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Racism from above and racism from below: let's put the dots on the i's

There is no doubt that this example from above only encourages and legitimizes intolerance and racism "from below".



As a premise, it should be noted that the term "racism", in the singular, is preferable to "racisms", if we want to capture the unitary character of the concept, beyond the historical and empirical variations of the phenomenon. Paradoxically, to name such a system, we are obliged to use a motto whose etymology refers to the belief in the existence of "races", criticized and then abandoned by a good part of the same social and biological sciences that had contributed to its elaboration. "Race" is, in fact, a pseudo-category as unfounded as it is paradoxical, since it is based on the postulate that establishes a

deterministic relationship between somatic, physical and genetic characteristics and psychological, intellectual, cultural and social characteristics.

In short, racism can be defined as a system of beliefs, representations, norms, discourses, behaviors, practices, political and social acts, destined to devalue, stigmatize, discriminate, inferiorize, subordinate, segregate and persecute categories of altered people, and this until massacre and extermination.

I write "altered" because, in reality, the "color" or the actual cultural and/or social distance with the *we* are quite irrelevant in the choice of victims, as evidenced by the tragic history of anti-Semitism. The stigma applied to certain categories of people can be independent of any somatic, phenotypic, cultural or origin differences, being the result of a process of social, symbolic and political construction.



Vox's racist propaganda in Spain against unaccompanied foreign minors (MENA).

Suffice it to say that, in the variable geometry of Italian racism in recent decades, the role of scapegoats and targets of alarmist campaigns has been attributed, from time to time and among others, to Albanian immigrants, "eslav@s" and ruman@s, in that, until proven otherwise, they cannot be said to be "black", nor that they are alien to European history and culture.

Racism becomes systemic when it is directly or indirectly encouraged or legitimized by national and supranational institutions and the media. When the "spontaneous" intolerance towards certain groups or minorities, diffuse in society, is endorsed and legitimized by the institutions, including the European ones, and by the state apparatuses, as well as by propaganda and part of the information system, it is when the vicious circle of racism is triggered.

The system-racism is supported most of the time on symbolic, communicative and linguistic devices, which are capable of acting on the social, producing and reproducing discrimination and inequality. Above all, it is reproduced, confirmed and legitimized through a set of laws, norms, procedures and routine practices: what is known as institutional racism, which ends up generating not only discrimination, but also stratification of inequalities in terms of access to social, material and symbolic resources (status, citizenship, work, social services, education, knowledge, information ...).

In this sense, the case of institutional delegitimization, if not criminalization, is exemplary, not only of NGOs that carry out search and rescue work at sea, but of anyone who, even if it is on an individual basis, makes gestures of solidarity towards [l@s refugiad@s](#) and migrants. All this not to mention the contribution of Italian institutions to the massacre of [refugiad@s](#) and migrants, one of whose pillars is the Memorandum of Understanding between Libya and Italy, which thus legitimizes not only the massacres in the Mediterranean, but also the horrors carried out by the so-called Libyan Coast Guard and those that take place in the "migrant reception centers", which in reality are none other than real concentration camps.

There is no doubt that this example from above only encourages and legitimizes intolerance and racism "from below". To limit ourselves to Italy, we could cite the numerous episodes of barricades (real or symbolic) against the arrival of asylum seekers; but also the growing number of so-called spontaneous riots in the popular neighborhoods against the allocation of housing to families of immigrant origin. It is well known: more than ever in times of crisis, but also when social demands and class conflict (as said before) no longer have a language and ways in which to express themselves, it happens that economic and social hardships and the feeling of abandonment on the part of institutions feed resentment and the search for scapegoats.

However, in these cases the formula "war between the poor" could not be more improper and misleading, which, only apparently non-racist, ends up representing aggressors and agredid@s as symmetrical victims; and making the poor "at war with each other" the only or main actors of the racist scene. In reality, it is usually the militants of far-right groups who socialize, manipulate and deflect collective resentment, instigating and sometimes even directing such riots. In this case, the vicious circle of racism only produces, if not the strengthening, then the legitimization, even if implicit or involuntary, of the neo-fascist right.

The ideological and narrative scheme that revolves around the phrase "war between the poor" is, after all, symmetrical or contiguous to the one that focuses on the key antitheses security/insecurity, decorum/decadence. And speaking of the vicious circle of racism, it is no coincidence that such antitheses abound, in particular, in the text of the Minniti law of April 18, 2017, No. 48 ("Urgent provisions on city security").

After all, this law only translates and legitimizes the common perception that l@s immigrants, l@s refugiad@s, l@s rrom, the homeless and l@s marginad@s are trajiner@s of degradation, insecurity and social disorder. In short, it makes the often imposed lifestyle and practices of those who are considerad@s "outside the norm" a social danger.

To try to break or at least diminish the vicious circle of racism, it would be necessary to build a great anti-racist mass movement, worthy of such an arduous undertaking. We are currently far from that perspective.

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