

A Transnational Perspective in Ethnic Studies

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What kind of education is desirable for migrants with transnational experiences and people with roots in other countries? I would like to think about this question while providing a brief sketch of the development of the transnational positionality in Ethnic Studies, particularly African-American Studies in the United States. The discipline of Ethnic Studies was born as a result of the Civil Rights Movement and student movements in the late 1960s and developed as an area of research in which the assertions of minorities could be heard. Accordingly, as with the appeals of minority political activism, the positionality of minorities as national citizens became a significant focus of this research and the development of research from a transnational perspective was delayed. However, recently, having been influenced by economic globalization and increasing numbers of migrants, it has become more important to understand ethnic groups not simply as minorities within the borders of the state, but as diasporas with transnational connections between their homelands and the other countries to which they travel. As a result of the recent interaction between African-American Studies and African Area Studies, African Diaspora Studies has been created as a new line of research. Many researchers today have inherited and pass on the political character of Ethnic Studies while they analyze phenomenon like the slave trade of the past and contemporary racism from a transnational perspective and they aim to connect the outcome of their research with efforts to overcome actual current social problems. On the other hand, however, there are researchers who resist the efforts of Diaspora Studies and argue for the importance of national perspectives. When citizenship is fundamentally tied to nationality and we have to think about things like the education of migrants and residents with foreign nationalities in a reality in which national patterns of thought are persistently imbued within society, then we cannot rely solely upon an emphasis on transnational perspectives. It is important to adopt both perspectives and in doing so the relationships between these two perspectives will also become clear.