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Discourses of Diversity

Alfonso Del Percio[i] and Zorana Sokolovska

What do discourses of diversity achieve and what do they stand for?[ii]

This has become a central question in critical scholarship examining the recent drive for diversity in areas such as education, corporate organizations, and marketing as well as in national and supranational governmental institutions (e.g. as in Ahmed, 2012; Duchêne and Heller, 2007; Heller, 2007; Michaels, 2006; Moore, 2015; Shankar, 2015; Urciuoli, 2003, 2010). In addition to acknowledging the perseverance of normalizing and stigmatizing discourses of difference, scholars have been particularly intrigued by how calls for diversity are articulated within the state management of racial progress and social inclusion (e.g. Berrey, 2015; Blommaert and Verschueren, 1998; Flores, forthcoming). Studies have also raised questions on ways in which diversity discourses become entrenched with processes of economic development and dispossession (see e.g. Heller and McElhinny, forthcoming; Pietikäinen and Kelly-Holmes, 2013).

This special issue on "Discourses of Diversity"[iii] is anchored within and inspired by feminist, antiracist, and neo-Marxist scholarship on the (symbolic) politics of diversity. It should be read as a collection of empirical analyses problematizing how and why discourses of diversity are articulated within the management of social (dis)order, economic development, and the governance of (in)equality. While research on language and diversity has recently turned its focus to studying the effects of globalization on language and communication (Androutsopoulos

and Juffermans, 2014; Blommaert, 2010, 2015; Blommaert and Rampton, 2011; Canagarajah, 2006; Creese and Blackledge, 2010; Garcia, 2009; Jacquemet, 2005, Jørgensen et al., 2011; Rampton, 1996), the articles in this issue are interested in the multiple and sometimes contradictory ways diversity gets roped into the state and economic apparatus. The particular questions include: What do corporate, political actors and institutions accomplish when advocating for diversity? And: What projects does diversity serve and what social effects do such projects have? The authors of the studies also explore how, why, and with which consequences discourses of diversity are sometimes endorsed, sometimes contested, and sometimes even resisted within the spaces and settings documented as well as by other audiences and publics addressed or affected by these discourses. In sum, the articles represent a critical questioning of both the larger sociohistorical conditions and the ideological formations (Bauman and Briggs, 2003; Gal and Woolard, 2001; Williams, 1977) in which diversity and its multiple meanings are anchored. The authors furthermore discuss the ways in which changing, contested, or conflicting meanings of diversity are articulated within processes of societal transformation and resistance as well as within larger dynamics of inequality and subalternity.

This issue unites seven original contributions to the field of language and diversity from a range of institutional and social settings located in different national (France, Italy, USA, Canada, and Israel) and international contexts (the Council of Europe). The articles span educational institutions and corporate actors, (intra)national governmental organizations, branding agencies and parades, cultural parks and historical society hikes, and charities and social organizations. Some of the documented discourses of diversity intersect with current conditions of accelerated globalization and economic restructuration (Appadurai 1996) and deal, for example, with processes of intercultural communication and transnational migration (Del

Percio, 2016), pinkwashing and homonationalism (Milani and Levon, 2016), state apologies and neoliberal multicultural polices (McElhinny, 2016), and with marked diversities and commodified tokens of language and culture (Jaffe, 2016; and Urciuoli, 2016). Others bear traces of older debates on citizenship and participation as well as on imperialism and (post)colonialism; such discourses engage with historical claims for bilingual citizenship (Urbain, 2016) or political debates on European integration (Sokolovska, 2016). By locating the investigated discourses in specific agendas and strategies that are produced and circulated by specific persons or institutions occupying unequally valued positions in society, the articles in this issue contribute to presenting a nuanced and, to a certain extent, demystified view on the status and effects of discourses of diversity. The articles also challenge perhaps too-easily made assumptions about the links constructed by means of discourse between diversity on the one hand, and freedom, equality, and emancipation on the other.

Despite their different temporalities as well as the variety of institutional and geographical spaces in which the documented processes are anchored, the papers in this special issue share an interest in understanding the ways and conditions under which diversity is invested in, enacted, disciplined, and sometimes contested by actors and institutions occupying differently valued positions in social structure. In general, the authors choose to approach these processes through the lens of discourse (Foucault 1969; Martín Rojo 2001). As an analytical and conceptual tool, discourse enables scholars to grasp the social, cultural, and institutional semiotic processes that shape diversity and that bring diversity into existence as an object of social reality and public concern.

One of this processes involves the practices of *investment* in diversity, or in other words, an interest in the logics, calculations, and reflections leading to the assumption that evoking and

valorizing diversity may come with certain benefits, both symbolic and economic (Duchêne 2016). Jaffe's (2016) documentation of a cultural park in Corsica exemplifies such a practice. She argues that the founders of this cultural park strategically chose to organize it around unexpected and diverse heterogeneous themes that break with longstanding notions of traditional Corsica and that are intended to create distinction and thus attract tourists, visitors, and locals whose desires, expectations, and ideological positions themselves are heterogeneous. In a similar vein, Urbain (2016) demonstrates that proficiency in French and English was strategically invested in by white Creole elite circles in 19th century French Louisiana in order to position themselves as authentic American patriots and to distinguish themselves from other French-speaking citizens occupying unequally valued positions in the social structure. McElhinny's analysis of the Canadian state's apologies to minority groups and indigenous peoples further demonstrate that diversity discourses are conceptualized by the state as means to heal political wounds and traumata that potentially hinder Canada's access to new markets and thus prevent the shaping of fully realized neoliberal selves (McElhinny, 2016).

Understanding how diversity is articulated with regard to political and economic interests and projects furthermore involves an analysis of the *disciplining* practices – techniques of coercion and control (Foucault 1995) used to both regulate diversity and to structure the ways people talk and think about diversity. For instance, Urciuoli (2016) argues that the conception of tokens of diversity as quantifiable neoliberal objects and skills requires processes of packaging that discursively disconnect diversity for social experience and reconnect it with a complex of institutional value. Having grown up with the inequalities of race, Urciuoli explains, has little value in itself. Unless this experience can be discursively reframed as form of human capital it is not considered to 'add value'. Similarly, in his ethnographic account of an NGO's management

of migration in Italy, Del Percio (2016) explains that diversity is displayed as the social workers' capacity to embody a specific communicational register that does justice to migrants' cultural difference and that naturally constructs migrants as the "Other." Sokolovska (2016) also demonstrates that the multiple ways in which Europe's linguistic diversity is imagined within the Council of Europe are the product of regulating practices of selection and choice that create hierarchies between languages and forms of multilingualism while also mediating geopolitical interests. In the same vein, branding a "pink" Israel also necessitates processes of the hierarchization of gayness and metonymic devices that model the marketization of diversity to fit locally accepted images of the Israeli nation and globally circulating notions of Israel as well as the desires of the addressed publics (Milani and Levon, 2016).

Investigating the ways diversity becomes entrenched with political and economic agendas also means problematizing the ways diversity is *enacted*. Milani and Levon (2016) propose that the pinkwashing/homonationalist project of Israel is not enacted exclusively through the promotional campaigns of an agentive and rational state apparatus. Rather, the messages on Israel's pluralism and liberalism are also shaped and circulated by a series of mundane practices produced and performed by a network of state, para-state, and non-state actors that, according to Milani and Levon, contribute to the reproduction of Israeli's homonationalism. Urciuoli (2016) also argues that corporate organizations use websites as promotional platforms to display diversity as a quality that organizations and their workers possess. Diversity is thereby imagined as an experience, as a skill, as knowledge and understanding. Yet in the case of the cultural park and historical social hike documented by Jaffe (2016), diversity does not seem to be an inherent quality of these cultural attractions. The cultural park and touristic hike's diversity, so Jaffe, is

rather a quality that visitors themselves attribute and project onto the objects, species, and places that they experience, sense, and appropriate when consuming these attractions.

Finally, inquiring into the status of discourses of diversity in political and economic apparatuses involves a documentation of the ways actors' and institutions' investments in diversity are *contested* and *resisted* by individuals and groups of individuals representing varying agendas and interests. In her analysis of state apologies as instances of neoliberal multicultural biopolitics, McElhinny (2016) argues that the apologies performed by the Canadian state have been contested by the communities and individuals to whom the apologies are addressed; indeed these groups construct the state's practices as inappropriate and in no way a form of reparation. In a similar vein, Del Percio (2016) demonstrates how expertise on migrants' diversity, which is intended to create a climate of acceptance and tolerance for the arriving migrants, is resisted and contested not only by the population that is asked to buy into these discourses of diversity, but also by the very social workers who are paid to circulate this prefabricated message. Yet, while people might contest or resist discourses of diversity enacted by state or economic actors, Urbain (2016) and Sokolovska (2016) argue that diversity discourses are themselves forms of resistance and contestation to hegemonic language ideologies and perceived forms of inequality and exclusion.

Although they draw on different data sets and diverse methodologies from the fields of ethnography, historiography, interactional sociolinguistics, urban geography, Piercian semiotics, and discourse analysis, the seven articles in this special issue are also grouped around several common topics or nodes. These related features are powerful indications of how the investigated materializations and instances of diversity's investment, enactment, disciplining, and contestation are linked across time and space.

First of all, the authors consider diversity discourses as anchored in larger societal attempts contributing to the (re)making of specific bounded places, be it nation-states (see Milani and Levon, 2016; Jaffe, 2016; or Urbain, 2016) or supranational entities such as "Europe" (see Sokolovska, 2016). Through marketing campaigns and promotional speech as well as through political talk, diversity is a means to link places with specific qualities such as pluralism, equality, openness, inclusion, tolerance, cosmopolitanism, and antiracism (see McElhinny, 2016; Urbain, 2016; Sokolovska, 2016). Diversity is also utilized to form a bridge between exoticism, cultural and biological vitality, modernity and tradition, and authenticity (see Jaffe, 2016). Diversity furthermore contributes to the reimagination of national or local histories and to the erasure, or invisibilization, of forms of intolerance and societal harm (see Milani and Levon, 2016; and McElhinny, 2016) that are linked to these places; more generally, it affects the ways in which the public thinks and talks about specific places and about the present and future (see Jaffe, 2016).

The authors also argue that discourses of diversity intersect with sometimes local sometimes national or supranational processes of political and economic development and transformation. Indeed, in addition to liberalization policies, restructuration and modernization of infrastructure, and funding of economic initiatives, discourses of diversity represent a powerful means to create a climate of tolerance, harmony, and freedom, thereby facilitating robust (economic) exchange with the desired actors (see McElhinny, 2016; and Sokolovska, 2016). Discourses of diversity may also contribute to fostering certain consumer's desires (especially in individuals who value sexual, cultural, or linguistic diversity) for the qualities of a specific place or destination and lead to the attraction of capitals and tourists (see Milani and Levon, 2016; and Jaffe, 2016). Finally, discourses of diversity may provide the means through which integrated supranational (in certain cases economic) spaces are brought into being and through which the

implementation of policies, measures, and strategies are justified (Milani and Levon, 2016; and Sokolovska, 2016).

Discourses of diversity are indeed part of larger attempts to reorganize the ways in which individuals and communities claim linguistic and civic rights and how they fight for equality. While the restructuration of the welfare state in many modern countries (Castells 1998, 2011; Harvey 2005) has complicated demands for class rights and socioeconomic equality, the authors argue that discourses of linguistic, cultural, and sexual diversity have also emerged as a powerful tool for marginalized individuals and groups to make claims for inclusion and recognition (see e.g. Del Percio, 2016; McElhinny, 2016; Milani and Levon; and Sokolovska, 2016). Note, however, that in line with Gal's account on polyglot nationalism (2012), Urbain's contribution shows that linguistic diversity was a crucial demand expressed by the francophone elite community in Louisiana within the framework of the American nation-building project in the 19th century. At the same time, governmental authorities have employed discourses of diversity as a means to create consent, i.e. to tranquillize and pacify stigmatized groups of people. As such, these discourses propose a form of recognition that – while acknowledging harm and situations of marginalization – does not necessarily lead to social action and reparation (see Del Percio, 2016; Sokolovska, 2016; as well as McElhinny, 2016).

The articles in this special issue furthermore demonstrate that discourses of diversity can represent powerful technologies, i.e. instruments of societal governmentality that interpellate (Althusser 1971) individuals as specific subjectivities or social personae that fit specific models of societal coexistence and that contribute to the production of wealthy and prosperous societies. Thus, diversity becomes an unequally valued skill embodied (or not) by an individual who, according to her or his capacity to enact specific culturally scripted forms of diversity, is

classified and unequally positioned and valued. In consequence, discourses of diversity demand that people work on their own body, language, and culture (Urciuoli, 2016; Sokolovska, 2016) as well as on their anxieties and traumas in order to adequately practice diversity and thus become rational selves responsible for the well-being of their minds and the productivity of their bodies (Del Percio, 2016; McElhinny, 2016; Sokolovska, 2016; as well as Urciuoli, 2016). Along the same lines, the authors claim that discourses of diversity – particularly in employment (Del Percio, 2016) and educational settings (Urciuoli, 2016), but also in institutional/interstate spaces (see Sokolovska, 2016) – contribute to the shaping of flexible selves able to do justice to the expectations and demands imposed by a changing society.

Finally, the articles in this special issue all (some more, others less explicitly) contribute to a critical reflection on the knowledge on diversity that researchers in the discipline have been producing in the past decades. By problematizing what is recognized as diversity (in the analyses as well as in the sites and settings investigated) and by questioning the claims and struggles in which discourses of diversity are anchored and what they replace or reproduce, the authors of the articles in this special issue contribute to a destabilization of a general understanding of who profits from how society portrays and invests in diversity. Such analyses involve a reflexive discussion about what scholarly expertise on diversity can achieve (or not), a questioning of whose rights are defended and advocated when academics support claims for diversity, and a critical look at the individuals and groups in situations of subalternity that scholarly expertise valorizes, obscures, or ignores.

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