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### STRUCTURAL RACISM AND TRENDS IN THE GLOBAL ECONOMY

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#### INTRODUCTION

1. In the years that spanned the decades to combat racism and racial discrimination, during which the first two world conferences took place, human rights concerns focused on the legacy of colonialism and the still existing (at that time) apartheid regime. The world community was rightly concerned with the human rights implications of racial discrimination against peoples who were struggling to achieve self-determination in territories subjected to foreign domination, or who longed for civic and political equality with dominant ruling groups and were denied, as subordinate and racially distinct populations, entry into, and participation in, a democratic polity. Theo Van Boven notes that: "...the situation was different at the time when the struggle against racism and racial discrimination was closely linked with the struggle against colonialism. In the fifties, sixties and seventies the combined and consolidated political forces of third world countries managed to develop and sustain a common strategy which found its expression, among other things, in significant political and legal instruments, such as the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples (1960) and the Declaration and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (1963 and 1965). However, it should be taken into account that this common strategy envisaged racism and racial discrimination practised by others while largely ignoring the existence of similar or comparable practices on one's own domestic scene. The struggle against racism and racial discrimination appeared to be a matter of foreign policy, at least in the perception of the majority of the membership of the United Nations."<sup>1</sup>
2. Since then, much has changed in the world. Not only did apartheid come to an end and traces of outright colonialism all but disappeared, but different kinds of ethnic-political conflicts and nationalist struggles have emerged in the wake of the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the fragmentation of multinational states in Eastern Europe. A new kind of racism has appeared, linked to 'ethnic cleansing' and genocide, in the framework of ethno-nationalist warring, as in the

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<sup>1</sup> E/CN.4/1999/WG.1/BP.7

former Yugoslavia, or of political conflict over control of the state by rival ethnically identified power groups, as in Burundi and Rwanda.

3. At the world level, new international financial and economic relationships develop with amazing speed, leading to the intensification of globalisation which, while rooted in the economy, also has wide ramifications in the political, social and cultural spheres of human activity. Globalisation brings diverse peoples together, but even as it emphasises the common humanity of humankind (most visibly in the field of consumer behaviour), it also underlines differences which often lead to asymmetrical relations, tensions and societal stress.
4. Consequently, while the concept and implications of *racism* did not disappear from public discourse, the phenomenon has changed sufficiently in recent years so as to produce a considerable amount of empirical research and generate controversial debates in the theoretical literature. Again, as Van Boven points out: "Today the situation is different. Very few or rather no countries can nowadays make a legitimate claim that they do not face within their own borders problems of racial discrimination as defined in article 1 of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. Problems of racial discrimination are not only rampant elsewhere, in foreign countries; these problems arise everywhere, including within one's own borders. Such awareness is now widespread and constitutes a step forward but also underlines the complexity of the problems."<sup>2</sup>
5. In the following sections of this paper I shall refer to some of the principal tendencies of the globalisation process that have a bearing on issues of racial and ethnic discrimination and discuss some of the more relevant approaches to an understanding of the dynamics of contemporary racism.

## GLOBALISATION AND MIGRATION

6. Globalisation, as it is generally understood, is not only a process of international economic integration under the driving force of transnational corporations and their particular interests. It also refers to a number of ancillary processes that are profoundly changing the way human beings behave, relate to each other and perceive the world around them. At no earlier time in history has the notion of 'One World' been more adequate than in our time. Peoples all over the planet are inter-connected by instant telecommunications, the expansion of single world-wide financial, commodities and services markets has turned the most variegated cultural groups into one-dimensional consumers, workers (both male and female) in the farthest corners of the earth may be employees of the same transnational company, and, most important of all, at least for the purposes of this analysis, massive migrations have brought people together in new and exciting ways that did not yet exist (except embryonically) at the time the UN framed its first international human rights instruments.
7. Let us start with the issue of *migration*. While the international economic system has always relied to some extent on migrant labour and whole nations were born out of the wide-scale movements of peoples and communities over the centuries, it was not until the post-war "boom" years that immigration became a political and human rights issue in Europe, to be dealt with bilaterally between states, covered increasingly by special legislation and international agreements. Europe,

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* Article 1, paragraph 1 of ICERD reads as follows: "In this Convention, the term 'racial discrimination' shall mean any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life"

of course, was not alone; North America continued to receive massive flows of immigrants, and so did, at later stages and on a minor scale, the Gulf states and some East Asian and Pacific countries. Trans-border migrations also occurred within the African and Latin American regions. On the whole, however, as has been widely documented, migration flows took place from the poorer, Third World countries towards the industrialised world, motivated principally by economic factors. In some European countries (Britain, France, Netherlands, Belgium), the major source of immigrant labour were the former colonies, and this circumstance gave a special flavour to the relations between the native populations at the receiving end and the immigrants. The racial and ethnic implications of this encounter generated considerable controversy and a spate of legislation, and impregnated for decades the political climate of Europe. As the title of a British publication in the early eighties put the issue succinctly, “The Empire Strikes Back.”<sup>3</sup>

8. After the ‘boom’ years, immigration issues became more complex. While migration continued to Europe, with second and third generation waves of immigrants from Europe’s periphery and more recently from eastern to Western Europe, lone male (and increasingly female) migrant workers were soon supplemented by family members, followed by political and economic refugees. The earlier seasonal migrations, determined for the most part by the needs of the local labour market, turned into more permanent settlement. Immigrant communities, whose younger locally-born generations had now become formal denizens when not citizens of the host country, became the focus of increasing public attention, due to the sometimes strained and conflictive relationships between settlers and host communities and the new demands which this situation made on government social policies (housing, education, employment, social services, crime prevention, administration of justice). For years, new immigrant communities have been in the process of becoming Europe’s ‘new minorities,’ as exemplified by Commonwealth immigrants in Britain, Arabs and West Africans in France, Turks in Germany, Moluccans and Surinamese in the Netherlands, Angolans in Portugal, Congolese in Belgium etc.<sup>4</sup>
9. Similar processes have occurred elsewhere, notably in the United States (and to a lesser extent in Canada), where continuous migrations mainly from the Caribbean, Latin America and Asia have contributed to change the socio-demographic picture of the country. Many migrants are stigmatised as ‘illegal immigrants’ because they come into the country without regular documents, a situation which exposes them to human rights abuses of various sorts. This has become, for example, a contentious issue between the governments of Mexico and the United States.<sup>5</sup>

## MIGRATION AND RACISM

10. International migrations have multiple causes and occur under various economic, legal and political conditions, though the phenomenon is now closely linked to the mechanisms of the global economy. Among its many facets one in particular deserves closer attention in the light of concern over racism and racial discrimination, and this is the fact that immigrants and host country populations are not only of different nationalities, but also frequently of different racial heritage, cultural tradition, religious beliefs, language and ethnic identity. While the encounter between immigrants and native residents often takes on the form of a “clash of civilisations,” to use a fashionable if misconstrued concept, it does highlight processes of ethnic change and

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<sup>3</sup> Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies. 1982. *The Empire Strikes Back. Race and Racism in 70s Britain*. London: Hutchinson.

<sup>4</sup> For an early assessment see Stephen Castles. 1984. *Here for Good. Western Europe’s New Ethnic Minorities*. London: Pluto Press.

<sup>5</sup> On international migrations see Anthony H. Richmond. 1994. *Global Apartheid. Refugees, Racism, and the New World Order*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. For a historical assessment see Lydia Potts. 1990. *The World Labour Market. A History of Migration*. London: Zed Books.

differentiation that may be conducive to individual and group expressions of competition, rejection and hostility, or of separatism, exclusion and encapsulation. In immigrant societies, spontaneous residential segregation appears to be quite common, and the widespread phenomenon of ethnic ghettos can be as much the outcome of specific housing policies as the result of natural bonding between people of similar ethnic backgrounds. Frequently these processes enhance the mutual perception of ethnic incompatibility, and when accompanied by certain kinds of group formation (particularly among youth) may lead to overt expressions of collective antagonism and sometimes violence.

11. In this context, particular attention has been given in some countries to the tendency to blame immigrants, foreigners or racial and ethnic minorities for all sorts of social problems and public ills. Scapegoating minorities is not a new phenomenon, of course, but when it occurs in times of economic depression or crisis it leads easily to restrictive immigration and social policies that express and also strengthen rejectionist perceptions and discriminatory attitudes among the host populations. Moreover, in such an environment it becomes easy for the judicial authorities to 'criminalise' certain ethnic and racial minorities. When 'undocumented' foreign workers are said to be taking 'our' jobs or 'illegally' using 'our' social services paid for by 'our' taxes, then the stigmatised ethnic or racial group as a whole is tainted by alleged criminal behaviour and becomes an easy target for unscrupulous public officials or political zealots. This occurs frequently, for example, with Mexican migrants in the United States (but the victims are also often *bona fide* Hispanic US citizens). The youth of ethnic and racial minorities frequently engage in non-standard activities (the Rastas in Britain, the Mexican Cholos in the US), which then becomes labelled as *deviant* behaviour, whence it becomes easy to classify it as *delinquent* behaviour. Members of such identified youth groups become suspects and are often treated as potential criminals by police and local authorities, irrespective of whether they have in fact engaged in any criminal activity.
12. As a result of immigration, the racial and ethnic composition of many host countries is changing rapidly. While these transformations obviously produce greater cultural diversity (styles of life, dress, music, entertainment, youth culture etc.) they are not always met with sympathy by the country's nationals. In fact, certain sectors of the host country's population may feel threatened by the increased presence of foreigners in their midst who look and behave differently, speak an unintelligible language and worship alien gods. People may reject not only individual foreigners whom they might dislike, but immigrants collectively, arguing that the host country's national 'essence' and identity are being undermined. Xenophobia has now become a common and widespread phenomenon in many immigrant-receiving countries, and opportunistic politicians play on, and actually promote, these fears of foreigners. Right-wing xenophobic political parties feed on this phenomenon and their recent electoral victories, as in Austria and Switzerland, greatly worry international observers. The European Parliament has produced two important reports on these issues.<sup>6</sup>
13. A particularly significant feature of contemporary xenophobia is the fact that it often finds support in specific racial and ethnic *ideologies*, that is, structured and systematic accounts, generally based on discredited pseudo-scientific theories, about human biological hierarchies, ethnic group attributes (intelligence, for example), racial purity, national essence and so forth. These are churned out by sometime academics, writers, radio announcers, preachers and self-appointed ideologues who make use of the mass media to disseminate their messages of hate often in the guise of respectable scientific conceptual language. The multiplier effect of such efforts should not be underestimated, for the authors of these writings have access to professional journals, well-established publishing houses, TV shows and Internet web-sites.

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<sup>6</sup> Europe is not alone on these issues. The *Japan Times* reported on October 13, 1999 that a local court ordered a store-owner to pay damages to a Brazilian customer he had chased from his premises, on the grounds that this action violated the ICERD which Japan had ratified in 1995.

## POVERTY AND RACISM

14. Cultural and ethnic differences are not by themselves the major causes of rejectionist behaviour and ideologies. A more crucial factor is that most migrants are poor and come from poor countries. As such they slip into specific economic niches, those of low-productivity, low paying jobs, or in the informal sector of the economy, and they tend to gather in virtual urban ghettos, not because of any kind of natural ethnic bonding, but because most other avenues are closed to them. Well known are descriptions of ethnically or racially distinct urban housing projects, shantytowns or deteriorated inner-city neighbourhoods, where unemployment is high and hopes are low. And, of course, drugs and violence proliferate, if only because alternative life-opportunities are not available.
15. Social researchers have often described the workings of dual or split labour markets in which low productivity jobs are attached mainly to racially distinct minority workers whereas the higher paying slots are taken up by natives or members of the majority or dominant ethnic groups. The system is usually thought of as self-perpetuating: racially distinct immigrant workers become identified with the low-paying economic niches, which then appear to be “reserved” for them. This is not necessarily the result of anybody’s intentional actions, or some kind of racist strategy, but rather the way the system works. Thus, *race and class* are frequently conflated, and in most countries where large groups of racially or ethnically differentiated populations intermingle as a result of recent or earlier migrations (for example, the situation of Blacks in the United States), a highly stratified race-class system has emerged which perpetuates inequalities within the social structure. When economic development improves the situation of immigrants and social mobility takes place, these groups begin to compete with each other over limited resources (employment opportunities, housing, access to educational institutions, political representation) leading to what has been called “racial competition.” Banton indicates that the global economy has helped create a global market for many types of labour, and has shown that there was an element “of truth in the thesis that capitalism causes racism, because economic development heightens competitive relations and these in turn evoke group hostility.”<sup>7</sup>
16. Whereas the idea of ‘race’ usually relates to hereditary and visible physical attributes, the concept of ‘ethnic group’ refers mainly to cultural differences between populations (including language and religion), which in contrast to race may be modified by choice under certain circumstances (a process sometimes known as acculturation or assimilation).<sup>8</sup> While many migrants can be distinguished from host country populations by racial criteria, others are identified by cultural or ethnic ones. Scholars describe the process of ‘racialisation’ in some countries, as in Britain, whereby numerous distinct groups from various regions of the world became categorised by the authorities, the legal system and public opinion as ‘Blacks.’

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<sup>7</sup> Professor Banton, who is a member of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination of the United Nations (CERD), remarks that “Since 1949 *de jure* discrimination has been abolished throughout the world, so that *de facto* segregation now presents the main challenge. In countries where racial discrimination was once legally enjoined, and in countries in which immigrants have entered at the bottom of the scale, the statistics show an association between socio-economic status and racial origin which is transmitted from one generation to the next and can become self-perpetuating. Racial distinctions have then been incorporated in a system of social class distinctions.” Michael Banton. 1999. “The causes of, and remedies for, racial discrimination”. Background paper prepared by Mr. Michael Banton, member of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, in accordance with paragraph 51 of Commission resolution 1998/26: United Nations. Commission on Human Rights. E/CN.4/1999/WG.1/BP.6. See also Michael Banton. 1983. *Racial and Ethnic Competition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. On split labour markets see Edna Bonacich. 1972. ‘A Theory of Ethnic Antagonism: The Split Labour Market’, *American Sociological Review*, vol. 37 (October).

<sup>8</sup> Scholars agree that the concept “race” –when used to refer to genetically defined, biologically bounded collectivities—has no scientific foundation, but to the extent that it is widely used and determines specific kinds of behaviour, it should be considered as a sociological category similar to that of “ethnic group.”

17. These were then lumped together and became the objects of 'Race Relations' Acts. The practice of racial labelling of minority groups (whether immigrants or not) is widespread and has implications for all kinds of social policies. In the United States, for example, the ethnic labelling of populations was systematically undertaken by the Census Bureau for purposes of resource allocation and the findings of social surveys are inevitably broken down by ethnic and racial categories in this country. Racial and ethnic labelling (some authors refer to this practice as "colour-coding") is needed for the purposes of federally mandated affirmative action in education and employment, which has been in practice for three decades. But compensatory politics has come increasingly under strong criticism from various quarters and is in the process of being dismantled despite its overall positive effects (or perhaps because of them), particularly at the local and state levels.<sup>9</sup>

## RACISM, XENOPHOBIA AND EXCLUSION

18. If racism is understood as a set of beliefs and practices whereby certain ethnic groups are discriminated against in a given society because of their real or imagined racial and/or ethnic characteristics, then the new name of racism at the end of the twentieth century is no longer colonialism or nazi ideology but rather *xenophobia and social exclusion* related to international migrations, the emerging of new kinds of ethnic or racial minorities, and the persistent and in fact growing inequalities between the "haves" and the "have nots" in a globalised economy. "The rise in xenophobia and overtly racist practices" writes Joe Oloka-Onyango, a member of the UN Sub-Commission on the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights, "has led to a serious diminution in the legal protection of refugees, migrant workers and asylum seekers in many countries," many of them people of colour.<sup>10</sup> I am not denying that vestiges of colonial thinking subsist nor that neo-nazi ideology is a threat. Indeed, both phenomena exist and are dangers to be dealt with. Racist ideologies – including in the form of political platforms — abound and threaten democratic polities everywhere. Nor do I argue that social and economic inequalities within and across national boundaries are necessarily linked to racism; they are sometimes, but very often they are not.
19. Rather, the argument is as follows. To the extent that 'race' is a social construct and 'racialisation' a social and political process, certain ethnic groups become 'racialised' in the global society and the concept 'race' is used extensively by dominant groups and public opinion in general to signify difference, incompatibility, hostility, exclusion, discrimination, rejection of specific collectivities on the basis of their real or imagined (constructed) biological and/or cultural characteristics. This applies as much to recent immigrants from far-away countries, as it does to long-established minority groups (Blacks, Indians and 'Hispanics' in the US, Jews and Gypsies in Europe, Burakumin in Japan, Amerindians in Latin America, Aborigines in Australia, tribals in south and Southeast Asia). The earlier distinction that some scholars have made between 'race' and 'ethnicity' as two distinct categories is no longer analytically valid nor practical. These are terms that mesh with each other and whose usefulness is determined rather by social usage and custom in specific situations. Consequently, racism can be directed not only at 'racial' groups but at 'ethnic' groups as well.
20. Race does not beget racism, but rather racism generates 'races.' This may appear to be a merely semantic difference but it has practical and political implications. In earlier times it was held that 'race' is something essential, immutable, an attribute that permanently distinguishes human

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<sup>9</sup> On "racialisation" and "racial categorisation", see Robert Miles. 1993. *Racism after 'race relations'*. London: Routledge; Yehudi O. Webster. 1992. *The Racialization of America*. New York: St. Martin's Press. On affirmative action see George E. Curry (Ed.). 1996. *The Affirmative Action Debate*. Reading: Addison-Wesley.

<sup>10</sup> (See J. Oloka-Onyango, "Globalization in the Context of Increased Incidents of Racism, Racial Discrimination and Xenophobia", MS, 1999).

beings from each other. Today it refers rather to socially constructed differences the content of which varies according to changing circumstances. Whereas in the US the difference between 'black' and 'white' appears to be locked permanently in place in the social consciousness, in Brazil, for example, society recognises a large number of intermediate gradations between the black and white extremes. In the Caribbean, various recognised levels of skin colour express as many different social statuses. Alleged 'racial' distinctions are used to identify Tamils and Sinhalese in Sri Lanka, and the Basques in Spain are often referred to as 'racially' different from other inhabitants of the Iberian Peninsula. Let us also remember that in English literature the nineteenth century Irish were frequently described as a distinct (inferior) race, whereas the British empire exalted the virtues of the 'martial races' in India for its own purposes of colonial expansion.

21. From a merely descriptive term, the word 'race' later turned into a highly charged concept that subsumes a vision of social inequality, a theory of human evolution and a program of political action. Thus, an ideology of 'race' – driven by economic, political and economic concerns – often becomes a daily practice of 'racism' directed against specific groups of 'others' who do not meet the specifications of the essential 'We,' the in-group. When threatened identities are compounded by economic competition, or when traditional ethnic territories (neighbourhoods, communities) lose their cohesiveness and become fragmented, then the racial ideologies have no trouble finding convenient scapegoats: troubled social relationships become 'race relations' and racism becomes a social force in its own right.<sup>11</sup>
22. Racism used to be understood mainly as a set of beliefs, rooted in prejudices and stereotypes, that certain individuals hold with respect to other "racially" distinct persons or groups. It used to be considered as some sort of personal disorder or at best a collective malady to be extirpated.<sup>12</sup> This is certainly one level of racism, but by no means the most important one. A more insidious form of racism is to be found at the ideological level, when it is expressed in pseudo-scientific garb and in structured political programs. This was certainly the case of Nazi-era anti-Semitism, apartheid in South Africa and racial segregation in the United States, and it permeates the ideology of extreme right-wing political groups in contemporary Europe, including a number of post-communist regimes.<sup>13</sup>
23. Scientific racism no longer presents itself under the guise of *Rassenkunde*, as in Nazi times, but rather, today, as differential psychology and socio-biology. While it is widely discredited in academic circles, it nevertheless counts on selective support from various scientific quarters.<sup>14</sup> Rather more pervasive is *institutional* or *structural* racism, which refers to the dynamics of economic and social institutions through which racialised groups become systematically marginalised or excluded from the benefits of development, regardless of the prejudices, beliefs or intentions of particular individuals who happen to direct or manage such institutions. It has

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<sup>11</sup> See, for example, John Rex. 1986. *Race and Ethnicity*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press. Robert Miles. 1989. *Racism*. London: Routledge

<sup>12</sup> Michael Banton (1999) reminds us that: "The ICERD preamble presents racial discrimination as a social sickness, a pathology attacking what would otherwise be healthy societies. Article 26 of the ICCPR, to the contrary, presents racial discrimination as one among several forms of unlawful behaviour, which, like a crime, is something for which one or more individuals are responsible and should be called to account. In all regions of the world, native workers resent competition for employment from immigrant workers and expect to be protected against it. This disposition to discriminate is a universal and normal form of behaviour, not a pathological form." *Op. Cit.*

<sup>13</sup> Glyn Ford. 1992. *Fascist Europe. The Rise of Racism and Xenophobia*. London: Pluto Press; Hans-Georg Betz. 1994. *Radical Right-Wing Populism in Western Europe*. New York: St. Martin's Press

<sup>14</sup> Elazar Barkan. 1992. *The Retreat of Scientific Racism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. UNESCO's early work on science and race is well known, and has been examined in Leo Kuper (Ed). 1975. *Race, Science and Society*. Paris: The UNESCO Press. On socio-biology see Ashley Montague (Ed.). 1980. *Socio-biology examined*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. On recent controversies regarding empirical studies on differential intelligence between racial groups in the United States, see the debates surrounding the publication of Richard J. Herrnstein and Charles Murray. 1994. *The Bell Curve*. New York: The Free Press.

been argued that the globalised market economy produces ‘winners’ and ‘losers,’ and that the losers are frequently members of certain ethnic groups whose particular vulnerability results from a past history of discrimination, oppression and exploitation. Structural racism works through subtle mechanisms that are frequently not intended and often denied. For example, the old adage that blacks are the last to be hired and the first to be fired is difficult to prove but exists in the personal life experience of millions of people. Is there a ‘glass ceiling’ in corporate employment structures that discriminates on racial, ethnic, religious or gender grounds? Again, personal experience proves it, but corporate statements deny it exists at all. Despite legislation to the contrary, discrimination in housing is a widespread practice in many countries, as it is in educational services. Even in societies that are nominally democratic and racism-free the myth of ‘colour-blindness’ is often shown to be false in daily life. Inter-personal discrimination on ethnic or racial grounds operates on an informal daily basis and affects the life-chances of millions of individuals in the economic, political and social fields.<sup>15</sup>

## STRUCTURAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL RACISM

24. In the globalised economy many jobs have disappeared from industrial heartlands, as transnational corporations transfer labour-intensive manufacturing to low-wage countries, creating a new underclass of unemployed, and often unemployable, people. Is it a coincidence that the new jobless urban poor (at least in the United States, the world’s premier economic power-house) tend to be the residents of inner-city ghetto neighbourhoods (a code word for Blacks and Latinos, usually), and that the new workers who physically produce much of the world’s consumer goods are the inhabitants of the first world’s former colonies, that is, the ‘underdeveloped’ countries of what used to be called the Third World? The ILO as well as numerous concerned human rights organisation are waging a world campaign against virtual slave labour and dire working conditions in many of the Third World’s sweatshops, whereas the new jobless urban poor in the metropolitan countries find that their welfare and social security benefits are eroding because in the globalised economy the welfare state (and the state in general) has beaten a furtive if ignominious retreat from earlier ideals of social responsibility and the collective good.<sup>16</sup>
25. These processes can arguably be described as structural racism, to the extent that they produce a pervasive pattern of discrimination and disadvantage for specific ethnic and racial groups, the socially excluded, a pattern that is hard to break for any individual caught up in it, and which can only be interrupted by concerted governmental and international action. As state intervention at the national level to change this globalised economic structure is less than likely under current neo-liberal ideological hegemony, international organisations bear a particular responsibility.<sup>17</sup>
26. Needless to say, not all scholars agree with the concept of institutional or structural racism. Racial or ethnic groups that are included in the concept of ‘disadvantaged poor’ (a term often used in the US) may not necessarily be victims of some kind of structural ‘invisible hand’ that

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<sup>15</sup> See Jonathan Kozol. 1991. *Savage Inequalities. Children in America’s Schools* New York: Crown. On social exclusion and racism, see Michel Wievorka. 1996. “Racisme et exclusion”, in Serge Paugam (ed.), *L’exclusion. L’état des savoirs*. Paris: Editions de la Découverte

<sup>16</sup> On the loss of power of states in the new world economy, see Susan Strange. 1996. *The Retreat of the State. The Diffusion of Power in the World Economy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

<sup>17</sup> On the new urban poor see W.J. Wilson. 1997. *When Work Disappears. The World of the New Urban Poor*. New York: Vintage. On the concept of the “underclass” and its relation to the issue of race see other works by W.J. Wilson as well as Lydia Morris. 1994. *Dangerous Classes. The Underclass and Social Citizenship*. London: Routledge. On the workings of the global economy and how it affects labour markets, at least in the highly developed countries, see Stanley Aronowitz & William DiFazio. 1994. *The Jobless Future. Sci-Tech and the Dogma of Work*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. Also: Jeremy Rifkin. 1995. *The End of Work: The Decline of the Global Labour Force and the Dawn of the Post-Market Era*. New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons



throws and keeps them at the bottom of the social hierarchy but, according to some observers, they have only themselves to blame for their plight. They are said to possess cultural values that prevent them from improving their condition and to lack other value orientations, which might help them to extricate themselves from their lot. Thus, instead of 'racist' economic structures and institutions, the blame falls on the victims and their 'culture.' Whereas the former approach would argue that racism must be attacked at the structural and institutional levels, the latter approach prompts individuals to pick up their lives and pull themselves up. Moreover, the argument is often turned around and those who would propose compensatory actions to offset the unequal consequences of structural racism are accused of wanting to perpetuate racial and ethnic inequalities, and of being 'racists' themselves!<sup>18</sup>

27. No one would deny nowadays that much contemporary racism has its roots in Western colonialism, the first truly global economic system. We are now witnessing racism as a post-colonial narrative which has difficulty in throwing off these roots, and frequently presents itself as an argument for 'nationhood,' 'national identity' and nationalism. Whereas the earlier racist discourse was needed as an ideological crutch for colonial domination and exploitation, in the post-colonial situation it offers arguments of support to patriotism and nationalism, even as the classic modern concept of the nation is being rapidly torn apart by the forces of globalisation on the one hand and the emergence of sub-national identities on the other.<sup>19</sup>
28. The process of globalisation has other implications as well, and these refer to changes in the environment and the perception thereof. The Rio environmental summit of 1992 called attention to some of the major problems long addressed by specialists and environmental organisations: global warming, deforestation and desertification, the threats to biodiversity, the poisoning of the biosphere, the disposal of toxic wastes, the uses of international marine resources, the 'commons' of the arctic regions etc. The crux of this problematique is that many of the more threatening and dangerous changes in the environment are taking place in the developing countries, where the world's vast poverty-ridden majorities are trying to eke out a living. Many are the reasons for this: growing population pressures, lack of adequate environmental legislation, governmental priority on growth rather than on sustainable development, lack of public awareness and information, as well as the absence, very often, of adequate democratic processes of popular participation whereby concerned citizens might make an impact on policy. However, an even more important factor than the ones just mentioned are the policies of transnational corporations which have systematically transferred to the Third World numerous activities of their production chains which they can ill afford or are actually impeded from carrying out in the industrial countries in which they usually have their corporate headquarters. Some of these activities, particularly related to the use of chemicals and the disposal of industrial wastes, may have long-term deleterious effects on the health and survival of local populations: whether it is massive lumbering of tropical forests, extractive activities (oil and mining) that poison water supplies and soils, chemical spraying of vast agricultural plantations, or the unsafe disposal of industrial wastes in toxic dumps without consideration of local conditions etc., all of which must be passively endured by populations that are unable to defend themselves due to the power of economic interests and corrupt governments. It is no coincidence, again, that many of these populations are the 'subordinate races' of the former colonial empires or the indigenous and tribal peoples (to which we turn below). Thus, it is possible to speak not only rhetorically of 'environmental racism,' a growing problem that emerges in the process of globalisation. Naturally, national states should be the first to defend their environments, but they are not always up to the task. At the

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<sup>18</sup> Jim Sleeper. 1997. *Liberal Racism. How Fixating on Race Subverts the American Dream*. New York: Penguin Books. For a similar argument regarding Mexicans in the US, see Linda Chavez. 1991. *Out of the Barrio. Toward a New Politics of Hispanic Assimilation*. New York: Basic Books. For a thorough and erudite analysis of the complexities of "anti-racism" see Pierre-André Taguieff. 1995. *Les fins de l'antiracisme*. Paris: Editions Michalon

<sup>19</sup> See Paul Gilroy. 1987. 'There ain't no Black in the Union Jack'. *The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press

international level, global responsibility and accountability must be enforced to prevent the expansion of this 'unsustainable' growth (not to be confused with development). To the extent that the right to a safe environment has become a fundamental human right, environmental racism is a growing concern of the world human rights community.

## RACISM AND INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

29. While the better known processes of racism (if only because they have been studied more intensively) occur in the former colonial motherlands or in what used to be called 'white settler' societies, another expression of racial and ethnic discrimination is to be found in areas in which formerly sovereign native or indigenous populations became subordinated to a modern state (after a shorter or longer period of colonial domination). This is notably the case of the countries of Latin America, conquered by Spain and Portugal in the sixteenth century, which obtained their political independence in the nineteenth century, but it also includes Anglophone North America as well as some other areas (notably Australia and New Zealand).
30. Indigenous peoples were never recognised as full-fledged members of society, usually remaining as wards of the state, after their lands and territories had been taken, their environment devastated, their cultures mutilated and their livelihoods destroyed by agents of empire, missionaries of God, government bureaucrats and corporate officers. The history of the dispossession and destruction of indigenous peoples has often been told. What is remarkable, is that so many of them have actually survived numerous genocides and ethnocides and are able, at the end of the second millennium, to demand their rights and struggle collectively for redress.<sup>20</sup>
31. The plight of indigenous peoples can be related to two major factors: the progressive destruction of their economy and livelihoods, and their denial as full and equal citizens in the modern nations that emerged out of the decay of the colonial empires. On the first count enough is known: once self-subsistent societies reduced to poverty and dependency, lacking the proper means to reproduce themselves as viable communities, a situation which continues at the end of the century. World Bank data indicate that the indigenous populations of Latin America live in 'abysmal' poverty, and that their indicators of socio-economic well being are much lower than the national averages.<sup>21</sup> Here again we find an overlapping of economic conditions and ethnic characteristics. Are Indians poor because they are Indians, or are they Indians because they are poor? A question which analysts still ask and provide ambiguous answers to. Some argued for a long time that Indian cultures were 'obstacles' to development and progress and should therefore be transformed through educational efforts and community development programs that might 'modernise' their backward communities. This was the basic principle of Latin America's *indigenista* policies for half a century, the avowed purpose of which was to assimilate indigenous peoples into the broader society. Others argued that the subordination and economic exploitation of indigenous communities by outside interests – not their own cultures — were to blame for their poverty and marginalisation. Only a change in economic relationships would enable indigenous communities to emerge from their subaltern status. Some development programs were indeed established in order to achieve these ends, but in general, they have been

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<sup>20</sup> The UN Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples is currently being considered by the UN Human Rights Commission, and a similar draft for the American continent is currently under review by the Organisation of American States (OAS). See: José R. Martínez Cobo. 1987. *Study of the Problem of Discrimination against Indigenous Populations*. Vol. 5. *Conclusions, Proposals and Recommendations*. (E/CN.4/Sub.2/1986/Add.4. New York. United Nations. Also: Roger Moody (Ed.). 1988. *The Indigenous Voice: Visions and Realities* London. Zed Books; and Franke Wilmer. 1993. *The Indigenous Voice in World Politics*. Newbury Park. Sage Publications

<sup>21</sup> George Psacharopoulos & Harry Anthony Patrinos (Eds.). 1994. *Indigenous People and Poverty in Latin America*. Washington: The World Bank.

only partially successful. As the global economy advances, and corporate interests expand upon Indian territories, the likelihood that things will change for the better are slim.<sup>22</sup>

32. The second factor which helps explain the subordinate and marginalised position of indigenous peoples is their systematic exclusion, until very recently, from the political system, and what is more, from the ideology of the nation. The Latin American countries gave themselves liberal constitutions in the early nineteenth century, mostly inspired by that of the United States, and attempted to create their newly independent nations as mirror images of Europe. In other words, the idea of nationhood implied for them the construction of a homogeneous culture and a unified social and political structure, something that few of them had at the time. The national culture thus defined was that of the small ruling classes who were ethnically the descendants of the early European colonists, augmented as time went by with the growing middle sectors of mixed racial and ethnic stock, the *mestizos*. Indigenous peoples were not considered to be part of the nation and were not recognised as distinct cultural components of the new republics, even when they actually represented in most countries the majority of the population.
33. Thus handicapped, indigenous peoples became the 'invisible' citizens of their countries, strangers in their own lands, denied legal and formal recognition as collective entities, who were expected to disappear as such and conform, each person individually, to the dominant cultural norms handed down by the hegemonic groups, when they were not actually hunted down and exterminated during the land-grabs of nineteenth-century savage capitalist expansion, as occurred in a number of countries (Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Uruguay among others). To this day, Latin American societies are highly stratified (income distribution continues to be acutely skewed in most countries), and indigenous peoples (as well as people of African origin) occupy the lowest rung of the social hierarchy.
34. Only during the last two decades have things begun to change for the indigenous, as a result of social and political mobilisation, the militant activities of indigenous organisations and the sympathetic support of national and international public opinion. During the eighties a number of Latin American countries adopted constitutional changes and new legislation giving Indians for the first time some kind of legal recognition and an opportunity to participate actively in the political system. While legal changes are no doubt positive developments, much remains to be done to break down the resistance of *mestizo* society to effective indigenous cultural and social citizenship (as distinct from formal legal citizenship).

## CONCLUSIONS

35. In the previous paragraphs, I have attempted to outline some of the structural factors in the persistent phenomenon of racism in an era of globalisation. I have stressed the issue of migration and the constitution of 'new' ethnic and racial minorities in some countries. Mention has also been made of the situation of indigenous peoples in numerous parts of the world. In contrast to earlier times, when it was closely linked to colonialism, contemporary racism adopts the form of *xenophobia and social exclusion*. Despite the retreat of legally sanctioned racial discrimination, many forms of structural and institutional racism subsist, and more recent legislation in some countries directed at limiting the influx of foreigners may have racist implications at various levels.
36. In an increasingly interdependent world, in which a kind of *global apartheid* prevails, racism is but one expression of social class differentiation which relates to the functioning of the world

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<sup>22</sup> In October 1999, the U'wa people of Colombia staged a protest against an attempt to open their ancestral territories to oil exploration by a multinational corporation supported by the national government. They argue that drawing oil out of the land destroys the Earth Mother, and thus their livelihood. In Chile, the Mapuche have long been struggling to regain control over their ancestral territories.

capitalist system. On another level, it reflects the changing nature of the nation-state and the role of nationalist ideologies in the repositioning of political interest groups as globalisation determines and conditions changing power relationships. Racism is not simply unlawful or unhealthy behaviour (as Banton points out), but a dynamic social phenomenon created and maintained by specific economic and political circumstances. In order to combat racism, these circumstances must be taken into account.

37. Aside from the usual legal and judicial mechanisms (anti-discrimination measures, outlawing of hate-speech, compensatory actions etc.) states must strengthen and promote educational, cultural and communications policies at all levels in an unceasing effort to counteract racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism, intolerance and exclusion.<sup>23</sup> But even such concerted activities might not be enough, unless the process of globalisation itself becomes reoriented into a more solidarity-based mode and unless the minimal objectives of equitable social development, as outlined for example in the Plan of Action of the Social Summit at Copenhagen in 1995 are met. Moreover, the world civil society (increasingly globalised as well) has a crucial role to play in this process.
38. As we enter the new millennium, we must countenance and accept the fact that our national societies are increasingly becoming multi-racial, pluri-ethnic, multi-lingual and multi-cultural. The old vision of a homogeneous nation-state is being replaced by the idea of postnational and multi-cultural citizenship in its various possible legal, political and cultural forms. This process is the result of both domestic socio-demographic changes within nation-states themselves (as already alluded to above) and of the integration of these states into larger regional units (such as the European Union). Preaching abstract 'equality' for racial and ethnically differentiated populations is no longer enough (though it has by no means been superseded). The oft proclaimed and much abused 'right to difference' must be complemented with a set of truly multi- and inter-cultural policies that promote recognition of and respect for social and cultural pluralism within a unified framework of human rights guarantees for individuals and collectivities ('races,' nations, minorities, tribes, communities, ethnies, peoples...). The rights of minorities and indigenous peoples are already being considered in the framework of some multilateral agencies (UN, ILO, OAS, EU and Council of Europe), and have been addressed by numerous national governments in different ways. Much more can be done in this field, and it is essential that the public realise that partial measures by themselves, however nobly formulated, cannot be successful unless they are integrated into a coherent set of global policies that address the issues involved in a holistic manner. Hopefully, the forthcoming World Conference on Racism and Racial Discrimination will address these issues constructively.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Preferential politics or affirmative action or positive discrimination, as compensatory measures are often called, are frequently challenged on the same grounds that justify them: they are accused of being in themselves racist or discriminative in favour of some, and therefore against other groups. The ICERD, however, considers that: "... special measures, taken for the sole purpose of securing adequate advancement of certain racial or ethnic groups or individuals, in order to ensure them equal enjoyment or exercise of human rights and fundamental freedoms, shall not be deemed racial discrimination, provided that such measures do not lead to separate rights for different racial groups and are not continued after the objectives pursued have been achieved." Ion Diaconu, *The definitions of racial discrimination*, Background paper prepared for the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. (E/CN.4/1999/WG.1/BP.10). This statement is consistent with legal practice in the United States.

<sup>24</sup> On multicultural citizenship and postnational membership see, *inter alia*, Will Kymlicka. 1995. *Multicultural Citizenship. A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights*. Oxford. Clarendon Press; Yasemin N. Soysal. 1994. *Limits of Citizenship. Migrants and Postnational Membership in Europe*. Chicago. The University of Chicago Press.