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A spotlight on 'established', as opposed to 'newcomer', Americans

By elaborating upon the idea of 'relational assimilation', Tomas Jimenez alters the dominant lens through which social scientists, and especially sociologists, have understood the concept of assimilation and the effects of immigration. In this highly readable and thoughtful book, we are asked to conceive of this kind of assimilation as one which involves 'the give-and-take of adjustment', not just a one-way route by which 'newcomers' must adapt to settings populated by 'established' members of the population. According to the author, ongoing forms of immigration and its resulting diversity actually change the regional self-understandings of those who are already living in those settings.

The main strength of this book is its portrayal of the so-called established population (individuals whose family roots in the USA extend at least 3 generations or more) in Silicon Valley. Importantly, the established population is conceived of as not only White, but also Asian, African American, Latino, and people of mixed ancestries. *The Other Side of Assimilation* draws on interviews with such established people in three cities: East Palo Alto (a mostly Black and Latino working class city), Cupertino (an affluent city with a mostly White and Asian population), and Berryessa (a more mixed city, both in terms of affluence and racial composition). Given what we learn of the three cities in the Silicon Valley area, the following assertion is quite credible: '… the settlement of immigrants has changed the ethnic, racial, political, economic, and cultural terrain to such a degree that it forces America's most established individuals to undergo an assimilation of their own.' (3)

Early on in the book, there is a cogent theoretical exposition of how his theorizing on relational assimilation departs from that of not only theorists of segmented assimilation, but also from neo-assimilation theorists, most notably in the work of Richard Alba and Victor Nee (2003). The author is right in asserting that prior research has not really explored the experiences of the established population (almost always focused on native-born Whites) other than as the standard by which immigrant groups' success is compared. Thus far, what happens to the established population in the USA, in the context of ongoing forms of immigration and its related dynamics, has not been explored in any substantial way.

This book provides a significant intervention and counterpoint to the longstanding orthodoxy of focusing on the assimilation of first and second generation immigrants. It also helps us to take an important step in disaggregating what we know as the White population. Unsurprisingly, despite what we know about the privileges of Whiteness, not all White people are… alike, including their racial politics and their proclivity to interact with, and in

some cases, even intermarry with minority newcomers or established minority people. As throughout much of this book, generational change and adjustment is the key theme, so that the established White and Black populations (as they are the main foci in this book) are hit especially hard by the pace of change around them.

In the film *Gran Torino* (2008), we see the gradual transformation of Walt Kowalski, a White, working class former veteran (and widower, played by Clint Eastwood), whose immediate neighbours are all newish immigrants, including the Hmong families on the street. It is clear that he is one of the only White home owners left on his Detroit street. This character's initial suspicion and tacit hostility toward his Hmong neighbours softens, as he gets involved in a feud involving his Hmong neighbour's son (and his cousin's gang). After he becomes known for helping his young Hmong neighbours, he is overwhelmed with gestures of gratitude, most notably in the form of food and invitations. Over time, Walt, whose relationship with his own sons (and their families) is strained, is brought into the Hmong fold, and he eventually embraces this relationship with his neighbours. Unlike Hollywood, however, there are bound to be a number of Walt Kowalskis who may be embittered, as they watch their neighbourhoods and localities change beyond all recognition.

By theorizing the interactions between newcomers and established people, this work extends our ability to understand and theorize the multiple and sometimes complex ways in which people can relate to one another in a variety of contexts. For instance, while ethnic and racial commonality (or difference) may still be very salient in shaping daily encounters in these 3 cities, ethnicity and race may not always be the most salient boundary or marker. In Chapter 3, there is an important discussion of 'neighbourhood tenure', and how one's length of residence in a neighbourhood could be a marker of insider and outsider status – and which could transcend ethnic and racial difference per se. This discussion is reminiscent of Les Back's (1996) ethnography of a south London housing estate, in which Black and White young people engaged in forms of 'neighborhood nationalism' that brought together White and Black youth from established families; this neighbourhood nationalism, which could transcend racial differences between Black and White youth, tended to exclude the more recently arrived Vietnamese youth on the estate as outsiders. Still, Back found that some of the White young people could opportunistically resort to racial name calling or objectification (of their Black peers) in heated situations, thus pointing to the fragility of such neighbourhood alliances. As this example illustrates, there are many different ways in which boundaries can be erected, observed, and (if only temporarily) dissolved, and this dynamic also holds true in this study of relational assimilation.

While it is often challenging to find participants, the exploration of the established population is primarily about White and Black people, as there are very few Asian and Latino people among the 'established' interviewees; this is a shame, as we are reminded of the

significant intra-group diversity within specific ethnic and racial groups (e.g. a third generation Chinese American as opposed to a recently arrived person from China).

Different social pressures apply to established people who are Latino or Asian – the influx of immigrants means that these established minority people are expected to demonstrate their ethnic authenticity, especially through language (Spanish or Mandarin, for instance). In that sense, these established individuals may experience social pressures and objectification from both sides – some Whites may see them as foreigners (and thus not bona fide Americans), while they also face the tacit disapproval of co-ethnic newcomers who see them as somehow betraying their minority ancestries. We also learn that some established people (who may have lost touch with a minority ancestry) can undergo what Jimenez calls 'ethnic replenishment' (Jimenez 2009), by virtue of all the exposure to more newly arrived coethnics. By comparison, African Americans may feel especially displaced by newcomers in the sense that they may feel that they are the 'cultural foreigners' in a city that used to be marked by a more dominant Black presence and culture, as they are overshadowed by Latino newcomers and the cultural resources and institutions aimed at the Latino community (see p. 107). As for the White individuals in this study, Jimenez vividly depicts their sense of group threat (especially in the Cupertino and Berryessa schools), as Asian students are seen, warily, as academically superior. Had there been more Latino and Asian participants among this 'established' population, a more fully fleshed model of how relational assimilation differs for more recently established populations (usually Latino and Asian American) from the experiences of established populations of a longer duration (usually White and African American) could have been elaborated.

According to the author, established White people in large diverse cities, especially the younger generation, experienced their ethnicities in a very superficial manner, against the backdrop of the vibrancy and ubiquity of the newcomer cultures around them. As such, in cities and settings where they are not the majority, they may not experience their Whiteness as an advantage, even if they understand the privileges that Whiteness has historically endowed. The symbolic ethnic options so famously elaborated by Mary Waters (1990) may seem largely hollow (and perhaps not entirely 'costless') in such settings.

At the end of chapter 2, however, I wondered about the author's claim: 'Given that respondents of all ethnicity, race, and class categories expressed similar desires to be "more ethnic"…' This assertion seemed credible in relation to the many African Americans interviewed, who felt a sense of loss and displacement, as Latinos moved into East Palo Alto, but I wasn't entirely convinced that this was the case with the White participants (especially those in Cupertino). Even if they realized that their ties to their ethnic ancestries were very tenuous – did they really all want to be more 'ethnic' in a more than superficial sense? Furthermore, even in a context where newcomers may outnumber established individuals, were there really no cases of established individuals (e.g. of Asian or Latino backgrounds)

who were uninterested in delving into their ancestral roots? Feeling the social expectations of coethnic newcomers is not necessarily the same as wanting to be more ethnic. This rather broad claim is a bit at odds with findings in the excellent third chapter, in which we learn that some established Asian pupils don't really relate, socially, with Asian newcomers, and may feel more in common with their White peers and their families, especially in terms of their perspectives on balancing studying and fun.

Do the author's insights about the established population and relational assimilation apply for settings *unlike* Silicon Valley, in which 'newcomers' do not constitute the numerical majority (54%)? Silicon Valley, we are told, has a very small White working class population – thus the White established participants in Cupertino and Berryessa are primarily middle class, on the whole, and that means that the findings among the White established population tells us relatively little about how White working class people (as in *Gran Torino*'s Walt Kowalksi - who may be less cosmopolitan than their better educated middle class counterparts) in other parts of the country would respond to these newcomers.

The author acknowledges that these 3 cities in Silicon Valley are far from typical in the USA. A lot of established people live in parts of the country where they have little contact with newcomers, or contact that is quite delimited to specific types of interactions – and not necessarily people who live in their neighborhoods. However, I think the author is right that the processes described in this book are a harbinger of more and more minority-majority cities, and that this case is still richly illustrative of the dynamics he investigates.

More than anything else, this book is really a story about generational change, and its emphasis upon generational depth within disparate ethnic and racial groups and the workings of family, writ large. We can grasp the ways in which one (established) family member's (be it a child, a niece, a cousin, etc.) relationship with, say, a Vietnamese or Mexican person, can have significant ripple effects for a wider family's network, and their understandings of who they are.

Jimenez points to 'the unquestioned normalcy of diversity' for the young respondents in Silicon Valley, as they had not known a different time, that had not been characterized by immigration fuelled diversity. In comparison with the older respondents, who had had to adjust to the 'new normal' of living in a 'minority-majority' location, 'For the young people we interviewed, diversity, and multiculturalism were facts of everyday life that required no explicit articulation.' (49)

This observation about generational change is resonant, not only for what is happening in terms of immigration-driven diversification in many metropolitan areas of the USA. In my research on multiracial people and mixed families in Britain (where Black/White mixing is very common, in contrast with the USA), a parallel observation can be made about the

growing normalcy of being mixed, and being part of a mixed family. In Britain, many mixed (or in the American vernacular, multiracial) children, adolescents and young adults are growing up in neighbourhoods and schools in which being mixed is entirely unremarkable (Song 2017).

Because ethnic and racial mixing and mixture is common and unremarkable for many young people in Britain, they may be less inclined to register or point to such mixedness as noteworthy. In a growing number of contexts, ethnic and racial difference – while not eroding entirely – will take on a different (and not always predictable) resonance. And as Andreas Wimmer and Rogers Brubaker (among others) have argued, we cannot assume the automatic salience of any one ethnic and racial background, as this meaning and significance will be mediated by many other factors, such as class, or religion.

Just as established individuals in Silicon Valley (and other metropolitan areas) may achieve ethnic literacy simply by living in a highly multi-ethnic and multiracial area, and may change as a result of such interactions and experiences, we must not conclude, as some US analysts have done, that the growth of intermarriage and multiracial people (especially Latino and Asian multiracials) is automatically equated with 'whitening'. Not only is there significant evidence of mixed people who do not wish to be White, and who value their minority ancestries, but there are also White people who wish to embrace their minority partners' cultures, networks, and practices (Jimenez 2010).

But given the very real regional differences across the USA – not just demographic, but also social and political – we are likely to encounter a scenario in which the 'established' population in some parts of the country (as in Silicon Valley) are effectively forced to adapt to this growing diversity, while established people in much less diverse places will not experience the day to day interactions and relationships with others which are critical for the formation of a more cosmopolitan sensibility.

This study of relational assimilation has reverberations for other key areas of study. If 'minority-majority' cities (or large metropolitan areas that boast a large immigrant population) continue to grow, there will be more cities witnessing forms of ethnic resurgence, as well as friendships and intimate unions between people of disparate non-White ethnic and racial ancestries. We are thus faced with a question of whether extant frameworks, concepts and classifications are fit for purpose. For instance, since intermarriage has traditionally been theorized in relation to White and non-White unions (and often premised upon the unions of first generation immigrants), how do we conceptualize and measure the unions of people who are (multigeneration) multiracial or third or fourth generation Mexican (should these be regarded as the same kind of intermarriage as those by 1st or 2nd generation individuals)?

As I have argued in relation to the growth of multiracial people, it is vital that social scientists rethink the concept of intermarriage, as it has been conceived primarily in relation to partnering with Whites, and the assumed 'dilution' that this entails (Song 2015). Since theorizing on intermarriage is premised upon the unions of two monoracially distinct individuals, we have no clear conventions for how to conceive of intermarriage when it concerns first or second generation multiracials – or how the conceptualization of intermarriage may differ, depending upon whether the unions involve White or non-White partners.

As Jimenez points out, in relation to Silicon Valley's established population, but especially its younger population, if ethnic and racial diversity (as well as multiple immigration pathways), is largely the norm, scholars and policymakers need to think carefully about how we use concepts such as diversity and multiculturalism. Similarly, the significant growth in multiracial people in Britain (and Canada, other European societies, and further afield, in Asia, and Australia) requires a rethinking of what we mean by 'minority' status. In the case of many multiracial people, many of whom are part White, growing generational depth in the multiracial population (not just mixed people who are the children of interracial unions, but also 2nd and 3rd generation mixed people) means that many of the existing frameworks for thinking about ethnic and racial inequality and disadvantage will require rethinking.

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