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Title: Migration (Immigration-Emigration): the pitfalls of duality!

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The central issue here is not how dissimilar distinct societies may be from one another, but what ability and opportunity the members of one society have – or can develop – to appreciate and understand how others function. This may not, of course, be an immediate way of resolving such conflicts. The killers of Captain Cook could not instantly revise their culture-bound view of him, nor could Cook acquire at once the comprehension or acumen needed to hold his pistol rather than fire it. Rather, the hope is that the reasoned cultivation of understanding and knowledge would eventually overcome such impulsive action....Reason has its reach – compromised neither by the importance of instinctive psychology nor by the presence of cultural diversity in the world. It has an especially important role to play in the cultivation of moral imagination. We need it in particular to face the bats and the owls and the insane moon. – Amartya Sen

Every now and then, due to contextualities and contingencies, certain aspects of our society stand-out. I would say that this is not because they were irrelevant (or even new) before their sudden salience. Their sudden saliency needs to (and can) be explained. Furthermore, we need to ask ourselves what we should do with this sudden saliency. I am referring here to the debates around the so-called “immigration issue.” A plethora of writing has taken place during the last years regarding the “immigration issue” within the U.S. Nevertheless, I have not read anything that questions the concept being used (“immigration”) and its deeper connections with other relevant historical forces: race, structures, globalization, nation-state, and linked fate. This type of questioning is sometimes perceived as esoteric in nature without any “real” practical value for our day-to-day lives. I would beg to disagree and even label this sort of criticism as anti-democratic and elitist.

As members of a democratic (work-in-progress) society, we need to and are entitled to converse, deliberate on any issue of relevance for our exercise of living as a community. These issues might be raised by any number of sectors or individuals within our community. In this case, I am strategically and purposely reacting to an underscored issue (“immigration”), but at the same time I wish to do much more than react. I wish to use this opportunity to contest many underlying presumptions of those that have taken the effort to bring to public light and discussion the so-called “immigration issue,” and in this way transform what could be perceived as a reaction into a proactive response. In other words, slide the rug away from under the feet of those comfortably standing on what could be perceived as demagogic or confused intentions. I do not want to assigned any specific mal-intentionality or go into the psyches of those involved

in raising the “immigration issue,” but what I do want to underscore is their misdirected efforts because of an incomplete conceptualization of what is at stake.

The reason why I have been questioning (and putting within quotation marks) the “immigration issue” is because it is a partial and skewed view of reality. It is paying attention to only one side of a story. It is a reality perceived as a duality, but focusing attention to only one side of that duality. And although there are many writings and schools of thought that would criticize the mere use of dualities, we live in a world today that understands realities from dualistic perspectives. Thus, I shall take for granted those dual reality perceptions, but make the case of paying attention to “both” sides for emitting judgments and deriving understandings. Therefore, we should be talking about migration instead of “immigration.” This is not for arguing that “immigration” does not exist or takes place, but by framing the discussion in those terms, it leaves open the possibility of understanding that social reality in such a partial way as to promote a mental scenario of fear, of intrusion, of invasion, which lends itself nicely to demarcate a starker and bolder bordering of “the other,” of “othering.”

Furthermore, by presenting the discussion as a migration issue, we underscore what it is really at stake: movement of people. The direction of those moves, immigration or emigration, would depend on the analytical gaze we assume and where do we positioned ourselves as social spectators and citizens of the world: in other words, humans. I would like to make use of a label with empirical and metaphorical currency for illustrating the idea of migration: people/citizens on the move. This is captured in Jorge Duany’s book *The Puerto Rican Nation on the Move: Identities on the Island and in the United States*, of course making reference to the Puerto Rican case and the literal and material back-and-forth of Puerto Ricans between the U.S. mainland and the Puerto Rican archipelago, but in addition to the metaphorical power of such a terminology, its attains practical currency when elements of culture are put into play, but culture as lived and performed and not solely as an elitist undertaking.

These comments or way of perceiving the issue of migration underscore the current understandings of nation-state borders and the so-called supposed threats raised from “indiscriminate immigration;” therefore, raising the need to become “not too permissive” on whom we allow to enter our nation-state borders. There are two issues that I would like to highlight from such conceptualizations. The first one is the taking for granted of existing nation-states’ borders. And secondly, the constitutive “othering” of reifying and defending these so-called accepted and pre-established borders; in other words, the implicit and explicit process of racialization within this act and thought of “othering.” By definition, “immigration” becomes a “problem” when those entering “your” polity/community are perceived as “toxic elements” (i.e., they do not fit in; they have another culture, etc.). Returning to our criticism of duality, this focus on “those entering our borders” is not gazing at the other side/element of the duality. What is making “them” wanting to come to “your” community? A usual response would be a partial acknowledgement of the duality, but at the same time still remaining with the analytical gaze elsewhere. “They are coming to our communities because they have problems in their own communities.” If this is the case, it makes sense to question then why should we fix or deal with the problems created elsewhere? Thus, it is perfectly reasonable to “object” this immigration wave.

Nevertheless, I would encourage a “full/complete” gaze for getting rid of the duality conundrums: linking our fates. The problems taking place “elsewhere” are not and should not be perceived as disconnected (not at least in its entirety) from “you,” from “your community.” Today there is much mentioning of globalization; however, globalization is usually understood, when accepted, as a free flow (or just an “inevitable” flow) of “economics” understood as capital. So space is partly permitted for “cultural flows” from hegemonic centers. But what it is not even considered as possible, put down as just being a die-hard romantic, is including within these global economics or beyond economics, a free flow of human beings.

Thus, I hope that a more forcefully proactive discourse has come across throughout this article (e.g., strategic interventions or framings). Having stated this, many (e.g., George Yancey’s *Who is White?: Latinos, Asians, and the New Black/Nonblack Divide.*) question if “progressives” should be worried about “Latinos” and “Asians” becoming “White.” I would state that we should always be wary about this possibility. What do I mean by this? This is so, because until we eradicate racial hierarchies (and the “race” on top has been “White” throughout modern times), the temptation will always exist (and its attractiveness) to hoard opportunities (i.e., power, wealth, status) for “your” group which by definition will be toward the detriment of those group(s) you distance from if racial hierarchies are maintained. Furthermore, this worry for “progressives” should not be solely regarding “Latinos” and “Asians” hoarding opportunities toward “Whiteness,” but also for “progressives” in general (including those labeled as “Whites” today) to not disavow themselves of the relevance of “race” and the reality of “racial hierarchies” that goes beyond mere “racial inequalities.”

I have made use of the label “possimists” in other writings to make reference to a conceptual syncretism between an optimist and a pessimist. Although I am not married to the label “possimist,” the gist of it is important. The underlying idea is some type of measured optimism/pessimism. The “pure” optimist would categorize the “possimist” as a sore loser; while the “pure” pessimist would categorize the “possimist” as a “token optimist” or wishful thinker. Nevertheless, underlying these caricaturesque portrayals of the “possimist” by both “pure” sides lays the power of that gist that I mentioned and that we do not hold as important in our society: imagination. Imagining that we can always do better (not limiting our human potential) without disregarding our starting point (status quo). Because disregarding the status quo would be naive and not thinking of something better would be defeatist.

This undermining or dismissing the power of the imagination (as something that needs to be nurtured throughout life; and we do not do in our schools) is beautifully underscored by Roberto Mangabeira Unger when he puts forth the idea that we should think of our kids as “little prophets.” In this way we should push ourselves to be “forward looking,” while remaining contextualized when we think about migration. The reason the migration issue has become salient does not lie within any “oddities” of “those coming in,” but within an incomplete reading and appreciation of what is at stake: the reasonable expectation of human beings living a life that they have reason to value.

What I advocate does not mean or applaud so-called “weakness.” I would turn the tables around and label as “weak” a lack of or an impossibility to open ourselves to question how we live. Doing so requires courage and humility, and a complete willingness to work for and within a

democratic society. It is not a call to “give in to” pressures from outside, but to embrace and welcome a reassessment of our societal arrangements. That takes courage because there can be no courage under certainty and within our comfort zones. “Fear” and uncertainty because of unknown causes, consequences, and circumstances can push us toward desperation, isolation, distancing, and seclusion or toward openness, inclusion. The latter route, I considered it the most difficult one and the one that requires courageous acts and thoughts.

And that courage might be facilitated if we link our fates and broaden those borders of inclusion. Inclusion and acceptance is not going to happen from one day to the next as Amartya Sen brilliantly underscores in the opening quote of this essay, but in order for it to happen and to achieve our common humanity, we need to active and openly strive for it. My reading of Sen is an advocacy for the so-called “possimist” perspective I mentioned because how he closes that particular chapter is making reference to Nietzsche’s pessimism, not with the objective of disregarding it, but for engaging it by putting down the barriers of dualism and broadening our gaze of “reality.”

We need to create spaces for dialogues to take place. In the meantime, this will happen across those constructed borders that divide us, not for reifying them, but for acknowledging their existence because they organize our current understanding of reality, while at the same time remaining active and collectively seeking their expansion, their replacement, their transformation. Nonetheless, without ever losing sight of the objective to construct and make real our common humanity, without this implying a simplistic seeking of homogeneity. Heterogeneity and homogeneity are both socially constructed and paying particular or sole attention to one of them distorts our gaze of reality and limits our living, our freedom, obstructs being able to live a life that we have reason to value and covet.