**The Blank Spaces between Us:
What about the Sources
of Discrimination, Segregation
and Exclusion?**

This is an ambitious book that seeks to describe how the space in which we live – the city in which we work, the neighbourhood in which we live – influences our mental habitus. This diversity of spaces in our life in many cases coincides with a variety of people with different social characteristics, those characteristics that configure prejudices, fears, and cognitive biases about who is 'different' – not least when thinking of immigrants or people who are variously identifiable as such. As Enos writes in the preface, reasoning about the effects of social geography 'can help to answer why "us versus them" seems increasingly to coincide with "here versus there", a phrase that efficiently summarises his work based on the assumption that the location of people in city spaces affects our mutual perceptions. Enos offers numerous theoretical elaborations to support these theses and tries to bring them into dialogue with a series of specific considerations relating to some American and non-American cities. Reflections on the effects of social geography on our behaviour concern both individual psychological issues and macro-social and political issues. The ambition is to unite the individual part of the reaction to diversity, to the foreigner, with the political and social part of everyday life: 'In this book, I explore these and other relationships that demonstrate the powerful impact of social geography on our individual behaviour and on the well-being of society. [...] geography penetrates our psychology [...] and with these changes in perception, it affects our behaviour' (p. 4).

Yet the feeling of this reviewer is that the cause and effect of the dynamics of exclusion and the propagation of prejudice are treated rather uncritically here. Enos does not deny the negative impact on the life of those who suffer, but nor does he criticise the structural reasons from which they arise. The author decides to dwell on the differences rather than the inequalities. The multiple experiments he describes in his essay (for example, the proposition of classifying ten faces as 'white' or 'black' according to the different gradations from white to black skin colour) seem to focus on the psychological component of the perception of 'whiteness' or 'blackness'. This, however, does not solve the primarily political problem of prejudice and racism and does not consider the historical and cultural significance of the problem as explained, for example, by Roediger [1999] or, before that, by the Birmingham School of Cultural Studies [see Hall 1980]. In the history of the United States, the very concept of whiteness was put in crisis by the arrival of Irish and Italians, to mention only two groups of migrants in America. In the analysis of the problems variously indicated as 'prejudice' or 'group-based bias', Enos ignores the numerous counter-colonial studies that speak of racism as a factor necessarily linked to the capitalist mode of production and to the concept of racialisation as a result of a hierarchically connoted representation of differences.

The assumption that '[...] we use space to psychologically organize our social world and this affects our political behaviour' (p. 5) seems to clarify the whole setting of the book, which tends to be a revival of known schemes, without making the status quo the subject of discussion. It is clear that the author himself does not have this ambition, since the social experiments he is talking about are based on the intention to describe phenomena related to the biases that characterise us both as individuals and as groups. However, the risk of this type of approach is to re-propose at an academic level the distortions that are inherent in a certain way of looking at the world and that reside in what, in the second chapter, is defined as 'the liberal di-

lemma': 'We often support diversity out of a genuine ideological commitment and because we rightly perceive that diversity can improve the performance of many organizations, such as universities and businesses' (p. 46). This is certainly a liberal vision of the world that leaves power relations unchanged. What Enos does not question is the relationship of subordination, taken for granted, of people unrelated to the liberal paradigm in which this book moves. The benefits of the diversity he mentions imply that it is 'whites' who benefit from 'contamination' with the foreigner (academically and in business, the author writes). In doing so, it proposes a structure of power relations that is unchanged, weakening its theses of a possible force that truly reforms the present condition.

Enos asks on page 51: 'Why does social geography affect our behaviour? Why can it lead to group-based bias? Why is it so powerful that it can overcome the forces of the modern world that work to close the space between us?' Enos's reasoning seems to involuntarily refer to the 'space' between academic studies on prejudices, bias, and discrimination and everyday life. The author's approach of discussing the experiments he carried out with the noble intention of breaking down some of the cognitive errors into which we fall does nothing but reproduce the separation between 'us' and 'them', thereby keeping all the consequences of this alive.

On page 81, the author explains that '[a] key aspect of scientific inference is separating the signal from the noise. The signal, for me, is the impact of social geography on group-based bias. But, of course, there is so much noise - all the other things, besides social geography, affecting city dwellers at any given time - that this signal can be hard to detect'. And, in his view, the solution to this interference is: 'Going into the laboratory allows me to isolate the signal of social geography from the noise of the social world.' (p. 81) This really

seems to represent the reverse of a work that talks about the impact of social geography but does not offer a real critique of the society in which this research is carried out. This also applies to specific case studies. As Enos explains: 'This book is about how politics is shaped by experiences like those of the 'L' riders in Chicago' (p. 2), since the reflections that led to the writing arose in the period of his life in which he took the 'L' (an elevated railway) line to work every day. On this crowded line, the different populations that were travelling up and down at the different stops were clearly visible, even to an inexperienced observed, making the separation between the black and white populations evident. The reflections on Chicago do not seem to add much to considerations already available elsewhere in the literature about the distribution of people within a city and the implications that this could have. In the first decades of the 1900s the 'Chicago school' [Park, Burgess and McKenzie 1967] studied Chicago's great development (and the consequent influx of migrants looking for work), and did so always in relation to the places where wealthy people and workers settled, evaluating the impact of the development of city transport.

Enos, for obvious reasons, deals with very different psycho-social aspects and yet offers a reading of the world around him that tries, through micro-observations, to reach wide-ranging conclusions. This approach somewhat sacrifices the complexity of analysis that would better help to understand, first of all, the power relationships that characterise the world we live in. Information obtained from the considerations that arise from the daily life of the author and his experiments is inevitably interesting. However, the possibilities for then widening the discourse and relating it to different variables are limited. Enos chooses a methodological approach that oscillates between personal experience and detecting behaviours from surveys and experiments

with groups. However, neither of the two methods result in a convincing attempt to move from the particular to the general, even though this method does have the merit of making it an academic text accessible to non-specialist audiences.

The last part of the book, dedicated to specific case studies, is interesting and a pleasure to read. Nonetheless, these parts are not exempt from the points of criticism highlighted above. The author's first-person experiences remain an incomplete attempt to relate a dense theoretical formulation to the direct experience of the writer. The application of an ethnographic approach within a city or a neighbourhood [e.g. Bourgois 2003] would probably have been more appropriate. In the part of the book dedicated to Jerusalem (chapter 7), Enos seems to focus in a somewhat claustrophobic way on social geography, which is immediately visible in a city delimited by a real wall. Even in a work focused on social geography the historical events that led to this socio-political situation should not just be mentioned as though they were of secondary importance. The complexity of this situation deserved greater attention in a work of a different nature like this. Similarly, when discussing Los Angeles (chapter 8), the categories to which Enos refers (politics, segregation, inter-ethnic tensions) reflect a narrow reading of the situation: the reduction to the problem of the vote expressed by the various social groups trivialises the problem of a city that has been affected for decades by different ideas about development and the management of diversity [see, e.g., Davis 1990]. In sum, this is a book that, in some ways, occupies the middle ground between psychology and sociology, but seems unable to open up a field of research in its own right because it neglects some important elements of analysis.

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Space as a Determinant Not Just of Geography But Also of Social and Political Life

What happens when different groups of people share towns, cities, and countries and yet they remain physically and psychologically apart? In *The Space between Us: Social Geography and Politics* Ryan Enos, in an innovative way, challenges the traditional definition of distance and argues that the space between us affects the way we think and behave, and it structures our politics (p. 5). He addresses one of the most discussed political trends of the moment: the increasing electoral support for political parties that oppose immigration. His aim is to understand '... why this xenophobia takes hold' (p. 4). He suggests that when an outgroup is large and close enough to be noticeable, but remains separated in segregated neighbourhoods, it widens the psychological distance between groups.

Enos puts forward his own theory of socio-geographic impact (pp. 11–12), which he summarises in chapter 1. He theorises that: (a) categorising people into groups (including oneself) is a basic cognitive process, and one that deeply affects behaviour and attitudes; (b) the salience of group categories is influenced by human geography; (c) three geographic conditions in particular alter the salience of groups: the size, proximity, and segregation of outgroups; (d) when the salience of an outgroup in-