions. Super-diversity and Transnationalism analytically contextualize a diversity dynamic, inviting migration studies to incorporate them both as independent and dependent variables. Cosmopolitanism and Solidarity have, in addition, a normative dimension. They express a desideratum regulating current critical thinking. Within this conceptual system, Ic is probably the most appropriate policy strategy for managing transnational and super-diverse realities, and by applying it, Ic helps to foster a cosmopolitan and solidarity diverse society. We could, of course, graduate these interlinks but nothing will change my central argument.

The epicentre connecting all these theoretical paradigms (the descriptive and normative ones) to Ic is obviously that they sprung up as direct criticism of methodological nationalism and its by-products (Mc included). They all belong, then, to the same family of categories that views the national-state lens as the main source of most epistemological barriers, which avoid a more pragmatic policy formulation against discrimination, inequality, racism and xenophobia, and even unethical treatment practices still pending in our cities. These four theoretical approaches introduce us the complexity of the notion of diversity. From this angle, it invites us to change the unidimensional view of diversity and the universalism that has governed much of the policy answers to the key-question on how to live together in diverse societies.

### **Ic and Transnationalism**

Today, transnationalism and the growing mobility of people are pluralizing our identities and self-national and cultural adscriptions. It is now the rule in migration societies. The nuclear definition of transnationalism describes the reality that people can simultaneously have different national ties. This framework of thought, as it is defined in terms of transcending traditional national-state boundaries, has logically been the first to detect the national iron cage governing migration studies. As Castles (2003, 20–21) rightly asserted a decade ago, the logic of multiple national identities “questions the dominance of the nation-state as the focus of social belonging”. This shows us that there is a logical link between transnationalism and complex diversity, namely diversity is demonstrating that people can live with multiple co-existing national identities, either through permanent social relations with families and friends living in their home countries, or through other social, political, economical and cultural ties (Levitt and Jaworsky 2007).

If the rough notion of transnationalism is to have a bi-national or multi-national mind, then the intrapersonal dialogue that occurs is, in itself, an

intercultural dialogue. The embeddedness in more than one national culture fosters the development of intercultural skills, namely the capacity to enter in contact with other people with different backgrounds in equality terms, the tendency to normalize diversity and difference, without separating it from a “virtual” national-unity. That is, the notion of transnationalism necessarily contains intercultural practice, and interculturalism is a way to understand transnational behaviour. Formulating the argument in terms of a hypothesis, what I assess theoretically is that transnational people have a predisposition to be more intercultural, and that the growing importance of people with multiple national identity affiliations (the basis of transnationalism) is a favourable context for promoting contact between people of different backgrounds, including national citizens (the basis of interculturalism). Interculturalism and transnationalism present some “overlapping affinities” (Zapata-Barrero 2018a). By this last notion, and in the absence of a better one, I want to emphasize that there is not just a juxtaposition between transnationalism and interculturalism but that each one necessarily contains the other in order to define its main conceptual dimensions and functional characteristics.

### **Ic and super-diversity**

As for super-diversity, it was coined originally to describe a society distinguished by a dynamic interplay of variables diversity-category related (Vertovec 2007). Its major contribution is, therefore, that of taking into account a whole range of factors for identity, breaking the “ethnicity primacy” rule.

Super-diversity describes the multiplicity of categories of diversity a person can hold. It tries to go, again, beyond the unidimensional interpretation that perpetuates the national-based view of identity, incorporating other drivers influencing inequality and power relations, discrimination and racism, such as gender, legal/economic status, education, language, religious belief and even age. The key epistemological consequence of the super-diversity theoretical paradigm is the importance of conducting intersectional research for producing knowledge. Another key epistemological implication is that we cannot think of diversity management in universal terms, as if there were just one way to interpret diversity situations (Meissner and Vertovec 2015). As a consequence, we cannot assume there is just one policy approach to deal with super-diverse scenarios.

Super-diversity is by itself then a serious attack to the multicultural narratives’ assumption that people owes one attachment to one culture and tradition. As a theoretical paradigm, what super-diversity introduces to us once more is the need to understand diversity in all its complex forms of expression, and that this complexity is also becoming the norm and not the exception in our current societies. Here again, the backbone of Mc faces many implementation difficulties, since, what kind of differentiated right can be applied to

people that are subject to several diversity-related discriminations, being ethnicity just one? If one recognizes super-diversity as a fact defining our current societies, then there is a serious difficulty in justifying Mc as a politics of national culture, as Waldron put it (2000). Finally, by inferring empirically social categories (avoiding theory-driven categories diversity-related, Boccagni 2015; Magazzini 2017), super-diversity also invites us to follow the pragmatic turn in diversity studies *methodological interculturalism* announces.

## **lc and cosmopolitanism**

Through migration studies, cosmopolitanism develops a sense of awareness to live in a complex diverse society, and that oneself is just one part of this diversity geography. The initial premise is that the growth of human mobility and the consequent encounters with difference inevitably leads people to step beyond the national boundaries to establish shared bonds (Beck and Sznaider 2006; Schiller and Irving 2017). The application of cosmopolitanism to migration studies has been done basically through the notion of Community of strangers (Derrida, Henig, Kristeva), or the idea that no everyone feel in the same community but the contrary, everyone feels like a stranger and different, and then this common feeling is what can unite us and develop feelings of hospitality and welcome. Epistemologically, this also means that there is not an “us” in this cosmopolitan word, because everyone is “other”.

The shared argument is that all human beings are or can and should be citizens in a single community (whatever size we apply). Every cosmopolitan argues for community-building (a cosmopolitan representative of interculturalism is probably Cantle 2012).

Formulating the view in negative terms, the cosmopolitan position rejects exclusive attachments to a particular national culture. The epistemological consequence here is that cosmopolitanism cannot be understood today without this encouragement of cultural diversity and intercultural encounters. In a cosmopolitan community individuals from different places (e.g. nation-states) and cultural/religious beliefs enter in relationships of mutual respect. Related to identity and culture it also means that even if I see myself as different from others, this does not necessarily mean we must have separate lives because we have nothing in common. This means again that we should incorporate diversity as a public culture, and then place diversity-recognition as the brand of the new society. In this view, cosmopolitanism is a way to say that there is no rational ground for curtailing the cultural freedoms (of language, religion and customs) in the name of a so-called majoritarian nation/church, or cultural dominant ideology. Cosmopolitanism also assumes culture is a fluid concept, elastic, open-ended, not atemporally fixed, which is also the basis of *methodological interculturalism*.



This follows that there are some affinities between cosmopolitan and intercultural citizenship. Not only focused on what is common within difference but also human rights, the refusal to interpret diversity from just one national identity affiliations, or linked to culture/territory. Within this framework, *methodological interculturalism* tells us that fostering contact is a strategy to build a cosmopolitan community.

The fact that people relate to each other, in different place-settings, for different shared purposes, suppose they develop a cosmopolitan culture: namely, that they understand other people can have different views about ways of live, religion, language, and that they recognize and respect them as they too would like for their views to be respected and recognized by others. The first principle of interculturalism can also be applied to cosmopolitan culture: diversity-recognition and self-recognition oneself is not separate from but belong also, to the diversity category. It is this mind openness which makes a cosmopolitan culture. It is what I also called *culture of diversity* (Zapata-Barrero 2018b). If diverse people live together but just one does not respect diversity, then a cosmopolitan problem may arise under the form of racism, xenophobia or whatever diversity-adverse behaviour. From an intercultural point of view, a cosmopolitan culture involves, then, that it is possible to recognize ourselves in our interactions with others.

Vertovec and Cohen (2002) rightly synthesize this vision suggesting that cosmopolitanism simultaneously: (a) transcends the seemingly exhausted nation-state model; (b) is able to mediate actions and ideals oriented both to the universal and the particular, the global and the local; (c) is culturally anti-essentialist and (d) is capable of representing variously complex repertoires of allegiance, identity and interest. In these ways, cosmopolitanism seems to offer a mode of managing cultural and political multiplicities. In this sense, we can say that intercultural people have a cosmopolitan mindset.

### **Ic and solidarity**

The concept of solidarity has been recently incorporated into the migration research agenda through two distinct avenues. First, in refugee studies, solidarity has been placed at the centre of the counter-argument against the state-based narrative on security. Solidarity is the main city narrative, also expressed through welcoming-cities, along similar lines than Ngos and citizens expressing their commitment to the destiny of forced migrants. In normative terms, political realism is competing with a much more humanitarian approach.

Second, in diversity studies, solidarity has been connected to what Banting and Kymlicka (2006) label as *corroding effect* of the multicultural project. Namely, the fact that multicultural policies unintended effects have been lack of trust, solidarity and social capital. Here lies the place of solidarity as

one of the cornerstones of welfare states. Solidarity refers to the practice of sharing material/immaterial resources on the basis of a sense of belonging and group loyalty. Traditionally the concept has assumed a certain sense of community, which is the basis of action. If this basis is humanity, solidarity can be expressed to all human beings. But generally as a principle driving policy, solidarity has not been linked to cosmopolitanism. Inverting the argument, that non-solidarity situations reveal a certain failure of community cohesion and shared values.

Behind these statements, there is a sense of belonging but also some emotional ties (empathy) to the situation of disadvantage of certain people that require external help. In this scenario, the increasingly diverse social fabric has come into conflict with the traditional idea that solidarity is necessarily embedded in an imagined homogeneous national community (Banting and Kymlicka 2015). Solidarity among culturally equals versus solidarity among culturally different becomes today a framework of reflection.

One common trend of this theoretical paradigm is that it has basically a normative meaning, and it is linked, again, with a determinate idea of justice. In whatever situation requiring the application of the solidarity principle, a determinate unjust equality-related situation arises.

When we link it to diversity management migration-related a mirror effect takes place and we see how traditionally solidarity has been embedded with a determined view of a social community with a shared (national) history and shared (national) norms and values. Today, in super-diverse and transnational societies, solidarity has real difficulties to remain within this national-state paradigm. Hence, this need to reboot the traditional view of solidarity is claiming, again, *methodological interculturalism*. Solidarity incorporating super-diverse and transnational realities has not been theorized enough but we can place as a premise the need for contact and intercultural encounters as a policy strategy to foster solidarity in diverse societies.

Having clustered each theoretical paradigm with Ic, and argued how all call for *methodological interculturalism*, it is now time to close the circle of my argumentation. What do these affinities tell us? That *methodological interculturalism* incorporates transnationalism, super-diversity as contexts and cosmopolitanism and solidarity as main normative drivers. Ic is a policy strategy favouring that these contexts and normative aims may be expanded within the diversity dynamics preventing the effects of inequality and discrimination that may arise, also challenging most of the multicultural idols. There is still a lot to do, theoretically and empirically but I think the necessary debate is here to enter and will probably remain during the next years.

### **Disclosure statement**

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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