Antagonismes communautaires et dialogues interculturels: du constat des polarisations à la construction des cohésions (Community antagonisms and intercultural dialogues: from the state of polarization to the construction of cohesion)

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In a globalized world, the relationship to ‘the Other’ becomes more and more crucial. Living in a peaceful world depends on our capacity to organize the living together of diverse people in a world of diversities. Seen from this angle, racism is just one form of ‘identity politics’ opposed to diversity and acceptance of ‘the Other’. This is to say that racism is not an old-fashioned concept, left over from the last century, but rather a reaction to new phenomena in today’s world. Overcoming racism and dealing with intercultural understanding is therefore one of the most important issues on the peace educators’ agenda. There are many books on racism: philosophical approaches, sociological studies, and political pamphlets. Other books deal with practical pedagogical issues like how to teach anti-racism in the classroom or how to intervene in racist events as a social worker … While the first category of books usually provides a good theoretical background, the strength of the second is its practical tools. Too few books deal with practical (pedagogical) experiences based on a scientific background. This is exactly the merit of Antagonismes communautaires et dialogues interculturels (Community Antagonisms and Intercultural Dialogues) and L’incident raciste au quotidien (Racist Incidents in Daily Life) both inspired and edited by Monique Eckmann and colleagues from Geneva College for Social Work, Switzerland. Both can be read as guides for practitioners, but they also help the reader to understand racism, not as an abstract concept, but the way it is experienced in daily life. Both combine a high theoretical level of analysis with a very close look at daily life. Thus, by overcoming the abstractness of social scientists and the practical narrowness of social workers, these two books fill a gap and are most relevant for peace educators.

Antagonismes communautaires et dialogues interculturels (Communitarian Antagonisms and Intercultural Dialogues) already refer to this twofold approach in the title. The first part is a collection of case studies of so called cultural conflicts in different (European) contexts, Kosovo, Kazakhstan, Belgium, and Russia. The focus is to describe and to understand social polarizations. Even if the examples are
very different one from the other, the authors discover some commonalities. In all these ‘ethnic’ conflicts, social factors, like poverty, play as much a role as ‘culture’ itself. A way out of these conflicts can be described as the ‘passage from nationalism to patriotism’ (237). This means, a common local identity can be considered a most-needed antidote to the claim of national identities that polarize different groups in a local population. However, as the editors underline, understanding conflicts does not suffice to solve them. There are many steps between descriptive social study and prescriptive social action. Thus, while the first part of the book discusses the antagonisms, the second part is dedicated to ways of promoting dialog. Again, we find several case studies, but at the micro level of social interventions, and again, cases vary from the Turkish–Armenian relationship in the European migrant community to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict in the Diaspora in Belgium, from dialog between Christians and Muslims in Europe to dialog between Israelis and Palestinians. In this second part, the authors concentrate on the specific pedagogical settings of the intervention they describe. Their aim is to identify the factors that nurture dialog and understanding. Even if these interventions are very limited in scope, they help to orient civil society towards dialog and to open new ways of understanding. A very interesting example is a special Israeli–Palestinian dialog. Integrating peace education and holocaust education, this project organized a series of seminars and encounters where Israelis and (Israeli) Palestinians studied the Shoah together. The chapter provides a double benefit to peace educators – they learn about the confrontation of quite different, even opposite memories of their ‘common’ past by Palestinians and Israelis as well as about the pedagogical approaches and strategies that made these very delicate encounters a success. Linking these two levels of analysis is maybe the most striking strength of this book.

L’incident raciste au quotidien (Racist Incidents in Daily Life) is also characterized by a very original structure explained in a preliminary ‘guide to the reader’. In fact, this book can be used as a handbook for practitioners who are looking for advice when confronted with a racist event. They will find 13 ‘vignettes’ of racist incidents, i.e. small case studies, classified as different types of incidents, like problems of a person with a Muslim first name, a young girl fascinated by skinheads, a child drawing a swastika, a teacher experiencing a racist incident in the classroom, and so on … The guiding question is always: ‘How to intervene?’ The practitioners will also find, at the end of the book, a checklist for analyzing racist and violent incidents, including their own reactions.

Readers who want to be informed about the topic more systematically will appreciate the second part of the book that consists of four pedagogical analyses: right wing extremism in the school – a marginal phenomenon compared to crucial pedagogical dilemmas; cultural differences as a pedagogical problem; an empirical study on facing racism; and representations of racism: social struggles and a pedagogy of recognition. This last chapter is maybe the most relevant one for linking pedagogical intervention and political analysis, an analysis that is especially rich because it can draw from reference books from the English, the French, and the German speaking world.

The guiding principle of all the chapters is a very promising methodological approach – linking research and intervision (a kind of supervision technique). This approach, described in one of the introductory chapters, allows the teachers and social workers to have a say and thus to make the research more vivid while the researchers analyze their practice collectively and get new insights. The interconnec-
tion of social analysis and (collective) pedagogical reflection, demonstrated in these two books, is unfortunately not self-evident in educational research. All the more, the two books from Monique Eckmann merit to be studied and used in order to refine our methods of pedagogical research and educational intervention.

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Social Justice, Peace, and Environmental Education: Transformative Standards illustrates a diverse group of contributors moving beyond critiques of systems of domination and oppression toward standards and principles that, if enacted, would surely change the way we relate to each other, other species, and the planet as a whole. In essence, the book represents a grass roots appropriation of the standards and outcome-based learning movement in order to transform the behaviors and values stemming from a capitalistic economic system and related cultural hegemony – two sources of many direct and indirect forms of violence. It calls for critical educators to unite around the intersections of social justice, peace, and environmental education. The book asks critical educators among us to affirm both the interdependence of life and the diversity necessary for human, ecological, and planetary survival. It urges us to resist systemic forms of domination and oppression and replace them with compassionate, caring, and sustainable relationships and systems. It calls for a widening of the narrow, economic, and functional focus of schooling to include more comprehensive and holistic purposes – justice for marginalized people, for plants, for animals, for ecosystems, and for the planet.

The sheer scope and breadth of topics in the book are quite mind boggling and they go in different, yet connected directions at great speed. The whole book was inspired by the Alaska Standards for Culturally Responsive Schools. Appropriately, Part I of the book begins with an exploration of indigenous knowledge paradigms and the cultural standards that have arisen from Maori (New Zealand) and Alaskan Native efforts in culturally responsive education. Part II of the book focuses on human rights, environmental education, social responsibility, interspecies education, and deeper conceptions of peace that include all species as well as the Earth. Part III focuses on particular peace and justice community struggles for Latina/os, for Asian-Americans, for people of African descent, for gendered justice, for the field of disability studies, and for ‘queer’ communities. Part IV focuses on connected themes and challenges for social justice, peace, and environmental education.

In the last chapter in Part IV, there is a meta-analysis of the diverse array of themes, principles, and standards that converge in six common themes and five core standards. The common themes include: the need for a new economy grounded in