Title: Episode 11: Representation in higher Education as a Matter of Social Justice
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HEIDY SARABIA:Welcome to Building Justice, a podcast by Sacramento State University's Center on Race, Immigration and Social Justice - CRISJ. We explore critical issues affecting our communities with the hopes of creating a healthier and more just world. Your host for today are myself, Heidy Sarabia, associate professor in the Department of Sociology at Sac State and Manuel Barajas professor, also in the Department of Sociology at Sac State and co-founder of the Center on Race, Immigration and Social Justice, also known as CRISJ. Thank you for joining us. This is the second part of a two part series where we learn more about the life and work of Manuel Barajas, professor of sociology at SAC State. At the end of the of the last part of this series, Professor Barajas told us about his transition into higher education. Today we are continuing a conversation with Manuel about higher education and the issues that come up when diversity is not embraced, and how a social justice perspective and framework can help us address exclusion in higher education as well as we are going more in-depth about his research, about how his family came to Stockton, California. Thanks for joining us. Manuel, let's begin by you telling us why build a center focused on race, immigration and social justice? What motivated you to take on this project?

MANUEL BARAJAS: What motivated the creation of the Center on Race, Immigration and Social Justice, that as the student enrollment of minorities went up and now are the majority in the CSU in the local university where we work, our numbers have declined, disproportionately vis-a-vis every other group. Those of us who are Chicanx or of indigenous ancestry, brown people, we are like the smallest. For example, for every, thirty six Asian American students, there's one Asian American professor; for every like 30 Black students, there's one Black professor; for every,one hundred and twenty Latinx/Chicanx students, there's one Brown professor. For every 10 white students, European American students, there's one white professor. So European Americans make up like 65 to 70 percent of the faculty; Asian America's like 20 percent; and the other 10, it's brown and black, and with the brown, they make up the majority of students now at the CSUs, about forty three percent or more of the enrollments. In our particular school [Sacramento State],Chicanx students account for thirty three percent [of the total]. And so there's like … a cultural-racial-gender taxation for minority faculty, and these students of color, don't see themselves in academic affairs through their teachers, the researchers, the mentors. And it makes a big difference if that if the faculty can relate to your background, to your experiences and it can see you with equity, with respect, not as in a deficit. ‘Oh! You can't speak this way. You have an accent.’ Everybody has an accent. My accent is Purepecha or some call it, Mexican and everybody should have an accent like inverting reality, The idea of homogeneity being normal and diversity being pathological is like, you know, it's just inverting reality. A diverse world is natural; a homogeneous social world it is not natural. It's only achieved through colonial projects, missions, schools, boarding schools, denials of multilingualism, multiculturalism, and that's not healthy for a society who wants to be pluralistic and democratic. It nurtures xenophobia and intolerance for difference. And that's what we've seen in the past four years, but it's been, of course, it has a longer history going back to colonialism.

HEIDY SARABIA:and Manuel, I really like how you started of this section, highlighting that it's not about belonging because we do belong in all these different spaces. It's really about the hostility that people encounter when they are seen as outsiders by this process of what you're describing as kind of social engineering, right? of engineering homogeneous spaces. And I'm curious about what do you think about what are the best ways to sort of include us without making us tokens? Because in many ways there is this sort of movement for multiculturalism, for diversity that is very superficial, right? Bring in a person of color to carry out the same colonial project that has been taking place for centuries. So what do you think?

MANUEL BARAJAS: Tokenism, That's a heavy concept. It can have different meanings, but tokens is used where, you know, when there's lack of a diversity. Maybe the higher ups may place a dean of color as window dressing. It doesn't really matter if the minority dean is progressive or not. They're being used, to window dress to say, Oh no, there's representation when there's none, and there is also tokenism when they're selecting who becomes the voice for diversity, and the power will seek out those voices that are aligned with their mindsets, who have conformed to these notions of assimilation of whiteness. And so it is problematic. It is very problematic also because it creates an unfair working environments for minorities, who are isolated, who are not, or maybe intimidated to be free in expressing their views, their perspectives because they're afraid of not being aligned with the norm, the norm is not a "we" that the norm is the majority and it isn't about individuals, personalities, it isn't about attitudes. It's about a shared culture. The notion that somehow your accent, your areas of interest are like more worthy, than somebody else's areas of interest and unique styles. And the norm reflects, the normalized standard reflects one group's experience, history. But it's excluding many other histories and voices. So in order to create something truly objective in the university, we need to encompass universal experiences that reflect different groups, experiences in the world and their competencies. We need to learn that [comprehensive universal] knowledge to succeed in society, by learning to apply it in different environments. We don't have that. We don't have that. And we see the effects of it is that we're failing society in preparing people who are able to work across groups in a very respectful, constructive way. And it it creates homogeneous spaces in schools, so it advantages some unfairly and it disadvantages others very unfairly. And so, yeah, tokenism is not good. So what can we do? We need to be democratic, substantively, not symbolically with tokens. But we need to advance equity and representation of the diversity that we have in society, proportional representation of who lives here, and that's not to benefit any one group, but to benefit all society, that way everybody learns from that perspective, views, expertise of diversified faculty in academia, and so they will go off to the world with that background. Not with a Eurocentric, middle class bias,perspective.

HEIDY SARABIA:And Manuel, it sounds like that is best achieved when we have a social justice framework to guide the work. Can you tell us a little bit about how you develop that moral compass of social justice to guide your work?

MANUEL BARAJAS:OK. So moral justice and social justice, social justice to me means advancing healthy relationships. And typically it is those at the margins who clearly understand when things are not healthy, for example:. in a patriarchal society, women who are exploited, devalued; in a racist white supremacist society, Indigenous [and] Black folks, who have consistently and perpetually been devalued in marginalized; among the citizens, those who are

undocumented; among sexuality, LGBTQ +in a hetro-sexual normative world. It is all these [marginalized] voices, especially those at the intersections, are able to understand when society has unhealthy norms, rules and processes. So to me, social justice is always attentive to those who have been disempowered and oppressed. And so, you can have [awareness of justice] cognitively, but praxis, [that is] being able to connect that knowledge with action is a different matter. When you go against the mainstream, there are consequences. There is the blockage of opportunities, there is resentment, there is hostility. In small spaces, departments and colleges and the university, there's consequences. So what motivates people to pursue social justice? What motivates, in my view, is when those at the bottom, at the margins, are the impulse for social justice because they are seeking, they're seeking, the right to live, to exist. They're surviving, to exist and with dignity, something that they're being denied. There's explosions, rebellions. That's because there's been a threshold broken. They've been already marginalized. And then there's a threshold, as you can only take so much. And then there's this impulse to change the structure, and that's necessary if we want to move to a better place, because it's only in those moments that those in power are able to consider, okay, what can we do? But sometimes they use time to maintain existing structures with very littleinstitutional changes, and enact very symbolic, performative programs that don't really do that transformation that is needed to advance equity, fairness to everybody. And so, yes, social justice is very important in CRISJ's work.

HEIDY SARABIA:Manuel, you bring up this issue of, you know, praxis versus just theory, and I'm just curious about how did you develop your social justice perspective, was it in these early years of sort of working with along with your family and experiencing firsthand what it is like to feel that you work really hard? Very important job. And you are not it's not being valued.

MANUEL BARAJAS: I think it comes from home, just growing up in the projects and being attacked for being an outsider and being physically, psychologically assaulted even before starting kinder. Seeing older siblings get jumped [physically assaulted], and then, that didn't feel right. So you're like, you know, people are pushed into different actions and some people wanted to accommodate to the power group in that new neighborhood, others who were embedded in loving relationships said no, I'm no less. And I think I come from a such community, where I was part of a big group, a village, not just my family, but a big village that loved me, so I could not say, Oh I going to abandon you and forget my Spanish, my culture. I'm going to try to fit in with a dominant group over here. Diversity is what matters, what's beautiful. [instrumental music] Yes, so in the fields, at a very young age, I got to see also state violence through the Border Patrol through back then it was INS. ICE now, in our days, but in many incidents as a little kid, seven year old picking cherries up a tree, I got to see indigenous people being persecuted and chased by big, blond Border Patrol officers in no time catching up to them because they were so tall and just, you know, tackling them and twisting their little arms and lifting them up like rags. And one of these occasions, I saw it just before me, like 10 feet away from me, and it was very traumatic. I was maybe like six or seven [years old]. And from then on, whenever I would see the Border Patrol, ... I felt traumatized. I felt high levels of anxiety and fear. But I saw elders, including my father, stand up to the Border Patrol and tell them, “You know, what you're doing is wrong. These people come here just to work.” And I saw them also getting attacked, but being able to stand up and continue the confrontation and telling them, you know, “I'm a US citizen, and even if I weren't what you're doing in inhumane. Why come at the

end of the harvest when everybody has finished picking. And then again, for people who just want to feed their families and themselves." And so I got to see many incidents like this growing up and I got to visit, as a [college] student, the border area, also where they detain undocumented immigrants and also where they offer refuge. And I got to learn their stories of why they come from, Mexico and Central America and understand the roots of their migration. How the U.S. is essentially responsible for some of these migrations, reorienting their economies not to serve their people, but to export things for us here consumers so their economies get reoriented, and organized not to feed their people but to feed affluent nations to the North. So what happens when one of these nations, like the US has a recession? Those countries who have been reoriented to produce for export for us experienced great depressions. And so we saw that during the Great Recession in 2008, even before that, people from Central America, Guatemala, Honduras.Here in the US, we had a recession, people went unemployed, people in the construction and the services went unemployment. So people, immigrants here couldn't send moneyto the South, to their families. And then eventually children are forced to migrate. And then in great numbers [in caravans] to move safely to the US. And then people here kept ignorant from the history and relationships between this nation and their nations, blames them for coming, without really understanding the central role in which US policy of interventions plays in them coming here. And so, yeah, social justice at different levels.

HEIDY:Manuel, that story, You know, the story that you start with, your father standing up to INS officers, again brings up for me that this issue of praxis and theory, right? That I think you did grow up seeing people stand up for what was right, to speak about inhumanity when they saw it. And I think, you know, that must have shaped how you ended up just committing to these, you know, social justice work.

MANUEL BARAJAS:Again, I think it's very important. There's this concept of community cultural wealth that when we are in unfriendly spaces, remaining connected to these loving, affirming communities, it's empowering because we're able to combat that dehumanization that we experience, when we're being told "bad hombre" or "primitive you" or "you're a threat" or whatever, because we know who we are because we're loved by people who we love, our parents, our siblings, our cousins, our friends who are proud to see people like themselves experiencing a better life in these middle-class spaces that you know we're in. And so I think those, community cultural wealth and social capital or social relationships, I don't even like that term [capital]. Relationships are very important and they keep us… [strong]; they give us the energy and the strength to endure some of the abuses that we face. In some of these are really hostile spaces.

HEIDY SARABIA:Manuel and I want to I have a follow up question, but I will save it for later on, but now I want to ask you to tell us a little bit about your, the work you did as a graduate student that eventually you published as a book because I think that work is fascinating because it is rooted in these relationships of love, community and affirmation. So can you tell us a little bit about how that project came about?

MANUEL BARAJAS: Yeah. Well, when I was a junior in high school, I had a very racist teacher, and he would put down all people of color, African-Americans, Asian-Americans,

Chicanxs. And on one occasion he was talking about, at the time in the mid-eighties, there was this one senator who was proposing to build a wall across the US-Mexican border.

And I never talked [as a student in high school]. I was very shy. However, when he was talking to a group of Chicano kids in some corner [of the class], and they seemed really hurt. And I got up, walked upto him, and I told them, “You know, you need us more than we need you.” And it really hurt to see that [nativism from the teacher] because I was a farm worker and I saw the labor that nobody wanted to do and the work that got paid less. So … when I walked out from that class, I thought, ‘Why in the world, did we come to this nation.’ So it's like one experience of nativism. And then I went to Davis [as undergraduate student] and I experienced the same nativism, you know, from some teachers. [The issues of belonging and not belonging in society always interested me and guided my studies at all levels]

When I went to college as an undergraduate, my first research paper was called, "How the print media covers undocumented immigrants," because I wanted to see how we were portrayed. How maybe that [portrayal] influenced people to hate us so much, so I reviewed three newspapers from 1986 to 1990. Sac Bee, Davis Enterprise, the Christian Science Monitor, I did a content analysis to see the themes that came up. And of course, mostly negative, very negative depictions, e.g., flooding, invading, draining public resources. No wonder they hated us, I thought. So then I go to graduate school and there I'm sensing the 1994 anti-immigrant nativism. We've surpassed European immigrants [in numbers] for the first time in U.S. history. From 1830 to 1980, most of the immigrants were coming from Europe, but for the first time in U.S. history in 1990, both Chicanx/Latinx and Asian migrations surpass European immigration and things just changed in the U.S. There's like this extreme nativism towards people of color. So California I sensed that in graduate school, just a lot of nativism, hatred. So there I became interested in this, all these nativist policies passed in California in the 1990s, and I want to know why. So I wrote a thesis titled, I forgot the exact title, "Negative attitudes towards Mexicans and how these affect voting behavior." And so I drew a sample of 300, all the different racial groups, and I see a clear pattern, you know, and racial prejudice is highly associated with race and there's a lot of fear [towards Mexicans]. I did that study for the master's thesis. And then I think, Wow, we were so hated, so why did we come? … It was personal. We've been here [for a century], we've been coming, but we didn't settle. Why did it take us two thirds of a century to settle in Stockton, from 1901 since the first village people, Xaripos, my indigenous pueblo began to come to the U.S. and I saw the intersections of race, class and gender. Only men were desired for work. A few women came. They settled in the 10s, in the 20s, in the 30s…throughout the US nation. But most of us came in the 60s and 70s, and the [migration trends] had to do with the racist and sexist structures that exist in the United States. Many people of color come to work and go back, but we've been here even before the US nation moved from the east to the west [of what became the territorial United States]. .... And so, so the book project came from that. Wanting to understand why did we come? Why did it take so long to settle in the US? What were the incorporation experiences in labor and in the community? So then also, how has this shaped us as a people, as families, have we become more equitable in gender relations? So for the book, I was interested in what caused migration, why they would take so long to settle, why was it mostly men who would migrate for two-thirds of a century? The settlement incorporation experiences, whether we were able to reproduce community as a village in Stockton and across borders, and how all these experiences affected the family, gender equity in the household and just trying to extract insights

[from these lived experiences]; and generally, what I learned is that these migrations are not really [voluntary], but are really dislocations. And they reflect … historical oppressions from within a nation,… oppressing indigenous people [and] dislocating them from their land. But the [migrations] become greatly intensified when there's … two oppressors, one your own nation and an external one, which is the U.S. When they [internal and external oppressors] collaborate and reorient the southern country to benefit the northern country, all the resources for the benefit of el Norte. I got to see that through the case study [that became my book]. And this case study is not unique. It's illustrative of a larger trend, massive trend, of communities from Central Mexico coming to the United States. And before these migrations, there were migrations from the northern states of Mexico, and then central states. Now in the last 20–30 years from southern Mexico and Central America. And so we see very similar patterns. You know, these [Latin American] countries were formed as a byproduct of colonialism. After the independence movements, the emergent nations …remained [racial and social] supremacist. And they were freer to be more savage and expansive with their colonial projects. More indigenous people got displaced after independence than during colonialism. And so yes, I got interested in understanding that history and its continuity. The process [of researching] was not like work,… it was very engaging for me to learn, to explore these questions.

The interviews were awesome. I did … formal interviews with 56 persons, 30 from Stockton, 26 from across the border. These were the formal interviews. On average I spend maybe like one hour and a half to two hours. The longest was like 6 hours, the shortest like 45 minutes. And the one thing about across the border in Mexico, I didn't know many of the people, but we were connected through shared relationships. So, you know, developing those connections was a great experience for me. It was also very interesting to learn about inequalities within the community. Borders divided up not just spaces, but also communities and families; that is, inevitably these borders preserve and maintain inequalities. …By coming here to the U.S. one summer, a farmworker, who is undocumented, can make the earnings that are equivalent to a teacher who has a master's degree across the border. And how when you go [visit Mexico] and you have nice clothing, pants, that some people there in Mexico or Central America, may spend two weeks, one month saving money to buy the [same] pants. Here, in one day or two, you can buy those pants. And so these inequities are manifested unintentionally across the border. And in a personal example, I remember when I was in college, maybe twenty one [years of age],…. that I went [to Mexico because] I had a cousin who was getting married, so I went from Davis to Michoacán, and I befriended her neighbor and her neighbor worked from six to six in construction... And I had invited him to go out in the evening after work for a meal of enchiladas, and the enchilada plate was six dollars and his earnings for a day's work was six dollars. And when we went out to eat, I wanted to pay for him and he didn't feel good about it. He wanted to pay for his own meal. It was like an issue of dignity. I don't know, I felt bad. But, you know, just occupying this space [in the United States]. Why should we have higher earnings than people over there who are as skilled and intelligent? If I'm farmworker earning as much as a teacher over there, what explains these devaluations? To be able to understand this, we have to look at it historically that even within this space in El Norte, we're still valued differently based on race, gender, class. And when you add nationality, we see greater impacts. It isn't because they are any less skilled, knowledgeable, motivated, or have any less potential. It is historical devaluations that are rooted to colonialism. And this is a major, destructive project that was [is] comprehensive in its oppression. It was not just imperialism, economic oppression. It was racial. It was gendered. It was class oppression. [It is comprehensively] colonial oppression. And that

[oppression] was… normalized and universalized in the conquest of the Americas. And we still see its manifestations in how some of the most essential workers in the US, farmworkers, for instance, who constitute one percent of all the workers, they are the least paid workers, yet they creates tremendous amounts of wealth. They make California the most affluent state in the nation, the fifth largest economy, and it's thanks to the agricultural sector where farm labor is foundational in this wealth production of an economy of 50 billion dollars. And yet, you know, they're the working poor, many of them Indigenous, of indigenous ancestry, and undocumented. Before it didn't matter if you were documented or not. De jure [racism], made it so that race could be used as an element of devaluation… to pay you less. [That's] prior to the 60s. That changed after the 60s. So legality became a proxy for race. And so we see that in these exclusion of people from attaining legal pathways to residency in the U.S. it isn't simply about immigration. It's about race, gender, and class devaluations.

HEIDY SARABIA: Thank you, Manuel, for sharing your perspectives about how to transform higher education into a more inclusive environment, which is not an easy task. But, as you pointed out, necessary. And also, thank you for sharing the fascinating findings from your research that are very timely as we sort of experience a new wave of xenophobia in the United States. Again, thank you for listening. We hope our ongoing conversations spark understandings, empathies, and motivation to join the struggle for a better future for all. Thank you.

[Music].