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**Xenophobia during Coronavirus pandemic: Attitudes towards
immigrants and ethnic groups**

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Introduction

The Coronavirus disease was defined by the World Health Organization (WHO) as a pandemic in March 2020. The global health crisis has amplified and triggered an economic crisis. The crises, has multiple consequences for everyone, however, it affects social classes, workers, genders and territories in different ways, deepening social inequalities and worsening the social conditions of disadvantaged categories. Among the most affected social groups we find immigrants. This double crisis affects them all over the world in a particularly hard way, they are doubly affected as immigrants and as workers (Range, 2020). Invisible to the public discourse, discriminated against in their access to prevention or treatment, accused of carrying the virus or being immune from it because they belong to different races, they are one of the most vulnerable groups at risk of suffering the heaviest consequences of the crisis.

In this essay I will present few examples of attitudes towards immigrants and ethnic groups, in the context of Coronavirus, from various countries, which express xenophobic tendencies and in addition I will refer to the term 'Othering'.

Incidents of racism related to the COVID-19 around the world

Since the beginning of the Coronavirus crisis, in early 2020, and as the number of COVID-19 cases has been rising, statements against foreigners and immigrants groups, are heard by politicians and others around the world. For example, in the US conservative elites racialized the pandemic, referring to the Coronavirus as the "Chinese flu". Reny & Barreto (2020), points out that while the threat to public health and the economy of this pandemic was very real, President Trump and others added fuel to the fire, demonizing Chinese and other Asian Americans by referring to COVID-19 as the "Wuhan virus," "Chinese virus", and the "Kung Flu", part of a larger and familiar political strategy of demonizing foreigners as threatening and dangerous (Reny & Barreto, 2020).

Later on, President Trump twitted in the Twitter, in 21/4/20: "In light of the attack from the Invisible Enemy, as well as the need to protect the jobs of our GREAT American Citizens, I will be signing an Executive Order to temporarily suspend immigration into the United State". The President made a linkage between the health and economic crisis and immigrants, who were portrayed as a threatening group. In reaction to that, social activists have claimed that the president is taking advantage of the global epidemic to justify his controversial immigration policy (Haarets, 21/4/20).

Reny & Barreto (2020), emphasize that when Donald Trump demonizes marginalized groups he not only primes attitudes toward those groups but

also, over time, emboldens the most racially conservative members of society to more openly express and act on their prejudices (Reny & Barreto, 2020).

The case of the US, is no exception to this pattern. An empirical study that was carried out during the Coronavirus in India, links between xenophobia and the pandemic. Considering its varied socio-cultural and religious diversity, India stands at a unique risk of prejudice and xenophobia during pandemics. Much of the news in India has centered around the Tablighi Jamaat, an Islamic missionary movement, who was accused by spreading the Coronavirus. The description of the spread of COVID-19 as the 'Tablighi Spread', has been as divisive as attempts to call COVID-19 as the 'Wuhan virus' or 'Kung Flu'. Viral videos advising people not to buy vegetables from Muslim vendors, and other expressions in the media, were the signs of extremism of the common attitude toward Muslims and islamophobia (Ahuja, 2020).

A new study by 'Public Health England', has confirmed that historic racism and social inequalities are contributing factors that increase the risk of black, Asian and minority communities contracting and dying from the Coronavirus in the U.K. By this report the pandemic "exposed and exacerbated longstanding inequalities" in the country. Relevant factors included "racism, discrimination and stigma, occupational risk, inequalities in the prevalence of conditions that increase the severity of disease". It added that "Lack of trust of NHS (National Health Service) and healthcare treatment resulted in their reluctance to seek care on a timely basis, and late presentation with disease" (Hui, 2020).

On the other hand, on his release from hospital, Prime Minister Boris Johnson made a point of identifying and thanking the migrant nurses "Jenny from New Zealand ... and Luis from Portugal", who had stood by his bedside whilst he was in intensive care. Prime Minister Johnson's words, express a trend of softening of attitudes toward workers such as nurses, care workers and agricultural workers – many of whom are migrants – that stands at the forefront of the pandemic response, and have been lauded as heroes, once promoted to the status of 'key workers' (Range, 2020).

Israel is at the bottom ranking of countries that welcome immigrants, according to a research that was conducted before the Coronavirus. Recently a survey about attitudes of the Israeli public towards work immigrants and asylum seekers, was conducted by the Institute for Immigration (Ruppin Academic center). The survey points out that although it was conducted during Coronavirus period, the findings showed that the significant threat according to the respondents, is not the health, nor the economic, but the social threat as the most significant threat. The social threat has been defined as a perception of the immigrant as one that can potentially raise the level of crime, and constitute a burden on welfare and education services.

The survey distinguished between asylum seekers and work immigrants and found that any threat feelings (social, economic, health and national threat), are much higher toward asylum seekers compared to work immigrants, even though their number in the society is much smaller. The public supports the tightening of immigration policy both towards asylum seekers and towards work immigrants.

An interesting point is that the asylum seekers were perceived as the official authorities tends to present them, as illegal infiltrating who threatens the sense of security, while once an explanation was added to the respondents in the survey, that their lives in the country of origin are in danger, there has been a tendency to be more tolerant and to support softer policy towards them. This emphasizes the importance of providing information to the public on the issue, especially these days (Institute for Immigration, 2020). These data show the tendency to attribute a threat and negative qualities to asylum seekers and work immigrants during the Coronavirus period.

'Othering' and xenophobic tendencies

Linking of outgroups with fear is not new, it is connected to the phenomenon of "othering", which is the mechanism of creating splits between groups, between "us" and "them". "We" are perceived as possessing good and positive qualities while "they", the Others, are the owners of negative qualities. As such Othering is used mainly against those in the margins of society – women, the disabled, the poor, people of minority ethnic background, 'race', etc'. The differentiation between "us" and "them" leads to a devaluation of the Other. "We" project upon the Other what is undesirable in ourselves or repressed and buried in our unconscious (Krumer-Nevo, 2003).

Xenophobic tendencies become all the more evident during the spread of infectious diseases. it was shown that chronic and contextually aroused feelings of vulnerability to disease motivated negative reactions to foreign immigrants. Temporary exposure to pathogen cues in certain groups increases prejudice towards real-world immigrants (Huang et al., 2011). Cohn (2012), who surveyed the history of pandemics in the West, and contested long-held assumptions that epidemics sparked blame of the 'Other', and that it was worse when diseases were mysterious as to their causes and cures (Cohn, 2012).

Summary

This essay dealt with the topic of xenophobia during the Coronavirus pandemic, and the way this pandemic affected the attitudes towards immigrants and ethnic groups. The examples (few from many), from different countries, expressed the phenomenon of 'othering' and xenophobia, that turns out to be more extreme these days.

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