



International and interdisciplinary Symposium  
**“Racism and racial discrimination, from grade school to the university”**  
University of Paris Diderot: September 27<sup>th</sup> -29<sup>th</sup>

## Call for papers

Nowadays, it is generally admitted that different parts of French society (employment, housing, etc.) are structured by racism and ethnic and racial discrimination. However, some fields such as the education sector in general and public education in particular, remain under-examined. They indeed benefit from an a priori which delegitimizes attempts to question them because of the universalist and egalitarian principals they promote and the image of selflessness of their professionals. The representation of the school as a neutral and safe space for students suggests that “it is exempt from racism and from discrimination”<sup>1</sup> (Dubet 1993 : 299). Racism and discrimination are presumed to be intrinsically exogenous and heterogeneous from a school defined in reference to an ideal of neutrality (Dhume, 2014). A part of social sciences contributes to spread and legitimize this conception, suggesting the idea that “the rise of racism is a social phenomenon extrinsic from school”<sup>2</sup> (Tapernoux 1997 : 37). Public education is rather seen as playing a key role in promoting antiracism. Regarding political struggles, the anti-oppressive pedagogy has already been invested for a long time, particularly as a medium of awareness-raising (Freire, 1974 ; Hooks, 2013 ; Célestine, 2016). Concerning institutional antiracism, especially the State’s and school’s, education against racism aims for the adhesion of the younger generations to the “values of the Republic”. And yet, even though schools and universities affirm principles that refuse racism and discriminations by putting forward these fundamental values as constitutive of their institutional program, what is the reality of racism and racial discrimination, and antiracism and antidiscrimination in educational and academic institutions?

### **An area of research to be built**

Despite (or with) the affirmation of these principles and the political significance of these issues, the understanding of the reality of racism and racial discriminations of / in the school and the academic

1 « [elle serait] donc préservée du racisme et de la discrimination » (Dubet 1993 : 299)

2 “la montée du racisme est un phénomène extrinsèque à l’école” (Tapernoux, 1997 : 37)

world is not very commonly addressed. This issue carries a weak political legitimacy within educational and academic institutions and rarely lead to organizational change and wide-ranging actions. Unlike Great Britain and the United States (Bhopal, 2016), the issue has a poor legitimacy and is understudied and addressed in French academic research. Overall, little research aiming at documenting, assessing and analyzing issues of racism and discriminations in schools, and even more in higher education and the academia is available. Despite the existence of studies over the last five decades that provided evidence about the processes of ethnicization, racization and discrimination in almost all dimensions of the educational system (Payet, 2003 ; Lorcerie, 2003, 2004 ; Dhume, Dukic, Chauvel & Perrot, 2011)—the understanding of the situation still remains piecemeal.

Available studies are often exploratory investigations with a limited extent, or are more systematic but remain isolated. The reference to ethnicity and “origins” can be used as a positive reference when it shows an “ethnic fellowship” between students (Guénif-Souilamas, 2000 ; Perroton, 2000). It can also be used as a resource by school actors, in order to establish a closer relationship with students, and to boost their self-esteem, although this often leads to opposite effects (Bonnerly, 2006 ; Sanselme, 2009). Most of the time, ethnic categorization is mixed up with social categorization and nurtures processes of stigmatization and hierarchization. On this point, early studies highlighted the strength of racial representations hierarchizing students (Durand, 1991), the weight of social and ethnic criteria in teachers’ judgment (Akers Porrini and Zirotti, 1992; Zimmerman, 1978), or the ethnic segregation of classes (Payer, 1995). If some recent investigations have confirmed these observations by showing the persistence of ethnic and racial categorizations in school actors’ perceptions (Bozec, 2010), in the debates and the decisions taken during class councils or disciplinary boards (Zéphir, 2013), they remain rare and dispersed. Other studies, even more rare, show that discriminatory processes and criteria are present in the recruitment of future teachers (Dequire, 2008). For example, professionals seen as black or with an immigrant background experience racism throughout their career (Bérard, 2002; Audebert, 2014). Recent statistical studies, although they are still too rare, highlight the mechanisms of discrimination which target individuals seen as Muslim in their access to university courses (Decharne & Liedts, 2007), or to private schools (Du Parquet, Brodaty & Petit, 2013). Some studies also provide statistical data on the pervasive feeling of being racialized or discriminated because of one’s origin or skin color (Brinbaum & Primon, 2013 ; Eberhard & Simon, 2016 ; Ferry & Tenret, 2017), while others demonstrate the importance and the impact of ethnic segregation in the school system (Felouzis, Liot & Perroton, 2005). However, much work remains to conduct to achieve a systematic, well-established and comprehensive analysis of the processes producing racism and racial discriminations in the educational and academic spheres, and how these processes influence the functioning of these institutions.

### **Understanding racism and discrimination as a social relationship**

The weak legitimacy of these questions can be related to a conceptualization of racism as either a predominantly extreme right-wing ideology or individual and one-time “misconducts”. Similarly, discriminations are mainly considered as individual and conscious acts or as systematic policies (in reference to historical institutional experiences like segregation in the United States or the Apartheid in South Africa). This kind of conceptualization is implicitly present in some of the most visible institutional initiatives in France, such as the “Commission against racism and negationism”<sup>3</sup> at the Université Jean Moulin Lyon III (Rouso, 2004). This way of thinking is also found amongst the school

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3« Commission contre le racisme et le négationnisme », Université Jean Moulin Lyon III

staff in France and Quebec (Potvin, Mc Andrew and Kannouté 2006; Dhume-Sonzogni, 2007 and 2014). School actors tend to consider that the origin of the problem lies in the school population, which shows an ethnic and racial interpretation of the issue: the racist discourse indeed “blames children [from immigrant families] for bringing into schools the problems of the urban crisis and for causing teachers’ paralysis, tensions, violence or a process of ethnicization that lead to cultural provocations”<sup>4</sup> (Wieviorka 1998: 99). This definition of the “problem” is also visible in the official discourse of the Ministry that mainly targets discrimination between students (DGESCO, 2010). Such an approach also reveals conceptual confusion: the idea of discrimination supposes the existence of processes of selection and hierarchization, and so a position of power. Thus it refers to school institutions’ responsibility rather than students’ one. If racism can take the form of racization and abuse between students, school processes play a significant role in this field: the difficulties of educational institutions and teachers in dealing with racist interactions between students contribute de facto to the socialization of children and young people by trivializing racism, or even by punishing those who are reacting aggressively to the violence they experience (Dhume-Sonzogni, 2007).

Like classism and sexism, racism and racial discrimination depend on a system of social hierarchization based on a process of racization of individuals and groups, as defined by Guillaumin (1972). This process does not necessarily refer explicitly to “races”, but also to cultural, religious and other categories which are essentialized (De Rudder, 2003), as shown, for example, by the way the reference to the French “laïcité” is used (Bozec, 2015; Orange, 2016). This system of social hierarchization is a long-lasting and structural feature of the world order and is maintained by interactions, practices, organizations or the daily functioning of institutions. Despite the values schools and universities refer to, they are nonetheless permeated by racism and racial discrimination, according to specific processes that this symposium aims at bringing to light.

This system of social hierarchization is rooted in racist values and ideas, which are still circulating nowadays, sometimes targeting specific groups – “islamophobia” or “anti-Muslim racism”, “anti-Semitism”, “anti-Roma racism”, etc. –, all these notions being debated in the political and academic spheres. This hierarchical system also has a material and practical dimension (Guillaumin, 1972; De Rudder, Pointe and Vouch, 2001), and translates into personal experiences in everyday life (Essed, 1991). At a micro-level, aggression, exclusion, discrimination and humiliation, regularly experienced, constitute a system and reflect macro-level mechanisms, more structural and sometimes institutionalized (legal discriminations, etc.). The reality of racism and discrimination often happens in a quiet way and manifests in common, banal and non-thought practices of everyday life (Guénif-Souilamas, 2000). Hence it is difficult for professional actors and institutions to recognize such practices for what they are, and even sometimes for the affected individuals and groups, who may minimize their personal experiences of discrimination (Cuturello, 2011). In any case, racial discrimination translates into individual deteriorated experiences of socialization, of training or of life, at school or at the university (Quintero, 2012).

### **An approach necessarily articulated and contextualized of social relations**

The question of how racism and racial discrimination operate in the context of the school and the university cannot be answered without looking at other social relationships such as class and gender.

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4 [Le discours raciste] « reproche [aux] enfants [de familles immigrées] d’introduire dans l’école les problèmes de la crise urbaine et d’être source de paralysie pour les enseignants, de tensions, de violence ou d’une ethnicisation qui se prolonge par des provocations culturelles » (Wieviorka 1998 : 99)

Racism often has a gendered dimension (Essed, 1996) and creates different social experiences depending on the positioning of each individual with regards to their gender or sexual orientation. The forms of racism can vary with the socio-economic positioning of the social groups in attendance, but also with the territorial situations of the educational and academic institutions (without considering the indirect effects of the labeling of territories, which are sometimes metonymies of socio-racial categorizations). In every theoretical frame of reference – i.e. “intersectionality” (Crenshaw, 1991), “coextensivity and consubstantiality of social relationships”<sup>5</sup> (Kergoat, 2009), etc. – it is necessary to analyze how the micro-shaping of power (Magar-Braeuner, 2017) works in the school, through the articulation of experiences, practices and actualizations of racial relationships *in relation to* other systems of social hierarchization. At the same time, understanding racism in the educational and academic worlds implies considering their singularities. These worlds are structured by specific systems of power, organization and distribution of work – related to knowledge –, and are also structured by hierarchies between adults and children, teachers and pupils, students and professors, and between professional activities (head office, teaching, educational life, administration, technical services, cleaning, security etc.).

The analysis of the functioning of the educational and academic institutions, and of the role of racism and racial discriminations within them requires a contextualized but also situated approach (Haraway, 1988). Indeed, rare are the studies which examine thoroughly the spaces, the modes of relationships, the trajectories and the actors’ and contexts’ characteristics which can foster the salience of ethno-racial categorizations and the development of discrimination processes, or on the contrary, which can contain or prevent them (Lorcerie, 2011). The study of social relationships in educational and academic fields, as in other fields of social life, would gain depth by paying attention to contextual effects and to the danger of an interpretation *a priori* focused (only) on “race” (Wimmer, 2015).

### **Main objectives of the symposium and topics**

This interdisciplinary and international symposium aims at opening the debate, starting from the current state of knowledge on these questions. Despite its international outlook, it focuses foremost on the situation in France and its oversea territories.

It aims at “mapping” what we know, or don’t know to this day about racism and racial discrimination processes in the context of the school and the academic field, including their articulations with other systems of power and social hierarchization. This “cartography” will help to build perspectives for future research programs. This symposium also aims at giving greater public visibility to controversial issues, to research studies which are little known or have limited exposure and to approaches that leave room to “subjugated knowledge” (Foucault, 1997; Boubeker, 2004). This event is made to create a public space for the exchange and confrontation of analyses and for the dialogue between scientific and practical perspectives on questions which have been, up until now, little legitimized despite their social and political relevance.

The symposium will be based on four central topics for discussion:

1. What do we know about the daily experiences of discrimination and racism in the context of diverse educational institutions within the private and public sector, in elementary schools as well as secondary schools or universities? How do students, parents and the professionals within those

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<sup>5</sup>« coextensivité et consubstantialité des rapports sociaux » (Kergoat, 2009)

institutions (teachers, administration, unions, etc.) experience discrimination and racism? How are these experiences perceived and / or analyzed by individuals, and how are they linked with gender, social class and power relationships in educational institutions?

2. What do we know about systemic / institutional forms of discrimination and racism in practice in the educational and academic fields? Which empirical data do we have to certify and document this reality, to understand its organization, its functioning and its dynamics? Which contexts, spaces and modes of relationships foster the processes of ethnicization, racization and discrimination or, on the contrary, prevent them? What do we know about the extent of these phenomena, and their functioning in educational relationships and space ? What are the concrete obstacles for the implementation of studies and fieldwork investigations on these issues?
3. What do we know about the colonial "heritage" and / or about the transfers and circulations (of imaginary, organization, staff, practices...) between the colonial educational institutions and today's French school and university ? To what extent are contemporary racism and racial discrimination related to these historic experiences, and are (dis-)continuities visible? How racism and racial discrimination within these institutions and social spaces have changed over time?
4. Finally, what do we know about anti-racist and anti-discrimination practices and struggles both in the educational and academic fields? What are the forms of resistance against these oppressive processes? What are they based on and which are their effects? How can we analyze the educational and academic action or inaction in order to regulate or oppose racism and discriminations? More specifically, to what extent do the so-called systems for "promoting diversity" help to regulate racism and discriminations, or, on the contrary, contribute to reproduce, if not to hide, this reality?

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## PAPER PROPOSALS

Proposals can draw on one or more of the topics outlined in this Call for Papers.

The contributions will last 20 minutes each, and will be gathered in different thematic workshops. You may hand in proposals and present your communication either in French or in English.

All proposals must be uploaded on Sciencesconf, on the website dedicated to the symposium: [www.racismeeecole.sciencesconf.org](http://www.racismeeecole.sciencesconf.org) (You first have to register on Sciencesconf). Afterwards, you will receive a confirmation of receipt by e-mail.

The length of the proposals is limited to 3000 characters. Proposals should include the title of the contribution, a summary presenting the empirical data and the method used and the main findings, and three to four selected references. All proposals should also include the author's name, surname, and scientific or institutional affiliation.

**Deadline for proposal submission: May 25, 2018**

Answer of the scientific committee: June 2018

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