

## **Immigration in Europe: towards a sustainable, fraternal and fair Europe**

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First of all, it is really necessary to mark that immigration cannot be rightly understood, in Europe or anywhere else, if we do not realise that every immigrant people that previously lived in his or her own country, his or her own world of relationships and meanings, that place which gives to everyone of us a particular meaning to our life. However, something happens in these countries that cause the migratory project to arise. Some forced situation is usually present in the origin of almost every migratory project and should lead our sight to different types of violence such as underdevelopment or climate change, which are the other side of «development» in our north and western countries and condemn entire nations to poverty. Thus, it is our injustice, implemented through centuries, one of the most important causes of migration, a migration that turns into a pacific rebellion against the lack of future, against the impossibility of living a worth living life.

Secondly, we should lead our attention to the travel conditions, because we can usually find out that human rights are not guaranteed, that migrants have to face lots of terrible difficulties merely to achieve a basic human right: the right to live a «human» life, there where it were possible, for them and their family. Exactly in the same way we would like for us and our family and friends. That is what it is established in the 13<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Positions like those that pretend to set a fortress-Europe, isolated from the needs we have created ourselves in the rest of the world, are directly against the most basic right: the right to live a life based on decent living conditions.

As far as I can see, only then we can rightly understand immigration in our countries. Immigration can never be rightly understood without looking at these international relations that build an unequal world, in which only a small part of humankind can access to life conditions that deserve to be classified as human.

The first issue I would like to point out about immigration in Europe is the demographic unsustainability of Europe. If we look at demographic pyramid of European population we can see a drastic reduction of population under 34 years old with a maximum in the group of 40-44 years old. As we all know, only women have children and, once a year has finished, no more people can be borned in any age group. Perhaps the situation in Spain could illustrate the consequences of this important issue: in 2012, 7 million women between 20 and 40 years old, have had 4.5 million new little girls, which is a mere objective fact; when this new young women have to have children, considering constant the current birth-rate –which is a clear overestimation-, they will have 2.8 million of new little girls; and repeating the same estimation, we will find, in only two generations, about 1.1 million women. In my opinion, this is not only a problem of how people can be replaced, but it also shows the possibly unsolvable problems to manage the needs (personal, social and even political needs) of the groups of population that are currently between 45 and 55 years old, when they reach the retirement

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age. This near future should be being translated in managing immigration of millions of people of 35 years old or younger, which implies obviously family migration and family reunification. Why European politicians are not doing so? I only can find two possibilities: they are ignorant, and then they should go home; or they are lying to us, and then they should go home.

This leads us to the second assertion. It is a mistake to consider immigration only from a labour approach. Although labour dimension is obvious –everyone needs to work for getting the means to live–, it is not always clearly recognized the positive effect immigration has in autochthonous employment level. However, an economic positive effect does not imply it be ethically acceptable. Thus, the simplification that sets immigration as a mere labour issue is an interested assertion: if immigrants are portrayed as a threat or as disloyal competitors with native workers, then their inequality, their exploitation and their disprotection could be shown as a consequence of their own will or decisions, even as feature of migration itself, instead of showing all these situations as consequences of our laws, our lack of solidarity and our own irresponsibility.

Immigrants are not only workers, but consumers as well. In Spain, with our rates of production of goods and services, if one million immigrants returned to their countries of origin, 5.000 doctors would be unemployed, 3.100 nurses would be unemployed; 56 tons of bread would cease to be produced; 61 tons of meat would cease to be produced... with the correspondent reduction of direct and indirect employments. Any reduction in population (in the amount of consumers) would cause the same with every good and service, affecting to the general employment level. What makes pressure and worsens general labour conditions is not immigration, but the lack of protection against exploitation and the impunity of exploitation and exploiters. There is no illegal person, there is no illegal worker: what is illegal is the exploitation and abuse and what is unjust is inequality and lack of protection by the law. Undocumented migrants only become illegal from our laws, which are arbitrary, socially incorrect -because they do not attend to the rights and needs of people or society- and, therefore, our laws become ethically unacceptable.

Migrant's daily experience in destination countries depends, firstly, on legal conditions and administrative practices, which exclusively depend on us, and secondly on economic and labour conditions, which depend on what each society allows, on how each society effectively protect workers or not. Migrant's living conditions arise as a consequence of what each society imposes to or accepts respect its members, all its members, and the measure of fraternity is not found in the medium class living conditions, but in the weakest part of society, among the impoverished people who are excluded from living standards uncritically assumed as normal.

This is the field in which we are playing –and putting into risk- integration processes related to migrant people and families in Europe. We may easily see that integration is not possible from inequality and injustice, much less intercultural processes. These intercultural processes are necessarily based on integration, and this one is based on reception and welcome practices. On the contrary, we are usually a walled Europe respect abroad; a Europe that defend its own interests, not always legitimate; an unsupportive Europe abroad and an unjust Europe inside, even among European citizens considered as second class citizens from their nationality, their ethnic belonging, their religious belief, and so on. We can hardly consider the real Europe as a

welcoming, inclusive society. Generally, European citizens and European countries conceive integration as a mere assimilation process through which migrants have to leave back –almost to forget- who they are and what have made them being who they are. Sometimes, it is an important achievement if we reach a multicultural reality and attitudes. Intercultural society is a horizon, when it is set as a political target; and it is a manipulation concealing inequality and injustice, when it is set as something already achieved. We should ask ourselves whether Europe, from our specific political and social practices, is letting authentic integration processes or not.

From my point of view, the problem is the deep contradiction among policies in Europe. Integration policies are clearly defined from the eleven basic common principles on integration in Europe (2004). However, security policies, borders control policies, home affairs policies, justice administration policies and immigration policies, are not always compatible with the possibility of real integration. In fact, we can easily see how policy practices are, even usually, against citizen's interests. Politics and society are drastically separated and we should pay attention to «*Indignados*» social movements, those social movements which are arising against those political practices and against those politicians that become harmful to people. If we can learn something of the current economic crisis is that governments have chosen to defend the particular interests of financial markets and international speculators –and their interests as politicians-, those who generate or permit the crisis to occur without any –or with really few, clearly insufficient- consequences, against the interests of every worker and every family and every particular person, those who are paying the costs of the crisis.

These facts lead me to think that our «cultured, civilized and solidary» Europe does not really exist but in an ethnocentric false image Europeans have built for centuries. Our societies in Europe are not fraternal or just. I wonder if that is all what we can say as Christians. If there is no other issue we can see, judge or do, then, in my opinion (and I beg your pardon), there is no point in being Christians. Ellacuría, a Jesuit priest assassinated in El Salvador, told that we should take charge of reality (be conscious of complexities of reality), to take care of her (assuming our responsibility), and carry her (accepting the consequences of our priorities and choices).

A life lived as Christian makes transparent and witnesses God's unconditional love. A life lived as Christian expresses the care and tenderness of God for healing «those who have no one». A life lived as Christian turns into channel of God's action in world and History. A life lived as Christian require the unconditional following the Spirit and a personal and institutional fidelity to the Gospel and the Lord Jesus. At the end, as a wise priest told me a lot of years ago, if our being Christian, our following of Jesus, doesn't cause us any problem, any difficulty, any personal or professional cost, even any prosecution, then something is wrong. It has not to do with masochism, but with the price of grace: the following of the same path than Jesus and the need of being able to assume the consequence, which is the cross.

The process of learning to act in that way goes far away of our possibilities here and leads us to keep on working, living and serving through life.

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