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# “WE DON’T KNOW THEM!”

## RACISM AND MIGRATION – IDEAS AND NOTES<sup>1</sup>

### In Portugal:

- Immigrants are 5% of population
- Immigrants constitute 11% of the working population
- Immigrants come from more than 180 countries

### Portugal –2001 Census counting:

- A total of 86.140 classic immigrant families with a total of 229.577 people, of which only 20,7% are women
- 729 stateless people
- Only 258.584 (legal) immigrants in 10.356.117 people (2,49%)
- Of these, 49.320 come from European Union countries (0,19%)
- 347.636 Portuguese born in other countries (and therefore ex-immigrants)
- 54.178 people living in other countries on December 31<sup>st</sup> 1999 were living in Portugal in 2001
- Of these, only 237 (0,43%) are non-paid workers

### Something has to be wrong:

Brazil - Non-caucasians are almost ½ of the population... almost all are poor

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South Africa - Only 15% are caucasian... almost all the non-caucasian are poor

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USA – 13% of the population is Afro-American... these 13% are 33% of the poor population in USA

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### Racism:

- Is not constituted only in direct violence, with death and blood
- Is not exercised only by one individual or by a restricted group
- Does not only involve young caucasian males
- Does not happen only ‘there, far away’
- Includes entire countries and whole society that in great ways serve as a support and instruments to reproduce racism
- Is also the cause of poverty, exclusion and impoverishment of cultures and people
- Is deeply rooted and disseminated invisibly in all dimensions of our life
- Is taught to us at home, in school, on TV, in the streets
- Serves the interests, benefices and privileges of some, and, therefore, there is not always a will to change
- Victories over racism and the changes we’re meeting today as models were very hard to achieve and have cost a lot of many pain and casualties
- Is one of the several oppressions that serve the interests of caucasian, male and rich people
- In parallel to racism there is sexism, xenophobia, colonialism, and all have to be eradicated simultaneously

***The only race is the human race***

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<sup>1</sup> This text and some figures were given during a debate in ESEC – Superior School of Education of Coimbra, the 6<sup>th</sup> of March 2004, after seeing the movie “Forbidden America”

*(...) by chance, it happens that all those who are sure to be white or non-blacks, or vice-versa (...), are throwing out conversation. From the genetic point of view, in almost absolute ways the only thing that any racist can be sure of is that he is a human being. (...) to belong to a biological race is to belong to a population that exhibits a specific frequency of a certain kind of genes; individuals have only the human complement of the genes, in a very high number, however undiscovered, and the most of which is shared by all the people.*

*When a man says "I'm white", the only thing he can be communicating scientifically is that he belongs to a population that has been confirmed to have a high frequency of genes that determine light colour skin, thick lips, hairs in several parts of the body, average high and so forth. Given that the population to which he belongs is necessarily an hybrid population – in reality, all the human races are hybrid -, there is no way of making sure that this individual has any genetic heritage of other populations. (...)*

*So, all the caucasians could be well advised scientifically to say: "I'm probably in part black" and all black people could affirm with much exactitude: "I am probably in part white" (...). All racial identity, scientifically speaking, is ambiguous.*

Marvins Harris in *Patterns of race in the Americas*

## 1. WHERE COMES RACISM FROM

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The concept of race was created by the hand of European scientists that search – in the light of the illuminist reason – to explain, classify and make hierarchies or homogenise all that exists in this world.

Race is invented when Europeans meet other people. As we are afraid and suspicious of what we do not know (not making ourselves predisposed to know), these people were classified by their looks. To this classification, another classification was added – geographical classification. After creating the necessary conditions, they began to speculate about the hierarchy, superiority and value of each of these "discovered" races.

Strangely, these scientists concluded that the superior race was theirs, and gave by this way a superior justification (because science is the bigger reason, being allowed to go over respect and dignity) to the imperialism, colonialism, oppression and theft, that we know so well from our history.

From here on, it was only a step that took us to the inauguration of a social and legal order that makes inequality the principle of society organization and that makes pillage of the many a legitimate way of assuring the luxury of some.

## 2. WHERE MIGRATION COMES FROM

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Migration is one of the oldest phenomena in history of humanity. Migration is nothing more than a natural phenomenon of human mobility, consequence of the desire and need to better one's life and of its loved ones, or simply of the will to discover what is beyond our places.

Independently of having a more adventurous or a more surviving pressure as motivation, the migratory fluxes and migrants were always considered, throughout history, not only natural, as welcomed. The inversions of these positive values over the cultural exchange, hybridation and the difference only happen around the 15<sup>th</sup> century with the Jewish migration. They were soon understood as a challenge to the societies in general, due to their power and wealth, instead of simply being faced as always, as movements that can be provisory or permanent and are founded only in the search for better living conditions and integration in different communities.

On the other hand, it cannot be forgotten that it was this capacity of mobility, of change and adaptation that have allowed the survival of humanity since pre-historic time, allowing us to evolve and face climatic changes, wild animals, etc.

To migrate is much more than to be a lousy being coming from a lousy country that seeks to enter a rich country... each one of us can be and is a migrant, in a larger sense.

### 3. RACISM IS NOT ONLY "AN ATTITUDE OF THE HEART"

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Racism is not only an attitude problem of some people; racism is a structural, social and cultural problem. Racism manifests itself in the most diverse ways in the most diverse dimensions – in looks, language, unemployment, poverty, exclusion, political participation, education, in abandonment...

Racism is taught to us since our youth, in school, by family and friends, by television, by language! This racism, as mentioned, is important to maintain the privileges of few people, and, hence, these few manipulate also our thoughts and actions, convincing us of thousands of things, e.g., Arabs are terrorists, blacks are lazy, Ukrainians (because the majority of immigrants from eastern Europe are Ukrainians) are mafia people, etc.

Racism is more than to discriminate. It excludes, destroys, kills, impoverishes, and makes people sad. It denies the other in its individual and collective existence; it rejects its looks and its history, at the same time.

Even though we can easily recognize that diversity is a condition for the human existence, the truth is that this diversity is today constituted as a difference that founds and justifies oppression. We have to be able to make this diversity a difference that gives us value individually and collectively, because it makes us richer.

### 4. RACISM HAS SOMETHING TO DO WITH MIGRATION

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We know that racism has something to do with immigration, but, after all, what is a migrant? A migrant is solely a person that abandons its country, because there he does not have conditions to live. It is a person who fights for survival in another country that he knows to be more prosperous and offers an opportunity to have a life with dignity.

- . Why is it that this/these country(ies) cannot give to their people a life in dignity?
- . Why is it that migrants always come to the same countries?
- . Is it true that poorer countries do not have immigrants?
- . Could it be true that the ostentation that these "rich" countries do is not only intentional, but also offensive and appealing?

But not all non-caucasians are immigrants!

There are many daughters/sons of immigrants that, having the nationality of the hosting country (where they were born), they continue being treated as foreigners. Then there are those who never were immigrants because their families are fixed in the country, they have no memory of where they came from, neither the memory of when they came, if they came!

For instance, before the 25 April, the Portuguese revolution that installed democracy, everybody was Portuguese, under the colonialist empire: Angolans, East Timorese, Cape Verdians, San Tomese, Mozambicans, Portuguese! There had been already decades (or even centuries) that thousands of black people were living installed in Portugal, and thousands of caucasian people were installed in Africa and Asia. How to solve then the problem of nationalities that the new independences brought up... unfortunately, the right to choose or the *jus soli* principle did not prevail, the colour of skin prevailed to define new citizenships. Black people suddenly started being Africans and caucasian

people Portuguese! Imagine the dimension of this drama in peoples lives... suddenly every country was full of immigrants and undesirable strangers! The rest of the story does not need to be told!

Where is then, after all, the 'white human' supremacy and richness? The race supremacy is already proved to have been invented; second, richness, is a result of so much pillage and violence that is not only illegitimate, as it is unsustainable to think we can continue accepting and collaborating with this injustice.

What happens then to immigrants, women and men, and by consequence to all the non-caucasians? They have no vote, voice or job!

- . Because they do not have the right colour, they are often not accepted in the jobs they are looking for
- . Their competences, formal or informal, are not accepted or recognized, and are undervalued
- . Because they supposedly lack competences they are poorly paid, have no working conditions and no guaranties of social protection (3D Job – Dirty, Dangerous, Difficult)
- . In parallel, politically, they are taken out of the agenda, without power to vote or having access to political information, not able to put pressure on the state and its governors
- . All this without talking about legalisations, employments, finances, schools, that are highly bureaucratic and make everything difficult
- . Consequently, we see poor ghettos, with instable families and in misery, children that do not have conditions to go to school, and if so, they go with empty stomachs and cannot study, do not have social support, no respect and no friends.
- . Like this, it might not be difficult to verify and prove that a non-caucasian is poor and does not have education and that probably the only way they can live and eat is to be a thief.

## 5. BUT THERE IS MORE...

Racism has to be constantly watched because, as any other way of discrimination, it is so naturalized in cultures and history that it can always find new and more complex ways of manifesting itself, and therefore, becoming even more invisible.

Racism is only one of the expressions of imperialism, conquest and domination that many call as capitalist and sexist society. This theory being pertinent and apparently valid, I think it is worth it looking at it more carefully.

Patriarchy is the domination of the world by males and capitalism. This domination of the world by the accumulation of capital and goods needed throughout history, and needs more and more, to exclude groups and people of having power and voices on their lives. This means to deprive people of their way of survival and democracy, and dehumanise them or to deny them of their humanity.

- . Racism makes it over all human beings that have a colour which is not white;
- . Sexism does it over women;
- . Xenophobia makes it over people considered inferior or barbarian;
- . Adultocentrism makes it over children and youngsters;
- . Ethnocentrism or Occidentalism makes it over all other cultures;
- . Homophobia makes it over lesbians and gays
- . Legalism makes it over other forms of regulation of societies;

And so forth...

Coming to the end of this list we understand that 'poor and miserables' are all of these, and they make more than 80% of world's population. We also understand that very few are "able" to have power, money and human rights guaranteed: men, caucasian, heterosexual, rich and educated.

## 6. AND THERE ARE NO INNOCENTS

"Those who receive the benefits of the system, although they did not actively engage in discrimination, they are not innocent" (John A. Powell)

I would like to finish with this idea, because it is very common to think or say "I am not a racist, because..." or "racism is already a crime, what else is there to do" or "racism is on its way to extinction". However, this kind of positioning, besides being the easiest, is also a recurrent story that is taught to us as a way of being demobilized and not seeing or criticizing anymore what happens around us.

The truth is that "all of us individually end up building races everyday!"

We do it when:

- . We consume more than our part of the resources of this planet.
- . When we acquire goods that are ethnic and cultural, and sometimes with a fundamental value for many as exotic, strange and absolutely ordinary.
- . When we tell racist jokes (or other) and we laugh, because whether we believe it or not, are reproducing false arguments and teaching them to new generations, legitimizing them, humiliating someone, etc.
- . When we look attentively to someone that is coloured, because they are strange or exotic.
- . When avoid eye contact not to say hi or to touch someone that we say to be our friend or a known persons, because they are coloured.
- . When we refuse/avoid to meet someone that is coloured
- . When we try not to sit beside someone that is coloured in a bus or at a coffee
- . When we think that we and our countries and cultures are the best, and that the rest are delayed, poor and only good for tourism.
- . When we forget our past, which explains much of the present and imposes us to take a stand
- . When we are unable to imagine ourselves in an intimate and long-term relationship with someone who is coloured or when we are unable to imagine ourselves with a daughter/son with a colour that is not caucasian

This is only what we can do for to our world, loosing and wasting its diversity that is precisely what makes so beautiful.

Now add millions of people that are doing the same.

And add millions of people invested with political power, in government or cities, doing even more.

And finally add people invested with economic power, enterprises and employers, doing much more!

Now, is it that strange we are not happy and that there is no peace, only hatred?

Is it so strange to say that all of us have something to do for Another World that is Possible Here and Now?

AJP/Celina M. dos Santos – Dezembro de 2004

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