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MIGRATIONS, RACISMS AND BELONGINGS
IN THE NEW ECONOMIC ORDER

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Racism in Portugal; the recent research

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Abstract: In spite of the theoretical and empirical diversity we can find some common features in the results of the investigations on racism in Portugal. Firstly, all investigations have in common the fact that they have made clear that the «myth» of the Portuguese «non racism», so widespread among the population is nothing but a myth – there is racism in Portugal. But this national myth became a sort of «self fulfilling prophecy» since, apparently, it has prevented the entry of racism into the political arena. Secondly, another common conclusion of the investigations on racism is that there is no connection between racism, nationalism, national identity issues and immigration. Immigrants are not seen as a threat to the national identity or to the Portuguese culture, and there are no political or common sense discourses on the theme of «invasion». On the other hand, all the studies are unanimous underlining that there really exists a «cigano issue» in the contemporary Portugal. Indeed, even the investigations that have other groups as a subject of study, conclude that the main victims of racism are the small communities of Portuguese ciganos and that they are probably victims of a racism more intense than the one that affects other groups. This communication aims to do a first evaluation of the results of the research about racism in Portugal in order to guide both the future in-depth studies on the subject and the policies to fight these phenomena.

Preface: In this research I use the word “*ciganos*” to design the ethnic group of portuguese romas. In Portugal people belonging to this group recognize themselves as “*ciganos*” and not roma, as recognized in others countries. The word roma is not relevant in the portuguese context, understanding generally as the roma people from Easter Europa. It's why I decided to keep the original portuguese word.

Until the last decade, one of the central features of the social sciences produced in Portugal about immigration, ethnicity or national identity was the absence of references to racism, racial discrimination or racial issues. This was probably due to the colonial past of the nation and the heritage of the ideology called *lusotropicalismo* and to a national myth that I call «Portuguese non racism» (Marques, 2007).

One could even formulate the hypothesis according to which, at first, on the research about immigration and ethnic minorities, the simple mention of racism would have constituted a kind of «taboo» for most Portuguese Social Scientists. It was only in the entry for the 21st century, that the scientific discourse about society started to use concepts such as racism, race relations, racial discrimination, etc. It was also only at the turn of the century that the sociological investigation addressed to the issues of racism and racial discrimination in Portuguese society. This communication aims to do a first and impressionist evaluation of the results of the research about racism in Portugal in order to guide future in-depth studies on the subject.

The entry of the scientific treatment of racism in Portuguese society came undeniably through Social Psychology. The first research entirely devoted to racism was conducted by Jorge Vala in the late 1990s. (Vala, Brito & Lopes; Vala, 1999).

The theoretical framework of this research was mainly inspired by the well known model of Pettigrew and Meertens (1993). According to this model, after the Second World War, Western societies would have developed a social norm contrary to the traditional racist attitudes. Pettigrew and Meertens proposed the concepts of «blatant racism» - which is now against the Western norm, and of «subtle racism» - that implies the acceptance of the anti-racist standard as well as some racist attitudes not censored by this norm. One of the expressions of these new racisms is precisely the substitution of the subject of racial hierarchies by the one of cultural differences, the latter appearing in the form of «subtle racism». This is to say that common sense would have gone along with the changes observed in scientific and political areas and would have replaced the biological explanations of behaviour by a sort of cultural essentialism.

According to this research, in Portugal, racism is expressed through socially accepted beliefs involving the accentuation of cultural differences between «whites» and «blacks» and the idea that «blacks» do not share the values needed to adapt to the dominant culture. These beliefs go along with an inability of the Portuguese to express positive emotions regarding the individuals categorized as «blacks». According to the findings of this research, racist prejudices of the Portuguese against the «blacks» obey to the same schemas found in the other societies studied with this same theoretical framework.

That is, the results obtained for the national sample do not differ substantially from those obtained in other European nations, namely: the United Kingdom, Holland, France and Germany: in the field of attitudes, the *blatant racism*, the most explicit and biological form of racism, would have been replaced by a *subtle racism* more normative and with cultural contours.

Just a few years later, another social psychologist draws some conclusions that, while somehow different, go in the same direction (Cabecinhas, 2007). Through an analysis of the stereotypes of Portuguese towards the individuals of Angolan origin, Rosa Cabecinhas came to the conclusion that, in a general sense, the Portuguese describe positively the Angolans, however, features like competence, responsibility, autonomy or individuality – features highly valued in modern Western societies – are systematically denied to this category. To the Angolans, the Portuguese reserve the more exotic features like a sense for music or dance. Rosa Cabecinhas concludes, on the one hand, that the ethnic and racial categorization continues to be extremely salient in Portugal and, on the other hand, that the contemporary

expressions of racism consist fundamentally in what she calls the «homogenisation» of the features of the minorities. Portuguese don't have a differentiated perception of various national groups of African citizens, they are globally homogenised as «blacks». This research also used the concepts of Pettigrew and Meertens and concluded that the scores of *subtle racism* are significantly higher than those of *blatant racism*.

However, the framework of Social Psychology, which describes the passage of the expressions of blatant racism to the ones of subtle racism, as it was taken up by Jorge Vala and by Rosa Cabecinhas deserves some considerations.

Firstly we must emphasize that theories and investigation of Social Psychology with regard to racism, relate to the field of attitudes, stereotypes and social representations, not to the field of actions and behaviour. And this is not always made explicit by the analysts. For instance, the book published by Rosa Cabecinhas has as subtitle, *The naturalisation of racial discrimination*. As we all know, in sociology, the concept of discrimination refers to a form of behaviour, to an action or to an omission and not to an attitude or belief.

Secondly, we think it's important to analytically separate attitudes and stereotypes – that are measured by the scales and lists of social psychologists – from concrete racist behaviour such as discrimination, segregation or violence. Since the nineteen thirties we know that the relations between racist opinions and racist behaviour are not obvious, nor necessary, nor predictable.

Finally, we must also ask ourselves about the complete replacement of the *blatant racism* by the *subtle racism*. There is sociological evidence that show us that many manifestations of racism that are observable in the Portuguese society are far from subtle. This is not to say that the attitudes of *subtle racism* – as they are measured by the scales of social psychologists – do not exist, but what can be argued is that they didn't replace completely the *blatant racism* behaviour. One may even say that the very insistence on the scientific paradigm of *subtle racism* may have as a kind of side effect to hide the most blatant manifestations of the phenomenon.

What the Social Psychology framework demonstrates clearly is the fact that there is a perversion within democratic societies which they call «subtle racism». And Portugal is no exception. What they don't explain is the specific nature by which each democratic society produces and reproduces racist behaviour and prejudices. This kind of explanations seems to be reserved to sociology.

The sociologist Fernando Luís Machado in his research on the integration of the Guinean community living in Portugal seeks precisely to reveal these specificities of Portuguese society (Machado, 2002). The author uses a theoretical framework which he developed during

the 1990s while studying ethnicity, in order to analyze the racism that is perceived by individuals of Guinean origin. He called this framework the model of «social and cultural contrasts and continuities».

In his research, Machado concludes that manifestations and perceptions of racism depend on the specific modes of integration of the different minorities in the Portuguese society: the stronger the social and cultural *contrasts* between the minority and the majority, the stronger is racism. Conversely, the stronger the cultural and social *continuities*, the weaker is racism against the minorities.

This explains, for instance, the fact that, in Portugal, racism against people of African origin is much less intense than racism against the Ciganos: there exists a very strong social and cultural contrast between the latter and the majority of the Portuguese. An explanation for the virtual non-existence of manifestations of racism towards individuals of Indian origin, despite the significant cultural contrasts with the Portuguese population, would point to the extremely successful economic integration of this community. This economic integration would have eliminated the social contrasts.

Within the sociological approach, my own research (Marques, 2007) leads us to the conclusion that, although kept clearly outside the political arena, many manifestations of racism that are observed in Portugal are not subtle at all.

Following French philosophers and sociologists such as Pierre-André Taguieff, Michel Wieviorka or Dominique Schnapper, my research starts by distinguishing the two ideal types of racism: the *inegalitarean racism* and the *differentialist racism*.

Inegalitarean racism accords the minority groups a place in society under the condition that they dedicate themselves only to the most socially devaluated occupations and that they occupy a space that is equally socially despised. This form of racism, inscribed in the system of social stratification, gives major emphasis to biological arguments in order to legitimize a social situation based on domination and exploitation.

Regarding the *differentialist racism*, the victim group is perceived as a threat; they are not given any place in the social system. This form of racism corresponds to a desire of rejection, of exclusion, of separation, and, in extreme situations, of expulsion or destruction. *Differentialist racism* underlines cultural differences and identity but these are understood in an essentialist way. That is, as something unchangeable. According to this ideal type of racism, the «Other» is considered as a strange body, a threat to the social and cultural homogeneity of the nation.

Shortly, we can state that while *inegalitarean racism* discriminates and exploits, the *differentialist racism* segregates or destroys.

In Portugal, racism, as it is lived and described by its victims, manifests itself through these two dimensions that vary according to the victim group. While the African immigrants are the victims of *inegalitarean racism*, the cigano communities are confronted with racist manifestations of the differentialist type.

On one hand, African communities are above all the target of an *inegalitarean racism*, clearly urban, linked to the inherited prejudices of the colonial past. The discrimination in several domains of the social life, eventually some verbal violence, constitutes the principal manifestations of this form of racism. African immigrants and their descendents are integrated in the productive and economic sphere but, preferably, in positions far from sight and social relations.

On the other hand, the small communities of Portuguese Ciganos are the targets of a clearly *differentialist racism*, essentially rural, that materialises itself in a violent rejection of this communities. Nowadays the ciganos are seen as strange bodies undesirable by the majority of the Portuguese. They are seen as a threat to the presupposed harmony and security of the rest of the society. Segregation and the desire of expulsion of are predominant here.

However, in spite of the theoretical and empirical diversity we can find some common features in the results of the investigations on racism in Portuguese society.

Firstly, all have in common the fact that they have made clear that the «lusotropicalist myth» of the Portuguese «non racism», so widespread among the population and among politicians, is nothing but a myth. – There is racism in Portugal.

But this national myth of the Portuguese «non-racism» is a kind of «self fulfilling prophecy» since apparently it has prevented the entry of racism into the political arena.

Secondly, another common conclusion of the investigations on racism in Portugal is that there is no connection between racism, nationalism, national identity issues and immigration. Immigrants are not seen as a threat to the national identity or to the Portuguese culture, and there are no political or common sense discourses on the theme of «invasion». The subject of the identity threat, so common in the sociological literature on racism and nationalism doesn't seem to be significant in Portugal.

All investigations are unanimous underlining that there really exists a «Gypsie Issue» in the contemporary Portuguese society. Indeed, even the studies that have other groups as a subject of study, conclude that the main victims of racism are the small communities of Portuguese ciganos and that they are probably victims of a racism more intense than the one that affects other groups.

These investigations also share the idea that, in Portugal, contrary to what happens in other European countries, anti-Muslim racism (which has been designated by *Islamophobia*) as well

as anti-Semitism has insignificant expressions. In this country - until now - racism against Muslims or Jews is not significant enough to deserve scientific treatment. This is probably due to factors like the small number of Muslims and Jews living in Portugal and their well succeeded integration in the society. One can also add that the current ideology reproduces positive images about the role of Jews and Muslims in the cultural heritage of the Portuguese.

It must be said clearly that the small evaluation presented in this communication does not allow us to say the phenomena of racism is increasing in contemporary Portugal. Although there are more scientific studies, and these are increasingly stringent and substantiated, it is not possible to assume that racism is more intense today than it was several years ago. What we witness is an increased awareness of its manifestations, both at scientific level, at the political level or even at the level of common sense, which is not equivalent to assume a progression.

To conclude, one should say that a society in which Social Sciences are mobilized to investigate, analyze and explain racism and to write about these phenomena, is a society that is more protected from its possible increase and inscription in the political domains.

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