

# INTRODUCTION: RACISM IN METROPOLITAN AREAS

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After the terrible annihilation of peoples because of their so-called racial features in the Second World War, the United Nations Organization was founded to work on the basis of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The basic creed of this attempt at worldwide negotiation and interaction in a common forum was not so much 'no more war', but rather 'human rights and human dignity for all'. One could indeed say that the UN's purpose is to prevent and eventually to remedy violations of basic rights of anyone by combating structural humiliation, exclusion and enslavement. The establishment of such an organisation and the implementation of the Declaration of Human Rights in actual policies throughout the world have never been attempted on such a large scale in the history of humankind. Over the past five decades, we have witnessed an increase not only in knowledge, but also in behavioural patterns accordant with Human Rights: an unprecedented historical milestone. But not all is well. A political discourse that incites exclusion and hatred for those who are seen as different is unfortunately gaining in appeal, most notably in affluent and developed countries, where certain groups are excluded from the benefits and privileges of mainstream society because of their ethnic, racial or religious identity. Two decades ago it would have been utterly impossible to publicly defend the atrocities of the Holocaust or any other racist policies. Today, however, certain political parties actively support such opinions by drawing upon racist discourses (often disguised as cultural fundamentalist proposals) which are finding massive appeal in the older Western democratic societies (see Ford, this volume). Racism is back, and antiracism is no longer accepted as an argument that suffices in itself.

Our first international conference held on these issues highlighted the topic of new manifestations of racism in Europe (Evens, 2002). The second international conference, held at Ghent University focused on the worldwide

context of large cities and racism. One obvious reason for this is that nowadays about half of the entire human population resides in cities and urban areas, thus accelerating the growth of the metropolis. This reality led us to investigate whether this form of settlement would show universal features of (new) exclusion of groups that differ from the nationalistic or territorial ethnic basis for racism of the past. In what sense does the larger city induce forms of collaboration or of structural exclusion that would be typical in some sense for the anonymous, necessarily multicultural and intrinsically dynamic context of the large city? This was the focus of the second conference from which the present volume emanates.

The format of the conference differed from what is commonly followed in academia. As racism is a social, cultural and political problem, and not a merely scientific topic, we have attempted to involve a series of relevant agents in dialogue with each other. Scientists, politicians, cultural brokers, captains of industry and media people were engaged in a constant forum of discussion during the conference.

The book expresses a similar mix of voices and competencies. Unfortunately, not all of the speakers were able to submit a written contribution. Racism is on the agenda of all these agents in contemporary society and our aim was to present an ongoing dialogue in this book. Moreover, we remain mindful that a printed dialogue is not really comparable with the dynamism of the real event.

Taking into consideration the focus of this publication, we begin the book with a short contribution by the chairman of a social democratic party with government responsibility in Belgium (Janssens, this volume). We end this part with the perspective on policies against racism at the European level by a member of the European Parliament who has a distinguished reputation on these issues (Ford, this volume).

The present introduction and the synthetic conclusions and propositions by Laura Nader in the final chapter thus encapsulate a set of contributions that is deliberately varied as a result of the particular professional interests of the authors. We would like to express our gratitude to the participating scholars, but even more so to the people 'from the field' for their willingness to participate in this endeavour.

The general structure of the book divides the contributions into two categories: those that discuss ways of empowerment and those that detail processes of disempowerment. Duster gives a detailed analysis of how employment policies in larger American cities can offer opportunities or keep racially identified youth away from the job market. Seward examines recent attempts to deal with surging racism in British cities. His involvement in this field in insightful in delineating a series of potentially effective measures. Hervik on the other hand, stems from a double background: that of academia and of policy-making institutes. He focuses on the situation in Denmark and proposes to negotiate with the people about limits of tolerance. Three authors then offer different perspectives on the questions of racism in India's caste society.

In the second part we present a set of authors highlighting cases of empowerment. Again we drew specialists from academia (e.g., Marx, Gingrich) and from the field. In the latter group journalists (Peirs) as well policy makers (Leman) offer their expertise.

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## Reference

Evens Foundation. 2002. *Europe's New Racism?* Oxford: Berghahn Books.