Book Review

Merry, M. S. (2014). *Equality, citizenship and segregation: A defense of separation*. New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillan. XV, 214 pp. £27.00. ISBN: 9781137469717

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Introduction

A consensus or a complete agreement might be the preferable outcome of a *political* discussion. However, an unquestioned truth, or a *doxa* as the late Pierre Bourdieu (1977) would call it, is not the most interesting thing to have within (social) sciences, and especially not within social theory. The present political and scholarly attention on ethnic diversity is largely accompanied with the doxa of integration. That is, there is a broad agreement on the necessity of integration, and only a small disagreement between liberals and conservatives on how this goal (integration) should be achieved. Only very few will challenge the doxa; this is exactly what Merry (2014) does in his book *Equality, Citizenship and Segregation: A Defense of Separation*. The book builds upon the insights of previous writings by the author (e.g., Merry, 2012; Merry & Driessen, 2012; Merry & New, 2008) and it constitutes the climax of his previous works.

The Argument

The book is divided in seven chapters. The first introduction chapter distinguishes conceptually between segregation, separation, and integration. Separation is defined as voluntary response to one's state of affairs, and thus, the author speaks about *voluntary separation* for the remainder of the book. Furthermore, Merry notes that the notion of "integration," which is largely used as the opposite of "segregation," remains an abstract and undefined concept. Integration in the United States refers to "spatial integration," that is, the mixing of populations in a specific context. In Western Europe, on the

contrary, it mainly denotes the sociocultural assimilation of immigrant individuals and this distinction has important implications for the argument of the book (cf. infra).

The second chapter is named "Integration" and focuses on the integrationist arguments against (involuntary) segregation. Indeed, integrationists claim that integration is a prerequisite for equality and for citizenship. The author interrogates and challenges these claims with both empirical evidence and theoretical arguments. Most importantly, Merry argues that even in integrated schools, middle-class parents have the resources to secure advantages for their own privileges and tend to do so by ability grouping and tracking. A sharp but interesting point is unfortunately hidden in a footnote—Footnote 23 to be more specific—which states that it is at least ironic that many liberal advocates of integration have a racist understanding of diversity when they assume that high concentrations of minorities are ipso facto inferior.

The third chapter "Foundational Principles" is probably the least interesting chapter of the book for a general audience, while it might be the most attractive one for philosophers. It basically frames the philosophical principles that guide a choice for integration or segregation: liberty and equality, and the necessary trade-off between them. Like many philosophical discussions, "resolving these tensions cannot be settled objectively" (Merry, 2014, p. 66). However, the chapter prepares the reader for the notion of "self-respect," which takes a central place in the remainder of the book.

The core argument of the book is presented in Chapter 4, named Voluntary Separation. Merry provides two main arguments in his defense of voluntary separation against both integration and segregation. First, the author argues that voluntary separation might provide resources that boost "self-respect," which is a precedent of educational equality for members of minority groups. It should be noted that "self-respect" is not the same as "self-esteem." While school integration or segregation might also harm pupils' self-esteem, the variation in self-esteem across schools is so small, that self-esteem can hardly play a major role in discussing school integration (see Agirdag, Van Houtte, & Van Avermaet, 2012). Self-respect, according to Merry, refers to "sense of being in charge of one's destiny" (Merry, 2014, p. 26). This notion of self-respect is very similar to the concept of internal locus of control, and the opposite of the notion of sense of futility. Indeed empirical studies show that pupils' sense of futility is a mediator of the relationship between school composition and academic achievement (Agirdag, Van Avermaet, & Van Houtte, 2013). The second argument in favor of voluntary separation, Merry argues, is that voluntary separation might enable the cultivation of civic virtues and citizenship. This argument echoes Putnam's (2000) statement that inward-looking virtues (bonding social capital) do not necessarily exclude outward-looking

virtues (bridging social capital). Voluntary separation might facilitate meaningful attachment to the community, and as the local and the general largely overlaps, voluntary separation might enhance civic virtues.

The fifth and the sixth chapters (respectively, named "Religious Separation" and "Cultural Separation") provide three case studies that illustrate how voluntary separation functions in practice. More specifically, the author gives the examples of Hindu and Islamic schools in the Netherlands and African-centered education in North America. The author describes how these cases of voluntary separation realize cultural recognition, positive role-modeling, and a caring ethos, which are all important determinants of academic success. According to Merry, these forms of voluntary separation enhance students' self-respect and stimulate civic virtues. The sixth chapter praises the strengths of African-centered education but it is also critical about the cultural essentialist notions of "authentic" Black culture and other aspects of identity politics that fail to recognize the broadness of experiencing Blackness.

The last chapter focuses on "Social Class Separation" and provides a case study of the White working class in England. The author examines whether voluntary separation might also be a solution with respect to the marginalization of the working class Whites. The tentative answer is a no: In contrast to the case of ethnic minorities, there are no institutions (like Muslim schools) that can address the situation of disadvantage. The historical institutions of working class Whites (such as trade unions and churches) have faded away. However, Merry argues, this is not a reason to argue for the integration of working class White minorities in middle-class schools. Here, the author advocates financial reforms such as reducing the costs of higher education.

The Strengths

It should be noted that Merry's book is not an anti-integration statement or a pro-segregation story. It does rather provide a third way, the case of voluntary separation, which might be regarded as a pragmatic alternative that can be of value in contexts where segregation is already an undeniable reality that is not likely to disappear. Some will call this a defeatist attitude, while the description of potential harms of integration makes clear that there is no "defeat" in the acceptance of a realistic third way named voluntary separation.

What makes the book particularly strong is the combination of theoretical arguments with references to a broad field of empirical research. Moreover, the theoretical arguments are not just presented as an intertwinement of different theoretical concept, but they refer to real-world issues and real-world problems.

Moreover, by focusing on both sides of the Atlantic, Merry provides one of the first accounts on school segregation that does not have a one-sided focus on the North American *or* the West European experience. The personal background of the author—a U.S. citizen who works in the Netherlands—explains the broad focus of the book.

Some Criticisms

The combination of North American and European perspectives is both a strength (see above) and a weakness of this book. Earlier, I mentioned that Americans tend to give a different interpretation to the notion of "integration" than Europeans do. Already in the introduction, the author states that it will not use one or the either but "will employ a broad definition (of integration)" (p. 8). However, in the remainder of the book, the case of voluntary seperation (VS) is mostly defended against the North American interpretation of integration as spatial mixing. What is even more is that in different parts of the book, the author seems to be in favor of the European understanding of integration as a sociocultural assimilation. This becomes in particular clear with respect to linguistic assimilation. In page 29, the author speaks about "legitimate concerns about language acquisition," and one of the only concerns about Islamic schools mentioned by the author is the *alleged* low levels of language proficiency in Islamic schools. The author neglects the fact that most of the pupils from the stigmatized groups are proficient speakers of their mother tongues which are equally neglected in the so-called separated schools. In other words, while the author successfully challenges the spatial integrationist doxa, it remains within the cultural/linguistic integrationist doxa. However, if mainstream education does harm stigmatized groups self-respect, as the author argues, then it does this also by not recognizing and the punishing linguistic resources of stigmatized minorities (see Agirdag, 2010).

The second important drawback is the ambiguity regarding one of the most central concepts of the book, namely, self-respect. Merry (2014) first defines self-respect as "a sense of being in charge of one's destiny" (p. 26). This is a definition close to internal locus of control. However, further in the book, Merry (2014) describes self-respect as "positive regard of one-self" and "natural sense of self-importance" (p. 55, 69). The latter interpretation resembles the definition of self-esteem. As I have argued earlier, however, self-esteem is not a decisive factor with respect to school composition. The interpretation of self-respect as the sense of being in charge of one's destiny (i.e., having a feeling of control over future) seems to be a more promising path to consider in future research.

Implications

In general, this book adds greatly to our understanding of school segregation and integration and provides a timely alternative (that of voluntary separation), that deserves to be widely debated. The contribution has also important implications for future academic (theoretical and empirical) work. First, at the level of theory, it invites the reader to formulate a critique of the notion of integration in a broader sense that also includes *cultural and linguistic* integration. The book itself (which articulates a well-argued critique of *spatial* integration) might be a good starting point for doing so. Second, the book provides two significant hypotheses that can be tested and further elaborated with empirical data. The first hypothesis is that schools with voluntary forms of concentration of stigmatized minorities outperform schools with involuntary (or de facto) forms of concentration. Second, the book hypothesizes that self-respect constitutes an important mediating variable that might explain how school composition is related to pupils' academic performance. However, before this work can be done, a more clear definition of self-respect should be given, so self-respect can be unambiguously operationalized and measured by researchers.

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