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Understanding and Combating Today's Racisms by Studying History. The Responsibility of Intercultural Education

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ABSTRACT: *The paper argues that intercultural education must assume a specific and explicit responsibility into an anti-racist direction, as a necessary response to the serious problems that the different forms of racism and discrimination cause in social living and in the open and positive development of individual and group identities. Above all we try to focus on the importance of the study of racisms in history to understand today's racist phenomena or the racist components of different phenomena as a basis for the anti-racist intercultural commitment.*

KEYWORDS: *Racism, History, Intercultural education, Anti-racism*

1. Introduction: The importance of recognising racism and the non-existence of human race

This essay begins by confirming the importance of studying racism throughout history in order to understand it today, and thus in relation to intercultural, anti-racist education and pedagogy. And although studying history is certainly useful to those who carry it out, it is also important not to underestimate how knowledge of specific historical elements can – and should – be used. In the perspective presented here, it is even more relevant to focus on what this study may be used for, particularly in relation to intercultural education and pedagogy aimed at combating racism.

The elements considered herein emerge from the identification of a selection of past phenomena which can be referred to in terms of racism, and from

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a focus on their underlying mindset and goals. Although not exhaustive, this analysis is important in terms of historical knowledge. Yet it also serves to equip ourselves with tools that will help us identify racist phenomena or racist components of phenomena outside of the contemporary era, and thus help us define anti-racism efforts that are effective in today's world.

The words of Luigi Luca Cavalli-Sforza, the internationally renowned and recently deceased scholar who was known for his studies of migration and the genetics of various populations, provide insight as to the importance of discussing these topics: «I believe that racism is the most relevant social illness, the one that makes the coexistence mechanisms of human communities even more problematic» (Cavalli-Sforza and Padoan, 2013: 3). One issue that we can merely mention (as a crucial prerequisite but not the targeted subject of our study) regards the unfortunate presence in society as a whole, and therefore within schools and other educational settings, of prejudice, negative stereotypes, intolerance and sometimes even aggressive behaviour in relation to the cultural and/or somatic differences of those who are perceived as 'foreign'. Various studies (and countless news stories) demonstrate how adults and children with darker skin tones are often the victims of discrimination when interacting with adults – but also among children. In terms of individual identity, racism is a serious obstacle to the full realisation of a person and his/her potential. Starting with the studies conducted in the United States in the 1940s by Clark and Clark (1950), for example, it has been demonstrated that children with darker skin tones internalise a negative image of themselves and their ethnic group as a result of the low value that the dominant group assigns them. Recent studies in Italy have come up with similar results (Cardellini, 2018a; 2018b; Frisina, 2018; Lorenzini, 2013; 2017; 2018; Vaccarelli, 2008). For this reason, an anti-racist perspective should be of interest to the entire educational system, but especially intercultural pedagogy.

The French philosopher, expert in racism, and historian of ideas Pierre-André Taguieff (1997) focused on the need to and possibility of analysing the phenomena of racism throughout history to obtain the tools necessary to understand racism today. After all, this chameleon-like phenomenon, with its many faces and components, does not only concern the past. However, as many scholars have noted, though racism certainly exists, one cannot say the same about race, understood as different, distinct 'species' of humans. Throughout

his career, including in the recent essay written with Holocaust expert Daniela Padoan, Cavalli-Sforza demonstrated the biological non-existence of different races and the scientific groundlessness of the concept of race to begin with. The idea that races – plural – do not exist and that there is only one race, the human race, has been around for quite some time. Alberto Burgio, with a history of philosophy background, and Guido Barbujani, another Italian geneticist, each have published works on the matter with rather clear titles: *L'invenzione delle Razze. Studi su razzismo e revisionismo storico* [The invention of race. Studies on racism and historic revisionism] (Burgio, 1998) and *L'invenzione delle razze. Capire la biodiversità umana* [The invention of race. Understanding human biodiversity] (Barbujani, 2006). Different races, therefore, exist only as symbolic constructs, i.e. to the degree to which they have been invented. They did not pre-date racism; it was racism to create them. And that creation came about in a specific historical period, in specific places and in specific cultures. This is not to say that differences between human beings do not exist. To the contrary, it is important to remember that they exist both on a cultural level, be they somatic and visible or genetic and invisible, and that thanks to such multiform diversity, *Homo sapiens* has been able to adapt and prosper in drastically different environments. However, the diffusion of such differences takes on variable, unpredictable trajectories. Because static, unchanging cultures impermeable to exchanges, interbreeding and transformations do not exist, genetic differences are diffused within populations and, as Barbujani and Cheli (a journalist and author) wrote, «The vast majority of variations in DNA are well-travelled, i.e. present in varying frequencies, across all continents» (2008: 76). Differences are minimal between different groups of people, and no greater than those that can be found within the same group of humans. Burgio and historian Gianluca Gabrielli specified: «An analysis of genetic heritage demonstrates similarities in morphologically distant populations and diversity within groups of humans with a similar phenotype, demonstrating that the vast majority of genes provide variability between individuals, not between so-called races» (2012: 61). For example, two 'pure-bred' Bologna residents (meaning their families have lived there for generations), may have markedly greater genetic differences than those identifiable between a Bologna native and a Rwandan (Burgio, 2012). Barbujani and Cheli also point out: «Our natural history has not been marked by the separation of small, isolated groups, but rather by the exchange between rap-

idly-growing populations scattered throughout the entire planet» (2008: 77). All humans are interfertile and their genes can be fruitfully intermixed. If a European person needs a blood transfusion, someone from Africa, China, New Zealand, or wherever else may save his life, while blood from another person of European origin may be harmful if not compatible (in the same way that an SS member could have saved a Jew, or a Palestinian can save an Israeli).

It is impossible to draw a clear, definitive line between groups, just as it is impossible to find a scientific basis for the superior-inferior hierarchy of those groups. In short, all past or present structures and opinions founded on 'race' are entirely invalid. «Today we have the genetic proof of our common ancestry in Africa, and we know that it makes no sense to express ourselves in terms of race, but rather that we come from ethnic groups, as marked by different climatic and cultural influences. Yet racism endures. A paradoxical kind of racism, without races!» (Cavalli-Sforza and Padoan, 2013: XIII). Racism itself is in fact the trigger for the process of racialising the 'other'. In order to justify racist ideology, different human groups have been seen as separate, distinct races, organised and judged in terms of a hierarchy, assigning more or less value to certain physical, mental and cultural traits said to be invariable and genetically inherited within that group. The word 'ethnicity', more acceptable socially and preferred among the scientific and academic community in Italy, does not seem to have completely replaced the word 'race' in everyday speech, even if that latter seems increasingly taboo and even if authoritative scholars have been calling for its abolition. In my opinion, the word 'race' remains insidious because it is loaded with negative connotations that have appeared over time and which still remain. Therefore, its use risks perpetuating the derogatory content that underlies collective beliefs connected to the ranking of human races, which in turn has been used to dehumanise and subjugate some to the benefit of others. On the other hand, whatever word is used – race, ethnicity, ethnic group – if we continue to believe that they correspond to a group of biologically homogeneous individuals who share psychological and moral characteristics, religious tendencies and lifestyles that are entirely rooted in their DNA, we are simply repeating the same fundamental error, as these homogeneous blocks simply do not exist among humans (Barbujani, 2008). In a linear, meaningful way, Tahar Ben Jelloun (1997) tells his 10-year-old daughter that there is only one human species, which includes men and women, people of different skin colours, short

and tall, and different, varied personalities, and suggests referring to the existence of the various groups that it is composed of.

Though not entirely doing away with the word 'ethnicity', which is less loaded with negative connotations compared to 'race', and considering it better suited to conveying the potential biological and cultural differentiations and intersections within each group of humans, one can share with Barbujani the opportunity to talk about populations or groups that make up the human species according to Jelloun's definition. It is undeniable that words matter and are not neutral, just as there is no doubt that race does not exist in a biological sense, though racism and racial discrimination certainly do, along with their destructive impact on society and individual and group identities. It is thus necessary to understand how to identify racist phenomena and racist components of other phenomena.

2. Learning from history to understand contemporary racism

2.1. *Historical phenomena that can be defined as 'racism'*

To focus on aspects that help us learn from history to better understand contemporary life, I will outline the perspectives of authoritative scholars, especially Pierre André Taguieff. It is important to note that referring to past events does not mean that the phenomena of today are directly or clearly traceable or even similar to them. Things are much more complicated than that. However, it is crucial to learn from history, taking elements that provide potential insight that will help us when trying to decipher present-day phenomena, though not definitive or applicable to every situation. It is also important to remember that pedagogy is an autonomous field related to different disciplines from which to collect data, processing said information according to our own purposes (Mariani, 2006). This is equally and particularly true for intercultural pedagogy which, in its goal of embracing pluralism, complexity and multiple points of view, must accept the vast variety of knowledge in existence while also directing it in an educational sense through pedagogical intentionality and specific educational purposes. To understand the various phenomena of racism, we must tap into the knowledge and analyses coming from non-pedagogical fields, without los-

ing sight of the question of what its purpose is on an intercultural pedagogical and educational level.

That said, let's examine a few historical phenomena. For example, in his hefty exploration of race, British historian Francisco Bethencourt starts from the premise that racism is «prejudice concerning ethnic decent coupled with discriminatory action» (2013: 1). He then continues to create a complex mapping of the forms that racism has taken on over the course of Western history from the Crusades to the twentieth century. Even Taguieff carried out an examination of the main manifestations of racism throughout history in the 1990s, trying to answer the question of *how can racist phenomena be characterised and identified?* Starting from that analysis, he proposed a way to understand the phenomenon, unpacking and specifying the elements that unite and distinguish different forms of racism. It is a path of particular interest on a speculative level and in terms of our knowledge of relevant historical phenomena. However, in relation to intercultural pedagogy in particular, *why head down such a path, starting by questioning the origins of racism? Why is it important to know that, according to some scholars, racism is to be understood as a universal phenomenon, part of human nature? What can come from the ethnocentrism that re-activates and exacerbates the self-preference of a group, hostility and contempt towards other groups and their cultural forms, and which overvalues its own customs, constructing a distinction between us and them, at times even dehumanising the other?* Why does it matter if we know that other scholars, such as Bethencourt (2013), reject the idea that racism is an innate quality shared by all human beings and that, like Tanguieff (1999), they consider this point of view to be unnecessarily reductionist, unable to grasp the historical culpability of racist thoughts and actions? According to the latter, that reduction tends to explain the multiplicity of racist social and political behaviours according to genetically determined frameworks, but it explains neither the specificity of the multiple racist expressions that have occurred throughout history nor does it address contemporary ethnonationalist movements. And, perhaps most importantly, it de-historicises racist manifestations, it strips their actors off responsibility, reducing the fight against racism to a battle against human nature. Bethencourt (2013) argues that each particular configuration of racism can be explained only within a precise historical context which must be studied over the long term. According to Taguieff (1997), even if racism re-activates ethnocentric attitudes, it cannot be reduced to the latter: racism is to be considered a West-

ern ideological and socio-political phenomenon that appeared in Europe and North and South America in the modern era, and is thus rooted in history. The importance that is also placed on the West in this analysis does not exclude the possibility of recognising racist phenomena in other contexts, though it follows the focus adopted by the leading scholars taken as reference points. Bethencourt explains: «I do not maintain that the reality of racism is exclusive to this part of the world; Europe simply provides a rather consistent setting that will be compared to other parts of the world where similar phenomena have manifested themselves» (2013: 1). We might ask if *attributing a central role to racisms in Europe and the West is not once again the expression of an ethnocentrist approach?* In my opinion, this hypothesis cannot be excluded. On the other hand, some scholars, such as French sociologist Michel Wieviorka (1998), reject the idea of racism as an anthropological constant and yet, even while recognising that the ideas and the practices to which the term refers are old and do not only regard the West (for example, the ancient Greeks considered the 'barbarians' – those external to the *polis* – to be inferior humans, and the phenomenon also exists in certain societies in Asia), they concentrate their analysis on Western, modern, individualistic societies whose development began in the late Middle Ages.

What we must highlight here is the importance of being aware that authoritative scholars have come to reject the thesis of racism as an innate characteristic shared by all people, an attitude that springs from their very nature, precisely by analysing phenomena that have emerged in precise historical periods and sociocultural contexts. That understanding counteracts the risk of slipping into a radically pessimist approach that would lead each attempt at anti-racism to an unfair fight against the inevitable, i.e. human nature and that which is considered consubstantial. A similar speculative approach founded on historic analysis may restore faith in the potential of not only legal consequences and/or sanctions towards those responsible for racism, but also (and especially) intercultural interventions that are preventive, pedagogical and educational.

So, which primary phenomena have been studied to identify racism throughout history? Tanguieff (1999) first contemplated the viewpoint that the theory of race preceded the emergence of racism. In the eighteenth and even nineteenth centuries in Europe, framed by the classifying thought of naturalists, hierarchical classifications of human races were formulated, understood as different and unequal versions of the same human species, based on visible, hereditary mor-

phological characteristics such as skin colour, height, skull shape, nose shape and hair type (Linné, Buffon, Camper). In these so-called 'scientific' taxonomies, not only do people and animals get lumped into the same classification in the zoological system, but humans are also divided into distinct, superior and inferior races, in contrast to the biblical vision of monogenism that says all humans are created by the same God and thus beings of an exceptional status in that they have been made in His image. During the innovation and revolt against Christianity of the Enlightenment, as the German-born, American-naturalised historian George L. Mosse (1978; ital. transl. 1992) explains, an elite group of intellectuals tried to replace the superstitions of the past with the values of reason and human virtue. Although under attack, Christianity proved to be incredibly dynamic, urging the creation of a community founded on the concept of brotherhood. «[…] racism had its roots both in the Enlightenment and in the religious reawakening of the eighteenth century. […] Despite its aversion to Christianity, the Enlightenment couldn't do without a God who organised man, morality and the universe into one great plan» (*ibidem*: 7). According to Enlightenment thinkers, understanding God's universe meant also seeing man as an integral part of nature, a link on the 'chain of being'. «The powerful myth of the 'chain of being' explains why scientists are so worried about finding the 'missing link' of the creation that unites man and animals in an unbroken chain of life» (*ibidem*: 8). And, in the eighteenth century, despite the fact that classifications of human races all vary from each other in some respects, they almost all connected the animal with the highest ranking, the monkey, to the human with the lowest ranking, the black man (*ibidem*).

Even in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, scientific communities in Europe were home to the publication of classifications of 'human races' in which the causal relationship between race and culture, race and civilisation and race and intelligence is affirmed in a more direct manner. According to the pseudo-science theories of biological determinism, not only in terms of phenotype traits, but also the mental and moral traits which were considered unchangeable and hereditary, 'certain races' were assigned permanent, definitive inferiority that would forever block them from reaching the supposedly elevated levels of civilisation of the races which were considered superior.

It is particularly interesting to note how, in the different classifications, the person creating the ranking himself is always at the top, along with the group

he belongs to. Meanwhile, black people always occupy the lowest rung of the latter, the missing link between man and the great apes, excluded from human progress and civilisation, imperfect and unable to be freed from their sub-human nature (Taguieff, 1997).

Being aware of this helps us focus on a crucial component of racism: the arbitrariness and instrumentality with which human hierarchies (be they genetic or cultural) have been formulated and invented.

Scholars such as Mosse maintain that «the cradle of modern racism was eighteenth-century Europe, whose main cultural currents had an enormous influence on the very foundations of racist thought» (1978; ital. transl. 1992: 5). Others such as Taguieff (1997), despite recognising that human race taxonomies provided racism with a 'scientific' cover and played a significant role in spreading ideologism in the twentieth century, feeding into Nazism and Fascism, do not however think that they could be considered the root of modern racism tout court. Instead, they point to forms of pre-racism (or proto-racism) that existed before – and independently of – the appearance of classifications of different 'human races'. Forms of social exclusion (segregation, discrimination) or domination (colonialism, slavery) emerged in the fifteenth century, based on an obsession with the loss of 'pure blood' due to 'inter-racial' marriages. Their 'mixed' offspring were in fact seen as degrading the entire superior group. There is no shortage of examples on the subject: the invention of the blood purity myth in Spain and Portugal; the European legitimisation of slavery and colonial exploitation of non-white populations; the French aristocratic 2-race doctrine (bloodline, lineage) relating to relationships between the Franks, the conquerors, and the Gauls, the conquered.

For example, let's consider what happened in the Iberian Peninsula, in what was known as the Golden Age (between the late fifteenth and mid sixteenth centuries) – a period of great cultural, political and military change. Despite religious orthodoxy teaching the unity of humankind beyond biological and cultural differences, and welcoming the conversion of non-Christians (considered non-believers) to Christianity, statutes of purity of blood where created, taking aim against the descendants of the Moors (Muslims) and especially against Jews. That is, in the fifteenth century, discriminatory legislation was enacted that was no longer founded on purity of faith, but upon *limpieza del sangre* (see also: Morin, 2005), creating true racial barriers between 'us' and 'them'. The institu-

tionalisation of the myth of purity of blood resulted in the recycling of anti-Semitic stereotypes and prejudices that originated in the Middle Ages (e.g. Jews are traitors, conspirators and predators). It also made it possible to perpetrate a system of exclusion from public office, university roles, and brotherhoods in relation to those who, as descendants of Jews, have been stigmatised and excluded for their presumed impure blood, even after their conversion to Christianity. This proto-racist doctrine combined with discrimination and marginalisation had a specific social function: it legitimised the exclusion of a part of the population, not on the basis of skin colour, but according to the idea of blood that is impure and bad by nature (Taguieff, 1997; 2015). The invention of the blood purity myth created an ideological foundation that served the interests and privilege of a Catholic-monarchic society.

It can be added, simplifying, that in the case of the colonial domination of black populations, inferiorised and relegated to sub-human conditions, racist ideology was instrumental to the legitimisation of exploitation and of the resulting economic benefits for the dominating group. Nazi anti-Semitism in the twentieth century fed into the image of Jews as a 'demonic other', legitimising the annihilation and extermination of those deemed to be the absolute enemy. We can thus see how the inferiority or the danger of the other, legitimising exclusion, exploitation, persecution and even total destruction (depending on the case), is structured within ideological configurations that are arbitrarily invented by humans in a certain historic era, geographic context and social-cultural climate. And according to the interests of some, at the expense of others. One of the important conclusions of Bethencourt's (2013) far-reaching analysis led him to confirm that, historically speaking, racism has always been motivated by political plans.

This analysis is helpful in reminding us of a few necessary questions when facing different forms of discrimination: *what is the point of marginalising and excluding the other? Whose interests does it serve? What impact does it have on those who are discriminated against?*

2.2. *Distinguishing traits common to different forms of racism*

Studying specific moments in history also serves to break down and clarify the various pieces that make up the phenomena of racism. Taguieff (1997) devel-

oped his analysis as a way to interpret racism that highlights differences and common points.

Considering the differences, we learn that racism is not a singular, monotone phenomenon. Instead, it is expressed on multiple levels: attitudes (prejudices, stereotypes, opinions, beliefs, dispositions); behaviours (actions, practices, institutions); ideological constructions (theories, doctrines linked to writers and worldviews). These levels can be interconnected or independent from one another, as one level can exist without the other. For example, a racist prejudice may not lead to discriminatory actions/persecution, and racist behaviours do not necessarily correspond with an explicit theory organised into portrayals and beliefs. It is also possible to distinguish between ordinary racist ideas (common, based on a collection of portrayals, conscious or not, that are not worked into doctrine but which hinge on a principle shared by doctrinal racism: us vs. them) and doctrinal racism (organised into theories with argumentative force). We can also distinguish between biological racism (classic or scientific), that begins with physical features to create unequal categories of people, and cultural racism (neo-racism and pseudo-racism), which is based on the categorisation of cultural traits (clothing, language, religion, etc.). Whether one refers to biological-racial elements or to ethnic-cultural elements, the clear separation of us vs. them, between races or cultures, is established. And on the basis of one or the other, the characteristics attributed to the individuals they represent are dictated. It is also necessary to distinguish between: exploitative racism (colonial, slavery, imperialism that enacts inequality between superior and inferior races, de-humanising the so-called inferior races by legitimising the profit deriving from their exploitation) and the racism of extermination (anti-Semitism and genocide, establishing a group of people as a vessel of contagious evils leading to an obsession with mixed blood and the legitimisation of attempts at annihilation). Lastly, there is a difference between universalist racism (based on contempt and aversion to difference) and differentialist racism (which absolutises identity and ethnic, cultural and national identity to the point of in-communicability and denial of common humanity) (Tanguieff, 1999: 55-61).

Among the points shared by different forms of racism are cognitive characteristics that imply at least three recurrent actions. Categorisation reduces identities and subjects each individual to processes of dis-individualisation that, concealing the individual's characteristics, turn him into a representative of the

group that he is believed to be part of and the characteristics that are (arbitrarily) attributed to it. This makes the difference between distinct groups of humans absolute, as it is seen as an insuperable destiny. Stigmatisation occurs when the individual and the group are assigned negative, unchangeable traits, signs of impurity so advanced that they make others impure, contaminating them, just by contact. This leads to the symbolic exclusion of the categorised: stereotypes and prejudices that affirm their dangerous nature, feeding into racist propaganda, create an enemy and shape popular opinion. Barbarisation is when certain groups of people and their members are considered unequal, unable to be civilised, educated and thus assimilated. In other words, they are carriers of negative differences from which to protect oneself. Lastly, practical-social characteristics imply at least five types of action: segregation (marginalisation); discrimination (unequal treatment based on racial origin, ethnicity, nationality or cultural belonging); expulsion (of those deemed undesirable, unsuitable or dangerous); persecution (use of violence against members of a group, not for what they do or do not do, but based simply on their belonging to that group); and extermination (i.e. genocide) (*ibidem*: 63-68).

The operation of breaking down the elements that make up different forms of racism is necessary in order to find the best tools with which to identify and combat racism in the present.

3. The basis of anti-racism

What should we keep in mind when seeking to combat racism in a way that will be effective today? It is necessary to know and try to understand racism in light of the fact that the phenomena attributed to it continue to give rise of problems of definition. For that reason, we must not dilute the concept of racism too much, extending it indefinitely, but we also must not limit ourselves to such a narrow definition that stops us from identifying current forms or, to an even greater degree, the single racist components of different phenomena. With 'racism', we cannot simply refer to the existence of a homogeneous, invariable, easily recognised entity that, according to a precise definition, someone might try to eradicate. To understand racism today, we have to remember that multiple racisms exist, and that racist ideas adapt to different contexts, they change according to

their targets, interests, methods and argumentative forms. It is necessary to carry out careful diagnoses to identify the new argumentative and practical-social forms that aren't always evident to inexpert or unaccustomed eyes. Anti-racism must also consider the fact that new racists may not resemble those of the past (Taguieff, 1997). However, strictly in regards to today, events which can be tied to those of the past seem to be increasing (e.g. the large number of migrants who have died in the Mediterranean Sea being called a new Holocaust). In the 1990s, Taguieff cautioned against the expectation of identifying forms of pure racism, as racism is increasingly masked and/or a part of other phenomena. In other words, it is rarer and rarer for it to come in the shape of explicit theories or sensational acts accompanied by claims or demands. Yet, in the current stage, we are still seeing changes to the way racism is expressed: though forms of disguise that we must analyse critically remain, there is also a proliferation of evident, violent and potentially illegal manifestations that are marked by insults and injury, and loaded with hate. If, up until recently, the expression of racism often seemed to take the form of compromise between hostile drives and respect for anti-racist norms internalised through education, today it seems that manifestations of hate often override such censorship. In these cases, it should be easier to identify and sanction those responsible. Nevertheless, the level of habituation or even legitimisation of intensified hostility towards certain people or groups seems to have risen, as demonstrated by the number of racist actions perpetrated against those with dark skin tones that increasingly appear in the pages of various newspapers (Lorenzini, 2018). It is thus necessary to persist in our attempts to redefine the phenomenon in its multiple aspects, accepting the indeterminacy of its content, following the paths of its recontextualisation, recognising points of contact, interweaving and overlapping between phenomena indicated by different terms (racism, ethnocentrism, xenophobia, ethnicism, anti-Semitism) in which it is possible to recognise racism or racist components. Still in search of answers to the question of 'what is racism'? Taguieff identifies a common thread (which seems very useful today) in the definition proposed by Colette Guillaumin (1972). The recently-deceased French sociologist and feminist stated that racism can be defined as all attitudes of exclusion tied to elements of genealogy, origin, and morphological and phenotype characterisation that appears to be permanent.

These brief yet precise clarifications help us understand how, today, one of the most common reactions against the mobility of human beings and their

mixing together (i.e. migration), one which aims to 'put the individuals who have left their group category *back in their place*' (Taguieff, 1997), corresponds to an attitude that we can rightly call racist, especially since it is intertwined with discriminatory practices regulated by legal specifications. One focal point of the racist imagination lies in none other than the obsession with the blending of peoples, in the fear of the loss of identity along with privilege, that can go so far as to discriminate by law. Under a right-wing, souverainist government that was in power in Italy for 18 months (lasting until August 2019), we witnessed the approval of discriminatory laws against those who try to immigrate, risking their own lives and those of their children, and also the criminalisation of solidarity and rescue, by sea or by land. These increasingly visible forms of intolerance and violence have come forth in a historical and political period in which, in Italy and beyond, extreme right movements are attempting to take root by leveraging the force of hate and contempt, aggression and over-simplification ('help them in their own homelands'). This sort of decline of the civil conscience isn't new and it didn't appear out of thin air, or even all of a sudden. Instead, it is a complex process intertwined with economic crises and social discontent. It is, however, making an appearance with new faces while gaining greater intensity (Lorenzini, 2018). Likewise, we can't simply sit back and hope that it has dissolved into thin air with the recent changes in political leadership.

Another substantial aspect to consider in this reflection echoes a statement by Albert Memmi, a Parisian anthropologist who was born in Tunisia to Jewish parents: «racism is a lived experience» (1982; ital. transl. 1989: 20) combining motivations that at times are unconscious, 'good reasons' that are legitimising for the racist, instrumentalised conversational practices, emotions, beliefs and interests linked to institutional and political contexts, and discriminatory social practices (Taguieff, 1997). Attempts at intellectual comprehension, as indispensable as they are, can produce incomplete and insufficient results, precisely because racism isn't just a problem that has to do with ideas (which have to be known and understood), but is one that must, imperatively, be contrasted through action. The effectiveness of the strategies adopted will become the provisional criterion for choices that should aim to protect the right to difference and the need for equity (combining, on a theoretical level, the needs of universalism and of belonging to a common humanity with those of ethno-pluralism and the protection of different identities).

On a practical level, we must remember that theoretical difficulties must be put aside (*ibidem*) in favour of assuming responsibility and taking concrete actions that do without searching for overly simplistic, definitive solutions while remaining faithful to the concrete contexts within which they develop.

4. Conclusions to start from: Intercultural pedagogy and education, and anti-racist efforts

Efforts to combat racism should have multiple distinct and/or contextual levels of expression, inside and outside of the political system and the state, as part of public authorities and civil society, actively involving individuals who are the targets of racism but also those who aren't directly involved, coming up with laws and policies inspired by the spirit of democracy and values aimed at the extension of human rights, strengthening and perfecting a judicial system equipped with punitive tools that make it possible to combat the phenomenon effectively, and not only in its macroscopic, destructive aspects (Wieviorka, 1998). But to take deep, meaningful, preventive action with potentially long-term results, it is necessary (including across each of the levels mentioned) to change the way people think, seeing to the breaking down of stereotypes and prejudices, and encouraging the growth of sympathetic, non-violent relational abilities while remaining aware of the potential conflict in each encounter/clash between different people. In particular, this hefty task is the responsibility of intercultural pedagogy and education, within the wide range of schools and other educational settings in existence. Here it is confirmed that intercultural pedagogy and education can make use of anti-racist pedagogical approaches (Aluffi Pentini and Lorenz, 1995), but also that they must intrinsically assume a specific, explicit responsibility for anti-racist efforts. Anna Aluffi-Pentini (2002) has already stated how anti-racism and interculturalism require one another, placing anti-racism as a veritable element of verification for intercultural approaches that hone our focus on and sensitivity to a problematic issue represented by forms of discrimination that may be manifested even within educational settings, and with regard to unequal balances of power that can arise in a class, in relation to the visible or invisible differences that characterise diverse individuals. Milena Santerini (2003) has confirmed that intercultural education

must include an anti-racist aspect, without which it would be based on naive pedagogical inspirations, lacking contact with the problems of discrimination. In a discussion dedicated to the role of education in tackling racism through intercultural dialogue, Alessandro Vaccarelli (2008) confirms the need to make school a symbolic and concrete place of recognition, appreciation and exchange of cultural and individual diversity. His work focuses on the obligation to deal with and look racism in the face, even in terms of knowledge of history, as a necessary step in identifying outlooks and strategies for action. We must therefore develop a kind of intercultural pedagogy that grapples with awareness of racist phenomena, including historical roots and evolutions, socio-political aspects, frequent targets, objectives, mechanisms and components that contain the critical tools required to identify problems of a racist nature when they come up, no matter how masked or explicit, subtle or violent they are. In addition, we must come up with and implement intercultural education that is aware of the impact of discrimination on individual and group identities in particular. It must then include the formulation of strategies to prevent and combat racism in order to develop flexible thinking that is open to comparison, and the creation of welcoming relational settings that are the context for interaction and democratic coexistence.

The reference criteria and tools of intercultural pedagogy can indicate ways and means to be pursued within concrete educational settings, with the actual people we find ourselves working with, and with educational responsibility. Due to their characteristics and purposes, the principles and mindsets of intercultural pedagogy already contain the potential to contrast close-minded, stereotyped and racist thinking. This starts with the facilitation of the development of flexible open-minded, complicated and anti-dogmatic thinking because, as Franca Pinto Minerva (2002), himself a migrant, has said, it is able to move away from its own cognitive, values-based framework. It's a mindset willing to move towards the other that is reflected in diversified cultural references, to discover respective differences and also points in common, and, as such, take advantage of discussion and the transformative enrichment that it can generate. Welcoming differences and pluralism, actualising active tolerance, dialogue and listening with reciprocity and respect for different identities as the main criteria of reference of intercultural pedagogy (Bolognesi and Lorenzini, 2017) pave the way for encounters between differences and, most importantly, different people.

However, these paths must not be exempted from facing the thorniest aspects of conflict and feelings of hostility (Morin, 2014), and even hatred, that coexistence in the same social, educational and scholastic setting can generate among people with different lifestyles and cultural models.

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