

The Manifesto of Human Diversity and Unity, eighty years after the Italian racial laws

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On July 14, 1938, the “Manifesto della razza” was published in “Il Giornale d'Italia” with the title “Il Fascismo e il problema della razza” (see Appendix). This document claimed the existence of a “pure Italian race”, in the biological sense of the term, which would have remained substantially unchanged for more than a thousand years and whose “Aryan” origin preserved (Gillette, 2001). The manifesto paved the way for the introduction of racial laws, a series of measures, mainly directed against the rights of people of Jewish origin, which were promulgated from September 1938 up to February 1945.

Eighty years later, Italians continue to have to deal with racism (Naletto, 2005). This year has even seen a surge in the problem. Fatal injuries involving non-EU citizens (in Macerata and San Lorenzo in Rome) have added to the murders of migrants with a probable racial motivation. Episodes of violence against “foreigners” have multiplied, especially by young people and adolescents. Even values that we have always claimed as “ours” - solidarity and civil coexistence - are being subjected to a progressive disintegration. This translates into human tragedies: it is worth remembering that the surge of more than 2,000 drownings recorded by UNHCR in the Central Mediterranean at the end of 2018 is related to the total absence of search and rescue vessels blocked by legal and logistical restrictions

and to ports closed to migrants (Gagliasso & Fiamingo, 2018). Unfortunately, the situation is unlikely to change in the near future. In fact, there could be an increase in social tensions, due to the combined effect of the persistence of the West's economic crisis and environmental deterioration in many of the migrants' countries of origin (Fenton & Bradley, 2002). On the whole, it seems that we are getting rapidly closer to situations, such as that of the United States, where difficulties in integration processes have led to societies with a *stigma* of inequality and xenophobia.

In this scenario, it seems necessary to go beyond condemning racism and intolerance, by reaffirming ever more frankly day by day the principle of equality between human beings with the same rights and duties in a shared destiny as citizens of the world. Therefore, what is needed is a renewed commitment by the actors of social and cultural processes and their communities, together with a better governance of institutions and voluntary associations. At the same time, those involved in the research and communication of the indivisible theme of human equality and diversity should promote an even more effective culture of *unity in diversity*. In this perspective, we wanted to restart from the fascist “Manifesto della razza” of 1938 as a paradigmatic example of the connections

between ideology, race and racism in the first half of the twentieth century (Fanon, 1952; Cassata, 2008; Gentili, 2010).

We are not the first to pursue this goal. In 2008, a group of Italian scientists and scholars proposed the “Manifesto degli scienziati anti-razzisti”, where the racial and racist axioms of the fascist Manifesto were discussed and demolished, point by point, through an accurate exposition of scientific knowledge and historical facts (<http://matematica-old.unibocconi.it/greco/manifestorazza.htm>). Being aware of the civil, political and historical value of this initiative, we thought it would be useful to look carefully at the changes in the social, political and scientific dimensions of human diversity that have taken place in the last decade. First of all, we took into account the new forms of intolerance (see Destro Bisol *et al.*, 2017, for a focus on the Italian debate, and other contributions to the JASs forum “What is race today? Scientific, legal, and social appraisals from around the globe”). Certainly, there is a certain continuity with the past that has to be acknowledged. In fact, the starting point for legitimizing or justifying racist acts, choices and policies remains in the subdivision of people into *discrete, homogeneous and exclusive* categories, such as the racial ones (Mosse, 1992). Likewise, an alleged ideal hierarchy among these divisions is claimed, with the so-called ‘white men’ often at the top. However, this new racism no longer looks at human diversity, as was the case with ideologists and promoters of the Shoah, apartheid in South Africa and racial segregation in the United States. To define the boundaries between human groups, and to attribute them values and disvalues, the new racism does not rely openly on the association between perception of physical diversity and prejudices regarding cognitive abilities and the moral quality of racialized persons; it focuses on cultural and religious differences. In public discourse, they are, explicitly or implicitly, presented as insurmountable barriers that require a separation, even physical, between human groups, and justify the discrimination of the “inferior” or “dangerous” ones, sometimes with their confinement forced

out of normal civil life. Among others, the new anti-Semitism, Islamic radicalism and, at the other extreme, Islamophobia demonstrate the disruptive potential of this new form of intolerance, often referred to as “racism without race” (Balibar & Wallerstein, 1991). Ultimately, it is a new and subtle attempt to use human diversity as an instrument of oppression and creation of ideological hatred. In opposition to this, we must highlight the extraordinary richness of the cultural diversities that humanity has built during its long and complex history.

Another novelty to be taken into consideration is the better knowledge of the genetic structure of human populations following the advent of human genomics (Mallick *et al.*, 2016). Looking at the Fascist Manifesto of 1938 from this perspective, with special regard to the concept of “pure races”, turns out to be useful in order to show that Science, once out of its ivory tower and freed from any instrumental manipulation, can help deal with issues apparently very far from science itself, i.e. those related to social problems.

For these reasons, we decided to write the “Manifesto of Human Diversity and Unity” that collects the testimony of the 2008 “Manifesto degli scienziati anti-razzisti”, re-elaborating its contents in the light of cultural, political and social changes and of the most recent scientific breakthroughs. With this initiative, supported by the *Istituto Italiano di Antropologia*, we intend to offer to students, teachers and citizens, new interdisciplinary knowledge of human diversity in order to increase their awareness of the evident scientific, cultural and political error and of the profound inhumanity of old and new forms of racism.

We are currently collaborating with other colleagues, including some of the signatories of the 2008 document, in order to complete the “Manifesto of Human Diversity and Unity”. We invite everyone to send comments, suggestions and criticism to the facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/ManifestodellaDiversitaUmana>. The complete text will be available at <https://sites.google.com/uniroma1.it/ilmanifesto/home>.

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Appendix - Manifesto of Race 1938

Published in "Il Giornale d'Italia" with the title "Il Fascismo e il problema della razza" (July 14, 1938) and republished in "La Difesa della Razza" (August 5, 1938).

- 1) **HUMAN RACES EXIST.** In fact, the existence of human races is not a simple spiritual concept, but rather a real material phenomenon that can be perceived through our senses. This reality is evident in the masses, an imposing number of millions of men who are similar in their physical and psychological characteristics, which were inherited and which continue to be inherited. Stating that human races exist does not necessarily mean that there are superior and inferior races, but only that there are different human races.
- 2) **LARGE RACES AND SMALL RACES EXIST.** It is not enough to admit there exist major groups that are commonly called races and which are differentiated only by a few characteristics. In fact, one must also recognise that there exist minor groups (for example, the Nordics, the Mediterraneans, the Dinarics, etc.) differentiated by a large number of common characteristics. From a biological point of view, these groups constitute the true races, the existence of which cannot be contested.
- 3) **THE CONCEPT OF RACE IS PURELY BIOLOGICAL.** It is therefore based on considerations other than those of people and nation, which are founded essentially on historical, linguistic and religious considerations. However, racial differences are the roots that determine the differences between peoples and nations. The fact that Italians are different from the French, the Germans, the Turks, the Greeks, etc. is not only due to their different language and history, but also because of the varying racial compositions of these peoples.. There have been diverse proportions of different races which, since very ancient times, have constituted the various peoples. Either one race has dominated another, or all have harmoniously merged together. Alternatively, there are still populations that have not mixed with the other races.
- 4) **THE POPULATION OF ITALY TODAY IS PRINCIPALLY OF ARYAN ORIGIN AND ITS CIVILIZATION IS ARYAN.** This Aryan population has lived in Italy for several thousand years and little remains of the civilization predating the Aryan people. The origin of the Italian population today stems essentially from the elements of those same races that constitute and will constitute the permanent living fabric of Europe.
- 5) **IT IS A MYTH THAT THERE HAS BEEN AN INFLUX OF ENORMOUS MASSES OF PEOPLE IN HISTORICAL TIMES.** Since the invasion of the Lombards, in Italy, there have been no other important movements of people capable of influencing the racial physiognomy of the nation. This means that, while for other European nations racial compositions have varied considerably even in modern times, for Italy the racial composition of today is basically the same as it was 1,000 years ago: almost all the 44 million Italians of today come therefore from families that have been living in Italy for at least a millenium.
- 6) **TODAY, THERE EXISTS A PURE 'ITALIAN RACE'.** This declaration is not based on the confusion of the biological concept of race with the historic and linguistic concept of people and nation, but rather on the pure blood relationship that unites the Italians of today to the generations that for thousands of years have inhabited Italy. This ancient pure kinship is the greatest representation of the nobility of the Italian nation.

- 7) **IT IS TIME FOR THE ITALIANS TO PROCLAIM OPENLY THAT THEY ARE RACISTS.** Everything that the [Fascist] regime has done so far in Italy is founded on racist principles. The leader [Mussolini] has frequently referred to racial concepts. The question of racism in Italy must be treated from a purely biological point of view, and free of philosophical and religious intentions. The concept of Italian racism must be based on Italian ideas and be Aryan-Nordic in orientation. This does not mean to say, however, that German racial theories in their current form should be introduced into Italy or that Italians and Scandinavians should be considered the same. It simply means that Italians have physical and above all psychological characteristics of a purely European nature that are totally different from any non-European race. This means elevating Italian to an ideal of superior consciousness and greater responsibility.
- 8) **IT IS IMPORTANT TO MAKE A CLEAR DISTINCTION BETWEEN THE MEDITERRANEAN PEOPLES OF EUROPE ON THE WESTERN SIDE, AND THE ORIENTALS AND AFRICANS ON THE EASTERN SIDE.** It is therefore dangerous to support theories that claim that some European peoples are of African origin and that within the Mediterranean race there are Semitic and Hamitic elements, which would establish absolutely inadmissible relations and ideological sympathies.
- 9) **THE JEWS DO NOT BELONG TO THE ITALIAN RACE.** In general, nothing remains of the Semites that landed through the centuries on the sacred soil of our Fatherland. The same applies for the Arab occupation of Sicily of which all that rests is the memory of a few names. Furthermore, the process of assimilation was always very rapid in Italy. The Jews represent the only population that has never been assimilated in Italy because they are composed of non-European racial elements, which are totally different from those elements that gave rise to Italians.
- 10) **THE PURE EUROPEAN PHYSICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE ITALIAN PEOPLE MUST NOT BE ALTERED IN ANY WAY.** Union is admissible only among European races, which is not to be considered real hybridization, given that these races belong to a common stock and are differentiated only by a few characteristics, being otherwise the same in most instances. The purely European character of Italians would be altered by racial mixing with any extra-European race which would produce a civilization that was different from the ancient Aryan civilization.

Signatories

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¹ contested attribution