Metamorphoses of racism, anti-semitism and anti-racism today

Michel Wieviorka

Racism, and the hatred of Jews – anti-Semitism is a term only in use since the end of the 19th century – are phenomena which are constantly changing. Thus towards the end of the 1960s we witnessed profound transformations in both, indicative of a change which had begun at the end of World War II and which on the whole seemed to point to their decline.\(^1\)

The movements for civil rights and decolonisation on one hand, and the awareness, albeit belated, of the specifically genocidal dimensions of Nazi barbarism to which hatred of the Jews had led on the other had suggested that, until then, support for racism and anti-Semitism was declining considerably in strength. Of particular note at the time were the significant efforts made by UNESCO which had the ability then to mobilise the most prestigious intellectuals, in the first instance Claude Lévi-Strauss; these efforts resonated with this evolution and strengthened it, culminating in particular in the resounding Declaration on Race and Racial Prejudice (1978).

But in fact, instead of regressing, racism was taking new paths to remain in existence: it continued, or was revealed, in what some American specialists referred to as ‘covert’ or ‘veiled’ forms. It was apparently an integral part of institutional structures or mechanisms and not consciously implemented by those who practised it.

The acknowledgement of this change can be found, at an early date, in the book by Carmichael and Hamilton, published in 1967, entitled Black Power,\(^2\) which attracted significant media attention.\(^3\) In this book, the two militants of the American Black Power movement envisage the modalities of action appropriate to dealing with the ‘systemic’ or ‘subtle’ racism characteristic of the established and respected forces in the society and which they analyse. The idea of a racism which will be described as structural, or institutional is there. It is based on the existence of modalities of prejudice or of discrimination which do not need to be manifested by explicitly racist individuals to function perfectly well. It is the institution and the structures which are racist; those who belong to it are not necessarily required to be racist themselves. The phenomenon seems to be a property of the system and not of the actors.

At the end of the 1970s a second change in direction was observed in the first instance by American specialists in the study of racism (in particular psychologists) which at this point was perceived as ‘symbolic’. The new racists considered that Black people were not capable
of adapting to the American ‘credo’ or ‘way of life’ which focuses on work and family. The Black population was said to be culturally different, preferring social welfare to employment and contributing to the break-up of the family rather than to its promotion. Here also, all over the world, an extensive literature took up this observation under various denominations: cultural racism, differentialism, new or neo-racism, the idea being that Black people (then other groups) are not necessarily inferior as such in their physical characteristics but that they are irredeemably different and, as such, a threat to traditional values (family, work) but also to the identity of the society (the nation or the dominant religion for example). From being ‘natural’, the racists now considered race to be ‘cultural’. In the wake of the United States, the debate was launched in the UK (Barker, 1981) as from 1981; in France, Etienne Balibar (Balibar, 1981) and Pierre-André Taguieff (Taguieff, 1988) popularised this theme in the second half of the 1980s.4

Similarly, the question of anti-Semitism was relaunched in the 1970s with the success of the ‘negationist’ theses (the claim that the gas chambers had never existed), followed by the extension of the theme of the ‘Shoah business’ – which is simply a softer version of the negationist themes (the claim being that today the Shoah is a ‘business’, a source of profit and wealth for the Jews). In the same context, there was a rise in hostility and hate toward the state of Israel and in radical identification with the Palestinian cause and/or Islam and Islamism in their cultural ‘shock’ with the West.5

Thus, at the end of the 20th century, racism would have seemed to have started to cast off its traditional guise and to be becoming less assertive. The very idea of race seemed to be losing its influence while that of cultural or religious difference was gaining in strength. The Jews were no longer described in terms of race by anti-Semites, contrary to what culminated in Nazism, so much so that some intellectuals questioned whether it would not be more appropriate to find another term for hatred of the Jews, and speak for example of the new ‘Judeophobia’. When apartheid was ended in South Africa in 1991, then when for the first time in the history of the United States a Black American, Barack Obama, was elected president in 2008, the idea of a world which had done away with racism began to acquire credibility. President Obama described America as being ‘post-racial’.

But it must be admitted, as Obama himself said in his farewell speech in February 2017, at the end of his second term as President, that this vision had never been ‘realistic’ and that in fact, racism and anti-Semitism today are in no way on the decline.

This is true for the English-speaking world but these countries are not alone. It is also the case in France, or in Latin America and the countries in the Northern Hemisphere, but also in India or in South America. The question of racism and anti-Semitism, and from there, that of anti-racist action, calls for a fundamental intellectual and perhaps, even, a scientific updating, and in its wake, political support.

As we shall see the new institutional, cultural and post-colonial forms of racism and anti-Semitism intertwine with classical and even archaic forms of these phenomena; at the same time they are also the outcome of a number of ambiguities in anti-racism.

A clean bill of health for classical racism

At the outset, we must state emphatically that any idea of a post-racial society must be abandoned for the moment, whether it be a question for example of the United States or South Africa. We must also be wary of the idea of a decline in racism and anti-Semitism, or of a softening up process whereby racism can only advance in disguise, by stealth,
indirectly, losing any charge of explicit essentialisation, or naturalisation of people and thus becoming cultural and therefore not racial, or at least less so. This idea is totally belied by the facts.

In the United States, the Black Americans who are shot by the police without having committed the slightest crime, or the least offence, are victims of a direct, flagrant racism which has nothing in the slightest ‘cultural’ or ‘symbolic’. This racism exists at the core of institutions like the courts, the police or the penitentiary system but this does not mean to say that it is only ‘institutional’, at least if we give this adjective the meaning which it acquired in the 1970s referring, as we said, to unobtrusive, non-explicit mechanisms acting apparently independently of the awareness of the actors. The white supremacists act in broad daylight, setting the stage for murderous violence, as on the occasion of their rally at Charlottesville in August 2017. Above all, wholesale racism, targeting Blacks but also Mexicans or Indians, has risen to the highest political level, with President Trump showing great understanding with respect to some of those who in one way or another profess it.

In South Africa, fierce campaigns on social networks compare the Black population to monkeys. In particular since 2015, university campuses have been disrupted by challenges in the name of the Black population and the ‘coloured people’ denouncing the cost of enrolment fees and also the still over present marks of the past of colonisation and Apartheid. For example, there have been demands for the removal of the statue of Cecil Rhodes (a leading figure in the colonial domination of the country) from Cape Town University. National reconciliation is very far from being a reality and the majority of observers speak of a deterioration in ‘race relations’, which is confirmed by the surveys.

Throughout Europe, populist and nationalist movements are developing intense xenophobic and racist campaigns which are in no way concerned by cultural niceties. Black football players are greeted by monkey chants from the stands. Political figures like Christiane Taubira in France, Minister for Justice from 2012 to 2015, are also publicly compared to monkeys, or even to a female monkey – which adds a particularly vulgar sexism to the racism.

Discrimination, which we readily described as systemic, indirect and institutional also remains explicit in particular in employment. In many democratic countries, the law, the legislation and the anti-racism institutions in no way prevent racial assignation, particularly in firms, when hiring or in promotion and advancement.

Anti-Semitism, weighted with old anti-Judaic themes, is back and thriving in Europe in its classical forms, unmistakable and rapidly brutal even deadly. In France, Islamist terrorists have killed Jewish people (Mohammed Merah murdered three Jewish children and a teacher in Toulouse in March 2012, and Amedi Coulibaly took as hostages the personnel and clients of a kosher hypermarket in Paris in January 2015 – four people were killed). Anti-Semitic crimes with no political or religious backing also occur, as when Youssouf Fofana and his ‘gang of barbarians’ captured and left for dead a young Jewish man, Ilan Halimi, for reasons which amalgamate villainy and prejudice – the Jews have money, he thought, they will pay a ransom. In the United States, the vitality of the anti-Semitic campaigns, fraught with intimidation and even violence, and imbued with prejudice about which there is nothing new, is patent, viral thanks to the Internet and the social networks and driven by the new right, the ‘alt right’ (or alternative right) discussed by Jonathan Weisman as distinct from that of the ‘neo-Cons’. It also thrives in the evangelical sectors which their hatred of Jews in no way prevents them from actively supporting the politics of the State of Israel.

It must be recognised that in numerous countries there is a persistence, and even a revival of a form of racism and anti-Semitism supported by the old cornerstones of racial hatred,
and medieval prejudices from far before the innovations constituted in the 1970s and 1980s by institutional and cultural racism.

This persistence is in action at a time when an important specificity characterises the potential targets of this blatant racism or at least some of them: they are less hesitant than in the past in internalising the racialisation or ethnicisation aimed at them, and much less hesitant in choosing to assert a real visibility, to describe themselves for example as Black or Jewish, including in the public sphere. The self-declaration of an identity then leads to discussions and challenges in which race becomes, along with other cultural, social or religious differences, a category of reference for the racists but also for those whom they target.

This observation should not prevent others from being formulated: these issues are in a process of renewal well beyond the transformations observed in the 1970s and 1980s.

The technological density of institutional racism

Recently in the United States and the United Kingdom, researchers, either in academic circles or in relation with these, possibly along with militant organisations from movements for example like Black Lives Matter have been developing work showing the links which may exist between digital tools and, in particular, racist forms of discrimination. Algorithms are not inherently neutral; they are liable to duplicate the biases and prejudices at work within society. Digital platforms and social media which operate increasingly as online communities, often quite remote from any universalism, are also prone to reproducing the racism which traverses society, or even to reinforce it.

Similarly, artificial intelligence is far from neutral, which leads us to question the implicit racist assumptions at the core of some of its developments (Buranyi, 2017). Racism transits through worlds in which digital technology, the Internet, new technologies and social networks may reproduce it; it operates like an additional layer or a supplementary screen between the prejudices which circulate in society and their implementation, in particular in the form of discrimination. From this point on, racism becomes invisible, apparently neutralised by resort to technologies which in fact strengthen it by appearing to be neutral.

This is a highly original version of institutional racism, a ‘digitalisation’ of the phenomenon which offers it immense perspectives, given that today digital technologies are central to our community lives. Whence the importance of the research in the humanities and social sciences on the possible abuses of artificial intelligence which could produce the racial, or other, for example, sexist prejudices, embedded in our culture with no questions asked. The same applies to research on the methods used by firms to hire personnel which discriminate against the members of certain groups, unaware of the implications associated with resort to digital procedures. Anti-racist mobilisation is itself under tension here: should it be exercised in the name of groups of victims, focusing on their racial specificity, in the name of cultures which are especially targeted or, instead, in the name of individual human rights with no consideration for any collective specificity? Or should there be a combination of both approaches? Should the campaign be anti-racist or more broadly-based, for example by pleading for legislation and institutions capable of regulating the new media environment created by digitalisation, along the lines chosen by some countries to regulate the press at the end of the 19th century (Frau-Meigs, 2018)?

The analysis of the link between racism and digital technology must on one hand consider digital technology as it actually functions, criticising the idea of its technological neutrality. On the other hand, it must consider the instrumental, deliberate use of digital
technology in racist strategies, for example in the misuse of tools and massive resort to social accounts and networks in spreading the discourse of hate. These are immense issues for discussion, research and polemics.

Anti-Semitism is concerned by these issues not only in the same way as any other form of racism, but also more particularly for reasons linked to the present-day culture of immediate communication and the inter-activity facilitated by the Internet and digital technologies. Limits to freedom of expression are reviled in this culture. However, action against anti-Semitism demands that these limits be defined; to curb the expression of incitement to racial or religious hatred, the glorification of crime, discriminatory remarks, the search for scapegoats, etc. The Jews are accused of being particularly vociferous in their demands for restriction of freedom of expression and the imposition of barriers on Internet specifically for their protection. This is perhaps the newest aspect of present-day hatred of Jews – these images which make of them enemies of this freedom. Thus, in January 2018, when Editions Gallimard postponed the re-editing of Céline’s anti-Semitic pamphlets, some social networks attributed this renunciation to Jewish influence – the CRIF, the Israeli Embassy, and important Jewish personalities had effectively intervened in the request. But they were not alone.

The second aspect of cultural racism

To evaluate the extent of the changes in cultural racism, we have to bear in mind the overall context at the end of the 1960s and in the 1970s. At the time, in Western societies, and in others, the idea of universalism was beginning to be challenged while, at the same time, specific identities were beginning to emerge in the public sphere.

Until then, cultural minorities had either been rejected or poorly treated, or else invited, if not to assimilate, and therefore to become invisible in the general population, at least not to attract attention. Subsequently various movements began to make demands for recognition which at times were quite radical and were backed up by memories usually fraught with suffering historically: some also demanded the independence of a country. Alex Haley’s best-seller Roots, published in 1976, is an American expression of this global phenomenon. The challenges grew in number; some purely and simply broke with the universal values of the rule of law and reason, others sought negotiable solutions, and yet others somewhat confusedly appealed to both registers. The challenges included cultural dimensions, focusing on a language, a history, a national identity and possibly a social or economic input. They were frequently ‘victim-orientated’, recalling in these instances the suffering endured by the minority concerned: genocide, slavery, victims of mass violence or plundering, etc. As from the 1980s, these challenges also included references to religion, in particular to Islam. There was even talk of competition amongst victims (Chaumont, 1997).^10^ Confronted with the rise in these identities, the political responses varied. Some minimised the impact and attempted to keep alive the conception of the Universal, inherited from the Enlightenment. France represents an extreme example in this respect; the majority of intellectuals and political leaders staunchly demand respect for the Republic, which is the national representation of the Universal, totally refusing any recognition of specific identities: from a republican perspective ‘à la française’ only individuals ‘free and equal before the law’ can be considered in the public sphere and there is no question of minorities. Others have endeavoured to promote different variants of a multiculturalism with two interactive aspects. One aspect is a demand for recognition of the cultural specificities of the group concerned, their language, their traditions, their history, music, ways of thinking, etc. The other aspect is the
expectation for social justice which should be regulated by Affirmative Action measures which compensate for the structural inequalities to which the members of the group are subjected.

On this basis the question of racism is posed in different terms. On becoming visible, a minority group would be likely to advance demands for recognition, while at the same time witness some of its members benefitting from specific resources, for example for admission to university. This led to discussions but also to tensions, even violence linked to the rise in the number of identities asserted and the challenge this represented to the political and social structure in the societies concerned.

The cultural racism described by researchers and anti-racist militants in the 1980s and 1990s and even in 2000 was primarily that of members of the majority group accusing members of minorities of being completely different so much so that they did not wish to accept the values of the nation and thus posed a threat to cultural integrity: it became more complex as from the point at which those targeted came to understand that the issue was precisely their difference which they themselves valorised, that it was their dignity and cultural being which was being called into question. As soon as they put forward their own culture and their contribution to the nation, to society, even to the world at large, these minorities found a resource to counter a racism which in fact denied them the access to the values which the dominant group vaunted. Cultural fragmentation forged ahead and with it, relativism.

The cultural racism of the 1980s or 1990s sees in those it targets a refusal to integrate the dominant culture. There is no questioning of the content of the difference which it in fact reduces to a refusal, or an incapacity, to adhere to its universalist credo as defined by the dominant group. Henceforth, in addition we have the fear and the contempt towards the minority cultures themselves devalued, or even forbidden, and in all instances inadequately recognised, but which are now gaining in confidence. Now, cultural racism not only challenges the capacity of those targeted to access universal values, but also invalidates their history, language, contribution to philosophy, forms of art, of literature, of music, etc.

There are therefore two sides to cultural racism, depending on whether the focus is on the presumed refusal of those targeted to integrate, or whether it stigmatises their identity.

But let’s take one step further. There are times when, by bringing to the fore a cultural identity, but also, as we shall see later, a racial identity, victims of racism themselves become liable to develop racist arguments as regards members of other groups, including the majority group. For example, minorities of colour may develop the theme of ‘anti-white racism’ targeting white people. The racism which some anti-racist discourse does today describe, even if it is not necessarily contradictory, does differ from classical racism and even from that of the 1980s and 1990s. The cultural and racial fragmentation which classical universalism tempered or countered, is spreading.

Post-colonial, anti-racist mobilisation

Post-colonial approaches have for long been critical of the negative or ignorant images associated with the formerly colonised countries and peoples. Edward Said’s book, Orientalism is a landmark here (Saïd, 1978); his analysis of the way in which the imperialist West has represented the Orient since the Middle Ages contributed to opening the way to post-colonial studies. But contemporary critics may well take another direction.

In the United States, following the research of a feminist academic, Kimberlé Crenshaw, since the beginning of the 1990s particularly dynamic trends have been pleading in favour of
putting ‘intersectionality’ at the centre of the analysis of racial discrimination. Behind this concept, which has become a rallying cry for various critical trends, one can find the idea that research should be located at the point where those who cumulate discrimination perceive it. From this perspective, the ‘intersection’ or the overlapping of different forms of injustice, exclusion, violence experienced, lack of respect of all sorts, is more than the simple addition of difficulties concerning certain people and certain groups: to be a woman, homosexual, poor and coloured, for example, means an accumulation of characteristics that shape a situation which cannot be reduced to the mere sum of its parts.

From there, discussions – at times heated – develop, particularly in the universities. The theme appears in the discourse of the Black Lives Matter movement but while this movement does also act in defence of homosexuals, it is primarily mobilised against the ‘framing’ of Black Americans by the police and the violence targeting Blacks, whether on the part of the police or from other sources. It focuses primarily on classical racism, in areas where trends open to ‘intersectionality’ or the overlapping of forms of discrimination develop different perspectives, in particular those which are more open to post-colonial themes.

In the United Kingdom, where ‘intersectionality’ is also all the rage, and where some movements claim to act on behalf of Black Lives Matter, an initiative originating in University College (London) demanded: #WhyIsMyCurriculumSoWhite? This movement challenged white domination as it is manifested in teaching, particularly, of history and literature. In September 2016, nine militants from Black Lives Matter chained themselves together on the runway at London City Airport. They explained to the BBC that only a small elite was able to travel from London City Airport. In 2016, 3,176 migrants were drowned or disappeared in the Mediterranean … Black people are the first to die and not the first to fly. The global warming crisis is a racist crisis. Let’s reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Let’s open the borders.

In France, in August 2016, a ‘décolonial summer camp’ not open to white people, an ‘Afro-feminist’ festival organised in May 2017 and a trade-union training course organised by Sud-éducation were all issues which led to controversy and polemics as they offered activities to which access, if only partially, was on an ethnic and racial basis. This approach opposed ‘state racism’, sometimes described as ‘institutional racism’. They spoke in terms of categories which, till then, were unheard of in discussion in France, such as ‘racialised’ and ‘whitened’. It was primarily a question of organising a campaign in which those who were, or felt, ‘racialised’ started thinking about, anti-racist action then possibly participating therein, on the basis of this ‘racialisation’. They were constituting themselves as subjects not on the basis of the colour of their skin, or any other racial attribute, but in function of the perception of the society which had racialised them. In this instance, ‘race’ is a social construction and not a natural attribute. In this approach, combating racism and discrimination calls for consideration which only those who have actually experienced it are supposed to be able to implement appropriately. Racism, in the words of Sihame Assbague, one of the organisers of the ‘decolonial summer camp’, ‘has its roots in slavery and colonialism’. From this perspective, only those who have been victims of discrimination are able to analyse it adequately. For this reason, some activities or groups and workshops were reserved to the ‘racialised’ ‘completely on their own, with no tutor, no observers and no interpreter’, said Assbague; the principle has sometimes been compared to the thinking behind the organisation of ‘Alcoholics Anonymous’ or ‘Weight Watchers’.

425
The challenge also concerns conceptions of teaching which are still imbued with former
domination at once racial, white, and colonial or possibly Western and Euro-centric. We
have referred to the ‘Rhodes Must Fall’ movement when describing these challenges in
South Africa.

The protest targets Western universalism which is considered to be just another form of
post-colonial domination. It is part of the approaches in which local, national, regional and
global dimensions are all intertwined and which, when they are academic, or in the univer-
sity, may be associated with academic disciplines. Economists request consideration for
approaches other than mainstream; sociologists and social anthropologists plead for the contri-
bution of the Global South to be valorised in the social sciences; philosophers and historians
intervene in their own right. With the help of ‘intersectionality’, in this discourse, race over-
laps with and interacts with other themes, beginning with those of gender and feminist studies
on one hand, poverty and social injustice on the other.

Thus the worlds of higher education and research are outstanding terrains for protests and
challenges which are anti-racist in intention and which target, amongst others, the very func-
tioning of the University. Hence Boaventura de Sousa Santos, one of the pioneers of the
promotion of the idea of the ‘Global South’, a professor at the University of Coimbra in
Portugal (de Sousa Santos, 2018b) speaks of Decolonising the University.

An analysis of the transformations in the university system and its opening up in the
1970s and 1980s to newcomers from communities more discriminated than others could
shed useful light here; disappointments and economic difficulties are acute for those who,
originating in these backgrounds, have difficulty today, or may no longer hope to accede to
higher education as students, researchers or teachers. This explains their radicality; conserva-
tive or reactionary sociology would describe it as ‘relative frustration’.

Criticism of universalism is frequently the driving force behind post-colonial anti-racism
and is the basis of its approach to racism. Universalism, understood as a mode of domination
of the West over the rest of the world, of whites over peoples of colour, or of men over
women is said to prevent the existence of traditional, indigenous or pre-colonial forms of
thinking. It leads in Rajeev Bhargava’s telling words to ‘epistemic injustice’, that is, to
unequal access to knowledge and the possibilities of spreading it; and is a sharp reminder of
the injury inflicted on those whom it deprives of access to the pre-colonial past and its cul-
tural, literary, philosophical and historical resources. This criticism could be perceived as
a call for intellectual openness of the kind personified by the economist Amartya Sen when
he explains that the West does not have the monopoly of the invention of democracy nor
that of justice. It could then be a source of cultural enrichment for societies opening up to
traditions from elsewhere. But it may equally well turn into identitarian closure, withdrawal,
rejection of so-called Western values and lapse into obscurantism.

The more radical the criticism, the more it tends to relativism. When anti-racism reaches
this stage, it contributes to processes of fragmentation and the withdrawal of groups or
nations into themselves with no communication, or less and less, with others, especially if
these are Western, ‘whites’, Americans, etc.

A tipping point is reached in these processes when the victims of racism, or their
spokespersons present themselves in the public sphere as ‘racialised’, and not only as indi-
viduals or citizens. ‘Race’ is now turned against the oppressors. This ‘embodiment’ of race,
(or auto-racisation) for those who wish to uphold the universal values of law and reason,
may constitute an invitation to rethink these values, to convert them into human rights
and to associate them with a struggle for emancipation without which they might effect-
ively serve as legitimation for various modalities of domination. But by upholding a racial
and ethnic image of community life, as had been the case for their own group, this ‘embodiment of race’ or auto-racisation, may equally well lead to a ‘race war’, reviving the perspective of serious or violent clashes arising from the Rassenkampf described by Ludwig Gumplowitz in 1883. If human groups define themselves in racial terms and no longer in social, cultural or political terms this will eventually lead to a racial clash.

Present-day anti-Semitism is no stranger to these trends especially when hatred of Jews is the result of criticism which goes well beyond the policy of the Israeli government. Thus it took the form of radical anti-Zionism when it was expressed in September 2001 in Durban during the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Intolerance. Symmetrically, Jewish institutions have developed hyper-community approaches which have contributed to the fragmentation of societies.

Ambivalence in anti-racism

The subjectivity at work in present-day anti-racist campaigns has two dimensions which are as likely to blend as they are to oppose each other. On one hand it refers to subjects who have no rights to existence as human beings, or individuals and on the other to historic or cultural communities which are in part destroyed or deprived of the right to exist and who desire to focus on its continuity, to establish or re-establish it or save it from disappearance.

To be banned from humankind, generally speaking, and rejected in the name of ‘race’ from the universal to which everyone wishes to belong is one thing; to be affected by racism because one belongs to a culture, traditions, ways of thinking different from the majority, is quite another. Some, as we have seen, demand a discussion amongst victims of what they share, to have a better analysis of their experience, which leads ultimately to a collective demand attracted by separatism and, for example, to demands for spaces reserved for specific racialised groups. The collective identity which may thus be forged originates in the experience of racism and not in a reference to a specific pre-existing culture.

In contrast, those who invoke a collective identity which has been destroyed, threatened or altered, a past, or non-Western ways of thinking, may grant less importance to ‘race’ and ‘racialisation’ in defining themselves since it is primarily a question for them of reconnecting with traditions in the assertion of the elements of a culture not recognised by the West.

In both cases, whether or not there be a cultural and historical identity in the references of the actors, the campaign against various forms of discrimination and injustice, at the outset those which are of a racist nature, strengthens the rationales of fragmentation, directly racial in the first case and cultural in the other instance. These processes rapidly become hybrid and the term ‘ethnicity’ is convenient to describe the outcome since it enables the maintenance of a degree of imprecision between categories of nature and those of culture. To put it clearly: whenever processes of this sort get going, protests and demands may well give way on the part of the actors (despite their being mobilised against racism, ignorance and lack of understanding on the part of others) to radical discourse and even to violence. Hatred, distance, fear or contempt may thus originate in the racism experienced: the new anti-racism may well bear within it renewed forms of racism.

Racism is a phenomenon which is ever changing and diversifying, as we have said: in a way, as Pierre-André Taguieff (Taguieff, 1988) has stated, anti-racism is its clone, (cf the sub-title of his book).

As we have seen, the old colonial, physical, biological racism lives on; this is not the target of the new anti-racism which is primarily successful in educated circles and, in
particular, in universities. Its primary function is not to act against the most flagrant forms of racism, police violence, or the most unrefined forms of prejudice, segregation, direct discrimination. The new anti-racism is a separate issue, which does not mean to say that it is indifferent. It tends to be sectorial, specific to actors who are quite well defined, in the world of research and in academia, in the media, culture and intellectual life where it can be counter-offensive and demanding, more easily than when the issue is one of confronting classical and brutal or explicit forms of racism. Loaded with demands for recognition, references to cultures and ways of thinking which may come from various parts of the world or which should be of interest or concern to the world at large, if only through groups in diaspora, by challenging the way in which migrants are treated all over the world, this globalised anti-racism can develop its own global credos.

Nor is post-colonial anti-racism the direct extension of the demands of multiculturalism, whether it be demands for multi-culturalism, whether it be, as we have seen, for Affirmative Action or cultural recognition – for a history, a language, a literature, a music, traditions, etc., individually, or in articulated fashion.

The multiculturalism thus conceived and implemented does have a counterpart. Those who benefit from it must accept what justifies this policy: belonging to a group, possibly visible, by virtue of the colour of one’s skin, for example, and the desire to belong to a society, by sharing its values, including the most individualist.

The innovation is that today, some of those who promote anti-racism are far more likely to maintain hyper-critical positions of suspicion and denunciation than to endeavour to obtain results and progress in integration.

Anti-racism is, on the whole, a multifaceted phenomenon within which tensions, if not contradictions, may appear. It can, for example, contribute to an academic system which is more just and richer in content, sensitive to qualities which are not those usually valorised, open to teachers and researchers from underprivileged backgrounds, to ways of thinking, authors, philosophical or literary traditions which usually are only of interest to a few specialists in specific ‘cultural areas’. An academic system also capable of not remaining smug and even less sanctimonious when confronted with the progress of artificial intelligence and digital technology, even though technologies are liable to reproduce racism. But, and this is the other side of the coin, this new anti-racism may also contribute to increasing the rationales of fragmentation and ethnicisation of community life which are destructive including, to continue with our example, intellectually and scientifically, within institutions for teaching and research. In these instances, the new anti-racism is likely to produce the opposite of what is desired: a world which is not more just, but on the contrary, even more unjust and in which the attraction of relativism reinforces inequalities and fuels hate speech and practices.

We have therefore entered a new historical era in which both racism and anti-racism are assuming new forms while at the same time the more classical forms persist. In this evolution, anti-racist campaigns are also changing and it sometimes happens that these changes are linked to a relativism which is never itself far from racism.

Notes

1 We shall not discuss here the issue of whether anti-Semitism should be considered a form of racism amongst many, or on the contrary, as is the case in this article, considered apart – cf. in particular my book *La tentation anti-Semite* (2005). Paris: ép Robert Laffont.

3 Thereafter an extensive literature analysed the concept of institutional racism and applied to various sphere of community life, housing, education, employment, justice, the penal system, migration policies, etc. or to demonstrate how it could be used for groups other than black people.


7 (a movement set up in 2013, after the acquittal of the assassin of a Black adolescent in Florida)

8 The Inequality Project, supported by the Ford Foundation, is specialised in the critique of these developments. Cf. the article by Stephen Buranyi, « Rise of the racist robots – how AI is learning all our worst impulses », The Guardian, 8-8-2017.


11 https://www.ted.com/talks/kimberle_crenshaw_the_urgency_of_intersectionality#t-647129


References


