

The Little Prince, Race and the Five Planets of Racism

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Abstract

This article takes an unconventional approach to the issue of ‘race’. It illustrates the complexity and inter-disciplinarity of the racial phenomenon by blending child-like and adult-like perspectives and, as such, it is written half as a fable and half as an academic article. It puts forward a number of arguments. First, the piece suggests that five key dimensions of racism exist—namely, the historical, the philosophical, the scientific, the legal and the economic—and that they are regularly used to justify and rationalise something (racial prejudice) that is often irrational. Second, the article highlights the ‘banality’ of racism—an attitude that stems from mankind’s diffidence towards diversity, exploits such fear and encourages forms of passivity that, as Hannah Arendt noted, are the best way of ‘banalising’ evil and making it appear tolerable. The fanciful classifications of ‘races’—such as those articulated in South Africa’s apartheid, where poor Chinese were regarded as ‘yellows’ while wealthy Japanese were classified as ‘honorary whites’—are cases in point. Third, the piece argues that racial discrimination is often unrecognised, internalised and unquestioned by society: since racial attitudes are learnt in childhood and become part of our cultural baggage, they are extremely difficult to identify and eradicate. Finally, the article suggests that racism is not only ‘banal’ but also highly convenient: racists do not need to know the individual, they just need to know the characteristics of the group to which that individual is thought to belong. The piece concludes in favour of a neglected right for children: the right to be left free from racism.

Keywords: racism, children, Little Prince, fable, anti-racism, education

1. Introduction: Learning from Children

I have serious reasons to believe that the planet from which the Little Prince came is the asteroid known as B-612. This asteroid has only once been seen through the telescope. That was by a Turkish astronomer, in 1909. On making his discovery, the astronomer had presented it to the International Astronomical Congress, in great demonstration. But he was in Turkish costume, and so nobody believed what he said. Fortunately however...a Turkish dictator made a law that his subjects, under pain of death, should change to European costume. So in 1920 the astronomer gave his demonstration all over again, dressed with impressive style and elegance. And this time everybody was convinced and accepted his report. Grown-ups are like that. One must not hold against them. Children should always show great forbearance toward grown-up people” (Saint-Exupéry, 1999: 15).

Children are ‘the hands by which we take hold of heaven’, an ancient proverb states. They shape our present and represent a bridge to our future. But children are also unused computers that grown-ups programme with all their values and beliefs—and thus with all their stereotypes and narrow-mindedness. Children see the same things as adults and yet they see them differently. “Grown-ups never understand anything by themselves”, Saint-Exupéry wrote, “and it is tiresome for children to be always and forever explaining things to them”. Left to their own devices, children accept others without the need to stereotype.

Grown-ups, however, soon come to influence children with their own perspectives, some of which are good and others—like racism—are not. Education plays an essential role in this because, contrary to popular opinion, racism is not inherent but learned. It is an attitude that stems from an impoverishment of culture and a patchiness of world-outlook. Regrettably, humankind seems to have absorbed it at a very early stage of its development.

Indeed, few prejudices are as easy to pick up and as difficult to get rid of as racial fear. It has accompanied mankind throughout history and it has found its Zenith in the genocides of the 20th century, a century paved with

the blood of people slaughtered simply for being *perceived* as different. In this respect, totalitarianism may have been built on terror, as Hannah Arendt wrote, but it was maintained through the short-term re-education of adults and the long-term education of children. Rwanda's Hutus in 1994 were short of time and prioritized the former through the microphones of the sinister *Radio des Mille Collines*, but Hitler took his time and, unsurprisingly, there was scarcely another problem with which he dealt so assiduously as education of the youth:

“If as the first task of the State we recognise the preservation, care and development of the best racial elements, it is natural that this care must not only extend to the birth of every little national and racial comrade, but that it must educate the young sapling to become a valuable link in the chain of future reproduction” (Hitler as quoted in Burleigh and Wippermann, 1991: 102).

Another dictator, Pol Pot, agreed: “We must give our youth a pure and perfect depiction of the history of the Party”, he stated (Vickery, 1984: 148). Not only are the tragedies of the 20th century reminders of the dramatic effects that racism can have, therefore, they also show how crucial education is in the economics of genocide.

This article takes an unconventional approach to the issue of racism. It argues that racial prejudice is, as with most sad things in life, the responsibility of adults and that in this area it is the grown-ups who should learn from children. The piece aims at illustrating the complexity and inter-disciplinarity of racial discrimination by blending child-like and adult-like perspectives and concludes in favour of a forgotten right for children: the right to be free from racism. Let us look at children and let them teach us one of the greatest of lessons: diversity.

While this is a difficult message for adults to learn, it is possible, for “all grown-ups were once children, even though few of them remember it” (Saint-Exupéry, 1999: 4). It is thus from childhood—that pivotal moment when both good and bad things are learnt—that grown-ups should embark on the path towards racial equality. Since racism is learned during children's education process, it is also in education that racism can be fought by grown-ups—who, when it comes to matters of ‘race’, should begin by re-educating themselves.

2. The First Planet and the Historian: Historical Roots of Racism

- *Good morning’, said the Little Prince.*
- *‘Good morning’, said the Historian.*
- *‘Who are you?’, asked the Little Prince, smiling at the old man who was reading at his desk, surrounded by thick books.*
- *‘I am the Historian’.*
- *‘And what do Historians do?’*
- *‘We remind people of what they did in the past’.*
- *‘What a funny job!’, exclaimed the Little Prince.*
- *‘It is an endless and tiring job’, said the Historian, ‘and it is not funny at all’.*
- *‘I apologize. But haven’t you said that you remind people of what they did?’*
- *‘Precisely’.*
- *‘Well, isn’t it funny that you should tell someone what they did in the past? You should tell people about their future instead. They would be more interested’.*
- *‘In a way I do, because the future lies in the past’, said the Historian, who had by now lifted his head from his book. ‘But tell me. You don’t come from Earth, do you?’*
- *‘I have never been to Earth’, confessed the Little Prince, shyly.*
- *‘That’s quite obvious from your question. You ought to know that grown-ups are strange creatures. They need to be reminded of what they did all the time. And not only this. They also need to be reminded of when they did it, why they did it, where they did it and how they did it. Sometimes not even this is enough, and I have to repeat things over and over again. I have been doing it for all my life. That’s why I am so tired. And old.’*
- *‘And what happens if, say, tomorrow you oversleep and forget to remind them of what happened today?’*
- *‘They would repeat the mistakes they have made today’.*
- *‘So your job is what grown-ups call ‘a matter of consequence’.*

- *'Of course it is a matter of consequence! It is a matter of utmost consequence. But unfortunately it is also a matter of great frustration'.*

- *'Why? Aren't grown-ups grateful to you?'*

- *'Grateful?!', sighed the Historian. 'Not at all. Often they don't even listen to me. And when they do, they quickly forget what I tell them. They still haven't understood that forgetting history is dangerous'.*

- *'But can't you warn them about the consequences of not listening?'*, asked the Little Prince, who was feeling sorry that so old a man had been given so ungrateful a job.

- *'That's what I do—all the time! But they get angry at me'.*

- *'Why?'*

- *'Because my job is to remind adults of their mistakes. But adults do not want to hear about their mistakes, so they forget them and think they never made any. This is why they keep repeating them again and again, for all eternity.'*

- *'So, grown-up people never recognise that they are wrong?'*, asked the Little Prince.

- *'Sometimes they do. But even then, they hardly ever apologize. Adults hate to apologize. But if one doesn't apologize, one doesn't change. That's why they repeat their mistakes'.*

The Little Prince remained silent for a while. Then he said:

- *'I have a Rose on my Planet. She is a bit vain. She often boasts about her four thorns. But she does apologize for this—by coughing. And she is so beautiful'.*

- *'Roses are humble', sighted the Historian, 'while humans are arrogant. They think they know everything, but they know very little. And even that little, they forget too easily'.*

- *'Humans should learn from my Rose', thought the Little Prince. 'She always coughs when she makes mistakes'.*

The history of racism is the history of mankind, and the idea of 'race' is mankind's biggest unrecognised mistake—one that led to tortures, pogroms and genocide. It is still unclear how many lives the greatest madness in history—the Nazi project of a racially-pure Germany—cost the world, but the magnitude of the crime is apocalyptic. Five to six million Jews, millions of Soviet prisoners of war, half a million Gypsies, one hundred-thousand people with disabilities and thousands of homosexuals and Jehovah's witnesses were all victims of an 'extended' idea of 'race'. Not to mention the 'special' relationship of the Nazis with young people:

"Children had been 'guinea pigs' in medical experiments conducted by SS Doctor Kurt Heissmeyer. He had removed their lymph glands and injected living tuberculosis bacteria into their skin. During an interrogation in 1964, Dr Heissmeyer explained that, for him, 'there had been no real difference between Jews and animals'" (Bruchfeld and Levine, 1998, 3).

The result was horrifying: in Europe, over half a million Jewish children were murdered.

Shocking as this is, however, the Nazi ideology was merely the practical culmination of deep-rooted ideas that had been well-established for centuries. Indeed, it is clear that human beings never seemed at ease with the idea of diversity and the fear of difference extends over centuries and stretches across continents. As early as 380 BC, for instance, the Greek king Minoxos noted that "[t]he mind of this State of Athens is so noble and free and so powerful and healthy because we are pure Hellenes and not commingled with Barbarians" (Baumann, 1999: 29). While 'pure' Hellenes were seen to personify the ancient Greek ideal of *καλοκαγαθία* (from *καλος και αγαθος*, 'handsome and nice'), non-Hellenic people were regarded as barbaric and the very word *βαρβαρος* ('barbarians') was coined for them. In this way, the subjective idea of 'beauty' was given an objective outlook and everything that departed from it was perceived as substandard.

The theme of Hellenic beauty was enthusiastically taken up in Renaissance Europe. As the historian George Mosse wrote,

"[s]uch beauty corresponded to the order of nature guided by natural laws. The eighteenth-century gardens and parks made nature conform to this theory, and the example of Greek sculpture applied the same ideals to man himself. Beauty meant order and tranquillity and it revealed an unchanging, genuine world of health and happiness. It put adults in touch with God and nature" (Mosse, 1978: 10).

More importantly, beauty became a policy tool as soon as the Europeans started their ‘civilizing’ missions abroad. In those distant lands, they soon faced an unexpected riddle: how to deal with someone who not only acted differently but who also *looked* different? This raised the question as to whether these ‘uncivilized’ people belonged to the adult community—and the colonizers’ response was often in the negative. Once it was recognised that these populations were physically different, the gate was open to their conceptualisation as inferior beings, justifying the exploitation and slavery that underpinned European colonialism:

“The expropriation of property, the denial of political rights, the introduction of slavery and other forms of coercive labour, as well as outright extermination, presupposed a worldview which distinguished Europeans (children of God) from others. Such a worldview was needed to explain why some should be free and others enslaved, why some had rights to land and property while others did not” (Omi and Winant, 1986: 58).

The vague and inconsistent idea of ‘race’ was particularly appealing to European explorers and it soon served as the intellectual basis for colonialism, which was effectively a form of state racism. In this context, the Europeans constructed a grand hierarchy of superiority/inferiority, moving from the lowest forms of life at the bottom to God at the top. Thus, one question prevailed: which ‘race’ is closer to God and which to apes?

French diplomat Arthur De Gobineau’s (1816-1882) response to this question reflects these racial attitudes of the 19th and 20th century Europeans. Indeed, his understanding of the relationship between beauty and moral righteousness can be seen simply as a development of the idea of Hellenic beauty mentioned above:

“The animal character...is stamped on the Negro from birth and foreshadows his destiny and his intellect will always move within a very narrow circle...White people [on the other hand] are the highest and...are gifted with a greater physical power and an extraordinary instinct for order, not merely as a guarantee of peace and tranquillity, but as an indispensable means of self-preservation” (De Gobineau, 1967: 205-7).

Europe—and thus the world—had found a simple, moralistic basis for racism that became widely embedded in daily discourse. Indeed, it became so entrenched that, despite scientific evidence to the contrary, it remains a powerful scourge in contemporary society. As the Historian told the Little Prince, adults rarely recognise their mistakes, so it is perhaps unsurprising that the ‘unrecognised mistake’ of racial categorization has been at the heart of much unhappiness and has cost many lives. In the wake of the Holocaust the world cried: ‘Never again!’ But it happened, again and again. Bosnia and Rwanda serve to demonstrate that the future lies in the past, but they are also sinister reminders of the calamitous consequences that can result from forgetting history.

3. The Second Planet and the Philosopher: Philosophical Roots of Racism

- *‘Good afternoon’*, said the Little Prince.
- *“Good afternoon”, replied the man with white scruffy hair.*
- *“Who are you?”*
- *“I am the Philosopher”, said the Philosopher.*
- *“And what do Philosophers do?”*
- *“We think.”*
- *“Oh, then I must be a Philosopher too”, said the Little Prince, who was delighted to learn that he had been one without even realising it.*
- *“I don’t think so. Philosophers do not go around other planets asking questions and bothering people”.*
- *“I apologize”, said the Little Prince. “But I, too, think”.*
- *“Philosophers think at a higher level than anyone else. In fact, we think at such a high level that sometimes it is difficult even for us to understand what we have thought ourselves. That’s why we need others to study and interpret our thoughts. Sometimes they come up with even better ideas than we have had.”*
- *“And what are you thinking about nowadays?”*
- *“‘Race’, the Philosopher replied.*
- *“What is ‘Race’?”*
- *“I have no idea. That’s why I am thinking about it”.*

- “But how can you think of something if you don’t know anything about it?”
- “It is very simple. Grown-ups asked me to think about ‘race’ because they said it is a matter of consequence and they needed some serious explanations from a distinguished intellectual to rely upon. So now I am thinking. And sooner or later I will come up with a theory about it. Then I will write it down and grown-ups will wholeheartedly believe it. They always believe what Philosophers say because they regard us as people of consequence”.
- “Grown-ups are curious creatures”, the Little Prince thought to himself. “They ask a person of consequence (the Philosopher) to think about a matter of consequence (race). But they don’t know what that matter is. And what is more, neither does the Philosopher! So he is the one who gets to decide what this matter of consequence is all about. This is quite a convenient profession!” Then, remembering his visit to the Historian, the Little Prince asked:
- “And do you ever make mistakes?”
- “Of course. Everyone does”.
- “A friend of mine would be happy to hear this! And do you recognise them?”
- “Of course I recognise them. I am a Philosopher—Philosophers are clever”.
- “And what do adults say when you tell them that, after so much thinking about their matter of consequence, you have made a mistake?”
- “I never tell adults about the mistakes I make.”
- “No?”
- “Absolutely not. They would be terribly disappointed! They are so happy when I come up with a new theory about ‘race’—whatever it is. They trust me. Plus they are so sensitive about mistakes”.
- “So I was told”, said the Little Prince.
- Then he thought to himself:
- “This Philosopher is quite a powerful person. But it is good that my friend the Historian lives on a different planet. He wouldn’t be happy to know that, just a few stars away, there is someone whose theories—no matter how wrong—convey such a great authority over grown-up people”.

Racism and philosophy have often formed a fruitful alliance. The British racial ideologue Houston Stewart Chamberlain wrote in 1899 that “[n]othing is so convincing as the consciousness of the possession of race”, adding that “[t]he man who belongs to a distinct and pure race never loses the sense of it” (Bruchfeld and Levine, 1994: 4). Because physical differences are visible, they were objects of study for the early European thinkers who tried to establish a theoretical basis for the colonization, exploitation and submission of the ‘uncivilized’. While these intellectual attempts were complicated by the fact that colonialism collided with the values of equality which formed the basis for the colonizers’ religion, mankind is capable of considerable ideological tolerance when it comes to conflating contrasting ideologies under the pressure of power or money.

Racial theories vary in scope but they tend to be in agreement on four key paradigms (Tudorov, 1989: 114-7): 1) the existence of different ‘races’; 2) the closeness between the physical and the cultural differences of ‘races’; 3) the unequal value of ‘races’; 4) the prevalence of the group over the individual. Racist thinking dates back to antiquity and even well-respected figures such as Kant were not immune to its insidious effects (“This fellow was quite black”, he once said, “a clear proof that what he said was stupid.”) (Rattansi, 2007: 27) However, the strongest theoretical endorsements of these racial paradigms were provided by three 19th century thinkers.

French philosopher Georges Buffon dedicated a chapter (*Les Variétés dans l’Espèce Humaine*) of his book *Histoire Naturelle* to racial theory, wholeheartedly believed in the difference between ‘races’ and constructed his imaginary ladder in the following way. At the top were the Northern European ‘races’; close seconds were the other European peoples; Asians and Africans were third; and the American-Indian savage—whom Buffon described as being “basically a first-rate animal” (Buffon, 1976: 370)—was situated at the lowest level of this hierarchy. He also added, nicely, that “the Negro is to a man what the donkey is to a horse; or rather, if the White is the man, the Negro is not a man, but a *sui generis* kind of animal” (Buffon: 370).

A revised version of Buffon’s views was echoed some decades later by another French thinker, Gustave Le Bon, who identified four ‘races’. For him, indigenous Australians were the lowest people: having no culture at all (“*aucune trace de culture*”), they were almost animals (“*voisin de l’animalité*”) (Tudorov, 1989: 130). Their

future was already written and they would soon be conquered by superior 'races' because "experience shows that all inferior people, put in contact with a superior race, are fatally and quickly condemned to disappear" (Tudorov, 130). The Black 'race' was situated at the second level, as a people "who are capable of some rudiments of civilization—but rudiments only", and whose "cerebral inferiority condemns them to never leave barbarity" (Tudorov, 130). The Asian 'races' and Europeans occupied the third and top tiers of the ladder respectively, and Le Bon asserted that "among the superior races are only the Indo-European peoples" (Tudorov, 130).

While Buffon and Le Bon undoubtedly contributed to the philosophy of 'race', the most outspoken racial theoretician was Ernest Renan. He defined the inferior 'races' (Blacks and American-Indians) as "peoples who are forever chained to immobility" (Renan, 1948: 861) and he believed in an "eternal state of infancy for these inherently imperfect races" who had "a total inability for organization and progress" (Renan, 1948: 859). Renan went on to define China—one of the world's oldest civilizations—as "a Europe which is not perfectible" and as "an incomplete and faulty civilization" that had always been "inferior to our West, even when the latter was at its worst" (Renan, 1948: 233). Having ideologically justified the superiority of the white 'race', the legitimisation of colonization and the foundations of a future eugenic project came quite naturally to Renan. So in *La Réforme Intellectuelle et Morale de la France* (1871), he wrote that "the submission of a country inhabited by an inferior race by one inhabited by a superior race is by no means shocking", and concluded that "[a] very small amount of noble blood infused into another population is enough to make the latter more noble" (Renan, 1948: 390).

As these examples suggest, philosophical reasoning played a role in legitimising racism and in providing the theoretical basis and moral justification for colonization and the enslavement of other peoples. Yet these racial theories paved the way for an even more calamitous outcome: the eugenics project. It would take less than a generation for Nazi Germany to put in practice what Renan had preached by turning inferior 'races' into soap.

4. The Third Planet and the Scientist: Scientific Roots of Racism

- *'Good Evening', said the Little Prince.*
- *"Good Evening", said the man in a white coat. "You want to ask me who I am. I am the Scientist".*
- *"You're right!", exclaimed the Little Prince.*
- *"Of course I'm right. I'm the Scientist".*
- *"And Scientists are always right?"*
- *"Of course".*
- *"Here's another one", the Little Prince thought, remembering what the Historian had said. Then he asked: "How did you know what I wanted to ask you?"*
- *"Thanks to my telescope, I saw you coming from the nearby planet. And thanks to my microphone, I heard your conversation with the Philosopher".*
- *"Can you look at every planet and listen to every sound in the Universe?"*
- *"I'm working on it", the Scientist replied. "I don't know everything yet. And this is good. If I knew everything, grown-ups too would want to know it straightaway and they wouldn't be interested in my work anymore. They wouldn't want my experiments and they wouldn't appreciate my inventions. So they would dismiss me. And I would be unemployed".*
- *But the Little Prince did not know what 'dismiss' meant. So he asked.*
- *"It is an act liked by grown-up people. It gives them authority and it makes their life easier. When they no longer need someone, they tell that person: 'I dismiss you'. They often do this to people with whom they disagree, or to those who remind them of their mistakes. Grown-ups are very sensitive about their mistakes".*
- *"I know", said the Little Prince. But he was worried.*
- *"I have a friend on another planet. He often reminds adults of their mistakes. He often disagrees with them. So I am afraid that he might be dismissed. He's such an old person".*
- *"Oh, but he will be fine then", the Scientist said. "Grown-ups do not dismiss elderly people—that would be bad mannered. You see, they follow proper procedures. So, when they don't need someone but that someone is old, they do not dismiss him. They just make him retire."*
- *"Ah, good!" said the Little Prince, relieved. "But I still do not know what you do".*

- *"I answer questions. And sometimes I shout: 'Eureka!' That's it".*
 - *"So, your job is similar to the Philosopher's".*
 - *"No way! The Philosopher can't shout Eureka! Only the Scientist can. And the Philosopher doesn't answer adults' questions. He thinks about them. Then he tries to answer them. But he is often wrong, as he told you. That's why he cannot shout Eureka!—not even once in his life. Only I can".*
 - *"Why?"*
 - *"Because, contrary to the Philosopher, I don't just think. I act. Science is not an Opinion. It's a Fact. The Philosopher answers adults questions with Opinions. I answer them with Facts. That's why he can't shout Eureka!"*
 - *"Sounds fair", said the Little Prince. "And is it difficult to find Facts?"*
 - *"No, it's very simple. Listen. Adults ask me about a matter of consequence. I create experiments about this matter of consequence. Then Nature tells me what the Facts are. Finally, I refer the Facts to adults. If the day is good, I also make discoveries and shout Eureka! If the day is bad, I just do experiments. Adults are usually satisfied with them".*
 - *"Adults are satisfied even if you don't shout 'Eureka!'"*
 - *"Adults are satisfied with anything that comes from the Scientist. It's enough for them to know that he said this or that thing about this or that matter of consequence. Because they regard him as a person of consequence. They are fond of people and matters of consequence".*
 - *"I was told so", the Little Prince replied. "I think I'll ask you a favour, then. Can you shout Eureka! for me now? I should like to hear it."*
 - *"I would like to, very much. But I am afraid I can't. I have found nothing."*
 - *"But you have found me", said the Little Prince.*
 - *"You are not a Fact", the Philosopher replied. However, as the Little Prince looked sad, the old man added: "But I promise you that the next time I make a discovery, I will shout Eureka! three times, so loudly that you will be able to hear me wherever you are in the Universe".*
 - *"Thank you", said the Little Prince. "So, next time I hear you, I shall be happy, because I will know that you have discovered a new Fact. But when was the last time you shouted Eureka!?"*
 - *"When I found out that race is not a Fact, and that it doesn't exist".*
 - *"But... are you sure?"*
 - *"Of course. I'm the Scientist. Scientists are always sure. Remember: we are the only ones allowed to shout Eureka! This gives us authority".*
 - *"Indeed", replied the Little Prince, admiringly.*
- He fell silent for a while. Then he thought to himself:*
- *"The Philosopher is far less lucky than I thought. After so much thinking about race, not only will he sooner or later realize that it's not a matter of consequence, but he will also learn that it's not a Fact; it is just an Opinion. And, even this time, he will not be allowed to shout Eureka!"*

Science stops where racism begins. There is an impossible marriage—and so is the one between science and 'race'. Biologists have long-since concluded that 'race', in a scientific sense, is an illusion, a human rather than a natural creation (Lewontin, 1972: 381). Indeed, during a UNESCO conference in Athens, a group of prominent biologists rebuffed any scientific basis for the idea of 'race' on the grounds that "the differences between the genetic structures of two individuals belonging to the same population group can be far greater than the differences between the average genetic structures of two population groups" (Lefait, 1982: 33).

Anthropologists also reject the idea of 'race', insisting that humans belong to one species: mankind. They maintain that there is no such a thing as a homogeneous 'race' because, "throughout history, man has remained on the move and exchanges resulting from migrations are myriad. That populations whose primary characteristic is that they are extremely various can remain racially isolated is quite impossible" (Lefait, 1982: 6).

This position is widely accepted: individual diversity is much more significant than group or cultural differences because mankind is a single yet varied whole. As a result, the word 'race' is an intuitive social construction

devoid of scientific foundation. Centuries of racial discrimination, hate and genocide have thus been based on a scientific fiction, artificially constructed by humans as a means of control. As the sociologist Robert Miles wrote, the term ‘race’ should thus be avoided altogether, because it “legitimizes and reinforces everyday beliefs that the human species is constituted by a number of different races, each of which is characterised by a particular combination of real or imagined features or marks and cultural practices” (Miles and Torres, 1999: 25-6).

Yet it is difficult to deconstruct such deeply embedded linguistic and psychological schemas, because for centuries science has provided the foundation for this understanding of racial difference and has engendered an acceptance of racism that would otherwise have been untenable. Following the works of the racial thinkers mentioned in the previous section, the brand-new ‘discipline’ of ‘racial science’ was invented in the 18th century with the aim of measuring cranial dimensions and IQ levels among different racial groups. This was not an objective ‘science’, however, to the extent that different ‘scientists’ constructed differing classifications that were influenced by the ‘race’ to which they ‘belonged’. So the English physician Samuel Morton, for instance, delineated his own racial ladder where—unsurprisingly—the English ‘race’ came out on top:

“The English skulls in this collection proved to be the largest, with an average cranial capacity of 96 cubic inches. The Americans and Germans were rather poor seconds, both with cranial capacities of 90 cubic inches. At the bottom of the list were the Negroes with 83 cubic inches, the Chinese with 82 and the Indians with 79” (Omi and Winant, 1986: 163).

Japanese scientist Fujirō Shinagawa, however, reached radically different conclusions, with his cranial classification reading as follows:

“Japanese (49.92), Chinese (46.29), Koreans (46.22), British (44.72), Russian Jews (44.72), Nordics (44.48), white Americans (44.14), Scandinavians (44.12), Germans (43.64), Eastern Europeans (42.55), Irish (41.54), Spanish (41.43), French (41.37), Canadians (40.97), Greeks (40.71), Portuguese (40.53), Southern Europeans (39.30), Hawaiians (39.00), Mexicans (37.04), American Indians (36.80), Italians (36.79) and Black Americans (34.94)” (Koshiro, 1999: 367).

While ‘racial science’ was in its ascendancy long before the 20th century, it was most strikingly consolidated and employed in Nazi Germany. In September 1933 cranial measuring was officially introduced into the classroom and ‘racial science’ became an established part of the German school system. According to the curriculum of a Berlin school, ‘racial studies’ looked at “the concept of race, the origin of races, the European races, the physical characteristics and origins of the different races in the German racial mixture” (Burleigh and Wippermann, 1991: 213-4). Another ‘subject’, criminal biology, was also introduced. Dr Robert Ritter, a Nazi child psychologist who specialized in this ‘discipline’, conducted research on thirty-nine Gypsy children with the aim of demonstrating that their criminal behaviour was based upon biological inheritance.

“Ritter made it all nice and easy”, one of the Gypsy children treated wrote years later. “You came in one after the other and sat on the chair. Then he compared the children’s eyes and asked us all questions... Then you had to open wide and he had an instrument to measure your throat, nostrils, nose, root of the nose, distance between the eyes, eye colour, eyebrows, ears inside and out, neck, hands... Everything you could possibly measure” (Bruchfeld and Levine, 1994: 39).

Most of these Gypsy children were detained in a Catholic children’s home so that Dr Ritter could study them. Once the research was over, they were deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau and killed in the gas chambers. Importantly, the notion of *Homo Germanicus*—“the new god in whose image the German admires and loves himself”—emerged precisely out of this kind of ‘scientific’ research. Moreover, this ‘racial science’ made a significant contribution to the creation of an artificial Aryan ‘race’, providing the foundation for eugenics (or racial hygiene), which in turn involved the systematic elimination of undesired elements. A conversation between an Official from Hitler’s Personal Chancellery and the Head of Chemical Section at the Forensic Institute is illustrative of this practice:

-“Can the Criminal Technical Institute manufacture large quantities of poison?”

-“For what? To kill people?”

-“No.”

-“To kill animals?”

-“No.”

-“What for, then?”

-“To kill animals in human form: that means the mentally ill, whom one can no longer describe as human and for whom no recovery is in sight” (Bruchfeld and Levine, 1994: 46).

This is how Nazi doctors and scientists worked towards the creation of a ‘racially pure’ society. It was they who conducted living experiments on Jews, people with physical or mental disabilities and other ‘asocial’ groups; it was they who ‘welcomed’ these patients into ‘euthanasia centres’ equipped with gas-chambers and crematoria; and it was they who decided who should be ‘disinfected’ (i.e. killed) and who should not. Finally, it was these same doctors and scientists who subsequently wrote letters like this to the relatives of their murdered subjects:

“Dear Sir or Madam: as you are aware, your daughter Fräulein was transferred to our institution on ministerial orders. It is our sad duty to have to inform you that she died here of influenza. All attempts by the doctors to keep [her] alive were unfortunately unsuccessful” (Bruchfeld and Levine, 1994: 46).

While the science of ‘race’ is a myth, therefore, racism has consistently and repeatedly depended upon a biological understanding of racial difference. Science, after all, is neither infallible nor definitive. As the anthropologist Santiago Genovés put it:

“Once the earth was flat; today it is round. Once we had forty-eight chromosomes; it turns out that we have only forty-six. The strongest male in any macaque colony used to be regarded as the dominant member; now we know that such is not the case. In the past there was such a thing as spontaneous generation; since Pasteur, there no longer is. The atom was called an atom because it could not be split; this is no longer so. Once there were races. Genetics has shown that they never existed” (Lefait, 1982: 15).

Like philosophy, like history, like law—indeed, like any human endeavour—science can be mistaken. And the fact that its mistakes are cyclically exploited for the most perverted of projects is clearly the responsibility of the adult community as a whole, rather than science alone.

5. The Fourth Planet and the Lawyer: Legal Roots of Racism

- *“I beg your pardon”, said the Little Prince, as he approached the man in a white wig and thick glasses. “Who are you?”*

- *“I am the Lawyer”, said the Lawyer.*

- *“And what do you do?”*

- *“I tell adults what is right and what is wrong”.*

- *“What a difficult job”, exclaimed the Little Prince.*

- *“That is the easy part”, the Lawyer replied.*

- *“And what is the difficult part?”*

- *“To convince them that I actually know what is right and what is wrong.”*

- *“Don’t they believe you?”*

- *“They are sceptical. For some reason, adults don’t trust lawyers, nor are they happy to listen to us. But lawyers always know how to get around a problem. So I have found a solution: when adults do not believe me, I order them to believe me—and I call these orders Laws”.*

- *“Oh!” the Little Prince said. “I have a friend on another Planet. He has a similar problem. He often reminds grown-ups of their mistakes, but they do not want to listen to him. He’s so old and tired—I worry for him”.*

- *“Just tell him to draft some Laws! It’s easy and handy. Adults will listen”.*

- *“Maybe he doesn’t know much about Laws. You know, historians are more into past mistakes”.*

- *“Historians? So, your friend is not a Lawyer?”*

- *“No”.*

- *“Then he cannot draft Laws. This is forbidden (by Law, of course). Only lawyers are allowed to—that is why we are the most important people around”.*

- *“So, are you what grown-ups would call a ‘person of consequence’?”*

- *“Of course I am. I’m the person of consequence—the most important of all you’ve met so far. Humans may be important because they live on the Earth and are numerous, but they need the Historian to remind them of their mistakes. The Historian may be important because he knows the Past, but often humans do not listen to him and so he has no real authority. The Philosopher may be important because his theories convey such a great authority over adults even if they are wrong, but he is not able to find Facts and he cannot shout Eureka! The Scientist may be important because he deals with Facts and can shout Eureka!, but he cannot draft Laws. I am the most important person of all, for I alone tell grown-ups what is right and what is wrong”.*

- *“And to whom do your laws apply?”*

- *“To everybody”.*

- *“Everybody?!”*

- *“Yes. And they apply everywhere.”*

- *“Even if one lives in a remote corner of the Universe?”*

- *“Of course.”*

- *“Even if one lives on other Stars, Planets, and Galaxies?”*

- *“Yes.”*

- *“Even if one lives on the Sun, Moon, Sea, or Earth...”*

- *“Yes.”*

- *“But ... how many people actually live on the Earth?”*

- *“I have no idea”.*

- *“And how many people are there on the Stars, Planets, Galaxies and in the whole Universe?”*

- *“I don’t really know.”*

- *“So you don’t know how many people you have authority over?”*

- *“It doesn’t matter since they are all subject to my Laws, even if they ignore them”.*

- *“I think I have a question”, the Little Prince said. “Have you ever drafted any law about ‘race’?”*

- *“I’ve been doing that for ages! But I’m becoming frustrated. It looks like adults do not want to listen to me on race. It looks like...it looks like I’m not so powerful in this area, actually”, the Lawyer said. “And the most frustrating thing is, I don’t really know why!”*

The Little Prince remained silent. Then he thought: “The Historian deals with the Past and is concerned with the Law of the Past; the Philosopher deals with Opinions and is concerned with the Law of the Mind; the Scientist deals with Facts and is concerned with the Law of Nature; and the Lawyer deals with rights and wrongs and is concerned with the Law of Justice”.

Then, after further reflection, he concluded: “Poor Lawyer! He may be the most powerful, he may draft Laws according to the Law of Justice, but he does not know that there are three other kinds of Law: the Law of the Past, the Law of the Mind, and the Law of Nature. It is no wonder that he cannot understand why adults disobey him on the issue of race. He doesn’t know of the Scientist’s discovery! He doesn’t know that race is not a Fact (Law of Nature) but just an Opinion (Law of the Mind). And, moreover, he doesn’t know that no order, law or punishment can rule completely over the Law of the Mind”.

When it comes to ‘race’, the law is in a paradoxical position. On the one hand it is essential, because no inclusive society can be realised without a legal structure capable of dealing with problems associated with difference, affirmative action, minority rights, racial attacks and so on. On the other hand the law is also inadequate, for it is called to deal with concepts (‘race’, ethnicity, racism) that need to be addressed in legal terms but which have no legal foundation. It is therefore unsurprising that the law has often proved to be ineffective in relation to ‘race’ and racism. This section considers these two phenomena separately.

5.1 Law and ‘Race’

Anywhere in the world, no matter what legal system we are dealing with, the law needs certainty. If certainty cannot be found in objective terms, it can be ‘created’ through legal definition. However, establishing a legal

definition of 'race' is highly problematic to the extent that 'race' is not a concept that warrants explanation. It is rather a 'mistake'—one of the biggest unrecognised mistakes that adults have made. Nevertheless, a legal framework for handling the issue of 'race' is necessary because this mistake cyclically leads to inequality, discrimination and tragedy.

In order to highlight the problems and contradictions inherent in the relationship between law and 'race', I shall briefly consider the way in which 'race' is handled in English law. By doing so I will suggest that even a racially-sensitive legal system cannot avoid serious flaws when dealing with this matter.

English law is equipped with a broad piece of legislation called the Race Relations Act (RRA). It methodically protects 'racial groups' against discrimination 'on racial grounds' and defines these two expressions as follows: "Racial groups means a group of persons defined by reference to colour, race, nationality or ethnic or national origins. Racial grounds means any of the following grounds, namely colour, race, nationality, ethnic or national origins" (RRA, 1976: 3(1)). The simplicity of this passage is deceiving, however, and soon led to major interpretative difficulties. As early as 1972 Lord Simon of Glaisdale complained that the phraseology of 'race, ethnic or national origins' was

"rubbery and elusive language—understandably when the draftsman is dealing with so imprecise a concept as 'race'... 'Racial' is not a term of art, either legal or, I surmise, scientific. I apprehend that anthropologists would dispute how far the word 'race' is biologically at all relevant to the species amusingly called *Homo Sapiens*" (*Ealing London v RRB*, [1972] AC 362).

So, while the RRA protects 'racial' groups, this category is not clearly defined in English law and it is important to examine how judges handled this ambiguity. Their reactions were, unsurprisingly, tentative. Lord Denning, for instance, adopted a narrow understanding of 'race' and, relying on a dictionary, equated *race* with *ethnicity*:

"In the Oxford English Dictionary, ['ethnicity'] was given as a meaning 'pertaining to race, ethnological' and 'ethnological' was given as a meaning 'corresponding to a division of races'. That is the meaning which I, acquiring my vocabulary in 1934, have always attached to the word 'ethnic'. It means 'pertaining to race'" (*Mandla v Dowell Lee*, [1982] 3 All ER 1108).

Only a year later, however, this approach was reversed. Lord Fraser of Tullybelton, favouring a much broader interpretation, noted that the terms 'racial' and 'ethnic' were not synonymous, since the second carries a far more comprehensive meaning than the first:

"*Ethnic* has come to be commonly used in a sense appreciably wider than the strictly racial or biological. [It] still retains a racial flavour, but it is used nowadays in an extended sense to include other characteristics which may be commonly thought of as being associated with common racial origin" (*Mandla v Dowell Lee*, [1983] 2 WLR 624-625).

The basic tenets of the RRA were thus contested and subject to significant shifts in understanding, so it is unsurprising that serious problems in implementing the legislation emerged, the most notable of which being the difficulty in distinguishing which groups could be regarded as 'racial' and thus accorded legal protection.

Sikhs, for instance, were initially understood to be a religious group and members of the judicial community concluded that "[t]hey are not a racial group, so it is lawful to discriminate against them" (*Mandla v Dowell Lee*, [1982] 3 All ER 1114). However, Sikhs were later recognised as a racial community falling under the protection of the RRA. In *Mandla v Dowell Lee*, for instance, the judges wrote that "Sikhs are a racial group defined by reference to ethnic origins for the purpose of the 1976 Act, although they are not biologically distinguishable from the other peoples living in Punjab" (*Mandla v Dowell Lee*, [1983] 2 WLR 625).

More controversial has been the categorization of Jews as both a religious *and* a racial group. An Employment Appeal Tribunal wrote in 1980 that "Jewish can mean a member of a race or a particular ethnic origin as well as being a member of a particular religious faith" (*Seide v Gillette* [1980] IRLR 428). Among other things, the extraordinary mobility of Jews makes this statement controversial—especially since only one year earlier another judge had written that "[t]here is no biological means of establishing that the Jewish people are a race and members of the Jewish people have diverse racial origins" (*King Ansell v Police* [1979] 2 NZLR 534).

Muslims and Hindus have both been denied 'racial group' status, largely because the religious dimensions of these groups have been recognised as paramount. Moreover, in contrast to the Jewish and Sikh communities, it is thought that Muslims and Hindus lack a strong and distinct cultural identity, and consequently they have been controversially excluded from the protection of the RRA (*Tariq v Young* [1988] EOR 24773).

Last but not least, Gypsies have arguably been the most troublesome group for English judges to classify. In 1976 one judge wrote that “Gypsies means no more than a person leading a nomadic life with no fixed employment and abode” (*Mills v Cooper* [1976] 2 WLR 1349). But *CRE v Dutton* reached the opposite conclusion: “No doubt, after all these centuries which have passed since the first gypsies left the Punjab, gypsies are no longer derived from what, in biological terms, is a common racial stock, but that of itself does not prevent them from being a racial group” (*CRE v Dutton* [1989] IRLR 12).

As these examples show, definitions of ‘race’—and the creative classification of racial groups—within English law leaves to be desired. The reason for this inadequacy is unsurprising: legal systems may pretend to master race relations and to distinguish between ‘race’, ethnicity and colour with ease, but they remain uncomfortable with these categories. Since the idea of ‘race’ is wholly unscientific, the law cannot easily distinguish between racial, ethnic, religious or national groups and it cannot always rely on comprehensive legal definitions of racial and ethnic discrimination. As the Little Prince in our fable noted, the idea of ‘race’ does not belong to the Law of Nature but rather to the Law of the Mind. The Scientist and the Lawyer should definitely have a chat.

5.2 Law and Racism

There is, and always has been, a close relationship between law and racism. While the racial scourge is supposed to be countered and halted through the legal apparatus, this has proved difficult to achieve and in fact the law has often *reinforced* racial prejudices. The major racial disasters of the 20th century (such as 1914 Turkey, Nazi Germany and 1994 Rwanda) were carried out not by individuals but by states that abused their legal systems for their own racist agendas. However, it is not only in the extreme cases of genocide and mass violence that the law can be used for racial purposes, and once again English law is a good case in point of this. In 1982 Lord Denning, a veritable institution of English law, noted with unmistakable racial prejudice that

“Even though in this society there were Saxon, Dane and Norman, they all became ‘English’, which were one race...They shared the same religious beliefs and, above all, they adhered uniformly to the rule of law. [Today] the English are no longer a homogeneous race. They are white and black, coloured and brown [and] they no longer share the same code of morals or religious beliefs [because] black, coloured and brown people do not have the same standards of conduct as whites” (Denning, 1982: 110).

This expression of racism was far from an isolated case. In 1969, another judge worried that “English cities might be surrounded by colonies of migrant workers” and added that “coloured migrants [carry] a fling of strangeness and all that strangeness implies” (Radcliffe, 1969: 47). A few years later, a Senior Magistrate asked a black defendant the following question: “Have you ever thought of going back to Barbados? I am a member of an organization which would gladly pay your fare” (Gordon, 1993: 96).

Moreover, racist attitudes are not confined to the past, as was highlighted in the 1990s when the chairman of the British National Party was indicted for incitement to racial hatred because he had summoned his party-members as follows: “Fellow racials, fellow Britons, and fellow Whites. I have been told I cannot refer to coloured immigrants. So you can forgive me if I refer to niggers, wogs and coons” (Gordon, 1993: 95). He also stated: “Last week in Southall one nigger stabbed another nigger to death. Very unfortunate. One down, one million to go” (Gordon, 1993: 95). Yet the most disturbing part came when Neil McKinnon, the judge who decided the case, referred to the defendant as

“[a] man who has had the guts to come forward...and stand up in public for the things he believes in”. He also acquitted Mr Read from all charges, wrote that “[i]t is difficult to say what it is that this defendant has done that amounts to a criminal offence” and told him: “You have been rightly acquitted. By all means propagate the views that you may have, but try to avoid involving the sort of action which has been taken against you. I wish you well” (Gordon, 1993: 95).

“Every judge on his appointment discards all politics and prejudices”, Lord Denning stated in 1980. “You need have no fear. The judges of England have always in the past and always will be vigilant in guarding our freedoms. Someone must be trusted. Let it be the judges” (Gordon, 1993: 95).

Indeed.

6. The Fifth Planet, the Politician and the Economist: Economic Roots of Racism

Of all the planets visited by the Little Prince, the Fifth was by far the smallest. It was also the only one inhabited by two people. On the one side of it was a man with a loudspeaker in his right arm. On the other was another man busy catching butterflies with a net. It was thus, by any standard, a pretty crowded planet.

The Little Prince approached the first man and said: "Good Morning."

The man lifted the loudspeaker, brought it close to his mouth and shouted "Good Morning!" so loudly that the person on the other side of the planet jumped and let all the butterflies escape from his net.

- *"Who are you?" asked the Little Prince.*

- *"I am whoever you want me to be," answered the man.*

- *"Well I don't really know. I want you to be no-one in particular."*

The man then brought the loudspeaker to his mouth and shouted: "I AM NO-ONE IN PARTICULAR!" And, once more, the person on the other side of the planet jumped and let all the butterflies out of his net.

- *"What a funny name you have", said the Little Prince, smiling.*

- *"You chose it", the man replied. "But you can pick another one."*

- *"So you have several?"*

- *"As many as you like. It is my job".*

- *"Your job is to have names?"*

- *"My job is to please people".*

But the Little Prince did not know what 'to please' meant.

- *"It means telling adults what they want to hear."*

- *"So, is that what you do in life?"*

- *"Yes. I please adults and I tell them what they want to hear"*

- *"It must be tiring".*

- *"Not really. It's very easy, actually".*

- *"But...grown-ups are complex creatures. They need the Historian to remind them of their mistakes, but then they do not listen to him. They want the Philosopher to come up with theories, but then they do not allow him to find Facts nor to shout Eureka! They want the Scientist to find Facts, but then they do not let him draft Laws. And they want the Lawyer to make Laws, but then they do not follow those on race. It must be difficult to do whatever adults want".*

- *"Oh, but my job is not to do whatever adults want. It is to tell them whatever they want to hear. That's much easier".*

- *"And are adults satisfied with it?"*

- *"Most of the times, yes".*

- *"And what happens if they are not?"*

- *"Then I refer them to the Economist. He is the one who deals with problems on this Planet".*

And this is how the Little Prince made the acquaintance of the Politician.

- *"Why do you catch butterflies?"", asked the Little Prince.*

- *"So that I can count them and know how many I own", replied the Economist.*

- *"And why do you want to know how many butterflies you own?"*

- *"Because one who owns something is seen by adults as a person of consequence. And since, on this planet, butterflies are the only thing one can own, I catch them and count them. Then I tell the Politician how many I own. He likes numbers. It is my job to give numbers to the Politician".*

- *"So, you and the Politician work together?"*

- *"Often. But we have different jobs. His consists of telling adults what they want to hear. Mine is to tell him to remind adults of what they do not want to hear".*

- *“About mistakes?”*

- *“About ‘race’.”*

- *“Oh! Another one who doesn’t know that race is a mistake!”, the Little Prince thought. “My friend the Scientist should really make an announcement about this. I don’t think anyone heard him when he first shouted Eureka! about race. He should borrow the Politician’s loudspeaker”.*

Then he asked the Economist: “But adults are fond of race. They regard it as a matter of consequence. So why don’t they want to hear about it?”

- *“It’s not that they don’t want to hear about race. They do—and that is precisely the issue! Race is very much liked by adults. It gives them an identity. It offers them security. But ‘race’ is also utterly unprofitable. It doesn’t make money. It runs at a loss. And it is a waste of talent. But because adults do not want to hear about my numbers, neither does the Politician! I always have a hard time telling him this. You know, his job is to please adults and...”*

The Economist had not finished his sentence, when a voice resounded vigorously throughout the Universe: “Eureka! Eureka! Eureka!”, it said.

- *“What was that?”, the Economist asked the Little Prince. “Have you heard that voice? It did not come from the Politician’s loudspeaker.”*

- *“Yes! And I am happy! Because, on a Planet somewhere in the Universe, a friend of mine has just found out a new Fact and wants to let me know about it! Wasn’t it a nice voice?”*

And, as the Little Prince was saying this, the sound came a second time: “Eureka! Eureka! Eureka!”

- *“Listen!” the Economist exclaimed. “Another fact discovered by your friend!”*

- *“No!”, the Little Prince replied. “This was not for me! It was for adults! It was to remind them of an old discovery he had made many years ago! It was to remind them that the Historian is right and that they should always listen to him! It was to remind them that an Opinion, even if repeated over and over again, can never be turned into a Fact! It was to remind adults of their mistake—of their biggest unrecognised mistake!”*

Racism and economics have never had a happy marriage. Racial prejudice—with its inborn, irrational tendency to marginalize entire groups on the basis of physical differences—is unprofitable. All major countries have benefited from economic migration and most of the strongest economies in the world are based upon large-scale immigration. In the context of increased globalisation, immigration has become a quick and cheap solution to aging populations and low birth rates, a solution that has boosted many political careers and that has bolstered many countries’ economies. Despite its unquestionable economic advantages, however, immigration has one major shortcoming: it collides with racism. In contrast to importing commercial freights, exotic foods or colourful merchandise, ‘importing’ human beings raises the problem of integrating them into the social fabric of a host society that is often unwilling to welcome them, particularly if they look different.

There are two factors at play here. Firstly, the rules of economics require labour to be imported to compensate for employment shortages in low-skilled jobs. This is a *pull factor*, since these economies need a cheap workforce and it is largely provided by immigrants. The second process at work is a *push factor*. Racism is, by its very nature, opportunistic. It may be blatant (such as in apartheid or direct discrimination) or subtle (such as in victimization or indirect discrimination); it may lie on the surface or beneath it; it may be ‘individual’ or ‘institutional.’ Regardless of its different manifestations, however, it is common to all societies and is always there, ready to emerge when the fragile equilibrium of a polity is broken by someone who looks different. It is a *push factor* because it rejects someone on the basis of a perceived difference.

Where is politics in all this? Politics must mediate between these two conflicting factors, but because politics is itself the product of a given society, its balancing role is inherently ‘unbalanced’.

English race relations are, once again, a useful example of this conflict between economic needs and racial fears. As early as 1569 Queen Elisabeth I complained of the sudden increase in black workers and instructed that they “should be sent forth from the lands” (Privy Council, 1596: 16). Dissatisfied with the lacklustre response, she issued a Royal Repatriation Proclamation, ordering the “transport [of] all Negroes and Black moors out of her Majesty’s realm” (Veenhoven, 1976: 199). Even this did not solve the ‘problem’, however, and the size of the Black community became a matter of public concern (Professor Banton recalls the episode of a white woman

who, after having seen a Jamaican man drinking from a public fountain, protested that ‘Children have to drink after you!’) (Jones and Gnanapala, 2000: 7).

Since Britain periodically witnessed dramatic shortages of labour, however, immigrants were a necessity and their presence became the joy (and wealth) of employers, who successfully pressured the government for a more tolerant migration policy. Waves of ‘voluntary’ immigrants were thus lured from the colonies with promises of easy work and substantial wealth. A government report issued in the 1930s pointed out that

“Coloured labour from the Commonwealth is greatly easing the labour shortage. The labour turnover among these immigrant workers is lower than average...and the employers would be very worried if coloured labour were withdrawn” (Foot, 1965: 3).

With the advent of economic recession, however, the wind started to change. As industrial growth stalled and the need for labour diminished, immigration policies became more selective and racial fear grew. “If migrants are allowed to continue coming unchecked”, a government paper read, “there is a real danger that over the years there would be a significant change in the racial character of the English people” (Jones and Gnanapala, 2000: 10). Similarly, an Internal Memorandum by the (Labour) Minister of the time complained about the ‘visibility’ of black immigrants: “If only they could be dispersed in small parties, then even though they did not get immediate employment they would cease to be recognisable as a problem” (Phillips and Phillips, 1999: 69). The pull factor of economics had begun to weaken, while the push factor of racism rose to the fore.

Politics was right in the middle of this confrontation and politicians had little choice but to acknowledge the change. In 1962 the Commonwealth Immigrants Act reduced the possibilities for entering the country, protecting the nation from what the government defined “the great influx of undesirables” (House of Commons, 1965: 176), and in 1971 a new Immigration Act drastically cut the number of immigrants coming from the Commonwealth. The last ‘halt’ came in 1981 when Commonwealth residents lost their right to enter the United Kingdom, the only exceptions being the migrants coming from the ‘white’ territories of Gibraltar and Falklands.

Immigration policy has therefore been highly ambiguous in the UK: it has been lax and immaterial when the country needed cheap labour, but it has been remarkably strict in the wake of economic change when immigrants lost the only appeal they had—their ability to work. This opportunistic political stance is evident in the words of the Home Secretary in 1961, when he patronisingly praised immigrants “for the courteous and efficient way in which so many of them *serve us*” whilst simultaneously stating that the economy would worsen “if others continue to flock into this country” (House of Commons, 1961: 687).

In the UK, just as elsewhere, politics is frequently torn between racial fears (which represent a major obstacle to the enactment of a balanced immigration law) and economic needs (which usually lean towards the import of a low-cost labour force). The result is that immigration doors open and close according to the needs of economics and the thrust of social—and thus racial—pressure.

7. Conclusion: Children’s Right to Be Left Free from Racism

One day I was coming back from kindergarten with Camilla. She was three and a half years-old. That day she was very happy because she had found a new friend: Blaise. “Who is Blaise?” I asked. “He is the one with the red pullover”, she replied. “I cannot see him. What does he look like?” I insisted. “Well, I don’t know. He has a red pullover”, she said. The next day I went to pick up Camilla and I asked her to show me Blaise. He did have his red pullover. He indeed looked lovely and funny. And he presented me with a large smile. The luminous smile that lightens up the all-black face of small children from Africa.” (Jelloun, 1999: 92)

This article has adopted a highly unconventional approach to the issue of racism. It has contrasted a child-like perspective of the world (the Little Prince’s) to an adult-like analysis of the issues involved in the subject of racial discrimination. It has mixed the simplicity of children with the seriousness of adults. And it has blended humour with tragedy. None of us were born with an in-built set of values, the piece has argued: rather, our values—both the positive and the negative—are taught to us by adults and are learnt during the educational process. It is precisely on the issue of education, therefore, that the world of the child meets that of the adults—and that the conventional and unconventional parts of this article intersect.

The centrality of education for the issue of racism leads me to one final point. Adults have a moral as well as a legal duty towards children: not only should they take full responsibility for racism and its transference to younger generations, they should also reduce the risk of reproducing racial prejudices via legal measures.

Morally, children deserve to live in an environment where their differences do not affect their chances of achieving their full potential. As a result, one of the priorities of education must be to ensure that grown-ups’

racial stereotypes are not passed on to children through education. This is especially important since, in the eyes of children, teachers are role models and have an aura of infallibility. If teachers are prejudiced, children are likely to be prejudiced too. As the Canadian Supreme Court wrote,

“Schools [are seen as] an arena for the exchange of ideas and must therefore be premised upon principles of tolerance and impartiality so that all persons within the school environment feel equally free to participate” (Tomasevski, 2001: 145).

Legally, children have the right to be free from racial discrimination, but this does not need dedicated legal recognition in that it is already part of the more general right to education set forth by Article 29 (a) and (d) of the Convention for the Rights of the Child:

“The education of the child shall be directed to (a) the development of the child’s personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential [and to]... (d) the preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin”.

This position is also confirmed by the Convention against Discrimination in Education, Article 5 requiring that “Education shall be directed to the full development of human personality”. Adults’ transmission of racism through education—with its legacy of exclusion and marginalization—is, I argue, entirely at odds with this legal framework. Children’s right to education requires not only that education takes place, therefore, but that it does so in an environment free from racism. We owe children nothing less.

There are at least two reasons for upholding these moral and legal duties towards children. First, since the children of today are the decision makers of tomorrow and the racist is both a victim and a perpetrator, failing to create a racially-neutral education means that racism will persist. Second, the results of a racially-biased education are too tragic to ignore, for less than seventy years have passed since people would turn the corpses of their fellow citizens into soap in order to cleanse their ‘racially’ superior bodies.

How was this possible? How could mankind reach the ‘Dark Times’ of Bertold Brecht—the times of “massacres without murderers”; the times when “there was only wrong and no outrage”; and the times when ‘the worst’ became ‘the unthinkable’? As Hitler himself was quick to realize, the answer is simple: with education.

“These young people learn nothing else but to think as Germans and to act as Germans. These boys join our organization at the age of ten and get a breath of fresh air for the first time. Then, four years later, they move to the Hitler Youth and here we keep them for another four years. Then we take them into the Party, the Labour Front, the SA or the SS. And if they are there for two years and have still not become real Nazis, then they go into the Labour Service and are polished there for six months. And if, after this, there are still remnants of consciousness or pride status, then we take them into the Wehrmacht... And they will not be free again for the rest of their lives” (Hitler as quoted by Burleigh & Wippermann, 1991: 206-7).

If it is true that Nazism reflected a corruption of the soul, therefore, this happened only to the extent that people’s souls could be corrupted—first and foremost through education and propaganda.

It has been suggested that the most difficult thing in life is surviving among grown-ups whilst remaining a child inside. Naive as this may sound, this could be an effective means of countering racism: to grow up enough to question things and see them in perspective, but not so much that stereotypes become engrained.

This paper has been an attempt at achieving this balance. There is great potential to be found in rejecting the tendency of adults to look at things with their eyes alone and in adopting children’s ability to see with their heart. “Bodies are just shells. The thing that is important is the thing that is not seen”, the Little Prince reminds us. The fact that adults attach such great importance to visible characteristics is just one example of the prejudiced attitudes of grown-ups in contrast to the remarkable open-mindedness of children. No wonder that adults can only see the hats and not the boas constrictors digesting the elephants.

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