

## **Clothing the Other in Dignity: Centeotl, NAFTA, and the Primacy of Tradition**

by Carlos Alberto Sanchez

### **English Abstract**

Beginning with Richard Rorty's critique of traditional morality, I go on to consider the issue of Mexican immigration after NAFTA. I argue that while we, US citizens or non-immigrants, might not have a categorical moral obligation to welcome and protect the immigrant other, to not do so is to violate the very basis of our traditions—especially, those traditions considered constitutive of an American ethos that as citizens we are loyal to and attempt or wish to emulate, propagate, and protect. At stake here is the very integrity of American democracy and the flourishing of its citizens, who in acts of loyalty toward the immigrant other expand and enrich those traditions that are the hallmark of their citizenship. I will look specifically on the case of Mexican corn farmers, whose livelihoods—and whose own traditions—were thrown into a slow process of ruin after the signing of NAFTA in 1994.

### **Resumen en español**

A partir de la crítica de Richard Rorty sobre la moral tradicional, el presente ensayo considera el problema de la inmigración mexicana después de NAFTA. Sostengo que mientras que nosotros, ciudadanos o no-inmigrantes, tal vez no tengamos la obligación moral categórica para acoger y proteger a el inmigrante-otro, a no hacerlo es violar la base misma de nuestras tradiciones—particularmente, aquellas tradiciones consideradas como constitutivas de el ethos norteamericano que como ciudadanos deseamos emular, propagar, y proteger. Con todo esto, ponemos en juego la integridad misma de la democracia estadounidense y el florecimiento de sus ciudadanos, que en los actos de lealtad hacia el inmigrante-otro enriquece esas tradiciones que son el sello distintivo de su identidad. Miro específicamente al el caso de los campesinos y agricultores de maíz, cuyos medios de vida -y cuyas propias tradiciones - fueron arrojados a un lento proceso de ruina después que se firma NAFTA en 1994, y a la misma vez, ellos mismos son obligados a inmigrar y sufrir los procesos de muerte esenciales a esta peligrosa aventura.

### **Resumo em português**

Começando com crítica da moral tradicional de Richard Rorty, o documento considera a questão da imigração mexicana após NAFTA. Defendo que enquanto nós cidadãos americanos ou não-imigrantes, pode não ter a obrigação moral categórico para acolher e proteger o imigrante, para não fazê-lo é violar a própria base da nossa tradições, especialmente, aquelas tradições considerada constitutiva de um etos americano que, como cidadãos que são leais ao e tentar ou deseja emular, propagar, e proteger. Está em jogo a própria integridade da democracia americana eo florescimento de seus cidadãos, que em atos de lealdade para com o imigrante outra expandir e enriquecer

essas tradições que são a marca registrada de sua cidadania. Eu analisar especificamente o caso dos agricultores de milho mexicanos, cujos meios de vida - e cujo próprio tradições foram jogados em um lento processo de ruína após a assinatura do NAFTA em 1994.

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Anti-immigrant nativism is rooted on the assumption that the immigrant other is a threat to the most cherished traditions of the national culture. Despite the abstract nature of these cherished traditions, or the fact that these are usually difficult to conceptualize outside the dramatic renderings of public and media narratives, nativism maintains that immigrants, and especially “illegal” immigrants, infringe and contaminate those traditions, and thus threaten the very identity of the “native” population.[1] Moreover, it suggests that “we,” citizens, must protect those traditions at all costs (or at least, at great cost), and that citizens have little to no obligations to the stranger, the alien, or those who, by virtue of a criminal trespass, stand outside the space of law and rights. In proposing that citizens do not have obligations to the non-citizen other, nativism also reinforces the seemingly absurd notion that communities are self-enclosed entities only responsible to themselves and their historical and economic survival—that is, that the historical progress or trajectory of a community is *sui generis*, relying only on the repetition and replication of its traditions for its integrity and its flourishing. I call the nativist position an absurd notion because, well, it is absurd to think that communities can survive and thrive without that kind of novelty that is possible only when the repetitions and replications cease; more importantly, it is likewise absurd to suggest that we, as a human community, are not all somehow connected to each other in one way or another and thus somewhat responsible for each other’s well being.

But perhaps the absurdity of this position is not *prima facie*. The American philosopher Richard Rorty, for instance, makes the case that depending on how one understands “justice,” and depending on how one grounds that concept, the idea that we are responsible to others outside of our bounded communities can become difficult to justify. In two short essays, which will serve as bases of my argument here, Rorty argues that thinking of justice and moral obligation as grounded on a particular form of (Western) rationality and going on from there to propose justice and moral obligation as universally applicable concepts, forgets that human beings always have specific loyalties to those closest to them; justice, that is, doesn’t account for my loyalties to what is most familiar. Thus he says, in “Postmodern Bourgeoisie Liberalism,” “One cannot be irresponsible toward a community of which one does not think of oneself as a member” (1985, 214); and in “Justice as a Larger Loyalty” he writes that “[t]here has to be *some* sense in which [a person we have harmed] is ‘one of us,’ before we start to be tormented by the question of whether or not we did the right thing when [we harmed them]” (Rorty 2010, 433). The point that Rorty is trying to make, in both cases, is that it makes more sense to say that feelings of responsibility or guilt are simply grounded on

a sense of belonging or “fellow-feeling” (2010, 441) expressed as loyalty to our community, our traditions, and our neighbors, rather than being grounded on a sense of justice. On this view, loyalty to our communities and our traditions trump obligations to strangers or those not part of our communities, those who do not participate in our traditions.[2]

However, Rorty’s point, especially in “Justice as a Larger Loyalty,” is not that we should disavow our fellows to protect ourselves and our traditions, but rather he aims to dissolve the distinction between justice (as grounded on reason) and loyalty (as grounded in sentiment) and suggest that justice *just* is “the name for loyalty to a certain very large group, the name for our largest loyalty” (2010, 434). So we can still be loyal to our communities and our traditions without forsaking strangers, but only if we are capable of expanding our loyalties to include them. Nativist, adamant as they are about protecting their (supposed) historical identity from the inevitable contamination that comes with exposure to other, *alien*, traditions are, on this account, reluctant or incapable of expanding their loyalties to include other communities and other traditions.

While Rorty does not offer a definition of what he means by “tradition”, we can say that a tradition is that set of beliefs, customs, and behaviors specific to groups, communities, and cultures which is handed down through time, tying a group, community, or culture to its past, and grounding its projections toward the future. Thus, a tradition will be held valuable by members of a group or community because it is a source of connection and identity; they will be loyal to it for this reason. Our historical (“American”) community, for instance, upholds *ideals* of freedom, respect, hospitality, and care for strangers in need. These traditions tell us that our loyalties, usually reserved for what is most personal and familiar, may widen to include the stranger and the unfamiliar when human suffering is involved. That is, while we may be unfamiliar with the stranger, we cannot be unfamiliar with her suffering (Rorty 1989, 189-198). If these are, in fact, some of the more substantial elements of our traditions, and thus of our identity as American, then anti-immigrant nativism within our community is incompatible with the very traditions it aims to safeguard.

In this paper, I will assume that there is something right about Rorty’s idea that one does not have to abide by traditional principles of justice or traditional morality in order to justify loyalty, care and compassion for the stranger. Assuming this Rortian perspective, I will consider the phenomenon of Mexican immigration after the signing and implementation of NAFTA (or the North American Free Trade Agreement) and argue that while we, US citizens or non-immigrants, might not have a universal moral obligation (*a la* Kant) to welcome and protect the immigrant other, to not do so is to violate the very basis of our traditions—especially, those traditions considered constitutive of an American ethos that as citizens we attempt or wish to emulate, propagate, and protect. At stake here is the very integrity of American democracy and the flourishing of its citizens, who in acts of loyalty toward the immigrant other expand and enrich those traditions that are the hallmark of citizenship. I will look specifically to

the case of Mexican corn farmers, whose livelihoods—and whose own traditions—were thrown into a slow process of ruin after the signing of NAFTA in 1994.

I begin with some brief remarks on NAFTA and its role in the de-stabilization of the Mexican corn farmer. After considering both the social and economic consequences of NAFTA on Mexican food production, I equate the dramatic loss of food self-sufficiency with the imaginary destruction of the temple of the Aztec God of Corn, also known as *Centeotl*. I do this in order to highlight the devastating consequences of, what I call, “the NAFTA event” not only on the Mexican material circumstance, which includes the ability of people to care for themselves, but also on the Mexican historical imaginary, in which corn is the tie to the past and the (now impossible) condition for the future. Next, I appeal to Rorty’s arguments against traditional conceptions of justice, in which he argues that we, citizens or non-immigrants loyal to what is most familiar, can expand our loyalties so as to be able to “clothe the other in dignity,” especially when her temples have been razed. My claim is that the symbolic destruction of the Temple of Centeotl provides the minimum justification for loyalty, which involves treating the immigrant other with dignity and humanity. I will conclude by returning to the issue of nativism and its inherent contradictions.

## I. The NAFTA-Event

The North American Free Trade Agreement between Canada, the United States, and Mexico was meant to create a trilateral trade block that would eliminate barriers to trade and investment throughout North America. However, since its implementation in 1994, it has led to the decreased self-sufficiency, vulnerability, and exploitation of one member country in particular—Mexico. The opening of Mexico’s northern border to trade has allowed for a steady increase in imports to that country, something that, perhaps, goes counter to the original vision of its Mexican signees. It makes sense to suppose that supporters of NAFTA intended to ameliorate Mexico’s economic woes by exporting more of its domestic product than importing from elsewhere. The reality has been different. Imports, coming especially from the US, are contributing to an increase in unemployment, poverty, and, much to the dismay of its northern neighbors, a seemingly unstoppable migration north. Ironically, the imports which have caused the most damage to the Mexican economy, and Mexico’s well being as a whole, are those that one would think should not be imported to a country like Mexico, where they are considered staples of the national diet, namely, grains and fruits. The importation of grain, specifically corn, is the most troubling, particularly given its central place in the Mexican cultural, historical, and, to a great extent, religious imagination (Pilcher 1998).

Perhaps this consequence was predicted. The overzealous Mexican president Carlos Salinas de Gortari, its principal promoter in the Mexican government, sought the salvation of the Mexican state, especially the ruling classes, in the neoliberal economic policies inherent in the agreement. The sales pitch at the time painted NAFTA as the means whereby Mexico could finally compete in, and share in the spoils of, free market

capitalism. But of the three countries, it has been Mexico that has lost more on the gamble. As Canadian sociologist Gerardo Otero reports, “only Mexico has seen food prices rise significantly” after the signing of NAFTA (2011, 388). And adding insult to injury, there is the fact that “the main food suppliers of the United States continues to be the European Union, first, and Canada, second” (Otero 2011, 390). Consequently, Otero notes, “Of the three NAFTA nations, Mexico is the least self-sufficient, and hence the one that expels the largest rate of migrants” (385). This is not to say that without NAFTA rural farmers could survive the wrath of globalization and not find it necessary to migrate north in search of opportunities; however, since its signing, the necessity to find these opportunities has forced many into, what I’m calling, the *death-procedures* of northern migration.[3]

The driving force of NAFTA is, of course, neoliberalism. We are all somewhat familiar with the workings of neoliberal economic policies in the US, where unrestricted markets dictate our present pains and our future hopes. In accordance with these hopes, the stock markets tell us how to feel and how to act (for instance, the numbers tell us when to feel secure, when to buy, sell, or save). NAFTA, however, exposes the weaknesses of neoliberalism when it demands “free rein to private investments in the market” while simultaneously expecting “the bearers of labor power—workers” to stay “rooted in their national states” (Otero 2011, 387). If the weakest members of our NAFTA-community are the most harmed by the privileges of free trade, then uprooting and migration from the national state is a necessary and vital consequence. Otero notes that “[a]lthough Mexico used to be self-sufficient and even export surpluses, NAFTA and neoliberalism turned it into a food-import dependent nation” (2011, 390). This has led to a loss of labor sovereignty, a loss of food self-sufficiency, and to food vulnerability. In this way, NAFTA has benefited all involved except Mexico.

Corn farmers are particularly devastated by NAFTA’s allowances. Injected as it is with the full force of neoliberal economic greed, it is responsible for that population’s fight against starvation and death, or at the very least, to processes of death that manifest themselves when survival demands the difficult and dangerous migration across inhospitable borders. Of course, immigrants from all traditions, classes and nations must confront the death procedures demanded by survival. What I am pointing out here is that rural Mexican corn farmers had a privileged insight into the causes of their own ruin, a front-row seat to the destruction of their temples with the implementation of NAFTA, and thus that the temptation to confront the death procedures of northern migration will be greater.[4]

Corn, the once mighty crop of the temple of Centeotl, was an unlikely casualty of globalization, as US-raised corn flooded the Mexican market, crippling small farmers who for centuries depended on the crop for survival. NAFTA destroyed this tradition, and, in effect, the temple. As Otero points out “the invasion of U.S. grain has led to the bankruptcy of a huge number of Mexican peasants” (2011, 391), and I insist, in the process, to their orphanhood and homelessness (in the existential sense). The existential homelessness has to do with feeling out of place in the world; for Mexican

corn farmers, I suggest, this might be do to the fact that Mexican farmers are no longer farming, since it is impossible to survive off one's own land when what one hopes to harvest is cheaper to buy than to grow. This, of course, creates a dependency on the cheaper, foreign product. If the cheaper, foreign product becomes scarce in the exporting nation (for example, corn yields in Nebraska decrease), this will more greatly effect the poor in the importing nation who depend on that product the most (that is, the price of corn, tortillas, etc., will go up, leading to hunger and, ultimately, the necessity to flee). This is illustrated by the rise in tortilla prices for rural Mexicans, which, due to trade imbalances, corruption, and the monopolizing of the so-called free-market by corporations both foreign and domestic, rose by 279% in the years after NAFTA (Henriques & Patel 2004, 6). This staggering increase in the price of tortillas is a clear indication that "the agreement" is not benefiting all equally. We can conclude, even if provisionally, that as the largest supplier of corn to Mexico, the US plays the biggest hand in the bankruptcy and desperation of those that once could survive on their own and by their own labor.

## II. The Destruction of the Temple

I associate the destructive consequences of the NAFTA-event, including the fall of the Mexican corn farmer into its inevitable death-procedures, with the collapse of the temple of Centeotl, the Aztec god of maize. Centeotl was arguably one of the most significant deities of that ancient culture, as it had been for the Maya and the Olmec before them. Associated with reproduction and kingship, Centeotl was the son of the Earth-mother, Tocitzin, the Mother of the Gods, and Tlazelteotl, the goddess of fertility and childbirth. But Centeotl was more significant than his mothers, and thus had his own *teopan*, or temple. The priority of this deity cannot be understated. For centuries, human sacrifice kept the god pleased and so it was that the corn harvests continued generation after generation (Spence 2010, 85-90). After the conquest and colonization, and the replacement of gods and deities by Catholic missionaries, death was no longer currency in dealings with Centeotl. Nevertheless, his temple continued to provide, despite the efforts of the Spanish conquistadors who tore down the actual, physical temples in an effort to erase history and tradition. Nonetheless, the temple remained in the Mexican imagination for the simple reason that corn continued to be a staple of the Mexican diet and a source of economic survival. Given the fact that 23% of Mexico's corn was imported by 2007 (Otero 2011, 389), we can say that the *symbolic* destruction of the temple of Centeotl is well underway.

With the destruction of the temple, comes the exodus. Peasant farmers, lacking subsidies and unable to compete with US farmers migrate north.[5] As Otero observes: "Mexico has become dependent on the importation of basic-subsistence grains, which used to be produced by smallholder peasant farmers. Many peasants become redundant in the Mexican economy, and their only way out, literally, has been to migrate to the United States or Canada" (2011, 385). And so they wander through inhospitable deserts, orphans whose temple has been razed!

### III. Loyalty to Tradition

What are we to make of these orphans? Of those fleeing a destroyed temple? Richard Rorty suggests that we take them in.

Rorty's "Postmodern Bourgeoisie Liberalism"—presumably a title given in jest<sup>[5]</sup>—is in some ways a defense of a historical community's right to keep to itself, to do its own thing, and be held accountable only to its members. That is, it defends the view that communities, particularly of the "rich North Atlantic democracies" (1985, 216), should not be thought as "immoral" or "unjust" when they do not respond to the needs of others who stand outside the bounded space of their own history and traditions. It argues against a liberal rationality that suggests that it is a prosperous community's moral obligation to intervene in the lives of other communities when those communities are in need. This intervention is justified by appeals to justice and a rationally derived universal moral obligation that demands such action. However, Rorty suggests that universal moral obligations are merely inventions of a Western rationality that considers itself as the arbiter of right conduct. The way communities *really* proceed when deciding on what to do is not by appeal to moral imperatives, but by appeal to what, historically, has worked better. That is, the best course of action is the one in which one stays true to the traditional way of doing things. So, if we are to respond to the cries of the stranger who stands at our door, we do it because that is what our traditions dictate—because we are being loyal to those traditions. (The job of the intellectual, says Rorty, is to convince "our society that it need be responsible only to its own traditions, and not to the moral law as well" [1985, 217]).

Rorty's view will be that loyalty to tradition is morality enough. As such, it is a response to those who want to ground morality on universal, absolutist, and ahistorical principles. He argues that the moral philosophy of Kant and his followers does not address the actual needs of real people, but, rather, of abstract persons who belong to "super communities" like "humanity as such" (Rorty 1985, 215). The most practical morality, Rorty says, is one that follows Hegel's suggestion that "there are no ahistorical criteria for deciding when it is or is not a responsible act to desert a community, any more than for deciding when to change lovers or professions" (Rorty 1985, 215). What Hegelians address—and Rorty counts himself as one—are actual persons and real communities. Evaluation of correct moral conduct must, on this line of thinking, respect the beliefs and traditions of particular historical communities whose members act based on shared trust and shared loyalty to those beliefs and those traditions.

Postmodern bourgeois liberals, like Rorty himself, are thus willing to throw out notions of right conduct based on "a universal human capacity", and adopt a more pragmatic morality that addresses the actual needs, beliefs, and hopes specific communities (2010, 443). Within such communities, loyalty to tradition and social custom take precedence over universal moral imperatives: "I hope thereby to suggest how such liberals might convince our society that loyalty to itself is morality enough, and that such loyalty no longer needs and ahistorical backup" (Rorty 1985, 216). What this

means is that if members of a particular society behave in such a way as to respond and be responsible, or loyal, only to the demands of their particular communities, then, the argument goes, that will be “morality enough.” In fact, living in accordance with the traditions of a community, he continues, defines the identity of the community and its members. Rorty agrees with Michael Sandel when the latter argues that “living by [those traditions] is inseparable from understanding ourselves as particular people” (Rorty 1985, 217; Sandel 1982, 179; Sandel 1998, 14). Our identity, that is, is tied up with our traditions and with the people that uphold them, with those whose “moral identity” is shaped by a set of “central beliefs” that we share (Rorty 2010, 440-441).

But there are a number of different communities to which one can belong; a number of different traditions that one must safeguard and to which one will pledge one’s loyalties. I can be an educator, but also a member of the gay community, or a member of an immigrant-rights group. This fact is what gives rise to most moral dilemmas that we, as members of different communities, might encounter. As he puts it in “Justice as a Larger Loyalty,” “Moral dilemmas are...the result of...alternative selves, alternative self-descriptions, alternative ways of giving a meaning to one’s life” (Rorty 2010, 436). It might be the case that in our attempt to respond to the needs of one community we violate the traditions of another. So how do we resolve these “moral” dilemmas? Rorty suggests that we usually do not resolve the dilemmas, but we become invested in solving them simply because these communities matter to us; and they matter to us because we are tied to those beliefs and traditions that are central to their constitution. We thus become advocates for our communities when its central beliefs are threatened or challenged, even if there is no way to fight off the threat or the challenge. This means, however, that communities of which we are not a part can easily be ignored, as my energies are spent advocating for those communities to which I belong and protecting those traditions that define me. According to Rorty, this merely reflects the postmodern view that there is no “great moral meta-narrative that will drive us to act on behalf of others outside our community” (1985, 218).

Saying that there is no such metanarrative is Rorty’s way of emphasizing the idea that what binds us to our communities is loyalty, trust, and fellow-feeling. This means that if one is to act on behalf of others outside the bounds of one’s community, it will be because one has a “larger loyalty” that extends beyond the loyalties to what is most proximal. But one is not forced, by moral decree, to be so loyal; without such decree, only our own communities benefit from our loyalties and our advocacy. Of course, this suggests that if our loyalties drive us to safeguard and respect only the traditions and customs of those communities that matter to us, then the traditions, customs, and people of communities external to ours will get no moral consideration.

Mexican corn farmers, trampled underfoot by globalization and neoliberalism, are certainly not part of the community to which either Rorty or any other postmodern bourgeois liberal belongs, and thus, toward which they *must* lend their loyalties. Nativism seems justified under this apparently insular philosophical position. Thus, if universal morality does not bind me to the alien other, and if my loyalties are not broad

or developed enough to include others outside my bounded community, then it seems that only other Mexican corn farmers, or other immigrants, or other Mexicans, are responsible to attend to the needs of that community—needs that might include food, shelter, water, or basic human dignity.

Rorty recognizes that critics might find his position to lead to some absurd consequences. According to these critics,

on my view a child found wandering in the woods, the remnant of a slaughtered nation whose temples have been razed and whose books have been burned, has no share in human dignity. (Rorty 1985, 218-219)

Rorty's critics thus question his postmodern liberalism on the basis that it suggests that only those who have their communities intact and who remain in them, whose temples are standing and productive, share in human dignity—namely, the rich Northerners. Why would this be a consequence of his position? Mainly because if loyalty to one's own community—to one's own traditions and one's own values—is "morality enough," then it seems like we become blind to the emergencies of those others who stand outside the boundaries/borders of our communal social context. Moreover, the stranger has no share in human dignity because dignity resides in contexts where freedom, individuality, and the possibility of human flourishing exist, namely, in places where temples are not razed, where there is no need to flee; thus the stranger lacks dignity simply because she wanders, because she flees, because she comes from elsewhere, outside the space of our loyalties.

Rorty counters this objection:

This is indeed a consequence but it does not follow that she may be treated like an animal. For it is part of the tradition of our community that the human stranger from whom all dignity has been stripped is to be taken in, to be clothed with dignity (Rorty 1985, 218-219).

The argument that it is part of our tradition to accept the stranger is well known. Inscribed as it is in the oft-repeated slogan that "we are a nation of immigrants," it asks us to consider it as part of our tradition that our doors have always been open to strangers. The reality of this mantra, however, is quite different. The history of immigration is a complex one, involving periods of acceptance, rejection, and outright brutality toward the strange other, or the alien. The factual history of this tradition puts into question Rorty's sentiment that we, as a community, share in the value of acceptance and welcoming of those who have been stripped of their dignity. However, looked at as a value, or tradition, toward which our liberal community *aspires* at every turn, and which it *aims* to uphold even in times of fear and suspicion, allows Rorty to suggest that this is, in fact, what we do as a community—that if we find a child wandering in the woods, fleeing from her burning temples, then we must take her in and "clothe [her] with dignity."

Again, we offer this protection not out of a sense of moral obligation or justice, but out of loyalty to our traditions and our values. If, as Rorty argues, justice and larger loyalties are different names for the same thing (“the demands of justice are simply the demands of a larger loyalty” [2010, 441]), then clothing the other with dignity implies that our sensitivity for suffering and need has been expanded to include the stranger in distress. Thus, caring for the plight of those fleeing their burning temples instantiates a loyalty to a much larger group than the one bounded by the laws and customs of particular nations.

Mexican corn farmers, whose temples have been razed by the machine of globalization and neoliberalism, by the ideals of progress and civilization inherent in the traditions of the postmodern liberal bourgeoisie, are those wandering children. They wander the deserts in Arizona and the streets of Los Angeles, they wander the country in search of a replacement for the gods they have lost. Rorty would say that it is our duty, then, as Americans, to clothe them with dignity, but not out of some universal moral imperative, but because this is what we do with the stranger in need—this is what our tradition dictates. But there is also the fact that the reason why they are wandering the woods is because other traditions that define our national identity are to blame for their misery. Free market capitalism, consumerism, greed, and the globalizing aspirations of American foreign policy—along with corruption and ambition of foreign leaders ready and willing to reap the benefits of “agreements”—contribute to the destruction of traditions, self-sufficiency, and misery in communities not our own. If we are to clothe the wandering in dignity, then, it is done not only because it is part of our traditions that we do this, but also because our loyalties have expanded to include those whom our own traditions have harmed. In either case, taking the stranger in is something we do *because* we are North American. Thus Rorty says that we, in our relationship with others outside the confines of our community, should be “more frankly ethnocentric, and less professedly universalist” (2010, 443).

#### IV. Conclusion

Ultimately, if we take a Rortian standpoint, acceptance of the immigrant other is not based on a universal moral obligation justified by appeal to reason or a sense of justice; it is justified by what we do and have always done, by values internal to our traditions and our way of life, by aspirations that we might not always meet, but toward which we strive—by trust and loyalty. Rorty’s point is that loyalty to one’s community, and thus, to one’s traditions, has more force than any one ahistorical imperative. Nativism forgets those traditions, or dismisses them as “unpatriotic,” suggesting that the stranger, the non-citizen other or the immigrant, deserves little to no compassion, since, as criminal trespassers they stand outside the realm of law, rights, and loyalties.

However, the nativist, i.e., the conservative, might object that Rorty’s call to “clothe the other in dignity” is, indeed, a case of justifying helping the stranger by appeal to the heart—to empathy and certain “liberal” sentiments regarding the poor and the

helpless. If such is the case, it is Rorty himself who is going against the most important tradition, presumably the tradition of liberalism that holds that what is right is what is rational, that what should be done at any given time is what is most beneficial to our national interests. But Rorty's stand against traditional conceptions of justice is precisely a response to the view that what is right is what is rational; his point is that feeling and sentiment, loyalty and trust, are better suited to dictate that which is right. Moreover, what if accepting the stranger is, in fact, what is most beneficial to our national interests, to our own traditions? My view is that dignity is what we *gain* when we help the stranger; that perhaps our liberal traditions don't have it in them to bestow such dignity. That is, it could be the case that it is the stranger's tradition that tells her that dignity should always be expected—that respect and love for others is the norm. If such is the case, then it is our traditions that benefit with every step we take to correct the damage they have caused through neglect or aggression. Put differently, accepting the immigrant other can only strengthen our traditions and, in so doing, make us better citizens and better human beings. We can then agree with Alasdair MacIntyre conclusion in "Relativism, Power, and Philosophy" when he writes that "every tradition must from the point of view of its own problematic view itself as to some degree inadequate....[and it] may at any time prove to be such that perhaps only the resources provided by some quite alien tradition...will enable us to identify and to understand the limitations of our own traditions" (1989, 408). But these are reflections for another time.

My point has not been not to make a caricature out of the immigration phenomenon by couching it in the mythology of ancient Mexico. My point has been to highlight the fact that immigration is not just a political or social problem, but a problem encompassing the entire human experience, including the historical, philosophical, and mythological imaginary. Inherent in Rorty's defense of the postmodern liberal bourgeoisie's way of doing things is a call to meet the standards of its own traditions, to be loyal and faithful to its history or the values of its history, and to treat others with dignity and respect, as those traditions dictate; but more importantly, to take responsibility, as citizens, for the terror and devastation that oftentimes are a consequence of our most central beliefs. This means, of course, that anti-immigrant nativism should be condemned not only on the basis of its hatred of the unknown but also on the basis of its place (or lack of place) within certain traditions that we, as a society, are privileged to uphold. Welcoming the immigrant other falls within the tradition that values invention and entrepreneurship, the tradition that values respect for the strange and the new, and the tradition that tells us that caring for others makes us better citizens and better human beings. Even loyalty to the tradition of liberalism, which calls for self-sufficiency and personal responsibility, would demand that we take responsibility for what that tradition has accomplished—the good and the bad, its accomplishments and its failings. This means that if we can't rebuild temples our traditions have destroyed, then the best we can do is accept responsibility and clothe those fleeing it in human dignity and respect.

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## Notes

[1] Aviva Chomsky equates “nativism” with “anti-immigrant nativism,” describing nativist as those who are “worried that immigrants would fail to assimilate, would undermine the perceived linguistic, cultural, and racial homogeneity of the country, would take American jobs, and would lower wages,” as well as bring diseases and a criminal element into the country (Chomsky 2007, xiv-xv).

[2] Rorty’s critique of justice is not a critique of justice as such, but rather of the theory of justice inherited from Enlightenment rationalism. Exemplified in Kant, the view here is that justice “springs from reason” and is thus universalizable to all human kind, in spite of cultural or historical contingencies that might make some communities different from others. The insistence that justice is rooted in reason is a result of West’s self-conceit, the thought that it alone can say what is reasonable or what is not. As he puts it, “I think it is better not to say that the liberal West is better informed about rationality and justice, and instead say that, in making demands on nonliberal societies, it is simply being true to itself” (Rorty 2010, 437). Such impositions, as the imposition of the liberal conception of justice, are unnecessary when we think of justice as loyalty and loyalty something that can be enhanced to include all of humanity.

[3] By “death procedures,” I mean to refer to the fact that the migration north is usually undertaken under the threat of death, either by exhaustion, dehydration, human traffickers, the cruel terrain, or drug cartels. For instance, the National Foundation for American Policy found that deaths along the Mexico-US border rose 27% in 2012, despite the fact that fewer people were crossing that particular year. In 15 years, 5,500 immigrants lost their life (Anderson 2013).

[4] Not everyone agrees that NAFTA had a direct influence on the ruin of Mexican corn farmers. Speaking of the price of Mexican corn after NAFTA, The World Bank Group noted in 2004 that “subsidized corn coming into Mexico from the US after NAFTA had no measurable impact on the Mexican price [of corn] that was any different before NAFTA” (Fiess & Lederman 2004, 4; my emphasis). This conclusion appears to fly in the face of a contemporaneous report by International Relations Center which, also in 2004, concludes that since NAFTA, Mexican states with the highest concentration of

corn production “have the highest incidence of poverty,” suggesting, of course that corn production and price have something to do with that (Henriques and Patel 2004, 3). My point, however, is not to speculate on whether or not NAFTA impacted the price of corn, but how NAFTA became a catalyst for the inevitable migration north that came with the loss of food self-sufficiency.

[5] According to the International Relations Center, in 2002, for instance, US farmers in received a total of \$18 billion in subsidies while accounting for about 3% of the total US labor force. Mexican farmers, on the other hand, received US \$9 billion in subsidies while its labor force accounts for 8% of the total population! (Henriques & Patel 2004, 3-4).

[6] Robert Brandom, in his Introduction to *Rorty and his Critics*, reports that Rorty’s use of this phrase, both in the title and as a term signifying Western liberals of the postmodern persuasion, was “tongue in cheek” s (2000, xvi).

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