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Problematising mainstream Spanish antiracism: race, racism and whiteness

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Abstract: In Spain, (anti-)racism is of scarce relevance to public debates and, when the topic is broached, it has mainly been discussed in relation to non-EU migration. Besides, its historical link with colonialism generally remains unacknowledged. This article analyses the problematisation of 'race' and 'racism' in this context, as performed by hegemonic stakeholders (i.e. public servants, NGOs, experts) in the fields of anti-discrimination, Roma inclusion and immigrant integration policies. As the fieldwork materials illustrate, this understanding rejects 'race' not only from a scientific-biological perspective but also as a social-political category. Accordingly, racism is depoliticised and theorised in a twofold manner: (1) as a matter of stereotypes, prejudices and lack of information about the 'Other'; (2) as the aggressive acts of explicitly racist individuals/organisations. The structural, historical and institutional dimensions of racism are addressed either as background context, or they are negated by public policies. By not confronting the uneven power relations (re)produced by racism, this approach reaffirms 'institutional whiteness' as the underlying perspective of mainstream Spanish anti-racism.

Keywords: Race; (anti-)racism; institutional racism; whiteness; Spain

1. Post-racialism in Spain

European countries are post-racial in a different way from the United States; in fact, in the US, 'race' has historically triggered social struggles, policy interventions and public debates. Conversely, 'the European Union has gone from racism to post-racism without an intervening period of anti-racism' (Sayyid, 2017, p. 20). In European contexts, 'race' was effectively banished from public discourse in the aftermath of World War II. However, a stronger post-racial focus has emerged following recent debates on the

'failure' of multiculturalism, as promoted by prominent politicians. Now more than before, racism is seen as a phenomenon of times past, largely overcome by liberal democracies and not embedded in the social structure; the assumption that European societies embody *racelessness* (Goldberg, 2015) has definitely opened the way to a depoliticised, neoliberal passivity. However, post-racialism is not the end of race, but rather 'the expression of raciality for our times' (Goldberg, 2015, p. 104). Indeed, by shifting the gaze from wider power relations to focus on the ability of minorities to integrate themselves into the national order, this approach ultimately results in 'rendering racially inspired or inflected injustices more difficult, even impossible, to discern' (Goldberg, 2015, p. 67). On the one hand, post-racialism silences race, and on the other, it leaves untouched 'the social forces producing that silence' (Goldberg, 2006, p. 359).

This paper discusses the implications of this silence: how are 'race' and 'racism' thought of, spoken about, or neglected? Which interventions are made possible and which are hampered by specific understandings of race/racism? The focus of this paper is the Spanish context, which presents three significant characteristics. Firstly, the Spanish Empire contributed to the construction of modern racial categories through the colonisation of 'America' (Quijano, 2000). While the significance of the Empire is still manifest in statues and street names, this experience is not considered to affect the historical present; deprived of its coloniality, racism is mostly addressed as a universal, ahistorical phenomenon (Azarmandi, 2017, p. 15). Secondly, like other Southern European countries, Spain was significantly affected by non-EU 'migration flows' from the 1990s onward. In this context, policies seeking to manage the increasing 'cultural diversity' that migrations were considered to bring, were promoted. Somewhat paradoxically, this framing implied the problematisation of racism as something 'recent', as a negative attitude towards the challenges of contemporary migrations. This close connection between racism and non-EU migrations not only entailed the collapsing of xenophobia into racism (Azarmandi, 2017, p. 77), it also contributed to silencing the historical discrimination of non-white nationals (such as the Roma or Black citizens) and perpetuated the imaginary of immigrants as strangers, eternally 'unbelonging' to Europe (Azarmandi, 2017, p. 157). Thirdly, racism only occasionally prompted public debates and media attention, usually when appearing in the shape of violent, isolated acts performed by extremist individuals (see Calvo Buezas, 1993; SOS Racismo, 2001). However, anti-racist grassroots movements that confront this narrative have emerged in recent years; emphasising links between racism, modernity and the constitution of the

Spanish state (see Garcés & Amzian, 2017). It is also thanks to the latter that racism has now started to be discussed outside of the migration framework.

Despite these significant characteristics, few studies have approached anti-racism in the Spanish context (see Azarmandi, 2017; Flores, 2015; Gil-Benumeya Flores, 2019; Johansson, 2017). In particular, Azarmandi (2017) analysed the problematisation of race and (anti-)racism among relevant civil society organisations, also engaging in a dialogue between the contexts of Spain and Aotearoa/New Zealand, while Gil-Benumeya Flores (2019) addressed the understanding of racism – and, more specifically, Islamophobia – among leftist activists. This research has focused on a wide variety of actors involved in 'anti-racist' policies/practices, such as public institutions at different scales, medium- and large-sized NGOs, and experts from academia and think tanks. By dialoguing with previous studies, my purpose is to add to existing knowledge and contribute to filling the gap in the literature. There is, in fact, a great need to question well-spread assumptions in Spain, according to which 'progressive' politics/policies are automatically 'free from racism' (Gil-Benumeya Flores, 2019, p. 67). Furthermore, as far as whiteness is concerned, few studies have addressed how Spaniards are deemed 'less white' in Northern European countries, while not focusing on how whiteness works inside Spain to inferioritise the racialised, 'internal' Others (Azarmandi, 2017, p. 36). Before starting the empirical analysis, I will clarify the theoretical framework and contextualise its methodology.

2. Racism and the social construction of race and whiteness

Following decolonial scholarship, the emergence of racism is linked to the colonial expansion of early modernity: it is the Spanish Empire that constructed the first racial categories through the colonisation of 'America'. This process enabled the transition from previous religious categorisations (applied by Spanish-Christian kingdoms to internal minorities, such as the Jews) to modern racial thinking based on the idea of race. Accordingly, non-European populations colonised/enslaved on the other side of the Atlantic were racially classified as 'Indians', 'Mestizos' or 'Blacks' (Quijano, 2000) and inferioritised according to a wide variety of markers – skin colour, ethnicity, culture, religion or belief, origin, way of being, living, feeling, knowing (Grosfoguel, 2016). At the same time, the relational opposites of those classifications ('Spanish', 'Europeans', 'whites') were constructed and posed at the height of racial hierarchies (Quijano, 2000). Race, understood as a 'discursive construct' or a 'floating signifier' (Hall, 1997), was

historically produced ‘in various assemblages of social, economic, ecological, historical and corporeal life’ (Hesse, 2007, p. 646). Racism was born as a *politics* (in a Schmittean sense) aimed to tame ‘the antagonism at the heart of the distinction between Europeanness and non-Europeanness’ (Sayyid, 2017, p. 21) by means of dehumanisation (Fanon, 1967; Maldonado-Torres, 2007). Eventually, this new racial logic would be applied back in the Iberian Peninsula, directed against Muslims, Jews and the Roma, among others.

This reconstruction is useful to break down relevant elements of contemporary racism. In particular, it points to its *coloniality*, intended not only as a matter of colonial origin but also as the persistence of the colonial power matrix to the present day, beyond the chronologies of territorial colonialism (Maldonado-Torres, 2007). Furthermore, the focus on the (geo)political dimension helps understand racism in terms of power: far from being merely a ‘superstructural’ issue, racism is entrenched in social reality and is (re)produced through a complex web of discursive and non-discursive practices, *habitus*, ideologies (both explicit and embodied), apparatuses, knowledge(s), assemblages of human and non-human elements (Hesse, 2007, p. 656). Also, as Ture and Hamilton (1992) observed while analysing the US context of the late 1960s, racism is mostly institutional/structural rather than individual: it has both an explicit and an implicit, even impersonal facet (‘overt racism’ vs. ‘covert racism’). While the first consists of ostensibly violent acts and is publicly condemned, the second ‘originates in the operation of established and respected forces in the society’ (Ture & Hamilton, 1992, p. 3) and usually goes unnoticed. However, it is the latter that more decisively contributes to the social, economic and cultural domination of Black (and, by extension, non-white) people.[1] In sum, racist practices are neither necessarily transparent, nor intentional, and sometimes they are even impersonal.

In continental Europe, racism has been approached quite differently by mainstream academia and policies. After the defeat of Nazism, the word ‘race’ was politically interdicted (Hesse, 2004). Against the backdrop of Nazi eugenics, its mere mention was interpreted as support for doctrines that recognise the existence of biological categories of human beings (Möschel, 2014). Heavily influenced by four declarations on ‘Race and Racial Prejudice’ published by UNESCO (1950–1967), this approach assumed that denying scientific value to the idea of race would ultimately help defeat racism (Lentin, 2004). However, the denial of race does not prevent it from being ‘the unspoken subtext’ (Goldberg, 2006, p. 335) of many social situations; thus, despite the institutional rejection of explicitly racialist language, racial categories (even if implicit) still play a significant role. Besides, in the current ‘post-racial’ era, non-white people have

increasingly 'had their racial characteristics emphasized, heightened, made a badge of identification' (Goldberg, 2015, p. 109), while whiteness – that during colonialism was ostensibly projected onto colonial subjects – has been made less visible: 'white has become the man without racial qualities' (Goldberg, 2015, p. 125). To be clear, whiteness can be (conveniently) 'invisible' for those who share its privileges,[2] but it is unlikely to go 'unmarked' for those who are excluded from them (Frankenberg, 2001). In this vein, Ahmed (2007) interprets whiteness as an 'orientation' that shapes bodies, institutions and, more generally, the social reality, making certain spaces more comfortable for some bodies than for others. She speaks of 'institutional whiteness' (Ahmed, 2007) as the implicit, 'given' state of things: in fact, even if hegemonic spaces of power may be traversed by non-white bodies, they are still inhabiting spaces that are transfigured 'on a white scale'. In this vein, 'white supremacy' is not a matter of KKK-inspired organisations or Nazi groups, but rather it is the expression of racist power relations affecting Western societies (see Beliso-De Jesús & Pierre, 2019).

3. Contextualisation and methodology

So far, most Spanish politicians have not considered racism as a public issue requiring specific interventions (Fundamental Rights Agency, 2012, p. 10); accordingly, anti-racism as a specific policy area does not officially exist. However, a vaguely 'anti-racist' field can be inferred to exist at the intersection of different political spaces that, to different extents, encompass an 'anti-racist' component. This is the case of the anti-discrimination framework, which was established following the approval of the EU 'Racial Equality Directive' (2000/43/CE) and contains specific provisions regarding ethnic and racial discrimination. Immigrant integration policies address anti-racism too: for example, the Ministry General Secretariat for Immigration and Emigration was responsible for drafting a 'Comprehensive strategy against racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, and other related forms of intolerance' in 2011, under the government of the Socialist Party, alongside other consultative platforms that exist under this umbrella that intervene on race-related issues. Finally, and under the pressure of Roma organisations, policies implementing the 'EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies 2012–2020' have recently started to consider the struggle against anti-gypsyism.[3] Accordingly, the fieldwork materials derive from various sources:

- written documents (institutional statements, reports, handbooks, surveys, meeting minutes, programmes, brochures) mostly related to Spanish anti-discrimination,

Roma inclusion and immigrant integration policies, selected according to their relevance and representativeness of mainstream discourses. The timeframe approximately covers the years 2003 (transposition of the Racial Equality Directive) to 2018;

− observations of public interventions, events (both online and offline) and institutional spaces;

− thirty-eight interviews conducted in Madrid and other Spanish locations, between January and April 2019 and in October 2019. The interviewees have been classified as:

(a). Non-mainstream anti-racism actors (5): organisations/activists disapproving official policies and their understanding of racism. While not directly cited, they helped provide a more comprehensive perspective on the anti-racist debates taking place in Spain;

(b). Mainstream anti-racism actors (15): medium- and large-sized NGOs, foundations, organisations participating in official anti-discrimination, Roma inclusion and immigrant integration policy frameworks. Most organisations receive public funds and are involved in policy-making through consultative platforms, like the 'Council for the Elimination of Racial or Ethnic Discrimination' (an equality body established by the Racial Equality Directive), its 'Assistance Service to Victims of Racial or Ethnic Discrimination', the 'State Council of the Roma People', or the 'Forum for the Social Integration of Immigrants'. Some organisations are both active in immigrant integration or Roma inclusion and have participated in the anti-discrimination framework. Most of the interlocutors coming from NGOs were also supportive of 'progressive' statements, sympathetic to the political left (considered more engaged in Equality and Non-Discrimination policies) and to the Socialist Party (governing Spain since June 2018);

(c). Institutional actors (11): public servants involved in policymaking at state, regional[4] and local level;

(d). Representatives of expert knowledge (5): publicly recognised experts, scholars, consulting services, stakeholders involved in the drafting of plans, strategies, policy assessments, surveys;

(e). Legal actors (2): lawyers, judges.

The interviewees represent a significant part of the universe under enquiry, which is not particularly extensive. There is a certain 'interchangeability' between the 'political' and

the ‘non-governmental’ sphere: current ‘experts’ could have previously been institutional stakeholders, NGO leaders could have previously worked in politics or vice versa. The sub-groups, therefore, represent a tentative classification, based on what I considered the primary characterisation of each actor, as observed during fieldwork. The interviewees were asked about their background/social trajectory and the experience of their organisations/institutions within their respective policy fields. Then, specific questions about the policies, legislation, programmes in which they were involved were asked. Finally, questions addressed their general understandings of race/racism. All the interviews have been transcribed and analysed, with their key aspects classified under different thematic nodes, with the help of a qualitative data processing software.

4. ‘Race is not a thing’

During the negotiation of the Race Equality Directive, EU member states reached an agreement to include this statement: ‘The European Union rejects theories which attempt to determine the existence of separate human races. The use of the term ‘racial origin’ in this Directive does not imply an acceptance of such theories’ (Council of the European Union, 2000, p. 22). Accordingly, some member states did not even mention ‘race’ in their transposition laws or added nuances and footnotes (Guiraudon, 2009). In the Spanish transposition law (62/2003), the expression ‘racial or ethnic origin’ was replicated without any explanation; however, this was mainly due to the inattentiveness of José María Aznar's conservative government, who were accused of doing a ‘poor cut and paste job’ (Guiraudon, 2009, p. 537) by scholars and social organisations. Indeed, a more profound analysis illustrates that Spanish actors are very cautious with using the word ‘race’. For example, an evaluation report of the Comprehensive Strategy against racism claimed:

> The use of the word ‘race’ is scientifically incorrect and less and less acceptable. Even if we copy that term, it does not imply that we agree with its use. We understand that we should use national origin, culture or skin colour. All of that, without detriment to using the term racism, which is perfectly acceptable. (Ministerio de Empleo y Seguridad Social, 2015, p. 114)

In a similar vein, a handbook addressed to public servants, aimed at achieving more effective equality policies, stated:

> Even though the European Union does not have an official definition of ‘racial or ethnic origin’, it usually implies belonging to a minority group which shares

common features such as language, culture, geographic origin, belief, etc. When speaking of this type of discrimination, it would be preferable to avoid the term ‘race’ given that, although it is commonly used to refer to groups with a different racial or ethnic origin, it currently has no taxonomic value and is applied only to domestic animals. (Ministerio de Sanidad, 2014, p. 37)

Although they recognise that ‘race’ is sometimes used in a colloquial sense, the statements above suggest its substitution for more ‘correct’ terms. The interviews with mainstream actors show similar trends: they generally avoided using the term ‘race’ and preferred less compromising expressions, such as ‘migrants’/’immigrants’, categories indicating nationality (‘Chinese’, ‘Spanish’, ‘Moroccan’) or ethnicity. To a lesser extent, indications of geographical origin (‘Maghrebi’, ‘Latin American’ and, on fewer occasions, ‘Afrodescendant’) or religious belonging (‘Muslim’, ‘Jewish’) were used. As already observed, categories based on nationality, origin, ethnicity or religion do not escape from racialisation: however, what is relevant, is that interlocutors tended to use them as ‘least bad solutions’, attempting to avoid more explicitly charged terminologies. Accordingly, the term ‘race’ appeared sporadically,[5] mainly used in a colloquial sense. Whenever participants offered a more analytical reflection, it generally served to derogate the term's utility. For example, a member of the ‘Council for the Elimination of Racial or Ethnic Discrimination’ criticised the previous name of this body (‘Council for the Promotion of Equality and the Non Discrimination of People on the Grounds of Racial or Ethnic Origin’):

Can anybody explain what racial origin is? If race is not a thing, then what is racial origin? Is there anything more racist than the name ‘racial origin’? Race is not a thing; racism is. Race is not a thing; racial discrimination is. (interview with a member of the Council for the Elimination of Racial or Ethnic Discrimination, 1/3/2019)[6]

Similarly, a representative of expert knowledge explained racism like this:

In social psychology, racism is basically linked to the idea of prejudice; that is, a negative attitude towards a social category based on race. As for the race issue, you know better than anyone, don't you? Race in itself is a very controversial concept […] Even though some approaches resort to this term, ‘ethnic prejudice’ is mostly used at the present day, acknowledging that minorities are not different races. (interview with a representative of expert knowledge, 4/10/2019)

Other racially charged words were also used, albeit infrequently: for example, 'Black' was mostly mentioned colloquially, or when expressing distance from its use. The director of a renowned equality body at the local level went even further, rejecting not only 'racial or ethnic origin' but also much more nuanced expressions such as 'Afrodescendants' (interview with a local institution, 4/3/2019). Interestingly, the term 'white' appeared even less frequently, and when it did, it was mostly criticised for its analytical/political uselessness. These findings strengthen Azarmandi's (2017) and Gil-Benumeya Flores (2019) observations about (i) the discomfort/refusal of discussing whiteness among progressive/academic actors; (ii) the exceptional recognition of whiteness only 'as a trope that white supremacists believe in' (Azarmandi, 2017, p. 169); (iii) the difficulty of connecting whiteness and blackness as two sides of the same relationship (Azarmandi, 2017, p. 170); (iv) the colloquial, theoretical and politically non-committal use of racial categories (Gil-Benumeya Flores, 2019, p. 72).

The aspects analysed show how the denial of race practically unravels in the context of Spanish post-racialism (see Azarmandi, 2017, p. 151). First, race is denied on the grounds of its scientific weakness, then substitute categories are introduced and understood in a depoliticised fashion – religion, culture, ethnicity or migrant status are disconnected from politics and presented as mere 'characteristics' of specific populations. The idea of whiteness is usually not mentioned but could be recalled and still be understood as an unproblematic 'characteristic' among many others, given that the privilege attached to it has been conveniently erased by previous operations. Furthermore, it should be added that for some actors (especially the oldest, largest, best-funded NGOs) the denial of race also has a strategic meaning, as it represents a way of disqualifying the agenda of emerging, grassroots movements who have recently disputed their positions of power (Gil-Benumeya Flores, 2019, p. 514).

5. Problematisations of racism

As Hesse observes (2004), continental Europe has approached racism mostly as ideologically marked criminal acts, committed intentionally by 'extremist' groups/individuals. Thus, racism is conceived as a pathology utterly opposed to liberal democracy, being confined to the realm of exceptionality – the Nazi aberration. In a 'softer' and psychology-based approach, racism has also been reduced to a matter of false beliefs, misleading representations, stereotypes or prejudices that provoke discriminatory actions. Accordingly, public authorities have usually proposed two 'solutions': (1)

entrusting the anti-racist struggle to the legal system, requesting courts to re-establish the 'normality' interrupted by racist acts (Fitzpatrick, 1990, p. 253); (2) promoting a policy agenda based on information exchange, awareness-raising and education (Maeso, 2015). Both narratives have emerged consistently from my interviews, although the second form appeared more frequently. To a lesser extent, a third narrative was found that mentions certain 'structural', 'historical' and, less frequently, 'institutional' components of racism, although such mentions were quite indefinite. However, other actors expressly engaged in denying institutional racism. I now consider each of these discourses in-depth.

5.1 Racism as a matter of stereotypes and prejudices

In this narrative, racism is understood as a matter of stereotypes/prejudices that originate from a lack of knowledge of the Other and their culture, history or traditions. Racist discriminatory practices appear as the extreme consequence of 'subtle prejudices' (Pettigrew & Meertens, 1995) and 'ambivalent attitudes' (Fernández et al., 2015, pp. 10) latent within individuals – including progressive individuals, who are often unaware of their 'unconscious biases' (Tate & Page, 2018). However, such attitudes can be countered by providing better information, fostering intercultural interactions and deploying psycho-pedagogical interventions. This narrative is consistent with the public and written discourse of institutions, experts and mainstream NGOs and it occupied a central place across the different types of mainstream actors interviewed. The first example of this discourse comes from the 'Dosta! Campaign', sponsored by the Council of Europe and launched in Spain in 2013. The structure of the handbook for this campaign is telling in itself: in fact, after introducing 'The Roma community in Spain' and dedicating an entire chapter to 'Stereotypes and prejudices', it enumerates the eleven most frequent stereotypes against the Roma, and then provides correct information to dismantle them (Ministerio de Sanidad, Servicios Sociales e Igualdad, 2013). In a similar vein, a public servant involved in Roma inclusion policies claimed:

> In my opinion, it is a very important challenge to combat the discrimination occurring in Spain against Roma residents, which is also related to ignorance of their history, the circumstances they had to face throughout history … well, there are many stereotypes. (interview with the public administrator, 11/2/2019)

According to this view, ignorance, stereotypes and prejudices are the first steps towards discriminatory practices. However, the discriminatory act is not necessarily a result of stereotypes and prejudices; sometimes, the latter may generate unfair social

representations without triggering concrete actions. This is, for example, the more nuanced way in which a handbook published by the Regional Government of Andalusia defines racist 'rumours':

> Rumours are related to ignorance and fear. Most rumours about immigrants are based on fear of what is 'foreign', fear of the unknown; unfortunately, they end-up generating more distance from the autochthonous community. This situation, in turn, precludes mutual knowledge and the overcoming of fears and prejudices. (Junta de Andalucía, 2015, p. 4)

Here, lack of information and fears are not directly relational to racist conduct, but rather, to a dynamic of 'mutual distrust' between immigrants and nationals. In other instances, this conceptual framework is even used to *negate* or *downplay* the relevance of racism, as in the following excerpt, from a public servant involved in anti-discrimination and Roma inclusion policies:

> Well, let us see … there is racism … but not so much as we are told […] Of course, cases are appearing in the press, such as a lynching against a Roma family in a town … but I think we have made good progress, and most of all, we have to work on stereotypes […] According to studies done, people claim to have problems with the Roma or migrants only in a few cases. Most cases are stereotypes. (interview with the public administrator, 14/3/2019)

The narrative above does not negate the existence of racist acts; however, it presents them as an echo of the past, an exception that does not automatically turn into discriminatory practices.[7]

Another example of how racism is downplayed comes from the 'Evolution of racism, xenophobia and other forms of intolerance in Spain'; an annual survey and influential study conducted since 2007 by the governmental body, the Spanish Observatory on Racism and Xenophobia (OBERAXE). Although arguing that intolerant attitudes feed on stereotypes and prejudices, the 2015 edition observes the 'practical absence of racist or xenophobic incidents' in recent years (Fernández et al., 2015 p. 8). Later, the study differentiates between 'racism' – intended as an overt supremacist ideology – and a more nuanced 'xenophobia' – defined as a fear that the economic and labour interests of nationals can be damaged by immigration (Fernández et al., 2015, p. 31). In this view, the 'subtle' prejudices of Spanish citizens are presented as 'ambivalences' or 'contradictions in the people's attitudes' (Fernández et al., 2015, p. 10) that, for the most part, do not trigger racist behaviours.

In summary, this first narrative presents some nuances: sometimes it does not mention 'racism' expressly, preferring more cautious terms like 'discrimination', 'rumours' or 'prejudices', reserving 'racism' for the harshest cases. However, both variants share a linear, unidirectional understanding of the relationship between cognitions, attitudes and conducts. Also, participants depicted racism – or whatever they called it – as a psychological phenomenon internal to the individual. Even if some recognise that racism can be conditioned by pre-existing social-historical-political factors, these are usually relegated to the background, as contextual elements. Discriminatory practices, not necessarily depending on the pre-existence of racist prejudices, or happening at a more profound, structural level, are ultimately not acknowledged by this narrative. Consequently, it should be stressed that the knowledge of racism legitimated by this approach has been generally based on the citizen's perceptions (mostly white people in the Spanish context), rather than on the experience of those who suffer it. While this is not an automatic consequence of the psychological approach, the levelling of power relations entailed by its individualist assumptions clearly facilitates this operation and ultimately ends up reproducing the specific viewpoints of the white majority as universal. As we can see, the denial of race (as a political/historical reality) makes it easier to shift attention to the wrong/irrational perceptions of the individual (Henriques, 2003). However, by naturalising prejudice as 'a natural effect of the information-processing mechanism' (Henriques, 2003, p. 72), this approach fails to explain why specific groups (and not others) are heavily targeted by prejudiced behaviours or represented as public threats. In other words, the psychological approach assumes as a given something that should be explained instead.

5.2 Racism as an aberration

This narrative focuses on the ideological features of racism, dealing with the exceptional, violent actions of individuals/groups marked by a pathological hatred of the Other, approached from a criminal law perspective. Called by Maeso (2018) 'the narrative of the "true racist"', this discourse 'confines racism in contemporary Europe to residual instances and cases that are separated from the normalcy of democratic regimes […] There is confidence in the law's regulation and capacity for redress in *cases* of discrimination' (Maeso, 2018, p. 12). The reference to extremist violence has emerged transversally to the different types of hegemonic actors interviewed; also, concern about

the recent rise of the far-right, anti-immigrant Vox party (see Jones, 2019) was raised by many.[8]

When approached this way, racism is described in harsh, derogatory terms; an attitude of moral rejection is adopted and citizens are invited to 'struggle against the scourge of intolerance and, in its most extreme form, discrimination, racism and xenophobia' (Gobierno de España, 2011, pp. 5–6), and combat 'this problem which is a true cancer, a "malignant tumour"' (Cachón Rodríguez, 2011, p. 28). Within this aggressive rhetoric, the effectiveness of anti-racism appears as directly proportional to the condemnatory fervour. Another significant example is the 2016 'Raxen Report', published by the 'Movement against Intolerance' and mainly focused on hate crimes. This document portrays an overwhelming situation of 'hate' and 'intolerance', advocating the legal prosecution of nazi and neo-fascist gangs – although 'radical leftists' are negatively depicted too. Institutions are blamed for their 'laziness' and lack of action, but at the same time, they are praised when sending 'tolerant' and 'inclusive' messages to the citizenship – speeches by the Spanish King, Angela Merkel, Pope Francis or François Hollande are positively highlighted (Movimiento contra la Intolerancia, 2016). Similarly, a representative of a relevant NGO stated:

> Racism, understood as it should, as an 'ism', a cosmovision […], as a doctrine, there is just a little here [in Spain], very little […] However, there are people, groups, organisations, behaviours, very extreme and polarised conduct, mainly based on ideological intolerance, or racial and xenophobic intolerance, that have led us to confirm the existence of a number of aggressions and deaths. (interview with an NGO member, 1/3/2019)

This problematisation leads to an overvaluation of overt racism, where racism is presented as 'an aberration rather than an embedded aspect of western state structures' (Lentin, 2008, p. 314). However, this narrative is not incompatible with the psychological one; actually, both often emerged simultaneously – sometimes during the same interview – working in tandem and reinforcing each other, functioning as opposing discourses that are 'systematically related' (Hall, 1996, p. 214). Furthermore, both discourses cohabit the same spectrum of individualist approaches to racism, the switch from the psychological to the criminological narrative being just a matter of degree.

5.3 Institutional racism (and its denial)

In her analysis of mainstream Finnish anti-racism, Seikkula (2019, p. 104) observes that the infrequent acknowledgement of structural racism does not entail 'a recognition of concrete practices or an encouragement for action against them' (Seikkula, 2019, p. 104). Mainstream Spanish actors are extremely cautious with this issue too. Based on the material identified in this study, the only official documents that expressly mention discriminatory practices in institutional contexts (without naming institutional racism) are the survey 'Perception of discrimination based on racial or ethnic origin by potential victims' (Ministerio de Sanidad, Política Social e Igualdad, 2011) and the annual report of its 'Assistance Service to Victims of Racial or Ethnic Discrimination' (Ministerio de Sanidad, Servicios Sociales e Igualdad, 2013). In the more informal context of the interviews, some mainstream NGO actors related racism to certain historical-structural conditions. However, the references were vague and circumstantial, playing a marginal role within their overall discourse. Moreover, the fact that 'institutional'/'structural' contexts such as school, housing or labour markets were mentioned, did not automatically imply their recognition as having a major role in the reproduction of racism; rather, they were considered as broader social contexts within which *individual* discriminatory practices could take place. This lack of acknowledgement was also reflected in their wording: a problem of 'employability' was deemed to exist among racialised people, but this was interpreted as a cultural predisposition, unrelated to the racial segmentation of the workforce (interview with the public administrator, 14/3/2019). Sometimes, there was recognition that racialised pupils faced structural disadvantages in education, but racism did not appear as a key factor. Also, 'school concentration' was discussed, but racial segregation was denied (interview with the public administrator, 11/2/2019), to the extent that the problem was instead framed in terms of 'poverty'. Similarly, migrants and Roma populations were recognised to be living in 'slums' or in conditions of 'substandard housing', but the existence of racial segregation in housing was questioned (interview with an NGO member, 7/2/2019), since their living conditions could be explained according to the narrative of 'vulnerable groups' (see also Maeso & Cavia, 2014).[9] This passage shows how the disconnection between race and racism works in practice: the presence of a racial issue can be constantly denied and reframed as a matter of 'culture', 'poverty', 'habits', 'low skills', etc., as if such matters were not traversed by racialisation. And once race is denied, whiteness also (conveniently) disappears from view: that

explains why, for example, spatial concentration was not even framed as a problem in the case of fully white neighbourhoods: it is not their privilege that is being questioned.

Occasionally, 'institutional racism/discrimination' was mentioned by members of mainstream NGOs; this was especially the case for those providing assistance services to victims of discrimination, who often had the first-hand contact with such situations. However, 'institutional racism' was mentioned only in verbal discourse: it was neither used in official publications by their organisations nor did it reflect their official viewpoints. The scant and 'timid' references to institutional racism made by some practitioners can be partially explained in terms of their dependence upon public funding (see Lentin, 2008, p. 317). However, the concept was generally interpreted narrowly, as discriminatory practices performed by individuals *working within institutions*. While Ture and Hamilton's (1992) definition emphasised the institutional dimension of racism *itself*, this understanding points to a 'weaker' interpretation (Hesse, 2004; Sayyid, 2017) that understands institutional racism as the sum of 'individual' racist acts that occurred in the context of public administration. In this narrative, institutions ultimately appear as neutral devices, which can be 'filled' with different political contents depending on the governing party (Gil-Benumeya Flores, 2019, pp. 414–415); the implication being that having 'good', 'committed' people inside institutions would suffice to achieve non-racist outcomes. Finally, the few references to institutional racism tended to diminish as the interviewees' status increased: in particular, public servants, representatives of expert knowledge or legal actors did not refer to this category. Besides, some interviewees expressly mentioned institutional racism with derogatory intentions. For example, an expert involved in policymaking stated:

> Does the administration discriminate, or is it the people who work in the administration? It is a totally different thing! […] Because institutional discrimination exists … in some cases. However, in most cases, it is specific individuals who discriminate, people who work in the administration and discriminate other people, but that is not institutional discrimination! It is not the whole institution discriminating! (interview with an expert involved in the anti-discrimination policy framework, 14/1/2019)

Another, sadder example comes from Madrid, where, on 15 March 2018, the Senegalese migrant Mame Mbaye died of a heart attack while escaping from a police raid against 'illegal' street vendors (BBC News, 2018). After this event, various activists denounced the daily violence suffered by Black street vendors and spoke of institutional racism in a

broad, political sense – among them were Malick Gueye, spokesperson for the Street Vendors Union, and Rommy Arce, a local councillor with a migrant background. However, they were denounced by the police as slanderers (Infolibre.es, 2018). While Manuela Carmena, the Mayor of Madrid, praised the 'correct management' of the situation by the police, she did not defend her councillor (El Plural.com, 2018). Similarly, the Observatory against Racism and Intolerance of the Autonomous Community of Madrid issued a public statement defending the police, both condemning the protests following Mame Mbaye's death and disregarding the demands put forward by street vendors and anti-racist movements (Europa Press, 2018). The Observatory was launched in 1998, six years before OBERAXE was established. However, despite its long trajectory, little information could be found on its activities; in recent years, it has not been particularly active, save for occasional declarations, international anniversaries or other highly symbolic activities. However, the Observatory felt compelled to intervene in this discussion, not to ask for a more in-depth investigation of the events, but to deny the existence of institutional racism. This example indicates a more general tendency: when concrete racist situations emerge that are not understandable according to the individualistic mainstream paradigm, the condemnatory fervour against the 'scourge' of racism is often replaced by self-absolving attitudes, aimed at disregarding its concrete manifestations and undermining the 'exaggerations' of those who 'call everything institutional racism' (interview with an expert about the events of Madrid, 7/3/2019). It is especially the case when the work of public institutions are in question.

The discourses analysed in this section show how mainstream conceptions of race/racism end up reproducing the innocence of social institutions (Henriques, 2003). On the one hand, the prioritisation of biological racism prevents racist logic, based on other markers, from been detected (Gil-Benumeya Flores, 2019, p. 67) and enables the constant re-framing of racial issues as something else. On the other hand, exclusive policies where 'race' is euphemistically replaced by 'legal status', 'culture', 'ethnicity', or 'religion', but whose racial content is left unchanged (Azarmandi, 2017, p. 145) can be promoted without the risk of being accused of racism. At the very least, it is unlikely that racism *in* institutions, let alone the racism *of* institutions is recognised.

6. Conclusions

This article focused on the understanding of race/(anti-)racism among mainstream Spanish 'anti-racist' actors. Through the empirical analysis, general tendencies already

observed by previous studies have been confirmed (see Azarmandi, 2017; Gil-Benumeya Flores, 2019; Johansson, 2017). To summarise: the notion of race was questioned according to its scientific/biologic invalidity. Mainstream actors did not acknowledge the historical, social and political components of race, nor did they recognise possible counter-hegemonic approaches to this discussion. Within this framework, racism and its derivative terms are mainly understood as a matter of stereotypes and prejudices rooted in ignorance and fear, or as aberrant, ideologically charged acts performed by extremists. This lack of reflection contrasts starkly with the recent emergence of grassroots movements led by racialised activists, who have increasingly politicised this debate (see Garcés & Amzian, 2017) by both emphasising institutional racism and problematising race and whiteness, not as fake ideological concepts, but as painful realities which they experience on a daily basis.

However, race and racism are not only downplayed theoretically but also on a practical level. In fact, as I have illustrated, the anti-racist commitment of Spanish institutions does not manifest in addressing specific issues raised by racialised activists; rather, it is mostly expressed rhetorically, through abstract declarations. Such anti-racist discourses, informed by 'racelessness' (Goldberg, 2015), do not prevent racial logics from being operative; on the contrary, they end up making it easier for the state to engage in racist practices that are not recognised as such (Goldberg, 2015, p. 70). In this context, declarations of will by institutions mostly work as 'unhappy performatives' (Ahmed, 2004); they are unable to dismantle uneven racial relations entrenched in social dynamics and are ineffective in questioning the normalisation/reproduction of institutional whiteness.

In order for this situation to change, public authorities must clearly acknowledge 'race' as a political-relational category and recognise the existence of both institutional racism and the privilege of whiteness. A discussion on the measures to be taken would only be possible once this recognition has occurred, whilst the proposals of those who suffer racism in the first person should receive preferential attention. However, the fact that racism, coloniality and whiteness are socially embedded and institutionally reproduced implies not underestimating their capacity to constrain the very horizon of what is thinkable and feasible. Against this background, it is unlikely that the whiteness of Spanish institutions (and the privileges linked to it) will be disassembled 'harmoniously', in the form of 'best practices' and policy recommendations. More likely, changes will come from the pressure of social struggles, through the questioning of the existing policy

arrangements. In the opinion of this author, only through a rupture of hegemonic power/knowledge relations will it be possible to call into question the (narrow) leeway enabled by the existing framework. If this happens, it will be the outcome of counter-hegemonic struggles led by racialised people rather than the result of a change of approach by the public administration.

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Notes

1. Mainstream literature cautions against comparing the US and European contexts. However, while the specific histories of Black or Native Americans should not be denied, analogies can also be established with the suffering of the Roma, a transnational European minority that has been historically subjected to structural violence (including enslavement). Similarly, the racialisation of Muslims and non-European migrants through migration and citizenship laws present analogies with the experiences of Asians or Latinos in the US (Möschel, 2014).
2. As a white person, I have not been external to such a power relation during fieldwork.
3. The research project this article is based on includes a strand dedicated to the analysis of Roma inclusion policies: I will specifically focus on them in forthcoming publications.
4. Spain is a decentralised state: regional governments retain significant powers over social policies and frequently draft programmes that complement national strategies. For my analysis, I have privileged the most populated and politically significant ‘autonomous communities’: Madrid, Andalusia and Catalonia.
5. During the interviews, I adopted a ‘neutral’ language so that my interlocutors could feel comfortable. I generally avoided strongly connoted words such as ‘race’ or

‘whiteness’, paying attention to their use of the language. If the conversation led to it, I sometimes asked more direct questions.

6. I have randomly altered the interviewees’ gender and the date of the interview to ensure anonymity

7. A discussion on the invisibilisation of contemporary anti-Roma racism can be found in Powell and van Baar (2019). Specifically for a historical perspective on anti-Roma racism in the Spanish context, see Garcés et al. (2015).

8. Recent accounts of contemporary far-right racist discourses across Europe can be found in Vieten and Poynting (2016) and Creţan and O’brien (2019).

9. For further discussion on Roma spatial segregation, see Marinaro (2017) and Málovics et al. (2017).

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